

Asset-Based Community Development: A Literature Review

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INTRODUCTION

Communities across the country are unquestionably distressed places due mainly to enormous economic shifts that have occurred over the past few decades. Many factors exist that contribute to this statement, and the strategies used to develop communities into more livable places for residents vary dramatically. It is safe to say that issues of community development can affect everyone, which makes the strategies used to develop communities crucial to people's well-being. Most community development strategies start with a needs assessment and an externally driven focus, which can be detrimental to community welfare because it leads to deficiency-oriented policies and programs as well as environments of service where residents are reliant upon the services of outside institutions.

Asset-based community development is one strategy which is internally focused and relationship driven; it is focused more on positive aspects and what is already present in a community than other strategies are. In this paper, I will review literature that pertains to the different ways to approach community development and the benefits and consequences of these different approaches. I will also review case studies of different community development initiatives and the motivations behind them in order to assess which strategies are most effective and beneficial to these communities. A history of the community development field and its shift in focus will be addressed, as well as the different components of positive community development. I will talk about why ABCD strategies and ideas are important and beneficial to the community development process as well as to community members. The consequences of needs-based approaches will

also be discussed. The goal of this review is to synthesize the literature relating to community development in a manner that will clearly demonstrate the importance and value of asset-based community development strategies and initiatives to overall community well-being.

A HISTORY OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FIELD

Community development began as a social movement and has been a growing industry since the mid-twentieth century (Vidal 1997). Definitions of community development vary between sources; however, it is overwhelmingly defined as a process aimed at bringing about change in local communities in a positive manner for the well-being of that community. Biddle and Biddle (1965) discuss the early stages of the community development field. At the time, the field was very loosely defined and not evaluated by a clear set of standards. The meaning of community development in 1965 was ambiguous because the field was so new. Increasing citizen participation and responsibility, however, was a mutual focus of most authorities on the subject at the time. The authors discuss the possibility of the creation of a new profession -- community developer. They outline several operational assumptions of the community development field that seem to be very similar to ABCD ideas. The importance and value of each individual in a community, building from small accomplishments, intimate relationships, and reciprocal learning between citizens and developers are discussed by Biddle and Biddle (1965) as important to the community development process. They equate the title 'community developer' with the term 'encourager.' Kaufman (1959) talks about the importance of community members and developers identifying with their locality in the community

development process to avoid a broad orientation aimed at mass society.

Community development, according to Brophy and Shabecoff (2001), has three goals: to change the economy of the neighborhood, to improve the physical nature of the neighborhood, and to strengthen social bonds between people in the neighborhood.

The community development field emerged in the form of community development corporations (CDC) in the mid sixties with the goal of addressing and alleviating poverty and capitalist disinvestments in low-income and minority communities around the country (Silverman 2001a; Vidal 1997; Stoecker 1997a; Brophy and Shabecoff 2001). The creation of CDCs is linked to Robert Kennedy's visit to Bedford-Stuyvesant in 1966 and the Special Impact Amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act that followed (Stoecker 1997a). Initially, CDCs had a dominant grassroots mentality and were characterized by democratic decision making and bottom-up, citizen driven growth with a focus on job creation.

Tinker (1961) describes the community development field as one based on self-help and initiative. However, a shift in the focus of these organizations has occurred over time due to an increasing connection to government funding and private sources of capital as well as to a growing institutional role in the field (Peterman 2000; Silverman 2001a, 2003; Stoecker 1997a). The focus of CDCs has moved from job creation to housing development over the past forty years and has become increasingly defined by outsiders (Brocklesby and Fisher 2003). Sue Kenny (2002) discusses the 'professionalization' of the community development field that has occurred over time. While the goals of community developers are to bring about positive change for the benefit of local residents,

they are required to adhere to bureaucratic guidelines that restrict the effectiveness of their efforts. Community developers become more focused on the interests and goals of outside sources rather than on the interests and goals of the community in which they are working, according to Kenny, as well as Silverman (2001a, 2003), Stoecker (1997a), and Brocklesby and Fisher (2003). According to Brophy and Shabecoff (2001), the number of CDCs grew sixty four percent between 1997 and 2001. Scholars have made positive and negative classifications concerning CDCs in general and this shift in their focus. The critiques of CDCs are mostly positive, however, a closer look at their success indicates an industry under pressure to meet its goals. CDCs tend to have trouble providing truly affordable housing because they now create moderate-income housing rather than low-income housing. CDCs also have trouble with housing management due to lack of needed skills and preparedness (Peterman 2000). Peterman offers a well-rounded, succinct overview of the CDC debate by touching on both the pro and con arguments in a relatively unbiased manner. He addresses Stoecker's (1997a) negative review of CDCs and Vidal's multiple positive reviews of CDCs.

Another actor in the community development field is neighborhood development organizations (NDOs), which are functionally equivalent to CDCs. NDOs are different from CDCs because they are private and non-profit. They are created and controlled by local residents, which allows the interests of community members to be central in their goals. For this reason, NDOs are fundamentally similar to ABCD. Because they are run by the people for the people, NDOs are more sensitive to neighborhood issues than CDCs, according to

Neil Mayer (1984). Mayer says that NDOs successfully utilize private and public resources for the benefit of their communities. Mayer and others at The Urban Institute conducted a study concerning the effectiveness of NDOs. The study evaluated ninety-nine urban NDOs nationwide and found that overall, NDOs meet their goals for community development and revitalization. By looking at what determines NDO success, how well they complete their projects and tasks, at NDO relationships with others, at how NDOs have improved in meeting their goals, as well as a number of other factors, the author is able to adequately evaluate NDO performance. Based on research findings, the author makes suggestions for improving and expanding NDO success. A multidimensional research approach (quantitative and qualitative methods and findings) allows the author to make effective suggestions for NDOs.

