

INTRODUCTION

Community development and democratic practice: *pas de deux* or distinct and different?

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In this introductory article, we discuss the theme of the Special Issue of *Community Development* focused on community development and democratic practice. Seven articles are summarized and highlight a range of case studies that vary by location, scale, and purpose, followed by a reflective essay. Drawing from the articles in the Special Issue and a series of joint learning exchanges on the topic sponsored by the Kettering Foundation, we then outline a heuristic framework for “democratic community development.” The framework asks a number of related questions about how democracy, community, and the public are constituted, and what processes, end goals, methods, and tools are to be used to further democratic community development.

Keywords: democracy; democratic community development; praxis

The impetus for this Special Issue of *Community Development* has its origins in a series of joint learning exchanges sponsored by the Kettering Foundation in Dayton, Ohio.¹ Beginning in 2012, the three exchanges brought together a diverse group of community development scholars and practitioners whose professional experiences span three continents, a number of regions throughout the United States, and a range of community settings. Participants represented many different orientations within the field of community development including architecture, community organizing, community psychology, economic development, geography, international development, institutional and behavioral economics, leadership development, organizational development, participatory research, participatory theater, rural sociology, political science, and urban planning.

The primary purpose of the gatherings was to exchange ideas about theories and practices that inform the field of community development in relationship to democratic practice. This was a tall order given the diversity of perspectives represented and the range of disciplinary orientations and theories that inform both community development and democratic practice. Regardless, the discussions were intentional and deliberative, lively and reflective, as the participants engaged in roundtable discussions and participatory theater, as well as informal gatherings and one-on-one discussions during meals and daily hikes. In addition to the forging of personal relationships and a commitment to continue the dialog at subsequent gatherings such as Community Development Society conferences, there was agreement that the effort would benefit from deeper engagement with the issues discussed – leading to this Special Issue of *Community Development*. From an initial set of 76 submissions received from the call for abstracts, 35 were invited to submit full manuscripts. There were a number of compelling papers

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acceptable for publication, but due to space constraints, we were only able to include seven in this collection.

We observe that the praxis of community development and democracy is hardly new and has been discussed in the broader literature and indeed in the field of community development through scholarship and professional collaborations for decades or longer (see e.g. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Boyte, 2004; DeFilippis & Saegert, 2012; Kemmis, 1990; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Phillips & Pittman, 2015; Robinson & Green, 2010). Yet, we also note the discussion has in large part been peripheral to these two fields with a paucity of directed scholarly work on how each informs and influences the other and how each is situated, theoretically and practically to the other. This Special Issue attempts to bridge this gap. In what follows, we briefly summarize each of the articles and draw from them to discuss the inherent overlaps and similarities, opportunities and achievements, challenges and tensions between community development and democratic practice. We then sketch out a heuristic framework for “democratic community development” given the number of questions the articles raise, but that were also evident during the Kettering exchanges. By putting community development in closer – and more explicit – dialog with democratic practice, our primary goal was to stimulate further discussions.

Navigating systems, creating structures

What was clear to us from many of the articles received is a central assumption that community development *is* a form of democratic practice and vice versa. That is to say that many professionals and scholars believe that they are one and the same. Implicit in many definitions of community development is a commitment to democratic practices as exemplified by citizen and institutional capacity building and the fair allocation of public resources. However, there are a set of additional assumptions regarding values and beliefs about democracy and the communities or publics that are being served. This raises an issue about how community development is constituted as a whole as there are different forms of practice, but not all can be characterized as “democratic” in empirical terms. For example, community development has become an umbrella concept that encompasses everything from citizen participation and community organizing to a market-driven profession that produces housing and administers government funding programs. Given this continuum, is it accurate to say community development is a form of democratic practice *in toto*, partially, or only in certain circumstances and contexts?

