

# THEORIZING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

By Jnanabrata Bhattacharyya

---

## ABSTRACT

This paper attempts a parsimonious definition of community development. It proposes that the purpose of community development is the pursuit of solidarity and agency by adhering to the principles of self-help, felt needs and participation. The erosion of solidarity and agency has been a historic process, connected particularly to the rise of industrial capitalism, the nation-state, and instrumental reason. Examples of community development practice as a positive response to the erosion are given from the fields of public health, violence, micro-economic development, and food. It also argues that "place" as a proxy for community has become conceptually as well as practically inadequate, and that effective community development calls for micro-macro coordination.

**Keywords:** community development theory, self-help, felt needs, participation, solidarity, agency

## INTRODUCTION

This paper submits a theoretical framework for the practice of community development, intended to help to distinguish the field from other related endeavors. It perhaps goes without saying that it should be read as one person's idea of community development, although its debt to numerous authors should be evident throughout the paper. In an earlier exercise (Bhattacharyya, 1995) I had proposed that community development is different from other endeavors in that it aims at building solidarity and agency by adhering to three practice principles, namely, self-help, felt needs, and participation. That paper has been received in community development and related fields with interest. Among other reactions, it was utilized as a springboard for discussions at the 2003 Community Development Theory Retreat at the Taughannock Farm Inn in Trumansburg, New York. This paper reflects my response to some of the feedback I received at the Retreat, as well as my continuing engagement with the subject while iterating the earlier proposition.<sup>1</sup> I discuss some of the definitions of community development of the last forty years to show the continuing need for a more rigorous definition. I have suggested that the purpose of community development should be seen as different both from its methods and the techniques to implement the methods. I have argued that place or locality often used in community development literature as a proxy for community has become or is

---

Jnanabrata Bhattacharyya, Emeritus Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, and Director (1984-1994), Department of Community Development at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. Email: jnan\_bhattacharyya@yahoo.com

becoming analytically irrelevant and practically inadequate. Finally, I have put forward the notion that in centralized states community development practice at the micro level increasingly calls for macro level intervention as well. I begin with a discussion of the problem of bounding the field of community development.

### The Problem of Defining Community Development

A theory of community development will define the concept and delineate the characteristics of its practice. It will demarcate the field from other endeavors in clear and unambiguous terms. But in community development literature such a theory is generally not available. What precisely is community development? Why is engaging in it important? And where does it stand in relation to other practical as well as academic endeavors? These are questions that have been rarely posed and discussed. There has been, historically, a reluctance to define the concept. “[F]or the present, all approaches which claim to be Community Development be accepted as legitimate contributions,” thus recommended William Biddle in 1966 (p. 12). Four years later, Lee J. Cary (1970) warned against “premature closure.” Nearly a quarter century after that, Christenson and Robinson (1989, p. 14) said much the same thing: “[D]efinitions of community development are not clear-cut, how one interprets community development affects one’s orientation when initiating a development program.” Denise and Harris (1990, p. 7) expressed similar sentiments: “This concept [community development] is as varied in definition as those who profess to practice it.” Many who call themselves community developers can perhaps do so because the field is unfenced; if it became fenced, they would be obliged to go their separate ways, or retrain.

The risk of exclusivity is probably real, but if the adherents themselves do not define the field, others will (as they have) and not necessarily to their advantage. For instance, a widely held belief in the U.S. and elsewhere is that community development is the same as “community organization” (CO), a specialty in Social Work, or only a part of this specialty. Especially since the 1968 publication of Jack Rothman’s *Three Models of Community Organization Practice*, community development has been viewed by many as Locality Development, which is one of the three models. Rothman’s article exerted a profound influence on the definition of community development, in part because its publication coincided with the establishment of community development graduate programs in the United States, and it came in handy.

Without much reflection, community development practitioners interpreted CO or only Locality Development as community development. Rothman’s article and, later, Social Work textbooks on CO (e.g., Kramer & Specht, 1969; Cox et al., 1974) were also the textbooks for introductory courses in community development graduate programs. The field was thus allowed to be defined by Social Workers. By adopting these textbooks, academic community developers legitimized the locality development definition while never ceasing to protest

that in some inarticulate way community development was different from CO and Social Work. Lee Cary, the founding president of the Community Development Society, reinforced this definition. In his keynote address to the 1982 meeting of the Illinois State Chapter of the Community Development Society, he had observed in reference to Rothman's article that "the first model of practice is identified as *locality development*, what we would refer to as community development."

Certainly, community development is not lacking in "definitions." Indeed a surfeit of statements purporting to be definitions have been published each slightly differently worded in an idiosyncratic frenzy with no explanation as to why the particular terms were chosen. (For a comprehensive list of such definitions, see *The Handbook of Community Development*, compiled by the Department of Community Development, University of Missouri-Columbia, n.d.). Two observations need to be made about most of these definitions: first, they are conceptually vague, and, second, they have a tendency to conflate place with community. Just to illustrate the point, let us scrutinize the definition in *Community Development in Perspective* edited by Christenson and Robinson (1989). It was published with the endorsement of the Community Development Society, and it has been fairly influential. Under "Major Concepts" (pp. 5ff.), the editors observe: "Community development encompasses a loosely tied group of concepts based on the experiences of community development practitioners." (p.5) That is, community development is what community developers do. But how do we identify a community development practitioner? This is a circular definition.

### Problems Defining Community

The editors then offer clarifications of the meaning of community, development, social change, community development, and related concepts (pp. 6ff.). They note that today:

Places of work, of commerce, of recreation, and of sleep are often miles apart, perhaps communities apart. Yet no matter how complex communities have become, the need to understand and to be able define community is still of critical importance to community developers. Most of our meaningful interactions take place in a *defined spatial area*. Most of us live; work; attend church; send our children to school; drive on the same roads; complain about the same traffic problems; and buy groceries, gas, and clothing in a *general locality, neighborhood or community*. (p. 6, emphasis added).

Reading the first sentence closely, they state that places of work, recreation, residence, etc. are far from one another. Then, they confuse the issue by saying that most of our meaningful interactions take place in a "defined spatial area... a general locality, neighborhood or community." We can ask, what is this *defined spatial area*, especially since places of work, commerce, recreation, and sleep are far from one another? What principle or criterion defines it?

In the next paragraph, the editors use the expression *community or neighborhood* introducing new ambiguities:

In short, a community or neighborhood can exist with close linkage to the larger society and still retain its identity and viability because it provides a basis for the *local* population to engage in *community* actions.” (emphasis added).

Here again we need to ask, what is local? Leaving aside the substantive point of this paragraph which is highly debatable (Janowitz, 1978; Bellah et al., 1985), it appears that the authors attempt to slide from *general locality* through *neighborhood* into *community*. This paragraph is devoted to considering the relevance of place or territory to the concept of community. The editors point out disagreements among writers on this issue. But instead of confronting the disagreements with one another in order to reconcile or synthesize them or even to side with one of them, they peremptorily declare:

The editors of this book think that spatial boundaries are an integral part of community and that most social interactions take place within defined and proximate spatial limits. Consequently, place or territory is considered a second component of our definition.(p. 14).

What are “defined spatial limits”? What is proximate in the days of fast transport?

Another example of circular reasoning – and imprecision – is in their discussion of the “fourth element” of community (pp. 7-8):

The fourth element of community is the idea of common attachment of or psychological *identification* with a community. Most people are able to give you the name of the community in which they live. People become dependent on a particular *locality* for the purchase of goods and services, for recreation, for employment, and for socializing. This locality is what most people identify with as community.

Instead of defining community, the statement presupposes it and specifies one of its features (attachment, identification). The difficulty continues with “People become dependent on a particular community...” This thoroughly contradicts the prior observation (p. 6) that “Places of work, of commerce, of recreation, and of sleep are often miles apart, perhaps communities apart.” Now people are dependent on “a particular community.” And, in the next sentence, locality becomes community, with no explanation.

### **Confusion about the Definition of Community Development**

A similar criticism can be made of their treatment of the definition of community development (pp. 11-14). After listing a number of definitions of community development they propose one of their own (p. 14): “a group of people in a locality initiating a social action process (i.e., planned intervention) to change their economic, social, cultural, and/or environmental situation.” It

may be recalled that the term locality and its relation to neighborhood, place, or community were left in a state of confusion; now in this definition it occupies a vital place. Also, why is political left out from the series? This definition no more and no less than the others they have cited is vague and arbitrary. There is no particular impetus for choosing one set of terms over another. But all this discussion of community development definition is rendered pointless by the conclusion of this section (p. 14), which I have already signaled: "In short, definitions of community development are not clear-cut, and how one interprets community development affects one's orientation when initiating a development program." So anything goes? It is another way of saying that, according to them, community development is not definable.

