THE CONCEPT OF

COMMUNITY OF INTEREST

A Discussion Paper which explores the concept of
Community of Interest as it applies to
Local Government boundaries.

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FOREWORD

The concept of community of interest is a factor which recurs consistently in discussions about local government boundaries. Many of the arguments put forward in proposals to the South Australian Local Government Advisory Commission, the body responsible for investigating proposals for boundary change, have concentrated on this concept. While it is an important concept, it has, however, been variously interpreted and applied. As a consequence, its usefulness and reliability as a factor in determining local government boundaries has been reduced.

This paper therefore proposes a working definition of community of interest in the context of local government, based on three dimensions - the perceptual, functional and political. It provides an overview of past applications of the concept in terms of the emphasis given to one or other of these dimensions, and to other criteria, such as economic viability, in determining local government boundaries. It explores the changing nature of communities of interest, and outlines the means by which the concept can be considered and applied in a broad operational manner. Its purpose is to provide a guide to determine how a particular local government unit can best encompass the identity, interactions and needs of a community into an effective political unit.

The paper is the second discussion paper to be made available to local government on issues associated with boundary change. It was prepared for the South Australian Department of Local Government in 1989 and released in January 1991 by the Local Government Services Bureau.

PART 1

A WORKING DEFINITION

Introduction

The concept "community of interest", is a nebulous one, lacking precision and having different meanings for different people. While researchers, Royal Commissions and practitioners in local government have found the concept hard to define and apply in relation to local government boundary reform, it has nonetheless been regarded as sufficiently worthwhile to continue those efforts. A number of examples of such definitions are contained in Appendix A.

The concept of "community" has itself been the subject of much discussion by a range of academics such as political scientists, social geographers, sociologists and community psychologists. Frequently referred to in such discussions is a paper by Hillery (1955) which classified 94 definitions of community. Hillery's summary (1955:111) remains a useful starting point:

"Most students (of community) are in basic agreement that community consists of persons in social interaction within a geographic area and having one or more additional ties".

Unfortunately, the simplicity of the concept has been lost as it becomes over-exposed. As Cost (1976:208) noted:

"No term which might have had a useful role to play has been more beaten into senselessness than community".

The significance of local community, though a desirable phenomenon, is also regarded by many as diminishing in the modern world. Jones (1977:26) expressed the view that:

"The term 'community' can be described as the 'aerosol' word of the 1970's, because of the hopeful way it is sprayed over deteriorating institutions".

Some might feel that the usefulness of the term "community of interest" with respect to local government has similarly diminished. It has been bandied about vaguely, with varying degrees of expediency, seriousness and passion. However, of the concepts offered to replace it, none seem to do so adequately. Such expressions as common identity, affinity, collective perspective, sharing common concerns, sense of common purpose, core of commonality, sense of belonging, a coherent social and economic whole, acting in the interests of community, and speaking with a united voice, have been put forward, yet each tends to cover only some aspect of the broad dimensions in which the concept of "community of interesC can be applied in local government.

Furthermore as part of the vocabulary of local government, it is unlikely the term can be abolished. It must therefore be more specifically defined if it is to have any real meaning or be applied as a useful criterion in the determination of local government boundaries.

The Dimensions of Community of Interest

This paper proposes a working definition of the concept "community of interest" in the context of local government, which applies to a group of people in the residential locality and having one or more of the following three dimensions:

1. Perceptual: a sense of belonging to an area or locality which can be clearly defined.

2. Functional: the ability to meet with reasonable economy the community's requirements for comprehensive physical and human services.

3. Political: the ability of the elected body to represent the interests and reconcile the conflicts of all its members.

It is important to recognise that this definition encompasses two broad interpretations of the concept of community of interest. These are distinguishable as the subjective (perceptual) and objective (functional) dimensions and as such, relate to different qualities and measurements. The political dimension involves both subjective and objective aspects.

The first dimension of community of interest, encompassing subjective interpretation, has regard to people's perceptions of the identify of the area to which they feel they belong. A community of interest can be said to exist where people feel an affinity or compatibility with the area and the people who live there. They see each other as having like interests and value systems and often equate that sense of identity with the "local" in local government.

The second dimension, or objective interpretation of community of interest, looks at the existing functional relationships between people living in the same area. This has conventionally been a measure of local activity patterns: where people go to shop, bank, school, church, play sport and socialise. In this sense the measure of a strong community of interest is that of the vast majority of people going towards a common centre for services, and having common membership of sports clubs, parishes and other community organisations. As the Victorian Commission (1986:52) commented:

"Units of local government will be more effective if they cover the same area as that in which people live, work and play. This is because the most responsive municipality is one which is securely rooted in a well established community".

The regular activity patterns of communities have implications for the provision and-maintenance of facilities and amenities provided by local government, (even though the general public is not always aware that Councils are the providers of those services). Some of the physical services include the provision and maintenance of roads, footpaths, street lighting, garbage collection, parking, and traffic control, to statutory functions such as planning, building, health and dog

inspection, pest plant and vertebrate control. The provision of community services which include libraries, public pools, community information, buses, aged care and home handyman programmes are also increasingly demanded of Councils, by those in their catchment areas.

The third dimension of community of interest integral to local government is the political one, which encompasses the organisational objective of participatory democracy. Local government's mandate is to act as the voice of local opinion. That voice should be representative of all the people who use and/or contribute to the facilities and services provided by the Council. It must be able to represent and reconcile differing interests, which will require public confidence in its leadership.

By virtue of its size, compared with State and Federal Government, local government should be able to involve a greater proportion of its electorate in decision-making processes. Whatever the extent of the actual level of involvement, it is important that constituents feel or perceive that their views are represented, or that they can participate in decision making if they choose to do so.

The more closely a group of people in a locality has these attributes, the more confidently they can be said to have a community of interest. Because the three dimensions relate to different qualities however, the practical difficulty in applying the definition will be the relative weighting to be attributed in each case to the three dimensions, particularly between the perceptual dimension and the functional and political dimensions. These difficulties are often at the centre of the conflicting views of pro-and anti-amalgamation supporters, as illustrated by the responses over the years of local communities to official government inquiries into boundary change.

This paper will examine some of those difficulties as well as the emphasis given to community of interest compared to other criteria, in providing an overview of past applications of the concept to local government boundary change. The paper then briefly describes the context of change before considering in detail the application of the three dimensional definition in terms of measurement and the relative importance of each dimension to boundary reform.

PART 2

PAST APPLICATIONS OF THE CONCEPT

Introduction

Community of interest is a factor which recurs consistently in discussions about local government boundary change and is widely held to be a desirable, some say fundamental, characteristic of local government. Doubt is thrown upon its reliability for determining boundaries criteria, however when it can be interpreted so diversely, even within a single community. Further the concept, loosely defined is susceptible to interpretation based on political expediency. As the Western Australian Local Government Boundaries Commission (1972:8) wrote:

> "This (community of) interest appears to increase to large proportions, or diminish to almost complete insignificance, depending upon the claim of a Council appearing before the Commission".

Dixon (1981:77), in her discussion paper on the concept, with respect to New South Wales rural Councils, similarly noted:

> "The concept of community of interest appears to depend on the circumstances at the time and whether it is a broad view being taken or a narrow one.

The broad and narrow interpretations suggested by Dixon, can be equated with a functional view of the interactions groups of people have in a locality, and a perceptual view of a group of people having a common identity. The tendency is for the broad view to be employed by those supporting enlarged Council areas, and for the narrow view to be adopted by those opposing change.

For example, one party representing the case for an amalgamation described the broad view of community of interest as:

"the wider sinews which just can't be denied. They are as clear as the telegraph poles and the wires that go down the street, that communicate right through this district and call people together for a whole variety of social, recreational, business and other interests. And it is this wider community of interest which when you identify it, calls logically for the local government structure to straddle that and be in conformity with that and not divide it (1).

The community of interest identified by the party opposing the amalgamation was a more localised, close knit community and was described in terms of loyalties and perspectives.

> "Yes we do have common interests, we play tennis together, we play bowls together and we compete together, but our outlook on life is rather different ...".(2)

"The common interests which I think are of most significance for local government purposes, are those which relate to the occupation of people and the sort of environment in which they live ...".(3)

These views reflect the different dimensions of community of interest and point to quite different conclusions about the appropriate size of local government units.

Application of the Community of Interest Criterion

The findings of official reviews have similarly often focused on some dimension of community of interest to the exclusion of others. In particular they have tended to be based on the functional and political dimensions of community of interest, and have not embraced the perceptual dimension.

For example, the South Australian Royal Commission into Local Government Areas (1974) noted that there were two or more levels of community of interest. The first surrounded the relatively well established and homogeneous local level which often centred on the nearest small country town. The Commission indicated however that this sized community of interest usually had an insufficient resource base to support a local government authority.

The Commission (1975 : II) was of the strong view that local government was essentially "community government" and as such had to provide a comprehensive range of services.

"Its prime function is to understand and meet the needs of the local community. It follows that a Council area must contain most, if not all, of those facilities and land uses which are essential features of a community, together with the people who comprise the community

It is a fact that, at present, most Council areas in South Australia do not meet this fundamental criterion; they are 'part communities' only; they are merely areas with boundaries depicted on the State map for administrative purposes". (4)

Inquiries undertaken in other states have also tended to conclude that many existing Councils fulfil only a part of their functions as service providers and advocates for their community. It has therefore been argued that community of interest is not adequately represented by existing Council areas and that boundaries need to be significantly reformed in most cases to encompass larger areas.

Responses by local communities to such inquiries have been consistently negative. The common position taken by smaller Councils has been to rely on the first sense of community of interest, arguing that larger Councils result in a loss of belonging and local identity. The public dissatisfaction with the approach of official inquiries has provoked substantial criticism and resistance from local government and local communities and has become so politically volatile at State levels that the official recommendations of such inquiries have seldom been implemented.

Further, however, it indicates the limited usefulness of discussion on boundary reform when these differences of opinion and approach are not resolved.

Community of Interest Relative to Other Criteria

In official government reviews conducted across Australia, the emphasis given to community of interest as compared to other criteria has varied considerably. The findings of a number of these reviews, as they relate to community of interest, are contained in Appendix B, and have also been summarised in two papers by the Advisory Council of Intergovernment Relations (A.C.I.R.) in Discussion Papers 12 (1982) and 13 (1984) on Local Government Boundary Re-Organisation.

