CONCEPT
The Journal of Contemporary Community Education Practice Theory

Vol. 4 No. 1 Spring 2013

Searching for the state and the market in American community development: reflections on editing Community Development in the Steel City

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This article was first published in Community Development Journal Vol 48 No 1 January 2013 pp. 158–162

As an African American (a Texan to be precise) living in Scotland for over ten years, I find that my overarching experience as an expatriate is one of deep ambivalence. The old cliche´ of expats being caught between two worlds turns out to be surprisingly true and disruptive to my sense of self. Certainly, my adopted country feels like 'home' most of the time, but there will always be a barrier to my inclusion – a kind of cultural grammar that I will probably always lack. When I periodically return to the United States, I find that my newly and stealthily acquired Scottish sensibilities exclude me from many of the taken-for-granted assumptions on which the American Dream is founded. W.E.B. Du Bois (1903, p. 3), the African American social critic and civil rights campaigner writing in the early twentieth century, argued that black Americans [are]:

> Gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

To be sure, Du Bois was arguing that a central part of the black American condition was the dilemma of having to understand and make sense of ourselves, our identities and our experiences simultaneously through a hegemonic white supremacist ideology and an ideology of racial equality, justice and uplift. I find Du Bois's concept of double-sightedness compelling for my expat adventures in Scotland. This 'double-consciousness' of perceiving things as simultaneously American and Scottish is essential but oftentimes burdensome. Organizing and editing Community

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Development in the Steel City: Democracy, Justice and Power in Pittsburgh was, I thought, a perfect opportunity to try to understand the assumptions, traditions and imperatives of one example of American community development using my insider/outsider American/Scottish double-consciousness.

The idea for this edited collection was born out of a United States/ European Union symposium on social inclusion and community development organized by the University of Pittsburgh in May 2011. This three-day conference brought together academics and practitioners to debate the role, purpose and effectiveness of community development in combating marginalization and exclusion in different national contexts. During my time in Pittsburgh, I also had the opportunity to visit a number of community projects and discuss with workers and activists their understandings and approaches to community development. Wanting to capture the enthusiasm of both the conference and the grassroots-based work in the city, I approached Tracy Soska (University of Pittsburgh), Terri Baltimore (Hill House Association) and Adrienne Walnoha (Community Human Services) to help me formulate and plan a publication about community development in Pittsburgh. The nine articles in this edited collection are written by practitioners and academics primarily working at the grassroots in the city. The articles reflect both the spirit and the work that typify much contemporary community development thinking and practice in the United States. Articles run the gamut from a history of urban regeneration in Pittsburgh to partnership-working for action research, developments of community university partnerships, innovations in comprehensive community initiatives, community organizing for economic justice, working with at-risk young people, arts-led regeneration, supporting community leadership and participation and new approaches to sustainable development. I am delighted with Community Development in the Steel City primarily because it provides an opportunity and a space for authors to reflect and share with an international audience the triumphs and setbacks of contemporary community development work in a particularly challenging post-industrial setting. Through this snapshot of practice that the publication affords, we can better understand the important influences a primarily place-based, micro-level practice can have on the life chances and opportunities of marginalized groups.

However, over the course of the year editing these essays, my expat double-consciousness continuingly provoked in me dissatisfaction with some of the assumptions, silences and taken-for-granted concepts underpinning the entire publication. Living in Europe, and in Scotland in particular, has required a crash course in my understanding of the opportunities and the dilemmas the local and national state offer in individual and community life. The state can be a cumbersome, bureaucratic and self-serving institution that undermines individual liberty and

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innovation. But it can also be a key guarantor and protector of equality and rights which makes individual liberty possible and meaningful. For community development, the state is both these things simultaneously. The state can undermine or suppress deliberative dialogue about the common good through 'invited spaces' that direct and control both the process and the outcomes of citizen debate. The state, however, can also support the democratic participation of the most marginalized through a system of social protection and welfare. Regardless of how the state in advanced capitalist countries is seen or experienced, it is important to bear in mind that it is not a monolith of either control or protection. However, in editing the contributions to Community Development in the Steel City, I found that the state was almost completely absent in many authors' analyses. Perhaps this is unsurprising given most Americans' hostility to 'the government' and its role in individual and public life. However, especially in a time of austerity, I was surprised not to see a clearer discussion about the field of power of the local, regional and national state and a closer examination of the free spaces and/or constraints that community development experiences in relation to the state. The state's absence in many of the narratives is telling because I think it signals the American state's simultaneous weakness and strength in relation to community development. The US state is 'weak' in the sense that spending on and defence of the social rights and protections of American citizens is far inferior to that in Europe. The state may be arguably 'strong' on protecting individual liberty but the recently enacted Affordable Care Act (the popularly dubbed 'Obamacare') notwithstanding, the state does relatively little to protect individual and group equality and justice – which is, I would argue, community development's primary concern.

