
Introduction to the *Research Handbook on Community Development*

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Fundamentally, research is the process of discovery and exploration – the outcomes of which range widely from increasing understanding and finding potential solutions to gathering information that may contribute to additional inquiry. Community development as a means of improving the places we live in is a pressing issue more than ever, and further discovery and exploration of it are very much needed. It is our intent to present this volume to spur ideas and innovations in community development. At its most basic, community development is simply about making things better for the people who live there (Musikanski et al., 2019). At its most complex, it is decidedly difficult to identify the most effective or desirable approach as needs, desires, conditions, external and internal influences and confounding factors and resources can vary widely between communities. Community represents agency and solidarity (Bhattacharyya, 1995), and it is critical to understand that community is not only a destination and location but can also include a common set of ideas and values (Trevan, 2016), which inform both research and practice for the co-creation of knowledge.

By focusing on research approaches, techniques and applications, we aim to illustrate both the broad complexity of community development and its potential. We hope this will help foster greater understanding of how research contributes to scholarship and to practice, where we see the results of ideas in action.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: THEORY, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Community development is both an area of theoretical development, research and study, as well as a practice. Kenny, McGrath and Phillips (2017, p.xxiv) provide the following description of community development as a social movement of collective endeavor:

it is concerned with creating better lives globally and ensuring that human beings can become agents of their own destinies. It operates on the basis of a commitment to social justice, social equality and the principles of universal human rights . . . It is underpinned by a strong emphasis on meaningful community participation and collaboration.

It occurs in the complex site of communities which can vary widely from one to the other, even within the same regions or cultures. This wide diversity provides a fascinating platform of study and practice.

Research and practice have a complex relationship. Practice-based research and related theory are an emerging theory in the arts, education, medicine, organizational theory and sociology and other disciplines. Mohrman and Lawler (2011) recognize that institutional

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structures of knowledge creation, generation and application occur both within and outside the walls of academe. Recognizing and understanding that “knowledge creation, generation and application has and is changing allows both academics and practitioners alike to come together to broaden the landscape of actors who generate and develop knowledge to inform practice” (Mohrman and Lawler, 2011: 9).

This volume seeks to broaden the field of knowledge creation and generation in community development with contributions from both academe and practitioners in the community development field. Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) note that a practice-based approach to research could include empirical, theoretical and philosophical approaches. Within these three approaches there is a dualism between the actual practices being produced from “specific social actions in the social world” (p. 1241).

In this *Handbook*, readers are introduced to theoretical, philosophical, empirical analysis and case studies from around the globe to expand knowledge generation to inform social action in the field of community development. While the exact definitions surrounding practice-based research may vary, Candy and Edmonds (2018) suggest that when practice itself creates new insights and knowledge the research is practice-based. When theoretical and/or conceptual research as implemented leads to new practices in the field, we could classify that as practice-led research according to Candy and Edmonds (2018). Why the distinction? Community development is, after all, an applied discipline. Community development is to some extent practice-based research, where theory, scholarship and practice often intersect (or in some cases, collide), generating new ways of thinking about issues and potential solutions or applications.

APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

As mentioned, research on community development is more critical than ever. Why? First, it “helps communities to develop, evolve, and improve in a constantly changing environment”; it is thus vital to deepen understanding of community development because every policy, action, strategy, process, program, investment and so on impacts people’s quality of life (Phillips and Pittman, 2015a, p. 346). Essentially, communities must be able to demonstrate the value and outcomes of their activities in order to be accountable to residents, justify and secure funding, and to assess the efficacy and outcomes of programs, policies and actions taken in the name of community development (Phillips and Pittman, 2015a). Measurement, assessment and evaluation are foundational to community development practice, especially in the context of understanding impacts and outcomes of development interventions and processes (Walzer and Blanke, quoted in Phillips and Pittman, 2015b, p. 347, Table 21.1).