CRITIQUES OF CDCS

Randy Stoecker (1997a) published a critical review of the CDC model in which he says that CDCs are not really community based but rather simply based *in* the community. He says that funding sources ultimately control CDCs because they are severely under funded and are staffed by inexperienced and unknowledgeable people. Kelly and Caputo (2005) point out the importance of a dedicated, caring group of people being involved in the administrations of community development agencies. Stoecker also asserts that focusing on physical development over social and economic issues can be detrimental to communities and their residents. He argues that CDCs are merely service providers that actually promote disorganization by acting as market-oriented organizations. Stoecker's view concerning the CDC debate is apparent (he is anti-

CDC) and he builds a strong argument supported with statistics and sources. However, his tone can be interpreted as hostile at times, which does not help articulate his argument and makes it seem like he is proving what he already believes to be true. Stoecker does not adequately address the variability of CDC orientation and ideals and he uses twenty-year-old data to support some of his claims.

Silverman (2001a) also addresses a few drawbacks to CDCs. CDCs, as explained by Silverman, tend to form based on deficiencies, needs, physical characteristics, and social structures of neighborhoods and communities, which places residents at an automatic disadvantage because they are defined by what they lack rather than what they possess. Silverman also points out that local interests and goals often lose priority to influential outside institutions when it comes to community decision making. He says that despite the strong community orientation of CDCs, their main resources come from outside institutions. Unlike Stoecker (1997a), Silverman does not frame this orientation in a negative light, but rather as a limitation that creates a specific role for CDCs in community development. By not completely dismissing CDCs, Silverman establishes a more well rounded and effective argument.

Vidal (1997) presents a positive review of the accomplishments of CDCs, but offers information about the pressures for CDCs to transform as well as challenges facing CDCs. He lists five characteristics of productive, lasting CDCs as a specialized staff, which allows them to take on more large-scale projects, a certain body of work that has been a lasting priority, the presence of established, competent leadership, confidence of potential supporters and partners, and

strategic action. Brophy and Shabecoff (2001) credit CDCs with success where other outside forces failed because they often employ local residents, which encourages local leadership in neighborhood issues. Vidal also talks positively about the goals for community development being based on the needs and deficiencies of communities. Increased corporate funding and involvement are portrayed as positive aspects of the changing field by the author, which encourage more local involvement. Vidal's positive and beneficial view of CDCs counters Stoecker's (1997a) argument, while it agrees and disagrees with Silverman's argument at times. Vidal depicts the different issues facing CDCs as an uphill battle that they are courageously fighting purely for the benefit of a community with substantial potential for success. On the other hand, Stoecker (1997a) describes CDCs as almost totally evil, while Silverman (2001a, 2003) discusses the deficiencies of CDCs in a less condemning manner. The most effective of these arguments seems to be Silverman's because of the more neutral and objective approach that he took. Extremely negative or positive reviews can discredit an argument because of a lack of bias and objectivity. Robinson (1996) discusses the limitations of CDCs as threefold. First, CDCs function more as a service provider than as a community advocate. Second, due to funding dependence, CDCs are often not able to fulfill their goals. Third, CDC success tends to rely more on location (liberal, capital-rich communities) than strategy. Robinson (1996) also talks about the benefits of CDCs. He points out that CDCs connect opposing forces (activists, government officials, private capitalists) in the development process and allow these forces to effectively work together. Ultimately, says Robinson, CDCs benefit the community in multiple ways such as

building social capital and creating empowerment. Most of the reasons why Robinson believes CDCs to be beneficial are similar to ABCD fundamentals, while the negative aspects are associated with needs-based approaches.

CDC proponents argue that CDCs are ultimately beneficial to the community development process. They initiate development in the country's poorest urban areas that might otherwise go overlooked and that they have the ability to spark political pressure for social change by lifting people's expectations (Stoecker 1997a). Contrary to Stoecker, Avis Vidal (1997) contends that CDCs today have a broad base of stakeholders and supporters as well as broad, community based missions that allow them to do good work for communities. She views the institutionalization of the community development field as a positive aspect because it has expanded financial support for the industry and describes the industry as sensitive to broad local community needs. Vidal discusses CDCs in an overwhelmingly positive and optimistic manner. Some critique of the industry is included, but not an adequate amount. The struggles and critiques of CDCs are portrayed in a manner that says they are not to blame for their shortcomings. She addresses multiple outside influences (environmental changes, federal budget cuts) that are responsible for shortcomings in the CDC model. While it is important to address these influences, shifting the focus from the flawed structure of the CDC model takes away from Vidal's argument.

Like Stoecker (1997a), Mark Brennan (2004) distinguishes between development *of* a community and development *in* a community. Development *in* a community entails a more outside driven, modernized approach that works to

improve local economies and institutions, while development *of* community focuses on the cultivation of social and cultural connections as well as positive relationships and networks among residents in order to build community.

According to Brennan, a balance between development *of* a community and development *in* a community is essential to success, which agrees with Stoecker's point of view.

Keating (1997) and Bratt (1997) published articles directly refuting Stoecker's (1997a) negative review of CDCs. Both authors argue for continued use of the current CDC model. Bratt believes that the benefits of CDCs outweigh the consequences and that Stoecker's proposal for a new CDC model will have its problems and consequences as well. Bratt makes a valid point when she asks why Stoecker wants to implement such a drastic plan and eliminate organizations that do bring about change and have positive influences for so many communities. She illustrates how extreme Stoecker's argument can be viewed. Like Bratt, Keating also believes that CDCs should have some role in community development and should not be eliminated. Keating comments on Stoecker's good ideas, but says that they do not have much direction or do not seem to be thought out well. Both authors seem to somewhat support Stoecker's ideas, however, they believe that his ideas do not necessarily translate into action very well because they are extreme.