While community of interest has been held to be widely significant, it has seldom been applied as the major determinant in boundary reviews. Economic factors on the other hand have often been the prime motivating factor and major criteria for determining new boundaries. Commonly, inquiries have been bound by, or developed a set of guidelines for Council size, based on size, population and revenue. For example, the South Australian Royal Commission (1974) was limited by its terms of reference to a criterion based on a minimum rate revenue of $500,000 for metropolitan local government areas and $50,000 for rural Council areas. Only later in the process has community of interest been applied and largely as a means to determine the exact location of a new boundary, once a decision to change the boundary has been taken.

The Western Australian Government Boundaries Commission (1972:19) for example stressed economic criterion and commented that:

> "Local government should be established on an economic basis with adequate financial 'resources. Community interest, where it is evident together with other factors, must be considered but community interest itself is not a good basis on which to design local government units. It is far too restricted for economy and efficiency and the advantages gained from adequate financial resources outweigh all other factors".

> While the Commission believed in preserving the "local" in local government it was sceptical about the value of community of interest, describing its importance as "diminishing". (5).

A similar pragmatic approach was taken by the New South Wales Boundaries Commission (1974) which stated:

> "The prime reason for local government boundaries is to define a convenient area of land for administrative purposes so that a Council's office will be sensibly located for the convenience of the public and where it can most effectively, efficiently and economically carry out its functions and services to the community". (6)

It may be argued that such a utilitarian approach makes the concept of community of interest fit a formula and disregards the diversity of local government communities. This point was taken up strongly by Senior (1969:5) in his Memorandum of Dissent to the Maud Royal Commission into Local Government Boundaries in England (1967-1969). Senior criticised the approach of offical

reviews, which started by establishing unitary principles based on population and revenue and later examined community of interest. He suggested (1969:44) that:

"The right approach surely, is to analyse the social geography of England in relation both to the functional requirements of the jobs local government should be able to do and to the organisational demands of local democracy, and thus to identify the structure that will satisfy all criteria. Only if the structure so indicated would be too complex will any need arise to "strike a balance" between competing claims".

It is not the intention of boundary reform, with respect to the criterion of community of interest that Councils be made into uniformly sized units. As the S.A. Royal Commission (1974:17) stated the community interest principle is of such importance that the resultant size of (Council units) is somewhat immaterial, provided a workable minimum is achieved. The Commission regarded community of interest as a basic building block in local government, a view put forward categorically in its First Report (1974:16):

"Our view is that if community of interest is to be disregarded, that is, if units are to be set up as mere areas of administrative convenience, then that would not be local government as we understood it".

The Victorian Commission Report on Principles and Programmes (1986:38) similarly placed greater emphasis on community of interest and underlined its value in enhancing the quality of local government and the role of Councils as community advocates. The Commission further suggested detailed objective ways of measuring the concept which are referred to in Part 4.

Even those enquiries which have proposed substantial increases in the size of local government units have regarded the concept of "community government" as sufficiently important to maintain the local voice of communities. The plan for large local authorities with administrative, functional and statutory duties, has thus been considered in tandem with the need to devise smaller "parish" or "neighbourhood" Councils (7) to give expression to the community's sense of belonging and substance to local political roles such as representing community opinion.

The Maud Royal Commission in England (1969:2) saw this second tier of "local Councils" fulfilling one of the major purposes of local government "to attract and hold the interest of its citizens". The New South Wales Barnett Report (1973:79-80) envisaged similar roles which would provide for "the representation of smaller communities ... to act as a voice for local opinion".

In summary, the past application of community of interest to boundary reform highlights three requirements if the concept is to be demonstrated in any operational sense. Firstly, it will require a recognition that community of interest relates to the fundamental role of local government as community government; secondly, a working definition which recognises its several dimensions; and thirdly, its application as a major determinant in boundary reform.

PART 3

THE CONTEXT OF CHANGE

Introduction

In South Australia the fierce resistance by Councils to boundary reform which formed around the Royal Commission Report of 1974 has subsided in the 1980's to the point where an increasing number of proposals for boundary change are being initiated by both rural and metropolitan Councils. Against a background of increasing financial difficulty, a reduction in State and Federal grants, and high interest rates on borrowings, most such proposals have been motivated by a desire to secure the future financial viability of Councils and have been based primarily on the economies of scale criterion.

In conjunction with this, there is considerable evidence to suggest that both the functional and perceptual communities of interest have shifted to such an extent that they no longer coincide with the established municipal boundaries, many of which were arbitrarily determined up to a hundred years ago. It is therefore a necessary first step in applying the criterion of community of interest to boundary reform that the Council, its workers and residents analyse the community's particular identity (or identities), its functional patterns and the nature of its political institutions. Concomitant to this is the need to understand the basis of its existing and past boundaries. (8) What, for example have been the forces and extent of change giving shape to the patterns of the present community and its interests? What can the demographic profile predict about the people's future needs?

Changes in Functional Communities of Interest

The lack of coincidence between the boundaries of functional communities of interest and existing municipal boundaries and its affect on the operation of local government in terms of its ability to fulfil an effective role at an administrative and/or political level has motivated a number of recent proposals for amalgamations. These include: the District of Central Yorke Peninsula and the District of Clinton; the Corporation of Naracoorte and the District of Naracoorte; and the Districts of Balaklava and Owen and with the District of Port Wakefield.

Several community submissions on proposals for amalgamation have reflected the contracting nature of functional communities of interest. As one long-time resident of Crystal brook described of the last thirty one years.

> "During this time I've been saddened to see the unfortunate slow deaths of virtually all the small surrounding communities. It started with Huddleston, Narridy, Beetaloo Valley, ... Merriton, Wandearah, Pine Gap, Mundoora, ..., more recently Gulnare, Koolunga and Georgetown. The death knell has been spelt for Yacka recently with the closure of its State Bank branch. Red Hill town is still hanging on, but even there the future is bleak. Facilities at Snowtown are continuing to diminish. Even the once relatively major town of Gladstone has dropped very significantly in importance in recent years. The first blow was the closure of the Gladstone gaol, then the ANZ bank, then the reduction of railway staff due to standardisation and closure of branch lines.

Their doctor also pulled out about this time and they had no doctor in attendance. Dalgety Bennett Farmers closed their office about 18 months ago, more recently…., (9)

In other areas, communities of interest may have expanded and spilled over into adjoining Councils. This may occur particularly in rural and outer metropolitan areas due to the availability of cheaper land for housing, establishment of retirement villages and holiday homes or new industrial estates, or expansion of town facilities where a tourist industry is being developed. For example, the extension and overlapping nature of communities of interest led to a proposal by the Tea Tree Gully Rural Environment Association in 1986 to sever a section of the area of the City of Tea Tree Gully zoned 'Hills Face' and 'Mount Lofty Ranges Rural' and annex the same to the area of the adjoining District Council of Gumeracha.

Changes in Perceptual Communities of Interest

At the same time, changes are also occurring in people's community of interest at a perceptual level. In urban areas, people's attachment to their locality has not only been substantially reduced because of vast changes in transport and communication, but also because of increased affluence. Jones (1977:27) identified a number of factors which may directly affect this attachment, such as the high degree of residential mobility and the greater availability and use of recreation in the home (such as private pools and videos) rather than outside facilities (such as Council pools and public cinemas). The structures of extended families and ethnic groups are also changing as people live in separate residences and different suburbs, and there is a greater tendency for people to work and form interests in areas away from where they live.

In rural areas, changes in lifestyle and expectations have meant that the traditionally perceived differences in outlook between rural and town dwellers have become less distinct. In a time of rural decline, more children and spouses of farmers seek employment in towns. Farming families may choose to live in the town close to facilities for children, while the farmer commutes to the farm. People with city employment may choose to live on the land and commute to the city. Social welfare recipients may move to outlying rural areas where housing is available and relatively cheap. More farmers may retire into their own towns rather than going further afield, because better hospital and aged care facilities are being provided locally.

Impact on Local Government

These changes in the functional dimension, and to a lesser extent perceptual dimension of community of interest have meant that, over time, the spheres of influence of many local government units have altered. This is illustrated in a local government area where the functional dimension has expanded as the catchment area of people using a service has become wider or more diverse, requiring a greater range or emphasis in the services provided by the Council. These demands may however, be complementary, or in conflict. (An example is provided in-farming areas in the Adelaide Hills where conflicting demands are placed on Councils by the varying needs of residents who are established farmers, hobby farmers and city commuters).

The interlocking and overlapping of functional communities of interest at the boundaries of municipalities raises a number of administrative, financial and political dilemmas, particularly if those people using services are not contributing to the rate base. Who pays for what? To what extent is duplication of services justifiable? Which services deserve priority? To what extent can

conflicting demands be reconciled? Will bigger local government units be more efficient or effective?

As noted by Senior (1969:43) in his Memorandum of Dissent to the Maud Royal Commission, it does not follow that local government areas must go on getting larger in area and population. What it does mean is that there are difficult challenges for local government in serving the interests of its communities: creative and comprehensive approaches are needed to plan, provide and pay for physical and human services. At the same time local government must remain sensitive to local requirements and be able to foster the sense of belonging that constitutes the perceptual dimension of community of interest.

In summary, the changes over time in the functional and perceptual communities of interest, and the emotional context in which many claims and counter-claims have been made, point to the need to develop more objective measures of community of interest. In order to do this, the following section reviews some of the relevant academic research and develops a working model to apply the various dimensions of community of interest.

PART 4

APPLYING THE THREE DIMENSIONS

Introduction

In the hearings of the South Australian Local Government Advisory Commission, which to date has mainly resolved proposals from rural areas, those people opposed to change are generally the most vocal. It is further notable that, even among those who accept a need for boundary change within their areas, there is reluctance to forego the status quo. The finding of the Maud Royal Commission into Local Government Areas in England (1969:63) similarly suggested that:

> "The response to questions about a reformed system of local government made clear (what we suspect all Royal Commissions must keep in mind) that most people prefer the status quo".

Within this debate, it is important to recognise people's need for boundaries which Scherer (1969:61) described as being based on human desires, goals and purposes.

> "Like definitions, identifications and locations, a boundary is a man-made device for grasping reality. When we see the beginning and end of matters we feel that we understand and control our universe".

The nature of boundaries can, however be regarded as equivocal. On the one hand, they bring a positive sense of order and control without restricting movement. People know where they belong, their social relationships within those bounds, and who their leaders are. On the other hand, boundaries like walls, can have negative implications imposing a sense of conformity and parochialism. The existence of boundaries can construct a sense where those on the inside are different (and if necessary protected) from those on the outside. This exacerbates an artificial sense of a line dividing the known from the unknown.

