Re-visiting the Community Development Projects of the 1970s in the UK

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Researchers and community organisations in Tyneside and Coventry have been re-visiting the Community Development Project (CDP) of the 1970s as part of an Economic and Social Research Council funded project – Imagine: Connecting Communities through Research (2013-17, research (grant no. ES/K002686/1). The National Community Development Project (NCDP), a Home Office-funded experimental, anti-poverty initiative of the 1970s, was located in 12 areas in the UK. Three of these areas are the focus of the Imagine study: Benwell (Newcastle-upon-Tyne), North Shields (North Tyneside)and Hillfields (Coventry). The programme of research has been co-ordinated by Durham University's Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, with Sarah Banks as Principal Investigator, in partnership with Warwick University, and 15 community partner organisations.

Materials from the research project are currently being collected together and further information can be found on the web and a themed issue of the Community Development Journal to be published in 2017.
Blogs: www.imaginenortheast.org/www.kyneswood.com/Imagine_Coventry
Website: www.dur.ac.uk/beacon/socialjustice/imagine/

*The first two pieces are taken from presentations given at the Imagining Benwell Workshop and Exhibition – Community Development in Benwell & the West End of Newcastle: From the National Community Development Project to 'Our Place' & Beyond – held at the Discovery Museum, Newcastle-upon-Tyne on the 21st January 2016 (see Armstrong, Banks and Harman, 2016). First, **Mae Shaw** considers the contribution of the CDP work for thinking about community development, past and present. Second, **Andrea Armstrong** offers a snapshot of the ongoing relevance of CDP insights for practitioners. In the final piece**, Gary Craig** gives a personal assessment of the legacy of the CDP work.*

Community Development in Austerity Britain: Looking back, looking forward

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When I first came across the material from the CDP inter-project group, as a practitioner in London in the late 1970s – another era of austerity and cuts - it helped me to understand a number of critical things about community development which have stood the test of time:

It's historically situated: the community solution is not new, whatever each shiny new version would have us believe. It's been a response to social problems and crises of various kinds for much of the twentieth-century and into the twenty-first in the UK and elsewhere. We should be able to draw on what's been learnt over time in responding to what's happening now.

It's always contextual and contingent: it can't be understood in the abstract. There may be general features and claims it can make, but it takes different forms and fulfills different functions in different places: eg 'discovered' in China and ex-Soviet countries for developing civil society organisations, 'rediscovered' in UK at times of austerity. Different models apply in the USA and Scandinavia because of the different state formations which prevail. In addition, changing political, economic, social and cultural conditions that are played out locally and globally mean that the problems and prospects for different communities alter significantly over time, thus reconfiguring the role and parameters of community development.

Having said that, it's increasingly argued that there is a much greater degree of commonality across contexts because neoliberalism now constitutes the 'context of contexts' in which national and local politics are secondary or subsidiary to the logic

of the globalized economic order: by that I mean the moves towards privatization of public services; the domination of market-based logic; the contract culture in the voluntary sector; the near commodification of communities; intense performance and measurement. These features are to be found in different forms across the globe.

Whilst this commonality of condition is true in general terms, the particular form and purpose of community development is nonetheless also contingent upon prevailing local conditions, particularly the nature and intervention of the state. Over time community development in the UK has fulfilled different functions for the state as it has gradually shifted its orientation from a social democratic model of public welfare (more or less prevalent at the time of the CDP) to a neoliberal model of private welfare. And practitioners and communities are living the consequences. The breadth, depth and reach of market power reflected in and through the state is clearly one of the most decisive features of contemporary reality. Community development has gradually seen its traditional mediating position between the state and communities shifting from one of stimulating democratic participation as a political process of contest and negotiation (however compromised it was) to one of delivering democratic participation as a managerial procedure through tightly regulated top-down programmes.

At the same time, performance and management systems have increased pressure on community development practitioners and communities to identify with neoliberal ways of thinking, talking and being: to use the language of the boardroom and the advertising agency even when it is inappropriate or injurious to the real expression of diverse community concerns, to compete when it would make more sense to co-operate over limited funding sources; to maintain managerial regimes people know to be diversionary and harmful to their work; to relate to those they work with as customers with choices they know to be a fiction – to indulge in the 'performance of fantasy'. A crucial by-product of sustaining this fantasy is a lack of time for working directly with people in a respectful and open-ended way.

Alongside this common experience of standardization and managerialism, however, there is also an increasing trend towards differentiation and deregulation of community development within and between different contexts: away from a publicly-funded, professionally-validated occupation, for example, to a renewed emphasis on standardized approaches which can be used by anyone in any setting for any purpose and funded through a myriad of sources, some of which may be quite dubious. The growth of community organizing models is also one aspect of this shift. This is the subject of much concern and debate and has revived some traditional debates and disagreements about professional identity in community development circles.

