Our Strength Is In Our Connectedness

Athena Lathouras is a Lecturer in the Social Work program of the School of Social Sciences at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia. She teaches courses in community development and social action; and critical social policy analysis. Athena engages in participatory action research projects exploring community development and citizen-led social movements that work for social justice and human rights.

Athena Lathouras

Introduction

The idea for this paper came about when the International Association of Community Development (IACD) circulated its new definition of "community development" last year:

Community development is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunity, equality and social justice, through the organisation, education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings.

I have now connected twice with members of the global network at conferences and know them to be thoughtful and passionate people, committed to the increasing recognition and standing of community development (CD) practice. Developing a global definition for such a broad-based practice would be no easy task; and it is my hope that the ideas in this paper advance the discussion. When the definition was circulated, some of us reacted strongly and negatively. The definition foregrounds the role of professionals and academics and does not make central the role citizens play in processes for social change. The citizen-led ethos of CD is one that has a strong tradition in Queensland. This can be attributed to a cohort of community development teachers and practitioners associated with The University of Queensland and now also Griffith University and the University of the Sunshine Coast. For the past 45 years, we have, together and in succession, been practicing and theorising citizen-led CD[i]. Alongside this work, practitioner gatherings commenced in 1974 with the first Queensland CD conference; the conferences bring together roughly 200 people (practitioners, community activists and academics) every two years in different regions of Queensland, to participate in co-learning and critical reflection. They play an important revitalising role as people connect with their "tribe". I refer here to people who share similar values, principles and the same sort of shared purpose. It is an important gathering that supports people's CD efforts.

When the IACD published the new definition, I pondered over the strong reaction to the statement. I also wondered about the extent to which the biennial Queensland CD conference assists participants to sustain their citizen-led framework for practice. To gain a greater understanding about this, I sought out a number of practitioners involved in our CD network; those who regularly attend the conferences. Some of them have spent their whole lives building community and others are comparatively new to the practice but also share a commitment to this collective and socially transformative work. I am grateful to Carmel Daveson, Morrie O'Connor, Maggie Shambrook, Ann Ingamells, Peter Westoby, Lynda Shevellar, Helen Betts, P.J. Humphries, Richard Warner, Howard Buckley, Isabel Stankiewicz, Jason MacLeod, Karis Ross, John Hooper and Lisa Price for sharing their thoughts and insights with me. To represent a somewhat collective analysis in this paper, their perspectives are incorporated into the discussion around themes that emerged from this process. It includes some of the commentary from my personal correspondence with them and if their direct quotations are used, permission was given.

I am also thankful for Peter Westoby's support by providing feedback on drafts of this paper, a feedback which included a question; he wondered whether I was saying that the Queensland Biennial CD conferences have become a vital kind of 'community of practice', not only to support and sustain practitioners in this work, but also as an alternative way of safeguarding the practice from the most deleterious effects of professionalisation. I agree with the proposition and think this subject matter would be thought-provoking and important for deliberation at our next conference.