Not engaging more directly and clearly with analyses and actions in relation to the state does not, of course, mean that the state 'withers away' from the politics of community development – the state is simply captured and directed by other more canny interest groups. The Tea Party, an influential force during the 2010 mid-term elections, may have seen much of its power wane on the national stage, but activists have not disappeared and gone home. They have refocused their efforts on local politics (Emejulu, 2011). Tea Partiers are bringing their libertarian small government agenda to school boards, city councils and state legislatures (Martin, 2012). The headline of the 2012 elections might be Barack Obama's expertly organised ground game of building a majority coalition among young people, women and minority groups, but the more pressing issue for community development are the results of 'down-ticket' local races. By ceding ground on the local state, community development practitioners may well be gifting the levers of government to those most hostile to its aims and purposes. As the actions of the influential American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC, http://www.alec.org), a free market, small government

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interest group demonstrate, local and state government can be easily captured by corporations and other partisan interests to advance their particular goals which are oftentimes anathema to the values of equality and justice. ALEC builds partnerships between policymakers and various special interests groups to jointly draft 'model legislation' for allied politicians to introduce and attempt to enact in state legislatures. The work of ALEC recently came under intense media scrutiny due to its model legislation of the so-called Stand Your Ground Law that George Zimmerman is using in his defence of the alleged murder of Trayvon Martin in Florida in February 2012 (Lichtblau, 2012). Given this stark political reality, I think American community development (in Pittsburgh and further afield) has a duty and an obligation to advance a theory of the state and state power and develop clear strategies as to how grassroots-based work can be translated into coherent political demands which are in turn realized in effective public policy formation and implementation.

The other notable silence in the text is in relation to free-market capitalism. Although Pittsburgh was ravaged by the movement of capital out of the city and overseas (as seen in the collapse of its steel industry), it is not clear to me that that very hard lesson of the free market has been integrated into the thinking and practice of community development in many of the contributions to the edited collection. With a few exceptions, there seems to be an assumption of consensus and of aligned interests between state, private sector and community actors which, at least to me, seems to be a very unhelpful starting point for advancing equality and justice for marginalized community groups. While conflict should perhaps not be the default position for community development, Saul Alinsky (1946, 1971), for all his problematic analyses and practices, was on to something about identifying and understanding a given community's self-interests and how those interests may well be at odds with other more powerful political actors. The story of Pittsburgh is in many ways the story of the reorganization of capital and the struggle to build a new economy in this post-industrial landscape. By all accounts, Pittsburgh is succeeding in its on-going restructuring and recovery from steel and towards a health service and knowledge-led economy. This transformation of the local economy is encouraging but it is creating new winners and losers in the market economy, which has a direct impact on community life. Understanding how the free market can create constituencies for resistance and/or compliance (note the different popular reactions to austerity policies across Europe) must be a central plank for community development.

As several essays in Community Development in the Steel City evidence, community development work in Pittsburgh is doing innovative and essential work of rebuilding neighbourhoods and supporting the participation of local people. The determinedly micro-level focus of much of the work in the publication is both its greatest strength

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and its greatest weakness. Demonstrating what can be accomplished without a clear role for or demands placed on the state is important. Understanding the opportunities that do exist when the state is 'silent' or 'passive' is crucial for analysing the scope of what is possible through the grit and determination of local action. However, as long as local community development action is disconnected from broader politics and policymaking, its impact may be, in the long run, undermined.

Community Development in the Steel City: Democracy, Justice and Power in Pittsburgh can be downloaded free from the CDJ Plus website: http://www.oxfordjournals.org/cdjc/?page_id=3

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