

Understanding Different Forms of Community Development: A Review of Literature

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Abstract

Community development is often a nebulous term defined by many conceptual and practical characterizations (Christenson & Robinson, 1980; Summers, 1986; Wilkinson, 1991). This is particularly tangible in the twenty-first century, characterized by a larger and growing presence of communities engaged in community development efforts. The growing interest in community development has resulted from the field's proven capacity to deliver solutions to community problems. Additionally, the multifaceted ways in which communities worldwide participate in community development efforts (Walzer, 2010) has contributed to community development's conceptual and practical pluralism. As a result, an increase in numbers and variability of individuals and organizations from multiple disciplines and frameworks practicing and studying community development has become palpable (Walzer, 2010). Policy-makers, practitioners, and academics should benefit from better understanding not only what community development is from a conceptual and overarching standpoint, but from an applied perspective, by acknowledging the different stakeholders, goals, and processes engaged to achieve such goals. Understanding of the different forms of community development and how they can complement each other is critical for establishing future processes that try to minimize the weaknesses of each form and promote their strengths.

Keywords: Different Forms of Community Development

Introduction

Community development is often a nebulous term defined by many conceptual and practical characterizations (Christenson & Robinson, 1980; Summers, 1986; Wilkinson, 1991). This is particularly palpable in the twenty-first century, characterized by a larger and growing presence of communities engaged in community development efforts. The growing interest in community development has resulted from the field's proven capacity to deliver solutions to community problems. Additionally, the multifaceted ways in which communities worldwide participate in community development efforts (Walzer, 2010) has contributed to community development's conceptual and practical pluralism. As a result, an increase in numbers and variability of individuals and organizations from multiple disciplines and frameworks practicing and studying community development has become palpable (Walzer, 2010).

As noted by Green and Haines (2008), the large number of concepts and practices associated with community development is strength of the field, yet it can also be a problem. Such pluralism has become overwhelming and has forced many to produce more narrow conceptualizations of community development framed by particular areas of specialization (e.g. community development as defined by economic growth or urban development). While extremely valuable, such conceptualizations lack a holistic vision or conceptual basis that provides an overarching guidance to the field.

Without an inclusive conceptualization, community development faces the risk of becoming too narrow in focus. Lack of an overarching conceptual definition and clear understanding of what community development entails results in a scattered literature often targeted at specific groups. Such specialization diminishes the opportunities for academics and practitioners to understand the internal connections between distinct disciplines that link the field together. This becomes a daunting problem, particularly for a field that prides itself on being multidisciplinary, applied, and oriented to problem-solving (Green & Haines, 2008; Taylor, 2007; Theodori, 2007; Walzer, 2010).

Community

The debate as to what constitutes a community is an ongoing, and perhaps never ending discussion (Green & Haines, 2008; Theodori, 2007). Human ecology, systems theory, and field theory are among some of the most commonly known approaches to the study of community (Luloff & Krannich, 2002). Human ecology defines community as the structure of relationships through which a localized population meets its daily requirements (cf. Luloff & Krannich, 2002).

Human ecology is concerned with community structure, which is comprised of the mechanisms by which the population organizes itself for survival in a particular habitat (Poplin, 1979). Further, the ecological perspective emphasizes society's adaptive processes to achieve such goal (Hawley, 1950). According to this approach, adaptive mechanisms emerge in response to changing technological, organizational, and environmental conditions (Duncan, 1959, 1964).

Systems theory defines community as the combination of social units and systems that perform major social functions (cf. Luloff & Krannich, 2002). From this perspective, a social system is a highly organized set of socially significant relationships between two or more persons or groups (Bates & Bacon, 1972; Poplin, 1979). According to this approach, the community can be viewed as a system comprised of statuses and roles, and groups and institutions that are closely articulated with one another (Poplin, 1979).

In addition to structure and function, interaction within a social group is an important component of a community. Field theory (Kaufman, 1959; Wilkinson, 1991) posits social interaction as the most critical feature of community. From this perspective, a community's existence, structure, and functioning are possible through local social relationships emerging from the interaction of its residents. Such social interaction consists of the extent and nature of relationships among the different stakeholders within a geographical area.