A Snapshot of the Biennial CD Conferences

A full account of the history of the Queensland conferences, their tradition and the principles for hosting a conference can be found on the *CD Queensland* website (www.cdqld.org). To this day, the hallmark of the conference is its community-based and practitioner focus. The local hosting group showcases their region and local practice and also welcomes practitioners from distant regions to share stories and create community in situ.
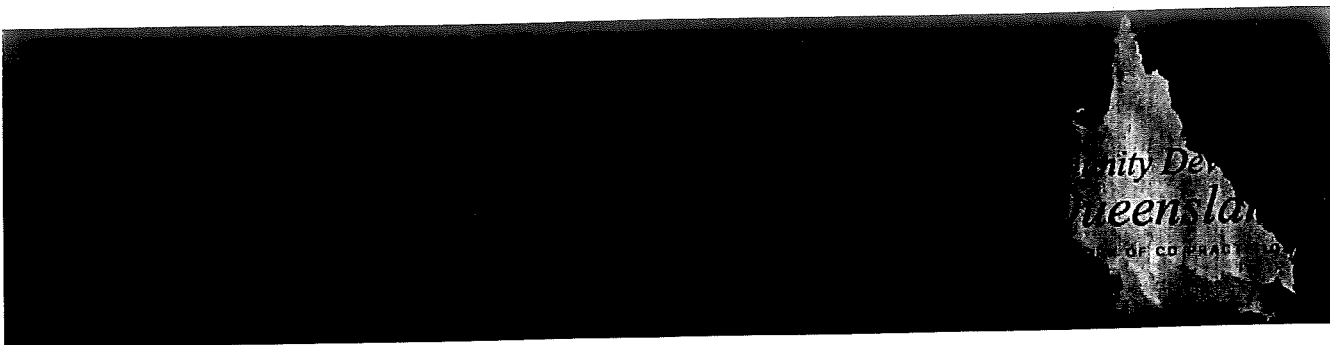
In 1999, the network semi-formalised as the entity *CD Queensland* to give the conference planning processes some structure. With more than half of Queensland's population living outside the greater metropolitan area of Brisbane, a regional approach to supporting practice across the state is deemed important. Taking a relational, not a corporatised approach, a small group, usually comprised of previous conference organisers, provides support to the community-based group hosting the next conference in their region. Ann highlighted: *"it is important to support each new host to keep the focus on 'community' in all its forms, so as not to lapse into corporate spin"*. The final plenary of each conference includes a session where an invitation is made for a regional group to host the next conference and a mandate is sought from attendees for that group to proceed with their planning.

The evening before the first conference day, the *Les Halliwell Memorial Address* occurs; it is a free and 'open-to-the-public' event given by a person with a CD framework of practice speaking about contemporary subject matters. Les Halliwell was the first head of the newly established University of Queensland School of Social Work in 1956. Les is remembered for his strong commitment to a people-first approach and influencing the practice of a unique approach to CD in Queensland (on this, see Lathouras 2010). The various locations in which the conferences have been held, the list of Les Halliwell presenters, and the most recent years' addresses can also be found on the CD Queensland website.

In the 1970s, a kitty of money was established as a roll-over fund and provides seeding funds for each planning group. It is hoped that each conference makes some money for the local hosting group's auspice organisation, as well enabling the seeding funds to be passed on to the next conference's planning group. Also regarding finances, the costs for conference attendance are kept intentionally low and external funding for bursaries are sought, so unpaid practitioners and activists can attend. The need for this is also peculiar to our context, a state that historically has had little funding for CD. Morrie, who has attended every conference since 1974, commented:

> *In many ways, the conference reflects the history of Queensland as a place where people have had to service themselves rather than being serviced by others. It also reflects that Queensland has been a place where polarities of justice and injustice have sometimes been markedly on show.*

The Importance of Holding a Citizen-led Ethos

An appreciative reading of the IACD's definition is that it incorporates important dimensions that are promoted by CD, including human rights, equity and social justice. However, it falls down when foregrounding professionals and academics as central to the work and runs the risk of de-valuing local people as the holders of knowledge and the owners of community processes.

For example, Carmel critiqued: *"What doesn't come through this definition is that the citizen is integral to the process; the CD person (paid or unpaid) is part of this process. Together, we all share our wisdom, experience, skills and knowledge"*. P.J. commented: *"The definition is privileging CD as a profession and in the space of 'expert', which is opposite to the values of CD which are that local people are the experts"*. Helen concurred: *"...it does not capture or value the bottom-up approach – people at the centre of the action"*.

Moreover, Karis' feedback characterised the phenomenon of CD as *only* occurring if citizens own it; CD cannot be professionalised as then it ceases to be CD: *"This definition places CD in the hands of professionals and academics – a place where it is likely to be reduced to an idea rather than a reality. CD is only really CD in the hands of the people"*. Richard follows on, and is sharply perceptive when he states that the definition: *"demonstrates professional and academic creep"*. Meanwhile, Lynda's comment is affecting: *"the exclusion of the citizen actor leaves me cold"*.