NEEDS-BASED APPROACHES

Needs-based approaches start with outsiders evaluating what is deficient in a community and how to fix the problems. Redburn and Buss (1982) compiled a collection of articles concerning public policies and distressed communities.

The majority of these articles are needs oriented, meaning they evaluate 'problematic' situations in communities and discuss how the outsiders can fix the problems or how they are fixing the problems. Multiple studies concerning how to fix all of the problems in these troubled communities are carried out and discussed throughout the articles. One article addresses whether or not Americans should care about "bailing out" distressed communities. Sue Kenny (2002) discusses 'The Charity Framework' for community development in which charity organizations attempt to provide resources and a base for empowerment to "deserving" people. Such organizations evaluate the need for their services in certain communities, identify the "deserving" poor, and then try to implement change, rather than working with communities to bring about change. Kelly and Caputo (2005) comment on external funding sources wanting to set "needs agendas" in the community development process. Mayo (1958) offers an early view of the community development field by saying that the process happens when community members come together to identify their needs and problems, or what is deficient in their communities.

Neighborhood 'reinvestment' is discussed as a needs-based community development strategy. Schill and Nathan (1983) talk about neighborhood 'reinvestment' in America's cities. This strategy looks at physical deficiencies in a community and how to fix them. Although this strategy starts with local residents, it focuses on how to fix mostly physical problems in a community rather than on how to build on existing assets or how to utilize existing assets. Neighborhood tension is addressed by Schill and Nathan as a possible drawback to neighborhood 'reinvestment' because it affects cohesion among residents.

United Way is an organization that utilizes a mostly needs-based approach to community development. The organization conducts Community Needs Assessments that evaluate the condition of a community based on certain indicators as outlined by a committee of diverse volunteers. United Way directs and focuses its efforts and attention based on a community's needs in various areas. Subjectivity is identified by the organization as a limitation of their needs-based approach. Volunteers from outside the community are responsible for making judgments regarding the significance of particular needs of a community, which can be problematic because they are not necessarily fully aware of community issues. Ten other limitations of their needs-based approach are outlined by the organization, which seems to indicate a need to develop a new approach. United Way, however, is trying to shift to a new paradigm that focuses on neighborhoods and community building. The organization credits Kretzmann and McKnight's work for helping trigger the shift in focus and is trying to integrate an asset-based approach with a needs-based approach as a result (United Way 2005).

Business participation in community decision making can have both benefits and consequences for a community. Amnon Boehm (2005) describes the pros of business participation in community decision making as the contribution of a business orientation and culture, a focus on economic community development, building social capital, support of lobbying, increased commitment to community issues, reduction of alienation, and promotion of business goals. On the other hand, Boehm also discusses the risks of business participation in community decision making. A concentration on narrow business interests, a widening of the social gap, inefficiency, and a reduced focus

on business activities are listed as risks of business participation in community decision making. Business participation in community decision making gives way for a needs-based approach, which businesses need to be conscious of in order to avoid alienation of a community and its residents.

Most community development starts with a needs-based approach, which means that communities are viewed as needy, problematic, and deficient places. This approach leads to communities viewing themselves in terms of their needs. Community and neighborhood policies and programs become deficiency oriented when taking a needs-based approach. Neighborhoods become environments of service where people begin to think that their well-being depends on receiving services from outsiders. Needs-based approaches are mostly led by outside experts with a focus on aspects of community such as broken families, welfare recipients, dropouts, gangs, slum housing, and unemployment (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993).

ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Asset-based community development (ABCD) is an alternative approach to community development that starts with what is present in a community, such as the capacities and assets of local individuals, associations, and institutions, rather than with what is deficient in a community and what a community's needs are. Because the focus and goals of the community development field have changed over the past forty years from bottom-up and internally driven to top-down and externally driven, the need for an alternative approach has become evident (Silverman 2001a, 2003; Stoecker 1997a). John Kretzmann and John McKnight (1993) responded with ABCD. Kretzmann and McKnight discuss the

downfall of a needs-based approach to community development. According to the authors, a needs-based approach to community development gives way to environments of service and client neighborhoods where people are dependent on outside sources in order to sustain themselves. They talk about the inability of residents to overcome the deficiency-oriented model because the focus of service providers and institutions is on maintaining that model because it is beneficial to them. The deficiency-oriented model causes residents to begin to view themselves in a deficient manner and leads simply to survival, not to change or development. Kretzmann and McKnight propose a drastically different approach to community development that involves total investment of local community members in the efforts because relying on help from the outside will not get anything done. Locating and connecting local assets in a community will allow its residents to more effectively build and develop their community argue Kretzmann and McKnight. By identifying and mobilizing local community assets and resources, a community once viewed as needy, problematic, and deficient can be empowered to work together in order to promote change. The authors propose an asset-mapping strategy to bring about these changes. Asset mapping allows communities to see what is present in their community and sets them on the path to utilizing and connecting those assets in order to bring about change. The strategy involves looking at the assets, gifts, and capacities of local institutions, citizens' associations, and individuals by compiling information about individual and community skills, enterprising interests and experiences, and personal information. The benefits of the ABCD approach are made evident throughout the book and it is clear that the authors have done their research

concerning needs based approaches and asset based approaches. Their opinion on the appropriate community development approach is apparent, however, is does not seem as though they went out looking only for evidence that supports their view; their research and argument does not seem one-sided or biased. The language used throughout the book is positive and hopeful of change, which communicates the authors' ideas more effectively and demonstrates how a positive approach can be more effective. The book ends with a series of questions and answers that address the limits and potential of the ABCD approach, which helps to support Kretzmann and McKnight's approach. The authors ask themselves if implementation of ABCD practices on a large, critical scale is possible, if all groups and communities have the ability to be totally inclusive (open door rather than a wall), if ABCD has the ability to be effective in communities that have little cohesion or associational life among residents, and what role outside resources play in the ABCD process. These questions most likely occur to readers while going through the text and having them answered by the authors makes their proposal for an asset-based approach more plausible. Kretzmann and McKnight have a logical and mostly complete proposal for an alternative approach to community development.