This issue of *Community Development* begins with an eloquent and insightful piece by Campbell (2015). In the article, he identifies the professionalization of community development experts, risk-averse bureaucracies, and centralized decision-making as primary barriers to enabling democratic practice. Campbell asserts the vital role active citizens play in democracy and local community development as, in his words, “an incubator of civic leadership” (p. 198). Drawing from twenty years of evaluation of local food networks and welfare-to-work programs, Campbell finds three essential attributes of democratic citizenship: *metis* (prudent knowledge), *craft* (skilled practice), and *civic mindedness* (sociable sensibility). Focusing on the scale of individuals and their entanglements in new forms of governance and in larger regional and institutional settings, he offers a description of active citizenship that draws from: (1) local, iterative, and experimental knowledge to contextualize “wicked” problems and counter technocratic power; (2) skilled practice in getting things done in public settings that is more art than science, and relationship-oriented than functionally oriented; and (3) a social

sensibility that values one's civic obligations, commitments, and responsibilities for the public good. A modest, but novel manifestation of these three attributes is the concept of the "workaround" in which individuals "carve out a measure of community autonomy within a hierarchically run, rule-bound federal and state system" (p. 203) in ways that meet the intent, but not instrumentality, of public policies and programs.

Mirroring some of the themes in Campbell's article, the contribution by Scully and Diebel (2015) point out that "citizens often find themselves on the sidelines of civic initiatives" (p. 212). Drawing from the literature on the social practice of community development as well as many years of personal experience, Scully and Diebel provide examples how citizens are pushed out of democratic decision-making, or are at least frustrated, by the growing influence of professional classes and institutional systems. Challenging the conventional wisdom that the public is apathetic and uninformed, they cite a number of scholars that argue that the problem is *not* citizens but increasing partisanship and ideological polarization, as well as institutional systems that "erode citizens' role in the essential work of addressing public problems" (p. 214). One dilemma is the lack of opportunity at the local level to become politically *and* meaningfully engaged. In response, Scully and Diebel counter with the need for citizens to tap into their "democratic capacities" which encourages "citizen-centered community work" that is grounded in "dialog and deliberation among ordinary, everyday citizens" as represented by individual citizens, organizations, and community networks (pp. 216–217). Democratic capacity differs from community capacity inasmuch as the latter fails "to capture the skills, knowledge, and social interactions that allow some communities to do a much better job than others of working together to address public problems" (p. 224). A focus on democratic capacity also makes explicit the *political* relationships often lacking in approaches to community capacity building.

Other contributors to the Special Issue suggest an even greater political response to systems of governance and structures that confine active citizenship. Drawing inspiration from Latin America and the Caribbean, Bronkema and Flora (2015) describe the social movement linking popular education, community development, and democracy. In the article, the authors review the first twenty-five years of theory and practice as disseminated through *La Piragua*, an influential journal that has its origins in the work of Paulo Freire and other early popular education pioneers. Responding to the wave of Latin American democratization during the 1980s, the contributors to *La Piragua* were intentional in articulating a vision of community development that placed democracy at its center in discussions of all aspects of public life. In mining the pages of *La Piragua*, Bronkema and Flora draw an explicit relationship between democratic practices in Latin America and the ideas that helped to shape them. One outcome of Latin American social movements has been the sharing of ideas and practices more broadly and in events such as the World Social Forum, which demonstrate the importance of solidarity (in this case globally) at the core of democracy *and* community development. Bronkema and Flora conclude their article by challenging us to consider what a robust vision of democratic community development might look like outside of Latin American and in the context of Western democracies. At the macro level, some of the optics include an explicit focus on power; a critical assessment of neoliberalism; and greater attention, and alternatives, to existing policies that shape community development on the ground. Instigating critical reflection in deliberative processes; acknowledging the importance of emotions and individual subjective realities in these spaces; introducing alternative economic frameworks; and systematizing outcomes for evaluative and learning outcomes are some of the implications for everyday practice.