It's intrinsically ambivalent: it can be as much about control as it is about empowerment, depending on the terms in which it is deployed and enacted. It is clear that power works at and through different levels: from the macro to the micro, the political to the personal, the global to the intimate – and that it operates in diffuse ways through culture, language, identity formation, relationships and behavior as much as through politics and the economy. We have much to thank the CDP workers for – together with feminists, anti-racists, disability activists and other social movements – in bringing this to our attention and extending our frames of reference. At the same time, it is increasingly difficult to pin down the institutional geography of power and decision making processes that shape political outcomes. On one hand, power has become increasingly centralized upwards so that communities have little real control over decision-making, while at the same time, there has been a downwards retreat to competitive privatism and self-help which holds communities responsible and which may actually disempower them in making claims on the state for the retention of democratically accountable public services. Community development could be decisive in supporting communities to challenge the state to retrieve its democratic potential.

'Community' is always framed in particular ways. The CDP projects highlighted the way in which 'community' was always framed through a deficit model – with communities regarded (explicitly or implicitly) as obstacles to progress for one reason

or another: deviant or deprived. This tendency to 'look down on the poor' for solutions, they argued, ignored the potential of looking up to the sources of wealth and power which were active in creating the problems. One influential CDP version regarded 'community' as an ideological mask for the predictable social consequences of the class relations of capitalism, expressed in publications like *Gilding the Ghetto* and *The costs of industrial change*. A contemporaneous publication posed the question bluntly: 'community or class struggle'?

As class analysis has receded under the weight of a combination of factors including critique from various intellectual quarters, a changing industrial landscape and concerted political and ideological action, community has now become shorthand for the problematic poor. It should be noted, though, that 'class' is being rediscovered – and about time too! There is now increasing evidence of vast levels of inequality which can only be explained fully through a class lens. Nonetheless, the demonization, objectification and stigmatization of 'problem communities' (increasingly racialised) by political elites and sections of the media in particular has become increasingly intense and determinedly ignores wider structural explanations of inequality and poverty.

At the same time, in shifting the balance of responsibility from the public to the private spheres, distinctions are made between the 'good' community who are recruited as social entrepreneurs or volunteers, and the 'bad' community (particularly those on benefits, or in danger of radicalisation) who are disciplined through various forms of punitive surveillance and management. This has been very divisive for many communities who are struggling as it is.

In the move towards privatism, however, there is a question as to whether assets-based approaches to community development are any more constructive. They can help to translate the legitimate political question: 'what do we need?' to the personal question: 'what can we offer?'. Models which regard communities as deficient in some pathological sense, or as assets to be offset against real public investment deny the possibility for communities to be regarded as active social and political agents

who can make demands on the state to resist the market, not simply to substitute for a declining public welfare system.

There is a tension between community development as policy (reflecting the imperatives and interests of government – crudely, top down) **and community development as politics** (reflecting the concerns and interests of diverse community groups – crudely, bottom up). This is certainly not to say that top down is always bad, nor that bottom up is always good – but that they are not the same. What is important is the nature of the relationship and the distribution of power and accountability which is available. Of course, making distinctions in practice may be less clear cut, but anticipating the tensions points to the necessity of acting strategically in the 'invited spaces' which inevitably generate the resources, whilst simultaneously establishing relationships of mutual support, creating solidarity, developing informed critique; carving out and facilitating convivial and creative independent spaces for people to come together in ways which allow them to explore collectively their own concerns and aspirations, hopes and fears – to turn their private troubles into public issues - and, perhaps, to make managing them more difficult as *Gilding the Ghetto* would have put it.

It is clear that for community development there is a widening gap between the position it occupies within the wider politics of the state, and the democratic disposition it espouses. The readiness, or disposition, to think and act democratically could be decisive in considering the options; supporting communities to challenge the state to live up to its democratic potential rather than simply supporting them in absorbing the devastating and disproportionate effects of a crisis they have had no part in creating. People do need to be supported in crisis, but they also need to question the nature of it. The possibility of organizing 'politically' around needs and aspirations, as Gary Craig suggests, needs to be revived as a core aspect of community development work.

> … a method of working with people … which essentially starts with the
> needs and aspirations of groups of disadvantaged people in poor localities

and which struggles, first of all, to articulate and organise politically around those needs and aspirations, placing them at the front rather than the end of political debate (Craig, G (1998) 'Community development in a global context', *Community Development Journal*, 33 (1).