Guided by these approaches, we define a community as a locality comprised by people residing in a geographical area; the resources such people require to subsist and progress; and the processes in which such individuals engage to distribute and exchange such resources to fulfill local needs and wants.

For our purposes, the different people (stakeholders) and resources within a community will be considered its "*elements*". The ways in which diverse and often competing stakeholders interact to develop strategies, programs, projects, and rules of action will be considered "*processes*".

Elements of Community

Communities need a wide range of resources (Taylor, 2007), also referred to as assets

(Flora & Flora, 2008; Goreham, Tweeten, Taylor, & Fier, 2009; Green & Haines, 2008), for subsistence and progress. In here, such resources are considered elements, as these are the "building blocks" for community life. Community resources are, thus, essential for communities to function, as they allow localities to emerge and evolve by fulfilling locally required needs and wants.

A first set of resources includes human resources (Taylor, 2007). These include the different stakeholders in the community. Community stakeholders (or groups of organizations often found in a community), according to Smith (1991, 1997) consist of families/residents (households), government, businesses (for profit), and the voluntary/non profit sector (volunteer and grassroots). Such entities are, in different situations and at different levels, part of the decision-making processes leading to specific community goals (as defined by a community's needs and wants).

The relevance of human resources in community development is the role they play in providing particular capacities to the community. Stakeholders implement, facilitate, and/or receive capacities that allow the continual mobilization of resources within (and outside) the community. Through these capacities, stakeholders seek to establish the ways in which resources are distributed, traded, and managed.

A second resource includes the physical component of a community (Taylor, 2007). The physical resource consists of the built and natural assets of the community that, taken together, conform its character (William, 2007). Physical resources are important for functional, aesthetic, and symbolic reasons. Functionally, people want to live in communities that facilitate means for subsistence, communication, and mobilization (e.g. transportation) so commercialization, provision of services,

and engagement in recreational and leisure activities can be achieved (Richards & Dalbey, 2006). Aesthetically, people want to live in places that are pleasurable for them (Howe, McMahon, & Propst, 1997; Richards & Dalbey, 2006; William, 2007). Symbolically, the physical resource plays a critical role in the formation of sentiments and identity towards a community (Gustafson, 2001; Howe et al., 1997; Hummon, 1992; Matarrita-Cascante, Stedman, & Luloff, 2010).

Key to the survival and development of any community are also the value that social groups give to local resources. Such value refers to the ways in which human and physical resources are turned into/become economic resources. Economic resources are the established market values of goods and services that are produced as a result of the interrelations of human and physical resources. Thus, economic resources are the productive and financial assets that respond to the distribution of resources destined to fulfill the wants and needs of a local population. Such resources are established and pursued to distribute and secure the community's livelihood through a system of prices.

Processes within community

The mechanisms by which local human, physical, and economic resources are combined to pursue community development efforts are here called processes. From a community development perspective, processes at the local level are concerned with the provision and management of resources that seek to improve a community's living conditions.

Community development processes focused on economic development pertains the establishment of local efforts aimed at improving the community's economic and financial resources. These processes are often directly related to poverty reduction; development, retention, and expansion of local businesses; reduction of economic leakages; jobs creation, and income generation (Marais & Botes, 2007; Taylor, 2007).

Community development processes focused on human development are concerned with personal development reflecting people's (including youth, adults, and elders) individual conditions (e.g. improvements to physical, spiritual, mental and emotional health, literacy and education levels, and skills for particular tasks; Acharya, Yoshino, Jimba, & Wakai, 2007; Kane, 2010); intrapersonal development reflecting internal sociopsychological conditions (e.g. attachment to and satisfaction with the community; Binns, 2010; Theodori, 2000, 2001; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2010); and interpersonal development reflecting the conditions of social relationships (e.g. reduction of criminal and deviant behaviors, promotion of broad involvement, power distribution, tolerance and equality, cooperation, self-empowerment, leadership, and capacity-building; Brennan & Israel, 2009; Craig, 2002; Kelly & Caputo, 2006; Lane & Henry, 2001; Richards & Dalbey, 2006; Speak, 2000; Tabbush, 2010).

Thus, community development, through human development processes, seeks to improve the characteristics of human conditions within and between individuals. As a result, human development processes seek healthier and more educated individuals, with stronger bonds amongst each other, and with the capacity to lead local efforts through established purposive collective action.