Critiques of ABCD have identified several weaknesses in the approach. Mathie and Cunningham (2003) identify five challenges to successful implementation of ABCD principles, ideas, and strategies. ABCD fails to address clearly what exactly the role of external agencies and institutions should be in the community development process and how their role can avoid encouraging dependency among community members. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993)

briefly discuss the role of outside institutions, but the topic requires more elaboration and thought, according to Mathie and Cunningham (2003). Mathie and Cunningham (2003) and Foster and Mathie (2001) address ABCD's failure to deal with unequal power issues, such as those that women and low-income individuals face. By not addressing the disparities among community members that prevent empowerment among them, groups like women and low-income individuals are left out of the democratic process. ABCD does not adequately address how to foster community leadership in varying settings or how to approach a situation in which there is a lack of a favorable environment in which to enact ABCD strategies. Mathie and Cunningham pose valid questions for and weaknesses of the ABCD approach and present their ideas in a clear format. Throughout their article, the authors' support for ABCD strategies is evident. By proposing several questions and challenges for ABCD, the authors eliminate bias issues and offer a well-rounded article. Peterman (2000) also talks about power issues in the community development process. He discusses race issues in relation to community development and revitalization. Poor minority households are often stuck in neighborhoods plagued by discrimination, disinvestments, increasing levels of poverty, and decreasing opportunities, says Peterman, which makes it harder for these communities to foster and promote action and change. Such communities are often overlooked in discussions about community development.

Mathie and Cunningham (2003) discuss areas of research and practice that have similar ideas to ABCD as well as challenges that ABCD faces in implementing its practices successfully. By talking about different community

development approaches that have similar views as ABCD, readers are able to see how ABCD principles are effectively applied in different arenas in somewhat different manners. This strengthens the reliability and validity of ABCD approaches. The authors discuss appreciative inquiry and its commonalities with ABCD. Appreciative inquiry, like ABCD, looks to promote positive change in a community that has previously been viewed as needy, deficient, and/or problematic. Appreciative inquiry does this by concentrating on the greatest experiences and successes of the past in order to encourage further collective social action. ABCD and appreciative inquiry also have similar theoretical bases according to Mathie and Cunningham. The authors also talk about the concept of social capital in relation to ABCD. Social capital is discussed widely throughout community development literature.

ROLE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital can be defined as “the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively” (Woolcock and Narayan 2000, p. 226). They name trust and reciprocity as important principles of social capital. However, definitions of social capital vary slightly across the literature. Silverman (2001b) refers to definitions of the concept as ambiguous and elusive because its substance and functional manner are not clearly defined. Cassidy and Narayan (2001) define social capital as relational and shared. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) describe social capital as building a strong network of community members by making use of their existing ties. Foster and Mathie (2001) say that operationalizing social capital is a defining characteristic of ABCD. Mathie and Cunningham (2005) identify social capital as a latent asset that can fluctuate

depending on the level of social support and obligation that one has to their community and co-residents.

Some scholars distinguish between bridging and bonding social capital (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993; Woolcock & Narayan 2000; Putnam 2000). Bonding social capital involves linking people together who are similar in important aspects or people who have existing strong ties among themselves, such as rural neighbors, while bridging social capital involves linking different groups of people together that might otherwise not come together or people with weak ties in the community. Woolcock and Narayan (2000) discuss four perspectives on social capital in which they categorize the concept of bonding and bridging social capital as 'The Networks View,' which is unlike any of the concepts in the social capital literature. The 'Networks View' focuses on bonding and bridging community ties through decentralization, creation of enterprise zones, and bridging of social divides. This view of social capital utilizes entrepreneurs, business groups, and information brokers. The authors break down social capital to a level that other authors do not; to a level that allows readers a thorough and in-depth understanding of the concept. They also provide suggestions concerning how to integrate the concept of social capital into developmental policy, which helps clarify the concept for readers and solidify the major ideas behind it and reasons for building it. Multiple authors cite Woolcock and Narayan's (2000) distinction between bridging and bonding social capital.

Many authors of social capital related literature discuss exactly how to measure it in varying manners. Narayan and Cassidy (2001) conducted a study that addresses a dimensional approach to measuring social capital. They begin

with a literature review of social capital measurement studies and with identifying the underlying dimensions of social capital that each addresses, which provides a clear background of social capital measurement and valid points of comparison between studies. The authors define the dimensions of social capital as group characteristics, generalized norms, togetherness, everyday sociability, neighborhood connections, volunteerism, and trust. They also discuss the uses of measurement of social capital in Ghana and Uganda, which provides a valuable international context for which to evaluate the concept of social capital.

Providing a universal method in which to measure social capital is a significant and worthwhile contribution to the social sciences and related research fields because it makes data comparison easier and more accurate.

Narayan and Cassidy's research allows them to formulate a list of questions for measuring social capital, which is valuable to efforts at mobilizing social capital.