Finally, it seems to have been more straightforward in some respects to define what was radical during the CDP era, and they helped to do that. Being radical today is more complicated – what could be more radical, for example, than what has been done by successive governments since the time of the CDP to transform the face of Britain. Despite the gloominess of the picture, and the difficulties encountered, I like the definition by Raymond Williams: To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing. The legacy of the CDP continues to offer resources of hope for the struggles ahead.

Perspectives on Community Development and Engagement During Austerity

Andrea Armstrong, Durham University

In Britain today, austerity is the dominant political narrative. The government has been telling a powerful austerity story using images and metaphors. So how do we unite against austerity? One way is to tell counter stories and today I'm going to tell you what people told us in interviews about community development and engagement in the West End and Newcastle during austerity measures.

* At one time Newcastle City Council had a Community Development Unit , which was closed a few years ago. Community development workers were either made redundant or redeployed in other areas of the council. Despite the closure of the Unit, current local authority workers said that they have ensured that the principles and values of community development have survived by ensuring co-workers understand them.

* Within the local authority there has been a shift away from working with and for communities on their own agendas, towards working for the local authority and local Councillors. A former community development worker explained in interview how their role has changed since the 1990s:

> What I did then was community development. What I do now is not. I don't think we can even try and dress it up and say we're doing community development work. We work with communities. We engage with communities. We consult communities, but we just don't develop them anymore.

* Local authorities are now setting targets and statistically evaluating services. Public engagement involves 'collecting local narratives' about services e.g. public satisfaction/dissatisfaction about street lighting.

> The loss of community development in the local authority has meant that the voluntary sector has taken on some of the work they previously did. Benwell has a relatively large community sector compared to some areas and they continue community development but in a challenging environment due to spending cuts.

* The connections and relationships which took time to build between the local authority community development workers and local communities have been broken but workers foresee that in years to come they will have to re-connect.

Community Engagement

We asked people involved in delivering regeneration (local authority) and residents and community organisations their opinions about community engagement and this is a snapshot of what we found:

* Many community workers and residents said that local people have had very little or no say in what happens in their area,

> I feel they ask you, then they don't take any notice; they go ahead regardless of what you say (Resident).

* Residents think it has taken a long time and demolition has led to Benwell people being dispersed all over the city. Some question whether the regeneration was needed:

> When government initiatives come in, it's almost like you have to play this game, and they re-invent the wheel and everybody's doing mapping and telling you what the problems are, etc., when actually, it just sometimes wasn't needed' (Resident).

* The new housing development (The Rise) was not popular with some residents as it is private housing which unemployed residents cannot afford:

> They knocked down the council estate, they dispersed the people all over. I mean, people that lived in Benwell all their life are scattered all over the place, and then they build a private estate. Now I feel like they want to push the people that can't afford houses out' (Resident).

* Local authority workers involved in regeneration highlighted the difficulties of new regeneration projects raising expectations which may not be met. What worked best was working with local people and organisations – getting to know them – to understand their aspirations. Then develop a shared agenda that is realistic and achievable rather than imposing ideas and beliefs on them.

* The boundaries imposed by regeneration programmes can cause frustrations and confusion for both local authority workers and residents e.g. not living on the right side of the street

Because if you lived on the one side of the road you weren't allowed to participate, which was madness. So we tried to bend the rules as best we could to get a greater impact. But yes it was, it was quite hard. And explaining it to people 'you can't get involved in that because you don't live on the right side of the street' – it was just madness. And as you can imagine, people get really, really cross' (Local authority worker).

* Local authority workers face challenges in working with local people and organisations, which takes time, and then priorities shift from above. This undermines the work already done and can lead to a lack of trust, and difficulties of sustaining those relationships. One worker summed it up well:

…it's getting to know people as individuals, it's getting to know organisations and groups and how they operate and what their priorities are, and it's about kind of being realistic - it's hard when you're trying to sell a regeneration package to people going out almost with trumpets like saying "this is regeneration, it's going to be…. ". You immediately raise that expectation with people and I think people immediately think it means demolition but sometimes it means new jobs or a new school or new houses or whatever…and with austerity that's not the case so I think it's about managing expectations and being realistic with people about what you can achieve, and having a kind of shared agenda, or an agenda that you've worked through together ... so you're understanding the aspirations of an organisation or you're not foisting your own thoughts or beliefs or what you think's best for them (Local authority worker)

References

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The National Community Development Project: a personal view of its legacy