One conceptual approach to thinking about measurement and assessment in community development includes Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) from Kretzmann and McKnight (1996), refocusing the field toward studying community assets based on relationships for empowered capacity as opposed to the deficit approach of the traditional needs assessment. Another approach is that of the Community Capitals Framework (Flora et al., 2004; Emery and Flora, 2006). This framework provides a method for analysing community development efforts from “systems perspectives by identifying the assets in each capital (stock), the types of capital invested (flow), the interaction among the capitals, and the resulting impacts across capitals” (Emery and Flora, 2006, p. 19). This

framework has influenced subsequent thought on evaluation frameworks, and has also influenced further development of ABCD thought and application. Other conceptual approaches focusing on the relational (community members as citizens not clients), interactional sustainable community development (recognizing economic development and protection actors need to work together to achieve meaningful change for today and in the future), learning (translating theory into actual practice), participatory (people-centered, bottom-up and process oriented rather than top-down and technological), sustainability (long-term approach focusing on human and environmental welfare), sustainable livelihoods (people focused on connecting to local knowledge and assets) and networked (people working in communities recognize that changing economic and political winds impact community development) approaches have shaped the field from perspectives of research and practice (Brocklesby and Fisher, 2003; Gilchrist, 2019; Korten, 1980; Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Mathie and Cunningham, 2003; Wheeler, 2015).

Another important area of evaluation and assessment is that of community indicators which are bits of information that, when combined, paint a picture of conditions in a community – is it moving forward or away from desirable goals? (Phillips, 2003). Community indicators, when used as a system, can provide valuable information to be used in decision-making processes about investments, policies or other actions within communities (Phillips, 2005).

There are many approaches to research on community development, and its use for enhancing its efficacy. More often than not, there is not a distinct delineation between quantitative and qualitative research approaches in community development but rather mixed methods are utilized. Some research approaches are more quantitative in nature, relying on econometric and other economic-based tools or techniques (such as predictive modeling for cities or regions, cost-benefit analysis and the oft used economic impact assessment). Research methods from other disciplines and fields of study are being applied, such as evidence-based approaches from health care or scenario planning from the corporate world (we have long used strategic planning originating from the military, for another example). Qualitative aspects are often used in community development research for many reasons, not the least of which is that communities are focused on people and their interactions, and given complexities of relationships, qualitative research may yield more insight. Borrowing from sociology and other fields, social network analysis, for example, provides an analytical approach for deeply exploring relationship patterns and connections. Quality-of-life research originating in psychology is also now applied within community contexts. Appreciative inquiry, as a method of dialogic organizational development, has been adapted for use in community development and is gaining much attention as a particularly relevant method. While all these and others are not yet fully integrated or widely used within community development, they represent ways of thinking about the deep complexities within the places we live.

In this book, a myriad of approaches are included, in a variety of contexts both creating new approaches and using traditional or a new combination of traditional approaches adding depth to theory, research and practice. This edited volume brings together 27 chapters contributed by 45 authors from around the globe. It is divided into three parts: Part I: Foundations, Part II: Research Methods and Frameworks and Part III: Emerging Constructs and the Future of Community Development Research. We chose these categories to provide a way to navigate the wide terrain of community development

research. In the first part, we focus on theories and essential or foundational conceptions about community development. This provides the platform on which to build and explore subsequent ideas and application. The second part presents an array of research methods and frameworks, ranging from experiential to applied. We conclude the volume with perspectives on future issues, especially those that are emerging using technology or different ways of approaching issues.

PART I: FOUNDATIONS

In the first part, a selection of eight chapters are presented. The volume begins with an exploration of the nexus or intersection of action and knowledge. Chapter 1, “Weaving reflection, action, and knowledge creation: lived experience as a catalyst into the cycle of praxis for community development” by C. Bjørn Peterson, Craig A. Talmage and Richard C. Knopf, begins our journey by calling for more critical consciousness (with a focus on personal experiences) as a basis for empowerment. It is thought-provoking by exploring collaborations across learning and action, with the request to guard the dignity of all involved in community development processes.

Elizabeth A. Dobis, Lionel J. Beaulieu and Indraneel Kumar explore a topic that holds relevance for many of the world’s communities – poverty. The authors present the context of poverty in relation to the dimensions of scope, scale and space in Chapter 2, “The study of poverty in places: scope, scale, and space.” A variety of disciplinary information is analysed from the place-based literature. They then examine how community development theory and practice may provide guidance for pursuing effective and evidence-based place-based poverty alleviation strategies and policy activities.