The subsequent article by Loh and Shear (2015) is a response to this challenge. The combined efforts of land trusts, alternative currencies, and workforce training networks, among other cooperative forms of development, have ushered in what Loh and Shear identify as alternatives to market-driven and capitalist development. In their article “Solidarity Economy and Community Development,” the authors highlight efforts in three Massachusetts cities using a solidarity economy framework. Loh and Shear call for greater attention to the solidarity economy as “a global movement of movements addressing economic and environmental crises through theories and practices embodying democratic, just, and sustainable development” (pp. 245–246). The authors share stories of worker cooperatives, cooperative workforce training programs, and local food system networks to highlight the possibilities and challenges of the solidarity economy framework vis-à-vis community development. Loh and Shear call attention to some limits of the existing model of development and, in particular, issues of scale and composition, that: (1) privileges the local as the unit of analysis and intervention at the expense of other scales, and (2) assumes communities being comprised of similar individuals in a geographical locale. The authors argue for a “scaling up” of both theory and practice in solidarity terms. Some potential benefits include the formation of coalitions that span geographies and jurisdictions to share best practices, pool limited resources, and challenge policy and resource allocations. However, the authors also identify some challenges to a solidarity economy framework: coordination and communication, entrenched politics and related policies, competition over limited resources, and race and class differences. Despite these challenges, Loh and Shear conclude that the solidarity economy framework is a viable alternative to existing ways community developers conceptualize both theory and practice and would go a long way to putting democracy at the center of community development.

Emplacing democratic community development

The remaining contributions to this Special Issue identify a number of other challenges to infusing participatory initiatives and professionals with a more democratic sense of purpose on the ground and within a particular place and social context. This emplacement cannot be overstated as the articles attest to the situatedness of practice, which have a significant impact on community development outcomes. In assessing another Latin American import of democratic practice, participatory budgeting, Weber, Crum, and Salinas (2015) look at implementation of this process in several of Chicago’s community wards. As the authors describe in their article, participatory budgeting is “a structured process that includes needs-assessment, deliberation over proposals for small capital improvements, decision-making, and implementation of the winning proposals” (p. 262). Developed in the late 1980s during Brazil’s re-democratization period after military dictatorship, participatory budgeting has “spread to over 1500 cities across all seven continents” and has become a popular strategy, at least in principle, to place decision-making of discretionary resources in the hands of local residents (p. 263). The study by Weber et al. is one of the first to systematically and critically analyze a large-scale participatory budgeting process in the United States. Their findings suggest caution is warranted when considering participatory processes that aim to democratize development and, in particular, greater attention and sensitivity to the politics of place. Top-down mobilization, an exclusive focus on physical infrastructure and bricks-and-mortar projects, lack of agreement on neighborhood boundaries, diversity of organizational missions that alternatively focus on advocacy or reform, and varying allegiances to elected

officials are some of the issues that determined levels of participation in four of Chicago's community wards. This stands in stark contrast to the experience in Brazil where such efforts are led by government agencies, where residents vote on social programs, and where participatory budgeting is implemented citywide. The Weber et al. study also complicates previous findings in the literature that makes causal linkages between citizen participation and pre-existing civic infrastructure, i.e. local capacity. Their article also makes clear that participatory methods (such as participatory budgeting) that aim to democratize development are tools and, as such, their success depends on who understands how to use the tools, in which context, and under what circumstances. One bright spot in their findings is that involvement in the participatory budgeting process pre-disposed individuals to future engagement as evidenced by a survey where 68% of respondents indicated interest in subsequent community processes.

The next two articles draw attention to the normative work of community development practitioners and particular skills and affects that embody democratic practice. Gruidl and Hustedde's (2015) article seeks to identify core competencies, i.e. specialized skills and knowledge, to promote democratic practice. In reviewing the literature on community development training and curricula, they found only one systematic study commissioned by the Standards Council for Scotland in 2009 that identified a list of competencies based on the experiences of practitioners. Building on the Scotland study, but expanding on the limited scholarship, Gruidl and Hustedde scan the literature in the community development field as well as community psychology. Gruidl and Hustedde synthesize their findings and identify seven key competency areas that can be divided into the two over-arching categories: foundational and function. The former includes listening, emotional awareness, cultural awareness, and humility. Public deliberation, facilitation, appreciative inquiry, and empowerment are in the latter category and are distinguished by their use in particular situations and contexts. While the authors admit permeability in the competencies identified, there is a discernable differentiation of the competencies at the level of personal, interpersonal, and group interactions. Despite the challenges of translating democratic values into a set of teachable skills, Gruidl and Hustedde's article offers a valuable contribution by making explicit what is often assumed or internalized by practitioners that embrace democratic values. Equally important, the authors provide a starting point from which to begin a conversation among community development scholars, educators, and practitioners to re-invigorate community development training in institutions with a democratic ethos.

