

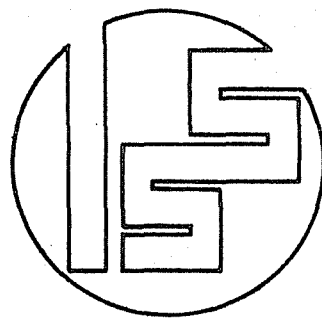
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OCCASIONAL PAPERS

Continuity and Discontinuity in Community Development Theory

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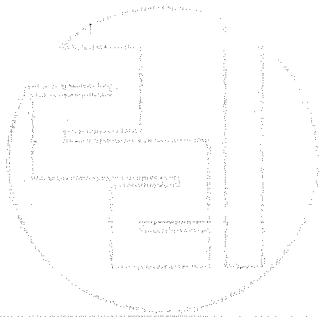
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OCCUPATIONAL PAPER

Community and Development Theory
in Community Development Theory

Community Development Theory

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Continuity and Discontinuity in Community Development *

J. Kuitenbrouwer

Few experienced fieldworkers in community development who attend advanced training programmes have any expectation of acquiring a cut-and-dried solution that can be applied to problems in the field. Moreover, it is now wellknown that the advanced nations cannot provide the so-called developing countries with lucid and effective development schemes or models ready for immediate use. The available tools for analysis, interpretation and evaluation of data and situations need to be made or adapted for particular circumstances at particular times. In addition, their selection and handling require other talents than those with which political scientists, economists or sociologists are usually equipped. The soundness of theoretical analysis does not guarantee that the recommended programme is also sound. The arrogance of objectivity in the social sciences is one explanation of the rapidly increasing disenchantment with development theory. Knowledge of the human condition is necessarily subjective, but knowledge of one cultural system by another is even more so. The objectivity demanded of scientific endeavour can only serve as a norm with which to relate inter-subjectivity to social reality.¹

The organisation of an international course in community development, whose participants represent a variety of social and cultural systems, is a magnificent challenge. Participants provide their own input in the form of their professional experience and analyses of the development processes in their home countries. Sociological models must be sought, if only to provide a starting point from which to explore the boundless complexity of social reality. However, such models should be constantly tested by a historical approach; this will draw in variables which social scientists are likely to omit for reasons of convenience. It is necessary and worthwhile to question the relevance of models which are otherwise likely to perpetuate themselves irrespective of social reality.

In this context, the question whether community development is a science or an ideology is beside the point.² It would be more appropriate to ask whether those concerned with community development projects realise the existence of sociological theory and carry out social research within the framework of their efforts. It cannot be denied that, as a movement, community development has often been surrounded by a mystique that deters some of its practitioners from questioning the viability of their own actions. In this they are not alone. The standardised message of democracy as this is understood in the North American and European contexts (especially the British), is preached as a saving device for all circumstances and at all times. Unfortunately, this approach, characterised by lack of imagination or of understanding of value systems and situations, tends to reinforce existing social systems that are marked by inequality and exploitation. All too frequently, it concentrates on the pacification of those who have adopted the images of the Western middle classes, while ignoring the need to change the institutional and

* Based on an address given at the opening of the Social Policy Programme, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, 1968.

structural framework, without which national development cannot take place.

The make-people-happy approach, that assumes that development will be given a natural take-off if numerous small-scale projects are initiated, is often combined with the idea that economic development through industrialization will automatically benefit the underprivileged groups, particularly the rural population. Nothing is less true! The fallacy of this assumption, particularly dear to percentage of growth advocates (fortunately, the institutional approach to the economies of developing countries is now in the ascendant), stems from non-perception of the fact that where the social structure of society remains feudal, this tends to shape the economic growth pattern and consequently helps to concentrate wealth and decision making power in the hands of a privileged few. Even if the actual management of wealth is delegated to people outside the inner circle, control over that management remains with the few.³ A study of the pitfalls of a foreign technical assistance system shows clearly how economic development then tends to reinforce the existing social structure.⁴

It would be unfair to posit that the filter theory is favoured only by economists. Wertheim,⁵ Dube⁶ and many others have analysed the sad effects of primary and often exclusive concentration on the rural elite, enabling them to accumulate the benefit of rural development programmes, whether fertilisation, technical knowhow, marketing arrangements, price guarantees, consumption facilities, educational or other facilities and incentives in the development process. A study of Indian development, which attempts to demonstrate that development of the rural masses will be effected through a downward innovative flow from the traditional elite, lacks conviction.⁷ The anticipated adhesion of the rural underprivileged to the value system of a higher caste seems to witness lack of insight into the functioning of the social system and its inequalities rather than conscious choice. Such adhesion should therefore be considered more a function of the existing social system than an indication of the process of development.

