

PLACE AND SPACE WITHIN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND: A THEORETICAL DISCUSSION.

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INTRODUCTION

Communities are shaped by interactions within a variety of spaces and places. Theories of place and space are complex, they show that space and place can on the one hand, provide safety and support, while on the other may divide and exclude. Community development theorists and practitioners have focused on identifying communities by who they include rather than who they might exclude. As a result, discussion has been limited on how communities interact in both physical and social environments at the same time. Other social science disciplines such as geography and psychology have a developed discourse on place and space that could benefit community development practice. In this article I will consider the three methods of community development most commonly used in Aotearoa New Zealand, situating their concepts of community alongside ideas of space and place offered by other social science disciplines.

Background

Community development is viewed either as a place based activity defining its community using geographical boundaries, or alternatively, responding to communities of interest who occupy a marginalised space in society. Community development theorists agree that 'community' is a hotly debated topic (Aimers & Walker, 2013, Shilongonyane, 2009, Shaw, 2006), yet few have delved into the nuances of the place and space, despite these being well developed in other disciplines such as geography and psychology. In this article I will consider three commonly practiced methods of community development and determine how theories around place and space may inform and enrich their practice. These three methods are a structural analysis approach to community development, asset based community development and community-led development. I will begin by discussing place and space as it is commonly articulated by community development theorists, this will be followed by a discussion of place and space derived from other social science disciplines. I will then examine each of the three community development methods and how their current views of place and space might impact on issues of inclusion or exclusion.

The community-a place or a space?

Community development has its genesis in what Shaw (2006, p.26) describes as either "benevolent welfare paternalism" or "working class struggle". Initially community development responded to the power play between the state and civil society either seeking to create social inclusion; or challenging power structures to shift power to those communities who are otherwise marginalised and excluded. While the idea of working class suggests a social space occupied by people who belong to a specific social strata, this can also translate into a place where a social class occupies a geographic area such as a neighbourhood.

Since its emergence in Aotearoa New Zealand some 30 years ago different forms of community development practice have developed and held currency; these practices all recognise communities in a number of different ways. In Community Development literature communities are generally defined in one of three types:

- Communities of place (geographically defined)
- Communities of identity (ethnicity, gender or age)
- Communities of interest (common interests or beliefs)

Some authors suggest that all of these come to play to create a fluid and changeable space (Aimers & Walker, Craig, 2007, 2009; Sihlongonyane, 2009; Shaw, 2007). Kelly and Sewell (1998) state that the process of building community must struggle, "to stay open to the multiple, changing patterns of human lives in different physical and social contexts." (p. 43). They reflect that while a sense of place imparts an identity, this is more than just a physical address. To answer the question where are you from? A place must include the space that is inhabited by culture and sub-culture, language and folklore (ibid). Kelly and Sewell (1998) urge practitioners to consider the words that are used to describe people in transience to illustrate the importance of identity in relation to a physical place, namely 'exile', 'refugee' or 'immigrant'; people moving from, or to, a new place where culture and language must be learned or adapted before it can be thought of as part of their identity. Contrast these names with 'native', 'citizen' and 'local' and we have another picture of where these people sit (ibid).

In Aotearoa we know that *tanagata whenua*, refers to Māori as the indigenous peoples from this land, but if we look at the literal translations of the phrase it offers a succinct definition of what it means to belong somewhere. Moorfield's (2003-2017) online Māori dictionary has several translations of this phrase to mean, to be natural, to be at home, and being comfortable to be naturalised, acclimatised, or established. Thinking about what it means to be in a community; the idea of being natural, at home and comfortable, to be established or adapted to your place and to have collective authority over that place seems like a worthy aspiration for the work of community development. This suggests that the notion of place in relation to community must incorporate more than a geographic location. However another Maori word, *tūrangawaewae* that means "domicile, standing, place where one has the right to stand - place where one has rights of residence and belonging through kinship and *whakapapa*" (Morrfield 2003-2017, n.p.) brings the cultural back to a specific geographic place, illustrating perhaps that the separation of place from identity is problematic. In their study of homelessness, Groot., et al., (2010, p. 127) argued that "tūrangawaewae is something that is engaged, nurtured and sustained through *whanaungatanga* (relatedness, the establishing of relationships) and *ahi kā* (keeping the home-fires burning) connections that are lived in the present " hereby emphasising place as a process that requires sustaining.