Telling stories of successful attempts at building social capital can help to foster and promote further attempts at doing so. Robert Putnam and Lewis Feldstein (2003) tell twelve stories of different communities that successfully created social capital. These stories are evidence that building social capital can be accomplished in many different ways. Community organizers have realized that in relation to creating social capital, smaller settings are better.

Relationships are built most effectively through one on one, face to face communication where listening and trusting are easier, which happens predominantly in smaller settings. Valley Interfaith, a coalition of church and school groups in Rio Grande Valley, Texas, is a good example of one on one, face-to-face communication benefiting parents, students, and teachers. Face-to-face

communication between teachers and parents fostered relationships based on a common interest for the well-being of students. One on one home visits furthered these relationships. Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California is another example of building social capital through face-to-face communication. Small groups are utilized in order to prevent feelings of alienation and anonymity that come with a massive group size. United Parcel Services (UPS) also utilizes face-to-face communication in order to build social capital. Managers and employees communicate regularly and openly and managers go to sites for face-to-face meetings in order to establish repeated personal contacts that have created accident reduction and worker retention. Clearly, based on these examples, face to face, one on one communication in small settings effectively builds social capital. A part of the “smaller is better” idea is federation, or the creation of small groups within larger groups. Despite a massive population, Saddleback Church effectively builds social capital through creating small membership groups that offer personal support and intimate connections to people. Saddleback’s ability to unite a huge amount of people is based on the cohesion that is formed at the micro level in their small membership groups.

In consensus with Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) and Woolcock and Narayan (2000), the authors say that the idea of “bridging social capital” is an important one when trying to create social capital. The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston effectively bridges social capital by rotating leadership among the three major ethnic groups in the neighborhood and by publishing brochures, newsletters, and meeting announcements in three different languages. These actions reach out to each community and bring them together

in order to build social capital. Mathie and Cunningham (2003) also discuss Dudley Street as a good example of an ABCD approach. The authors credit the neighborhood with effective group capacity building, involvement in a wide range of improvement and development activities by a wide range of residents, and positive inside driven, bottom-up development. The Chicago library created book groups that brought different ethnic, gender, class, and age groups together and created common ground for all of the groups. The Portsmouth dance project in New Hampshire also brought different groups together (working class and professional, hippies and conservatives) by establishing intimacy and trust between the groups.

Personal stories help people relate to one another by establishing commonalities. The Craigslist is an example of telling stories to build social capital that Putnam and Feldstein (2003) discuss. By looking at stories online, people create empathy for each other in a virtual setting. Storytelling includes three different types of stories: “I”, “we”, and “they”. “I” stories build trust because they establish commonalities. For example, Dudley Street in Boston organized a “unity meeting” in which individuals told their personal stories about their involvement with the neighborhood. This meeting brought people of different backgrounds together because they were all working toward the same goal, and sharing their stories made them realize that they have a common interest. “We” stories also establish connections between people. By telling “we” stories, Dudley Street activists were able to mobilize against a common issue (making their neighborhood a better place to live). With “we” comes “they”; creating and having an enemy can help build social capital. Residents of Dudley

Street were working against the city and higher ups in order to make their neighborhood better. Despite the fact that residents characterized city officials as their enemy, they did not demonize their enemy. Kris Rondeau and the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers did not demonize their enemy, Harvard, despite the fact that they were fighting for recognition against the institution.

Another way to build social capital is to utilize existing resources and direct them to new purposes, say Putnam and Feldstein (2003). The Do Something (an organization that encourages community activism and development of leadership skills among young people) organizers in Waupun, Wisconsin utilized this method when their initial plan for establishing local chapters failed and they drew on existing relationships in order to redirect their plan. In order to identify and bring in non-habitual readers, the Chicago Library works with schools in order to reach parents.

The twelve stories told by Putnam and Feldstein (2003) offer many examples of and “lessons learned” from building social capital. The twelve stories tell readers that in order to build social capital, smaller settings are needed, and that “bridging social capital,” telling stories, identifying an enemy, and redirecting existing resources, among other things are important factors. Building social capital can only happen when everyone in a community is recognized and valued and when his or her abilities are utilized and everyone works together.

Social capital is an important factor in asset based community development and community development in general. Silverman (2001b) deems social capital as necessary for sustainable community development, but outlines

the boundaries of its application. He says that overemphasis of social capital can lead to other important issues being overlooked. Social capital discussions, according to Silverman, tend to ignore the possibility and degree of instability that results from “interorganizational networks proliferating” (p. 264). Financial and human capitals are often underemphasized in social capital discussions as well, says Silverman (2001b). Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) say social capital is important because it is linked to different principal community issues that affect community building and development. They provide a tool that is intended to help associations and institutions figure out how their activities bring about the creation of social capital in communities. Kretzmann and McKnight’s social capital measurement tool is much more comprehensive, but less straightforward than Narayan and Cassidy’s (2001) proposed measurement tool. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) outline a five-page checklist/ questionnaire that organizations can use to measure social capital creation, while Narayan and Cassidy (2001) outline a simple one-page chart. Woolcock and Narayan (2000) address social capital’s effects on economic development and the implications for theory, research, and policy. Mathie and Cunningham (2005) say that networks, norms, and social trust are key aspects of social capital and address the recognition of the value of social capital in recent years. Activation of social capital necessitates a mediating organization, say the authors, in order for important connections to be made in the community that will advance community development. The different reasons why different authors find social capital to be important to community development all contribute to a larger understanding of the importance of community based development initiatives.

All seem to agree that social capital is vital to the community development process.

