Socio-Ecological ‘in-between’ spaces in medium density residential developments in Aotearoa

By Sarah Copeland

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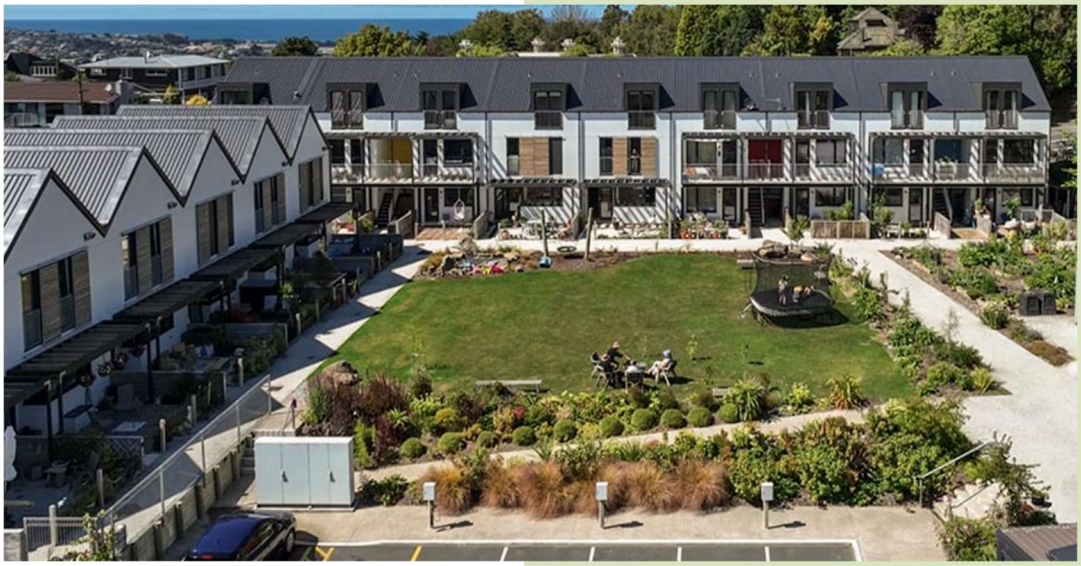

Residents in recently built Medium Density Residential Housing (MDRH) in Aotearoa New Zealand still prefer privacy from neighbours and passers-by, a sense of individuality and good access to car parking.

In order to attract more people into MDRH, housing providers are developing an urban form that creates a sense of separation and accommodates car-dominated infrastructure. These land-use preferences are associated with common characteristics of urban sprawl, which is one of the most dominant factors increasing national and global declines in biodiversity.

This research identified indirect connections between socio-spatial drivers and preferred ecological characteristics within residential form.

Correlations between social connection and greenspace parameters demonstrate that the spatial configuration of residential developments affects people's use of in-between spaces, communal spaces and their relationships to greenspace.

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SUPERVISORS

Claire Freeman

Yolanda van Heezik

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In-between spaces of residential developments, such as those with detached orthogonal layouts, result in low levels of socio-ecological activity compared to courtyard residential layouts which result in higher levels. The addition of a central open space results in high levels of through vision and visual connectivity. Central open spaces allow for better quality green spaces and social connectivity.

Although developments such as Toiora reflect a very appealing vision of communal living (image, overleaf), they do not represent the dominant direction of multi-complex developments in Aotearoa, especially in the public housing sector.

Key recommendations

- Implement large and unfragmented greenspaces into the central courtyards of multi-complex developments.
- Provide alternative carparking solutions such as stacked carparking at the periphery of developments and ensure public transportation services are available.
- All MDRH developments should have communal greenspace that meets size and distribution requirements.
- For duplex, stand-alone and terrace developments, onsite roads should be replaced with communal space and carparks should also be located at the periphery of developments.
- Alternatively, require at least one community garden and greenspace in duplex, stand-alone and terrace developments.
- Kāinga Ora should include a section in their UDG and LDG that sets out a range of standards that incorporate an overall vision and objectives.
- Kāinga Ora reconsiders its guidelines regarding the implementation of realistic measures to combat urban heat island effects. Guidelines should allow for larger areas of greenspace between carparking to mitigate the effects of heat retention.
- Kāinga Ora should acknowledge the importance of micro-scale level connections, specifically regarding everyday activities. Urban form features should be designed to facilitate daily interactions among residents.