The reality is that boundaries are frequently drawn somewhat arbitrarily, except where physical features such as a river, mountain range or main road provide a visible separation between areas. As the First Report of the South Australian Royal Commission (1974:17) commented, while precise community boundaries were difficult to find they:

> "…. generally selected those Hundred lines which approximate community of interest boundaries, as the Hundred lines are existing, and when used for Council boundaries, are no more anomalous than other lines that we may fix".

Rossi (1972:92) pointed out that the necessarily arbitrary drawing of boundaries:

> " … often leaves the researcher with a sense of dissatisfaction of not being able to do adequate justice to the richness of the concept of community he or she had in mind".

The application of the criteria of community of interest to boundary change can assist in determining the relevance of the existing municipal boundaries. Its end-point is to determine how a particular local government unit can best encompass the identity, interactions and needs of a community into an effective political unit. This will require an examination of the perceptual, functional and political dimensions of community of interest and their appropriate weighting within an individual community. It will also require a certain pragmatism to determine the importance of other criteria, such as economies of scale to boundary reform.

THE PERCEPTUAL DIMENSION

The perceptual dimension of community of interest is described as a sense of belonging to an area or locality which can be clearly defined.

Communities show considerable diversity in the nature and strength of the networks which operate, both overtly and covertly, between local residents. In perceptual terms, community of interest may range from virtually non-existent, to transient, to a proud local tradition.

In some localities, the physical proximity and daily interaction of residents in activities such as shopping, recreation, and worship may create only loose-knit networks. People in the street may nod to each other, but avoid becoming familiar, or be of the view that relationships with neighbours, kin and friends should be separated. It may take an unusual occurrence or threatening local issue to bring together such people to form a community of interest. (10) This might be illustrated in the combined response of residents to a plan for a freeway through the area, the demolition of a heritage precinct or the formation of a local Neighbourhood Watch programme.

In other areas, people's interactions may be more neighbourly. They may see the community as the next point of contact outside the family, may talk over the fence, borrow tools, mind each other's children and become good friends. Such a community may be centred around an informal institution, such as a delicatessen, school, church or hotel.

In other localities (for example long-established rural communities), there may be a strong network of people, who are proudly self-sufficient and actively demonstrate their compatibility and common outlook. They may, for instance, build community facilities together and have a considerable knowledge of their particular locality. Such communities may be readily identifiable, particularly in comparison with more densely populated urban areas. In terms of the basic definition of community, of people in the same locality having one or more ties, rural communities commonly have an additional strong tie to each other through the land and their common source of livelihood. These ties are accentuated by their relatively sparse populations and geographical isolation.

These perceptual bonds are frequently referred to in community submissions on proposals far-boundary change. In particular, concern is often expressed that if a Council area is enlarged, the sense of community identity will be lost, or become blurred (especially if the newly defined area is perceived as less homogeneous than the original). Therefore, it is relevant to determine the limits, both in area and population, with which people can identify and the factors which strengthen or weaken attachment to the community.

Measuring the Perceptual Dimension

A rough starting point in identifying an area which shares a community or collective identity is to examine the use of locality names. Often these identify the common tie of terrain, or occupation, such as "blockies", "the mallee" and "cockies". Common use of shortened versions of place names such as "Kyby" (for Kybybolite), "Tumby" (for Tumby Bay) and the "The Port" for Port Adelaide may also indicate a group consciousness (pride, fondness, solidarity), even though there may be an apparent absence of any organised co-operative interaction within the area.

More objective measurements undertaken by political scientists, geographers and sociologists involve questionnaires and household interviews to establish the area with which people identify. The type of questions asked are listed below and usually require the resident to choose a response ranging from strong to weak.

Typical Questions to Identify the Perceived Local Community

Is there an area around here which you would say you belong to or you feel at home?

Please describe or draw that area.

Besides this area, is there a larger area you feel you belong to?

How many people do you know in this area?

How interested are you in what goes on here?

What membership or participation do you have in organisations in this area?

How friendly and mutually supportive are people in this area?

To what extent is there a sense of pride and people working together to get things done for the community?

What sense of loss would you feel if you had to move out of the area?

A number of studies have sought to examine the area or community with which people identify. In a South Australian study John Robbins (1975) surveyed the attitudes of people to their "home area", or the area to which they felt they belonged and with which they identified. He noted that 27% of people surveyed did not know, and of those who did, the majority identified their "community" as having fewer than 5,000 people. For people living in Council areas with fewer than 20,000 people, most identified the "area" in which they felt "at home" as the local government area. Above 20,000, perceived communities were smaller than the actual population of the local government area. (11)

Robbins also attempted to assess the importance of community feeling to respondents as well as their perception of the level of community feeling within the locality. He found that within the Adelaide metropolitan area, the sense of community was relatively weak compared with that of rural respondents. In both areas, the perceived level of community feeling was considered to be

less than desirable, although the short-fall was greate r in the case of the metropolitan area (1978:82-83).

The Maud Royal Commission's Survey of Community Attitudes across England (1969) found that in urban areas, most people defined the "home" area by the group of roads within ten minutes walk of their residence, and in smaller boroughs, with the whole town. "The major finding was that more than three-quarters of those interviewed were conscious of living in a local community which was defined as the "home area". This feeling was strongest among those people who had lived there longest, and it seemed to be most closely linked with the number of their relatives and friends living in the area" (Vol.1, 1969:62).

The results of these and other surveys are based on the aggregate of individual responses which in themselves will be idiosyncratic since people's perceptions reflect their own experiences and perspectives. For example, a woman based at home with small children may have a clearer, although more narrow view of her "home area" than her husband who leaves the neighbourhood everyday to go to his workplace. The results of the Maud Royal Commission Survey indicated that there was a tendency among people with a higher level of education or longer period of residence to describe a larger area. A study conducted in Adelaide by Martin (1970) similarly identified a relationship between an individual's structural position (in terms of employment, income and social class) and the nature and sense of identity with his/her local area. (12)

Senior (1969:50) noted of the Maud Survey that people who lived close to their Town Hall valued easy access to it, while those who lived further afield felt relatively indifferent to it. (Interestingly, attachment to an area has been described in terms of being within hearing distance of the Town Hall clock chimes. Perhaps the proximity to other physical markers such as libraries, churches, community centres and schools is similarly important).

Haga and Folse's (1971:46) study of rural towns in Illinois found that people from a range of populations (5-6,000 people to under 100) identified symbolically with the closest perceivable town, even if that town had lost its economic relevance.

> "Nonetheless these functionally inactive communities remain alive in perceptions of rural residents. The scope of identity remains tightly bound to the immediate area of the community. It does not expand its circumference concomitantly with economic activities".

They concluded that the sense of identification did not decrease with the size of the town in the way functional interactions did.

It is argued in a number of reports (13) that shifting the municipal boundary will not damage the perceptual community of interest, because that relates primarily to a relatively small and fixed centre. Hampton (1970), for instance, was sceptical about the idea of people losing their sense of community in a larger reformed local government system since his study in the City of Sheffield, England', Showed that electoral boundaries did not correspond with people's perceptions of community.

To date, assessments made of the loss of community identity, in the event of amalgamation, have tended to be based on subjective value judgement and considerable hearsay. As Dixon (1981:54)

suggested, comparative studies should be undertaken to identify, systematically, changes to perceived community of interest before and after an amalgamation. This should include an analysis of the social effects on individual Council employees and groups of elected representatives (In the absence of such data, voter turn-out at elections may give a limited indication of the effect of boundary reform on perceived community of interest - this is discussed later).

A number of studies have sought to compare perceived community of interest with the detailed patterns of regular community interaction. Two kinds of community interaction have generally been distinguished: functional interactions, measured by trade patterns for a wide range of goods and services, schools, and places of employment, and social or effectual relations measured by the location of church activities, after-work socialising, kinship, recreation and community organisation membership.

Munch and Campbell, (1963:21) found that perceived community membership did not coincide with either the functional or effectual patterns of interaction. Smailes (1984:28) found that while the patterns of functional and effectual interaction did overlap, effectual relations came closest to coinciding with perceived sense of community. Haga and Folse (1971:45), found that the best fit between perceptual, functional and social interactions was the parish.

The evidence outlined suggests that people's sense of belonging tends to be limited to a size known as the neighbourhood. Its focus is likely to be the closest perceivable town or centre and will tend to remain fixed, despite changes in functional patterns. As the perceptual dimension of community of interest is usually smaller than most existing local government units, this dimension is alone unlikely to be a sufficient base to determine appropriate boundaries. However, most people desire to maintain the sense of belonging, so that the pertinent questions become: how can the perceptual dimension be fostered and used to enhance people's sense of identity with, and ability to play their role in, local government? If boundary lines are being redrawn to better serve functional and political dimensions of community of interest, how can regard still be paid to the perceived sense of community? Several options are suggested.

As the Advisory Council for Intergovernment Relations (1984 : Paper 13, 42-43) noted:

"Smaller Councils are not necessarily closer to the people than are larger ones because closeness depends wore on attitudinal factors than administrative ones

Of more significance perhaps is the concern that participation may be rendered worthless if, for other reasons, local government becomes an unimportant or ineffective level of government".

These issues are examined in the following sections.

Fostering the Perceptual Dimension

Firstly, since the measure of perceived community of interest (which equates with the neighbourhood) tends to approximate the size and concept of wards, a ward system can protect

the established sense of community of interest. At the same time, care needs to be taken to guard against ward boundaries which artificially divide groups of people or create conflicts of interest.

On the other hand, municipalities may choose to have elections at large (with no wards) where the community of interest is commonly regarded as being undifferentiated. Such elections have been used for some time in South Australian Council areas which are physically contained or geographically isolated (for example Warooka, Kimba and Dudley).

A second possible method to foster the perceptual dimension of community of interest is the formation of "neighbourhood" or "parish Councils" referred to earlier. Their appropriateness is reinforced by evidence that the interaction patterns of people in a church parish came closest to matching the area identified as "home".

Interestingly, amongst South Australian proposals for amalgamation similar suggestions have been put forward such as the establishment of community development boards which would operate "as a think tank rather than actually undertaking works of a major nature" (14). Another proposal suggested that "a rural neighbourhood committee be formed as an advisory body for that sector of the population ... should the rural community have any apprehension or doubts over their ability to obtain ''fair representation" (15). Potentially, such bodies may fulfil a transitional need in the formation of a new Council, or may have a continuing role.