These ideas suggest that for community development practitioners the notion of place must be seen as more than a geographic boundary or unitary social identities. The community is obviously a complex and slippery beast that shifts and ebbs according to the identities of the people in place.

Theories of place and space across social science disciplines

The US National Research Council (NRC), a body that advises on public policy, defines place as a territorial domain bounded by the natural environment or as social constructs shaped by human interactions (National Research Council 2002, p. 56). They go on to describe this notion of place as one that moves both horizontally, within the environment, and vertically, at different scales, leading individuals to occupy a variety of places at any one moment. For example an individual can be in a home, neighbourhood, town, state or country or socially constructed spaces of associations, clubs and networks all at the same time. The NRC (2002) conclude that the character of a place therefore is based on "its peoples' sense of rootedness" which in turn are "shaped by interactions within the place and other place" (p. 56).

Space however is seen as a more abstract concept where it considers people's spatial feelings and how they form attachments to home, neighbourhood or nation (Tuan, 1977). Humanistic geographer, Tuan (1977) talks of place as something people are attached to in order to seek security, whereas space is something that is longed for and represents freedom. Space in this sense is non-physical, infinite and unknown. Place may be physical or mythical but unlike space it is finite and familiar and as such place acts to bound space (Tuan, 1977). How unknown spaces become familiar by defining the boundaries of a place is explained thus,

We are in a strange part of town: unknown space stretches ahead of us. In time we know a few landmarks and the routes connecting them. Eventually what was strange town and unknown space becomes familiar place. Abstract space, lacking significance other than strangeness, becomes concrete place filled with meaning.

(Tuan 1977, p.199)

This goes some way to explaining the logic of place based community development as it creates an argument for creating a place that is familiar, known and safe for those that live there. Geographer John Agnew (1987) argues that to be a place, a space must have three components, a location (that distinguishes this place from other places), a locale (a shape or boundary) and a sense of place (personal attachment). A complicating factor for community development is that people do not confine their social relationships to a specific locale, their interests go beyond their street or neighbourhood and therefore so does their personal attachment (Green & Haines, 2015). In addition Giesekeing, et al., (2014) argue that issues of power and subjectivity are critical to any understanding of space and place. They maintain that wealth and decision making define our physical environment and regulations, while social norms limit our social experiences; therefore our experience of subjectivity is heavily influenced by the power exerted by social, political and economic forces. Power can become imbued in geographic or spatial arrangements as veils or tools for oppression and inequity (Blomley, 2006). Such political and social boundaries can be incorporated into physical infrastructure and town planning to work for or against individuals leading to either inclusion or exclusion from the communities they inhabit.

Psychology offers another view of identity and place as the origin of conflict and even war. Environmental psychologists refer to place attachment, a phenomena that is also linked to place identity experienced more as a social identity such as class. In this case there is a strong emotional bond between a person and a place (Flores, 2011; Proshansky, 1978). While the status quo is retained this presents as a positive and caring relationship, however this phenomena is also thought to be the catalyst for NIMBYism¹, whereby communities are overly protective of

¹ Acronym for "Not In My Back Yard." A term for a person who resists unwanted development (Tajfel and Turner, 1979)

their environment and are not open to change or new developments. Social identity is a person's sense of who they are in relation to their membership of a particular social group. Similar to place identity there is a distinction between members of this group and outsiders, in its extreme genocide and war can be waged based on differences in social identity (Tajefel & Turner, 1979).

What all these perspectives offer is an understanding that place and space are complex notions that can on the one hand provide a community with familiarity and security, freedom and possibilities for engagement, while at the same time being divisive and excluding.