Another aspect that often arises but not always in conjunction with poverty is that of marginalized communities. Jason Reece explores this topic in Chapter 3, “In pursuit of just communities: supporting community development for marginalized communities through regional sustainability planning.” During the Obama Administration the principles of sustainability and progressive regionalism made their way into the thinking of many federal agencies. The Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Urban Sustainability Initiative (SCI) was designed to identify regional community solutions. This chapter analyses how SCI scales relate principles to overall processes and how solutions are identified providing greater equity for a diverse population.

Returning to strategies that identify strengths in the community, Chapter 4 focuses on “Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD): core principles” and is by Ivis García. This chapter outlines the core principles of the ABCD approach and its application within communities. Building on John Kretzmann and John McKnight’s 1993 seminal work, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community’s Assets*, this chapter highlights engagement strategies for stakeholders across communities.

In relation to assets, institutions and organizations can serve as catalysts to energize civic engagement within communities. Chapter 5, “Stepping up the ladder: reflecting on the role of nonprofit organisations in supporting community participation” by Julia Fursova, explores how grassroots community action can support community development outcomes focused on equity and justice. This is developed through community

engagement as the priority goal and having critical intrinsic values included in the process and the development of participatory action.

The next chapter deconstructs the relationship of community development and community action by viewing via a gendered lens for community decisions. Chapter 6, “Social economy, social capital, NGOs and community development: a gendered perspective” by Dyana P. Mason, explains the importance of integrating gender issues into community connections, social capital discussions and economic development. Using a feminist theory lens as well as traditional theoretical approaches, this chapter analyses the case of a US supported grassroots cooperative in Laos and community development impacts on social capital and the social economy.

Another case-focused chapter will provide a comparative analysis of community enterprises between Europe and US community-based organizations. Chapter 7, “What can Northwest European community enterprises learn from American community-based organizations?” is by David P. Varady, Reinout Kleinhans and Nuha Al Sader. The chapter discusses Community Development Corporations (CDCs) and applies a framework on Northern European Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and their impacts at the community level.

Our final comparative analysis in Part I is Chapter 8, “Community development, well-being and technology: a Kenyan village” by Claire Wallace and Leanne Townsend. The opportunities and challenges of new technology are explored and applied to a Kenyan cultural framework. How the overall usage or avoidance of the technology was adapted and adopted is discussed. Specifically, outcomes provide explanations as to how technology can enhance overall well-being for the Kenyan communities in the case.

PART II: RESEARCH METHODS AND FRAMEWORKS

This part includes 11 chapters from a range of perspectives and research methodologies and frameworks. Since community development is such a diverse and wide-ranging area of scholarship and practice, it is expected that a variety of techniques and methods are utilized.

Part II begins by using well-established research of the Grameen Bank. In Chapter 9, “Experience of group formation in Grameen Bank, Bangladesh” by Kazi Abdur Rouf, the author discusses the Grameen model and its application to community development approaches in Bangladesh. Specifically, civic engagement, the development of social capital, and community organizing provide an interesting conversation about lessons learned from a lending institution; and vice versa.

Chapter 10, “How to build an ‘intentional community’” by Brenda M. Elias, uses established community development principles to provide intersectional opportunities between space and community participation. Using a “higher degree of teamwork,” the 5-year research project with the Reena Community Residence, in Ontario, Canada examines how this impacts the living experiences of the residents.

Zoning provides a framework on community interaction and inclusion in communities. Chapter 11, “Inclusionary zoning and inclusionary housing in the United States: measuring inputs and outcomes” by Katrin B. Anacker, analyses the impacts of inclusive policies and how they affect socioeconomic integration. The outcomes of affordability,

business returns and beneficiaries of inclusive policies are compared to the core focus of inclusive policies.

Using a case study analysing how Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) impact international community outcomes, Chapter 12 is focused on “Enhancing evaluation capacity: lessons from faith-based community development in El Salvador,” and is by James G. Huff, Jr. In Latin America, FBOs are a catalyst for community engagement, managing and responding to change, and overall stewardship. This chapter discusses the intersection of rural residents, practitioners and researchers working together to create an evaluative framework for community development outcomes.