In summary, perceived community of interest is not a particularly useful dimension for determining the appropriate size of local government units. Of more relevance are the functional and political dimensions. Is the size of the municipality sufficient to provide the basis for all or most of the functions required? Is the size and structure of the reformed unit appropriate to maintain residents confidence in their ability to influence the decision-making process?

THE FUNCTIONAL DIMENSION

It is hard to dispute the conclusion of the South Australian Royal Commission First Report (1974:17) that it would be uneconomical and impractical to base a local government authority on the first level of community of interest, relating to the sense of local identity. The base needs to be broader, involving a clustering of local neighbourhoods which may be alike or complementary, but which are interdependent communities of interest in functional terms. As the Bains Victorian Royal Commission (1979:79) commented:

"The reality is that most strong municipalities already serve a number of local communities".

The functional dimension refers to the interactions of the community, the sense of common activities such as trade, sport and schooling, and common needs for area-based facilities and amenities. These interactions occur on a much larger scale than the perceptual dimension. Smailes (1984) showed, for example, that community shopping and economic functions have diminished at the neighbourhood level. His study of trade patterns on Southern Yorke Peninsula showed a hierarchy of towns which were used for purchasing different sorts of goods and that with improvements in communications and transport, these functional communities appear increasingly to extend beyond the existing municipal boundaries.

Most studies have concluded that municipal boundaries should follow the spatial patterns of human activity. They follow the Loschian (1954) principle in which spatial competition among (rural) towns of varying sizes follows a geographical distribution (Haga and Folse, 1964:49). At the margin between adjoining regions a "zone of indifference" can be expected - the residents there find shopping in either centre equally convenient (or inconvenient).

Generally speaking, functional communities are more readily identifiable in rural areas. They tend to stretch in concentric circles around populations centred in one or more towns, with a light dispersal of people living around the periphery. Smailes (1984:6) likened the nature of a rural community to a spider's web - an invisible web of regular contacts, with a central focus and open membranes. He described a remarkably persistent core of territorial social groups, the edges of the web were never totally closed, but the links there thinned out. There was a spatial mixture of loyalties on the fringes, as householders considered themselves members of more than one community.

The practice of matching municipal boundaries to spatial patterns of human activity will never be clear-cut or definitive, especially in larger cities since no single indicator will be adequate to assess the functional dimension of community of interest (16). As the Victorian Local Government Commission (1986:2) noted, however, it does "provide a better guide than whim or prejudice" and to this end, a number of measures are suggested, some of which will be more relevant to particular communities than others.

Measuring the Functional Dimension

One measure proposed by researchers is propinquity, or the factor of distance. The original model by Galpin (1915) was based on distance measured as a trade zone of customers. This has

however, become less relevant, given developments in transport and communications. What is perhaps more important is the measurements of travel time, which makes allowance for terrain and the local road network. The New South Wales Bains Board of Review (1979) considered it unreasonable to expect any substantial section of inhabitants of a rural municipality to travel more than an hour to reach their municipal headquarters.. The Victorian Local Government Commission (1986:18) nominated an upper limit of forty-five minutes and added that, as a general rule, at least 80% of inhabitants should be able to travel to their municipal centre in less than thirty minutes. In South Australia it may be appropriate to consider variations on these figures given that areas such as Eyre Peninsula are much more sparsely populated than the mid-north.

The importance of telecommunications in reducing the impact of distance has been acknowledged by the Victorian Local Government Commission. They have also made considerable use of telephone linkages to measure community of interest because:

"Experience has shown that the distribution of telephone calls is highly correlated with other significant modes of interaction" (1986:40).

Telecom Australia has given that Commission access to telephone traffic dispersal information for individual exchange areas, in terms of the destination of calls and strength of interaction between any two individual exchanges (in terms of business in the daytime and recreational and personal linkages in the evening). These are mapped onto matrix patterns and indicate the degrees of interaction operating between various communities and areas which are commercially and socially compact.

Sport has also been identified as a strong focus for community life in rural areas, (Smailes, 1984:16) and is frequently used by rural people as a measure of community interaction. People may however be able to identify with different levels of community depending on context and circumstances. For example, if you live in Yeelanna and support the Cummins Ramblers Football Club, you may also support the Great Flinders League (of which the Cummins Ramblers are a member), when they play the other seven leagues in Eyre Peninsula for the annual Mortlock Shield. Your next level of loyalty may be to Port Adelaide Football Club which uses your region as a catchment area for recruits. Building on that, 'you're likely to support a combined South Australian team in an interstate match.

It may also be the case however that the sporting community of interest criss-crosses municipal boundaries and that participants will regularly drive long distances to play with a team of their choice.

Measurements of functional community of interest should also analyse the extent of local government's role as a provider of services. For many facilities or services provided or sponsored by local Councils, the catchment areas can be readily assessed - through borrower records of libraries, membership of senior citizens clubs and users of aged care and home assistance services. Other measures which reflect local activity patterns could include surveys of users of services. As the Victorian Local Government Commission (1986) suggested, measuring "from where people came for services", and in particular those services where local government is represented on management structures - for example local hospital boards, childcare centres, schools and kindergartens and community health centres.

As well as measuring current use of services, future demands should be assessed by Councils, through analysis of census statistics. Accurate demographic profiles of factors such as age, occupation, incomes, housing and family types, home ownership rate and recipients of welfare benefits, will indicate how homogenous (17) or stable the community is and the likely direction of changing needs relevant to Council planning and policy. Waiting lists for admittance to local nursing homes or other local programmes may also assist in determining future or unmet needs, as will reference to planning directions incorporated in local supplementary development plans.

Another subjective but useful measure of the functional community of interest is the perception residents have of the field of service the Council renders to its community. This could be achieved by a survey of the Council area in which residents are asked to comment on the range of Council services and whether, over time, those services have improved or diminished and how satisfactory that has been.

Regular, practical patterns of movement which have evolved to suit the needs and wishes of residents may also indicate approximate boundaries of functional communities of interest. The routes devised for rubbish collection may be one such example. Country school bus routes are another and may be particularly useful considering the importance of schooling in community life. In metropolitan areas, the routes of community buses operated by local Councils may mark out communities of interest within municipal boundaries.

Requests for modifications and/or expansions to the route may reflect the additional needs of local residents. In addition, occasional variations of the route to travel to a regional shopping centre outside the particular local government boundary, or a proposal to run a bus jointly between neighbouring Councils, may illustrate a wider community of interest.

The Victorian Commission (1986:46) has commented that where possible integrated land use, environmental and transport systems should be contained within the one municipality (18). Studies of traffic patterns and shopping activity may also indicate functional interactions relevant to effective Council planning.

It may also be useful to assess the existence of, or trend towards, co-operative arrangements between adjacent Councils in terms of community of interest. The basis of joint arrangements such as sharing staff for dog control, pest plant control, or jointly operating a cemetery or an aerodrome, may be largely pragmatic. Other joint arrangements may highlight similar or complementary communities of interest in adjoining Council areas - for example, the establishment of neighbouring community development boards. Joint planning at a regional level may also indicate a broader level of community of interest where a group of local Councils is responding to shared community needs. Examples of such activity include: political lobbying by the South-East Local Government Association; the development of a local tourist industry by combined Barossa Councils; the development of employment schemes by the Western Region; social planning jointly funded by the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Organisation; and the economic entrepreneurial activities of Councils in The Green Triangle in the South East. (This last grouping recognises a community of interest which overrides State boundaries).

A functional community of interest in local government terms can therefore be very broad. Its operational sphere can extend to the Local Government Association itself, with membership

covering all local Councils and representing the interest of this sphere of government in negotiations with State and Federal Governments.

Examples in the metropolitan area are more difficult to identify. In some part, the proposal by a number of Blackwood Hills residents to secede from Mitcham Council, reflected the frustration of a fairly densely populated community being physically (and perceptually) distant from the administrative centre at Mitcham. Alternatively, these frustrations may be overcome by establishing a branch office, corresponding to a perceptual community of interest, and maintaining the accessibility to, and involvement of the community in the Council and its services.

The second condition is that no community of interest should be divided by a municipal boundary. Until the recent amalgamation of Snowtown and Blyth, the township of Brinkworth was a dramatic illustration of this condition. The town was physically divided by a railway line, which was also the administrative and political boundary between two Councils. The strength of the Brinkworth Progress Association in building the facilities and amenity of the town has demonstrated an active community of interest working to overcome any divisions or conflicts of interest created by the municipal boundary.

The second condition also applies to a community of interest formerly contained within a municipal boundary but which, over time has changed or expanded. This may occur particularly in older metropolitan Councils, where boundaries were originally defined by outlying tracks which encompassed discrete villages or settlements. In modern times these roads may have become the focus of various commercial or industrial developments. Although both sides may have similar needs for amenities such as traffic control, advertising and planning restrictions, they may be working under different policies if the road continues to divide two municipalities. Thus the functional community of interest seems to be divided artificially. (The solution may be to adapt the principle applied by planners who use minor roads or mid-block lines as boundaries to divide different land use zones).

The findings of official inquiries into local government boundary reform, as outlined in Appendix B, are unanimous with respect to the third condition, in recognising the interdependence of service centres and the surrounding countryside in rural areas. The clearest instance of this occurs in the case of the so-called doughnut Councils where the town and surrounding countryside are severed by a local government boundary.

This separation into two local government units fails to recognise that town and rural dwellers interact in a single functional community. In such circumstances, it is inequitable that the town has to bear the costs of facilities, such as town roads, parks, and lighting which are used by non-contributing residents from surrounding districts. In the case of services like public libraries and pools the "user pays" principle applies to some extent, but it is generally argued that country residents do not contribute fully to the available amenities.

There may also be a considerable duplication of plant and administration. Although there may be a number of functions shared by joint boards, such as maintenance of the cemetery, airport or pest and plant control, in many instances, the Council alone lacks a sufficient rate base to employ specialist staff such as an engineer, to undertake major new projects or justify extensions to its community services.

The anomaly of a single functional community of interest being split, as in the rural/town doughnut circumstance, also has a correlation in the political dimension. As the South Australian Royal Commission (1974:Volume 1, 23) noted:

"It is unfair that those who are outside the confines of the country town or city, are deprived of a say in the local government affairs of what, in common parlance, is known as 'their' town".

