Happiness and Domestic Life

The Influence of the Home on Subjective and Social Well-Being

Edited by Maria Teresa Russo, Antonio Argandoña and Richard Peatfield

Chapter 12

The "Neighbourhood" as a Pivotal Element of the Infrastructure of a Flourishing Society

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David Thunder and Cecilia Serrano

Introduction[1]

Family life conditions the character of members of the home, and their fitness to participate responsibly in social life. But it is also true that the customs, institutions and mores of small, medium and large communities condition the life of the home and shape the capacity of parents to make a responsible contribution to society and to prepare their children to do the same. In a healthy society, a well-functioning family and home will have a fruitful, mutually reinforcing relationship with healthy and well-functioning communities. In a healthy society, the influence between the home and the communities it is embedded within, will form a virtuous circle: healthy homes will produce virtuous, responsible citizens who can build healthy communities; while healthy communities will provide social structures and material and educational resources that support families in their efforts to create healthy and vibrant homes, as well as in their efforts to contribute to the life of society outside the home.

This paper examines the vital contribution of neighbourhoods to the flourishing of individuals and families. Our analysis complements that of some other essays in this volume, which consider the contribution of the life of the family to a flourishing and functional social order. The central hypothesis to be explored is that (a) the neighbourhood plays a critical role, not easily replaced by other types of community such as cities and nations, in supporting the full development of individuals and families and integrating them into a multi-family community; and (b) the socializing function of neighbourhoods may be greatly enhanced by deliberate human interventions at the level of urban design, institutional design, social policy and individual action (including several measures to be considered in this paper). The paper is a philosophical reflection on our shared experiences of neighbourhoods and family life, rather than an empirical study of a specific neighbourhood or set of neighbourhoods. Drawing on public knowledge and common experiences, we set out to explore the critical role of the

neighbourhood as a structure that supports the full development of individuals and families, and integrates them into the life of a larger community.

We begin by making the case that community and family relations are confronting a crisis of uncertainty, loss of meaning and disorientation in a world of increasingly fragmented and disembedded social relations. Next, we argue that the neighbourhood seems to offer the type of social structure that could mitigate this crisis, by providing a rich and geographically rooted social network to support the emotional, economic and moral development of families and their members, and to prepare them to take up constructive roles in society. Third, we suggest that the contribution of the neighbourhood to socialization and human development will depend on the degree to which the neighbourhood is functional or dysfunctional, and present a number of typical features of functional and dysfunctional neighbourhoods respectively. Last but not least, we offer some practical suggestions concerning how vibrant, flourishing neighbourhoods may be promoted at the level of individual and collective action.

The Crisis of Community and Family Relations

People's everyday lives are normally embedded within specific communities of one sort or another. A community, as we understand it, is a collection of persons, families and/or social groups who are bound together over a sustained period of time by a shared project, and share the same social or geographic space sufficiently to feel a genuine sense that they are a cohesive social body with a shared identity and sense of belonging. Communities may be defined territorially – for example, the community of a neighbourhood or town – or institutionally – for example, the community of a university or church. In the current highly globalized world, the exact geographic and demographic limits of community life are not always easy to draw. For example, we are now witnessing the emergence of social groups bound together by virtual forms of communications that do not neatly coincide with communities based on well-defined identities or interests (Donati, 2006, 223). Since the second half of the twentieth century, modern institutions and social relations have been characterized by their extreme dynamism and open-endedness, derived from the disembedding of social systems from specific cultural and geographic contexts and the constant re-ordering of social life under the influence of rapidly evolving knowledge and technology affecting the actions of individuals and groups (Giddens, 2015). The destabilization of traditional communities and the unprecedented speed with which social relations evolve in a globally connected society[2] unmoors individual life projects from concrete, coherent and enduring community values and practices.

Community life requires families capable of preparing the next generation to take their place in the community. Thus, families have rightly been

considered as the cornerstone of community life. The family can be defined as a social relationship of full reciprocity between sexes and generations, with a specific genome[3] not to be confused with anything else. On a social level, its particularity is due to the coexistence and interdependence of four characteristics: the motivation of free giving, the rule of reciprocity, conjugal sexuality and generativity (Donati, 2013). Under the right conditions, the family home is well positioned to serve a number of critical social functions, in particular:

i   social reproduction: to provide a social and physical context within which humans may bring the next generation into being, and confer upon that new generation the knowledge and skills necessary to be functional members of society;[4] and

ii to provide a safe and nurturing space within which parents and especially children may feel unconditionally accepted and loved, and develop and express their personalities in their own way, freed from the scrutiny and judgment of the wider society.