Much the same can be said about the work of Denise and Harris (1989). They write in the Introduction (p. 7), "This concept [community development] is as varied in definition as those who profess to practice it." As evidence, they note that the 22 authors in Christenson and Robinson (1989) each had defined the term differently. They then add one of their own. Thus, a community is "a collectivity of people, who can be identified geographically, who have something in common which unites them in action.... Such a definition includes micro communities (special interest groups, neighborhoods, subdivisions, villages, towns, etc.) as well as macro communities (cities, megalopolises, areas, regions, states, nations, international alliances, and global humanity)." Like Christenson and Robinson, Denise and Harris conclude:

We believe that community development should be so defined as to encompass the wide spectrum of beliefs of those who practice it. Therefore, to the editors, the "field of community development" contains numerous approaches to community development with differing values, beliefs, goals, purposes, and methods – all of which are concerned with improvement of the communities (p. 7).

What is not an approach to community development, then? Every socially approved occupation exists because it is thought to contribute to community improvement. If community development is to be recognized as a distinct academic/professional field, then an all-encompassing concept is not going to accomplish it; not everything that contributes to community improvement can be claimed as community development. To define, after all, is to set limits.

A concept of community development must satisfy two conditions. First, it must be distinctive in its purpose and in its methodology. Second, it must be universal in scope: it must be applicable to all types of social formations, urban as well as rural, post-industrial as well as pre-industrial, to sedentary as well as nomadic populations. Our task therefore is to construct an unambiguous reference point to guide community development activities and to determine if certain activities fall within the orbit of community development. Such an attempt is made in the next section.

## **A Theory of Community Development**

It is necessary at the outset to explain what I mean by theory. There is a widespread misconception that only explanations can be theories. In hard sciences, theories or laws are indeed explanations; they claim to explain how a phenomenon occurs and make predictions on the basis of that. But theories can also be teleological – charters for action towards a goal, such as theories of democracy, freedom, equality, etc. where the purpose or the end reflexively enters the causal stream, urging, when necessary, modification of our action. The purpose of building a rocket, for instance, cannot do that; it cannot alter the laws of physics. Democratic theories are not like the laws of physics. They are not explanations but they elaborate a vision of a kind of social order. A theory of community development is of this kind. It advocates a particular kind of social order and a particular methodology for getting there. How children learn is a matter of explanation, but “No Child Left Behind” is not a matter of explanation but a goal to be attained, which calls for changes in the way we manage our school education.

We assess the quality of a teleological theory by the reasonableness (to us) of its assumptions or value premises (e.g., We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal) and the logical coherence between the assumptions, the methods, and the goal. The assumptions or value premises are political choices, unlike the axioms of physics. Accordingly, a theory of community development will specify its purpose (goal, rationale), its premises, and its methods.

One important point needs to be made beforehand. A purpose is different from the methods that may be utilized to achieve it, and both of these in turn are different from the techniques or tools that may be utilized to implement the methods. We have a purpose to fulfill, we try to do that by following certain methods, and we implement the methods by means of certain techniques. A method refers to the logic of the actions to achieve the purpose. It is a more general description of what needs to be done than the techniques or tools. Suppose we want to revitalize our main street (the purpose). We choose to encourage various specialty stores to locate downtown (the method), and how we encourage them (tax incentives, pedestrian malls, antique streetlights, etc.) are the techniques. The asset-based community development (ABCD) approach (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), community development corporations (CDC) (Ferguson & Dickens, 1999), social planning, social action, locality development, etc. are techniques or tools, not to be conflated with either the purpose or the methods of community development. For community development to be a distinct field, its purpose and its methods must be specific to it. As regards tools, they need not be specific to community development at all; we could access the entire range of human knowledge as potential tools for the implementation of its methods.

I propose, as I had done earlier (Bhattacharyya, 1995), that we conceptualize the purpose of community development as the promotion of solidarity and agency. Although this formulation may appear to be yet another arbitrary definition of community development, I will argue that solidarity is the essential characteristic

of community, and, there is an important view that the purpose of development is to promote agency (see, for example, Berger, 1974; Giddens, 1987; Sen, 1999). Moreover, I think these are the qualities that most community development writers intend to convey in their definitions of the term.

### Community as Solidarity

For community development to be a universally relevant field, we have to extract the essence of the term community and not be limited by its common usage in the social sciences and community development literature. Durkheim's (1964[1893]) mechanical solidarity and Tonnies's (1957[1887]) *Gemeinschaft* referred to pre-industrial social formations – villages or tribes. Similarly, the community development definitions produced by the United Nations, the Ashridge Conference, the Cambridge Conference, the International Cooperation Administration (the precursor to the U.S. Agency for International Development) meant pre-industrial social configurations. So did most anthropologists and other social scientists that were concerned with development (Bendix 1964; Biddle & Biddle 1965; Brokensha & Hodge 1969; Dobyns, Doughty, & Lasswell 1971; Dube, 1963; Erasmus, 1961; G. Foster, 1973; Goodenough, 1963). With a few exceptions (e.g., Bradshaw & Blakely, 1979; Clinard, 1966; Ferguson & Dickens, 1999; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Popple & Quinney, 2002; Spiegel & Mitterthal, 1968) most self-identified community development writers brought to their work a classical concept of community – as a village or at least a rural agricultural settlement or a small town (Batten, 1957; du Sautoy, 1958; Flora, 1998; Knowles, 1960; Sanders, 1958a, 1958b; Summers, 1986; Wileden, 1970).

From the very inception of the field, rural or agricultural settlements or small towns have stood as a proxy for community. Even in the exceptional cases signaled above, place or space (e.g., urban neighborhoods) has remained an integral constituent of community. It can thus be said that place, whether rural, urban or whatever, has been an invariant element of the concept of community, and, as I argue below, it must be transcended to reach a theory of community development.

Three observations need to be made on this connection of place with community. First, this mode of usage takes the meaning of community as self-evident. A neighborhood, a small town, or a village is automatically assumed to be a community, regardless of the absence of any cohesion in it.

Second, it obscures another understanding of the term that transcends all connections with place, such as Durkheim's organic solidarity and Tonnies's *Gesellschaft*, a solidarity based upon shared interests or circumstances. It is this quality that is invoked for such bodies as the Jewish community, the Christian community, the community of Islam (the *Umma*), the Black community, the medical community, and, at an earlier time, trades union. In this sense of community place is incidental, not integral to its definition.

Finally, it fails to take into account the radical social change brought about by modernity in the social significance of place. Modernity, very briefly, is the

complex of transformations ushered in by industrialization. Wherever industry has become the dominant mode of production, it has had the effect of dissolving or at least weakening place-centered communities. We recognize place-centered communities better by an earlier term for it, namely, face-to-face communities (*Gemeinschaft*, mechanical solidarity, folk community). Place or locality was significant in such societies because most social activities took place within its confines and among people who were familiar with one another and who shared a common culture. Modernity divests place of this significance as most social activities can no longer remain confined in the "place" but must be oriented to unknown people in unknown places, to abstract institutions, and within rules that are different from the community norms (Berger, 1973; Giddens, 1990). It can even be said that the solidarity movements in the last century and a half arose in reaction to the decay of place-centered communities. Thus, a focus on place in the definition of community distracts from a theory of community development. A broader concept of community would not prevent us from seeing or developing community where place retains its significance, while freeing us to focus on the widest range of communities. Developing community in this sense has acquired an increasing urgency in recent decades in post-industrial as well as newly industrializing countries (for a useful summary of the concerns about community in the West, see Bellah et al., 1985; Fowler, 1991; Plant, 1974; Polanyi, 1944; Putnam, 1995; Wolin, 1990).

What is this quality that unites these two different understandings of community? The classic answer is solidarity (Durkheim), meaning a shared identity (derived from place, ideology, or interest) and a code for conduct or norms, both deep enough that a rupture affects the members emotionally and other ways. The decade old social capital movement conveys the same meaning: networks, trust, and mutual obligations enabling people to take collective measures to address shared problems (Putnam, 1995), as does the quality of life ideals listed by Ferguson and Dickens in their vision for community development (1999, p. 2). It is the weakening of this solidarity that has been in one way or another the point of departure for social criticism for over two centuries (e.g., Bellah et al., 1985; Fowler, 1991; Nisbet, 1962; Putnam, 1995; 1993; Wolin, 1990; Zagarella, 1988).

Understanding community as solidarity (shared identity and norms) serves to define the concept in a distinctive and intrinsic manner, making it possible to distinguish a community from all other types of social relations. We can say that any social configuration that possesses shared identity and norms is a community. The term is thus freed of the incidental baggage of territoriality, ethnicity or level of industrialization of the economy.

