

Where We Live Matters

*Place-Based Neighbourhood Work –
A Review, Promising Practice and an Approach*

August 2013



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Electronic copies of this report are available from:

Community Development Halton
860 Harrington Court
Burlington, ON
L7N 3N4
Phone: (905) 632-1975
Fax: (905) 632-0778
Email: office@cdhalton.ca
Web: www.cdhalton.ca

United Way Funded Agency



Prepared by: Jody Orr, B.A., M.A.

Research Team

Joey Edwardh, Executive Director
Ted Hildebrandt, Director of Social Planning
Richard Lau, Research Associate
Rishia Burke, Research Associate

Executive Summary

Despite the enormous investments from government and other funders, as well as the efforts of several generations of service providers, complex problems such as concentrated pockets of poverty, social exclusion and poor health outcomes continue to characterize life in many neighbourhoods and communities in Canada. Over time, traditional services and programs have tended to have modest impacts at best and overall social and economic indicators seem impervious to significant change. So, what are we not getting?

Over the last few years, in the hope of having a greater impact on such issues, funders and others have turned to place-based investment in programs, services and approaches and focused their efforts on neighbourhoods. These approaches are characterized by engagement of residents and the coordination of a broad range of stakeholders that includes service providers, governments, funders and sometimes the private sector. They are generally seen as the most promising approach to addressing the deep-seated issues neighbourhoods often face. However, the evaluation of the impact of these comprehensive, place-based initiatives is still in its infancy. To date they have had, at best, mixed effectiveness in addressing deep structural issues such as poverty.

This paper presents an approach to neighbourhood work based on best and promising practice. It also acknowledges some of the limitations to and challenges of neighbourhood work that arise from the larger social structures and relationships of power in which neighbourhoods are situated and in which residents seek to build their own futures.

Typically, an executive summary provides a high level walk through of an extended paper that follows the structure of that paper. In this case, however, we want to bring the reader's attention immediately to the approach to neighbourhood work that is being proposed in this paper. We are, therefore, presenting it first. The remainder of the paper, set out in Sections One and Two, presents key concepts and best and promising practices that support this approach. Finally, Appendix A presents a summary of the history of place-based neighbourhood work that has informed theory and best practice.

An Approach to Building Neighbourhoods

The paper presents an approach to effective neighbourhood work built on the following principles and best practices:

- Determining whether a neighbourhood is ready for this kind of work and when this is not the case, working to build readiness;
- Maximizing neighbourhood control of activity and decision-making;
- Identifying and building on neighbourhood strengths (assets);

- Building social connections and relationships within the neighbourhood (building social capital);
- Developing social/neighbourhood capacity to take action and;
- Using strategies that fit the situation (community development processes and social action strategies)

While the approach as presented assumes that someone from outside the neighbourhood may start the process, such as a worker from a human service or government agency, it can also be applied to situations where people within a neighbourhood take a look and decide to do something about their community and its issues.¹

The diagram on the following page lays out this approach for neighbourhood work.²

Key Elements of the Approach

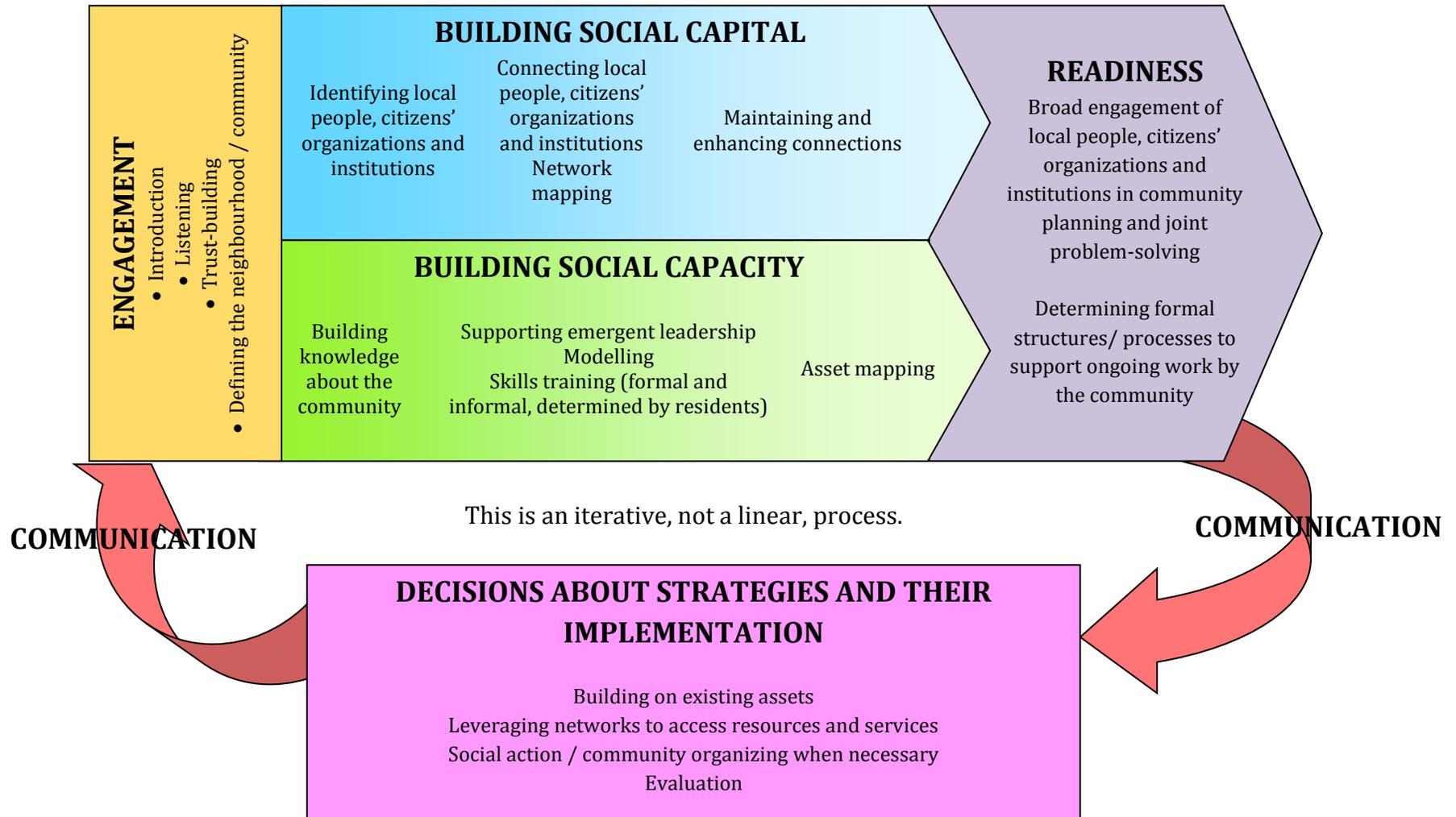
The approach presented in this paper is fluid and dynamic and contains a number of stages or elements. However, it does not propose a linear process, but rather one of repeated cycling back and forth, depending on the situation and the people who are involved in the work. Key elements in the approach are:

An engagement process: If someone from outside the neighbourhood is initiating work, they need time to introduce themselves, to get to know the neighbourhood and begin a process of building trust. If work is being started by someone from inside the neighbourhood, these processes are also important. People should be on the lookout for issues that are identified by a number of residents. It may be possible to identify natural neighbourhood leaders. It is important to encourage these leaders to talk to others until a consensus emerges about the important issues. This process will vary from community to community and neighbourhood to neighbourhood. Eventually, people may agree that it is a good idea to convene a small group to explore some of what was heard as important issues. Alternately, they may decide to put on an event that would provide opportunities for neighbours to chat about issues important to them.

¹ Numerous terms can be used relatively interchangeably to describe this role. We have chosen “animateur,” a French term, we are using to mean “a person who enlivens or encourages something, organizes projects and gets people interested in them.”

² There is an extensive Bibliography attached to this paper. In particular, work by McKnight and Kretzman, Mattessich, Monsey and Roy, Margaret Wheatley and Bill Lee should be consulted when considering the implications for practice when undertaking neighbourhood work.

An Approach to Building Neighbourhoods



A critical step in this process is encouraging the people who live in an area to define its boundaries. They may NOT correspond to the official definition of the neighbourhood, such as a planning area, a potential problem for urban planners, but not for people living in a place.

The animateur's role at this stage is building trust and connecting people with one another. An informal inventory of individual and community assets should be kept and maybe even an informal network map, both of which are processes that the neighbourhood residents may later wish to firm up through more formal processes. Once issues are identified, broader participation from the community can be encouraged. This moves the work from engagement to building social relationships, referred to as social capital.

Building social capital is a repeated process of identifying and connecting people and organizations to each other. The animateur has a responsibility to assist others in identifying and furthering connections. Eventually, a formal network mapping session (or several spread out over time) can be useful. This not only involves people in a fun visual exercise, but gives clues as to where there are strengths and weaknesses in the neighbourhood's networks. Through network building, neighbourhood strengths and community assets are uncovered and vital connections can be made that link community assets to those who can benefit from them.

Building social capacity: As the process of building social capital (connections) increases in scope, the opportunity to develop a good knowledge of the community will emerge. Sometimes this will be informal. In other cases, those who have engaged in the work to date may wish to gain this information by holding a meeting or doing a survey. When assessing community readiness, the animateur will have to consider how to support other new leaders to develop the skill sets they require to do the work without dictating to them what those skill sets should be. Sometimes this can be done by modelling (e.g. how to put a good meeting agenda together or how to do minutes) or through more formal training if this is what residents want. If external experts are needed to do training, it is important that these experts understand they are acting as resources rather than experts who will tell the community what it needs or what it should do.

It is also important to be alert to the opportunity to build a formal vision of where the neighbourhood wants to go or what it wants to set as the goals for its work together.

Finally, the animateur also has a role in encouraging a view of the community that is based on "look what we have to work with" rather than on "look how damaged we are." At some point, this might lead to formal asset mapping.

Planning and problem-solving: At some point in the process, the community will be ready, or at least believe it is ready, to take on issues and engage in problem-solving. If a formal vision or set of goals has not been established, it is important to do so now.

Nothing feeds success more effectively than success, so it is important for animateurs to determine the neighbourhood's readiness to act. It is also better to start with quick wins demonstrating that, by working together, neighbours can achieve shared goals. If a neighbourhood is not yet ready, a good explanation about why something might be premature may be all that is required. If the neighbourhood wishes to press on, animateurs have a critical role in assisting the community to reflect on and learn from whatever happens.

As the issues get bigger and more complex, neighbourhoods must deal with the possibility of needing more formal organizational structures and processes. If there has been effective transfer of skills and learning and neighbourhood assets have been effectively mobilized, some of what constitutes good practice will have already been adopted (for example: communication lines are well understood by all; people have learned to work together respectfully; a tradition of consensus or majority rules will have been established; minutes of meetings are being kept, etc.). As the community becomes more formally organized, the external worker's role is to give advice, serve as a resource, assist others to leverage resources the neighbourhood has identified that it needs and encourage the ongoing building of social capital and capacity. Ultimately, the people in the neighbourhood will decide what they wish to take on, but the animateur has an important role to play as a resource person throughout this decision-making process.

Communication: Throughout all of these processes, the importance of effective, open communication that helps build trust cannot be overemphasized. Particularly today, the use of social media needs to be factored into communications as does the identification and use of communication vehicles that may be unique to the neighbourhood.

Characteristics of Communities in Which Effective Community Building Processes have been Carried Out

Mattessich, Monsey and Roy identified a number of characteristic of communities in which effective community building processes have been carried out:

- Community awareness of an issue
- Motivation from within the community
- Small geographic area
- Flexibility and adaptability

- Pre-existing social cohesion
- Ability to discuss, reach consensus and co-operate
- Existing identifiable leadership
- Prior success with community-building (Mattessich, Monsey and Roy 1997, 14)

While the authors did not set these out formally as readiness indicators, they indicate that the more a community exhibits these characteristics, the more likely it is that community building efforts will be effective. The implications for practice from this set of factors is clear; where there is a gap between what is needed to be ready and actual community conditions, time and resources may well be required to assist the community to become ready for community building.

Personal and Professional Qualities and Skills for Effective Neighbourhood Work

If someone is interested in doing neighbourhood work, it is helpful to consider the skills and qualities that will make them effective in that work, whether as a worker from outside the community or as a leader in the neighbourhood. Among key qualities and skills are:

- Understanding of the community
- Sincerity of commitment
- A relationship of trust
- Level of organizing experience
- Ability to be flexible and adaptable

(Mattessich, Monsey and Roy 1997, 16-17)

To these qualities, Community Development Halton's research team add their own observations that really skilled neighbourhood animateurs are able to "bracket" themselves, i.e. not let their own assumptions and biases colour their work. This does not mean abandoning values and principles, but it does mean being transparent about them, encouraging the same in others and not imposing them on others.

Communities bring with them not just assets and strengths, but they often have embedded within them the potential for conflict in the form of oppressive behaviours and attitudes such as racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia and ableism. There may arise in the work challenging personalities who want to, for whatever reasons, undo the work of the neighbourhood to date, or create difficult power struggles.

Part of working effectively in communities calls on the animateur to assist residents to be conscious of the values and principles they hold to be important and help them name and deal with actions and behaviours that violate them. This is not easy work, but the modelling

of appropriate behavior and a willingness to facilitate the identification and resolution of value-driven conflict is well worth the effort.

How Did the Approach to Building Neighbourhoods Emerge?

In getting to the point where an approach to effective neighbourhood work could be presented, an extensive literature search was undertaken along with some ad hoc discussions with seasoned community animators.

The paper starts with two related sections that help the reader understand key principles and theory that have evolved over the years to describe neighbourhood work (or community work as it is often called), and the best and promising practices that have emerged from the field.

Section One lays out key concepts related to neighbourhood work, including place, community assets, social capital, network mapping, community/social capacity, empowerment and approaches to citizen engagement. Many of these re-emerge in the approach for neighbourhood work that is presented in the paper.

Section Two outlines best and promising practices in neighbourhood work, focusing on place-based versus people-based activity, professional/external control versus resident/local control, asset-based versus deficit-based approaches and the tension that exists between dealing with symptoms versus root causes of these persistent social issues.

Finally, because it represented a significant segment of the research that informs this paper, an appendix is included providing a brief history of place-based neighbourhood work. It explores the rich legacy of place-based practice we have inherited, work that relates to vitalizing or revitalizing neighbourhoods that might normally be viewed as disadvantaged or plagued with social problems.³ It begins with the settlement house movement of one hundred years ago and goes on to examine the urban renewal and development years, social activism and social action of the 1960s and later, the place-focused social policy interventions of the American War on Poverty, the Canadian development of universal social programs and the emergence in the last ten to fifteen years of Comprehensive Community Initiatives both in Canada and the United States.

³ This understanding of disadvantaged neighbourhoods is, itself, shaped by history and a dominant human service system that sees problems and disadvantages rather than assets and resources.

Concluding Remarks

There is a growing sense among many people that the large institutions that have been created over time to manage and regulate our daily lives have failed. This is seen through a diminishing confidence in, and growing disenchantment with, these institutions from which people feel increasingly alienated and which they no longer trust.

Perhaps we should not be surprised by this:

...people's capacity to self-organize is the most powerful change process there is...

All systems go through life cycles. There is progress, setbacks, seasons. When a new effort begins, it feels like spring. People are excited by new possibilities, innovations and ideas abound, problems get solved, people feel inspired and motivated to contribute. It all works very well, for a time.