Application of the filter theory thus seems to assist in the preservation of the prevailing system. Although it may help to create pockets of wealth and welfare, it tends to obstruct rather than to stimulate development.

Another approach deserves attention owing to its negative implications: that which regards local communities as autonomous social systems forming the principal vantage points from which the development process can be generated. This approach, still evidenced in many programmes, may be attributed partly to the traditional anthropologists whose infatuation with the small community leads them to consider it as a world on its own. On the other hand, it has been stimulated by the admiration shown for the classical community-state relationship in Europe and North America. The persistent image of the pioneers who, by force of will, sweat and consistency, built up successful communities and were then anxious to create, retain and extend control over the 'artificial' systems that started to grow beyond their boundaries, is reflected in the view of communities as territorial units with self-generating motors which need only a drop of development oil to start the development motor

ticking over. Alexis de Tocqueville lucidly analysed the cohesion, motivation and dynamism of rural life in 18th century America. However, it would be dangerous to consider his analysis as guidance for development in totally different historical and cultural contexts.

If modernisation implies differentiation in the social system and national development the creation of new interaction through establishing and strengthening functional institutions, serious arresting effects could result from emphasis on action through the local community with the idea of preserving its cohesion and harmony.⁹ The dualist theory, which views rural and urban communities as different social systems, is dangerous in that it diverts attention from the fact that the relationship existing between the two systems is determinant of their position and their potential for development.

A Latin American sociologist has argued, correctly in my opinion, that this relationship is often one of internal colonialism, with all its attendant debilitating consequences.¹⁰

This relationship is much more marked in Latin America and Asia than in Africa, but even there it is becoming apparent. In the Arusha Declaration, President Nyerere spoke out strongly against those mechanisms of injustice which condemn the rural peoples to have to sell their produce at low prices and to buy consumption goods at prices that are often excessively high. The choice of a socialist approach that will safeguard the rural areas then seems the only approach to the negative effects of the free market mechanism. Nyerere's Education for Self-Reliance programme can only have perspective within such a framework.

This does not preclude rural communities from playing a crucial role in the development process. But they should not be left to develop by themselves; rather, they should be integrated into regional systems that will protect and simultaneously facilitate their organisation.

Does this imply rejection of the grass roots approach? Yes and no. Community organisation efforts which do not try to build links between communities in terms of interests, whether social, economic or political, are of little relevance. On the other hand, institutional networks developed from above, which give no attention to the systematic preparation and training of local people to assume responsibility and to exercise control over these institutions, inevitably lead to a type of development that falls flat once the task masters are withdrawn.

"Plural mobilization of carriers of development as well as fundamental democratization in institutional development in a regional framework" seem essential prerequisites for a development process with a self-generating perspective, in which not only human dignity is respected, but people have a fair chance to realise their potential by becoming involved in the decision-making process regarding matters of their own interest, by learning to choose between alternative courses of action, and by protecting themselves and fighting for their own future.

The above analysis implies a central concern for the problem of concentrating and distributing power in a society. It is my belief that any analysis of development problems which bypasses this factor is of doubtful relevance.

A politico-sociological and politico-economic approach seems indispensable for some understanding of the forces that shape a society. It would be a mistake to think that a traditional situation can be directly replaced by a pluralist society with dispersed and balanced interests. However, this should not lead to the idea that the only realistic possibility is to consider planning from the viewpoint of the prevailing interests and a prognosis of their likely change,¹² unless such consideration implies only 'taking into account' and the prognosis is not based on the natural trend to be extrapolated from the existing social structure. In that case, planning would lose its fundamental function of exerting influence on the modification of the political, economic and social systems so as to make them more conducive to development. The search for sub-regional units or inter-village systems, based on combinations of joint ecological, historical or economic interests, particularly in terms of the viability of organizing the market system, is essential in this context. The search for identification will nowhere lead to identical outcomes; in each case, while the criteria applied may be the same, the actual definition of the community as an inter-village system will lead to different conclusions. Studies by the Institut de recherches et d'application de méthodes (IRAM) have tried to elaborate such conclusions for some African countries.¹³

A crucial element in the organisation of these sub-regional units is the possibility for the people to exercise control, through their elected representatives (animateurs), on the development of the area and particularly on the handling and marketing of their own produce through the inter-village cooperative organization which combines production and marketing with a consumption-supply function. Exercise of such control will enable a regional system to develop which not only expresses the views of the planners from above but also those of the population.