Community development through physical development entails efforts aimed at creating and managing local built and natural resources. Among the former, community development is often associated with infrastructure development processes including downtown revitalization, real-estate and commercial development, construction and maintenance of roads, streets, and sidewalks, and the promotion of communities through branding and marketing practices (Richards & Dalbey, 2006). Among the physical natural environment, community development is concerned with the ways in which natural resources are distributed and used locally. This requires processes of resource management balancing for human consumption, conservation, and sustainability (Kemp, 2010; Marfo, 2008; Maser, 1997).

While conceptualized as economic, human, and physical development, such processes are highly inter-related and are, often, inclusive. Further, the nature of such processes is highly dependent on who is the community developer (i.e. the "who"; Walzer, 2010). Knowing the "who" is important because it reflects the needs and wants sought to be fulfilled, and the routes of action associated with each community development process. Understanding the person or groups leading such efforts is important because, depending on this, approaches taken, goals set, and resulting outcomes can differ extensively.

In summary, community development operates with different elements (i.e. stakeholders and resources) that undergo certain processes that seek to improve the community. Developed programs/strategies seeking improved living conditions can vary in many ways depending on the particular resource(s) being developed. This often reflects the goals and training

of who is implementing such efforts. Based on these different views of community development, we offer a definition and characterization of community development in the following section.

Community development

Based on the elements and processes examined in the previous section, we have built a definition of community development: Community development is a process that entails organization, facilitation, and action, which allows people to establish ways to create the community they want to live in. It is a process that provides vision, planning, direction, and coordinated action towards desired goals associated with the promotion of efforts aimed at improving the conditions in which local resources operate. As a result, community developers harness local economic, human, and physical resources to secure daily requirements and

respond to changing needs and conditions.

Because of the multiple stakeholders involved, their goals, and the forms (processes) in which they appropriate, use, and manage local resources, community development produces many different outcomes. However, within such variability, overarching forms of community development that take place in a community can be noted and categorized. We summarized such forms in a community development typology that represent the different community development forms particularly focused on the view of community guiding the community development efforts, the benefits they produce to the community, who is the principal stakeholder leading the community development process, and the levels of input, involvement, and learning outcomes for local residents. Such typology can also be seen as a continuum, as community development efforts can vary in forms and can be placed along intermediate points in respect to the major categories presented here. Following a people-centered approach (in contrast to a developer-centered approach; Botes & Van Rensburg, 2000), forms of community development were labeled here as imposed, directed, and self-help.

Imposed forms of community development

Within the imposed form of community development, the predominant view of community consists of a place where people exchange goods and services to fulfil major functions necessary for survival and progress. Imposed community development efforts seek to improve the living conditions of a community through physical and economic development mostly by developing infrastructure and/or technology (structural hereon). Projects or strategies included in this form of community development are often technical in nature and are commonly promoted by contracted private industry (on instances extra-local to the community) or government institutions. From this perspective, the community developer is concerned with providing the community with an asset that makes life possible and/or easier. An example of a project fitting this category is the construction of roads, which makes transportation possible and more efficient in a particular community.

Without structural contributions, the community would find it hard to subsist, or would subsist in a less efficient form, limiting the capacities to progress. Community development efforts fitting this perspective parallel the "method" approach to community development as defined by Christenson and Robinson (1980), as it places particular emphasis on a specific purpose or end. Thus, imposed community development forms focus on "hard tasks" (Botes & van Rensburg, 2000). Botes and van Rensburg (2000) denote such tasks as technological, financial, physical, and material, and their implementation reflect what Summers (1986) and Wilkinson (1991) called development in the community processes.

Due to the nature of structural assets, which require specific skills and technology, the implementer focuses its attention on providing such assets mainly guided by its own expertise and judgment. The community developer in this case does not require/seek the community's (i.e. residents) input and involvement in the process (therefore the name of imposed). Consequently, projects/strategies in this category rarely produce learning outcomes (e.g. technical knowhow, learning about working together, learning about local resources) for the large majority of the community residents.