Illustrative of one of the core competencies identified by Gruidl and Hustedde, the last article by Farmer (2015) draws attention to the important role of creating safe spaces for taking risks, building relationships, and expressing emotions in engendering democratic forms of association and practice. In contrast to cognitive approaches, Farmer challenges us to consider the sensory experience and how play, performance, and feelings of joy and happiness, among others, create transcendental moments in group settings that connect individuals to one another. What is important, Farmer contends, is how practitioners might enable these "magical" moments in community development contexts to create spaces of inclusion – a core tenet of democratic practice. Farmer explores the historical representation of cultural rituals in Western science and its negative pre-disposition of emotions as irrational, pathological, and associated with hysteria. This disembodied viewpoint, which is substantiated by some feminist scholars, is used as an example by Farmer to draw attention to gender bias, among other forms of prejudice, that privilege rational forms of communication and decision-making. As an alternative to the "rational" spaces of civic deliberation, Farmer shares her professional

experience using community theater as a vehicle to draw out peoples' emotions, make personal connections with one another, and creatively imagine alternative futures. In one example, a group of African-American and Asian seniors that had very little interaction with one another developed a play to advocate for greater neighborhood safety, which led to the formation of a traveling theater ensemble to draw greater attention to the issue. These and other forms of everyday democracy are examples of, in Farmer's words, "magical moments."

Finally, this Special Issue of *Community Development* ends with a reflective essay that returns us to where this collective effort began several years ago. Tate (2015) shares some heartfelt thoughts about community development and democratic practice as a participant in the last gathering of Kettering's joint learning exchange, which took place at a Shaker Village in Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. The Shakers, a faith-based group that established communal living sites during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries become the place imaginary for Tate's reflections on an embodied and relational understanding of equality, intentionality and commitment to community, and an appreciation for moments that call individuals to action.

Future trajectories of democratic community development

Throughout this effort, a central question has been, how can the relationship between community development and democratic practice be made more visible in the work we do as educators and scholars, practitioners, and citizens? Because of the entanglements of community development's diverse origins and traditions, theories, and practices – not to mention how the practice of democracy is constantly evolving – the relationship between community development and democratic practice is difficult to identify and describe in precise terms. Rather, we would like to propose analyzing the intricate and delicate relationship between community development and democratic practice through a heuristic that is meant to serve as a relational framework for theory and practice.² This framework draws from the articles and asks a number of related questions about how democracy and the citizens functioning within it are constituted, and what processes, end goals, methods, and tools are to be used.

As many of the articles make clear, at the center of community development and democratic practice is the issue of power and how community development either serves to enlarge or shrink the political, economic, and social capacity of citizens. Re-framed as an overarching heuristic question, we ask, *what are the end goals of community development and how do these end goals relate to power in a democracy?* Falling under the meta-question of power, there are a number of secondary questions that put means and ends, process and outcomes into conversation with one another. These include the following.