The meaning and social context of family life has evolved quite dramatically in the modern era. First, in modern industrialized societies, the family became nuclear and isolated, disembedded from a rich, multi-generational social context. Then, in contemporary western societies, the family became less needed to guarantee basic needs and safety, leading to a weakening of kin ties. In a globalized world and an era of increased mobility, long-term relations and territorial attachment have become rare, depriving the family of a well-defined community to lean on, share with and learn from.

The Neighbourhood as a Potential Solution to the Crisis of Community Life

The weakening of social supports for family life as well as the progressive uncoupling of individual life projects from the guidance of community norms, customs and histories, is a problem that threatens basic human goods, such as social reproduction, stable social mores and the integration of individuals into cohesive communities. We contend that an important part of the solution to this problem is the rehabilitation of small and medium scale neighbourhoods as embodied, territorial communities within which individuals and families can situate their life projects and aspirations.

The term "neighbourhood," as its etymology suggests, refers to the geographic and social space that is populated by "neighbours," or individuals in more or less close proximity to each other, (i) in geographic terms (living not too far from each other), (ii) in social and cultural terms (sharing a social space and having certain shared cultural landmarks, symbols and guiding norms) and (iii) in psychological-affective terms (having some sense of

mutual affinity, acceptance or identification). A functional neighbourhood is populated by a group of individuals and families who together constitute a sort of community (a dysfunctional neighbourhood may be torn apart by toxic strife and division, the negation of "community"). All functional neighbourhoods are communities, but not all communities are functional neighbourhoods.

Just as the family home can provide a physical and social context favourable to social reproduction and the nurturing of individuality, in a similar way, the neighbourhood can provide a physical and social context favourable to the introduction of children and teenagers, and indeed adults, to the challenges associated with living in multi-family communities, and to the dispositions and virtues required to adequately rise to such challenges. Children's development is profoundly influenced, for better or for worse, by their family relationships and their lived environment, and these in turn are conditioned in important ways by the broader societal and community context within which they are embedded.[5] As Aristotle reminds us, human beings cannot adequately realize their full potential without participating in communities larger than the family.[6]

Multi-family communities are necessary to

1   generate a viable material economy to support the material needs of families (division of labour),
2   enable the development of rounded personalities through interaction with a wide range of personality types and exposure to a wide range of role models, and
3   enable growth in knowledge and understanding of the world, through exposure to conversations, perspectives and experiences different from one's own and those of one's family.

A nationalist utopia (or perhaps, dystopia!) would conceive of a multi-family community as a national society with a shared ethos, language and culture; while a cosmopolitan utopia (or perhaps, dystopia!) would conceive of a multi-family society as an international society with a shared ethos and culture. But children, teenagers and adults cannot be successfully introduced into the life of society through very extended and impersonal collectives like nations and international societies. "No one lives in the world in general"[7] because human beings are embodied and spatial beings who situate their lives and their projects within concrete geographic and social spaces that can be seen, smelt and touched.

While individuals may be inspired by national or international heroes and role models whom they see from afar, so to speak, they develop their character and personality on a day-to-day basis, and build up life habits, "rubbing shoulders" with other flesh-and-blood human beings in specific architectural and geographic settings. These settings may be

either incoherent fragments of a larger whole – much like the deserted streets of a war-torn society – or coherent reflections of a human community that can inspire a sense of loyalty, familiarity and belonging in its members.

A neighbourhood is uniquely positioned to provide families and individuals with the sort of tangible community ties, norms and customs they need in order to break out of the anomie of social disembeddedness, isolation and individualism. The reason for this has a lot to do with intimacy and scale. Human beings find meaning and purpose in communities which have some identifiable geographic and cultural roots, and whose members have "names and surnames" and are not just faceless individuals. Therefore, the sort of social unit that can serve to introduce us to a coherent, functional and intelligible form of social life that transcends the limits of the family must be of a sufficiently small scale, with a sufficiently well-defined identity and sense of shared purpose, to make our interactions with it familiar and homely rather than distant and alienating (Etzioni, 1994; Hilton, Bade and Bade, 2015; MacIntyre, 1981).