ROLE OF EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is a widely discussed concept of community development in the literature. Empowerment is a key concept in ABCD because it is the starting point of action and change. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) talk about mobilizing communities and releasing the power of individuals, which starts with empowerment. Stall and Stoecker (1998) talk about empowerment as a goal of the woman centered approach to community organizing and development.

Cultivating self-confidence that is more constructive and self-concept, a more analytical worldview, as well as abilities and means for social and political action are all parts of empowerment and the woman-centered approach, say the authors. Robert Silverman (2003) also discusses empowerment and the woman-centered model of community development. He says that the woman-centered approach focuses more on empowering residents through the community development process than other approaches do. Peterman (2000) discusses empowerment throughout his book as important in promoting action and development. He says that although it is a widely discussed concept of grassroots, bottom-up action, empowerment is seldom clearly defined.

Empowerment, according to Peterman, is often relative to one's political perspectives. Ultimately, empowerment results from "citizen participation that leads to citizen control and citizen power," says Peterman (41). Stoecker (1997b) describes empowerment as a feeling and a reality in which residents execute progressive control over their community. Community organizers and

developers are responsible for coordinating the situations that allow people access to power, says Stoecker (1997b). Jourdain (2005) makes a valid point concerning empowerment. She says that those who feel empowered need to be conscious not to impede others' empowerment by trying to rescue them.

Engaging people with a mutual interest in community issues is an important factor in fostering and promoting empowerment, says Jourdain (2005). Guy Gran (1983) says that empowerment results when people take control of resources, of the definition of common goals, and of the processes affecting their lives. He talks about the power and ability of small subgroups being important in bringing about empowerment. Self-reliance is a key factor in empowerment, says Gran, because without it people are clients rather than citizens. Moving from a client role to an active citizen role is also an important point made by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993). Rubin and Rubin (2001) say that empowerment happens when ordinary people realize that they have the power and the ability to take control of their situation and influence the decision-making and development process. Empowerment, according to Rubin and Rubin (2001) as well as most of the above-mentioned authors, is necessary for collective action to take place. Unlike other authors, Rubin and Rubin (2001) discuss exactly how people are kept disempowered, which strengthens their argument for the necessity of empowerment in bringing about collective action. Other authors outline how to empower people, however, Rubin and Rubin (2001) make clearer distinctions between exactly what it takes to do so. Raising consciousness, self-assertion, agenda framing, power and capacity building, and bootstrapping are discussed as empowerment strategies by the authors. The authors also distinguish between

collective empowerment and individual empowerment, unlike other authors. Collective empowerment happens when community members become responsible for the well-being of each other as well as the entire community. Empowerment leads to increased social capital in a community, say the authors, which is in consensus with Putnam (2000) and Kretzmann and McKnight (1993). Dudley Street in Boston is given as an example by Kretzmann and McKnight of collective empowerment that led to collective action.

An aspect of community development that is not addressed by many authors is youth engagement and involvement in the process. Camino (2005) discusses the importance of engaging and involving youth in the community development process. Youth have valid and worthwhile contributions to make to community development that often go overlooked, says Camino. Engaging youth around community issues exposes them to goal setting, problem solving, and planning, while steering them away from poverty, neglect, and other issues. The author conducted a study to determine what practices enabled youth in the community involvement and building process. Although Camino's findings are beneficial, evaluating more than two youth engagement programs would have strengthened her argument. Wolff (1952) also talks about the role of youth and schools in the community development process. He says that by engaging youth in community issues, an interest in participation will be sparked and adults will be better able to accept youth in the community development process. Engaging youth strengthens community-building efforts because it connects them to the larger community. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) discuss releasing the capacities of youth in the development process by implementing projects that

connect youth to their communities by increasing their self-esteem and abilities, while making the community a better place at the same time. Re-framing our views of youth from incompetent, irresponsible, and immature to competent, responsible, mature, and worthwhile sources of contribution to the development process allows the abilities of both youth and communities to be fully utilized.

The concept of community building is discussed in community development literature as a way to foster change. Fraser and Kick's (2005) discussion about community building mirrors discussions of ABCD. Inclusive community building includes increasing the capacity of local residents through building social capital, state the authors. Community building projects should be taken on based on assets that are already present in a community and citizen participation emphasized as opposed to a traditional top-down approach. Fraser and Kick (2005) say that positive change arises when community capacity is improved and activated. Similar to the discussions of ABCD, the authors discuss bridging social capital as an important aspect of community building. Fraser and Kick (2005) pose a valuable question when they discuss how communities can procure the resources needed to bring about change, while sustaining independence in decision-making. A "teamed approach" is proposed, which combines the efforts of funding sources and local residents in order to promote positive community development. Many authors of community development literature fail to address this issue. United Way discusses their use of community building strategies in a manner similar to ABCD as well. The organization talks about building on existing strengths and assets of a community, promoting local decision making and citizen participation, and building social capital.

SHIFTING FROM A NEEDS-BASED APPROACH TO AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH

Shifting from viewing a community in terms of its needs to viewing it in terms of its assets is also important in the community development process. HSU graduate student Tiffany Wilson (2005) conducted an asset mapping and capacity inventory of the Bayside community, which helped this community establish commonalities and cohesion. Bayside is a community affected by changing times and increased community disconnection due to population differences (some residents are living in a gated community, while others are living in shacks). Some residents were unsure of what is even considered to technically be the Bayside community. Wilson's study allows Bayside residents to see connections between themselves and realize that they have a mutual vision for their community. Collective empowerment resulted from Wilson's study, which will hopefully result in collective action.