Directed forms of community development

Directed forms of community development are a combination or mid-point between imposed and self-help forms. Within this form of community development, the predominant view of community is as a place where people exchange goods and services to fulfill major functions necessary for survival. Yet, although limited, some emphasis is placed on viewing community as a place where people associate and create meaningful relationships. The community is therefore mostly defined, as in the case of imposed forms of community development, by the functions necessary for survival of the

community. Projects or strategies fitting in this form of community development are mostly interested in structural improvements to the community.

Commonly practiced by local governments or funded institutions, directed projects or strategies are interested or required to engage in participatory/democratic efforts. In this form of community development, the community or group of residents are, for the most part, often directed towards a program or activity that has been previously designed by a group of stakeholders within the community (e.g. local government) and asked to provide feedback. The project or program is then modified based on the input of the community. Thus, the benefits to the community from directed projects are also linked to the community through the promotion of interactional processes. An example of a directed community development project is when a local government asks the residents of a community to provide feedback in the design of a greenway or bike paths.

The notion of inviting residents to the decision-making process is to some extent new. According to Richards and Dalbey (2006, p.22), "not until the 1960s and early 1970s was broader-based citizen participation tolerated in local land use decision-making." However, on instances, while the resident's input is taken into consideration, it is not to the extent that it would create major changes in the program or activity, reflecting more tokenistic forms of participation (Arnstein, 1969). Taking a more critical stance, Botes and van Rensburg (2000, p. 43) noted that "community participation is in these cases is nothing more than an attempt to convince beneficiaries what is best for them." Despite how seriously the input of the community is taken or not, directed forms of community development often provide residents with some level of information and voice. Thus, the resident's involvement in the process is sufficient to result in a moderate level of learning outcomes.

Self-help form of community development

Within the self-help form of community development, the major view of the community is that of a place where people associate with each other while building meaningful relationships critical for the community's subsistence. From this perspective, the community is defined by the relationships existing among individuals, and not by the functions each resident performs. As a result, whereas imposed forms of community development are focused on task accomplishment, self-help forms focus on interactional processes. Self-help forms of community development reflect development of community type efforts as defined by Wilkinson (1991). In this form of community development, the community or group of residents are often the leading stakeholders promoting a program or activity. From this approach, the community's input and involvement in the process are high, resulting in high levels of learning outcomes for the community. An example of a self-help form of community development can be the establishment of community gardens, which allow residents to interact and at the same time produce goods needed in the community.

Self-help forms of community development are focused on "soft issues" as defined by Botes and van Rensburg (2000). Support for this form of community development has gained much attention in academic and extension circles, and overall popular media. Such interest is fed by the relationships noted between local involvement/participation, and multiple outcomes including increased local control; affirmative success, effectiveness, and support rates; capacity-building; community agency; cohesion; identity formation; and local empowerment (Craig, 2002; Laverack, 2001, 2005; Matarrita-Cascante, Brennan, & Luloff, 2010; Rappaport, 1987; Richards & Dalbey, 2006; Simpson, Wood, & Daws, 2003).

This form of community development does not ignore end-result approaches (particularly as produced outcomes are critical for a community's sense of achievement and success; Simpson et al., 2003), yet places major emphasis on the establishment of mechanisms that allow the promotion of capacity-building through the interaction of its residents. The major contribution of self-help forms of community development is that it provides residents with capacities necessary to take over the direction of change in their locality (Matarrita-Cascante, 2010; Richards & Dalbey, 2006). Thus, in this form of community development, particular emphasis is placed on the enhancement of the human resource of the community resulting in high levels of learning outcomes for local residents.

The provided definition of community development allows the delimitation of the different elements and processes that exist in a community. Such elements and processes, from a community development approach, merge to produce goals that seek to improve a community's living conditions and quality of life. Further, the offered conceptualization allows us to produce a typology that synthesizes the different forms and context in which community development occurs in modern times.

While some might argue that some of the forms presented here might not be considered community development due to the lack of local residents' involvement, the benefits that such efforts bring to the community cannot be ignored. Nor should it be taken that these forms of community development are mutually exclusive. Due to the different aspects that comprise a community, the need for development of structural and interactional components of a community are both important. Multiple forms of development (local resident based as well as structured governmental agencies) often do exist in the same space. A key aspect of development is to link them or at the least make them aware of each other and their activities. Overall, the approach taken here is that all the different forms of community development are critical for the improvement of a community's living conditions through the fulfilment of local needs and wants by management and allocation of resources.