A generic, cosmopolitan society, with no geographic or cultural roots, cannot possibly fulfil this mediating function, because it does not readily kindle the imagination and passions, or produce locally accessible rituals and a shared way of life. A national society may confer some sense of community, to a certain extent, through the rituals, language, and shared sense of purpose of a national people. However, because of its highly abstract character, i.e., its heavy dependence on symbolism and rituals abstracted from much of the lived experience of social life, it easily lends itself to ideological manipulation and to the subordination of individuals to political projects such as national patriotism that bear only a tangential relation to the well-being of local families and communities (Kateb, 2008).

The neighbourhood is the type of social unit that is ideally structured to help to socialize family members, or equip them with knowledge, skills and virtues requires to navigate the social world and form meaningful and functional relationships with persons outside the limits of family life. In the case of a neighbourhood with resilient and friendly social relations and genuine opportunities for personal growth and development, the proximity of neighbours fosters frequent contact, mutual awareness of problems and a sense of belonging to a place. Living in a dysfunctional neighbourhood, or a neighbourhood rife with delinquency, alcoholism, crime, poverty and mass unemployment is associated with bad developmental outcomes for young people, including poor mental health and well-being.

The neighbourhood has certain special advantages as a vehicle of socialization, both in comparison with the family unit, and in comparison with larger social units such as nations. Here are some of the distinctive advantages of the neighbourhood as a vehicle of socialization:

Reiterated Interactions Enhance Social Capital and Trust

Many members of the neighbourhood frequent the same social venues, and in the case of a pedestrian neighbourhood in particular (a non-pedestrian design begins to introduce the impersonality of larger societies where interpersonal interaction with strangers is minimized), the likelihood and frequency of repeat interactions is sufficiently high that people have a strong incentive to demonstrate their trustworthiness or gain social esteem or credit with their neighbours. This can build social capital and reduce the likelihood of deception, fraud and betrayal of trust among neighbours (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000).

Meaningful and Intense Interaction with Role Models Is Easier in Smaller Communities

People acquire social skills and virtues, especially at an early age, by being exposed to role models. Their first role models are their parents and older siblings. But the virtues and skills required to navigate a more complex society require a wider range of role models beyond the family. A neighbourhood, if structured in ways that facilitate role-playing and apprenticeship in small social groups, can provide opportunities for intense interaction with a variety of different community role models. Close relations with such role models, particularly role models with an intimate understanding of the social conditions of individuals learning from them, are greatly facilitated by neighbourhoods because of their small scale and potential for social cohesiveness. These role models may be found in institutions such as schools, sports associations, farming and business cooperatives and artistic guilds.

Neighbourhoods Facilitate Emergence of a Civil Economy

Neighbourhoods are well positioned to foster virtues of solidarity and social responsibility in business entrepreneurs and owners. They may provide a social infrastructure favourable to a civil economy that combines economic ambition with social solidarity and a principled commitment to common goods that is not exclusively a function of economic calculations. That is because small and medium businesses rooted in a neighbourhood can have a more intimate relation with their staff and customers, and develop a sense of solidarity and emotional investment in the community within which they are rooted. Fundamentally, the community they serve is *their* community, fostering a greater sense of loyalty to its long-term flourishing. The concept of "civil economy" originated in the Italian tradition of civic humanism embodied in small merchant towns, such as those in the north of Italy in the late Middle-Ages (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries). The fundamental idea is that economic interactions are viewed as fully human and fully moral

interactions, which find their purpose not only in profit-making, but also in the promotion of the common good of the relevant community (Bruni and Zamagni, 2007).

Local Projects Are Less Vulnerable to Ideological Co-Option

Neighbourhood projects, because their consequences are uniquely tangible and observable, are not as easily co-opted as national and international projects may be, by abstract and de-humanizing ideologies. It is easy to imagine a national government inculcating an ideology such as radical anarchism or radical egalitarianism, with potentially destructive social and economic consequences, because decision-makers do not suffer the immediate consequences of their decisions in a tangible way.[8] But neighbourhood projects play out in tangible ways on the ground, and their beneficial or harmful effects are much easier to observe than those of a national project. That is why local projects are more resistant to ideological co-option or distortion.