It might be asked how local people will have to be elected in order to make them truly representative of the population. We may assume that most villages, on the verge of leaving the subsistence economy or already inside the monetary market economy, show increasing signs of internal conflict. The picture of harmonious, peaceful, traditional communities, drawn by the late Robert Redfield and still cherished by many anthropologists and theologians, who somehow consider the traditional rural order as being sacred and good for everyone,¹⁴ does not stand the test of elementary scrutiny. Apart from the ideals which lead to such misinterpretation, it must also be caused by the image of a community with a static economy. Oscar Lewis, in his studies of Mexico as well as of India, has shown that conflict is a regular if not all-pervasive feature of the average village community.¹⁵ George Foster has tried to illustrate that the pressure for conformity, emanating from the traditional, egalitarian-oriented system, is a major cause of the emergence and rise of conflict.¹⁶ Such pressure is likely to turn into open conflict when local entrepreneurs or the more enterprising peasants start operating outside the traditional system of sharing, and orient their savings towards investment and re-investment in the individual enterprise.

This is clearly discernible in countries where the communal land-tenure system still prevails. It occurs that the community suddenly claims a piece of land which was hitherto understood to be leased on the usufruct type of arrangement.

To return to the question of local representation, a policy decision will have to be taken whether to support the representatives of the traditional order, in most instances the local chiefs, or to support the election of new and innovative entrepreneurial persons. Sometimes but not usually, these will be one and the same. Sometimes, no action can be initiated except with the benediction of the local lords, if development is not to be a matter of increasing policy control. Too often, however (and this approach is supported by traditional Western community organizations and dominates the views of many community development practitioners), the preservation of peace and harmony has been considered of such pre-eminent value that no action was considered permissible before harmony was ensured or re-established.

Such views have done considerable damage in that they have reduced community development practitioners to pious but ineffective action, in which support has been given, often unintentionally, to forces that enhance the preservation of the traditional order as against those that favour a new realignment in the social system that could dynamise the community and provide a channel for innovation. At the same time, the election of amateurs for potential leadership, based on socio-educative skills and promise of technical competence, must be fruitful if their followers, who are willing to take risks, adopt the proposed innovations and actually increase their incomes by applying the new techniques and using the new marketing and supply arrangements. Pressure must then be brought to bear on those who implicitly defend the traditional order and its inherent lack of productivity. To conclude, pedagogical persuasion to change is helped more by results demonstrated by those who are willing to take the road of progress than by concentration on those anxious to preserve the status quo.

"Working with the community as a whole", as stated in the United Nations definition of community development, should therefore be understood as expressing a normative ideal rather than as an operational device. The creation and support of newly-established interest groups that operate in an inter-village network, is then a primary task.

This stresses the need to identify communities as planning units in functional rather than localised territorial terms. The local community should be regarded as a target for differentiation and for new functional groupings which cut across territorially isolated and coherent units. The need to concentrate on the functional approach is greater in areas where local communities have already become part of a larger social system than in those which still function in relative isolation. In the latter case, special motivational approaches are necessary to prepare the community for confrontation with the outside world and to enable it to become a partner in development.¹⁷ Timing is as important an element in planning as the definition of goals and techniques.

Aside from the urgent need to train technical and administrative staff at all levels towards an attitude and mentality that will allow a two-way process and continuous feedback from the population,¹⁸ the political will of central government is essential if local institutions are to function effectively. Sometimes, as in Chile, direct intervention by central government through special committees enables local institutions such as settlement and credit unions to initiate plans and provides backing when local units request the cooperation of technical and administrative services at the regional level. Thus, pressure from below backed by pressure from above, tries to stimulate the government apparatus at the intermediate level to come down, adapt and share decision making and planning efforts with local communities and interest groups. In some States of India where Panchayats have received an increased measure of autonomy, the technical services are now answerable to the Panchayat Council in planning matters, although still answerable to State Ministries in the technical field.

Thus the accountability of government technicians is more clearly defined vis-à-vis the local population, who can voice their claims and leave the technicians less margin in which to operate in vacuo or to excuse their own absence, inaction or poor performance. Obviously, the establishment of autonomous structures at the grassroots will not cause the situation to change immediately, but it will increase people's awareness of their own powers and their sense of responsibility for their own betterment. Their elected representatives will learn to gain the cooperation of the government technicians in order to further the interests of the communities.

Few countries will be able to follow the road taken by Yugoslavia, where the općina, the commune, and its working communities, whether social or economic, have a maximum degree of autonomy, forming the basic units in a constitutional system in which state and federal powers are directly derived from them and technical services are mostly under direct control of local government. The historical developments that led to this constellation are surely unique. The fact remains, however, that the system increasingly forces those who hold the power to put themselves at the service of the community or to be replaced. Rarely, in a one party-system, has the party been willing to relinquish its all-pervasive control in favour of a system in which this power is conceded to grassroots institutions and been content to change from all-inclusive controller into a dynamizing agent without formal powers of control. The evolution of this system leads increasingly towards regional organization, initiated by communes which discover common interests and the need for joint planning and action.