John took the IACD's definition into a deliberative space, that is, to a network of which he is a member. He used it in a process to assist participants to deepen their understanding of CD:

> *When we presented this as a definition of CD to our Neighbourhood Houses conference this year, which was a mix of 130 people working and volunteering in Neighbourhood Houses that are focussed on community development – there was stunned silence and then laughter... as we expected. It's not easy to define community development, but this isn't it. At its heart, I define CD as "people coming together around a common issue or opportunity and then working together to do something about it."*

Furthermore, and perhaps a more pernicious idea, is that without citizens as central drivers of all aspects of CD, the practice may run the risk of objectifying them, or even doing harm. This is particularly so if the practice is project-based and that work is captured within neoliberal agendas contradicting community aspirations.

Maggie commented: "This definition has a feeling of a top down...a 'fix them up' approach". Ann responded: "This is a very conservative definition. Most professionals are employed in organisations, which are firmly embedded in the technocratic frameworks of contemporary corporatism. Such roles rarely enable professionals to pursue significant community level change in the injustice impacting on people's lives".

Meanwhile, Jason said it eloquently, when describing some of his current work:

> I worry that the IACD definition is pushing us into that safe, risk-free, project-orientated, professional straitjacket that will empty CD work of its dynamic life-giving energy. In West Papua where I do most of my work, NGOs are doing good work bringing people together to take collective action but I have noticed a retreat from social and environmental justice and even shared action for human rights. NGOs, which are for the most part led by professionals, are increasingly distancing themselves from social movement work, which is the realm of more risky and unpaid work. Activists, community leaders, students and others see NGOs through the lens of funding proposals and projects. Worse, they are obstructing community organisers and their nonviolent resistance because it is seen as too risky, even though that is where so many people's energy is. Only a few days ago, one Papuan woman said to me 'I won't talk to NGOs now, I refuse to be their object'. My hope for CD is that it retains an edginess and a liberatory impulse.

Peter was also apprehensive about the emphasis on professionals in the definition; he acknowledged there are good reasons to professionalise, such as to create a knowledge base for practice and to gain recognition. He also recognises that IACD sees itself as a professional association and is therefore trying to mark out the territory for its membership. Appreciatively, the definition is attempting to trigger a conversation and work against the trend that 'anything goes as CD'. However, he is concerned that the associated risks outweigh the benefits: "I think this is a very dangerous definition. CD is both a citizen and professional project.... it is another case of the colonisation of professionals".

Peter went on to cite Arundhati Roy's book Capitalism: A Ghost Story (2014) and commented that in the tradition of Freire, Roy explicitly critiques community development in the context of NGO funding... and the discourses underpinning CD.

> Armed with their billions, these NGOs have waded into the world, turning potential revolutionaries into salaried activists, funded artists, intellectuals, and filmmakers, gently luring them away from radical confrontation, ushering them in the direction of multiculturalism, gender equity, community development – the discourse couched in the language of identity politics and human rights (Roy, 2014, p. 34).

> In the NGO universe, which has evolved a strange anodyne language of its own, everything has become a "subject", separate, professionalised, special-interest issue. Community development, leadership development, human rights, health, education, reproductive rights, AIDS, orphans with AIDS – have all been hermetically sealed into their own silos, each with its own elaborate and precise funding brief. Funding has fragmented solidarity in ways that repression never could (ibid, p. 37).

Roy's critique makes two salient points, the *first* relating to funded practice and suggesting there is potential for the work to be compromised or debased. This highlights a tension we hold within our field; resources external to communities and often in the form of government funding are required to engage in what are sometimes lengthy processes to address community issues. Oftentimes, that funding comes in the form of paid CD worker positions. Along with that funding come contractual agreements about the parameters the funder has prioritised. Without a critical analysis about the opportunities those parameters provide and, importantly, their limits, the work can become of little value to the community. The Papuan woman's stance in Jason's quote above is a good example. The second point relates to Roy's use of the word "anodyne", which means 'not likely to offend or arouse tensions' (Merriam-Webster 2017). This suggests we are unlikely to engage in action that might jeopardise that funding, regardless of preferred community wishes. This kind of top-down practice, with a 'we know best' stance, explains the disquiet felt by some in relation to the emphasis on the "profession" in the IACD's definition of CD.