(The other side of this however is the negative response of people from country areas which are almost inevitably more sparsely populated than towns and who fear that they will be in the minority in terms of elected representation. This issue is discussed in the next section).

Since the 1960's a number of so-called doughnut Councils have been successfully amalgamated in South Australia including the Corporation and District of Murray Bridge and the District Council of Mobilong, the two Councils of Burra, the two Councils of Strathalbyn, and the Corporation of Maitland and the District Council of Yorke Peninsula.

In some circumstances, the size of the town centre may be so large and intensive in use that the more appropriate decision may be to maintain separate town and surrounding country municipalities, but rectify problems of overlapping functional communities of interest by extending the two boundaries. This was the case with the City of Mt Gambier in 1987.

The fourth basic condition with respect to the functional dimension is that boundaries should be easily identifiable and have regard to boundaries defined and used by other government and statutory bodies. The shape and topography of the area must also be considered in terms of the ability of the Council to efficiently service the area.

In drawing the boundary line, Smailes (1988) stressed that the use of hundred lines was important because it correlated with the collection of statistics useful for planning in farming communities. As far as possible, municipal boundaries should try to be consistent with, or not cut across, areas defined by such bodies as the Bureau of Statistics, E.W.&S., Australia Post postcodes, hospital and school catchment areas and other bodies related to community planning. This kind of consideration is becoming increasingly important as statistical justifications are required to attract financial contributions from other spheres of government towards community workers (such as aged care officers). Similarly, for the purposes of political lobbying, it tends to be effective to have a municipality contained within the one State or Federal electorate.

As a factor in Boundary Reform

Once these four basic conditions relating to functional community of interest have been satisfied, a number of other criteria need to be applied, notably those of economies of scale and political compatibility. It may be found that a proposal, based on functional considerations, significantly alters economies of scale or efficiency of work patterns in adjacent local government areas. Thus, while the cause for reform of boundaries on a functional basis may be justified, the effect on the adjacent municipality must be considered. This occurred for example, in the (1986) proposal by the District of Hallett to increase its size by annexing the northern half of the District of Burra Burra which was rejected because it left the remaining part of Burra Burra unviable.

Recent examples of successful Council amalgamations, motivated by the recognition of a shared single functional community of interest and similar identities, would be the District of Central Yorke Peninsula and the District of Clinton in 1987 and the Districts of Balaklava, Owen and Pt Wakefield coming together as the District of Wakefield Plains in 1983.

In both these cases the new Council has an improved rate base, increased efficiency in the administrative and outside workforce and better use of plant. Wakefield Plains has already been able to achieve a number of projects such as the establishment of a tourist caravan park and improved human services, which would not have been feasible for any of the individual Councils to undertake alone. Evidence suggests that this has not been at the expense of the identities of the individual Councils. As Mayor Shepherd (the first Mayor of Wakefield Plains) said, his first objective

"was to encourage the whole Plains Council area to become as one, but at the same time to maintain their individual identity. I was told that I was contradictory. I said that it is not. You can belong to something larger and still maintain your individual identity and I think that's what has got to happen within an amalgamation ..."(19)

While boundary reform may be appropriate based on functional communities of interest, there remain a number of questions about the political and perceptual dimensions of community of interest. What is the extent of the willingness of the parties to commit themselves to making the arrangement work? What degree of compatibility is there with respect to expectations and priorities for service development? Are difficulties likely to persist when the individual municipalities have traditionally perceived their identities as being distinct?

This is illustrated in the recent unsuccessful proposal by the Corporation of Naracoorte to be joined with the District of Naracoorte. Both Councils were financially viable in their own right and better off than many in the State. Each recognised that they shared a single functional community of interest, although there were differences in priorities. The District Council was adamant that they did not want amalgamation and was particularly concerned at the possible reduction in the quantity and quality of its political representation. In recommending against the proposal the majority judgement of the South Australian Local Government Advisory Commission (March 1987:54) was that:

"… in the circumstances of this case, the Commission believes the views of the electors in opposition to amalgamation are significant enough to outweigh the benefits of it ... . There is not a sufficient level of support within the community for the Commission to have a reasonable degree of confidence that an amalgamated Council would be successful at this time".

In conclusion, while it may be demonstrated that an amalgamation between two or more Councils will better approximate the functional community of interest and have economic advantages for residents, several key questions need to be answered in relation to the other two dimensions of community of interest. With respect to the perceptual dimension of community of interest, are the residents willing to pay more or perhaps accept reduced services, in order to retain the status

quo? It may be their assessment that the value placed on community identity outweighs any economic advantages in changing a Council area.

With regard to the political dimension, will the proposed joint Council be able to represent the diverse views of its residents, reconcile any conflicting interests and successfully bring its goals and policies to fruition? Are the residents able to perceive that this can happen and commit themselves to making it work? Or, to put it another way, are the communities of interest so distinct that they require political autonomy to operate as good local government? These questions are examined in the following section.

In summary, the functional dimension of community of interest tends to extend in concentric circles, and vary in diameter and strength, depending on the function being measured. In applying this criterion to boundary reform, a Council needs to understand how far those circles extend. Do they extend significantly past its municipal boundaries? Where do they intersect or overlap with the spheres of influence of adjoining Councils? At those points of interdependence, are they complimentary or in conflict?

Four Conditions Relating to Functional Community of Interest

A useful staring point in applying the functional dimension of community of interest seems to be that municipal boundaries should reflect the spatial patterns of human activities and contain most, if not all, of the facilities and services which are essential features of that community. A number of conditions follow which relate firstly, to the location of the administrative centre, secondly, to the division of an identifiable community of interest, thirdly, to the relationship of towns and surrounding countryside and fourthly, to the definition of boundaries.

With respect to the first condition, where possible the administrative centre, in terms of a main service town, should be located towards the geographic centre of the municipal unit, rather than near its periphery. Difficulties arise when a reasonably large town is adjacent to a boundary rather than centrally situated. The likelihood of (non-contributing) residents from the adjoining Council area using the facilities of that town is high, and the efficiency of administration of Council business and outside workforce is reduced. The township of Lock provides one such example. It is the largest town within the District Council of Elliston and therefore has a central focus. However, it is situated only a few kilometres from the border of the District of Cleve. This anomalous position with respect to functional community of interest has been the principal basis of a recent proposal from the District of Elliston to sever areas of Cleve and Tumby Bay District Councils.

THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

The political dimension of community of interest relates to the ability of local government to represent the interests of all its members. In other words, the local Council should be, and should be seen to be, government by the people of the community. This is not only important for the working of the local government unit itself, but also for its recognition as a strong and viable sphere of government by State and Federal Governments.

Discussion about the perceptual and functional dimensions of community of interest have stressed the need for local government to define and represent an area that is a coherent social and economic unit. It has also indicated that there are likely to be diverse identities, needs and priorities clustered together within that unit.

The political dimension of community of interest needs to acknowledge the existence of such diversity, be able to reconcile conflicts of interest and differing priorities, and bring policies to fruition. To do so effectively, there must be public confidence in local political leaders and in the ability of local activity to influence decision making processes. Resident interest and involvement in local politics will in turn foster the perceptual dimension of community and enhance the workings of local government as community government. As the Advisory Council Inter-Government Relations (1984:36) commented:

> Local Government has been acknowledged to have the capacity and potential to foster a sense of belonging and identity through its ability to reflect local community diversity. This in turn reinforces its own role and identity".

While the level of interest and involvement by the public in Australia's local government is notoriously poor, the issue of boundary reform frequently gives rise to lively discussion and debate, and provides an occasion on which communities of interest can be identified and their faith (or lack of it) in political leadership demonstrated.

Measuring the Political Dimension

The first basic measure of interest in the local government unit is that of voter turnout at elections. Research by the Have-A-Say Campaign in South Australia (1987) indicated that publicity and education have improved the level of knowledge and interest in local government. While the campaign raised the general consciousness level, the indications are that, especially in the metropolitan area, people are unfamiliar with, or do not understand the system of ward boundaries. This points to the need for local Councils to educate their own communities about representation and boundaries, and to review boundaries so that they better approximate perceived and/or functional communities of interest.

Interestingly there are some striking examples of increased voter turn-out in municipalities which have undertaken boundary reform. This occurred for example in Gawler after boundary changes in 1985. The reasons suggested for this were the generation of publicity, and perhaps for the first

time, a demand on residents to consider their Council as an identifiable community (20). In the first election of the newly amalgamated Centre Yorke Peninsula Council in 1987, voter turn-out was a record 47%. Recognition of the special nature of a community may also improve voter turn-out, as demonstrated by the introduction in 1987 of general postal voting in the large sparsely populated District Council of Cleve.

Analysis by the Have-A-Say Campaign indicated that a number of factors affect voter turn-out including the type and number of positions, existing issues, extent of candidates' camp aign and profile, frequency of contested elections and press coverage. Traditionally, however it can be said that voter turn-out has been low in large Councils and comparatively high in country areas and older metropolitan areas, each with smallish populations (21).

This suggests that the political dimension of community of interest relates strongly to the perceptual dimension. However Hampton's extensive study of local politics in Sheffield England (1970:18) showed no links between the degree of neighbourhood attachment and level of political knowledge. Rather, he identified the following factors which encouraged political interaction in local government: the seeming perceived relevance of decisions to the electorate; information available about the decision-making process and decisions made; apparent opportunity to affect those decisions by local activity; and having the size of the local government authority relevant to the functions it undertakes (including being a sufficient size to carry out its policies without continual frustration).

By itself voter turn-out is not a very reliable measure of the relationship between political community of interest and municipal boundaries. Four factors may be applied to give a more comprehensive picture: familiarity with boundaries, quality of leadership, information distribution and informal political networks.

Firstly, a measure of the political dimension based on familiarity with the municipal area was advocated by Walmsley (1977). His questionnaire listed nearby local government areas, and asked residents to indicate their familiarity with each on a five point scale, from "know extremely well" to "don't know at all". The resultant scores could then be applied to defining communities of interest in areas in which boundary changes were contemplated.

Rossi (1972:118) suggested measuring the second factor of quality of leadership through a questionnaire of social indicators. How well do people feel they are represented? Do people see the Mayor/Chairman as a focus for the locality in a collective sense? How much do residents trust decision makers and feel they have access to them?