Functional and Dysfunctional Neighbourhoods

Now, when we say that neighbourhoods are more appropriate contexts for socialization than national and international societies, we do not mean to suggest that all neighbourhoods are paradises on earth, or that any social unit that vaguely resembles a neighbourhood will automatically do a good job at socialization. Just as a family may be profoundly dysfunctional, failing to provide a loving home to its members or failing to equip them with the skills and virtues necessary to be functional members of a larger multi-family community, in a similar way a neighbourhood may be profoundly dysfunctional, fostering vice, criminality and drug addiction rather than virtue and social responsibility.[9] But by understanding the socializing function of the neighbourhood, we can begin to better distinguish between a functional and dysfunctional neighbourhood.

A Functional Neighbourhood

1 Is populated by many families that provide children with a good head-start in life by providing them with strong parenting role models, and transmitting to them pro-social attitudes and a robust sense of accountability for their actions.
2 Includes organizations that promote young members' involvement in the neighbourhood and educate them in knowledge, skills and virtues necessary in order to live a humanly decent and socially functional life.[10]
3 Is marked by an architecture, geographic layout and urban design that encourages frequent interactions among neighbours.[11]

4 Includes a broad range of essential services and entertainment options within walking distance, or within a short car drive. This encourages people to live out a large part of their lives in the neighbourhood, and thus develop a stronger affective bond with it and with their neighbours.

5 Is located within a society that provides sufficient opportunities for work and for earning a living to keep unemployment and poverty in the neighbourhood from becoming endemic.

6 Has some shared projects that provide neighbours with a sense of shared purpose and identity. These projects may be anything from a rose garden to a farmer's market, philanthropic society, local schools, or shared sport event.[12]

7 Includes a "civil economy," or businesses that are sufficiently rooted in the local community that they feel a sense of loyalty to it. If business owners have a strong bond with the neighbourhood, their policies and decisions are more likely to be convergent with its interests.[13]

8 Is governed by public decision-making processes that are genuinely participatory, accountable, and highly responsive to local interests, needs and preferences, especially on issues that have a major impact on the life of the neighbourhood, such as zoning and public spending decisions.

A Dysfunctional Neighbourhood

1 Is populated by many families with *weak role models*, which do *not* transmit to children a strong sense of purpose, self-confidence, personal accountability, responsibility, and virtue, and enhance risks of delinquency, drug addiction, and marital instability.

2 Has a *weak network of civil society organizations* that might build social capital and educate young members of the neighbourhood in knowledge, skills and virtues necessary in order to live a humanly decent and socially functional life.

3 Is marked by an architecture, geographic layout and urban design that *discourages* frequent interactions among neighbours. A car-centred urban design, such as that of many Midwest towns in the United States, heavily reduces opportunities for neighbourly interaction.

4 Includes *an inadequate range of essential services and entertainment options within walking distance, or within a short car drive*. This encourages people to live out a large part of their lives *outside* the neighbourhood and thus develop a *weaker* affective bond with it and with their neighbours.

5 Is located within a society that provides *insufficient opportunities for work and for earning a living*, leading to spiralling unemployment and poverty, along with their associated risks of poor health, delinquency and so forth.

6 Has *few if any shared projects* that provide neighbours with a sense of shared purpose and identity. Without a shared sense of purpose and identity, people have less incentive to stay in a neighbourhood, so there is likely to be a more rapid population turnover, reducing social cohesion. In addition, without the enhanced meaningful interaction brought about by a shared project, neighbours may have less incentive to spend time together, get to know each other or build bonds of mutual care and trust.

7 *Does not incorporate a strong "civil economy,"* or businesses that are sufficiently rooted in the local community that they feel a sense of loyalty to it. If business owners do not have a strong bond with the neighbourhood, this may result in strategic decisions made externally that are adverse to the interests of the neighbourhood, driven by external investors and shareholders. In the case of large businesses, such strategic decisions may be devastating to a neighbourhood.

8 Is ruled by bureaucratic or top-down decision-making processes rather than by bottom-up, participatory, and responsive methods of governance, yielding public decisions, whether concerning public spending, zoning laws or other policy areas, that are inadequately responsive to local needs and interests.

How Might We Promote More Functional and Thriving Neighbourhoods?