Simply defined, a "profession" is an occupation or work for which people are paid (Merriam-Webster 2017). Particular skills training or advanced education is undertaken, resulting in a qualification. For example, in my local area, a CD worker is likely to need a three-year university qualification in the social sciences to be competitive for a paid position. The term also connotes adherence to a code of ethics or principles that govern practice which, when followed, assumes a level of professionalism. Ife (2016, p. 361) questions if a professional model is antithetical to the idea of community work, promoting knowledge and skills and the use of associated language and jargon by experts. Ife argues that this tends to mystify, alienate and disempower communities, denying them the right to define their own needs in their own way (ibid). (See also a comprehensive piece on the dangerous features of professionalisation in Andrews 2012, pp. 39-54)

Westoby and Shevellar's (2014) exposition on the professionalisation of CD includes what they understand to be a tension between CD as both a professional and

citizen project; the former being more aligned to goals of the state and the latter to activist or civil society goals (ibid). Their concern is that, through the lens of professionalisation, practice deployed by civil society can be rendered marginal or invisible, *"excluded on the basis of lacking skills, knowledge, qualifications"* (ibid, p. 70).

Ann illustrated this tension in the field:

> We have professionals who use the language, but are inhibited by organisational barriers and we have citizens who have the passion, but often have too little understanding of method, processes and dynamics. In my experience, it is when people are driven by a passion for social change - and also understand the dynamics of community development as a method for pursuing change - that change can occur. It doesn't matter if the person is a professional or not.

Richard also highlighted the vocational and citizen-practitioner elements of the field:

> *Look at iconic overseas practitioners like MK Gandhi, Ela Bhatt, Cesar Chavez as well as many of our own home-grown mentors. I think you'd say they are 'professional' and think critically - but there are also strong vocational elements within what they do. And of course, many practitioners arise from within communities and outside of any professional and academic influence.*

In support of the IACD, or any group that aims to promote CD practice and therefore elevate its standing or status, it could be argued that defining the practice is a fraught task because of the complexity associated with the practice. CD is a complex and highly contested form of practice because of the myriad theoretical positions that inform it and its applicability to diverse contexts. Its complexity also emanates from the variety of methods utilised in the work, the differing groups of people involved and the diverse training and backgrounds of practitioners. Some practitioners contributing to this paper provided comments reflecting the complexity and intangibility of the practice. For example, Karis commented: *"For me, CD is that palpable yet unquantifiable connection which forms between people when they have a shared concern. CD is what comes out of that bond; the changes created by having that bond. In so many respects, it is indefinable".*

Moreover, Howard's comments attempted to convey *multiple layers or dimensions of the practice:*

It crosses all disciplines, as it is an approach taken by people when they choose to act collectively through a set of principles (as identified in the IACD definition) to bring about social change. But, the IACD definition... lacks heart and soul... and fails to draw out the deeper level of CD practice that is really about collective movements of people who, through building purposeful relationships, struggle, laugh, cry, celebrate, sing, play, organise, educate, meet (and meet again), lobby, meet even more and fight to enact change in their corner of the world. They choose, whether paid or unpaid, to come together to dream, vision, plan and act collectively to promote desirable change or resist destructive change.