And then, especially if there is growth and success, things can start to go downhill. Leaders lose trust in people's ability to self-organize and feel the need to take control, to standardize everything, to issue policies, regulations, and laws. Self-organization gets replaced by over-organization; compliance becomes more important than creativity. Means and ends get reversed, and people struggle to uphold the system rather than having the system support them. These large, lumbering bureaucracies - think about education, healthcare, government, business - no longer have the capacity to create solutions to the very problems they were created to solve. (Wheatley 2011, 9 - 10)

Place, particularly the smaller local space we call our home, our community, our neighbourhood, holds the promise of being an antidote to the institutional juggernauts around us. It is here that we make connections and can find in each other the resources to effect meaningful change in our day-to-day world.

Being able to work with people where they live in ways which honour them and make a REAL difference in their lives on a day-to-day basis is "right work." Being able to do this work effectively is critical.

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Introduction

The place we call home can provide a rich set of resources and relationships to enrich our lives and support our families and communities. Conversely, if thin in resources and relationships, it can also prove to be an environment that poses challenges and barriers to the good quality of life that we want. In urban and rural communities across Canada, this too often is the case. We see, instead, concentrated pockets of poverty, social exclusion, poor health outcomes and other challenging issues that disturb the tidy picture of a wealthy country with good quality of life for all its residents.

Given all the investment over the years in services of all sorts, why have we been unable to deal effectively with issues such as poverty, poor health outcomes and social exclusion? What are we not getting?

Despite the enormous investments over time from all levels of government and funders such as United Ways, community and private foundations, as well as the earnest efforts of service providers, these complex problems abide. Traditional interventions, i.e. services and programs, both universal and targeted at those in need, have tended to have modest impacts at best. While services abound and the circumstances of some individuals and families may improve, overall indicators seem impervious to significant change. What are we not getting?

Increasingly, people are looking to “place” to help address social problems that simply do not seem to want to go away.

Increasingly, in the face of these marginal successes, those wishing to have an impact on these issues, particularly poverty, have turned to a wide variety of place-based investments in order to try to reduce the impact or frequency of these issues. As a result, in the last decade or so we have seen the identification of priority neighbourhoods by funders and policy makers resulting NOT in a targeting of resources to population groups but to discrete geographic areas, often selected on the basis of a critical mass of troubling social and economic indicators. This has meant an embracing and testing of practices that, although they have been around for decades, have now gained renewed attention given the less than successful performance of more traditional interventions.

This paper focuses on emergent and promising practices in place-based initiatives – initiatives we are calling neighbourhood work – that are targeted, in the long term, on these deeply embedded problems. It is based on an extensive literature search and many years of experience in community development, policy analysis and development and social action

on the part of the Community Development Halton (CDH) research team. It has several sections, including:

- a discussion of the key elements and theory that underpins place-based practice or neighbourhood work
- an examination of best and promising practice in place-based neighbourhood work
- presentation of a suggested approach to effective neighbourhood work
- a brief discussion of the skills and qualities of an effective neighbourhood worker, or animateur.⁴

There are a number of terms used to talk about place-based neighbourhood work. The terms used often carry fine distinctions linked to how the work is done, the types of strategies used and the target of the work, e.g., the physical place or the people living in a physical space.

For the purposes of this paper, “neighbourhood work” means activity by community animateurs and residents that is focused on a discrete geographic area that residents see as a neighbourhood, and work that has as its goal the vitalization or revitalization of the local area in order to address significant social issues, whether or not these geographic areas have any official designation as such, e.g., municipal planning units or “official” neighbourhoods, wards, cities, etc.

Definition

Neighbourhood work is activity by community animateurs and residents that is:

- *focused on a discrete geographic area that people define as their “neighbourhood”*
- *undertaken to address significant social issues through neighbourhood vitalization or revitalization*

⁴ Numerous terms can be used relatively interchangeably to describe this role. We have chosen “animateur,” a French term, we are using to mean “a person who enlivens or encourages something, organizes projects and gets people interested in them.”

SECTION ONE: Key Concepts in Neighbourhood-Based Work

There is a rich history of neighbourhood and place-based work that has shaped theoretical thinking over the last four or five decades. Appendix A provides a short history of place-based work that has informed both theory and emergent best and promising practice in neighbourhood work. This section explores key concepts and establishes the foundation for an exploration in Section 2 on best and promising practice in neighbourhood work.

In order to best situate these best and promising practices, it is important to first take a look at the theoretical underpinnings of place-based neighbourhood work, ranging from definitions that practitioners and policy-makers use through to the range of concepts, values and principles that inform this work today.

a) What is Place?

The history of place-based initiatives indicates an initial separation between the notions of a physical location and its associated natural and built environments on the one hand and, on the other hand, the social fabric that has been woven in a specific locale. Urban renewal efforts, for example, have tended to focus primarily on locale and built environment. Traditional service provision tended to focus on people rather than place and, in fact, this distinction between place and people is still important for some today. Belsky and Fauth, however, define both “place” and “people” and argue that “integrating people-based and place-based strategies within a master vision” is one element of promising practice (Belsky and Fauth 2012, 75).

Place is an evocative word. It is not only where we physically locate ourselves in the moment, it is also broadened and deepened in our everyday experience by the rich tapestry of people, relationships, landscapes and built forms that shape our interaction with our environment.

In part, the growing attention to ‘place-based development’ and ‘place-based public policy’ reflects a growing appreciation of the unique significance of local settings: localities are where *diverse factors* come together to generate either positive or negative effects. In the case of economic and social innovation, for instance, it has been recognized that local settings are the sites where elements are combined in new ways to generate desirable change (Industry Canada, 2002: 72). On the other hand, as with the concentration of poverty in urban neighbourhoods, local sites can also be the place where multiple factors interact in ways that foster complex problems. (Leviten-Reid 2006, 4) (emphasis added)

Dillman and Peck also employ a richer definition of place, noting that:

...unlike “people-based” programs that focus on individuals, place-based initiatives consider an entire community. (Dillman and Peck 2012, 15)

If one approaches “place” as a rich integration of both physical location and natural and built environment on the one hand and the social and economic relationships that play out in that physical location on the other hand, then paying attention to both in any place-based practice is, by definition, essential. It is clear from a review of the current literature that comprehensive approaches focused on a local area are seen as the most promising practices in place-based work.

“Place” as a concept integrates both physical location and natural and built environment on the one hand and the social and economic relationships that play out in that physical location on the other hand.

b) What is the Local Focus?

Like the term “place,” there is diversity in the terminology used to describe local areas in which place-based work is carried out, notably, “community” and “neighbourhood,” which are often used interchangeably.

Rather than attempting to delineate the fine distinctions that may be applied to these terms, it is more helpful to note the huge areas of overlap in the way these two terms are used today.

Classically, the term community has been used to denote either a specific geographic area or a group of “people who share or possess a common and essential factor, perhaps gender, race, religion or socioeconomic status” (Lee 1994, 13-14). Lee notes that Community of Interest is a subset of this second form of community. He goes on to describe additional essential features of “community” as possessing boundaries and having some:

... consciousness of itself, its boundaries and/or focus. (Roberts, 1979: 45.) It may be only a potential consciousness, but the group of people must ultimately recognize itself as a distinct entity. (Lee 1994, 14)

He also suggests that communities have a self-interest or set of interests that:

...correlate with some parts of its environment and run counter to others...over time, a community's political nature will be quiet and unseen at times and, by the necessity of its self-interest, be high profile at others.

(In later sections of this paper, there is a discussion about "readiness" to act as a community that has an impact on its "political nature.")

Mattessich, Monsey and Roy provide a succinct space-based definition of community that incorporates Lee's elements when they define community as:

People who live within a geographically defined area and who have social and psychological ties with each other and with the place they live.
(Mattessich, Monsey and Roy 1997, 6)

Neighbourhoods, the other term frequently applied to the foci of place-based work, are defined variously in the literature. Understanding this term has been made more challenging due to the fact that at the municipal level, urban planners have often divided their municipalities up into planning units called neighbourhoods without reference necessarily to the fact that people living in the area may not share common bonds. Leviten-Reid (2006) poses some questions about this struggle to define neighbourhood:

In practice, neighbourhoods rarely fall neatly into formal political boundaries of official catchment areas. While having a geographic dimension, they are also defined by the lived experience of residents... In the end, what may be more important than any formal definition of neighbourhood is attention to what practically will facilitate a productive revitalization process in the actual setting under consideration. In any particular context, what would constitute the setting where people can be brought together to address shared concerns and interests? (Leviten-Reid 2006, 5).

The way in which people living in an area define their neighbourhood or community is a critical factor in determining boundaries for place-based neighbourhood work.

This raises important considerations for promising practice since a critical step in working with residents in a local area is determining what they see their "neighbourhood" or "community" comprising.

c) Ways of Working in Local Areas: Place-Based Neighbourhood Work

There has been, as summarized in the Appendix to this paper, a long history of place-based work. Understanding the terminology and more importantly the theory, values, principles and frameworks attached to various styles of place-based practice is important since these provide a base from which to identify promising practice today.

The literature on styles of local place-based practice is lengthy and there is confusion over terms and styles of intervention. Hess (1999) observes:

Despite years of experience with various forms of local initiatives – such as those defined here as community organizing, development and building – there remains much confusion on the part of many observers and practitioners over the differences in the nature of these various strategies. Furthermore, the dependence of the outcomes of interventions on the approach undertaken is often not recognized or expressed by those who support or engage in these efforts at community change. Finally, little discussion has occurred regarding the way these strategies can relate to each other. (Hess 1999, 5)

He provides a framework for distinguishing important differences among the approaches, building on an initial attempt to classify interventions by Ganz (1998, communicated by personal correspondence with Ganz who was with the John F. Kennedy School,

One way of distinguishing among the ways that neighbourhood or community work is carried out is to determine where “control” lies (inside or outside the community) and whether the aim is service provision or advocacy.

Harvard University at the time.) The initial dimensions Hess uses are whether control of the intervention or activity is from an external source or a source internal to the local community and whether the intervention or what is provided (Hess calls this the Product) is traditional services or the use of power to advocate for change. This results in a simple 2 X 2 table where different forms of practice can be located:⁵

⁵ Adapted from Hess (1998). Hess goes on to provide even further distinctions in how community work is carried out, but for the purposes of this discussion, we are presenting only this first analysis. Hess’s resulting observations, however, are discussed later in this paper.

Figure 1
Hess's Typology of Community Practice against Locus of Control

		Form / Style of Practice	
		Provision of Service	Power / Advocacy
Control	Internal to the Local Community	Locally controlled and determined services, e.g. Community Development Corporations, service centres with local Boards, community development	Community organizing, citizen / resident driven advocacy (I would also include social action here)
	External to the Local Community	Services provided by external sources, e.g., government, nonprofit organizations with Boards drawn from outside the local area	Advocacy by people external to the local area on behalf of residents, clients

Hess also assesses the classic definitions of locality development, social planning and social action posited by Jack Rothman (Rothman 1995). Hess suggests that Rothman's "social planning" (the marshalling of facts and determination of plans based on evidence) is a technique "...[that] does not really represent a method of change, but rather a task-specific function which many organizations all employ at various times." He also goes on to suggest that Rothman's "locality development" is really a combination of "community development" and "community building" (Hess 1999, 8-9).

d) Assets, Social Capital, Network Mapping and Capacity

In the 1990s, new thinking was brought into this dynamic mix of theory and practice. In 1993, John McKnight and John Kretzman published *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Towards Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* and later founded the Asset-Based Community Development Institute (ABCD).

McKnight's and Kretzman's approach is premised on a critique of conventional approaches to community work:

The first [path]... which begins by focusing on a community's needs, deficiencies and problems, is still by far the most traveled, and commands the vast majority of our financial and human resources. (Kretzman and McKnight 1993, 1)

What they term a deficit-driven approach to responding to community needs begins from the assumption that disadvantaged communities and neighbourhoods are troubled places characterized by long lists of unmet needs.

Once accepted as the whole truth about troubled neighborhoods, this “needs” map determines how needs are to be addressed, through deficiency-oriented policies and programs. Public, private and nonprofit human service systems, often supported by university research and foundation funding, translate the programs into local activities that teach the nature and extent of their problems, and the value of services as a solution to their problems. As a result, many low-income urban neighborhoods are now environments of services where behaviors are affected because residents come to believe that their well-being depends on being a client. They begin to see themselves as people with special needs that can only be met by outsiders. (Kretzman and McKnight 1993, 2)

This approach, they argue, leads to:

- Fragmentation of efforts to provide solutions
- Funding to service providers and not residents
- Negative impacts on local community leadership
- The perception that only outsiders can provide solutions to a community’s problems
- A deepening of the cycle of dependence
- A focus on individuals and not the community (Kretzman and McKnight 1993, 4)

Margaret Wheatley, rooting her observations in an analysis and understanding of complex systems, describes this deficit approach in a slightly different context, but the results are the same:

In Western culture, we’ve refined the practice of problem solving. We learned to identify and label the deficiency – here are the failing schools; these are the broken families; this is the abusive Corporation. We’ve developed squadrons of professionals trained to break down problems and their component parts, and then to resolve, reform and eradicate them. These are the well-intentioned social servants who are reengineering our schools to produce learning, our hospitals to produce health, our police to produce safety, our legal systems to produce justice. We approach problems one by one and invest in specialized institutions to deal with each of them...

Unfortunately, the proposed solutions that come from these institutions often have little to do with the people who live in the community; they have to do with the professionals who come to solve the community's problems. The citizens themselves become clients, needy people who are acted upon by wiser outsiders. (Wheatley 2011, 83-84).

To counter what they see as an approach and process that disempowers local areas, McKnight and Kretzman employ an asset-based approach to community that begins with a very different understanding of what a local community might be – a place full of untapped assets. They identify three categories of assets:

- Individual Assets: the gifts, capabilities, skills and talents of individual residents and, in recognition that every individual is gifted in one way or another, identifying and mobilizing these “assets” must include intentional engagement of those people who would traditionally be marginalized
- Citizens’ Associations: the formal associations that operate within a community (including churches, citizen organizations, cultural groups), even if loosely organized, have key connections and skills to tap into as community assets
- Formal Institutions: businesses, schools, libraries, educational institutions, hospitals, parks, service providers need also to be engaged in the community development process (Kretzman and McKnight 1993, 6 - 8)

They then outline three critical characteristics of an asset-based approach to community development:

- It begins with the assets already present in the community
- It is “internally focused,” i.e. “...the development strategy concentrates first of all upon the agenda building and problem-solving capacities of local residents, local associations and local institutions.”
- It will be highly “relationship driven,” i.e., constantly building and rebuilding the relationships between and among residents, their associations and local institutions (Kretzman and McKnight 1993, 9)

The “asset-based” approach to place-based community work dovetails nicely with the notion of building social capital in communities.

This asset-based approach intersects with literature that is focused on the notion of “social capital.” This term was first coined by Robert Putnam in his 2000 book titled *Bowling Alone*, in which he argues that “[Americans] have

become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbors, and our democratic structures.” In other words, there is a rapid decline in sense of community (The Saguaro Seminar, Harvard Kennedy School of Government 2013).

The Saguaro Seminar, for which Putnam is the lead investigator, defines social capital as follows:

The central premise of social capital is that social networks have value. Social capital refers to the collective value of all “social networks” [who people know] and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other [“norms of reciprocity”].

The term social capital emphasizes not just warm and cuddly feelings, but a wide variety of quite specific benefits that flow from the trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation associated with social networks. Social capital creates value for the people who are connected and – at least sometimes – for bystanders as well. (The Saguaro Seminar, Harvard Kennedy School of Government 2013)

Social capital, then, has an impact on information flows, norms of reciprocity (mutual aid), collective action and on building a broader identity (The Saguaro Seminar, Harvard Kennedy School of Government 2013)

This notion of social capital has had a significant impact on recent place-based community work, since it is at the level of “neighbourhood” or “local community” that social capital is expressed, lost and built.

However, there is recognition that it is not internal relationships across a local community alone that count, but horizontal and vertical relationships as well.