### **Development as Agency**

The ultimate goal of development should be human autonomy or agency – the capacity of people to order their world, the capacity to create, reproduce, change, and live according to their own meaning systems, to have the powers to define themselves as opposed to being defined by others (de Certeau, 1986;



Giddens, 1984). Giddens (1984, p. 14) puts it succinctly as “to be able to ‘act otherwise’,” that is, “to be able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs.” Others have called it freedom (Sen, 1999). It is apparent that empowerment, capacity building, and similar “buzz words” are not ends in themselves but means for the higher end of agency.

Agency is a modern concept, and it is linked with the concept of choice, which in turn is the product of the pattern of social change called modernity (Apter, 1971). In pre-modern societies, neither the concept nor the problem of agency could arise because choice was either conceptually absent or very limited. It is only with the onset of modernity that we could think of choosing our occupation, our domicile, our attire, our diet, and even our religion. But, as will be discussed in slightly greater detail later, modernity even as it created unprecedented opportunities for choice and agency also unleashed forces to annul them. To foster agency is what sets part of the agenda for community development.<sup>2</sup>

There was a time when development was indistinguishable from economic development, or, more narrowly, growth in the value of gross domestic product (GDP). That still seems to be the meaning in ordinary language. Most people understand development as economic development. In the field of development studies, the focus on simple economic growth was replaced first by the idea of modernization (better technology and associated cultural change), and eventually by the idea of “human development” and freedom (Blomstrom & Hettne, 1984; Sen, 1999). The *Human Development Report* published by the United Nations Development Program since 1990 utilizes a Human Development Index to measure development. The index is a composite of life expectancy at birth, literacy rate, mean years of schooling, and GDP per capita in real terms. Human development is defined as the creation and promotion of people’s choices and capabilities, that is, agency, which is the unifying concern of the social sciences and humanities today.

Wittingly or unwittingly, many governmental as well as private social service organizations create chronic dependency in the “clients,” establishing a relationship as between givers and abject recipients, the latter rarely gaining the capability to break out of the relationship. They are service *providers*. In community development parlance, such projects are set up *for* the clients not *with* them. Examples abound in the social history of most welfare societies of the providers strongly discouraging the “clients” from developing a sense of entitlement to the services that they could *demand* as a matter of civic right. On the contrary, the clients, poor and ill educated, frequently the targets of social ridicule and contempt, are scarcely allowed to develop what Freire (1973) called the critical consciousness. Briefly put, critical consciousness means not accepting an undesirable condition as fate or unchangeable, understanding the structure of causes that brought it about, and then evolving strategies to mitigate them. Community development in order to promote agency aims at generating critical consciousness, addressing problems that the affected people “own” and define, and take active measures to solve.

Defining development as agency-promoting activity has the advantage of parsimony: it captures the goals typically enumerated in community development definitions (economic and social change, improvement of quality of life, etc.), and, besides, it specifies the ultimate goal of development.

We can thus say that for any activity (economic development, organizing migrant farm workers, mobilizing for minority rights, elderly care, the environment, cultural rights, or better schools) to be called community development, the activity must be animated by the pursuit of solidarity and agency. Defining community development this way – the fostering of social relations that are increasingly characterized by solidarity and agency – also aligns community development with the mainstream intellectual concerns in the humanities and the social sciences today, adding to the field's academic respectability. Furthermore, it opens up a vast field for action and research on the process of erosion of solidarity and agency and the means for reconstructing them.

### **The Context of Community Development**

Community development is a positive response to the historic process of erosion of solidarity and agency. Its premise is that people have an inalienable right to agency and that solidarity is a necessity for a satisfying life. Community development is a part of the democracy project. At the core of democracy is the vision of solidarity (“fraternity”) and emancipation from authoritarianism or “unnecessary domination” (M. Weber) (agency). At the highest level, solidarity demands that we feel a concern for every person in the nation and the world as a whole (the solidarity of the species), extending solidarity to people we do not know. This is also the argument for the public good. More practically, it implies a willingness to engage in collective effort to create and sustain a caring society.

Freedom from authoritarianism or agency means the opportunity for the affirmation of the human will. Authoritarianism means the exercise of power by persons or institutions demanding obedience: it permits no dialogue, no freedom to inquire, only compliance. It does not permit ‘acting otherwise’. Agency means freedom from unnecessary restraints (negative freedoms) and access to resources that makes affirmation of the human will possible (positive freedoms). More practically, it means respect for different preferences, different cultures, and different ways of life.

Since I have said that community development is positive response to the process of erosion of solidarity and agency, it is necessary to trace the history of this process.

### **The Erosion of Solidarity and Agency**

The erosion of solidarity and agency is a modern affair. In the evolution of human society, we see transformations of solidarity. For example, the domestication of plants and animals and the rise of agriculture dissolved the solidarity type of nomadic or hunting-gathering society, but they generated new ones of the type found in farming villages. Similarly, the invention of printing

coupled with the spread of literacy vastly enlarged the private space at the cost of public entertainment (such as public poetry recitation) and of the leisure time spent in the company of friends and neighbors (see McLuhan, 1962; Febvre & Martin, 1976). But these also enabled the formation of new forms of solidarity based on more widely shared meanings, attitudes, and sentiments.

What we are confronted with today is erosion rather than transformation of solidarity at both micro and macro levels. The very titles of some works of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam (1995), *The Lonely Crowd* by David Riesman (1950), *The Pursuit of Loneliness* by Philip Slater (1970) convey a sense of the state of solidarity today. In the case of the United States, Putnam (1995) noted the steep decline in a number of dimensions of solidarity (social capital) – in civic participation, church going, membership in social clubs, trade unions, in time spent with family and neighbors. During the last third of 20<sup>th</sup> century, they fell by 25 to 50 percent at both macro and micro levels. According to the 35 country World Values Survey, civic participation and social trust levels are worse in most other countries in the Survey than in the United States (Putnam, 1995), and the process of solidarity erosion, notes Meranze (2001, pp. 110-111),

is visible all around us: in the closing of health facilities, the widespread stigmatization of some recipients of governmental assistance, the transfer of fiscal resources from schools to prisons, long-term attacks on labor unions and labor rights, the contraction of social commitments to shared basic rights, the tightening of “social borders.”

It is impossible in this short essay even to outline the complex history of the erosion of solidarity and agency. I will therefore focus on several related factors of modernity that have played a decisive role in it, industrial capitalism, the rise of the nation state, and instrumental reason. It should be noted at the outset that social change, at least its modern variants, is almost always ambiguous; it ushers in changes that enhance life while at the same time making it less meaningful. This is true of these factors as well.

### **Industrial Capitalism**

Beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in countries where it has become the common mode of production industrial capitalism has created unprecedented prosperity, numerous amenities, and freedom from famine. It has expanded literacy, increased life expectancy at birth, and has vastly enlarged opportunities for choice. In many cases, it has brought about a democratization of society.

However, the erosion or even destruction of solidarity has also been an integral feature of the process of industrialization, with its attendant ideology of the free market. This is a well traversed ground but bears a little recapitulation in view of the current euphoria in many quarters about globalization of free market economy that has tended to obscure the catastrophic effects of free market on human solidarity, since its beginning.

The dominant fact about industrial capitalism is the commodification of life and its consequences. This has been the verdict - and the warning - of social critics of diverse ideological persuasions from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. This is one point on which Marxists, non-Marxists, and even anti Marxists are in broad agreement (see, for example, Bellah et al., 1985; Berger, 1973, 1974; Marx & Engels, 1847; Nisbet, 1953; Polanyi, 1944).

A commodity, by definition, is an object produced for sale on the market, and a market is the intersection of demand for and supply of a commodity. There has to be a market for every ingredient of the economy, including labor, land, and money. But labor, land, and money are not commodities. Sixty years ago, Polanyi (1944, pp. 72-73), the distinguished economic historian, wrote:

“Labor is only another name for a human activity which goes with life itself, which in its turn is not produced for sale but for entirely different reasons, nor can that activity be detached from the rest of life, be stored or mobilized; land is only another name for nature, which is not produced by man; actual money, finally, is merely a token of purchasing power which, as a rule, is not produced at all, but comes into being through the mechanism of banking or state finance. The commodity description of labor, land, and money is entirely fictitious.”

But it is this “commodity fiction,” Polanyi (1944, p. 73) continues, that is utilized as a vital organizing principle in regard to the whole of society affecting all its institutions in the most varied way, namely, the principle according to which no arrangement or behavior should be allowed to exist that might prevent the functioning of the market mechanism on the lines of the commodity fiction.