In support of the inclusion of *"an academic discipline"* in the IACD's definition, Carmel lamented: *"Practitioners usually do not write, hence the need for conferences".* Oftentimes, our CD conferences are the main vehicle for current CD action research and stories of practice to be presented, where through a process of dialogue attendees explore this content. Maggie also highlighted the importance of research that generates new knowledge for the field, saying: *"Practice has also evolved as a result of development of new theories, practice tools, other recordings offered by academics and others".*

Processes for systematic critical reflection on practice, knowledge-sharing and grappling with complexity are vital. Writing about CD in the Australian context, Rawsthorne and Howard (2011) highlight the critical importance of practitioners' knowing that their *practice is making a difference.* The field of CD within communities across Australia was identified in social policy contexts four decades ago; yet, very little is known about what approaches actually work (ibid, p. 98). Rawsthorne and Howard go on to say: *"If we do not begin to build a body of knowledge about working with communities, we are doomed to repeat our practice of trial and error indefinitely"* (2011, p. 98).

Writing about the need for reflection on practice in social work, Taylor (2013, p. 82) suggests that reflective practice is an important tool for learning and can aid self-understanding and awareness; however, if reflective practice is broadly accepting of the status quo and does not have an analysis of unequal power relations in society, it can equate to an exercise of *"benign introspection"* (Taylor 2013, p.79). Practitioners

may have a goal to undertake their very best practice and use processes of reflection to improve practice; yet, at the same time, they may adopt a politically neutral stance, that is, a stance where an *overt analysis of matters relating to power, hierarchy and domination within social structures is side-lined* (ibid. p. 83). Conversely, practitioners engaged in *critical* reflection will attend to discourse and social and political analysis, seeking to enable transformative social action and change (Finlay, 2008, p. 5). Taylor (2013, p. 93) argues that it is not enough for the individual practitioner to be self-aware or simply to add to their expertise and competence through the processes of reflection. Practitioners need to view reflection as a way to *wrestle with tensions that exist in contemporary practice* and, at the same time, demonstrate a commitment to emancipatory politics (ibid. p. 92).

From this discussion it is evident that when attempting to define CD practice, foregrounding *citizen-led practice* is of critical importance; this does not mean that people cannot be paid for their CD practice or, together with communities seek funding for projects communities wish to develop. Moreover, the discussion also suggests that, for community development to live up to its emancipatory potential, holding a critical stance about unequal power relations and structural factors impacting on communities is essential. This needs to include overt critical reflection on ideas about effecting more fundamental change, so that people do not experience disadvantage by virtue of their gender, class, race, geographical living situation, etc.

Normative for many of us is that CD practice works developmentally, that is relationally and from the bottom-up. We undertake a myriad of dialogical processes to build connections between individuals, groups and organisations, ensuring a collective and critical analysis is built; one that brings about the kind of change desired by communities. Ann illustrated this by sharing a story of some exciting CD work, highlighting considerable outcomes:

> *A group of professionals worked with local communities to set up an organisation (governed by the people for the people) and which would drive change. They shared their knowledge generously over several years with community members, who gradually infused the process with their own vision, became ready to drive changes themselves and teach others. The outcomes, in terms of a mobilised community with widespread capacities, are substantial. Incredible relationships have been built over time... about 15 years of effort, combined with funding that was outside of government constraints. When the community members look back now, they say, "we did this ourselves".*

Ann's story illustrates a commitment to the long haul when building community; commitments to action needed to address concerns or hopes occur over extended periods of time. Ann also highlights that citizens feel their own agency and are integral to the processes to bring about a vision - one that has become truly their own.

The Practice is a Beacon in Dark Times

The CD tradition in Queensland has maintained the central analysis that its role as a field of practice and theory is committed to a vision and is rooted in values that include the pursuit of social justice and human rights, which is not a utopian, idealistic vision never to be achieved. As we know, the pursuit of social justice and human rights begins when ordinary people commit to dialogue and solidarity-building – through discussions at home, in our workplaces, with our neighbours, in our community groups and organisations and most importantly, with people whose values *differ from our own*.