Public participation is key for successful community development and this is explored in Chapter 13. “Managing competing interests in the public participation process: lessons from an analysis of residential displacement in Buffalo, New York’s transitioning neighborhoods” by Robert Mark Silverman, Li Yin and Henry Louis Taylor, Jr. discusses public participation strategies as well as multiple competing interests that are introduced in stakeholder engagement processes. Using a case study from Buffalo, an analysis of stakeholder engagement for neighborhood revitalization using a series of focus groups is thoroughly investigated. The final results look at competing interests and how they can inform future community development activities.

M. Rezaul Islam, in Chapter 14, “Methods and framework of participatory action research for community development in Bangladesh,” provides discussion on methods and participatory action frameworks as well as different contextual aspects of these methods. Using Bangladesh’s high rate of participatory action research, this case study reviews community development, participation and empowerment processes and how they compare to other methods of social inquiry.

Many community developers will define success based on the health of a community. In Chapter 15, “Building a healthy community: the Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition” by Patsy Kraeger, the literal meaning of health and how it applies to well-being in the community is explored. Using the Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition (CGIC) and its broad reach, community development outcomes and additional resources are leveraged in this case. The chapter explores how participatory community development theories are used by the CGIC not only as a process but for informed community actions leading to quantifiable outcomes. Understanding how these apply to the CGIC may improve outcomes of community health, well-being, economic opportunity and overall quality of life.

Chapter 16, “Social indicator projects for rural communities: the case of the Northwoods Quality of Life Database” by Brandon Hofstedt, provides a framework for community indicators and their acceptance as data analytics and drivers of decisions. Using the Northwoods Quality of Life Database (NWQoL), a mix of primary and secondary data points explore overall conditions in rural America. This indicator process provides the conceptual framework, geographic scope, technical organization and data collection processes.

Food deserts is a relatively new term that has been integrated into current discussions of community development, equity and socioeconomic parity. In Chapter 17, “An exploratory study of food deserts in Utica, Mississippi,” Talya D. Thomas discusses how food deserts applies to rural and urban communities. The chapter provides a framework for causes of food deserts and how communities are improving and increasing access to healthy foods and illustrates concepts by the use of a case of a small town in Mississippi.

Socioeconomic characteristics can have a causal impact on satisfaction of the overall community. Chapter 18, “Impact of socioeconomic characteristics on neighborhood environment satisfaction in deteriorated areas” by Mostafa Norouzi, Abolfazl Meshkini and Somayeh Khademi, examines the importance of how socioeconomic characteristics in the Ab-Kooh neighborhood, a deteriorated area in Mashhad, impact residents’ satisfaction and perception of their community life. Factors such as density, relationships and concentrations can have a significant impact on socioeconomic characteristics. Review of recent research through the collection of questionnaires and analytics provides the basis for conversation.

Chapter 19, “Downtown revitalization, livability and quality of life in Tucson, Arizona” by Carlos J.L. Balsas, looks at the other large metropolitan area in Arizona and the overall quality of life in this urban region. Using this case study, discussion is provided on the lessons learned through the revitalization efforts in Tucson. Specifically, this chapter reflects on Tucson’s urban and regional transformations and applies a quality of life and livability framework.

PART III: EMERGING CONSTRUCTS AND THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

Our final part includes eight chapters. We seek to look at newer or current issues that impact community development research. While much is unknown about what the future may hold, these chapters represent innovative ways of thinking about community development while also recognizing that emerging issues will impact what we can or will do as we face the future.

Transitioning into Part III, Chapter 20, “Theories and concepts influencing sustainable community development: introducing the concept of community productivity” by Maria Spiliotopoulou and Mark Roseland, provides a journey of sustainable development and its intersection with community development as well as other notable areas such as ecology, economics and other social and natural sciences. The chapter also transitions into a concept of community productivity and what factors serve as productive catalysts of well-being.

Chapter 21, “Re-imagining community development: the Cocoa360 model” by Shadrack Frimpong, Allison R. Russell and Femida Handy, looks at the application of enterprising strategies enhancing community development. Using Cocoa360, a nongovernmental organization in rural Ghana, this chapter provides analyses on how innovations can support grassroots progress. A case is made to utilize this approach for other development projects in rural agriculture-based communities.