The issue of changing leadership is often a major concern to communities facing boundary change. The desire to retain the status quo is frequently linked to a fear that in a larger unit, voters' representation will decline in quality and quantity. This is not however necessarily the case. For example, Abelson's survey of elected members in rural New South Wales (1979:20) found that quality of leadership and workload for individual members was affected by factors other than the number of constituents. Those factors included the elected member's occupation, length of time on Council, office help available, rate of community growth and the nature of its demands. (It is also important to note that as Councils become more involved in long term and corporate planning and Centrepreneurial activities, the roles of elected member will change. They will tend

to concentrate more on policy and corporate issues and less on day-to-day administrative matters.)

There is evidence to suggest a connection between the size of the local authority and the degree of contact between constituents and Councillors. Robbins (1975:375) found that residents' knowledge of Councillors remained high in a population of up to 20,000. Public contact with Councillors and Council officers was equal in populations of between 5,000 and 10,000 and in Council areas of greater than 10,000 people, contact was greater with Council officers than elected members.

Research has further indicated that only a small percentage of the population plays a direct role in local politics, and that those people tend not to be particularly representative of the community in demographic terms. In particular, there are relatively few women actively involved while older and well educated people, and those in occupations of manager, professional, farmer and employer tend to predominate (22).

The study by Dixon (1981:53) suggested that the factors most relevant to local political involvement were the individual's structural position, level of education, and occupation. Hampton (1970:118) noted that the confidence, initiative and motivation required by an individual to become involved in local government are closely related to the experience and practice that person gains in his or her social and working life. The Maud Community Attitudes Survey (1969:149) similarly found that a large proportion of Councillors have first been brought into contact with local government through organisations connected with work, welfare, education, politics and public bodies.

The factor which appears to be most relevant in rural areas in the choice of candidates is individual occupation. This is reflected in the high rate of involvement by farmers in broad-based community organisations, such as school committees, management committees of recreation centres and rural Councils. On such bodies farmers' representation is often disproportionate to that of the whole population.

The Maud Community Attitudes Survey in England also found that active members of organisations tended to be more closely associated with local affairs and have a higher sense of community responsibility. They were more likely to have considered becoming Councillors than the electorate at large. Length of residence was not a significant factor and it was likely that "increased mobility may augment, rather than reduce interest in local government" (1969:157). Interestingly, involvement in local affairs has been shown to be higher among families, and to increase with the number of children (Konig (1968:148). This is probably explained by such people being more settled, spending more time in the local community and using more of its services than for example a single, professional person.

The third factor suggested for measuring the political dimension is information distribution which can be critical to developing and enhancing community of interest in each of its perceptual, functional and political dimensions. There is no doubt that Councils which communicate actively with residents through newsletters or other consultative mechanisms stimulate and retain the responsiveness of residents.

Good communications will not resolve real differences of opinion, but the free flow of information is a necessary condition of the rational discussion which forms the basis of democratic politics". (Hampton, 1970M.

Konig (1968:148) referred to a study which showed a definite relationship between strong community integration and wide readership of the local press. (It is notable that local papers in rural areas tend to be well read and have a distinctive local flavour).

In metropolitan areas, local papers can also have a strong unifying role, although the greater diversity within the community may create more conflicting demands on editors and less consistency in the type of coverage given to local politics. Local papers may also be distributed on a population basis in metropolitan areas, thereby arbitrarily dividing communities of interest, for example along the boundaries of major roads (23).

The fourth factor which provides a measure of the political community of interest is that of informal political networks. As the Victorian Local Government Commission (1986:34) noted:

It is important to understand that participation, whether it be in the form of volunteer labour or involvement in decision making, usually takes place at the neighbourhood level".

Examples would include lobbying Council for specific area-based benefits, such as improved parks, opposition to a specific development proposal and submissions on a local traffic problem. Residents associations frequently represent the formalised community voice on such issues focusing on a part of the Council area, usually a ward. While such a body may become activated only on a specific issue, the existence of a consistently strong residents association is likely to reflect and foster a strongly perceived community of interest.

Community Development Boards may also express the broader community of interest within a local government area. Their membership base is often broadly representative, where the constitution follows a formulae of *including local* residents, representatives of local service and statutory organisations, perhaps the local member of parliament and some Council staff. The role of such Boards tends to vary from one Council to another, but is essentially that of a non-executive sounding board for community needs. A study of the role of a Board and its relationship with the local Council may provide a rough indicator of how effectively the Council has understood and responded to the needs of its community.

Freilich (1963) highlighted another level of the informal political network, which relates to the informal processes of information pooling and distribution. Where do people interact, how do most community members receive a new piece of information and how quickly is it dispersed? Which sets of associational groups meet and overlap?

Each community will have its own distinctive networks and powerbrokers, among school committees, management committees of community facilities, football clubs, churches, CWA, Masons and the like. Identifying these networks will contribute to an understanding of the local political culture and provide an informal context for interpreting community satisfaction with its

leadership. It may, for example, explain a consistent pattern of uncontested elections ("we do our homework before, and get the right person for the right job" (24)).

The Operation of Political Networks

This kind of knowledge about the operation of formal and informal political institutions within a particular community will also provide a context in which to assess responses to issues. It may help clarify whether low voter turn-out at an election should be interpreted as a sign of general satisfaction, or disinterest with local leadership and decision-making. In the case of boundary reform, it may help to explain the cause of a strong voice on one side against a weak voice on the other. For example, in contemporary public hearings on boundary reform in rural South Australia, why have farmers been so much more vocal than town-dwellers?

A relevant study by Musgrave and others *(1985)* of rural Councils in New South Wales, noted the traditions of rural people to have strong and well vocalised opinions as well as generally conservative political views. As one South Australian farmer put it:

> Country people are a solid group who do band and work together for a common cause and are very much against any great changes in their way of life". *(25)*

The combination of these factors suggest that if such a community is faced with change (not initiated internally) it will readily support its political leaders and demonstrate a unified and vocal community of interest.

On an issue such as amalgamation, the urban community's voice and solidarity, by contrast, may be comparatively weak. Reasons for this are that town residents tend to be considerably more mobile, less homogeneous in occupation and more reliant on existing organisation to voice and respond to their needs, exhibiting a "limited liability" for themselves.

In a larger and denser population there may also not be the same need to take sides. Swedish researchers, Dahl and Tufte *(1973:94)* have studied the demonstration of (strong) views and size of the community. They suggest that group conflicts are relatively infrequent in small communities and tend to be ad hoc rather than institutionalised. When they occur, however, they are likely to be explosive:

> If the cost of conflict is high in the small system, the price of neutrality is higher. The neutral is not only perfectly visible but, in the emotional, inflamed atmosphere of the conflict, likely to be perceived as an enemy by both sides. Threatened by isolation, he may find it better to break some ties than to rupture all his friendships. As more issues are involved, more and more individuals and groups find a reason for joining the fray. Hence the smaller system - particularly if it is a territorial community such as a village or a town - is likely to become more fully polarized into two warring camps than the larger system, where anonymity, indifference, impersonality, lack of direct ties, even lack of knowledge, all make it possible for a large part of the population to sit it out".

An example of this occurred in Naracoorte as a result of the Corporation's 1986 proposal to amalgamate with the surrounding District Council. In addition to the petitions circulated among residents, businesses, who relied on both town and rural dwellers, were asked to sign a public petition.

These findings are consistent with the observations of a number of communities involved in boundary change. If local government is to operate on a political level as community government, heed must be paid to the desire and right of residents to be kept well informed on issues and the processes of decision making.

This applies particularly to boundary reform as people often interpret change to the status quo as threatening or a "takeover". All parties need to be informed (as objectively as possible) about the options and implications of boundary change, so that rational debate can take place within those communities which are affected. Unless this occurs political decisions may have the appearance of being made behind closed doors and issues of conflict can degenerate into personality struggles. Such occurrences amount to a violation of the concept of community of interest in its political dimension, and of Council as the voice of the community.

PART 5
CONCLUSIONS

This paper has defined "community of interest" in the context of local government as a three-dimensional concept. It applies to a group of people in a residential locality and has one or more of these dimensions:

· Perceptual: a sense of belonging to an area or locality which can be clearly defined.

· Functional: the ability to meet with reasonable economy the community's requirements for comprehensive physical and human services.

· Political: the ability of the elected body to represent the interests and reconcile the conflicts of all its members.

The more clearly these attributes apply in a locality, the more confidently the people in it can be said to have a community of interest. If the boundaries of a local government unit approximate a three dimensional community of interest, the unit will be a strong and viable one, representing a coherent social and economic whole.

The application of the criterion of community of interest to boundary reform is not aimed at making Councils into uniform units but is rather about defining the diversity of local government units. Since each Council will have a distinctive matrix of interests, the application of community of interest is concerned with identifying the distinctive interests of the community, and examining those interests in relationship to the existing Council boundary.

As it is defined, the concept of community of interest is fundamental to the view of local government as community government.

If the concept is to be applied to boundary reform it is important that the concept be conceived of in a broad, operational manner. Such an approach will enable newly defined local government units to provide comprehensive services and be flexible enough to adapt to the changing needs of residents. It will not be possible if community of interest is conceived of narrowly and defensively, focusing essentially on the continuity of past practices and traditions.

In those terms, it is evident that communities of interest do not remain static, but shift and change over time. In many areas it is likely that existing local government boundaries, drawn up to a hundred years ago, no longer coincide with the community of interest they were originally intended to serve and represent. Consequently the community of interest criterion needs to be applied in the context of the original basis and relevance of current boundaries, the major influences on the community's identities, the forces of change affecting the unit and the implications of its demographic profile for future needs and directions.

When the criterion of community of interest is applied to a local government unit, the relative weighting given to each of the three dimensions needs to be decided in view of the particular characteristics of the unit.

It has been argued that the first dimension of community of interest - the sense of belonging, or identity with a particular area - approximates the area described as the neighbourhood. That sense of belonging will vary greatly from area to area, depending on whether it has evolved over time or is more issue-based. While there may be no evidence that this dimension is damaged or altered by shifting municipal boundaries, of more importance is its application in reforming boundaries so as to enhance the local government unit.

In most cases, community of interest will be more realistically applied in the broader functional dimension. This dimension identifies a cluster of localised communities which have significant interactions, and involves the premise that municipal boundaries should reflect the spatial patterns of human activities. It follows that, as far as possible, the functional community of interest should not be split, its service centre or centres should be geographically central rather than towards the periphery and its boundaries should be readily identifiable. In regard to service centres, it should be acknowledged that branch offices of Council may also be established, corresponding to and fostering the perceptual community of interest. This will become increasingly relevant as local government units become larger, in order to maintain the accessibility and involvement of the community in Council activities. Where the sphere of influence of a Council overlaps the boundaries of other local government units, boundary reform must take into account the need to encompass interdependent parts of a functional community, so that costs of service provisions are distributed across all users.