Through their analysis of the literature, the Social Planning Network of Ontario has identified three key strategies in the formation of social capital:

- Bonding strategies that build trust and cooperation among individuals and within communities
- Bridging strategies that break down barriers across groups and communities and enable collaborative action on shared objectives

- Scaling-up strategies that connect communities in collective action for social change and development at the policy and/or systems levels

(Social Planning Network of Ontario 2001)

It may be that it is vertical relationships, achieved through scaling up strategies that bring with them the most likely possibility of power differentials.

There may be no precise and uniformly agreed definition of social capital, but all definitions refer to some type of social network from which a benefit can be obtained by its members...[The] narrower view associates social capital with local community associations and the underlying norms (trust, reciprocity) that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit...A broader view of social capital recognizes its positive and negative effects by broadening the concept to include vertical associations, where relationships among members may be hierarchical and power sharing unequal... Coleman (Coleman, 1990) is explicit “A given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others.” (Bebbington 2000, 13)

In her review of the literature on neighbourhoods, Freiler notes that:

Despite having been described as “an analytical sack of potatoes,” social capital is influential and widely accepted as useful, in large part because it is seen as being as important to economic development as economic capital is (Kearns 2004). Social capital refers to “...those stocks of social trust, norms and networks that people can draw upon to solve common problems. Networks of civic engagement, such as neighborhood associations, sports clubs, and cooperatives, are an essential form of social capital, and the denser these networks, the more likely that members of a community will cooperate for mutual benefit.” (Sirianni and Friedman 2013)

The dimensions of social capital can include: empowerment (people feeling listened to); participation (people taking part); associational activity and common purpose (people cooperating with each other); collective norms and values (people sharing common values and norms of behaviour); and trust (people feeling that they can trust their neighbours and organizations in their community) (Forrest 2003).

(Freiler 2004, 11)

Building social capital has increasingly become seen as a critical promising practice in place-based community work.

The term social capital is very similar to Kretzman's and McKnight's argument that asset-based community development must, by definition, be strongly "relationship-driven."

While not always identified as "social capital" in the literature, this notion of relationship has become a critical part of promising practice.

Place, then, is more than a matter of geography; it involves a conceptual shift as well, a re-focusing of attention from the parts to the relationships among them. Underlying ANC's (Action for Neighbourhood Change) work has been a focus on how diverse groups and processes at play in neighbourhoods relate to one another, and how they can be linked most effectively to achieve the goals of local residents. (Leviten-Reid 2006, 5)

It is also worth noting that "scaling up" may not, in fact, be a useful way of approaching the issue of sharing successes or "best practices" or even coming together to achieve larger system goals. Margaret Wheatley challenges the notion of "portability" and focuses on "scaling across" from community to community (the bridging that SPNO has identified) when she asserts that:

...what these many success stories revealed is that change happens differently than many of us imagine. It doesn't happen from top-down support, or elaborate plans, or from the best-practice or franchise model. It happens as small local efforts create and develop solutions that travel freely through networks of relationship. Each community works from the same principles, yet what manifests from local ingenuity are designs and innovations that look very different and that are beautifully adapted to work well in their own environment. (Wheatley 2011, 38)

Network mapping is an additional tool that can facilitate building social capital in communities.

Network mapping is a process through which the networks in an area are physically represented as a series of nodes (circles) and connectors (lines representing relationships) on a network map. The map identifies nodes and shows the connections between them. Within this, along with regular nodes and clusters of nodes, one can have more prominent nodes that are hubs (nodes with many direct connections that quickly disperse information), nodes as brokers (connecting otherwise disconnected parts of the network and serving as liaisons) and nodes as boundary spanners (connecting two or more clusters of nodes) (Krebbs and Holley 2006).

Krebbs and Holley identify five key principles that inform and shape networks:

1. Birds of a feather flock together: nodes link together because of *common attributes, goals or governance*.
2. At the same time, *diversity* is important. Though clusters form around common attributes and goals, vibrant networks maintain connections to diverse nodes and clusters. A diversity of connections is required to maximize innovation in the network.
3. Robust networks have several paths between any two nodes. If several nodes or links are damaged or removed, other pathways exist for uninterrupted information flow between the remaining nodes.
4. Some nodes are more *prominent* than others – they are either hubs, brokers, or boundary spanners. They are critical to network health.
5. Most nodes in the network are connected by an indirect link in the network. A-B-C-D shows a direct link between A and B, but indirect links between A and C and A and D. Yet, the average path length in the network tends to be *short*. There are very few long paths in the network that lead to delay and distortion of information flow and knowledge exchange (Krebbs and Holley 2006, 4).

They go on to note that unmanaged networks tend to lead to small and dense clusters that work against “new ideas and innovation.” From a community building perspective, then, they suggest that networks be intentionally managed (and tracked) using a four stage process as a guide: identifying existing scattered fragments, supporting the emergence of a single hub and spoke arrangement, building a multi-hub small-world network and linking to the periphery in a core-periphery set of linkages (Krebbs and Holley 2006).

The idea of mapping may sound odd, but it can be a powerful tool. The image on the following page shows a network map that was created to capture a network that has been developed in relation to place-based community work supported by staff from Community Development Halton.

The Orton Family Foundation identifies eight contributions to community work that a network mapping process can offer:

- Identifying new connections and relationships
- Increasing knowledge and innovation by casting a wider net
- Allocating scarce resources more strategically
- Speaking visually and demonstrating the process

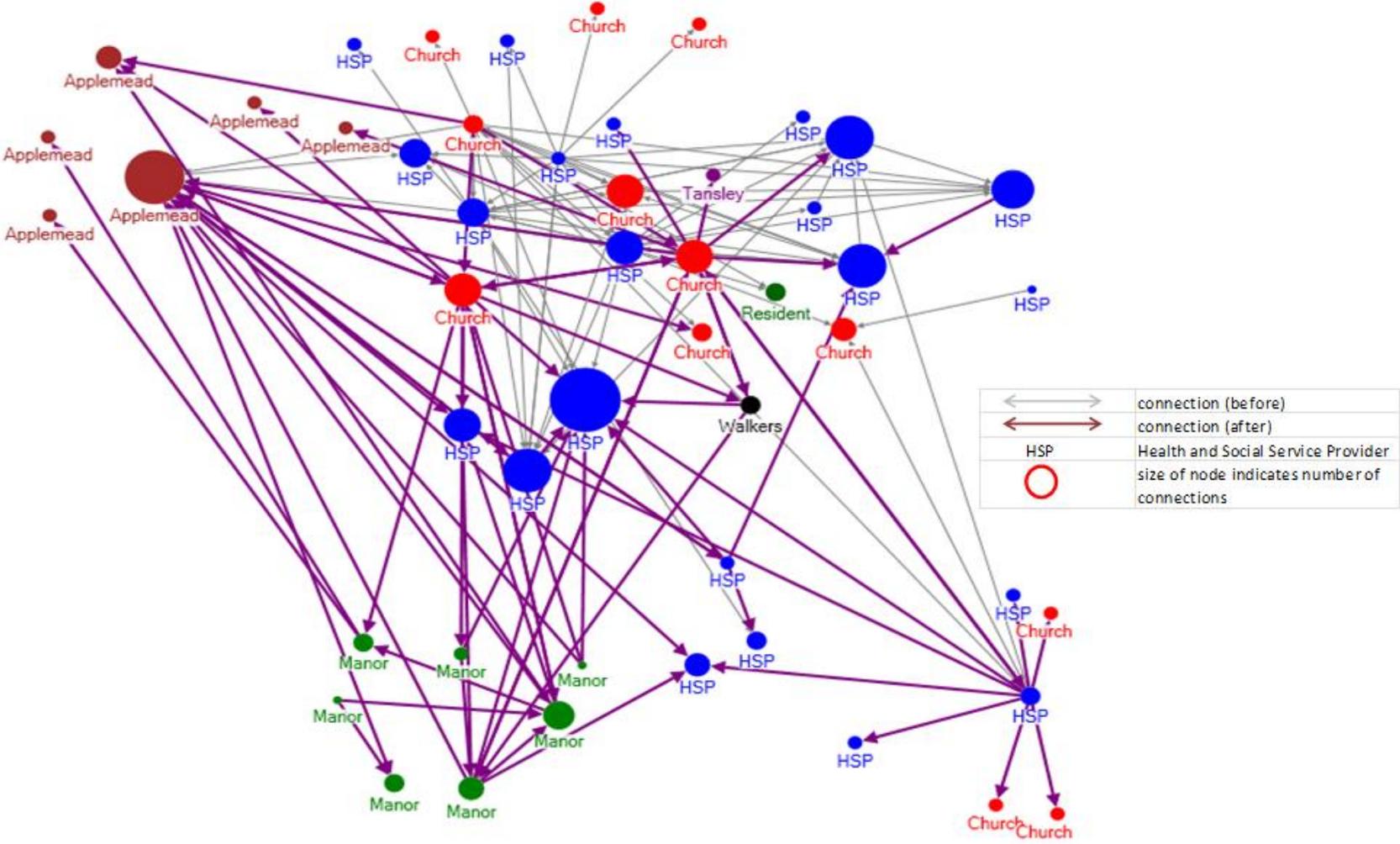
- Identifying new stakeholders
- Uncovering the reach and influence of your project team's networks
- Identifying key communications channels
- Identifying critical gaps in outreach strategy

(Orton Family Foundation 2013, 3).

The attention to social capital has received additional impetus and greater viability from the emergence of network mapping as a useful tool for community-building. Network mapping is an emergent tool that can facilitate the identification and nurturing of social capital and as communities build their social capital, begin the process of building community capacity.

On the following page is an example of a social network map depicting the social connections in North Burlington. The grey spokes indicate connections that were initially present, prior to engaging the community in neighbourhood development. The bottom left corner of the map is noteworthy in that the connections in the Manor, a small housing development in North Burlington, were not connected initially. The purple spokes indicated connections that had developed after neighbourhood development initiatives had been underway for nine months to one year's time. Clearly, the number and breadth of connections had dramatically increased, indicating strong social network connections.

North Burlington Network



Prepared by Community Development Halton

e) Community Capacity

As is the case with other terms in use in the literature, there are a variety of definitions for community capacity and capacity building. In a handbook produced in 1999 for Human Resources Development Canada, Frank and Smith defined capacity as:

...the ways and means needed to do what has to be done. It is much broader than simply skills, people and plans. It includes commitment, resources and all that is brought to bear on a process to make it successful. Most often, capacity is referred to as including the following components:

- People who are willing to be involved
- Skills, knowledge and abilities
- Wellness and community health
- Ability to identify and access opportunities
- Motivation and the wherewithal to carry out initiatives
- Infrastructure, supportive institutions and physical resources
- Leadership and the structures needed for participation
- Economic and financial resources, and
- Enabling policies and systems

(Frank and Smith 1999, 10)

Social capital refers to the relationships in a community – social capacity refers to the ability to work together to get things done.

Mattessich, Monsey and Roy provide a shorter definition and refine the use of the term by referring to social capacity, which is: The extent to which members of a community can work together effectively.

This definition includes the abilities to:

- Develop and sustain strong relationships
- Solve problems and make group decisions
- Collaborate effectively to identify goals and get work done

(Mattessich, Monsey and Roy 1997, 61)

In an article focused on Comprehensive Community Initiatives, Kubisch remarks on the perhaps more important role they play in building social capital than on the services they provide:

Neighborhood transformation may depend less on putting into place a model of comprehensive neighborhood-based activities than on developing the

capacity of neighborhood residents and institutions to define and affect responses to local needs on a sustained basis. This is not to suggest that more and better programs, increased economic activity and opportunities, and improvements in housing and neighborhood conditions are unimportant. It suggests, instead, that these changes alone will be insufficient to achieve the kind of transformation distressed neighborhoods need. Unless local capacity is strong, programs of social services, housing, crime reduction, etc. will achieve only a fraction of their potential. (Kubisch 1996)

A critical question that someone wishing to undertake place-based neighbourhood work must ask then is the degree to which social capacity exists in that community. If the answer is that social capacity is low, then building capacity is a fundamental step in preparing the road to problem-solving.

f) Building Social Capacity and Readiness

In their excellent contribution to the literature, *Community Building: What Makes it Work*, Mattessich, Money and Roy deliberately focus on social capacity and building social capacity rather than on task accomplishment. In essence, they look at all the conditions necessary for citizens to effectively act together to achieve a goal that is part of their vision, but do NOT focus on whether that goal is achieved.

This runs counter to the broader literature in which goal achievement is often blended into discussions about the factors that helped citizens achieve a change – or not. Rarely, however, is readiness or lack of readiness identified as a contributing factor; instead, the assessment of success or failure to achieve a goal more often than not focuses on the efficacy of the strategies used to achieve the end result that citizens desired. Whether they were ready to undertake the work necessary to achieve it is rarely explicitly explored, even though elements of what could be termed “readiness” may be identified, e.g., lack of leadership, poor communications, etc.

The CDH team believes that the effectiveness of strategies to achieve a goal needs to be assessed against a different set of benchmarks and factors than readiness to act: questions such as who has power in the larger environment and who does not; the choice of strategies that citizens might make despite their readiness to seek a change; the openness of decision makers to meaningful citizen engagement; existing mechanisms for policy development and change; etc.

The readiness of citizens in a local area to take steps to achieve some sort of change is often implicit in the literature, but focused discussion is rarer. Mattessich’s, Money’s and Roy’s

discussion of community building is very helpful and they do cite a few other commentators who have made the same distinction. Based on their review of well over 500 evaluation studies of community building, they developed three essential lists: first, the characteristics of communities in which effective community building occurs; second, characteristics of the community-building process itself, and; third, characteristics of effective community building organizers (these last two inventories will be explored later.)

Communities in which effective community building processes had been carried out were identified as having:

- Community awareness of an issue
- Motivation from within the community
- Small geographic area
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Pre-existing social cohesion
- Ability to discuss, reach consensus and cooperate
- Existing identifiable leadership
- Prior success with community building (Mattessich, Monsey and Roy 1997, 14)

Ensuring communities are as ready as possible for community building to occur is a critical first step.

While the authors did not set these out formally as readiness indicators, they indicate that the more a community exhibits these characteristics, the more likely it is that community building efforts will be effective. The implications for practice from this set of factors is clear; where there is a gap between what is needed to be ready and actual community conditions, time and resources may well be required to assist the community to become ready for community building.

Building a sense of belonging to a caring community whether organized around a cooperative housing unit or a community center, requires certain skills and resources. **If these are lacking among the aggrieved group they will have to be acquired.** This is done through substantive achievements, such as developing an organizational framework for making decisions and taking actions, creating binding relationships, and developing leadership and learning skills for both maintenance and organized actions. (Pilisuk, McAllister and Rothman 1996) (emphasis added)

g) What Is Empowerment And Does It Have Limits?

The definitions of social capital and social capacity explored above clearly point to the ability for people working together to get things done as the critical defining element.

In places where disadvantage and a weak sense of community exist, the building of social capital is linked to the process of empowerment.

For such people [...those who have lived with neither the requisites for dignified existence nor the capacities to change their circumstance...] the primary organizing activity is the restoration of a psychological sense of power so they may renew shattered hopes for improvement of their conditions. Empower means "to increase one's capacity to define, analyze and act upon one's problems. Empower is a reflexive verb: groups and individuals can only empower themselves" (Labonte 1989). Strictly speaking, one cannot empower someone else and to assume otherwise would deny their capacity for choice. The underlying assumption in grassroots organizing is that to achieve social change one must first address this issue of psychological disempowerment. (Pilisuk, McAllister and Rothman 1996)

Empower means "to increase one's capacity to define, analyze and act upon one's problems. Empower is a reflexive verb: groups and individuals can only empower themselves.