Social media has influenced connectivity with positive and negative outcomes; from the reduction of certain types of social capital to bringing empowerment to entire national movements. Chapter 22, “Community development and place attachment using an inductive social media approach” by Justin B. Hollander and Max Page, explains how software and social media can be used to strengthen community engagement. They use Holyoke, Massachusetts as a case study to provide a framework around common social media platforms of Twitter and Flickr, and explore how these platforms impact attitudes about place attachment.

Mobilizing the community is critical to the success of community development efforts. Chapter 23, “Re-imagining democratic research processes in community-based

development: a case for photovoice” by Camille Sutton-Brown, provides analysis on how beneficiaries of community development policies must be involved in all aspects of the process. The author presents participatory models of research as providing an alternative to top-down approaches, and stresses the importance of this approach that incorporates photovoice technology. Impacts on community outcomes and increasing power dynamics for final decision-making processes are included as important features of a democratic process.

Chapter 24, “Centering aesthetics in community development: approaches from the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity” by Jerrold McGrath, looks at how creativity is used in community development approaches. Using the case of the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, in Alberta, Canada, this chapter draws on multiple forms of architecture to video games design. Using an approach of positive impacts of positive interactions, this chapter analyses the subjective experiences of participants and how these dynamic behaviors can inform better approaches to work toward community solutions.

Our final selection of the following three chapters is grouped intentionally together as all explore relationships of higher education and community development. It is fitting to end the volume with discussions of higher education as the future will surely provide more opportunities to further develop curriculum, scholarship and research in community development. At the intersection of theory and practice, higher education’s role in community development will continue to have a significant influence.

Anchor establishments can drive public policy and progress in connected communities. Universities plan a critical role with successful community outcomes. Chapter 25, “The new role of the university in community development” by Graciela Tonon, frames the interaction of multiple diverse groups and sharing of knowledge among these participants. This chapter looks at the role of the university, the democratization of knowledge, and respect for a diverse group of stakeholders participating in the process. Finally, arrangements between the university and community are discussed as possible approaches for future partnerships.

Chapter 26 looks at “Community innovation and small liberal arts colleges: lessons learned from local partnerships and sustainable community development” and is by Craig A. Talmage, Robin Lewis, Kathleen Flowers and Lisa Cleckner. This chapter brings forward a robust discussion of how smaller liberal arts colleges represent innovation within their communities. This includes themes of collective impact, design, innovation and entrepreneurship for community change and disruption. They utilize a case study of the efforts of a liberal arts college in upstate New York and how it approaches innovative solutions with the community.

Finally, utilizing a foundation of community development, the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) can guide relationships between a university and its host community. In Chapter 27, “Sustaining an urban education pipeline: a case study of university and community development partnership,” Gloria Bonilla-Santiago explores how education and institutions can transform a neighborhood in distressed areas of a city. From the beginning, the university and community relation can be “reciprocal, collaborative and respectful of community life.” This chapter examines a 25-year research project of the Rutgers/LEAP pipeline and its impact on community outcomes.

In closing, community development is a dynamic and evolving field of research, with theoretical and conceptualization dimensions, as well as applied practice and reflection.

The process is just as critical as the outcomes for overall success of community engagement, programs, projects and evaluation. Understanding the nexus of practice and research with applied research to co-create this *Handbook*, the editors recognize that applied research for developing a comprehensive theoretical base is often practice oriented. As mentioned earlier, practice oriented research contributes to the depth of understanding of the field of community development from multiple perspectives.

This *Handbook* seeks to reduce uncertainty in the field through these various perspectives. Keeping the community as the priority throughout all aspects will remain critical while researchers seek to expand to other needed aspects of exploration for community development and linkages to myriad dimensions important to collective human well-being and development. For example, continued evolution of technology in rural and urban communities will surely need much attention with the advent of artificial intelligence and as other life-altering technologies emerge. There is also much need for more research and its implications for application in the domains of subjective and other intangible feelings, preferences and values reflected in individual and collective community well-being and quality-of-life dimensions. It is important to consider both the objective (as often expressed in empirical or quantitative data and analyses) and the subjective dimensions of communities and the people who live there. In other words, it will always be instrumental to balance the variables of analysis and the tools of community decision-makers with the needs of community residents. Let us work together continuing to build on the insights within this volume for enhancing community development research both now and for the future betterment and well-being of the places we live in.

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