Multiple authors discuss the shift from a needs-based approach to an asset-based approach. According to Wilkinson (1991), "Attachments to structures other than community are barriers to community development only if they constrain community interaction" (p. 36). Kathy Jourdain (2005) poses the question, "How do you shift communities to an asset-based view?" The answer, she says, starts with the individual. People need to have the ability to view their communities as places of opportunity rather than as places of problems. She lists four questions that communities should ask themselves about what they observe around the community in order to shift to an asset-based approach to community development issues: what's the opportunity in this?, how could we turn this into

an advantage?, what are the conditions/characteristics we would like our community to cultivate?, and what is working here? Looking at the opportunities and advantages in a situation is an example using a positive view and of starting with what is present in a community, rather than what is deficient, which is a main idea of ABCD. Jourdain's questions are a good place for communities to start re-framing their views of development. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) propose the creation of Neighborhood Development Trusts that would be sponsored by a group that is not interested in using intermediaries but rather, aims to provide funding to help prompt local groups to "create, support, and develop their own asset-development fund" (p. 355).

As director of The Center for Social Development (CSD) in St. Louis, Missouri, Michael Sherraden (1997) talks about the organization's goals to shift to an asset-based approach. The organization wants to set the tone for the advancement of ABCD practices by working on projects and activities in different areas. CSD wants to help define the field of asset building research by identifying important academic questions, as well as policy and community strategies. Applied research is another aspect that CSD wants to address by monitoring community development accounts at the state level and by performing a global assessment of asset-based policy. Basic research, discussion in the form of conferences, publishing research and policy studies and books concerning asset building, policy development, and training are also needed, according to Sherraden, to make a successful shift to an asset based approach to community development.

Mathie and Cunningham (2005) talk about adopting an ABCD approach at

the Coady Institute, which runs an educational program on community based development. The institute has recognized that an ABCD approach benefits the communities in which they work more than a needs-based approach does. The authors believe that ABCD employs the different practices that are predominant in development literature and therefore, is important to incorporate into their practices. More hands on learning and less research are proposed by Mathie and Cunningham (2005), as well as by Jourdain (2005) and Sherraden (1997), as a way to apply ABCD practices. While some organizations and agencies are attempting to shift from a needs-based approach to an asset-based approach, others are already operating programs and different approaches that are similar to ABCD in principle and in function.

THE WOMAN-CENTERED APPROACH

Many different authors discuss the women-centered approach to community organizing and building involved in community development. Silverman (2003) talks about community development organizations led by women that have comprehensive approaches focused on empowerment. The issue with such organizations, says Silverman (2003), is that they remain subordinated in the institutional context due to dated views of women and the public vs. private spheres. Silverman (2003) and Stall and Stoecker (1998) talk about gender in relation to the different types of movements that form under different kinds of leadership. The woman-centered model for community development increases the role of residents in the process, like ABCD.

Silverman (2003) conducted a study on CDCs in the Detroit area, which are predominantly women-led organizations. He found that despite female

leadership, these CDCs are unable to achieve the goals of a women-centered approach to development due to the institutional structure in which they operate. As a result, a clear distinction between male-led and female-led CDCs is hard to find. Seventy-one percent of CDCs in Detroit are led by women, which is a high number considering the female population in Detroit is 47 percent. Silverman has found an interesting test population in this respect that is worth studying. Silverman's research revealed that the CDCs in Detroit tend to be more comprehensive in the tasks that they take on because multitasking is more of a female quality than it is a male one. While Silverman's research offers valuable knowledge regarding the structure of CDCs, including research regarding CDCs in other geographic areas would have been beneficial.

The Alinsky Model counters the women-centered approach, according to Stall and Stoecker (1998) because it exhibits the interests and experiences of men and is oriented more with the public sphere rather than with the private sphere like the women centered approach. The emphasis of the woman-centered approach, according to Stall and Stoecker (1998), is "relationship building, coactive power, indigenous organizers, and informal organizational structures," (p. 748) which is very similar to the emphasis of ABCD. The Alinsky Model is more focused on "self-interest, confrontation, professional organizers, and formal organizations," say the authors, which is aligned with traditional community organizing and development efforts and needs-based approaches. A criticism of the woman centered approach that the authors offer is that the ideas and goals of the approach do not easily convert into action because they do not consider being subjected to the processes and ideals of the public (masculine) sphere. This is

also a criticism of ABCD approaches.

The woman-centered approach is beneficial to communities in several ways. It focuses on inclusiveness and citizen participation and is more egalitarian than other approaches, says Silverman (2003). Tom Borrup (2003) makes the connection between ABCD and a feminine approach to development by saying that female led organizations tend to be inside out and concerned with building on the existing assets of a community. Like Stall and Stoecker (1998), Borrup likens traditional development strategies to masculine approaches. He discusses the field of community cultural development, which is very similar to ABCD. He outlines the principles of this field as actively building social capital, building community, identifying and utilizing the cultural assets of a community, bringing disconnected parts of a community together, and fostering positive individual development. Like ABCD, social capital is an integral part of community cultural development as indicated by Borrup (2003).

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is another approach that is similar to ABCD. AI is based on the premise that constructive change results from focusing on the greatest experiences and achievements of the past, say Foster and Mathie (2001). Community members come together to compile information (through interviews and storytelling) that will aid them in formulating strategies for development. Like ABCD, AI attempts to shift away from a needs-based approach to community development. Both approaches build off what is present in a community in order to improve it and encourage an inside out approach to development that focuses on identifying strengths, assets, and capacities. AI,

however, is more limited in scope and less comprehensive in identifying assets in a community than ABCD is, according to the authors. ABCD focuses more on the present, while AI focuses on the past. The authors propose using AI and ABCD in conjunction with one another in order to improve development initiatives, which would be effective because the two approaches are complimentary (where AI leaves off, ABCD picks up). By comparing the two approaches and pointing out when one compliments the other or when one takes up where the other leaves off, the authors make a good case for the usage of a combination of AI and ABCD. Mathie and Cunningham (2003) also discuss AI in conjunction with ABCD. They liken the beginning stages of mobilizing communities in ABCD to AI, as well as the theoretical bases of the two practices.