Empowerment has both individual and group dimensions. As individuals develop a sense of self-efficacy, they develop ability at the individual level to make change in their own life and come together with others to share their experience. Building on Freire's concept of dialogue, (Freire 1968):

... then a collective self-efficacy emerges. Goals that were once learned to be external to the individual's control may be seen within the collective grasp (Pecukonis and Wenocur 1994). As successful action brings about desired change, the original needs that created the group may be diminished but the organizational skills and the feelings of empowerment remain. This encourages action for more far-reaching goals for social change. (Brown 1991)

In her attempts to define empowerment in relation to a specific group of people, in this case psychiatric survivors active in self-help groups, Chamberlin listed the following dimensions or characteristics of the process of empowerment at the individual level:

1. Having decision-making power
2. Having access to information and resources
3. Having a range of options from which to make choices (not just yes/no, either/or)
4. Assertiveness
5. A feeling that the individual can make a difference (being hopeful)
6. Learning to think critically; unlearning the conditioning; seeing things differently; e.g.
 - a) Learning to redefine who we are (speaking in our own voice)
 - b) Learning to redefine what we can do
 - c) Learning to redefine our relationships to institutionalized power
7. Learning about and expressing anger
8. Not feeling alone; feeling part of a group
9. Understanding that people have rights
10. Effecting change in one's life and one's community
11. Learning skills (e.g., communication) that the individual defines as important
12. Changing others' perceptions of one's competency and capacity to act
13. Coming out of the closet
14. Growth and change that is never ending and self-initiated
15. Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma

(Chamberlin 1997, 44)

Based on experience and the literature, these characteristics of empowerment, that do not need to exist all at the same time, can carry over to empowerment of groups, changing the "psychology" of groups that hitherto had been disempowered and disadvantaged. In an empowered community:

It is through the coming together, the forging of relationships and dialogue that empowerment of communities occurs.

...people have the feeling within themselves that they can act on their own behalf to be able to meet their physical, spiritual and psychological needs. Thus, insofar as community work is oriented to empowerment, it can be seen to have a profoundly personal dimension. (Lee 1994, 29-30).

In his essay for The World Bank's *New Paths to Social Development*, Bebbington crystallizes the dominant critique of empowerment as an approach to community development when he highlights the intersection of local communities undergoing social or economic development with the institutions and policy-making processes that exist in the larger world. He notes that:

...empowerment depends on the relationships, networks and organizations that give poor people access to decision making and through which they can leverage resources, influence policy, and challenge the power and organizations of elites. (Bebbington 2000, 11-12)

Indeed, although his focus is on international development, the CDH team would argue that Bebbington's comments strike a warning note just as applicable to impoverished communities in the developed world when he observes that:

...social capital can be used by social groups (such as elites) in ways that aggravate poverty... the social relationships that give particular groups privileged access to bureaucrats, decision makers (sic), and information on public policy and finances have often been used to capture the benefits of public programs and expenditures. As a result, the poverty-reducing effect of public action is minimal; perhaps negative. (Bebbington 2000, 18)

This point is critical and underscores the distinction made by Mattessich, Monsey, and Roy between community building and the successful attainment of goals by communities in which there have been space-based initiatives focused on community building. More pointedly, the degree to which decision-makers are prepared to make porous their processes and invite – or let – citizens and communities participate meaningfully in decision-making processes is, in no small part, a key determinant in the ability of citizens and communities to achieve their goals, dreams and visions.

When looking at the impact of Comprehensive Community Initiatives in relation to poverty reduction at the local community level, Gardner underscores this same point. He observes that the Comprehensive Community Initiatives that he reviewed did not produce many results in terms of their overall goal of poverty reduction:

If the goal is reducing poverty overall, then there is little evidence of success so far. But this may not be a realistic expectation – what Aspen terms a “theory failure,” as opposed to planning or implementation problems. Even the most effective and cross-sectoral of CCIs cannot reduce poverty unless the fundamental underpinnings of social and economic inequality are addressed. (Gardner 2011, 5)

Empowerment as a goal of the community-building process may be critical in terms of building a sense of efficacy, both for the individuals and groups involved. However, it is important to keep in mind that the intersection of place-based initiatives and the larger institutional, policy and decision-making environment in which they operate can be a critical limiting factor in what communities can achieve. Whether or not the changes sought by participants in community building processes will be achieved relates, more often than not, to the larger community's capacity and/or willingness to embrace these changes and the tactical choices that communities who have met "readiness" benchmarks make in their journey to achieve change.

h) Citizen Participation and Engagement

Today, the call for participation of communities in the planning and development of their own futures dominates the literature on place-based initiatives.

In the development of public spaces, for example, the Project for Public Spaces has developed a placemaking process that is defined as follows:

...Placemaking is a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design and management of public spaces. Put simply, it involves looking at, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work and play in a particular space, to discover their needs and aspirations. This information is then used to create a common vision for that place. The vision can evolve quickly into an implementation strategy, beginning with small-scale, do-able improvements that can immediately bring benefits to public spaces and the people who use them.

Placemaking capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, ultimately creating good public spaces that promote people's health, happiness, and well being (Project for Public Spaces n.d.).

A critical element in the placemaking process is the principle that it is the community that is the expert:

The important starting point in developing a concept for any public space is to identify the talents and assets within the community. In any community there are people who can provide an historical perspective, valuable insights

There is general agreement that resident participation is a critical success factor in effective place-based community work. Where there is disagreement is around the degree of control that residents should have.

into how the area functions, and an understanding of the critical issues and what is meaningful to people. Tapping this information at the beginning of the process will help to create a sense of community ownership in the project that can be of great benefit to both the project sponsor and the community. (Project for Public Spaces n.d.)

The Caledon Institute also cites citizen engagement as a critical element in community building:

...ANC (Action for Neighbourhood Change) has begun to chart an approach to neighbourhood revitalization distinguished by its emphasis on the central role played by neighbourhood residents ...In fact, a primary purpose of ANC's first phase was to build a strong foundation for its work by engaging residents as key participants in leading and producing change in their neighbourhoods. (Leviton-Reid 2006, 3)

A number of Canadian municipalities, ranging from Toronto and Ottawa through to Hamilton and Guelph, to name but a few in Ontario alone, have also introduced neighbourhood-based strategies for change and revitalization. Resident engagement in these processes is cited in each case as critical. Many of these can be described as Comprehensive Community Initiatives (CCIs) and resident participation is a critical defining feature of such initiatives. For example, Gardner cites "...planning that is driven by community interests and perspectives..." as a key promise of Comprehensive Community Initiatives (Gardner 2011, 4).

Freiler, in her 2004 review of neighbourhood initiatives, cites citizen participation or engagement as one of the critical elements of what she terms a third option when focusing on neighbourhoods as a focus of attention in relation to anti-poverty work, one that "align(s) and coordinate(s) the goals of strengthening neighbourhoods with a broader, structural strategy to address poverty and inequality:"

One of the most important potential roles of neighbourhood-based initiatives is to nurture and promote the involvement, empowerment and civic engagement of local residents, particularly those people for whom these opportunities do not presently exist in other areas. Experience has shown that true community involvement takes time, draws on people rooted in their communities, and requires adequate funding. (Freiler 2004, 31).

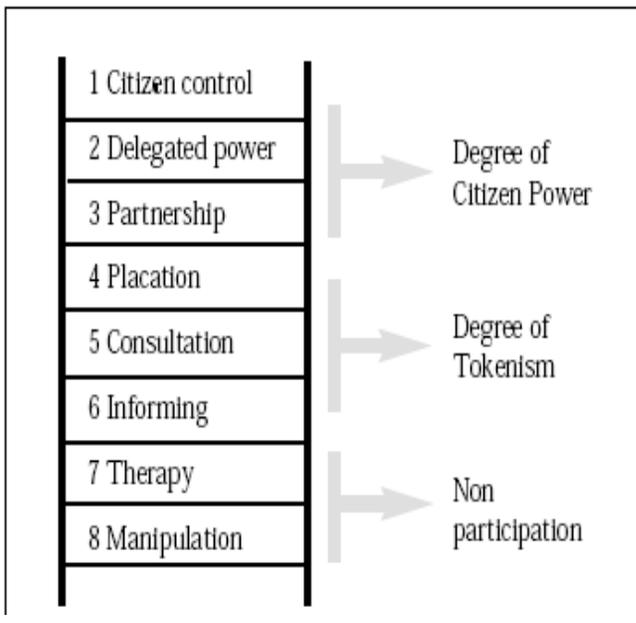
ANC was clear about the value of resident participation, which brings with it: local knowledge; leadership development; social capital; networks and; collective voice. (Leviten-Reid 2006, 11-12)

Experience has shown that true community involvement takes time, draws on people rooted in their communities and requires adequate funding.

Gardner elaborates on the potential purposes of collaborations in Comprehensive Community Initiatives by noting that:

One such purpose is supporting community capacities, resilience, and social capital – either in the sense of enhancing communities’ abilities to deal with the adverse effects of poverty and inequality, or in the stronger sense of **empowering communities to mobilize to change their adverse circumstances and constrained opportunities.** (Gardner 2011, 4) (emphasis added)

It is at the moment of “changing their adverse circumstances” that residents may collide with the limits of empowerment and participation. In fact, all citizen participation or resident engagement processes that have been offered or supported over the years by decision and policy-makers run up against the litmus test of citizen impact: how much weight is actually given to citizen perspectives when it is time for decisions to be made?



Sherry Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation (Arnstein, A Ladder of Citizen Participation 1969)

This is more than a rhetorical question. We have already seen that the intersection between community building and the ability to effect change is mediated by the openness of processes and institutions in the larger community and their responsiveness to community determined goals and dreams.

In her article, oft-quoted by others, *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*, Arnstein deals openly with the fact that citizen participation is about the distribution of power in our society.

Although this naked assessment may be unpopular, it is critical to understanding community work. She notes that:

... [citizen participation] is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out. In short, it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society. (Arnstein, A Ladder of Citizen Participation 1969, 216)

Arnstein indicates that her ladder of participation is intended to be provocative and lays out issues related to power clearly and succinctly. Her ladder suggests that as one rises on the ladder, the degree to which citizens have control over outcomes derived from the participation process increases.

In work funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 1994, Wilcox built on Arnstein's work and reframed participation in the context of a pluralistic society with competing interests and an array of stakeholders. Specifically, he reframes Arnstein's eight rungs on the ladder to five stances that characterize how power can be actualized in designing and implementing citizen participation processes. These are, in order of increasing power and control for citizens:

- Information
- Consultation
- Deciding together
- Acting together
- Supporting independent community interests (Wilcox 1994).

He notes that:

The ladder of participation model... suggests some levels are better than others. In this framework I suggest it is more of a case of horses for courses – different levels are appropriate in different circumstances. (Wilcox 1994)

He also acknowledges that “the ‘lower’ levels of participation keep control with the initiator – but they lead to less commitment from others” (Wilcox 1994).

Wilcox's *Guide* was designed for people planning participation processes and he is clear about critical factors such as power and control:

The initiator is in a strong position to decide how much or how little control to allow to others – for example, just information, or a major say in what is to happen. This decision is equivalent to taking a stand on the ladder – or adopted (sic) a stance about the level of participation.

Understanding participation involves understanding power: the ability of the different interests to achieve what they want. Power will depend on who has information and money. It will also depend on people's confidence and skills. Many organisations are unwilling to allow people to participate because they fear loss of control: they believe there is only so much power to go around, and giving some to others means losing your own. However, there are many situations when by working together everyone can achieve more than on their own. This is one benefit of participation (Wilcox 1994).

Within this discussion related to citizen participation, it is important to note that people more readily support a future that they themselves helped dream and create. Looking at large institutional failures to undertake change effectively, Wheatley goes so far as to suggest that the way we traditionally “do” change in fact kills creativity:

The assumption is that people do what they're told... People don't support things that are forced on them. We don't act responsibly on behalf of plans and programs created without us. We resist being changed, not change itself. (Wheatley 2011, 45)

From the perspective of how decision makers structure citizen participation, once a community has reached a state of readiness to begin to plan for and take action to achieve change, tactical choices become important. To a large degree, the processes that a community adopts in order to achieve a change will be determined by a number of things. Critical to the choices it makes will be where the locus of change is located:

- First, if the locus of the change that is sought is totally within the community and external resources or policies are not implicated, then there are few to no concerns about the way in which decision-makers in the larger community structure citizen participation and;
- Second, if the change that is desired does require changes in policies from external organizations or a realignment of resource allocation, communities need to

determine which avenues of participation are open to them and whether they can be leveraged to obtain the desired change or not.

An example here can be helpful. Residents in a poor neighbourhood want to make a playground's equipment safer. They convene meetings, talk to local merchants who are willing to donate materials and put a work crew together. They get the necessary permits they might require and hold a work weekend, erecting the new equipment. They cap off their efforts with an outdoor barbecue at the revamped playground. Other than necessary building permits, this has been an internally focused effort that has not required residents to engage in larger participatory processes.

Let us look at the same group of residents and assume there is no playground in their community. However, they have learned that the municipality has money in the capital budget for one new playground to go up somewhere in the community and that there is time set aside at a council meeting to hear delegations. The group of residents gets a petition signed by most neighbourhood residents and a small group is elected to make a presentation. They do so and are optimistic about the result. However, when the decision is finally made, they learn that the new playground is going into a new neighbourhood with single family detached homes that range in price from \$400,000 and up. They have used the participation processes that have been made available to them, but they are frustrated in their efforts. In a situation such as this, where a neighbourhood's future depends on outside decision-makers, experience may suggest that, in the future, they organize in a different way and through social action, put pressure on decision-makers.

It has been the experience of the CDH team that the language related to citizen participation, couched as consultation, information and opinion seeking, too often fails to identify the limits to participation. People are consulted, but, as Arnstein notes, there is "...no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account." Ruth Grier, a former Minister of the Environment in the Province of Ontario, put it quite bluntly in a CBC interview in 2009:

We need a genuine collaboration – not the kind of collaboration we have done in the past where we invite everyone to the table and get their opinion and then we do what we were going to do anyway... (Grier 2009)

These calls for more genuine participation – participation with an impact – were tested through the Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) initiative of Asset-based Neighbourhood-led Development.

Tensions around the extent of resident involvement may also reveal underlying differences between community development processes and more conventional approaches to government and politics. More than one ANC [Action for Neighborhood Change] site perceived that the idea of substantial resident participation in shaping government policies and programs met with substantial resistance from some elected and nonelected officials...

On the other hand, at least in the case of some individuals, the issue may involve a more fundamental clash between approaches to governance and politics in terms of 'power over' rather than 'power with.' Whereas the community development perspective being used in ANC seeks to strengthen voice and involvement of residents in shaping neighbourhood affairs, partisan politics and top-down modes of government may be at odds with such inclusive processes. Some ANC participants have wondered about the extent of culture change required for more participatory governance to be embraced and supported. (Leviten-Reid 2006, 15)

This notion of "power with" versus "power over" is longstanding. People have explored this distinction in various ways. One author suggests that it is the difference between influence and authority, with authority being linked to hierarchy and influence being linked to non-hierarchical empowered groups of individuals who have come together. She also points out that there is a thin line between authority and influence and that groups need to be vigilant about this potential shift from influence to authority (Starhawk 1990, 9 - 10). Another way of conceptualizing this would be in how decisions are made, with "first past the post" and "majority rules" approaches aligning more with "power over" and "consensus building" aligning more with "power with." Again, Arnstein's ladder of participation moves up from the rungs from "power over" to "power with."

The result of decades of consultation, still only on the middle rungs of Arnstein's ladder of participation, in which citizen views are heard but not necessarily taken into account is cynicism. Much of this could be reduced if the sponsors of citizen participation processes adopted transparency about how information, input and feedback will be used in policy and decision-making.