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The back story of the National Community Development Project (CDP hereafter) is very well-documented and its output of national and local project reports have, in community development terms at least, included a number of best sellers – for example, *Gilding the Ghetto*, the critical history of state-sponsored anti-poverty experiments, and *The Costs of Industrial Change*, which provided a left-leaning analysis of what we now commonly recognise as the impacts of globalization. Almost fifty years ago, however, this was only just beginning to be understood as the movement of capital out of old deindustrialising neighbourhoods, which left local populations to cope with the consequences of unemployment, industrial dereliction and the shift to low wage, part-time feminised service sector economies.[1]

In short, the story was that the Wilson government of the mid-late 1960s, panicked by so-called 'race' riots and general disaffection within inner city areas, sponsored a range of initiatives under the general aegis of the Urban Programme, including special grants and the bending of some modest funding streams for inner city investment. Within this over-arching Programme, the CDP involved teams of community development workers, employed by local authorities, supported by/working alongside

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[1] Some of the outputs of national and local CDP reports have now been uploaded onto a portal which is publicly available at www.ulib.iupui.edu/digitalscholarship/collections/CDP Hard copies of many of the local and national reports can be purchased at modest charges through

research teams sponsored by local universities, and operating with what were then very generous budgets. Projects were eventually established in twelve inner city and other deprived areas, including one each in Wales and Scotland.

Most of these areas, ironically given the origins of the programme, had a very small ethnic minority population. The final location and distribution of the projects owed as much to political horsetrading as to any sense of a rational experiment, with James Callaghan (Wilson's successor) determinedly refusing to have a project in Cardiff and Richard Crossman (another senior Cabinet Minister) demanding that one be established in Coventry. Projects were established from 1970 onwards for a five year period with the earliest ones coming to an end as the later ones were just setting up.

In the brief period (less than two years) when all twelve projects were co-operational, workers from many of the projects came together to develop an analysis of inner city decline which challenged the government's view that these areas were dysfunctional largely because of the anti-social behaviour of their resident populations. The areas had suffered both from industrial decline, from poor public services and a failure of the state to engage local people in any serious debate about their future. As the trickle of reports from the projects and the inter-project collectives became a stream, government let it be known that it would not stand in the way of local authorities wishing to kill off the cuckoos in their nests. Some authorities, aided by internal divisions within projects, took advantage of this message and closed projects early. A few limped to their natural conclusion and all had closed by 1978 although several managed to leave 'legacy projects' involving information and advice centres, law centres and trades union and community workshops.

What was the overall legacy of these 12 original projects? In a very few cases, legacy projects have survived in one form or another, although often transformed in terms of their size or orientation, but nevertheless with the original CDP workers' commitment to making important supportive and advocacy services available to disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

In terms of community development, there still remains an argument about what the CDPs 'did for community development' itself. As the so-called structural analysis emerged, a number of high profile commentators, largely those from a social work background such as David Thomas (of the National Institute for Social Work and later the Community Development Foundation), argued that the CDP had effectively contributed to killing off the development of a strong autonomous community development profession and the practice of neighbourhood work in particular. This was a complete misrepresentation of what the projects actually did on the ground. Although many workers from both action and research teams (which in the more radical projects became joint action –research teams) contributed to a huge canon of challenging writing, this probably occupied less than one quarter of those workers' time overall. Most workers from both sides of the action-research divide engaged in neighbourhood work as it was commonly understood, building community groups. Latterly this included supporting joint community-workplace action, and helping to establish campaigns to address key local issues such as housing repairs and maintenance; demolition and renewal; the lack of decent services including transport; the need for information, advice and legal services in deprived neighbourhoods, and protection of shopping and other facilities.

What made these projects different from most neighbourhood community projects (and probably a source of understandable envy) then was the substantial budgets which they were able to command. This gave them a range of levers with which to support local groups and empower them to make some decisions about their communities; to challenge the common mode of top-down decision-making which had been their experience for many years. Some of this neighbourhood work was also later reported in a series of accounts from local projects.

One positive legacy of the so-called structural analysis of course was that the CDP rumbled the government's victim-blaming account which located the responsibility for decline with local residents. This challenge to the official view of inner city decline located the true responsibility with footloose capital. This included the pressures of international capital working their way both through private sector

interests which were disinvesting in the UK but reinvesting in low wage areas elsewhere in the world, and with its global agents such as the International Monetary Fund which pressed both Labour and Tory governments to make what have now become familiar rounds of public expenditure cuts (recounted in an early CDP report, *Cutting the Welfare State* – dated 1974!). This critical analysis gave people an alternative narrative by which to understand that what was manifested in local neighbourhoods, was simply a symptom of these processes.