These days, our ongoing commitment to CD is needed more than ever; indeed, this particular time in our history can be seen as a terrible indictment on our society. Hatred, the 'othering' of people from vulnerable population groups and negativity abound. This has been brought on by the global financial crisis and the refugee crisis at a time of far-right political populism - Donald Trump, Brexit and Hansonism in Australia; not a day passes where we do not hear nationalistic and fear-inducing commentary. At the same time, we know that inequalities are growing and substantive numbers of Australians are living near or below the poverty line. Marginalised and vulnerable people in local communities experience the flow-on effects, resulting in their ongoing disadvantage. It is critical that the CD field continues to respond to such disadvantage and marginalisation.

The Queensland conferences usually take on a critical and contemporary overarching theme and have become an important vehicle for analysis, especially in relation to neo-conservative/liberal environments and how citizen-led change can make a difference. Ann shared why she keeps going to the conferences, saying: *"to keep a CD community alive... and to keep the torch burning in dark times".* Lisa highlighted the lack of opportunities for this kind of analysis elsewhere and looks forward to the biennial conferences: *"For those of us who work at the grass roots, it feels like it's the only conference around that works in this space".* Likewise, Peter and Howard appreciate that the conferences provide this kind of critical content:

> *We step back and think about CD practice and the contextual challenges (reforms/shifts in the sector, policy and program, economic shifts etc.). This includes what is happening in the world and how this might affect and impact on my practice of CD (Peter).*

> *It is true that CD in Australia has grown out of the social services sector but, ironically, it is this sector that has turned its back on CD in modern Australia. The biennial CD conference offers practitioners the opportunity to reflect on key differences between bottom-up/community-led CD work and collectively build resilience to respond to the challenges we face from the all-encompassing neo-liberal driven service delivery paradigm (Howard).*

Practitioners contributing to this paper also acknowledged the guidance we have received at successive conferences from leaders in our field, an exposure that has helped develop a commitment to the vision and values of CD. For example, Morrie commented that, significantly, conferences *"also reflect the influence of some inspirational thinkers and CD actors – Sugata Dasgupta, Tony Kelly, Carmel Daveson, to name a few"*. In this vein, Karis also suggested that:

> Queensland has been blessed with some very strong, charismatic and inspiring leaders, for example, Tony Kelly and Dave Andrews, who have successfully passed on their values and methods to new generations. I would say the majority of today's CD "family" could trace their CD heritage back to one or both of these men. The sustained commitment to citizen-led practice also speaks to the power of the CD vision as an ongoing source of hope for change. The darker the night, the stronger and more attractive that vision is.

The Conferences as an Evolving 'Community of Practice"

Communities of practice can be defined as groups for *"co-operative inquiry"* (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:124), processes that support ways to understand practice more deeply, develop a collective analysis about trends and issues and effective ways of responding to those. Drawing on the work of philosopher Michael Polanyi, Peter highlighted the significance of the biennial conferences as evolving *"communities of practice"*. Peter explained:

> Polanyi's ground-breaking study on how to form scientists is crucial here. He discovered that scientists didn't learn their practice in class, but in the whole architecture of science – fostered by a community of practice (to use Wenger's ideas). Polanyi's elaboration of tacit knowledge is crucial, because I'd say that community workers learn the craft by being immersed in a community of practice, supported by an architecture of conferences, workshops, mentoring (informal and formal), study groups, and hanging out with other community workers. As (philosopher) Matthew Crawford puts it, 'for Polanyi, scientific inquiry is above all a practice, best understood as a kind of craft'. The craft is learned in places like the CD conferences, or more accurately, in the community of practice that the conference produces.

Peter's analysis anchors the salient point that an important form of knowledge-generation is one where it is held *'tacitly'*; Polanyi's (1966) theory of *'tacit knowledge'* suggests that it comprises conceptual and sensory information and images that help us make sense of something. Hunches, informed guesses and imaginings might help us discover 'truth', but are not necessarily in a form that can be stated in propositional or formal terms (www.infed.org). Given the dynamic and complex contexts for CD, Polanyi's emphasis on

dialogue within a trusted community, where tacit knowledge is explored collectively seems vital for the development of mature practice.