Transparency from decision makers about the weight of resident input and/or the control that they actually have over decisions is critical but far too often not forthcoming, leading to some of today's citizen cynicism with participation and consultation.

The blend of comprehensive, coordinated service planning and provision characteristic of Comprehensive Community Initiatives adds the additional dimension of professional service deliverers being “at the table” with community residents in place-based initiatives that attach a strong value to increasing access to services. The Action for Neighbourhood Change experience indicated the value of “going slow and letting the community lead”:

Despite the short time frame of ANC’s first phase, sites agreed that it was vital to invest substantial time and effort in the engagement process. Building relationships with and among residents was considered to be the foundation for revitalization efforts. As suggested by the adage “Alone we go fast, together we go far” benefits from this investment will be felt long beyond the start-up phase. Moreover, by being transparent about the open-ended nature of the initiative and its reliance on direction from the neighbourhood itself, residents were given the space to gradually take ownership of the process. In order to allow such ownership to develop, it was important that ANC project teams be willing not to rush ahead but wait for residents themselves to push forward the process (Leviten-Reid 2006, 9).

However the concepts of “power with” and “power over” are understood, it is important to keep in mind that how and with whom decisions are made are critical elements in place-based community work. Broad, multi-stakeholder participation at one table with residents as only one stakeholder group,

Building relationships with and among residents is considered to be the foundation for vitalization and revitalization efforts.

while it may encourage citizen participation, may tend to dilute resident control of decision-making. Achieving clarity about who makes decisions is a critical element in the evolution of those processes and needs to be clarified for all stakeholders involved.

Based on what the CDH team have learned from the literature, it is possible to identify promising practices in place-based community work.

SECTION TWO: Promising Practices

In *Community Building: What Makes it Work*, Mattesich, Monsey and Roy identified characteristics of what this author has called readiness in relation to community building. So, too, do they identify a set of characteristics of community building practice present in successful community building efforts, what we have termed place-based neighbourhood work.

They identified a number of factors that associated with success in community building:

- Widespread participation
- Good system of communication
- Minimal competition in pursuit of goals
- Develop self-understanding
- Benefits to many residents
- Focus on product and process concurrently
- Linkage to organizations outside the community
- Progression from simple to complex activities
- Systematic gathering of information and analysis of community issues
- Training to gain community building skills
- Early involvement and support from existing, indigenous [local] organizations
- Use of technical assistance
- Continual emergence of leaders, as needed
- Community control over decision-making
- The right mix of resources

(Mattesich, Monsey and Roy 1997, 15 - 16)

In looking at this list of the elements of successful community building processes, it is clear that there is a wide range of activities that could be used that would align with them. For example, there are many communications tools, strategies and methods that could be used to achieve a good communications system; there are a variety of ways that technical expertise can be made available to residents and; there are many ways that a profile of a community can be developed.

From the literature, there appear to be three other major dimensions or tensions that assist in shaping the most promising practices in place-based community work.

a) Place-Based Versus People-Based Activity

The analytic distinction between place-based versus people-based initiatives has been an important theme in the literature. The CDH team believes this distinction derives from a narrow definition of “place” that is confined to physical locale and the built and natural environments in that locale. A richer definition of place that acknowledges not only physical locale but the rich web of social and economic interactions that arise in that place avoids this distinction. Indeed, community work that is informed by attention to all aspects of place – social, economic, spiritual and physical - is open to the largest potential in terms of solution seeking. Freiler makes this point when she calls for approaches that bring together place-based and people-based approaches. In fact, Comprehensive Community Initiatives are largely focused precisely on blending strategies that represent investments in people but that are targeted to specific communities (Freiler 2004). She also notes, however, that place can incorporate neighbourhoods, or cities, or even larger areas such as regions. Clarity as to the place is critical as is resident definition of what constitutes their community.

Place must incorporate both physical and social dimensions and the definition of residents as to what constitutes their community is essential.

Comprehensive Community Initiatives, in particular, can focus on larger places than what we might know as neighbourhoods. The Vibrant Communities initiative in Canada, for example, is focused on cities and incorporates broader representation and sets of interests than the neighbourhood or local community. We therefore see groups such as the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction included as Vibrant Communities sites, aiming to act as a broad collaborative effort that spans the community as a whole.

The Tackling Poverty in Hamilton initiative is built on bringing people from many different walks of life together to address Hamilton’s most pressing problem.

Hamilton has committed to a collaborative approach because no one sector has the solutions; no one group can tackle poverty alone...

Funding to support the planning phase has been provided by Hamilton Community Foundation and the City of Hamilton, along with three donations from private sector members of the roundtable: Dofasco, Pictorvision and Turkstra Lumber. In kind resources have also been donated by the Social Planning and Research Council, Wesley Urban Ministries, City of Hamilton and Hamilton Community Foundation (Hamilton Poverty Roundtable n.d.).

Simultaneously, we also see support for neighbourhood strategies such as Hamilton’s Neighbourhood Action strategy focused on neighbourhoods identified as meeting a certain set of criteria related in part to social indicators.

Determination of place is critical. The experience over the years with professionally led neighbourhood interventions, while it appears to have increased access to services, has done little to build the social capacity of local areas.

Given our definition of place as a physical location that includes a rich web of social and economic relationships, it is also important that place-based work ensure that residents of an area have the opportunity to define the boundaries of their own community.

b) Professional/External Versus Resident/Internal Control

The history of place-based community work suggests that, over time, resident engagement has come to be viewed as a critical promising practice. The phrase “resident engagement,” however, is vague and begs the question: how much control should residents actually have in planning and implementing change for their community?

In fact, in Mattessich, Monsey and Roy’s list of the features of the most successful community building processes, there is only one element that does not have any flexibility about it. In other words, community-building processes in which there is community control over decision-making are more likely to succeed than those that do not.

What is less certain in the literature, particularly with regard to disadvantaged communities and the notion of pluralistic communities and political systems, is the degree of resident power and control that current practices support. Some initiatives, by the very nature of them being collaborative efforts (some CCIs such as the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction) come to mind in this regard. Comprehensive Community Initiatives may include residents, but normally as only one of many stakeholders.

Community control over decision making is critical.

One of the most interesting and successful community-building processes in the United States is the Dudley Street Neighbourhood Initiative (DSNI) in Boston, Massachusetts. It was initiated in 1985 by a Boston-focused private foundation that collaborated with a few neighbourhood associations to develop a broad community plan for what was a truly devastated inner city area. There was recognition of the need to engage the community early. At an initial large community meeting with 200 people present, plans for governance were shared with the community. The reaction was strong:

The pivotal moment of the meeting came after the presentation of the governance structure and board nomination procedure. Some residents angrily challenged the legitimacy of the proposed board in which only a minority of seats (4 out of 23) were specifically designated for residents...to some residents, the new Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative looked like the failed efforts of the past that made false promises in the name of a community that wasn't really represented...In Slotnik's words, "All hell broke loose" after Ricardo Millett finished the board presentation. "We don't see the community here!" was the common theme (Medoff and Sklar 1994, 53).

In this particular case, the proponents of the DSNI recognized that the resident reaction had a strong experiential and factual base to it and that they needed to respond. They did this by holding two straw polls at that meeting, through which it was agreed that "both the general membership and governing board [would] "be modified so as to ensure that 51% or more" of their members be residents from the core or secondary areas" (Medoff and Sklar 1994, 56). In the case of DSNI, residents continued to control the organization's activities, received significant funding and oversaw major projects. Control has always stayed in the hands of residents, with substantial support from hired staff, experts and professionals as required and requested.

In this regard, it is interesting that broader collaborative initiatives, such as Comprehensive Community Initiatives, can support more local resident-led activity. For example, the Hamilton Neighbourhood Action Planning process, sponsored by the City of Hamilton but aligned with the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction, puts residents at the centre of the planning process:

The majority of participants on the planning team and the chair of the planning team are residents of the neighbourhood (Neighbourhood Development Office, City of Hamilton 2011, 1).

As suggested earlier, resident-led and controlled initiatives may encounter real challenges when the changes they seek intersect with the larger community because changes in policy or resource allocation controlled outside the local community are required. We saw this with the political reaction to the Community Action Program in the United States in the 1960's, also observed in Leviten-Reid's discussion of Action for Neighbourhood Change (Leviten-Reid 2006), and we see it today whenever there are competing interests at larger decision-making tables. Generally speaking, it is those with power who are likely to see their interests met, not traditionally disadvantaged communities.

In such cases, choice of strategies becomes critical. Once a community has reached a stage of readiness to act to seek changes, they may find that it is structures and processes outside the local community that control policy-making or the allocation of resources necessary for those changes. Where external decisions do not align with resident goals, the horizontal and vertical bonding that mapping of networks helps pinpoint can be leveraged for building coalitions or exerting influence. Local communities can link with larger regional, provincial and national networks to seek policy changes or resource allocation. Alternatively, they can mobilize through community organizing and social action in the more classic community work sense.

Place-based neighbourhood work in which residents have control can have the potential for conflict with external decision and policy-makers. However, this does not necessarily have to be a bad thing.

In his analysis of Comprehensive Community Initiatives, Hess suggests that the classical community interventions of community building, community development and community organizing to achieve broader change should not be viewed as stand-alone activities, but should be employed as part of a continuum of strategies that are available to help neighbourhoods achieve their

goals. In particular, he notes the important contributions that community organizing / social action can make. He asserts that, since Comprehensive Community Initiatives are usually initiated as a collaborative dominated by professionals, funders, etc., the conflict usually inherent in community organizing (or social action) is viewed negatively.

There appears to be little explicit dedication in CCIs to seeing conflicts between interests as a point where the practice of organizing can advance the community's agenda – which was identified in the community building process – over constraints or road blocks that other interests may place on the initiative's success. Instead, conflict is viewed as pathological and interests for the collaborative are identified through consensus (i.e., communal) or through expert research into the community's needs (i.e., singular) (Hess 1999, 35).

Community organizing (or social action), as one of a number of strategies available to local communities, requires an analysis of power. Hess notes that:

Discussion about "empowerment" in CCIs often seems to preclude a more detailed discussion of power. Empowerment appears to be defined as efficacy in coping with the factors a community faces, and not about gaining control over these factors. "Systems reform" in CCIs refers to improving agency delivery and design. It does not refer to the larger systems of the local

and national political economy which organizing wishes to tackle. In other words, diagnosing ways to improve treatments or encourage voluntary action to cope with factors causing distress, and not directly confronting the origin of the factors, is key...Although the political needs of residents are recognized as part of the holistic approach of CCIs, rarely can an explicit discussion of power be found in the literature (Hess 1999, 36).

Thus, when community work is directed towards the most promising practice of resident-led or resident-controlled activity, the community animator may inevitably be opening the door to community organizing at some point along with the more internally focused activities of community building and community development.

c) Asset-Based Versus Deficit-Based Approaches

Mattessich, Monsey and Roy do not include asset-based work in their list of the characteristics of successful community building processes. Others, however, do.

Freiler, after her extensive review of the literature on neighbourhoods, includes the use of an asset-based approach as promising practice:

Policies that focus on the deficiencies of neighbourhoods do not work as well as community-based approaches that stress the assets and strengths (social capital) of neighbourhoods. It is therefore important to invest in community organizations as capacity-builders, not only as service deliverers (Freiler 2004, 31).

Since McKnight and Kretzman first set out the principles of asset-based community work (Kretzman and McKnight 1993), we have seen the emergence of additional theory and practice that aligns with and to some degree advances this thinking (i.e., work on building social capital and the use of network mapping and theory as tools to support the building of social capital in local communities.) Based on the literature and their experience, the CDH team believes that the use of an asset-based approach and the development of social capital represent promising practice in effective place-based community work.

d) Focusing In – Dealing With Symptoms Versus Focusing Out – Dealing With Root Causes

More often than not, the growth of complex, professionally driven services has led to the amelioration of some of the worst symptoms of disadvantage, but it is a downstream solution to upstream problems. The root causes of disadvantage are linked to much larger

systemic and structural issues that require remedies that lie outside the boundaries of local communities.

The CDH team's experience indicates that it is not an either/or situation and that place-based neighbourhood work can span both. Using promising practice, local residents can plan and implement solutions that ameliorate, if not totally solve, many of the pressing symptoms of disadvantage: unemployment, few to no services, crime and violence, poor nutrition and poorer health to name a few. As residents in an area come together, social capital is increased and social capacity is intentionally nurtured; the ability for people to critically analyze and locate their own situation within a larger social and structural context grows. At that point, working with others to achieve the desired systemic or structural changes becomes feasible.

SECTION THREE: An Approach to Building Neighbourhoods

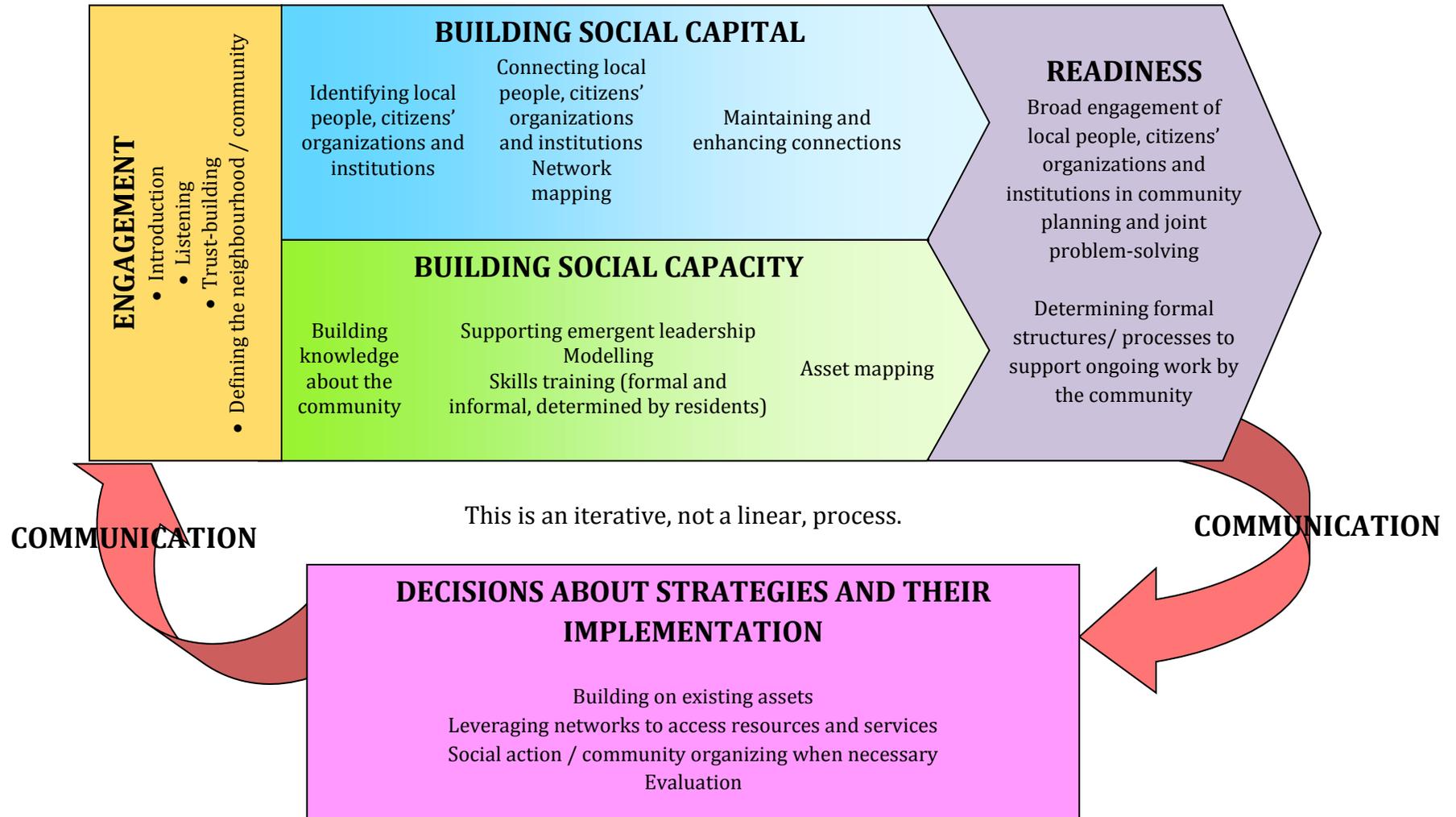
For those wishing to engage in effective place-based neighbourhood work, a recommended set of promising practices is outlined below. It has been informed both by the literature and experience. While it is constructed in a linear fashion, the CDH team suggests that the process needs to be dynamic and fluid, allowing movement back and forth as the situation demands. The final section of this paper will focus more explicitly, albeit briefly, on the characteristics and qualities of the community animateur that best support effective place-based community work.