So far, we have seen that the *neighbourhood*, understood as a geographic and social space that is populated by a community of "neighbours," or individuals in more or less close proximity to each other, in geographic, socio-cultural and psychological-affective terms, plays a pivotal role, of the sort that cannot be easily substituted by other social units, in supporting the full ethical, psychological and economic development of families and their successful integration into the life of the broader community. As we have already seen, the neighbourhood can facilitate reiterated interactions that enhance social capital and trust; meaningful interactions with role models, promoting the development of virtues and skills relevant to social integration and responsibility; businesses with roots in local communities, promoting the emergence of a civil economy; and social projects planned and executed at a local level, promoting governmental accountability and reducing the risk of ideological co-option.

We have also suggested that these benefits are not automatically conferred by any social unit formally resembling a neighbourhood, but by vibrant and well-functioning neighbourhoods. A *well-functioning* neighbourhood, as we have outlined earlier, (a) is populated by vibrant families with strong role models; (b) includes organizations successfully engaged in the education of future generations; (c) is physically designed in such a way as to facilitate frequent interactions among neighbours; (d) includes essential services

and a reasonable range of entertainment options within a short range, certainly within a short car drive and ideally within walking distance; (e) has some valuable shared projects that are meaningful and attract local loyalty and support; (f) is embedded within a vibrant economy that can provide work opportunities to the vast majority of adult residents, at least up to retirement age; (g) includes many businesses with strong community roots, and a high stake in keep the neighbourhood vibrant and in good shape (h) is governed by genuinely participatory, responsive and accountable decision-making processes.

This all sounds very good in theory, but how likely are we to see neighbourhoods that embody all of these characteristics? That is not a question we can answer with any precision in the context of this paper, which aims to develop an ideal, rather than survey the state of neighbourhoods across the world. What we can say is that few if any real neighbourhoods are likely to embody all of the earlier mentioned features to an optimal degree. It is more likely that different neighbourhoods will approximate this ideal to different degrees.

In any case, being a human reality, it is within our power as human beings to deliberately invest in our neighbourhoods, to take steps to make them *more* functional and vibrant than they currently are. Furthermore, in the context of a rapidly urbanizing world, it is likely that we will have the opportunity to build many new neighbourhoods from scratch. Therefore, there are likely to be many opportunities to put careful thought into the physical design and social ecology of new and emerging neighbourhoods, as well as pre-existing ones.

In the short space that remains, we wish to propose seven actions that could be taken at a policy or collective level, and five actions that could be taken at an individual level, in order to enhance the functionality and design of neighbourhoods, i.e., in order to render them more fit to enhance human and social development, and prepare families to participate constructively in the life of society.

Collection Actions

1   Promote local entrepreneurship by providing substantial tax deductions or low-interest credit for businesses located within a short radius of a neighbourhood, whose owners reside in the neighbourhood in question. Business owners are pragmatists. They will normally seek to maximize their returns and minimize their tax burden. Tax policies should treat businesses with strong roots in neighbourhoods favourably.[14]

2   Build public amenities like parks, nature walks, and attractive playgrounds, in or near neighbourhoods, to encourage people to identify their neighbourhood as a place of leisure, and not just as a "dormitory town"[15] Neighbourhoods need to be attractive places to spend leisure time in, if they are to become hubs of social life and interaction.

3 Shift the bulk of tax collection and spending to the municipal and regional level, and re-centre fiscal decisions as much as possible at the level of the town or city and its boroughs, so that tax spending can be more sensitive to local needs and interests, and so that citizens have a greater incentive to hold public spenders accountable for their allocation of public money (Frey and Eichenberger, 2004; Oates, 1999; Teather, 2005). Spending decisions can be made even more sensitive to citizen' preferences and interests by allocating spending credits or vouchers to citizens which they can assign to their preferred public service. This could be done in relation to schools, health centres, or other services in which voters may be trusted to make an informed choice about which service provider to support with their income.[16]

4 Make planning and zoning decisions strategically, to ensure that essential services like health centres, schools and a reasonable range of restaurants and other forms of entertainment are located within walking distance or within a very short drive of all parts of the neighbourhood. Where the size or make-up of a given population makes schools or other amenities economically un-viable, pool resources and taxes with other neighbourhoods, on a pragmatic basis, merging together if need be. Pooling resources and tax bases would be inevitable for very small neighbourhoods with a limited tax base.