A free market would eventually ruin society. This is how Polanyi (1944, p. 73) deduced it:

[T]he alleged commodity “labor power” cannot be shoved about, used indiscriminately, or even left unused, without affecting also the human individual who happens to be the bearer of this peculiar commodity. In disposing of a man’s labor power the system would, incidentally, dispose of the physical, psychological, and moral entity “man” attached to that tag. Robbed of the protective covering of cultural institutions, human beings would perish from the effects of social exposure; they would die as victims of acute social dislocation through vice, perversion, crime, and starvation. Nature would be reduced to its elements, neighborhoods and landscapes defiled, rivers polluted, military safety jeopardized, the power to produce food and raw materials destroyed. Finally, the market administration of purchasing power would periodically liquidate business enterprise, for shortages and surfeits of money would prove as disastrous to business as floods and droughts in primitive society.

Polanyi pronounced these dire warnings sixty years ago. Their aptness is amply demonstrated today by the current state of the world: the acute social dislocations, crime, perversions and starvation, global warming and the

despoliation of nature, and economic crises. The warnings that may not seem to have come to pass (such as food production) might yet do so; but the predicted ruination of society has been averted not by the mechanisms of the free market system but by its regulation by the state. The Great Depression in the United States, for example, did not come to an end because the market had corrected itself. It was overcome, and the society saved, by state intervention (the New Deal) to regulate the free market.

The implication for community development of the arrival of industrial capitalism and the free market ideology derives from the extraordinary fact that for the first time in human history, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, society became an accessory of the market. Until then the economic system was an accessory of the society controlled and subordinated by social authority. With industrial capitalism society came to be regarded as an aggregation of individuals as opposed to a complex web of relationships; and a new ideology emerged, anchored in the new science of economics, that defined the human being as an individual bent on optimizing individual utilities. This was reflected as methodological individualism in philosophy, economics, and the social sciences. Solidarity and the entire culture complex (meaning systems, sentiments, religion, language) were regarded as externalities: often hostile, dysfunctional, and in need of radical reform if they impeded the utility optimizing behavior, as pre-industrial solidarity and culture patterns almost always did (Foster, G., 1973; McClelland, 1961). The value of human beings came to rest on their market price. It is this historic reversal that provides the context for community development, the predominance of the market, the dis-embedding of economic activities from society, and the rise of the isolated individual that has structured the erosion of solidarity in modern and modernizing societies.

Market economies today are highly, though imperfectly, regulated by the state or other agencies (e.g., in the United States, the Federal Reserve Bank, and the Departments of Treasury, of Health and Human Services, of Labor, and the Securities and Exchange Commission). But the process of objectification, the underlying individualistic ideology, and its preoccupation with negative freedoms persist. There is mounting pressure in the United States (and elsewhere such as Britain, Germany, India) to drastically cut back state regulation of the market, and to reduce the role of public policy generally. In the United States, examples of the absence or erosion of solidarity at the macro level are large-scale poverty and illiteracy, the reluctance to increase minimum wage, millions of children who are not immunized, and OSHA regulations that are being weakened (Iceland, 2003).

The erosion of solidarity does not remain confined to the macro level but is mirrored in every social space (Bellah et al., 1985; Berger, 1973; Putnam, 1995). The logic of industrial capitalism with its attendant characteristics of commodification of life and radical individualism permeates every aspect of life and has a global reach. The implication for community development is that weak solidarity and meager social capital diminish the potential for collective action.

### The Ascent of the Nation-State

Benedict Anderson (1983) has called the modern nation-state the imagined community. In the nation-state, we feel a kinship with fellow citizens by virtue of common nationality although we really do not know most of them. Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the nation-state, in tandem with industrialism has triumphed as the common and the dominant form of social organization. It has indeed become almost interchangeable with nation or even society. As with industrialization, the story of the nation-state is also ambiguous. It created the opportunity for broader communication and solidarity than earlier modes of social organization often encompassing multitudes of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. The concomitant centralization of political, administrative, and fiscal powers often subdued the bigotry of ethnic and religious groups.

By the same token, the nation-state has ruined earlier solidarities based on cultural identity. Communities lost their relevance as economic and political powers were centralized and national social and ethical norms came to dominate community norms. The republican communitarian tradition in the United States, for instance, that had impressed de Tocqueville, was effectively brought to an end in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The tradition of American federalism with strong regional cultures was disrupted by the rise of a strong center with a unitary national culture committed to individualism (Shain, 1994).<sup>3</sup>

The impetus to forge a single national identity led most frequently to the enthronement of one language as the national or official language to the exclusion and sometimes brutal suppression of all others. Turkey, for example, did not even acknowledge the very existence of Kurdish, the language of some 20 percent of the population, until August 2002 (Kurkcu, 2003). But this has happened in almost every nation, in the U.S., in Canada, all over Europe and Russia (Seton-Watson, 1977), in China, and the Philippines. In California, Hispanic children were punished for speaking in Spanish while at school (Hakuta, 1986), and it was the same with Native Americans in Canada. In post-Revolution France, all non-French languages were *abolished* by law (Weber, 1976). Anglicization in the U.K., Russification in the Russian Empire, and Sinicization in China, most prominently in Tibet (Dalai Lama, 1990) are examples of the same policy of cultural domination that almost always accompanies nation building. In numerous countries today communities submerged in the nation-state are striving for measures of autonomy or outright secession.

The challenge before community development is to find ways to resist the homogenizing impulse of the nation-state and to defend cultural pluralism.

### Reason

Reason has numerous versions. Instrumental or technical reason is the reason of calculation and efficiency. Rational choice theory in sociology and political science is a loan from economics where rationality is defined as the capacity to choose the most efficient means to attain an end, and consistency in

choice. It is concerned strictly with the means, and indifferent about what we choose for the goal that we should be efficient about. This reason pervading every modern institution obscures the goal from reasonable scrutiny and becomes an end in itself. Reason as efficiency is measured by market-price computation of benefit-cost ratios. The human or environmental benefits or costs figure in the computation only if and when they affect efficiency. This reason becomes the only kind of reason. It subverts community by expropriating the authority to judge and validate traditions, worldviews, and the entire range of human subjectivity (e.g., attachment to place and people). Modern societies are rationalized societies where every aspect of life has come under the purview of instrumental reason (Berger, 1973; Braverman, 1974; Weber, M., 1978).

As conceived in 18<sup>th</sup> century Western Enlightenment, reason is a mental faculty – absolute, eternal, and universal. It challenged and even supplanted the authority of the church and god. It is reason that is in charge of the universe, not god. It is the reason of science and technology, and of historicism. With its application, we can discover the laws of the universe and of human history and manufacture objects. These laws are independent of what we may think or feel. They are ineluctable as the laws of thermodynamics.

A third version views reason as context-bound, inter-subjective, dialogical, or communitarian. Reason means “the willingness to talk things over”; to be reasonable is “to be conversable” (Rorty, 2001). There is not just one, singular reason, absolute and universal. It is not a free and spontaneous activity, but contexted and historical. Modern rationality is merely a historical condition, and is therefore susceptible to change. Because reason is context-bound, there may be as many reasons as contexts. The purpose of rational inquiry is not to apprehend objective truth or reality, which is assumed to be already there, to be *discovered*. The truth or reality is that which results at the end of the investigation. Objectivity does not mean correspondence to a pre-given reality, but inter-subjective or communitarian agreement on the definition of the reality (see the debate in Brown, 1984; Rorty, 2001, Sahlin, 1976).

We can call the first two versions of reason positivist and the third version subject-centered or inter-subjective or communitarian. The positivist version was dominant in the social and behavioral sciences until the 1960s – the purpose was to discover laws of human behavior as scientific as those of the hard sciences (Giddens, 1987). Auguste Comte, the co-parent of sociology with Saint Simon, looked for sociological laws of human affairs (*prevoir pour pouvoir*). Karl Marx following the historicist tradition formulated his laws of economic determinism; Ernst Cassirer sought a “positive,” “exact,” political science. (The positivist version has returned in the social sciences as rational choice theory.)

The communitarians find support in Darwin: evolutionary progress is tychistic – it occurs through “accidental congruence of genetic modification with environmental niches” (Rorty, 2001, pp. 29-30). There is no systematic law in human affairs, which are full of uncertainties and randomness. Communitarian reason thus sought to debunk historicism and positivism as it applied to human

societies: you cannot extrapolate from the past to the future. Human culture is an act of *bricolage*, tinkering: we fashion things out of what we have available around us. Positivist reason may explain natural and social phenomena. It can help us in determining benefit/cost ratios or evaluating the rationality of a course of action for a *given* end. But it cannot furnish the ends – the gods or demons we pursue are beyond the scope of instrumental reason (Bernstein, 1985).