The approach detailed here is based on the assumption that the impetus for community-building is coming from the outside. If the impetus comes from inside the neighbourhood, the approach would need to be modified by the community animateur who is supporting the activities or by the resident leadership associated with community revitalization.

The diagram on the following page lays out a process for place-based neighbourhood work aimed at vitalization or revitalization of disadvantaged communities. While it aligns with Asset Based Community Development as outlined by Kretzman and McKnight, it lifts out the critically important processes of building social capital and social capacity for particular attention. Kretzman and McKnight stress the importance of relationship building in their model and speak at length about the importance of making connections between and among community assets. The literature on social capacity and social capital and, in particular, the additional analysis of success factors carried out by Mattessich, Monsey and Roy, suggest that these processes be an intentional focus of place-based neighbourhood work to assist disadvantaged communities to get to the ready stage.

This paper is intended to be a “what to” NOT a “how to” manual. The reader wanting to know “how” to go about implementing this approach should consult some of the resources in the bibliography, specifically the work of Kretzmann and McKnight, the work of Margaret Wheatley and the work of Bill Lee. Having said that, a brief discussion follows the presentation of the approach on the following page.

An Approach to Building Neighbourhoods



The approach contains a number of elements. Each of these is briefly discussed below.

An Engagement Process: The neighbourhood animateur needs a period of time in which they introduce themselves to the community, get to know the community and begin the challenging process of building trust. A good place to start can be existing neighbourhood associations or institutions which can guide the animateur in terms of residents with whom it might be good to chat with. Seeking out opportunities to meet people informally is important: coffee shops, churches, libraries and laundromats are always good sites for this type of interaction. Canvassing door to door, preferably with a community member or two asking non-threatening questions can be a good strategy, but ideally after a small network of people have been engaged. These steps are also important if the person wanting to do something in the neighbourhood is a resident. Slowly, the animateur or the resident should be able to see certain issues identified by a number of people and may begin to identify emergent leaders. At some point, it is important to encourage these emergent leaders to talk to others until a consensus emerges regarding what constitute important issues. Eventually, and this will vary from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, people may agree that it is a good idea to convene a small group to explore some of what has been heard or, alternately, put on an event that will provide opportunities for neighbours to chat and come together.

A critical step in this process is encouraging the people who live in an area to define its boundaries. They may very well NOT correspond to the “official” definition of the neighbourhood, e.g., ward or planning district.

The animateur’s role at this stage is building trust and connecting people with one another. They should also be developing an informal inventory of individual and community assets and may wish to maintain an informal network map, both of which are processes that the community may later firm up through more formal processes. Once issues are identified and some emergent leaders have become involved, broader participation from the community can be encouraged. Once the animateur feels reasonably comfortable in the community, the work of building social capital, with its connections and relationships in the community and the nurturing of skills development or social capacity, can begin.

Building Social Capital is an iterative process of identifying and connecting people and organizations to each other. As those connections are made, the animateur has a responsibility to assist others in identifying and furthering such connections. As this work starts to mature, a formal network mapping session (or several spread out over time) can be useful because it not only engages people, but provides a strong visual cue as to where there are strengths and weaknesses in the community’s networks. Through network

building, community assets are uncovered and vital connections can be made that link community assets to those who can benefit from them.

Building Social Capacity: As the process of building social capital – connections – increases in scope, the opportunity to develop a good knowledge of the community will emerge. Sometimes this will be informal. In other cases, those who have engaged in the work to date may wish to do something more formal. They might wish to hold a community meeting or they might wish to do a community survey. At some point, developing a vision or concrete goal is important. If there is a critical and pressing issue, residents may wish to start mobilizing a community response to it. It may, in fact, even be an issue that first encouraged people to talk to each other in the first place. When assessing community readiness, the animateur will need to consider how to support and cultivate emergent leadership and how to ensure that residents can develop the skills they require to do the work without dictating to them what those skills should be. The easiest way to do this is through modelling although, as individual resident confidence and skills develop, they may well start defining their own learning needs and request something more formal.

The animateur also has a role in this process of ensuring that, should residents decide that external professional resources are required, the professionals coming into the community understand that they are acting as resources and not experts who will tell the community what it needs or what it should do.

Finally, the animateur has a role in opening dialogue with residents about community assets and encouraging a view of the community that is based on “look what we have to work with” rather than on “look how damaged we are.” At some point, this might lead to formal asset mapping. This activity should be easier to encourage than it might otherwise be due to connections that have already been made through the earlier and parallel work of building social capital.

Planning And Problem Solving: At some point in the process, the community will be ready (or at least believe it is ready) to take on issues and engage in problem solving. A vision or goal may have already been developed. If this has not occurred, encouraging conversations that permit a vision or goal to be identified is important. Nothing feeds success more effectively than success, so it is important for the animateur to be working closely with emergent leaders to determine community readiness. Where the animateur sincerely believes the community is not ready, they need to be able to communicate this without dampening enthusiasm or passion. A good explanation about why something may be premature may be all that is required and, if the community wishes to press on, the animateur has a critical role in assisting the community to learn from whatever happens. A

key role, then, for the animateur, is to encourage reflection that focuses on what has been learned rather than on who is to blame.

As a result, it is also better to start with “quick wins” that demonstrate how working together allows the community to achieve common goals.

As the concerns get bigger and more complex, the community will have to confront the issues of more formal organizational structures and processes. If there has been effective transfer of skills and learning and assets have been successfully mobilized, some of what constitutes good practice will have already been adopted. For example, communication lines are well understood by all; people have learned to work together respectfully; a tradition of consensus or majority rules will have been established; minutes of meetings are being kept; etc. As the community becomes more formally organized, the animateur’s role is to give advice, serve as a resource or assist others to find resources the community has identified that it needs and to keep encouraging the ongoing building of additional social capital and capacity. Ultimately, the community will decide what it wishes to take on, but the animateur has an important role to play as a resource person as this decision making process continues.

With regard to readiness, it will be helpful for the animateur to keep in mind the readiness factors identified earlier in this report such as a small geographic area, flexibility, adaptability and pre-existing social cohesion. These need to be considered particularly in the early days of the work.

In this regard, and keeping in mind the recommended approach for community work, it is worth focusing in the section below on qualities and skills of an effective neighbourhood animateur, community animator or neighbourhood organizer.

It bears repeating that the process being outlined here is iterative, flexible and dynamic. It is also emergent. It ultimately requires a community facilitator who can work within these challenging parameters.

Communication: Throughout all of these processes, the importance of effective, open communication that helps build trust cannot be overemphasized. Particularly today, the use of social media needs to be factored into communications as does the identification and use of communication vehicles that may be unique to the neighbourhood.

SECTION FOUR: Qualities and Skill Sets for Effective Neighbourhood Work

In much the same way that they identified the characteristics of communities where effective community building activities have occurred and what the characteristics of effective community building processes are, Mattessich, Monsey and Roy also identify the characteristics of effective community building organizers. They suggest that effective animateurs, referred to as organizers, should have:

- Understanding of the community
- Sincerity of commitment
- A relationship of trust
- Level of organizing experience
- Ability to be flexible and adaptable

(Mattessich, Monsey and Roy 1997, 16-17).

The key to effective community work in this approach is the ability to support and assist a hitherto unorganized community to discover and build strengths, connections and capacity so that it can dream, vision and build a new future for itself. While this may require connecting and accessing external resources at some point, these external resources need to be responsive to what the community says it requires, not to what the external resources think the community needs.

In the same way, an effective animateur, while sharing their knowledge and experience as a resource person, has a responsibility to “bracket” themselves, as does any effective facilitator. This does not mean animateurs need to abandon a commitment to their values and principles, but it does mean being transparent about these and encouraging the same in the community in which they are working.

The effective community worker knows how to “bracket” themselves and how to guide the community – not control it – by asking the right questions NOT providing what they believe to be the right answers.

Communities bring with them not just assets and strengths, but they often have embedded within them the potential for conflict in the form of oppressive behaviours and attitudes such as racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia and ableism. There may arise in the work challenging personalities who want, for whatever reasons, to undo the work of the community to date. Work in the community is about change which often brings with it difficult power struggles.

Part of working effectively within communities calls on the amateur to assist residents to be conscious of the values and principles they hold to be important and help them to name and deal with actions and behaviours that violate them. This is not easy work, but the modelling of appropriate behavior and a willingness to facilitate the identification and resolution of values-driven conflict is well worth the effort.

Concluding Remarks

Place-based community work has a long history. Over the years, it has taken different forms stemming from dynamic tensions between built environment and people-based solutions, professionally-planned and resident-driven approaches, viewing communities as deficit-ridden or as full of unrealized assets and a series of strategic and tactical choices ranging from building social capital and capacity and internally focused problem solving to social action that seeks a reallocation of resources and power.

There is a growing sense among many people that the large institutions that we have created over time to manage and regulate our daily lives have failed us. We see this in a diminishing confidence in and growing disenchantment with these institutions from which people feel increasingly alienated and which they no longer trust.

Perhaps we should not be surprised by this:

...people's capacity to self-organize is the most powerful change process there is...

All systems go through life cycles. There is progress, setbacks, seasons. When a new effort begins, it feels like spring. People are excited by new possibilities, innovations and ideas abound, problems get solved, people feel inspired and motivated to contribute. It all works very well, for a time.

And then, especially if there is growth and success, things can start to go downhill. Leaders lose trust in people's ability to self-organize and feel the need to take control, to standardize everything, to issue policies, regulations, and laws. Self-organization gets replaced by over-organization; compliance becomes more important than creativity. Means and ends get reversed, and people struggle to uphold the system rather than having the system support them. These large, lumbering bureaucracies - think about education, healthcare, government, business - no longer have the capacity to create solutions to the very problems they were created to solve (Wheatley 2011, 9 - 10).

Place, however, particularly the space we call our home, our community, our neighbourhood, holds the promise of being an antidote to the institutional juggernauts around us. It is here that we make connections and can find in each other the resources to effect meaningful change in our day-to-day world.

As noted earlier, it is important to keep in mind that the intersection of neighbourhood work initiatives and the larger institutional, policy and decision-making environment in which they operate can be a limiting factor in what communities can achieve.

Having said that, particularly for those communities that are impoverished, place-based neighbourhood work offers the promise of liberating people's capacity to self-organize to begin the process of creating their own futures. And this is an inspiring possibility.

Appendix A: Place-Based Neighbourhood Work – Roots and Current Practice

Historically, place-based neighbourhood work has usually been linked to attempts to reduce poverty and its impact on people:

Community development evolved as a response to a complex, interwoven set of issues... The movement's basic aim however, was to attack the roots of poverty in inner city America. (Berube 2012, 56)

Place-based initiatives, under a variety of different names, have been around for at least a century, taking different forms and using a range of processes. Understanding some of this history assists in grounding the theory and promising practices that are explored in this discussion paper.

a) The Settlement Movement

While histories of place-based work often acknowledge the settlement house movement, it is rare to see a discussion of the philosophical and values framework that informed the work of settlement houses, particularly as it relates to key values and principles that would later come to underpin at least some of the processes that we know today as place-based neighbourhood or community work.

The settlement house movement in North America was heavily informed by the British example of Toynbee Hall in London, founded in 1884.

In 1873 a Church of England curate, Samuel Barnett, and his wife, Henrietta rejected the easy option of a parish in an affluent area and came to St Judes in the East End of London, the Bishop commenting 'St Judes was the worst parish... inhabited mainly by a criminal population.'

The Barnetts worked tirelessly to address these problems but came increasingly to the conclusion that a truly radical approach was needed; the idea was to bring the most privileged – the future elite – to live in the poorest area of London; a privilege for which they had to pay. Through educating the future leaders and opinion formers the Barnetts hoped to change society for the better. (Toynbee Hall 2013)

Settlement houses introduced the notions of poverty having systemic roots and of the necessity for professionals to work side by side with people in a community.

This approach, later emulated in settlement houses in Canada, (e.g., Central Neighbourhood House in Toronto, founded in 1911 and St. Christopher House in Toronto, founded in 1912) and the United States, had a philosophical and analytic framework that significantly differentiated it from both the prevailing charitable approach and the legacy of the Poor Laws that characterized the patchwork relief efforts of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Believing that poverty resulted not necessarily from an individual's characteristics or dysfunction, but from root *societal* causes and living conditions, these individuals [in settlement houses] set out to work with others, and neighborhood residents themselves, to achieve change in the lives both of individuals and communities...

While they differed in their motivations, the early settlement leaders passionately believed that **education empowered individuals to improve themselves...** Settlement house founders also believed that the causes of poverty lay in a variety of social conditions, including lack of access to education, nutrition, health care, and housing, and debilitating industrial working conditions. Thus, the way to reverse poverty was to remedy those social problems in a concerted and holistic way, both individual by individual, AND through public policy change. **As a result, settlement house workers engaged neighborhood residents in advocacy to inform community and civic leaders about their living conditions and need for change.** (Edelstein and Rodriguez 2003) (emphasis added)

The settlement movement, therefore, undertook early forms of what would later come to be called capacity building and community organizing. Both elements in variants of place-based neighbourhood work today.

b) Urban Redevelopment and Urban Renewal

Over the 1930s – 1950s, place-based work in urban areas was dominated by physical planning and the provision of public housing. These approaches sought a built environment solution to the urban blight of poor housing that was, by definition, concentrated in neighbourhoods, in this case neighbourhoods of disadvantage. In the United States, in addition to an expansion in public housing, this took the form of urban redevelopment, later to be known as urban renewal, a process through which:

...a government agency staffed by experts took “blighted and slum areas” by eminent domain, demolished the buildings therein, and turned the properties over to private developers to redevelop...Needless to say, this top-down program had no mechanism for consulting those whose businesses and homes were to be taken. (von Hoffman 2012, 14).

The 1949 Housing Act in the United States persuaded:

...the downtown powers – the mayors, businessmen and civic leaders - [that] public housing would kill two birds with one stone: clear the awful-looking slums and provide upwardly mobile African Americans with a new lot in life. They overlooked that public housing only provided for a fraction of the houses that were demolished, and they hardly ever thought about helping the displaced find new homes. (von Hoffman 2012, 15)

In Canada, expropriation of lands was also the tool used to develop housing projects such as Regent Park in Toronto or to improve roadways and construct major civic projects such as Copps Coliseum in Hamilton.

Early place-based work in the 30s and 40s focused almost exclusively on replacing poor and deteriorating housing stock as part of what would become known as “urban renewal.”

During the 1930s, South Cabbagetown was one of Toronto's worst slums and as such was targeted by Toronto city planners for a grand urban renewal scheme called Regent Park (The History of Regent Park 2013).

The planned community of Regent Park was built in 1949 and was Canada’s first public housing project, followed by many more.