Which values of democracy guide community development and how can these values be measured in practice? Deliberative, distributive, and agonistic theories of democracy are some contrasting examples that express different aspirations and values of democracy. Similarly, different values are expressed in community development settings. Some examples include solidarity and agency (Farmer, 2015; Gruidl & Hustedde, 2015; Loh & Shear, 2015); shared responsibility, problem-solving, and the co-production of public goods (Gruidl & Hustedde, 2015; Scully & Diebel, 2015); inclusion, participation, and voice (Farmer, 2015; Gruidl & Hustedde, 2015; Weber, Crum, & Salinas, 2015); and human dignity (Campbell, 2015). Related, measures of democracy take many forms. Enabling voices of the marginalized to be heard (Farmer, 2015; Gruidl & Hustedde, 2015),

openness and creativity (Farmer, 2015; Gruidl & Hustedde, 2015), common ground (Scully & Diebel, 2015), and the re-distribution of resources (Loh & Shear, 2015; Weber, Crum, & Salinas, 2015) are some examples.

How do people seek to order their co-existence and what are the implications for citizen participation, representation, and recognition that lead to individual and collective forms of action? Interest-based, issue-based, territorial, cultural, and other forms of association are some of the ways communities are organized and assembled. As an outcome, these forms of association translate into forms of action at multiple scales, from local citizens (Campbell, 2015; Farmer, 2015) and community groups (Scully & Diebel, 2015) to home-grown institutions (Campbell, 2015) and governance networks (Campbell, 2015; Gruidl & Hustedde, 2015; Scully & Diebel, 2015; Weber, Crum, & Salinas, 2015). Some manifestations include the individual workaround (Campbell, 2015); relational forms of governance between individuals, organizations, and networks (Scully & Diebel, 2015), cooperative and collective forms of ownership (Loh & Shear, 2015), and social movements (Bronkema & Flora, 2015).

What are the everyday practices of community development and how do our various roles determine which methods and tools are employed in these settings, and with what results? Citizens, community developers, specialists, and elected officials, among others, each have a role to play in decision-making, but employ different approaches in understanding, analyzing, and solving collective problems. Critical reflection (Farmer, 2015), listening (Campbell, 2015; Farmer, 2015; Gruidl & Hustedde, 2015), deliberative dialog (Gruidl & Hustedde, 2015; Scully & Diebel, 2015), and popular education (Bronkema & Flora, 2015), among other methods, are tools of democratic practice that can facilitate change at different scales of impact. Some measures include the forging of new relationships (Farmer, 2015), proliferation of new ideas and practices (Campbell, 2015), the formation of new identities, meanings, and values (Bronkema & Flora, 2015), political capacity building (Bronkema & Flora, 2015; Loh & Shear, 2015; Scully & Diebel, 2015), and changes in state policies (Bronkema & Flora, 2015; Weber, Crum, & Salinas, 2015).

In identifying lessons for community developers, many of the authors in this Special Issue draw out some of the inherent tensions about democracy itself; they observe that there is much at stake beyond the distribution of material resources. Equally important are the negotiations of respect, autonomy, control, and status as dependency and autonomy coexist at the individual and community levels, and, we would argue, beyond. As Campbell (2015) notes, such negotiations are

a complex dance at the frontlines of social change, requiring the full attention and skills of active citizens ... (and) as in dancing, beautiful results are possible, but only among partners who treat one another as equals and who put in the practice required to move together in rhythm. (p. 208)

We agree and hence the title of this piece, “pas de deux,” a French expression that means, literally “step of two” in which two dancers perform intricate moves in unison. Dancing is an appropriate metaphor for the relationship between community development and democratic practice. As many of the articles demonstrate the two are not one and the same, and we should not take for granted their symbiosis. Community development cannot evolve and flourish when equality is absent and, while power differentials may exist, equality is a pre-condition of democracy, not something to be attained. We hope this Special Issue offers an insightful review of this ongoing performance.

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Notes

1. The editors would like to thank the Kettering Foundation for enabling the learning exchanges and for supporting its publication. According to their website (www.kettering.org), “the Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering’s primary research question is, what does it take to make democracy work as it should? Kettering’s research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation.” This Special Issue of *Community Development* reflects the views of the authors and not necessarily the views of the Kettering Foundation, its directors, or its officers.
2. The proposed framework was initially developed as part of the Kettering joint learning exchanges, but has been expanded to include substantive issues raised in the articles of this Special Issue of *Community Development*.

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