The implication for community development is that positivism disregards our subjectivity – our will, our spontaneity, our meanings, and our capacity to order things. Positivism confronts us with seemingly ineluctable laws that we must obey. The ground is thus prepared for domination sponsored by the state, the party, religious bodies, teachers, parents, or the local planner, all of whom claim to uphold truth in compliance with objective facts and reason. Laws and decisions based on reason thus can be presented as apolitical, uncontaminated by particular preferences.

Reason liberated us from religious and political tyranny but harnessed to industrial capitalism has itself become tyrannical as instrumental reason. Cultures that do not obey the market logic of capital are labeled as irrational. In order to explain why poor countries remain poor, the resistance to or the slow pace of modernization, western social scientists and their Third World emulators in the 1950s and 1960s branded whole cultures as suffering from various syndromes which by their absence explain the “success” of the West. Thus, the Mexicans suffered from the *encogido syndrome* (Erasmus, 1961), some from the image of the limited good (G. Foster, 1973), or lacked the achievement motivation (McClelland, 1961). Southern Italians had amoral familism (Banfield, 1958), and now it seems all Italy does (Ginsborg, 2003). Such characterizations of cultures become meaningful only from the perspective of instrumental reason. Family, community, tradition, and place that made life meaningful are often viewed as an irrational drag on the march of rational choice. Where this reason takes hold, cultures lose their vitality; solidarity disintegrates into an aggregation of individuals bowling alone.

The same reason is at play when developers objectify people. Development research, for example, is frequently what Chambers (1983) calls extractive. The researchers extract information from people who act merely as passive reservoirs of information with no role in designing the research agenda or in the research process. People’s cognitive participation (Berger, 1974) – their perception and knowledge of the problems are dismissed as irrational (Chambers, 1983). Thus, the agency-generating powers of defining the problems, explaining their causes, and proposing remedies are denied to the respondents. There is no dialogue; the ownership of the problem slips away from the people to the developer.

Industrial capitalism, the nation-state, and reason have shaped the modern world. They have made possible the production of great wealth, longer life, uncountable amenities, and freedoms from ancient tyrannies. Above everything else, they have given us the opportunity for choice, perhaps the defining



characteristic of modernity. But they have exacted a price in human solidarity and agency.

As a field, community development is more concerned with the cost of positivist reason even as it acknowledges the benefits. Just as it should resist the homogenizing impulse of the nation-state, it should resist the tyranny of positivist reason by affirming that reasons can be as varied as cultures. So, how should we practice community development?

### **Self Help, Felt Needs, and Participation**

Since the goal of community development is solidarity and agency, the practice of community development must be guided by this goal. Communism and capitalist modernization, the two grand movements of modern history, promise human emancipation but as the end product. Despite fundamental differences, both objectify people during the process (Berger, 1974; Freire, 1973). Agents of both know what is best for the people regardless of what the people think. This is development imposed from above. Communism has been debunked and development practices today show a greater recognition of the need for people's participation than before. But across the globe, the participatory rhetoric notwithstanding, development practices generally remain conventional, imposed from above. By contrast, echoing Freire (1973), community development practice must regard people as agents (subjects) from the beginning. And it is this that sets community development apart from other development practices. In this sense, community development proposes an alternative politics, a truly democratic politics – non-impositional, non-manipulative, and respectful of the will of the people.

Three overlapping principles – self-help, felt needs, and participation – are the appropriate methods for the practice of community development. The choice of these methods is not arbitrary. As I elaborate on them later in the paper, they seem to be appropriate and consistent with the goal of solidarity and agency. Self-help builds and utilizes agency, mobilizes people's cultural and material assets (e.g., indigenous technical knowledge, tools, and labor), and most importantly, avoids dependency. Felt needs (or demand) affirms human variation and thus resists developmental imposition from above. Both of these principles facilitate effective participation leading to agency and solidarity. Thus, more than being pragmatically efficacious, they are also intrinsically important for the growth of agency and solidarity, i.e., they ought to be practiced in their own right. Secondly, as a formulation of method, the three principles are parsimonious. They address the core concerns about agency and solidarity leaving open the choice of techniques.

Thirdly, they have the backing of tradition. From its inception as a named movement more than half a century ago these were the guiding principles adopted by the U.S. International Cooperation Administration, the United Nations, the Ashridge Conference, the Cambridge Conference, and numerous other organizations

and individuals (for a near exhaustive record of the concept's formulations see the University of Missouri's *Handbook of Community Development*).“ To be sure, neither the wordings nor the rationales used by these entities are identical, but the principles as stated here, I believe, correctly represent them.

### Self-Help

Self-help is the opposite of helpless dependency. It does not mean the denial of inter-dependence or mutuality that is the very basis of social existence. The principle rests on a concept of human beings that when healthy they are willing and able to take care of themselves, to reciprocate, to be productive, more predisposed to give than receive, are active rather than passive, and creative rather than consuming (Fried, 1971). Human beings are *homo faber*, by nature they like to be productive. They are agents. But there are people who by a variety of causes have been rendered incapable of self-help. In some instances, the causes are rooted in individual pathology. But when the loss of agency afflicts large numbers of people or particular groups of people or is chronic, the causes are located outside of the individuals, in public policy, in the structure of economic and cultural opportunities (see Mills, 1959). The practice of self-help includes collective effort to alter these debilitating structures in order to restore agency.

Freire (1973) distinguishes problem solving from problematizing. Problem solving is the approach of conventional development practice. The problem to be solved is defined by outsiders (the state, the development organization, for example). The people whom the problem presumably affects have little role in defining it. They may have a role in implementing the solution (by sweat equity or matching funds, for example). By contrast, problematizing requires the people to determine what the problem is, so that they “own” the problem, which is the first necessary step for them to exert themselves for the solution. Problematizing is agency-generating whereas problem solving reinforces the agency-less passivity.

As a method, self-help is similar to the educational philosophy of Dewey, Piaget (1973), and Freire (1973) among many others. Proper education is agency-giving. It teaches the methods of learning, with which the pupils can launch ahead in the journey of creativity, as opposed to rote memorization or dependency-generating knowledge -consumption, which is analogous to the problem solving approach of conventional development practice.

### Felt Needs

This principle, a complement to the principle of self-help, implies that development projects should respond to people's needs as they see them; they should be demand-based. It ensures project relevance. It is agency-generating because it recognizes and fosters people's capacities to define and prioritize their problems. Much conventional development work involves manipulating the people to buy what the developer intends to sell. Responding to felt needs can be an entry point for selling. But manipulation is inherently anti-agency –

making people do what they would not willingly do. Since the project may not “take,” it can also lead to resource waste with high opportunity costs. The principle of felt needs is grounded on the premise that, given the knowledge and other resources available to a people, all their cultural practices including needs are rational (Vayda, 1983). The attempt to change a practice therefore should begin with changing the material/knowledge resource base, changing felt needs, and the experienced reality.

### Participation

Participation is the most recognized of the three principles of community development practice. Understood properly, it encompasses the principles of self-help and felt needs. But commonly it is used in a narrow sense as in electoral participation. Like self-help and felt needs, it is also used as an empty formula or a device to promote people’s acceptance of goals already decided by the development organization. This was the case, just to cite one example, with the rhetoric of participation in the Great Society program during the Johnson administration (Janowitz, 1978, Moynihan, 1969).

In its broadest sense, participation means taking part in the *production* of collective meanings. People can be excluded from it in many ways, by silencing a language, for example, or by overwhelming or de-legitimizing a culture, or by instrumental reason. Language is the heart of a culture, the vital medium for the production of collective meanings (Fishman, 1972), and its suppression has been one of the most common characteristics in the formation of nation-states (Anderson, 1983; Seton-Watson, 1977; Weber, 1976). In modern societies, the production of culture – history, ideas, literature, music, technology, and commodities of all sorts – is exclusionary (Braverman, 1974; Freire, 1973; Ranajit Guha, 1983; Johnson et. al., 1982; Lamont & Fournier, 1992<sup>4</sup>). Civilizations, in the sense of Great Traditions (Redfield, 1955), such as Christianity or Islam, have often de-legitimized cultures or Little Traditions (Niebuhr, 1951).

Similarly, positivist reason, pervasively embedded in the modern, bureaucratized, society undermines cultural or practical reason. The public-private distinction tends to disappear. The deep penetration of instrumental reason opens up to conscious scrutiny what are culturally settled practices and makes them contingent upon re-validation by instrumental reason. Every aspect of life becomes public, exposed to control and manipulation by the state and the market. This undermining of culture (meanings) finds its legitimation in the material abundance produced by the application of positivist reason (Bernstein, 1985; Foucault & Gordon, 1980; McCarthy, 1978; see also Baker & Reill (eds.), 2001).