One of the challenges of a built response to the housing needs and conditions of people who were poor was that it rarely involved the provision of adequate amenities and services. Notes Daniels Spectrum, an artistic hub in today’s Regent Park, on its website:

...[the] area’s inward orientation isolated the residents within from the city outside – creating the physical, social and economic barriers the community would face for the next 60 years...By the late 1950s, Regent Park had expanded to 69 acres and a population of 10,000...According to Toronto Community Housing, community programs in Regent Park “were wedged into vacant apartments and townhouses, creating a patchwork of small service providers scattered across the community.” Unfortunately, **they did**

not support the community's needs. Though, a few small stores were “slipped into a low-rise building, [...] little employment and service came from so small a commercial area.” (Daniels Spectrum 2013) (emphasis added)

This focus on built environment can still be seen today in many place-based initiatives, although it is often balanced by a focus on the social, economic and natural environment as well.

Whether it was to provide improved housing or in some cases to make way for major civic projects, this focus on the built environment demonstrated the emergence of urban planning as a technical process focused on space and built environments, that was separate from a consideration of social issues. It set up a dichotomy between “place-based” and “people-based” solutions to issues. This distinction between “place” and “people” can be found elsewhere in the literature (see, for example, Freiler 2004 (p. 28), and von Hoffman 2012).

c) Place-Based Community-Organizing

Over the late 1930s and 1940s, another stream of response to community needs began to gain currency, specifically the use of community organizing tactics drawn from Saul Alinsky's work with unions that was transferred to inner city neighbourhoods in urban America. In Canada, over this same period, community organizing also emerged, e.g. in the Antigonish and the cooperative movements, although it is Alinsky's work that was to have the more significant impact on theoretical thinking about work with communities. Other organizers, some of whom were peers and colleagues of Alinsky, popularized these same tactics in organizing citizen response to the often deplorable housing and living conditions in inner city America. Place was critical as organizers focused on engaging the residents of impoverished inner city areas; their efforts began in the community.

The emergence of these community organizing techniques, formalized by Saul Alinsky in his foundational book *Reveille for Radicals* and known today as “social action,” set up a dynamic tension between citizens organizing for improvements on the one hand and professionals providing services that they determined were needed on the other. This tension still exists today; within social work, for example, there are both clinical (resolving individual problems) and structural (social issues) streams:

Social work is a profession concerned with helping individuals, families, groups and communities to enhance their individual and collective well-being. It aims to help people develop their skills and their ability to use their

own resources and those of the community to resolve problems. **Social work is concerned with individual and personal problems but also with broader social issues such as poverty, unemployment and domestic violence.** (Canadian Association of Social Workers 2013) (emphasis added)

d) The War on Poverty and the Expansion of Service Provision

Despite the focus on public housing and urban renewal, by the late 1950s and 1960s, it became abundantly clear to many observers that this had been no antidote to poverty in either Canada or the United States. Despite that, over these decades, urban planning continued to pit expressways, public housing developments and luxury buildings against old neighbourhoods. The more general activism of the 1960s spawned protests that:

Although not always successful, especially at first... gained champions who articulated the intellectual case for their cause. In her landmark book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Jane Jacobs... laid out a devastating critique of city planning that destroyed old buildings and neighbourhoods and built instead monolithic public housing projects and soulless civic centres (von Hoffman 2012, 19).

In the United States, President Lyndon Baines Johnson launched the War on Poverty in 1964, ushering in a complex set of programs and enabling legislation, including such initiatives as the Civil Rights Act, the Food Stamp Program, the Economic Opportunity Act and Neighbourhood Development Centers. Through the enabling Office of Economic Opportunity and programs such as Model Cities, place-based strategies with a more comprehensive approach that included significantly enhanced access to and provision of services were embraced. Many of these initiatives tended to be “top down” and were often about increased availability, better coordination and improved access to a variety of services. In general, then, the place-based focus to service delivery of these initiatives (and there were exceptions) was largely shaped by professionals external to the communities where services were deemed – by professionals – to be needed. For example:

The 1960s saw the rapid expansion of professionally planned and delivered services targeted at impoverished communities. This added an additional tension that continues to this day – determining the most effective blend of professionally-planned versus community-planned services in place-based neighbourhood work.

The fundamental concept of the 1966 Model Cities program was that focusing diverse programs and approaches in a concentrated area would

transform a slum neighbourhood and its low-income inhabitants... [the programs] relied on an integrated approach to uplift that would break down the barriers between different types of social services. In practice, however, effectively coordinating separate and often jealous government agencies often proved infeasible (von Hoffman 2012, 18).

Despite the War on Poverty placing the greatest emphasis on professional planning and delivery of services to disadvantaged communities, one program put meaningful resident participation squarely at the centre of anti-poverty work:

The program that generated the most intense controversies and came to dominate the politics of the early War on Poverty was the Community Action Program [CAP]. Envisioned as a foundation of the War on Poverty in 1964, the CAP offered the most promise for reform, but also the most potential for turmoil. Administered by the idealistic and aggressive new OEO (Office of Economic Opportunity), the implementation of the program proved to be the most contentious part of the War on Poverty. Most controversies involved the distribution of power to poor people that often bypassed traditional federal, state, and local bureaucracies. By requiring the “maximum feasible participation of the poor” in Community Action Agencies, the Economic Opportunity Act substantially elevated the role of marginalized people and set off a daring policy experiment (Germany n.d.).

The principle of “maximum feasible participation of the poor” set out as a principle in the Community Action Program meant that:

Some community action program agencies took this goal literally, threatening the local political status quo. In response, vexed southern and big-city politicians let [the administration] feel their ire in no uncertain terms. The Johnson administration in turn gave mayors more say-so in the Office of Economic Opportunity and Model Cities, but never entirely rejected the principle of participation. Hence, in contrast to public housing, urban renewal and highway construction, the antipoverty and community development projects of the 1960s enshrined, at least to some degree, a bottom-up approach (von Hoffman 2012, 20).

Canada also saw a major expansion in social programming over the 1960s and into the next decades.

While some Canadian anti-poverty initiatives were focused, as in the United States, on urban renewal and built environment solutions to poverty, much of the support to disadvantaged communities in Canada came not through place-based initiatives but through enabling social policy developments and revenue and tax point transfers between the federal and provincial governments. Prior to 1930, Canada had seen the introduction of Old Age Pensions, unemployment relief, Mother's Pensions and in Ontario, Workers Compensation, was introduced in 1914. Since World War II, there was growth in provincial government supports to people in need through a variety of social assistance programs and regulatory regimes. Post-1940, Canada saw an expansion in universal programs such as Unemployment Insurance, Family Allowances and the Canada Pension Plan. In 1966, the adoption of a cost-sharing formula for social programs including income support was codified through the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) (since replaced by the Canada Social and Health Transfer and later by the Canada Health Transfer and Canada Social Transfer).

These government initiatives had been paralleled by the growth of charitable and third sector service providers and, not incidentally, the growth and professionalization of the social work profession. When CAP was introduced in 1966, a period of sustained service development and provision was ushered in until the 1980s. However, the introduction in the 1990s of significant expenditure cuts, by both the federal government and the Harris government in Ontario, ushered in a new era with deficit reduction becoming the primary mantra of governments at all levels (see, for example, The Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services 2012). The long upward growth in service expansion experienced over the 1960s and 1970s has slowed, with anomalies here and there. Throughout all these decades, however, the intractable issues of poverty and disadvantage have remained.

e) Citizen Action

The 1960s and 1970s also ushered in an era of profound social upheaval. In the United States, the expanded, more comprehensive service provision efforts ushered in through the War on Poverty came face-to-face with a series of civil protests over living conditions, lack of jobs and opportunities and other troubling concentrations of inequity in urban areas, some of which turned

The 1960s and 1970s saw a revitalization of citizen and direct action as the anti-war, civil rights and feminist movements swept across the North American continent.

violent. For example, Watts in Los Angeles and Detroit. There also emerged a set of social and political movements: the civil rights, the anti-war and the feminist movements. The combined energies and experiences of these movements both popularized direct action and, particularly where they became violent, exposed the structural inequities and racial tension in American society.

The Canadian experience with direct action over this same period was generally less dramatic, a notable exception being the rise of separatism in Quebec and the October Crisis in 1970. However, social activists were influenced by what they saw happening to the south. Although less well known, Canada does have a history of direct action, as evidenced by the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. The social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the community organizing experiences they ushered in brought important lessons about citizen engagement.

In the United States, from the mid-sixties onward, along with significant investments from city and federal governments, the private sector, particularly private foundations, began recognizing the benefit of revitalized neighbourhoods. Often joining up with government, they also began to make significant investments in local community and neighbourhood groups. This was usually through investment in Community Development Corporations, with a commitment to place-based neighbourhood development and usually with a strong services access and provision component. Today, the scope of private investment in community development projects in the United States far outstrips private funding in Canada through heavily capitalized philanthropic organizations such as the Ford Foundation. Although Federal government interest had stagnated, in the 1990s Freiler, citing Gittell, notes that:

After a 20-year gap in federal urban revitalization policy, the interest in neighbourhoods and urban policy was revived through President Clinton's introduction of the Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Communities Program in 1993 (Gittell et al, 1998).

In America, since the 1980s and more specifically in the 1990s, despite bumps along the road, there has been significant support for the development of more comprehensive place-based development and planning, processes that have incorporated citizen engagement (and in some cases citizen control of the local community development body or process) and an often robust mix of physical, social and economic planning activity. Von Hoffman refers to this approach as Comprehensive Community Development (von Hoffman 2012, 40). More recently, this approach has been supported by both government and philanthropic organizations who have injected the notion of measurable impact against which investments can be assessed.

Over the late 1990s and 2000s, place-based community work has seen a resurgence of interest, but it tends to differ from previous approaches with an emphasis on multi-sector coordinated activity that brings all stakeholders to the table, including professionals and residents.

In Canada, over the 1970s and 1980s, there was also support for place-based initiatives with a mixed commitment to both redevelopment of housing, sometimes in mixed income developments and an improved access to an array of social services. Significant government interest in place-based community work, however, lost its profile and priority and, instead, community-based development was often undertaken by nonprofit organizations such as the YMCA and Social Planning Councils. However, over the 1990s and more so in the 2000s, there has been resurgence in interest from governments, United Ways and private funders in place-based practice focused on communities of disadvantage. We have seen the emergence of initiatives such as Vibrant Communities, with a strong poverty reduction agenda, out of the collaboration of the Tamarack Institute, the Caledon Institute and the J.W. McConnell Foundation. A wide number of municipalities have embraced place-based approaches to fighting poverty and/or improving quality of life, e.g. Ottawa, Winnipeg, Guelph, Toronto and Hamilton to name a few.

What distinguishes many of these more recent place-based approaches has been the level of coordination across services and sectors on which they base their work. In most cases, while they may be initiated by professionals, they often bring community engagement or citizen participation into the process. These most recent approaches to place-based work are known as Comprehensive Community Initiatives (CCIs.)

f) Comprehensive Community Initiatives (CCIs)

Hess, based on American experience, describes CCIs as:

....attempts by a variety of local actors to coordinate the work of community-based and government agency-based services and projects to offer more comprehensive treatments to social problems than the fragmented programs of the past. Furthermore, CCIs strive to increase the capacity of service and development providers by increasing the linkages between programs within a community to external actors and thus raising the number of opportunities local projects have for taking action. In addition, CCIs aim to increase the social capital within distressed communities including developing a strong resident vision for and participation in these various projects (Hess 1999, 5).

In Canada, CCIs have also emerged over the last decade or so in response to deep-seated issues such as poverty or homelessness. Gardner defines them as:

... bring[ing] together a wide range of service providers, people with lived experience, community leaders, and other stakeholders to build broad

collaborations to address the roots of local problems in their specific communities (Gardner 2011, 1).

g) Assessing Impact

In Freiler's 2004 analysis of neighbourhood initiatives completed for the City of Toronto's Task Force on Strong Neighbourhoods, she undertook an analysis of the literature on the impact of neighbourhood focused initiatives up until that point and found that the effects, as discussed in the literature, were mixed. In some cases, there were improvements in important social indicators and, in others, this was not the case. She concluded that:

...the importance of neighbourhood effects research should be neither exaggerated nor discounted. Knowing whether there are neighbourhood effects and how they operate may not be as important as we think since there are, arguably, other reasons for focusing on neighbourhoods or area-based initiatives more generally. According to Lupton (2003), these include: ensuring a fairer distribution of resources; piloting new approaches to service delivery or community development; having a greater impact by focusing activity; increasing people's confidence and capacity to participate in the community; and promoting social cohesion and 'bottom up' approaches to neighbourhood revitalization (Freiler 2004, 21).

Funders and policy makers in Canada and elsewhere, concerned about ensuring that investments make a difference in people's lives, continue to see place-based initiatives focused on communities of disadvantage as worthwhile, but have increased their interest in performance measurement. Increasingly, projects and initiatives are being tasked with measuring their impact. In this regard, definitions of vibrant or healthy communities have been developed and indicators determined that would permit the tracking over time of impact.

Early assessment of the impacts of CCIs on poverty and other elements of disadvantage were mixed, and, as a result, those supporting CCIs as a way of investing in anti-poverty work have increased their interest in measuring impact or performance.

It is here that place-based initiatives intersect with the body of literature on performance measurement, outcome measurement and the social determinants of health. As we better understand the role of social factors such as poverty, poor housing, attachment to the labour force and early years experiences in shaping individual and population-based outcomes, the interest in measuring impact against these indicators grows. The results are mixed.

At their core, these comprehensive initiatives try to tackle long-standing disparities in housing, employment, education, and health caused by public policy decisions, market forces and failures, and patterns of discrimination. Yet overcoming these inequalities has proven to be difficult. In some cases, place-based initiatives have led to measurable improvements; in others, efforts have struggled, failing to significantly “move the needle” on the challenges associated with deeply entrenched neighbourhood poverty. (Cytron 2010, 3)

Furthermore, evaluation of comprehensive community development initiatives (what we are calling Comprehensive Community Initiatives) in the United States, indicates that measuring impact is not a straightforward task: the processes of CCIs can take up to a decade to yield significant results and there are disagreements in the evaluation field regarding important methodological and process issues (Dillman and Peck 2012).

We can see that over the last century that place has often been a focus for work with disadvantaged communities, but its currency as a key focus for Canadian policy makers fell off in popularity over the 1980s and 1990s. Why this may have occurred and why “place” may have re-emerged in the 2000s as a priority is of some interest.

h) Why Did Place-Based Activities Fall Off Our Radar for Two Decades?

In undertaking this review and research, a considerable amount of time went into trying to track down accounts of why place-based activities fell “off the radar” of funders and policy makers in Canada over the 1980s and 1990s. In fact, place-based activity really did not disappear, but it would be fair to say that it became a small locus of activity within a social policy and social services field that experienced significant growth until the massive budget cuts introduced by Finance Minister Paul Martin in 1994 through 1996.⁶ It is important to

For some 2 decades, place-based community work diminished in importance to governments and funders in Canada. Reasons for this might include: the professionalization of social work; changing demographics; the impact of increased demands for accountability; the challenge of making the case for preventative programming, and; back lash against the social action which such work can lead to.

⁶ Place-based activity in the United States moved ahead in this same period, but it was through the development of intermediary lending organizations and social investment through businesses and private foundations and philanthropists that much of this growth was supported; housing and economic development activity was often at the centre through the rapid growth of Community Development Corporations.

take a moment or two and ask why this was the case and why place-based activity is experiencing resurgence in popularity today.

While this discussion is speculative, in piecing this puzzle together through conversations and interviews with life-long community workers and activists, the CDH team has identified several distinct but inter-related factors that may have contributed to this rise and fall of community work: the professionalization of the social work profession; changing demographics; the growth in demands for accountability from service providers linked to the emergence of evidence-based policy and decision-making in other disciplines and its “spill over” into human services; the challenge of making the case for preventative services, and; the backlash in reaction to political activism that emerged in some place-based community action.

