

# **COMMUNITY ENCOUNTERS OF THE CLOSE KIND**

**A SYDNEY STUDY OF  
COMMUNITY WITHOUT PROPINQUITY**

by

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## **DECLARATION**

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I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

I certify that this thesis does not exceed 100,000 words in length.

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of the author.

Alison McIntosh

To the memory of my mother  
**Nancy Lu Rose OAM**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines Webber's 1963 Community Without Propinquity (CWP) hypothesis within a contemporary Australian context. Webber predicted that barriers to communication between people in increasingly well-educated and affluent societies would be overcome by developments in transport and technology. Close social ties in the place-based community of the neighbourhood would thus become unimportant because personal interactions would be maintained in dispersed communities of interest not limited by geography. This investigation is timely, appropriate and essential because elements identified as catalysts for CWPs, notably improvements in communications and transport, together with the impacts of globalisation and economic restructuring, are widely seen to be changing the nature of many advanced economies, including Australia's.

The project researches individual neighbourhood areas and people's identification with such areas; explores where different types of shops, facilities and services are used and the extent to which people's activities are contained within neighbourhood boundaries; examines close social ties and interactions in formal and informal associations; and investigates the salience of issues for place-belonging and associated impacts on wellbeing. Areas with different socio-economic, demographic and cultural characteristics in metropolitan Sydney are studied. Composite results are examined in detail; in addition, locational differences are considered.

The results indicate that out-of-area activities exist alongside neighbourhood activity. Whilst the majority of close social ties away from neighbourhoods are with friends and kin, most people also have important place-based associations and relationships. Differences in mobility, in household composition, in number of hours worked and, perhaps most significantly, in affluence emerged as important elements apparently affecting propensities for neighbourhood attachment. The study also suggests factors that seem to weaken neighbourhood cohesion and have effects on wellbeing.

This study pioneers comprehensive and systematic research on where, with whom and how close social ties are maintained and explores aspects of neighbourhood life in well-established suburbs of Sydney. The findings facilitate further investigations of the changing nature of urban society. Most importantly, it illustrates the continued relevance of the neighbourhood for social interaction in spite of dispersed networks of association.

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A technological revolution of historic proportions is transforming the fundamental dimensions of human life: time and space.

(Castells 1987: 1)

Cyberspace might have annihilated distance but not place.

(Walmsley 2000: 5)

There are places I remember  
All my life, though some have changed  
Some forever not for better  
Some have gone and some remain  
All these places had their moments  
With lovers and friends  
I still can recall  
Some are dead and some are living  
In my life I've loved them all.

(Lennon & McCartney 1965)