However, it is important to differentiate between different forms of community development efforts as they tackle different needs and wants, resources, stakeholders, and processes. Therefore, it is important to identify and understand the ways in which each form is associated with community development and, more importantly, how such forms benefits the community. Throughout this article the contribution that imposed forms of community development have on the community is noted. This form of development often focuses on providing localities with the structural components needed for communities to operate. On the other extreme of the typology (continuum), self-help forms of community development are critical for the provision of more than just desired goals. Such forms of community development focus on the establishment of mechanisms promoting skills and know-how for a wider local population. These mechanisms are essential for community members to better connect and associate, key to more democratic community-level processes. As a mid-point, the directed forms of community development is preferred

Such forms differ in approaches and outcomes, but, again, both are needed for survival and progress of communities. Each form has its strengths and weaknesses. Overall, imposed efforts provide residents with assets that otherwise would be nearly impossible for them to develop (for instance, sidewalks and roads), as they lack the technology, funds, and skills to do so. Furthermore, the stakeholders promoting efforts within this category have the expertise and resources to conduct these types of efforts in a timely and efficient manner. Efforts within this form of community development, however, lack the capacity to include residents in the decision-making process. Failure to do so can result in a variety of negative effects including high dependency, alienation, opposition to the project, reduced long-term sustainable goals, failure to empower residents, lack of attachment, ownership associated with the project, and overall fails to build "community" (as defined from an interactional standpoint).

Directed forms of community development present strengths in its inclusion of local voices. While such involvement is often limited, residents and stakeholders collaborate and promote the inclusion of a mixture of administrative and grassrootsbased activism. As diversity of stakeholders is present in this form of community development, changes can be palpable often in a timely manner. Additionally, as different stakeholders participate and exchange ideas, the emergence of "community" can occur. However, directed forms of community development face the risk of generating resentment and divisiveness when the input of the residents is not taken seriously. Further, as the projects are often designed and led by administrators, efforts can fail to be sustainable and end with the loss or replacement of such persons. Additionally, in many instances, such managerial positions can result in limited innovation. Instead of the creativity and innovation needed from local leaders, managerial roles tend to focus largely on maintaining local programs. Growth, change, or significant adaptations are not seen as an end goal. Alternatively, community-based activities and activities led by more classic examples of leaders have been shown to foster innovation, sustainability, and dedication from involved citizens.

Self-help forms of community development provide residents with opportunities to develop capacities resulting in self-reliance and greater control over change in the community. These efforts can lead to innovation, sustainable outcomes, and the formation of feelings of attachment and ownership, while also building "community." However, self-help forms of community development can present limitations in regards the nature of the projects to be developed. Residents often lack by themselves the technology, time, funds, and expertise to design, implement, and maintain particular projects (e.g. the construction of a highway). Additionally, this form of community development faces constant challenges as it heavily relies on local participation and involvement. This can be a problem in many communities, where reduced levels of participation are a well-known phenomenon (Putnam, 2001). This in turn, affects the possibilities of such projects being successful and sustainable.

Conclusion

Ignoring one form over another runs the risk of becoming too reliant on specific conceptualizations of community that fail to account for aspects of a locality that are important. Further, this can result in local efforts ignoring the strengths and weaknesses present in each form. For instance, a strong concern with participatory processes is important for communities to engage in better informed and diverse decisions; however, few community residents have the economic and technological resources to develop the necessary infrastructure for communities to operate (Geoghegan & Powell, 2009). Conversely, becoming too concerned with community development processes that promote programs or projects that are aimed at fulfilling infrastructure without accounting for the needs, requirements, and involvement of the community, faces the risk of being rejected by its residents, generating conflicts, becoming too costly, and promoting dependency on top-down processes (Knotts, 2006; Richards & Dalbey, 2006). This is particularly relevant, as noted by Simpson et al. (2003), due to the capacities and innovations that people can build as they become involved and participate in local efforts.

Policy-makers, practitioners, and academics should benefit from better understanding not only what community development is from a conceptual and overarching standpoint, but from an applied perspective, by acknowledging the different stakeholders, goals, and processes engaged to achieve such goals. Understanding of the different forms of community development and how they can complement each other is critical for establishing future processes that try to minimize the weaknesses of each form and promote their strengths.

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