The Professionalization of the Social Work Profession

As noted previously, following World War II, social work underwent a gradual professionalization culminating in Ontario with the establishment of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) on August 15, 2000. This was the result of intensive lobbying work by professional social workers over many years. As OCSWSSW explains on its website:

Regulation of a profession defines the practice of the profession and describes the boundaries within which it operates, including the requirements and qualifications to practise the profession. The primary mandate of any regulatory college is to protect the public interest from unqualified, incompetent or unfit practitioners.

Regulation brings credibility to the profession. Practitioners of a regulated profession are subject to a code of ethics and standards of practice (The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers n.d.).

Social work is defined by the College as:

... a profession concerned with helping individuals, families, groups and communities to enhance their individual and collective well-being. It aims to help people develop their skills and their ability to use their own resources and those of the community to resolve problems (The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers n.d.).

Despite the acknowledgement of the importance of the community as a focus for practice, the profession tends to be dominated by practice focused on individuals and families and not communities.⁷ With regard to community work, while practitioners who focus on individuals and families often engage in social justice issues through advocacy on behalf of and sometimes with their clients, it is rare to see these practitioners extend advocacy into broader systemic change work.

In fact, a cursory (albeit anecdotal) look at people engaged in community and place-based work from the 1970s on in the Hamilton, Toronto and Halton regions, for example, suggests that it has been populated by many people who are not social workers. A look, for example, at the staff of many social planning councils, which engage routinely in place-based work, indicates a rich mixture of academic backgrounds that includes sociology, political science, geography and the humanities.

So, while the community engagement and systemic/structural critique that characterized the early work of settlement houses helped inform the development of social work in its early years as an emergent profession, it is probably fair to say that today community work is the “poor cousin” to individual and family practice.

Social work has been influenced by a humanist liberal approach that emphasizes caring for the individual:

...the humanist liberal approach ...suggests that while innate evil does not exist in any one group, there is also no group composed of people who are equal in every respect. The systems in which we live are stressful. The weaker members will not be able to cope and become casualties who...must be cared for, cured or protected. The emphasis in this approach is clearly on the individual (Lee 1994, 5).

This contrasts with a more critical perspective that suggests:

Experiences like poverty or racial or gender discrimination are by their very nature destructive to human development and render their victims alienated

⁷ While a search for research on the career paths of social workers was conducted in order to determine the proportion that entered some form of clinical practice (focused on individuals or families rather than communities), no such research was found. However, a review of the Service Canada discussion of the outlook for employment of social workers supports the suggestion that social work professionals tend, primarily, to be employed in some form of individual or family work and not in the policy and structural issues more likely to be associated with community work. (Service Canada 2013)

and unable to deal ably with their environment. The economic system and the acquisitive social relationships produced by Capitalism and bureaucracy are largely responsible for inequality and social injustice (Lee 1994, 5).

The emphasis in this second approach is clearly on the systemic roots of inequality and injustice requiring that efforts towards change must also be systemically and structurally focused. By its very nature, it is focused on reducing inequity and social injustice and opens to critique and challenge the institutions and processes that lead to inequality and social injustice. The professionalization of social work and its adoption of institutional forms that are well integrated into the mainstream almost inevitably meant that individual and family work would dominate the profession, leaving community work and the potential for social critique and social action a less common mode of practice.

Demographic Changes⁸

The political and social activism of the 1960s and 1970s that occupied the hearts and minds of baby boomers was transformed by changing life circumstances into a concern for children, mortgages and career success by the 1980s. As many young baby boomers (particularly middle class) aged and took on family responsibilities, their energies and focus may have often been redirected from community issues towards ensuring personal and family stability. For many working class baby boomers, the simple struggle to raise children and make ends meet probably worked against any ongoing involvement they may have had in neighbourhood organizing.

Activism among baby boomer parents still emerged, noted one community activist with whom the CDH team spoke, but often this activism was focused on issues that had a direct impact on them and their families, e.g., child care, educational system reforms, etc.

This is not to say that there have not always been a small group of committed community facilitators and animators who have kept the community and place-based work torch alive, but for many, life stages demanded a reorientation of their commitments. As one colleague put it, “[for some] once you have children, they cannot be the cannon fodder for your ideas.” By the late 1980s and 1990s, many who had once engaged in community activism were no longer linked to communities and community issues in the same way.

⁸ I am grateful to Lin Grist, former Executive Director of Central Neighbourhood House in Toronto and her partner, Ron East, for suggesting demographics as a component in the rise and fall in popularity of community and place-based work (personal communication, March 24, 2013.)

The Growing Call for Enhanced Accountability in the Human Service Sector

The growth in social spending by government and the investment in social programs by private foundations and charitable organizations in the 1960s and 1970s gave way, particularly in the late 1980s (perhaps not coincidentally in parallel with a deep economic recession) and the 1990s to a focus across governments on deficit reduction, translated into spending cuts and across all funders in ensuring value for money. Although accountability for dollars received had always been an important concept, more often than not it had been defined as “did the service provider – in whom we have invested - do what they said they would do” and “how efficient were they in doing this?” Service providers scurried about, collecting statistics and focusing on reporting service and activity levels, i.e. counting bums in seats.

By the mid-1990s, some funders began not only to require evidence of compliance and efficiency, but began to look at effectiveness. In the foundation and charitable sectors, this was often in response to the competition for donor dollars and a perceived need to ensure donors received value for money. The result was that service providers were increasingly asked to begin to account for the **impact** that their services were having for the individuals, families and communities they serve.

The 1990s to the present has witnessed the rise of increasingly sophisticated impact measurement systems: both outcomes measurement and Results Based Accountability for example. These systems were intended to reduce impact to a set of measurable, statistical outcomes. This movement to assessing impact has been heavily influenced by evidence-based decision-making out of the health sector, but has not always translated as easily into human services, whether the service focus has been on individuals, families or communities. There are a number of reasons for this, including:

- The challenge of using the linear logic of measuring impact in complex systems, i.e. we do this and this is the result, leading to what John Mayne has referred to as an “attribution” problem, i.e. how much change or impact on an issue is actually due to what a service provider does (Mayne 1999)? Poverty reduction is a good example here. Poverty is the result of myriad factors, so how much of what one service does can have an impact on poverty?
- In neighbourhood work, we have learned that “relationships” and “networks,” “social capacity” and “social capital” are critical factors that do not necessarily define but are critical to success. Good neighbourhood or community work consists of creating the conditions in which, for example, social capacity can emerge. Indicators for measuring this type of impact are hard – if not sometimes impossible – to find and record.

- The hard results (whatever those might be) of effective community building may take years and years to emerge, but funding cycles are often far too short to take these extended periods into consideration. It is, therefore, challenging for community animators to discover, far less provide, the hard data for which funders are looking.
- Impact assessment is a complex field replete with debates about methodology and data collection. Designing systems that will gather the necessary reliable information requires expertise and the simple fact is that citizen and community groups that emerge through effective place-based neighbourhood work may not have the skills or resources to undertake this. While professionals in the field can assist, this too requires resources that on-the-ground community builders may not have.

It is worth noting that, certainly within the charitable funding field, the interest in measuring impact has been enmeshed in the tension between charitable versus social justice models of social analysis. It is arguably easier to alleviate or respond to symptoms, e.g., respond to hunger with the provision of a meal than to address the systemic roots of hunger, a process that may call into question the distribution of incomes or accessibility of food in our communities today.

Funding projects that challenge the “charitable” foundations of donor relations may, in some cases, be just too risky for funders.

The result of all this is that it has been extremely challenging for place-based neighbourhood work to adapt to the impact assessment demands of funders. One possible result has been that interest in investing in community work, at least in Canada, may have dropped over the same time period that impact assessment has increased in popularity since organizations and citizens groups invested in community building work have been unable to reach the “evidence bar” established by funders.⁹

Finally, in relation to impact assessment, it is worth noting that the push for this has come particularly from funders. Eager to have “evidence” of the value of their investments in response to taxpayer and donor concerns about the value of spending, they have been anxious to share the value of what their investments have produced. However, what funders may want by way of evidence may not align with what neighbourhoods see as important as they work to become more vibrant and healthy.

⁹ We certainly know, anecdotally, that organizations engaged in capacity building activities and community work have been involved in extended dialogues with funders – in some cases for over a decade – about ways in which to interpret the outcomes of their work in a way that meets funder needs for quantitative outcome or result measurements.

None of this is meant to suggest that assessing impact is not important or relevant. It may, however, suggest that there needs to be a rethinking of what makes up acceptable evidence in community work. There might also need to be a corresponding rethinking of the time frames in which to realistically expect this evidence, depending on its nature, to emerge.

The Challenge of Making the Case for Preventative Programming

The emergence of impact assessment as a factor in the rise and fall of place-based activities is related to the inherent challenge in proving the value of preventative programming.

The most dominant form of service in our communities is based on identifying a problem and developing programs and services to reduce its incidence. It is, for all intents and purposes, a downstream response. It is far rarer to see upstream programming, that is, programming that identifies the root causes of problems and seeks to remove these causes before the problems emerge. However, a good portion of place-based neighbourhood work falls into this prevention category.

Putting the issue in simple terms, how do you measure something that does not happen? And how can you prove it did not happen because of something you did?

While one frequently hears talk of the need to invest in preventative programming, seeking funding for preventative programming is still an uphill battle. Perhaps the best documented example of this is in the health system where the distribution of health dollars is still dominated by hospitals, physicians and “sickness care.” The Drummond Commission (Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services 2012), for example, characterized the current health care system as being based on “Intervention after a problem occurs” and argued instead for a system driven by “health promotion”. This second approach would end up focused much more on prevention and on the social determinants of health, concerns which generally characterize the work of the comparatively much less resource rich public health envelope within Ontario’s health care budget.

Since 1998, public health practitioners have been influenced by the 1998 declaration of the Wingspread Statement on the Precautionary Principle which was developed in relation to public health and environmental decision-making. It states:

When an activity raises threats of harm to the environment or human health, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically (Science and Environmental Health Network n.d.).

This statement of principle, although focused on environmental risks, public and environmental health, clearly states the case for preventative measures even where the evidence of efficacy is not as clear as one might wish. In the absence of clear linkages demonstrating the impact of long-term community building, where problems are prevented from emerging, community level interventions have been and remain much more challenging to sell. The precautionary principle would suggest this needs to change.

Backlash in Relation to Community Action

While there are a wide variety of neighbourhood and place-based activities that can and do occur that do not challenge decision and policy-making external to the community, as neighbourhoods develop social capital and capacity, as residents identify resources they require and as they seek to acquire some of those resources, challenging situations can arise. These may be in the form of professionals who sincerely believe that they know better than residents what is really required; it may be funders who have a different set of priorities than residents, or; it may be city hall, bylaws or legislation.

While it is not inevitable, neighbourhoods ready to shape their own future may determine that social action is among the range of strategies necessary for achieving their ends. This decision always depends on a community looking at its environment, undertaking an analysis of the systems of decision-making in which it resides and determining that other strategies to access resources or influence decisions have not, or will not, work. They may see social or political action as the only viable strategy in a particular situation.

The dominant analysis in the literature today is that we live in a pluralistic society in which there are competing interests that our institutions mediate and manage. In this analysis, our systems of governance and resource allocation are seen as having the flexibility to be responsive to social action, but it is a messy business at best and one that decision-makers would undoubtedly prefer to avoid.

An alternate view, based on an analysis of the distribution of power in society, in communities and across neighbourhoods, would suggest that as residents in an area collectively develop the capacity to define and respond to their circumstances, they may determine that the distribution of power works against them and take social and political action in order to achieve their goals. Once again, decision-makers, in this case, those with power, would be facing a situation that they would undoubtedly prefer to avoid.

The CDH team believes there is, in the demise in popularity of place-based work over the 1980s and 1990s, an unstated concern among policy and decision makers that resident control of place-based work carries the seeds of social action. There is invariably the

potential for conflict and so investing in opportunities that empower local communities may well have been seen as too risky for some established policy and decision-makers.

i) Why the Resurgence of Place-Based Work?

While we saw the tapering off in Canada in both the profile and priority of community work in the 1980s and 1990s, the first decade of the new millennium has seen place-based work re-emerge as a significant focus of investment by governments and private funders. This has primarily been through the rise of Comprehensive Community Initiatives (CCI).

Freiler suggests three reasons for the resurgence of “place” as a focus for action and investment:

- Concern about growing neighbourhood concentrations of poverty and disadvantage and their effects on individuals and the broader community
- Increasing recognition that cities and urban regions are socially, environmentally, and economically critical to the well-being of individuals, regions and countries
- The ‘discovery’ of social capital and its potential as a building block for social cohesion and to finding local solutions to problems (Freiler 2004, 3).

Freiler’s suggestion that concern about the neighbourhood concentrations of poverty needs to be expanded upon by noting that concentration is not the only feature of concern; the persistence of poverty, despite universal programs intended to lift families and children out of poverty, is also a concern. Despite the best efforts reflected in decades of spending, poverty is still with us. This has led many to conclude that, for complex problems such as poverty, coordinated efforts focused on the “place” where poverty is experienced and plays out might achieve a more effective set of outcomes.

...since the 1990s, such initiatives [CCIs] have evolved in the US, the UK and other countries as ways to tackle complex social problems (Leviten-Reid 2006, 2).

These “place focused” initiatives, normally respond to complex social problems by bringing together a wide range of stakeholders that all have a piece of the problem, including the residents of a particular community, to forge “comprehensive, multisectoral approaches to poverty.” (Leviten-Reid 2006, 2)

While the profile and priority of place-based work diminished dramatically in the last couple of decades of the 20th century, it is important to note that there were still important pockets where place-based neighbourhood work was carried on. Community Health

Centres come to mind in this regard, as do social planning councils that maintained a strong community development component in their work.

Place-based work did not wither away – other instruments for dealing with critical issues such as poverty, whether through social policy initiatives, income transfers or increasingly impact-driven service provision, simply overtook them as the preferred response. What Gardener calls “wicked problems,” however, did not disappear and the neighbourhood, the community, the place where people live, has once again become a focus for addressing these issues:

Poverty, health inequalities, and concentrated social disadvantage and exclusion are persistent problems in Canada and other rich countries. These problems are complex, with underlying social and economic forces that are deep-seated, interdependent, and constantly shifting.

They are classic “wicked” policy problems because:

- they cannot be “solved” with a program here or an investment there, but require interventions by multiple actors – including, but not limited to, public policies – over the long term
- there is little agreement within policy circles on the most effective solutions, and limited evidence or predictability about the impact of interventions, and
- the longer-term impact and implications of any policy response are uncertain and dynamic.

But we policy analysts can’t just throw up our hands and say it all is too complex to deal with. We need models of policy thinking, strategic investment, and service interventions that can address complex problems related to health inequalities, neighbourhood revitalization, and poverty (Gardner 2011, 1).

It is also worth noting that there appears to be a growing acknowledgement that the hard outcome measurements associated with impact assessment may, in and of themselves, be found wanting, at least in the short term. Although applied to international development work, Bebbington has argued the need to incorporate ways of taking into account the soft evidence of social capital and social capacity into thinking about the effectiveness of social development strategies:

...though clearly the stuff of everyday experience, social relationships can seem too intangible for development policy to consider them. How, then, can

the World Bank and others incorporate concern for social relationships into the way they do business and the way they conceive of social development? Recent thinking on social capital and poverty reduction suggests some useful guidance (Bebbington 2000, 11).

The increasing willingness of funders to accept qualitative data and not just quantitative data as part of evaluation and impact frameworks for funded projects suggests that they are also struggling with ways to broaden their outlook on impact, making it more feasible to include place-based community work in their funding portfolios.

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