

"We all sort of feel like we're all part of the same community": exploring community social cohesion

[Presented at] The International Academic Forum (IAFOR) International Conference of Sustainability, Energy and the Environment (IICSEE) held in Honolulu, Hawaii, 4-6 January 2018

Abstract only.

Social cohesion and inclusion is important for the attraction and retention of residents as well as the economic development of communities. Relationships that are formed based on trust allow for greater productivity as individuals are more likely to work together. As such, the aim of this study was to identify resident perceptions of social cohesion within their community. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in two Australian mining communities. There were 20 (3 male, 17 female) residents interviewed in a remote, purpose built, mining community and 11 (4 male, 7 female) residents interviewed in a rural, agricultural community where mining was introduced. Common themes were identified within the interviews through an interpretative phenomenological analytical framework which provided an in depth examination of the lived experiences of participants. Participants from both communities reported similar perceptions of social cohesion within their community. Though communities generally reported high social cohesion, some participants reported a lack of cohesion or a divide between particular groups within the community. The main groups that participants reported were based on occupation and ethnicity. The perceived divide between groups was often the result of a reported lack of trust as well as the perception of the unjust distribution of wealth. These findings suggest that for communities where there are identifiable groups, further steps need to be taken to facilitate interactions between residents. For example, councils and/or community organisations could organise community events that target different groups within a community with the purpose of encouraging participation and interaction.