If boundary reform involves annexation of part of a local government unit account must also be taken of the effect on and viability of the remaining portions. The criteria of economies of scale, and representation will need to be applied.

The political dimension of community of interest should then be applied to indicate whether a newly proposed local government unit will work. Assessment of political characteristics such as leadership, information distribution and informal political networks will help to determine the compatibility of the communities to be clustered together. Will they complement or undermine each other and are they willing to make the new unit work? Is there a balance between the unit being small enough to be sensitive to local needs, but large enough to have the ability to service them?

It may be that most people prefer the status quo. For a local government unit to accept any boundary change, communities must be involved in and identify with the change. The application of the criterion of community of interest is an important way to bring about this acceptance and to ensure the success of such change.

FOOTNOTES

<u>PART 2</u>

1)   Mr Perry Q.C. Counsel for Naracoorte Corporation, P.950 Transcript of public hearing 24.10.87.

(2)   Mr Leo Williams, witness for Naracoorte District, P.70 Transcript of public hearing 15.4.87.

(3)   Mr M. Beamond, counsel for Naracoorte District, P.32 Transcript of public hearing 15.4.87.

(4)   The Commission discussion went on to say that it was not suggesting that all existing councils should take on all such facilities. Their point was, rather, that when the issue of new boundaries was being considered, that the newly defined areas should encompass at least most such facilities, along with the people who would use them.

(5)   Commissioner Johnston of the Western Australian Royal Commission dissented. His view was:

"It may well be that in some areas, the degree of community of interest has been reduced. This to me does not mean that it has become less important. I believe it is a most important foundation on which to build and foster local government ... . Without (community of interest) local government cannot work effectively because it is in the co-operation between the people of the district and the local authority that effective local government lies".

Royal Commission on Metropolitan Municipal District boundaries (Judge L.F.J. Johnson, Chairman) Report, Government Printer, Peter, 1974, p.26 and 23. (As quoted from ACIR Discussion Paper 13, P.33-34).

(6)   As quoted by Dixon, (1981:78)

(7)   The neighbourhood has been identified as the area most people identify with and the closest approximation to it in measurement is the parish. The parish also often exists as an active network.

Hampton (1970:286) envisaged a large executive council body being supplemented by a mass of small, largely non-executive bodies based on the social communities of neighbourhoods, rather than the existing district authorities. He suggested that these would let more people participate in decision making than at present.

<u>PART 3</u>

(8)   For example the boundaries of the City of Kensington and Norwood were neatly drawn around the two original village centres and the tramline which ran between them. However, the square to the south-east made up of Heathpool and Marryatville which logically belonged in the Burnside area, was included with Kensington and Norwood's boundary because an early mayor had personal and property interests there. So it has remained ever since.

(9)   Mr Millard. businessman and former district clerk and overseer of Crystal Brook, p.128 transcript of public hearing of Crystal Brook proposal, 12.8.86.

PART 4

(10)   Konig (1986:50) noted: "It is extremely characteristic that in the village the principle of neighbourhood appears only under exceptional circumstances and usually under stress (urgent or heavy labour, natural disasters, accidents and so-on, which demand co-operation), whereas in ordinary circumstances a very definite reserve and distance are more usual".

Konig added that this is also true of small or large towns, although the way neighbourhood expresses itself there may be different.

Jones (1977:28,29) noted the formation of communities of interest over an issue such as that of conservation in local areas in large cities. Examples would be communities like Paddington in Sydney and Carlton in Melbourne, who want to protect their historical character.

Dixon (1981:45) noted: "Community of interest differs from community in that communities are formed over time". Later Dixon (1981:59) commented: "Certain communities of interest, like those which are formed to resist change, are to be expected in the natural course of events, so that little importance should be attached to them outside their particular purpose".

(11)   Bowman and Halligan's (1985:21) list of councils sizes in South Australia shows that 21.7% of local government areas have populations above 25,000, 30.2% have populations between 1,000 and 10,000 and 44.2% are below 1,000 people.

(12)   Martin (1970) described people as carrying in their heads symbolic maps of the city as a whole, with some areas charted in great detail and others with negligible detail. These could be used to demarcate possible patterns of social mobility and appropriate community values.

A survey group from a south-eastern upper middle class suburb tended to limit their involvement in community groups, in favour of their commitment to home, family and work. They tended to join professional or business groups centred in the city and these were largely an extension of their work role. They took the view that kin, neighbours and friends should be kept in separate categories.

People surveyed in a north-western Housing Trust suburb, mostly employed in blue-collar jobs, described themselves as weak in terms of community activities. Often they had not chosen to live in that particular locality and were reasonably dependent on outside organisations like the Trust, the government, council and youth groups.

The suburb closest to the village community with close knit ties of kin, neighbours, friends, church and other associations, was a western suburb. The breadwinners had varied occupations and were interested in joining local organisations and holding office in them.

Martin's general conclusion (1970:319) was that:

"as the socio-economic status of the sample declines, the ties which bind its members to the formal social life of the society lessen".

(13)   See for example South Australian Royal Commission Second Report (1974:14)

Point 6(b) "When an amalgamation takes place, there is no loss of identity. The complaint that there is such a loss may allude to the "loss" of a particular council, or to the transfer of offices and/or depot from a particular town or place".

Point 6(c) "The point that many people apparently overlook, however is that local government is not lost - it will still exist in the area".

Wright (1981:46) "Further evidence produced by this (N.S.W.) study indicates that communities of interest and local government boundaries are not congruent, thus damage to community of interest through boundary change is not substantiated".

Barnett N.S.W. Inquiry into Local Government Areas (1973:29) "We do not attach great importance to the view that the creation of larger areas submerges the identity of local communities ... Improved education, greater leisure, heightened public awareness, better communications, are also making it easier for local communities if they so wish, to give effective expression to their views whatever the size of the local government area".

(14)   Mr Ed Spencer, Chief Executive Officer of Snowtown District Council, P.70, Transcript of public hearing of Crystal Brook/Georgetown/Redhill proposal, 12.8.86.

(15)   Submission to the Local Government Advisory Commission, Corporation of Naracoorte, 28 January 1986, p.20.

This submission went on to say that "Any such fears would appear to be more theoretical than practical because voting trends show that rural residents take a far greater interest in local government than their urban neighbours". p.20-21.

(16)   Robbins (1975) applied the criteria developed by the Royal Commission on Local Government in Scotland (1969) to South Australian councils and concluded that thirteen existing non-metropolitan councils failed to qualify for "community" status. Points were given for the existence of a variety of facilities in a larger locality, for education facilities, hospitals, local shops and possibly a weekly newspaper and in a smaller locality, the requirements were the existence of a primary school, sub-post office, bank branch and local shops. It is suggested that such a measure of community is limited since it does not incorporate a very comprehensive or operational sense of community of interest.

(17)   The Victorian Local Government Commission (1986:52) highlighted the desirability of striving for a heterogeneous community as a matter of social policy. It stated this principle: "Municipal boundaries should embrace a balanced community; areas should not be segregated on the basis of social or economic class".

(18)   "The Commission believes significant planning functions should be performed by municipalities if at all possible. Regional authorities and joint committees involve additional expense and duplications and they can also diminish the role of the local council".

(19)   Mayor Shepherd, p.226 transcript of the Public Hearing of Naracoorte Corporation's Proposal for amalgamation with Naracoorte District, 31.7.87.

(20)   Have-A-Say Campaign Report 1987.

(21)   Have-A-Say Campaign Report, 1987:17

        "28 wards had turnouts of 50% or more. All of these were in country areas. The 20 Councils this covers have populations of less than 4,800. 24 of the 28 wards have less than 500 electors.

        60 wards had turnouts of 40% or more. Of these, 7 were in the metropolitan area from 4 Councils. Of these 60 wards, only 6 had more than 1,000 electors. It is pleasing to note that the number of metropolitan Councils with turnout of 25% or more had risen from 6-9. All of these Councils are older, more established communities and with one exception, small populations".

(22)   The findings of the Maud Royal Commission in Great Britain in its Community Attitudes Survey (1969: Appendix 9, 130) shared this conclusion with Robbins (1975). Robbins' subsequent survey of South Australian councillors in 1986 reiterated that:

        "Councillors remain preponderantly male and middle-aged or older. Women councillors are increasing in number but still remain very much in the minority, particularly in the country". Draft of "The Making of a Councillor" (1986:12).

(23)   For instance the area covered by the Eastern Suburbs Messenger (formerly The Burnside Messenger) combines news of the council areas of Burnside and Kensington and Norwood, but St Peters Council news appears elsewhere.

        Similarly the Blackwood hills area of Mitcham Council is served by the Hills Messenger while the rest of Mitcham Council area shares its news with Unley Council in the Courier Messenger.

(24)   Mr Smallacombe, witness at the Public Hearing of Crystal Brook's Proposal, 12.6.86, P.136 of transcript.

(25)   Mr Possingham, witness at the Public Hearing of Naracoorte's Proposal, 15.4.87, p.114, transcript.

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APPENDIX A

EXAMPLES OF DEFINITIONS OF "COMMUNITY OF INTEREST"

From:

First Report

South Australian Royal Commission into Local Government Areas (Ward), 1974.

4.(3)   Community of Interest

    a.   One factor to be taken into account in determining local government boundaries is what is known as the "community of interest" within a particular area. As is stated in Collins and Meaden's "Local Government Law and Practice (3rd Edn.)" at page 169:

> "There is no single principle of universal application that can be applied to determine where the boundaries of a municipality should be drawn. The most successful basic approach appears to have been that of community of interest. The broad application of this principle is usually comparatively easy in rural areas and on the outskirts of provincial cities. Drawing the actual line, however, may prove difficult because there will very often be found to be persons in the borderline territory who have their interests in one municipal district whilst there are others in the very same territory who have their interests in the other municipal district. The successful application of the community of interest test requires an examination of the places to which people go for their employment, the location of their banks, the location of their schools, the places where they do their shopping, and the location of their religious, recreational and major transport facilities. The application of such a test as this in the case of the suburban areas of a capital city is very difficult, particularly if that capital city is growing rapidly".

    b.   The term "community of interest" is also referred to incidentally in Gifford's "The Australian Local Government Dictionary", dealing with the word "boundaries" at page 38:

> "The boundaries of the territories administered by local government authorities are in many cases overdue for revision. There is a considerable tendency in local government work for boundaries once fixed to remain unchanged long after they have ceased to be appropriate. The tendency is an unfortunate one, for inappropriate boundaries can impede the development of local government. An obvious example is the case of the urban area of a city extending into the territory of a primarily rural shire: in such a case the shire is unlikely to be administering controls of the same nature or to the same standard of requirement as the city, and a later revision of boundaries can leave the city with a problem area which has come under its jurisdiction too late. Boundary revision is also important to ensure that the most effective use is made of roadmaking

and other equipment: there are cases in which one local government authority has to take its roadmaking equipment through the territory of another local government authority in order to reach some part of its own territory, and there are cases in which roadmaking equipment has to be taken for long distances to service a small community which could be more readily serviced from the depot of an adjoining local government authority. Financial questions are, of course, also involved in the question of boundary revision.