Sometimes, as a result of increasing pressure from the grassroots, where rising expectations combine with concrete claims for governmental performance, the formal willingness of government to allow the population to share in the planning process is counteracted by the bureaucracy, when the latter realises that it will lose its comfortable non-accountability.

The bureaucracy may then start to technocratise the planning process so as to exclude any dialogue with the population or its direct representatives and to safeguard its own independence and inaccessibility. Technocratisation then arrests the development process and preserves the power of the established political and administrative elites.¹⁹

The only answer to this process seems to be to create a decentralised structure. The contention that people are not ready for decentralisation may be correct, but the new structures will be the best means with which to prepare the population, even in the face of problems and tensions which the new system will undoubtedly produce.

These problems are in no way peculiar to developing countries. The richest country in the world has seen its anti-poverty programmes threatened and lose momentum because of increasing opposition by the intermediate and municipal bureaucracies. The programme was directly operated from the centre and designed to help a minority group to improve its own situation. In several European countries, a general feeling of increasing dissatisfaction among the population, articulated and manifested by a minority of young intellectuals, turns against a society in which the decision-making process is concentrated in the hands of a few, in spite of the formal provisions of democracy. The requirements of the technological age then serve as explanation. It seems that the thirst for fundamental democratisation is strengthened by increased concentration, and it becomes clear that democracy is a process without a terminal station. Those presenting achievements in democracy of the Western world are not always aware of this fact. It is no accident that in a number of European countries, including the Netherlands, rapidly growing interest and attention is shown for community development. This is nourished by a desire to introduce instruments for social control in a rapidly changing society and to introduce into the social system stabilisers that will help to direct the process of social change, minimising possible conflict and tension. In most cases interest in democratisation of the social structure remains idealism, only in a few cases is it put into practice because of the discovery of its productive effects.²⁰ This is understandable in a society in which the existing order is considered by the older generation as an expression of some natural law which commands respect under all circumstances. But the older generation controls the political, social and economic life. It may be asked whether the social equilibrium theory which has dominated sociological thought for so long has been useful in explaining and serving the process of change with its concomitant conflicts and tensions.

However, there is a wide gap between the efforts of a sociologist qua sociologist and those of the practitioner, and good sociological insight is no guarantee for sound action.

Perhaps one explanation of the relatively small contribution made by sociologists is that sociological research is rarely directed toward the question of feasibility. Too often, it focuses on why things went wrong in the past. If sociological research should concentrate more on feasibility, it might possibly have to modify the emphasis in its research methods. In most cases, sociologists carrying out research for a certain development programme, think of their work as an objective effort. Once data are established and interpreted, conclusions are presented for future action. However, the process of social change does not wait while data are collected and interpreted. The constellation of facts and forces that will shape future development may well have changed.

To overcome this, research should be a continuous process; the more it takes on the character of action research, the more likely it is to catch new variables in the stream of change and take them into account. Thus, social research activity becomes an integral element of development action; it follows the course of events step by step in such order that it may precede action by its observations and recommendations.

This emphasis on action research, as carried out, for example, in the Vicos project in Peru,²¹ goes hand in hand with an experimental attitude toward planning and programming, coupled with a systematic feedback of information from the communities. A good example is the Comilla project, which has focused on trying to devise an adequate change agency, on workable local-level organisations, and on finding acceptable items to be adopted by individuals.²² It is encouraging to see this experimental attitude carried over from the Comilla pilot scheme into a much larger context in West Pakistan.²³ It is mostly at this point that, under pressure of circumstances, experimental approaches are eliminated.

The administration and management of development programmes remain primarily an art which requires particular skills and insight into the sociological background of the situation. Even with increasing support from the scientific side (which unfortunately accumulates mostly in industrial societies), this character is maintained. The study of group-dynamic processes in society, community and group as a distinct field of endeavour is still in its infancy. Community development experiences and studies have resulted in an impressive array of prescriptions and rules.²⁴ However, their ad hoc character has still to be overcome and advance is likely to be slow.

If community development is defined as the approach to development which focuses on the viability and feasibility of participatory processes and structures, with particular attention to motivation and communication, then I have paid too little attention to the place and function of the latter. This is not due to their under-estimation. It becomes increasingly clear that any structural or institutional reform, whether in the field of land tenure, taxation, marketing, the introduction of new settlements, or any other, will have to be preceded, accompanied and followed-up by intensive training. Training and education are thus at the core of development, if it claims to be human development. I chose to emphasise structural and institutional aspects because, in traditional community development theory and practice, these have been seriously neglected for more than one reason.

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