Thus the principle of participation means inclusion, not merely in the electoral process or endorsing decisions but in deciding the agenda for debate and decision; it means inclusion in the processes of defining the problems to be solved and how to solve them. At a more important level, it means countering the domination and repression of positivist reason in its various manifestations

be it the state, the scientized politics, the industrial production process, or the culture industry.

Together these three principles provide the necessary guidance for the practice of community development. The people must have the opportunity to own the problem by feeling and defining it, and also to apply their knowledge/material resources for solving it. By acting as agents from the beginning, people can regain or reaffirm their solidarity and their agency.

### **Community Development in Practice**

Community development is being practiced by countless organizations, in numerous countries with diverse political traditions, addressing a truly astonishing variety of issues. Some of the organizations are small, stand-alone, neighborhood groups. Some are affiliated to umbrella organizations (e.g., the Industrial Areas Foundation, the Grameen Bank) that provide training in community organizing, routine administration, sometimes loans and/or grants, and a larger voice in regional and national politics. They are active in democratic countries (e.g., the United States, the U.K., India), in transitional democracies (e.g., countries of the old Soviet Union), and even in authoritarian countries (e.g., China).

Instead of describing exemplary cases of community development, which it is impossible to do in such a brief space,<sup>5</sup> I will point to some significant shifts in thinking about various social problems. What has become obvious is that “local” action, centered in neighborhoods and villages, is not adequate to the task of finding enduring solutions to social problems. The local problems are local manifestations of problems whose sources lie farther upstream. Community development thus calls for simultaneous action at both micro and macro levels. This is a tall order, but, as I illustrate below, such simultaneous actions are indeed happening.

### **Public Health**

Perhaps the greatest change in thinking has been taking place in the field of public health, what has been called a ‘paradigm drift’ (Campbell, 2000, p. 185) away from the clinical epidemiological approach to the community development approach. Instead of focusing on modifying individual behavior, the new method focuses on the community and macro factors (Davis, Cohen, Baxi, & Cook, 2003). The typical approach to epidemics, such as HIV/AIDS, poliomyelitis, obesity, or infantile pneumonia, is clinical epidemiological. It attacks the clinical cause of the disease (the virus, the bacterium). Health care personnel administer medicines or preventive inoculation. The health education component – radio and television broadcasts, billboards, posters, group sessions, and school curriculum – follows traditional teaching format, experts giving out information to a passive audience. Such, for instance is the approach of the current WHO programs against the resurgence of polio in certain countries, notably India. It has also been the approach to HIV/AIDS in which case, in addition to medicines, people were urged to practice safe sex and abstinence.

The new thinking that is taking place has two related parts. One, there is increasing recognition that the health status of a population depends not so much on medical care as on the socioeconomic environment in which people live and work. In the United States, health disparities are determined by macro factors such as polluted residential area, poverty, lack of access to nutritious food, safe streets or playgrounds, and the absence of community norms that support healthful behavior (Acharya et al., 2003). To improve health, therefore, requires strategies to alter the environment.

The second part, 'the paradigm drift,' calls for participation and representation of local people in health programs (Campbell, 2000, pp. 182-196). The 'drift' was initiated by the World Health Organization and endorsed by a number of international declarations – the Alma-Ata Declaration of 1978, the Ottawa Charter of 1986, and the Jakarta Declaration of 1997 (Campbell, 2000). The most effective tool against HIV/AIDS, for instance, has proved to be community norms revitalized by community-based organizations (social antibodies) (Epstein, 2003; Hansen, 2003; Singer et al., 1991; Bhattacharyya, K. & J. Murray, 2000; Blum, H. L.; 1981, Frieden & Garfield, 1987; Madan, 1987; Nichter, 1984, 1989; Rifkin, 1981; Rifkin & Walt, 1986; Stone, 1992).

In each of these cases, the standard bureaucratic method of individual-targeted healthcare was shunned for a community approach. The people were not treated merely as carriers of disease, actual or potential. The diseases were understood in their relation with broader socioeconomic contexts. The people participated cognitively by understanding the disease and its causes, and, armed with the understanding, in developing community norms and implementing the programs. The successful programs have been those where micro and macro level organizations have worked in tandem.

### **Violence**

As in the case of health, the standard bureaucratic posture to violence targets individuals, regarding it as a police, military, or behavior modification problem. The preventive measures, therefore, have generally been reactive rather than proactive – harsher punishment, more policing and more prisons, counseling. The relatively few proactive programs, such as the federal Safe School/Healthy Students program that was initiated in response to the Columbine School tragedy, have relied on greater vigilance (e.g., metal detectors), more rigorous monitoring of truancy, and more counseling (anger management, mediation). School personnel (counselors, social workers) make home visits more frequently to discuss children's problem behaviors with parents or other care providers. But even such programs have shown little readiness to formulate strategies to deal with the underlying socioeconomic causes of violent behavior although such causes - the cumulative effect of low SES, residential segregation by race, residential instability - have been known for nearly a century (Acharya et al., 2003; Sampson, 2004).

After studying 343 neighborhoods in Chicago, Sampson (2004) has shown how specifically those factors are related to neighborhood violence. The

immediate cause, he concludes, is the absence of neighborhood solidarity (informal social controls or collective efficacy, not police and courts), “the capacity of a group to regulate its members according to desired principles – to realize collective as opposed to forced, goals.”

The implication of this finding for community development is far reaching. Such solidarity is hard to achieve simply by neighborhood organizing. Solidarity grows out of face-to-face relations and trust over time and that becomes available with residential stability. Residential instability as well as the concentration of disadvantages is linked to macro political economy, not easily amenable to neighborhood solutions. Neighborhood organizing is necessary but without some level of micro-macro coordination, it alone is unlikely to be sufficient. For neighborhood solidarity to be achieved one needs to influence the policies of the city, the state, and the nation on employment, housing, pollution, education, police protection, and so on, as in the case of health.

### **Economic Development**

The modernization movement over the last half-century or more has followed the growth model: growth in gross national product. This model relies on top-down decision-making, large scale enterprise by the state or the private sector, and increased labor productivity. The result has been the creation of a permanent underclass – unemployed, underemployed, or unemployable, ill educated and ill nourished. An approach that is gaining the attention of policy makers is the micro economic development model. The Ford Foundation has been an early supporter, and in 1996, the World Bank sponsored a global micro credit summit, and has since created a micro credit fund exceeding \$50 million. The model is built on the recognition that job growth is unlikely to keep up with the growth in the number of underclass jobseekers. Its remarkable popularity amply demonstrates that it has tapped into a huge reservoir of felt needs for economic security and very poor people’s capacity of enterprise.

This model consists of innovative lending and entrepreneurship development programs for people who are too poor to qualify for conventional bank loans. The problem of poverty is not caused by the lack of effort or cultural preference, as many believe, but by the unavailability of financial and psychological capital and technical knowledge, and by macro social, political and economic policies (sexism, racism, red-lining, urban bias). The micro credit organizations furnish the capital, sometimes as little as \$100, and, given the characteristics of the population (chronic economic and social marginalization), literacy and health education, skills training (such as bookkeeping), and other support to generate self-help.

Prospective borrowers vouching for the initial borrower take care of the problem of attachable collateral. Perhaps the best known example of this model is the Grameen Bank. The model’s effectiveness is best evidenced by the fact that it has been adopted in numerous countries with very different political

economic systems, from China to the United States. (Ford Foundation, 1992). But there are a hundred other organizations practicing a similar community development approach to economic development: the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA), The Trickle Up Program (TUP), the Women's World Bank, the ACCION International, the Working Capital, and numerous others (Ford Foundation, 1992; Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992). They have created not only hundreds of thousands of self employed people, but some degrees of power and solidarity among historically marginalized people.<sup>6</sup>

### Food

An interesting development in the United States in the last two decades is the Community -Supported Agriculture (CSA), a concept that is a step up from the farmers' market. In the CSA, consumers commit to buy a share of the harvest. According to Roosevelt (2003), the CSA movement began in Japan 30 years ago and spread to Europe and the United States. From one CSA in Massachusetts in 1986, the movement has grown to 1,200 farms with 1,000 families as members. The impetus for CSA is only partly the desire for fresh food. (Currently, U.S. grown produce travels 1500 miles and is 4-7 days old before reaching the supermarket.) Partly it is the desire for food that has not been genetically engineered and is free of pesticides and hormones.