The appropriateness of the particular boundaries must necessarily be determined in each particular case in the light of its own particular circumstances. There are, however, basic principles which should be borne in mind. Unless the revision is being affected by way of amalgamation, it is important to ensure that each of the local government authorities affected by the boundary revision is left with a sufficient revenue to enable it to function effectively. A test that is commonly applied in boundary revision is that of community of interest".

This passage illustrates the necessity for review of boundaries from time to time.

From:

C. Wright (1981:23)

'Feeling or sentiment shared by a group of people who have common values, customs and perhaps traditions. It therefore incorporates a shared sense of belonging and perhaps a common territorial unit, signified by employment, shopping and recreational spheres of activity".

From:

M.A. Jones (1977:26-27)

Jones used the word "community" to refer to "groups with common bonds so that frequent and significant interaction occurs between group members. "Local community" refers to significant interaction among residents in a particular area.

From:

J. Robbins (1975:40)

The criteria of "naturalness", or "community" are closely associated with the concept of sovereignty, in that the existence of a distinct social entity will foster demands for some degree of autonomous political action. The location of such entities is in part a social-geographic exercise, plotting the distribution of population and the concentration of subjective awareness of feelings of distinctiveness and of actual patterns of social relationships.

From:

<u>J. Dixon (1981:44)</u>

Pons described communities of interest as "Those groups which gather first and foremost because of shared beliefs, values and concerns rather than because of proximity of residence or because of established patterns of social relationships".

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS OF RECENT GOVERNMENT INQUIRIES ON BOUNDARY CHANGE RELATING TO THE CRITERIA OF COMMUNITY OF INTEREST

From:

Report - (Maud) Royal Commission on Local Government in England 1966-69, 1969, Volume 1, p.4.

1. Local authority areas must be so defined that they enable citizens and their elected representatives to have a sense of common purpose.

2. The area must be based on interdependence of town and country.

3. In each part of the country, all services concerned with the physical environment (planning, transportation and major development) must be in the hands of one authority. Areas must be large enough to enable these authorities to meet the pressing land needs of the growing population, and their inhabitants must share a common interest in their environment because it is where they live, work, shop, and find their recreation.

5. If possible, both the "environmental" and the "personal" groups of services should be in the hands of the same authority, because the influence of one on the other is great and likely to increase. Further, concentrating responsibility for all main local government services in a single authority for each area, as in the present country borough, would help to make the idea of local self-government a reality. Through allocation of priorities and co-ordinated use of resources, a single authority can relate its programmes for all services to objectives for its area considered as a whole.

From:

Report on Metropolitan Municipal Boundaries

(Heron) Local Government Boundaries Commission (Western Australia), 1972, P.17.

8. The aim to retain municipal boundaries, merely for the sake of preservation of the identity of a locality, cannot be accepted as a valid reason, or justification for not changing boundaries.

9. Community of interest was stressed by some councils. The importance of this factor is diminishing.

10. Municipalities should be sufficiently large and financial to be capable of employing qualified officers in each department, to meet the changing and increasing demands of local government and to administer the full range of local government services.

11. The connotation "local" should be preserved.

From:

<u>Report - (Barnett) Committee of Inquiry into Local Government Areas and Administration in New South Wales, 1974.</u>

p.43 ...... "If every identifiable local community had a municipality or a shire, there would be many more local government areas than exist today, as many areas already contain several such communities".

P.46 ...... "We have concluded that justification no longer exists in many parts of the State for the separation of town and country for local government purposes".

P.50 ...... "While we think most existing areas are too small, we do not believe there is any one ideal size for a local government area".

P.81 3. Provisions be made for community councils to be established within districts, to be a voice for local communities.

From:

<u>Reports - (Ward) Royal Commission into Local Government Areas (in South Australia) 1974 and 1975.</u>

<u>First Report, P.67</u>

8 (3) The basic approach that we have adopted is that the boundaries of local governing bodies should be determined on principles relating to community of interest. We have, of course, had regard to all of the criteria contained in our terms of reference.

(4) Where the first level of community of interest does not provide a sufficient resource base for a local governing body to operate, we have adopted the second or some other level of community of interest, or we have combined two or more communities which can complement one another; we have at all times endeavoured to avoid splitting a community.

(5) The application of the community of interest principle necessitates the disappearance of local governing bodies for country towns and cities as separate entities from the local governing bodies for the surrounding areas.

<u>Second Report, p.21</u>

12 (2) There is, too often, a lack of understanding of the term "community of interest", or a difficulty in relating it to local government boundaries. We can understand that. in the application of the principle of community of interest to local government boundaries, there will often be differences of opinion.

b. In our First Report, 4(3), we dealt with the principle. We do not wish to restate what we have set out. We need only relate the term to our concept that each council area should be such that it provides for most, if not all, of the needs of the residents of the area. If a local government area is such that it provides those facilities which people

need and expect, including employment opportunities, commercial needs, schooling, shopping, the practice of religion, hospital and medical care, cultural needs, recreation and major transport, for most or, at least in suburban areas, a significant number of the inhabitants of the area, then it can be said that the area has a community of interest. In some areas, the facilities may be lacking or disjointed or supplied in such a way as to render it difficult to recognise the community, and the result will be that the community is not as strong as it otherwise could be.

    c.   There are several levels of community interest. That based on a small town or a single suburb or locality will usually be too small, or too lacking in facilities, to form a satisfactory base for a council. In such cases it is necessary to look for a wider level of community interest, or to combine two communities. Sometimes it is necessary to judge between the competing claims of adjoining communities.

    d.

Third Report

P.11

5. COMMUNITY GOVERNMENT AND LOSS OF POWER

(1) The Present Situation

Local government is essentially "community government", that is, its prime function is to understand and meet the needs of the local community. It follows that a council area must contain most, if not all, of those facilities and land uses which are essential features of a community, together with the people who comprise the community.

In speaking of the provision of facilities, we are, of course using that term in an all-embracing sense, and including within it all facilities whether-supplied by government, local government, or private enterprise.

If a council area is not fully representative of the local community in that manner, the council for the area cannot claim to be community government - hence it is not local government.

It is a fact that, at present, most council areas in South Australia do not meet this fundamental criterion; they are "part communities" only; they are merely areas with boundaries depicted on the State map for administrative purposes.

If a significant number of the inhabitants of a council area are required to cross a council boundary to meet many of their needs because those needs cannot be met within their council area, then that boundary is wrong.

We are not suggesting that each of the present council areas should be provided with all of the various facilities that make up a community. That is not necessary or desirable - it would lead to unnecessary duplication. What we are saying is that the present boundaries must be adjusted as we have recommended so that the new areas encompass at least most of the facilities that have been or are likely to be established, together with the people who will use those facilities.

(7) The Remedy

We say that if each council was truly representative of a community, as we have suggested it must be, local government would be strong and effective, and there would be no question of loss of power. On that basis do we say that? If council areas were updated to become true 11community areas", each and every resultant council would automatically become directly involved in most, if not all, of those factors which make up a community. Hence the new councils (and therefore local government), would be seen to be an indispensable part of the general community - something without which the community would think it could not survive.

This would be recognised by central government. Confidence in local government as evidenced by the performance of all councils would be established or re-established and there would be no need or desire for the transfer of powers.

Each council would have knowledge and experience in all local government problems and thus local government would be united in dealings with central government. Local government would be treated as a respected if not equal partner in the total government structure.

Any finances allotted by central government from the general revenue pool would be on the legitimate basis of proper and complete functions of government, resulting from a strong, united case put forward by councils representing complete communities.

Compare this with the present situation. Many councils cannot or do not carry out their full community functions. Local government as a whole is judged by this lack of performance - hence confidence in its ability is lost - hence its powers are lost little by little.

Instead of being an equal partner with central government it is very much the "junior partner" - the third tier of government

... We say that if local government is to occupy a position of strength, and prevent loss of powers from the local community, the boundary of each council area must conform with community trends.

From:

First Report - (Bains) Board of Review of the Role, Structure, and Administration of Local Government in Victoria, 1979.

1. Ideally no municipal boundaries should divide any community of interest.

2. The smallness of most communities could lead to the establishment of community councils to provide channels of expression for local feelings.

3. Most strong municipalities already serve a number of local communities.

From:

The Restructure of Local Government in Victoria: Principles and Programme. (Victoria) Local Government Advisory Commission, Feb. 1986.

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Re-Community of Interest

13 A municipal boundary should not divide a local neighbourhood or country town.
14 Municipal boundaries should embrace a balanced community; areas should not be segregated on the basis of social or economic class.

15 Municipal boundaries should reflect the spatial patterns of human activities.

16 Town and country are inter-dependent and rarely need separate administrations.

Re Services

17 Municipal boundaries should encompass a convenient area for providing physical and human services.

Re Land Use Planning

18 To the extent that it is possible on a municipal scale, transport, environmental and integrated land use systems should be contained within the one municipality.

Re Existing Boundaries

21 In defining municipal boundaries regard should be had to the existing boundaries of other institutions (e.g. postcode, regional and electoral boundaries), but these should not be an overriding or major consideration.

22 In defining municipal boundaries preference should be given to amalgamations and boundary adjustments; an existing municipality should not be dissected unless this is clearly the best course open having regard to other factors.

Important Notes

No single principle should be regarded as absolute.

There will always be special circumstances which justify a departure from general principle.

There will be occasions when it is not possible to apply a particular principle without departing from other principle.

In the final analysis it will always be necessary to exercise a judgement based on all relevant matters, including the view of those living in the areas affected.