Perhaps the sustained citizen-led ethos of CD we hold in Queensland can be attributed to both our leadership and the community of practice the conference process enables. The conferences are a space where practitioners pass down values, methods and knowledge to successive generations. Wenger (1999) argues that a community of practice does not depend on a fixed membership, but what is essential to any long-lived practice is the arrival of new generations of members.

> As long as membership changes progressively enough to allow for sustained generational encounters, newcomers can be integrated into the community, engage in its practice, and then – in their own way – perpetuate it (Wenger 1999, p.99).

Community Of Practice

Further to the importance of knowledge exchange between practitioners at conferences are the opportunities to lead highly participative 'interactive workshops' and 'story-telling' sessions. Interactive workshops provide more in-depth dialogue and analysis, whereas story-telling sessions provide opportunities for anyone to share. The latter usually takes the form of a session of four 15-minute stories, followed by 30 minutes facilitated whole group discussion. These processes enable co-learning and a mutual exchange of ideas about what is working and what challenges are being faced. P.J. and Peter shared how the conferences have contributed to their learning experiences and practice:

> The conference is a safe and encouraging space. At my first CD conference, I was very new in the world of CD, and at the most recent conference, I co-facilitated a session. Thus, it is not a conference that is top-down, but participatory, engaging and welcoming, celebrating and valuing the grassroots work – again keeping true to CD principles and values (P.J.).

> Crucial to learning about CD are conversations. I myself, starting as a young community worker of 20 years old, was gradually inducted into a community of practice, linked to CD Queensland many years ago. I was not explicitly aware of such an induction, but it occurred naturally and organically. Attending workshops and conferences, with senior practitioners who had been working with the practice for decades, enabled me to learn tacit skills and observe how people practised the practice. It entailed a conversation with people, but also a dialectic conversation between what can be construed as a 'tradition' (something inherited) and innovations (new ideas) (Peter).

Nourishes and Renews Commitment to the Task – 'Public' Work

The conferences also provide a replenishing or a sustenance-giving effect on practitioners personally; in their feedback, practitioners referred not only to the knowledge gained, but also the connections and comradeship they feel with fellow sojourners, all of which contributes to sustaining them in their practice. Practitioners referred to how the conferences clarify methods of CD; Helen commented: *"The conference, every time, renews my commitment as well as a deeper understanding of the method"*. Isabel highlighted that the conferences are significant to her own self-care. *"(They fuel my) dedication and passion for the work. They create a space for people to come together and connect which is critical for self-care, relationships and sustainability"*. The passion in this quote from Carmel, is palpable: *"This has nothing to do with networking, it is all to do with creative energy, the feeling that we believe in something, that we've held to this vision, that we are all out there doing our little bit to try and make the world a safer, just and caring place"*.

In addition, practitioners discussed the idea that CD practice is *'public'* work, which speaks to the *vocational* aspects of practice or one's life's work: *viewing practice as more than just a career.* They highlighted that CD is embedded into the lives of people at every level. For example, in practice, there is a *holism* effect, as opposed to a project or silo-ed effect. Saliently and eloquently, Carmel summarised: *"The CD conference is connected to who you are"*.

This sentiment also, perhaps, speaks to the negative reaction to the IACD definition about CD being a professional practice; Karis provided this insight: *"Interestingly, Gandhi was very careful to keep what he called his "public work" completely separate from his paid work. He would not accept any payment for "public work" as he felt it compromised what he was doing with the people"*.
Finally, on the theme of vocation and public work, Carmel raised a concern and perhaps a challenge to conference organisers about a paid worker-driven conference, when she commented:

> *(In the past, the conferences)… reinforced my belief that it wasn't seen as a separate activity or a professional discipline. We used to bring people with us. This way of working is for everyone. The content wasn't as important as receiving personal reinforcement. These creative, visionary people would come together to support each other. It was open to anyone who was working this way, be they a mum in a childcare centre or a woman in public housing who is trying to bring people together. The conferences are spaces for all of us to be engaged conceptually.*

Having a CD framework of practice and working from it does not necessarily conflate with paid work, but of course, it can. Yet CD theorists and commentators provide warnings that, when driven by social policy agendas and managerialist discourses couched within a neoliberalist ideology, community work can be colonised by *"technique, technology…with an emphasis on measuring, providing results, showing impact"* (Westoby 2015, p. 4). As you might imagine, these kinds of discussions, about holding in tension top-down and bottom-up approaches to practice are often grappled with at our conferences.