But it is also a movement to create communities to recover the meaning of food. According to Nestle (2002), the U.S. population buys nearly half its meals prepared elsewhere, and is consuming more processed food, rather than locally grown "whole" foods. Among those who cook at home, few do so from scratch. There is a growing sense that large numbers of people have little control over what and how they eat. Just ten corporations dominate the global food market. Since 1960, the number of farms in the United States has declined from 3.2 million to 1.9 million. Such consolidation under giant corporations has raised productivity by 82 percent, but the corporations produce fewer crops, leading many varieties to virtual extinction (Nabhan, 2002).<sup>7</sup> People's control over food is also compromised by powerful marketing techniques of the food industry. In 1998, for instance, the ten leading manufacturers of *packaged food products* spent \$8,228.5 million in advertising. Food and food service companies spend more than \$11 billion annually on *direct media advertising*. In 1999, McDonald's spent \$627.2 million, Burger King \$403.6 million, and Taco Bell \$206.5 million on direct media advertising (Nestle, 2002; Schlosser, 2002). Nearly 70 percent of food advertising is for promoting the most highly processed, elaborately packaged, and fast foods (Nestle, 2002).

The CSA movement along with farmers' markets and local food coops is an attempt to regain some control over food. It is restoring variety by bringing back heritage seeds and poultry. By practicing organic farming, it is producing wholesome food while protecting the environment. But it is more than that. "Even beyond

economics, community-supported agriculture is about something deeper: a sense of common good uniting those who plant and those who eat.” (Roosevelt, 2003, p. 61).

An interesting example of micro-macro linkage is the emergence last April of the National Cooperative Grocers Association consolidating the resources of 94 independent natural food co-ops with 111 retail locations. It has 400,000 member owners, millions of consumers, and an annual sales volume of \$626 million. This is an excellent example of networking among food coops and independent organic growers. Their national clout was evidenced by, among other development, when the US Department of Agriculture last September finally issued the organic certification procedure.

Similar examples could be provided from almost every area of social life. But the few examples sketched above perhaps suffice to give a sense of how community development is being practiced and the changes it is causing in dealing with social problems.

### **Concluding Remarks**

I have tried to present in these pages my vision of community development – the pursuit of solidarity and agency. For context – the reason for community development – I have focused on the corrosive effects of historical forces of industrial capitalism, the nation-state, and positivist–reason as applied to human affairs. None of these causes are likely to be transcended any time soon. They are inter-active, and deeply entrenched in national and global political economy, and in our habits of thought. Community development has to function – and it is functioning – within this environment. Thus, community development practitioners must address macro factors while working in microenvironments. Local problems today are likely to be only local manifestations of larger problems. This calls for political action, and networking among community organizations to gain political clout.

I have maintained that we need to distinguish among goals, methods, and techniques or tools. The various models of community development (conflict, community self-study, locality development, social planning, etc.) deal with techniques, as do community asset building programs. Techniques are the front end, the most immediately relevant and crucially significant aspect of community development. But they cannot – and should not – be ends in themselves. They are tools to implement certain methods (such as, self-help, felt needs, and participation), and as such, they must cohere and be consistent with the methods. The methods in turn are significant only to the extent they help to create and sustain a satisfying life, which I have defined as the acquisition of solidarity and agency.

The purpose of this paper was to bound community development as a distinct field. That distinction can be achieved, I have suggested, by adhering to the goals of solidarity and agency together with certain methods that are consistent with the goals which I have argued are self-help, felt needs, and participation.



## NOTES

1. I am indebted to Drs. Karabi Acharya, Sumita Bhattacharyya and Susan Maher, and to Kakali Bhattacharya and Uttiyo Raychaudhuri, for help with different aspects of the paper. I thank Dr. Ted Bradshaw, Dr. Ron Hustedde, Noemi Danao and other members of the Taughannock Farms Inn Retreat for comments on an earlier incarnation of this paper and for the encouragement to write this one. I also thank Marilu Carter for her assistance.

2. There is no single work that deals with the problem of agency in such diverse fields as anthropology, history, literature, philosophy, political science, psychology, and sociology, and it will take too much space to cite even the major works in each field. An overly simplified introduction to some of the authors is W. Foster (1986). More scholarly sources are Lemert (1979), Giddens (1984), and Wolin (1990). None of these works deals with literature, especially post-modernist criticism, and on this there is no generally accessible overview; the interested reader may consult Berman (1988) and Kellner (1989).

3. The disruption of regional cultures was also a blessing as it abolished slavery and extended civil rights, once again illustrating the ambiguity of history.

4. See especially the articles in Part Two: High Culture and Exclusion, in Lamont and Fournier (1992).

5. See the excellent collection of recent cases in Putnam and Feldstein (2003). The annual *Report* and the quarterly *Letter* of the Ford Foundation commonly publish accounts of community development from across the world.

6. For a critical assessment of the movement see Jonathan Morduch (1999).

7. The large industrial farms have made inroads in the fast growing organic food market shipping organic produce to the U.S. from as far away as China and New Zealand (Roosevelt, 2003). The federal organic certification procedure released in September 2003 is too cumbersome and time consuming for truck farmers that had initiated and sustained the organic movement. The new label for locally grown organic foods is ecological.

## REFERENCES

- Aburdene, P., & J. Naisbitt. 1992. *Megatrends for Women*. New York: Villard Books.
- Acharya, K., R. Davis, T. Gantz, & P. Leuna. 2003. *Salinas Safe Schools/Healthy Students Local Evaluation Report: Toward a Community of Caring*. Oakland, CA: The Prevention Institute.
- Anderson, B. 1983. *The Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Apter, D. E. 1971. *Choice and the Politics of Allocation: A Developmental Theory*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Baker, K. M., & P. H. Reill, (eds). 2001. *What's left of Enlightenment?: A postmodern question*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Banfield, E. 1958. *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*. New York: The Free Press.
- Batten, T. R. 1957. *Communities and Their Development*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Bellah, R. N., R. Madsen, W. M. Sullivan, A. Swidler, & S. M. Tipton. 1985. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bendix, R. 1964. *Nation-Building and Citizenship*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Berger, P. L. 1974. *Pyramids of Sacrifice: Political Ethics and Social Change*. New York: Basic Books.

- Berger, P. L. 1973. *The Homeless Mind*. (With B. Berger and H. Kellner). New York: Vintage.
- Berman, A.. 1988. *From the New Criticism to Deconstruction: The Reception of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Bernstein, R. J. 1985. *Habermas and Modernity*. 1<sup>st</sup> MIT Press edition. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Bhattacharyya, J. 1995. Solidarity and agency: Rethinking community development. *Human Organization* 54(1): 60-69.
- Bhattacharyya, K. 1993. *Understanding Acute Respiratory Infection: Culture and Method*. Sc.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University.
- Bhattacharyya, K. & J. Murray. 2000. Community assessment and planning for maternal and child health program: A participatory approach in Ethiopia. *Human Organization* 59(2): 255-266.
- Biddle, W. 1966. The "fuzziness" of definition of community development. *Community Development Journal* 1: 5-12.
- Biddle, W., with L. Biddle. 1965. *The Community Development Process*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Blomstrom, M., & B. Hettne. 1984. *Development Theory in Transition: The Dependency Debate and Beyond: Third World Responses*. London: Zed Books.
- Blum, H. L. 1981. *Planning for Health: Generics for the Eighties*. New York: Human Sciences Press.
- Bradshaw, T. K., & E. J. Blakely. 1979. *Rural Communities in Advanced Industrial Society: Development and Developers*. New York: Praeger.
- Braverman, H., 1974. *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Labor in the Twentieth Century*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Brokensha, D., & P. Hodge. 1969. *Community Development: An Interpretation*. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co.
- Brown, S. C. (ed.). 1984. *Objectivity and Cultural Divergence. Supplement to Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Campbell, C. 2000. Social capital and health: Contextualizing health promotion within local community networks. Pp. 82-196 in S. Baron, J. Field, & T. Schuller (eds.), *Social Capital: Critical Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carry, L. J., (ed.). 1970. *Community Development as a Process*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
- Chambers, R. 1983. *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*. New York: John Wiley.
- Christenson, J. A., & J. W. Robinson (eds.). 1989. *Community Development in Perspective*. Iowa City, IA: Iowa State University Press.
- Clinard, M. B. 1966. *Slums and Community Development*. New York: Free Press.
- Cox, F., J. Ehrlich, J. Rothman, & J. Tropman (eds.). 1974. *Strategies of Community Organization: A Book of Readings*. Itasca, IL: Peacock Publishers.
- Dalai Lama. 1990. *Freedom in Exile: The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama of Tibet*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Davis, R., L. Cohen, S. Baxi, & D. Cook. 2003. *A Community Approach to Address Health Disparities*. Working Draft. Oakland, CA: THRIVE, Environmental Scan, The Prevention Institute.