Understandably, government never again embarked on programmes of this kind: setting groups of inquisitive and challenging activists and academics loose to explain the structural causes of deprivation. All the successor national state-sponsored poverty programmes were held within a very tight top-down managerial grip. The nearest the UK came to seeing anything like the re-enactment of the national CDP was in the Labour-inspired New Deal for Communities Programme of the very early 2000s but, at the point when local people challenged the right of government to install their own place-men and –women in 'local' management committees, and attempted to create true community-controlled management committees, the state quickly moved to block such action. It is interesting that the national evaluation of this programme, undertaken by academics who operated in a detached manner from the projects (as opposed to their CDP research and evaluation counterparts who collaborated in the projects), remained largely silent on this aspect of local control.

One area where the CDPs largely failed (although some material emerged from local projects later in the day) was in widening the analysis beyond the more traditional forms of political struggle and its typical political constituencies, to include those who had been even more marginalised in shaping the destinies of local communities, particularly women and members of ethnic minorities. Few projects had much to say about the role of women in community organising (even though most community groups were actually dominated by women); and fewer still reflected on the political implications of the needs of the then-generally small but growing ethnic minority populations in their areas. (This latter remains a serious lacuna in community development work generally: the literature in this territory remains remarkably sparse.

An acknowledgement of the politics of evaluation may be another legacy from the CDPs. The general mode of evaluation of such programmes was shown to require the active engagement in a formative fashion from researchers (who were tasked in each area with the role of evaluators) rather than accepting the original and passive mode of summative evaluation promoted by the government. This generally required a research team to go into an area, measure everything, stand back for five years whilst the community workers did their job, then go back, measure everything again and attribute causation to the intervention of the community workers.

This positivist model was quickly blown out of the methodological water by the early experience of some projects which found overnight that their neighbourhoods might lose thousands of well-paid jobs or millions of pounds of public investment as a result of processes originating completely outwith the neighbourhood. Such disinvestment completely dwarfed the modest sums which CDPs brought to their communities. From a purely evaluation research standpoint then, the CDPs were able to demonstrate how important the engagement of evaluators was in shaping public intervention programmes, because they could continually inform and shape the direction as an understanding of its needs emerged over time.

This was not a new insight for those who had been engaged in formative evaluation work for some years, but in this highly politicised context, it offered – and still offers – a very clear vision of how to approach public policy evaluation where political goals are a hidden but powerful factor shaping public narratives about causes, impact and outcomes. Unfortunately, most such evaluations are now completely corrupted by political expediency, with so-called pilots being set up and then quickly rendered redundant as the whole of the programme is rolled out – for party political purposes – before the findings of pilot projects are fully reported and utilised.

Notwithstanding its limitations, the national Community Development Project was and remains the most highly significant event to shape the work of community development (and not just in the UK) over the past fifty years, a view which is shared
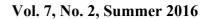
by many high profile and authoritative community development commentators both within and outside the UK, and which continues to attract academic and policy attention many years after the projects have been dead and buried.2

Many of the workers involved in the 12 projects, together with many who had not continue to pursue the messages of the CDPs in other organisational settings, and its intellectual legacy is apparent in much of the subsequent writing about community development and its relationship with the state, in a context of industrial and urban decline.3 The fact of its significant budgets, the hugely influential reportage (not just in terms of what was said but how it was used), the ability of projects located in many different places to be able to come together and establish an analysis which got below the presenting problems to reach a clear view of the common structural/global problems facing local neighbourhoods, and its enduring political impacts, means that it remains a key moment in community development history in the UK.

Community development was never the same again. What it provided most of all, perhaps, was a reminder to community workers that they should use a wide range of tools to inform their work, including the skills of research, evaluation and investigative journalism (to map the power-holders), alongside the more familiar tools of the trade such as mapping neighbourhoods (those subject to the control of outside interests); setting up and organising community groups, and the general tools of campaigning; an understanding that they should never take communities and community decline at face value, but spend time understanding why things are the way they are (and that they don't have to be that way); that they should build collectivities of support for their work within and across communities, workplaces, and national boundaries; and that they should amplify the insights derived from their work as widely as possible.

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2 As evidence by the fact that the ESRC funded a major five-year research project (the Imagine project mentioned earlier) to explore how people become involved in their local communities, with the national CDP programme being one of the major historical foci of the programme.

3 See for example, London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group (1981), *In and against the state*, Pluto; Craig, G. (1989) 'Community Work and the State', *Community Development Journal,* January; G.Craig, N. Derricourt and M. Loney (eds.), (1986) *Community Work and the State*, Routledge;

Community work may start from neighbourhoods, but its political impact can and should go much wider. The continuing fascination with the experience of the CDP has shown just how widely that impact can go, both over time and over space.