Locating communities in practice

In this section I consider three methods of community development practice popular in Aotearoa New Zealand and consider how they view the notion of space and place.

Structural analysis community development

Community development work first became recognised in Aotearoa during the 1960s and 1970s as a response to the rights-based grass-roots movements such as feminism, the Māori renaissance, Pacific peoples diaspora and developing youth cultures (Aimers & Walker, 2013). Structural analysis grew out of these movements but is based on the work of Paulo Freire and his pedagogy of the oppressed. The goal of structural analysis is to develop an understanding of, and challenge the nature of power relations. Structural analysis acknowledges that people have different realities and knowledge. This approach maintains that power was gained through ideologic, political or economic means and the analysis of problems can only be defined by those who have lived that problem (AWEA, n.d). The National Council of Churches brought activist Father Filipe Franchette to Aotearoa in 1980 and many community workers attended his structural analysis workshops at that time. Structural analysis took a political analysis that sought to identify and challenge the institutional power structures that put social justice at the heart of community development. The process was informed by Marxism and had a clear economic focus. Franchette was quoted in the Auckland Star in 1983 as saying, "You must find out where you are. Get to your roots. We've all been conditioned. Unless we look at the conditioning and distance ourselves from our situation we can't see where to go" (AWEA, n.d. p. 2-3) Structural analysis was later developed to draw on Bourdieu's (1984) idea of habitus that recognises that culture has an impact on oppression in subtle yet powerful ways. This is expressed via the everyday subjectivity of the clothing that is worn, the way people talk or other ways of being that seem natural. This method of community development focuses strongly on communities of interest or exclusion and to that extent frames the idea of place as a convergence of the social, political and economic spaces rather than physical places. The role of both spaces and places in constructing systems of power is a strong theme.

The goal of this form of development was to create a space for freedom or liberation from traditional constraints that could be linked to Blomley's (2006) notion of subjectivity. This is achieved by encouraging the powerless to use their innate knowledge to challenge the boundaries that protect the status quo in order to achieve equity of resources. As such structural analysis resonates strongly with Tuan's (1977) notion of space that represents freedom and infinite possibilities. It could be argued therefore, that this method rejected the strong associations and institutions often valued in place based community development as subjective positions that may contribute to maintaining the status quo rather than lead to liberation of the oppressed.

Asset Based Community Development

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) was introduced to New Zealand by the Department of Labour's Community Employment Group (CEG) in the early 1990s (Aimers & Walker 2013). It is known colloquially by its practitioners simply as ABCD. CEG brought international experts in ABCD to engage with small towns and rural communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. This was supported on the ground by CEGs Bootstraps programme that aimed to re-vitalise communities. ABCD eschews the notion of 'needs' preferring instead to focus on the assets or gifts already available in a community. ABCD practitioners then facilitate the process whereby community members can take charge of the development process by mapping and mobilizing both economic and social assets to create local economic and social opportunities through bridging and networking (Winther, 2015; Mathe & Cunningham, 2002; ABCD Institute, n.d.). Although essentially place based, ABCD maintains that productive communities are held together by creating a unique culture based on high trust relationships and it is these relationships they seek to develop (McKnight, n.d.). McKnight suggests this can be achieved by developing strong associations within a community. These associations may be focused on specific interests but if they have strong interconnected networks then this combines to develop a strong cohesive community. McKnight notes that while each of these groups may have a boundary that inherently creates outsiders, this can be ameliorated by associations that are welcoming rather than exclusive. By recognising that everyone has something to contribute this form of community development looks to build relationships through positive interactions. Associations with dominant norms are however at risk of excluding those with minority groups such as displayed in NYMBism as described by Tajefel and Turner (1979). Overall though, this method seeks to develop the emotional connection communities have with a physical place suggesting this method reflects the environmental psychologists (Flores, 2011; Proshansky, 1978) viewing of place.