- De Certeau, M. 1986. *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, B. Massoumi (trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Denise, P. S., & I. Harris (eds.). 1990. *Experiential Education for Community Development*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Dobyns, H. F., P. L. Dougherty, & H. D. Lasswell (eds.). 1971. *Peasants, Power, and Applied Social Change: Vicos as a Model*. Beverly Hills: Sage
- Du Sautoy, P. 1958. *Community Development in Ghana*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Dube, S. C. 1963. *India's Changing Villages*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Durkheim, E. 1964 [1893]. *The Division of Labor in Society*, G. Simpson (trans.). New York: The Free Press.
- Epstein, H. 2003. AIDS in South Africa: The invisible cure. Pp.44-49 in *New York Review of Books*, July 17.
- Erasmus, C. J. 1961. *Man Takes Control: Cultural Development and American Aid*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Febvre, L., & H. J. Martin. 1976. *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800*. London: New Left Books.
- Ferguson, R. F. & W. T. Dickens (eds.). 1999. *Urban Problems and Community Development*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Fishman, J. 1972. The sociology of language. Pp.45-58 in Paolo Giglioli (ed.), *Language and Social Context*. Pier Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books.
- Flora, J.L. 1998. Social capital and communities of place. *Rural Sociology* 63: 481-506.
- Ford Foundation. 1992. *The Report*. Washington, DC: The Ford Foundation.
- Foster, G. M. 1973. *Traditional Societies and Technological Change*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Harper & Row.
- Foster, W. 1986. *Paradigms and Promises: New Approaches to Educational Administration*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Foucault, M., & C. Gordon. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Fowler, R. B. 1991. *The Dance with Community: The Contemporary Debate in American Political Thought*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press.
- Freire, P. 1973. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Fried, E. 1971. *Active, Passive: The Crucial Psychological Dimension*. New York: Harper Colophon Books.
- Frieden, T., & R. Garfield. 1987. Popular participation in health in Nicaragua. *Health Policy and Planning* 2: 162-170.
- Giddens, A. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Giddens, A. 1987. *Sociology: A Brief but Critical Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Giddens, A. 1984. *The Constitution of Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ginsborg, P. 2003. The patrimonial ambitions of Silvio B. *New Left Review* 21(May/June): 21.
- Goodenough, W. H. 1963. *Cooperation in Change*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Guha, R. (ed.). 1983. *Subaltern Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Hakuta, K. 1986. *Mirror of Language: The Debate on Bilingualism*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hansen, K. 2003. Letter in *New York Review of Books* (November 20): 57.
- Iceland, John. 2003. *Poverty in America: A Handbook*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Janowitz, M. 1978. *The Last Half-Century: Societal Change and Politics in America*. University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson, R., G. McLennan, B. Schwarz, & D. Sutton. 1982. *Making Histories: Studies in History, Writing and Politics*. London: Hutchinson in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham.
- Kellner, D. (ed.). 1989. *Post-Modernism: Jameson Critique*. Washington, DC: Maisonneuve Press.
- Knowles, M. S. (ed.). 1960. *Handbook of Adult Education in the United States*. Chicago: Adult Education Association of the USA.
- Kramer, R. M. & H. Specht. 1969. *Readings in Community Organization Practice*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall.
- Kretzmann, J. P., & J. L. McKnight. 1993. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Chicago: ACTA.
- Kurkcu, E., 2003. Leyla Zana: Defiance under fire. *Amnesty Now* 29(3): 22-25.
- Lamont, M. & M. Fournier (eds.). 1992. *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lemert, C. C. 1979. *Sociology and the Twilight of Man: Homocentrism and Discourse in Sociological Theory*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Madan, T. N. 1987. Community involvement in health policy: Socio-structural and dynamic aspects of health beliefs. *Social Science and Medicine* 25: 615-620.
- Marx, K. & F. Engels. 1847. The communist manifesto. In *Selected Works, Vol. 1, 1962*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- McCarthy, T. 1978. *The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- McClelland, D. C. 1961. *The Achieving Society*. New York: Free Press.
- McLuhan, M. 1962. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Meranze, M. 2001. Critique and government: Michel Foucault and the question 'What is Enlightenment?'. In K. M. Baker & P. H. Reill (eds.), *What's Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Mills, C. W. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York, Oxford University Press.
- Morduch, J. 1999. The microfinance promise. *Journal of Economic Literature*. 37(December): 1569-1614.
- Moynihan, D. P. 1969. *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty*. New York: Free Press.
- Nabhan, G. P. 2002. *Coming Home to Eat: The Pleasures and Politics of Local Foods*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. New York : W.W. Norton.

- Nestle, M. 2002. *Food politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Nichter, M. 1989. *Anthropology and International Health*. Boston: Kluwer.
- Nichter, M. 1984. Project community diagnosis: Participatory research as a first step toward community involvement in primary health care. *Social Science and Medicine* 19(3): 237-252.
- Niebuhr, H. R. 1951. *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper and Brothers.
- Nisbet, R. A. 1962. *Community and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Piaget, J. 1973. *To Understand is to Invent: The Future of Education*. New York: Grossman Publishers.
- Plant, R. 1974. *Community and Ideology: An Essay in Applied Social Philosophy*. London: Routledge & K. Paul.
- Polanyi, K. 1944. *The Great Transformation*. New York: Rinehart.
- Popple, K., & A. Quinney. 2002. Theory and practice of community development: A case study from the United Kingdom. *Journal of Community Development Society* 33(1): 71-85.
- Putnam, R. 1995. Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*. January: 65-78.
- Putnam, R., R. D. Butler, & L. M. Feldstein (with D. Cohen). 2003. *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Redfield, R. 1955. *The Little Community: Viewpoints for the Study of a Human Whole*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Riesman, D., in collaboration with R. Denney & N. Glazer. 1950. *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Rifkin, S. B., & G. Walt. 1986. Why health improves: Defining the issues concerning 'comprehensive health care' and 'selective primary health care.' *Social Science and Medicine* 23 (6): 559-566.
- Roosevelt, M. 2003. "Fresh off the farm:" Community-supported agriculture. *Time*. Nov. 3, Vol. 162, issue 18, pp. 60-61.
- Rorty, R. 2001. The continuity between the Enlightenment and 'Postmodernism'". Pp. 19-36 in K. M. Baker & P. Hans Reill (eds.), *What's Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Rothman, J. 1968. Three models of community organization practice. *Social Work Practice 1968*. National Conference on Social Welfare. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sahlins, M. 1976. *Culture and Practical Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sampson, R. J. 2004. Neighborhood and community: Collective efficacy and community safety. *New Economy* 1: 106-113.
- Sanders, I. T. 1958b. Theories of community development. *Rural Sociology* 23: 1-12.
- Sanders, I. T. 1958a. *Community Development and National Change*. Washington, DC: US International Cooperation Administration.
- Schlosser, E. 2002. *The Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. New York: Perennial Press.

- Sen, A. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. New York: Knopf.
- Seton-Watson, H. 1977. *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Shain, B. A. 1994. *The Myth of American Individualism: the Protestant Origins of American Political Thought*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Singer, M., C. Flores, L. Davison, G. Burke, & Z. Castillo. 1991. Puerto Rican community mobilizing in response to the aids crisis. *Human Organization* 50: 73-81.
- Slater, P. E. 1970. *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Spiegel, H. B. C., & S Mittenthal. 1968. *Neighborhood Power and Control: Implications for Urban Planning. A Report Prepared for the Department of Housing and Urban Development*. New York: Institute of Urban Environment, School of Architecture, Columbia University.
- Stone, L. 1992. Cultural influences in community participation in health. *Social Science and Medicine* 35: 409-417.
- Summers, G. 1986. Rural Community Development. Pp. 333-340 in *New Dimensions in Rural Policy: Building Upon Our Heritage*. Studies prepared for the use of the Subcommittee on Agriculture and Transportation of the Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States. Washington,DC: US Government Printing.
- Tonnies, F. 1957[1887]. In C. P. Loomis (trans. and ed.), *Community and Society*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- University of Missouri at Columbia. n.d. *The Handbook of Community Development*. Columbia, MO: Department of Community Development.
- Vayda, A. P. 1983. Progressive contextualization: Methods for research in human ecology. *Human Ecology* 11: 265-281.
- Weber, E. 1976. *Peasant into Frenchman: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Weber, M. 1978. In G. Roth & C. Wittich (eds.), and E. Fischhoff et al. (trans.), *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wileden, A. F. 1970. *Community Development*. Totowa, NJ: Bedminster Press.
- Wolin, S. 1990. Democracy in the discourse of Postmodernism. *Social Research* 57: 5-30.
- Zagarella, S. A. 1988. Narrative of community: The identification of a genre. *Signs* 13: 498-527.