5 Design zoning laws that will incentivize close proximity between residential and commercial properties. This may increase public presence or "footfall" in residential areas, rendering them less isolated from public view and thus less vulnerable to violence and crime.[17]

6 Build multi-purpose community centres or civic centre's open to cultural, leisure and educational uses by neighbourhood residents or friends of residents. This provides more educational, cultural and leisure opportunities within a neighbourhood, and may also attract more visits from people in nearby areas. This increases social interaction, and helps to instil a stronger sense of identity and belonging as members of a neighbourhood engage in common cultural, leisure and educational projects.[18]

7 Appoint a committee drawn from well-respected members of the neighbourhood to propose public initiatives and projects for the neighbourhood, funded by voluntary contributions and a portion of local tax income. These initiatives and projects should then be discussed and voted on in a local neighbourhood assembly meeting at a time at which many people can show up, such as the evening.

Individual Actions

1 Promote a stronger social network within your own neighbourhood by inviting some of your neighbours to your home for a dinner party or simply inviting them over for a drink. This first "ice-breaker" can set

the tone for the next 5-10 years. If nobody reaches out in this way, neighbours may slide into anonymity, barely knowing each other's names.

2 Prioritize local businesses with roots in the neighbourhood when you choose whose products and services to patronize, even if you can find the same products and services marginally cheaper on Amazon or some other global corporation. Local businesses are an integral part of the social ecology of the neighbourhood. They develop a bond of loyalty and trust with local customers, and help prevent commerce from sliding into depersonalized consumerism or the blind pursuit of material acquisition for its own sake. Local businesses put a human face on commercial transactions, and some of the proceeds of such businesses may be put back into community projects.

3 Support families in your neighbourhood in whatever way you can, whether through your counsel if you are an experienced parent, through babysitting exchanges to give parents a night off, or by supporting or organizing leisure events geared towards families. Families provide children with their first role models and make a decisive impact on their psychological and moral development. The health of the family is therefore a predictor of the health of the neighbourhood. Parents are vitally important role models for their children. But it is sometimes forgotten that parents themselves also need role models of their own to look up to, and this is not possible if families live in a self-contained bubble with minimal interaction with other families in the area.

4 Consider ways you can become more than just a rational consumer and/or a "law-abiding citizen." In particular, consider ways you can actively promote the common good of your neighbourhood, through public service, participation in decision-making organs, donations to local initiatives, or launching some initiative that might contribute to the renewal of your neighbourhood.[19] One example of a personal initiative that gave rise to a significant collective action is the "social streets" movement in Italy, which aimed to use social media technology to connect neighbours and crowd-fund for neighbourhood projects (Pasqualini, 2018). Pro-active interventions and generous leadership are vital to the future of any neighbourhood. If too many people are passive or disinterested, the social and institutional infrastructure of a neighbourhood may steadily decline.[20]

5 If you have children, gradually introduce them into the social life of the neighbourhood by encouraging them to participate in summer camps or other civil society structures that help to educate children and develop their social skills. This can be facilitated through formal schooling, but even if you home-school your children, it is worth thinking about ways they can participate more fully in the life of their neighbourhood and become more aware of their neighbourly responsibilities.

In this paper, we have argued that the neighbourhood, understood as a geographic and social space that is populated by a community of "neighbours," or individuals in more or less close geographic, socio-cultural and psychological proximity to each other, plays a critical role in supporting the rounded development of individuals and families and in integrating them into the fabric of community life. In addition, we have suggested that not just *any* neighbourhood can confer these important benefits: only a *functional* or *well-functioning* one. With this in mind, we reviewed some of the characteristic features of a functional neighbourhood: strong family role models, the presence of competent and effective educational organizations, proximity of entertainment and essential services, shared neighbourhood projects and a vibrant civil economy. Finally, we reviewed a number of actions that could be taken at the individual and collective levels to promote vibrant neighbourhoods, from decentralizing the tax system and building multi-purpose community centres to attending to the needs of neighbouring families and inviting neighbours to dinner.