Conclusion

This paper set out to explore a strong and negative reaction by some Queensland practitioners to the IACD's new global definition of community development. That reaction has been attributed to the citizen-led ethos for CD that has been part of a tradition of CD in Queensland for the past 40+ years. My connections with practitioners to prepare this paper have confirmed my hunch that there is a strong connection between the biennial conferences and the citizen-led ethos to CD that has been sustained here. I am aware of other CD-related networks that have also sustained themselves over lengthy periods; for example, the Social Developers Network in New South Wales; a network associated with the Borderlands Co-op in Melbourne; and Heart Politics groups in Lismore, New South Wales and Maleny, Queensland. I am sure there are others. It would be wonderful to hear from networks that are also finding ways to sustain their critical CD approach.

The process of writing this paper has been satisfying; as a 'pracademic' (a person who has come from practice to the academy and now researches practice), it has been wonderful to hear the perspectives of my colleagues and to write them up to share with readers of New Community. As part of the CD Queensland network and as one of the people who supports the conference planning groups, I have found this process to be helpful to reflect on our work. I feel reassured that the conference planning process itself models the CD method known to many of us. Richard commented: *"The conference shows the strength of CD practice here in Queensland and 'walks the walk' i.e. it demonstrates the method, in that communities and practitioners organise the conference"*.

However, there is always room for improvement and new generative ideas; 43 years after the first CD conference in Queensland, it is timely to consider again our own sustainability. Like all kinds of network structures, an enduring question for CD Queensland relates to how best sustain the structure so the successful conference tradition continues and innovates too. Many of the practitioners providing input to this paper commented they hoped it would do so. About this matter, Howard cautioned:

> *With all traditions, they can become tired and lose their meaning unless the soul of the tradition is kept alive. This occurs by new people, younger people or the next generation embracing and taking on leadership. This transitioning needs considerable work for the CD conferences to remain a vibrant mechanism for the tradition to be sustained for the future.*

Maggie also highlighted that the network's strength is the sense of collegiality and reciprocity that occurs amongst us; she too offered an invitation for others to commit to this ongoing work:

It is a collegial network... providing flexibility and the use of limited energies, spreading power and decision-making to those willing to commit. It operates to connect and share as best it can with limited resources and without expectations that 'participants' will be 'serviced' by others. You will get out of it (the network) what you put in, perhaps?

I will leave the last word to Carmel Daveson, perhaps our most enduring practitioner, whose commitment to CD in Queensland is virtually unparalleled. Carmel's framework includes the concept of the *"unbroken whole"*, which refers to our inter-connectedness — *"the self; our relationships with others; our connections, regardless of formal organisation; and also our connections across and between culture/s and generations"*. For Carmel, one small part sheds light on the whole; she suggests that CD, wherever we are and whatever we are doing, *potentially facilitates change or transformation*, in ourselves and in others. Her message is clear: *our strength is our connectedness.*

CD is a process of continuous social change based on social justice principles. We all hold a similar vision and value base. All these people together are doing different things but we are all interconnected. What a joy to know people are doing this work.

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i See publications from this cohort, Andrews 2012; Burkett 1998; Burkett & Kelly 2008; Dasgupta 1974 & 1980; Daveson 1996; Halliwell 1969; Ingamells, Lathouras, Wiseman, Westoby & Caniglia 2010; Kelly & Sewell 1988; Lathouras 2013; Owen & Westoby 2011; Westoby & Dowling 2013; Westoby & Ingamells 2011; Westoby & Owen 2009.