Community led-development

Community-led Development (CLD) characterises itself as a place-based practice that seeks to develop local resources and strengths by nurturing a whole of community shared vision (Inspiring Communities, 2010). Introduced to Aotearoa New Zealand in the mid-2000s this form of development was adopted by the Ministry for Social Development and has formed the basis for their support of community development since this time (Aimers & Walker, 2013). Similar to ABCD, CLD seeks to maximise assets and skills, connecting groups and associations, building local leadership to developing a shared vision that drives action for change and work adaptively (Inspiring Communities, n.d.) In addition CLD considers the development of relationships at multiple levels to be the key to the community change process thereby linking the geographic place with the social and cultural. Where CLD differs from ABCD is that it considers power relations in its processes and this is acknowledged in all levels of the change process be it personal, structural, relational or cultural. The practice promotes whole of community decision making which requires skilled facilitation and well developed process (Department of Internal Affairs, 2013). Of all three community development methods discussed, CLD takes the middle ground between place and space, succinctly representing Agnew's (1987) viewing of place as location, locale and sense of place.

DISCUSSION

The three methods of community development discussed in the previous section represent different positions in relation the community as space and/or place. ABCD relies strongly on place based connections and while they acknowledged the cross cutting nature of social bonds and identity, this was not fully developed with regard to those people in the community who may feel excluded. The CLD approach appears similar to ABCD in that it focused on capitalising on strengths and building networks. CLD works in social and cultural spaces that requires extensive discussion in order to avoid individuals or groups being excluded. This does however lead to a more

process orientated approach. Ultimately both ABCD and CLD could be described as essentially place based. Methods of place based community development involving the whole of community argue that by separating out communities of interest or exclusion we risk working in isolation and do not take into account the wider ecology of the community as a whole and how it interacts (Clarke et al., 2002). As such commonality must be sought using the tools of consciousness raising, negotiation and problem solving (Clarke et al., 2002). I would argue however, that the risk of isolation is still high unless place based practitioners also consider the view of Green and Haines (2015) who maintain that social interests and attachments go beyond a specific locale that may move horizontally, vertically and at different scales, leading to individuals occupying various places and spaces concurrently (National Research Council, 2002).

The structural analysis approach was very different to ABCD or CLD, focusing on an entirely space based approach to community while rejecting the notion of place as a barrier to the freedom of their communities who are oppressed and on the margins of society. There was little consideration for the effects of developmental change on those outside their communities of the oppressed, as this method is unapologetically about shifting power to those without power. Whether this can cause an overcorrection in power relations is not really considered. Physical boundaries were almost irrelevant unless they were used to exert or veil some form of power.

Commonalities between the three methods of community development do exist as they all value the inherent knowledge of their community members. In addition the application of that knowledge was critical to all three methods. However given the very different ways each method defined their community I would suggest that viewing community knowledge under the lens of Gieseking, et al.'s (2014) notion of subjectivity would be of benefit to practitioners of all three methods in order to extend their view of community and limit any divisive effects of their practice.

CONCLUSION

A nuanced understanding of place and space as it relates to communities is critical for community development theorists and practitioners. As such community development has much to learn about place and space from disciplines such as environmental psychology and critical geography. Without exception theories of place and space are about inclusion and exclusion and as the ultimate goal of community development is aimed at including rather than excluding this must be a primary consideration. Rigid boundary setting whether it be physical or social is problematic for community developers. Whether the goal is for a livable community, or a place to feel comfortable, established or have authority over your own place, these notions are not simple and require careful thought by community developers. Community development practice should be wary that creating strong associations can also create further inequality by excluding people as a result of creating a boundary. I conclude that all forms of community development can benefit from further analysis of what it means to belong to a social/cultural space and live in a physical place. There is considerable risk for community development practice to inadvertently build divisions as well as connections as a by-product of their development activities by being blind to those they exclude. By applying the perspectives of disciplines such as psychology and geography to incorporate such concepts as subjectivity, the parallel and horizontal movements in social space and divisive potential of any form of social or physical boundary; community development practitioners can develop a stronger analysis that can ultimately improve understanding and practice.

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