This list of actions is, of course, not meant to be exhaustive or to offer an easy formula for neighbourhood renewal. Rather, the list is intended to serve as a means of stoking up the ideas and imagination of the reader, who will undoubtedly be in a much better position than we are to know how she or leading members of her neighbourhood might best contribute individually and/or collectively to the promotion of a more vibrant neighbourhood. The important thing to keep in mind is that social structures, though deeply conditioned by historical and evolutionary processes that we cannot readily control, can be transformed over time, for better or for worse, by human decision-making and human interventions. We can do our part by influencing those decisions and interventions for the better.

Notes

1. The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support of Fundación Ciudadanía y Valores Proeduca Summa S.L.
2. The effects of globalization (Bauman, 1998; Giddens, 2003), the structural conditions of industrialization (Beck, 1992) and social change in general have been deeply studied in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (Adams, 2007). Also, several approaches such as reflexive modernization and individualization have been developed. For a critical discussion of these theses, see Caetano (2014).
3. From a sociological viewpoint, this definition corresponds to a relational approach to the study of the family. See Rossi and Carrà (2016).
4. This reproductive function is highlighted by Aristotle (1962) in the *Politics*, Book. 1: "He who thus considers things in their first growth and origin, whether a state or anything else, will obtain the clearest view of them. In the

first place there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other; namely, of male and female, that the race may continue (and this is a union which is formed, not of deliberate purpose, but because, in common with other animals and with plants, mankind has a natural desire to leave behind them an image of themselves) ...”

5. For instance, the ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) looks at a child's development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment.

6. See *Politics*, Book. 1: “But when several families are united and the association aims at something more than the supply of daily needs, the first society to be formed is the village.”

7. This statement of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1996) has been empirically explored. For example, Christensen (2008) explores the children understanding of themselves though their experiences and their environment, in particular spatial localities.

8. The epistemic and motivational distortions of democratic decision-making are exposed quite forcefully by Caplan (2011).

9. It is not our aim to discuss here why do some neighbourhoods thrive and others do not. For a conceptual framework of dysfunctional neighbourhoods based on urban regeneration and renewal policy areas, see Squires and Booth (2015). The article of Odoi et al. (2005) also found some socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of neighbourhoods related to social exclusion, poverty, low social capital and increased health risks.

10. Youth participation in locally based organizations has important and positive implications (Quane and Rankin, 2006). Neighbourhood context and activities are associated with civic competence and participation (Rossi et al., 2016)

11. Admittedly, some people prefer to live in a more isolated or anonymous way, and may have little taste for intense and frequent neighbourly interactions. Nonetheless, an architectural and urban design that facilitates intense and frequent neighbourly encounters is generally preferable to one that does not, given the strong connection between reiterated interactions and the build-up of social capital.

12. For example, Fong et al. (2021) showed that hosting a Neighbour Day event led to a significant increase in neighbourhood social identification that, at the same time, predicted increased social cohesion, reduced loneliness and improved well-being.

13. Neighbourhood-based entrepreneurship is a source of local social value and it is driven by both, local social networks and local embeddedness through emotional attachment (de Beer, 2018)

14. There is mixed evidence of the effects of local taxes on economic development (Bartik, 1992). However, localities need to implement measures to support entrepreneurship, improve their efficiency and increase competitiveness (Goetz et al., 2011).

15. Research suggests that local parks with recreational facilities may support the development of social ties in inner-city areas (Kaźmierczak, 2013).

16. For a more detailed discussion of tax voucher schemes, see Frey and Eichenberger (2004). There is also growing evidence of the use of vouchers as a mechanism that increases community participation in local public decision-making and improves community satisfaction with allocation of resources, see Beath et al. (2018)

17. Jacobs (1992) discusses the advantages of situating residential buildings in commercial zones in connection with the infamous 1950s city planning movement, which uprooted many urban communities and moved them out into dedicated residential areas. This exposed communities to dramatic increases in delinquency, drug addiction, and insecurity.

18. There is little research on the effects of community centres in western countries, but there is some evidence of the association with improvements in health and well-being (Jones et al., 2013)
19. It is clear that there is a very intimate relation between personal initiatives and collective action. Personal initiative unites citizens in collective action. Without personal initiatives, many interesting forms of collective action other than what one might describe as "spontaneous" adherence to custom or largely routine perpetuation of institutional norms would not be possible.
20. Indeed, Robert Putnam (2000) notes a marked decline in social interaction in the United States from 1950 on, epitomized in the decline of bowling clubs.

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