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) is also similar to ABCD. Brocklesby and Fisher (2003) talk about community development in SLAs. SLAs connect socioeconomic and environmental matters in a forum that allows policy development. Both SLA and ABCD attempt to shift away from a needs-based approach to focus on people and their strengths, as well as on change being fostered within a community. Like ABCD, SLAs emphasize community participation and empowerment as vital to the community development process. Capital assets (social capital, natural capital, financial capital, physical capital, and human capital) are what people utilize to make their livelihoods, according to SLAs. Social capital is discussed as one of these capital assets that people make use of to create a sustainable livelihood. Unlike ABCD, SLAs concentrate on policy development and creation, according to the authors. The authors end by

posing valuable questions about the contribution of SLAs to the community development field. Mathie and Cunningham (2005) also talk about the connections between SLAs and ABCD. SLAs offer more expansive knowledge concerning assets and asset building, according to the authors. They posit that ABCD compliments SLAs in various manners. ABCD offers “a practical means of operationalizing [SLA] at the community level, while challenging the technocratic decision-making process that critics have associated with SLA” (Mathie and Cunningham 2005, p. 180). The authors say that ABCD is both people-centered and citizen driven, while SLA is only people-centered.

CONCLUSION

Community development has been a growing field since the 1960's. The focus of the field has moved from a grassroots orientation, to a needs-based orientation, and is slowly moving to an asset-based orientation. ABCD offers multiple benefits to communities across the country. Community members work together to bring about positive change by building on and utilizing what is present in their community, rather than listen to outside sources tell them what their problems are and how to fix them. Looking at the positive aspects of community issues gives way for positive change. Without involving and empowering local residents, community development is largely ineffective. ABCD allows community members to shift away from relying on services and functioning as a client. Relying on outside development efforts results in the implementation of an outside agenda that may not be conducive to community goals. Asset mapping connects community members by informing them about the wealth of resources in their community and by offering a common ground to

some.

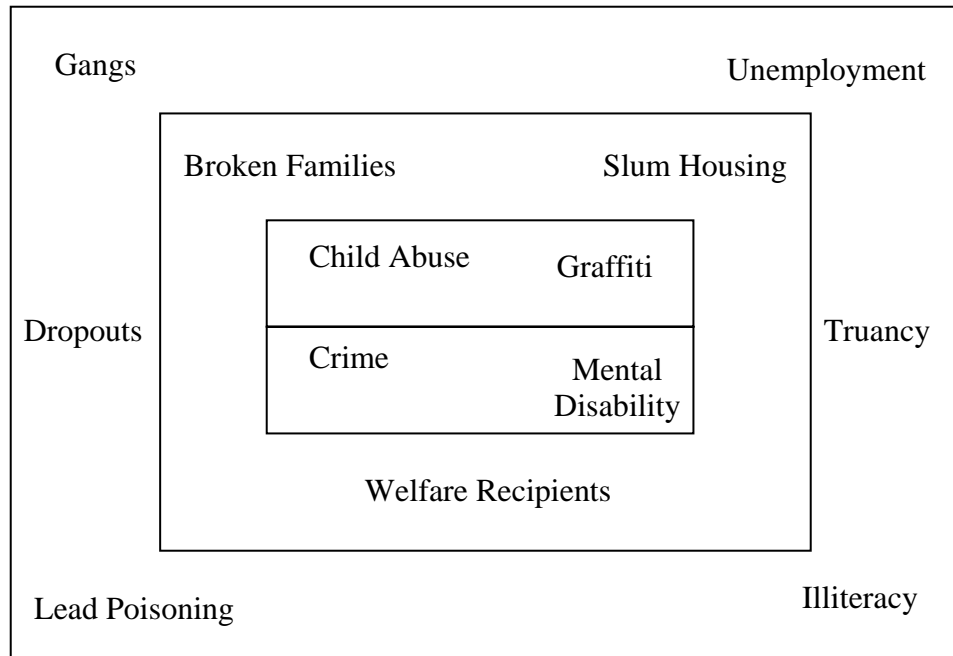
Critiques of ABCD have identified several limitations in the approach and its related research. ABCD does not adequately address the role of external agencies and institutions in the community development process and how their role can avoid encouraging dependency among community members. ABCD also does not deal with unequal power issues, like those that minorities and women face, which can exclude them from the development process. ABCD does not address how to foster community leadership in varying settings or how to approach a situation in which there is a lack of a favorable environment in which to enact ABCD strategies. ABCD has been criticized as a one-size fits all approach of sorts for these reasons.

Future research should be done in order to make the community development process more beneficial and encompassing. More comparative studies of asset-based approaches versus needs-based approaches should be done in order to illustrate the importance and value of ABCD. More research needs to be done into the long-term effectiveness of ABCD strategies. Youth engagement in the community development process is another area that needs further research because they are a part of the population that often goes overlooked in the development process. More research also needs to be done concerning unequal power issues and how ABCD can address them.

Although ABCD has room for improvement, the strategy seems to be overall more beneficial and effective for communities due to its positive, grassroots orientation. ABCD aims to mobilize an entire community in order to bring about change in a positive manner, which is more effective than outside

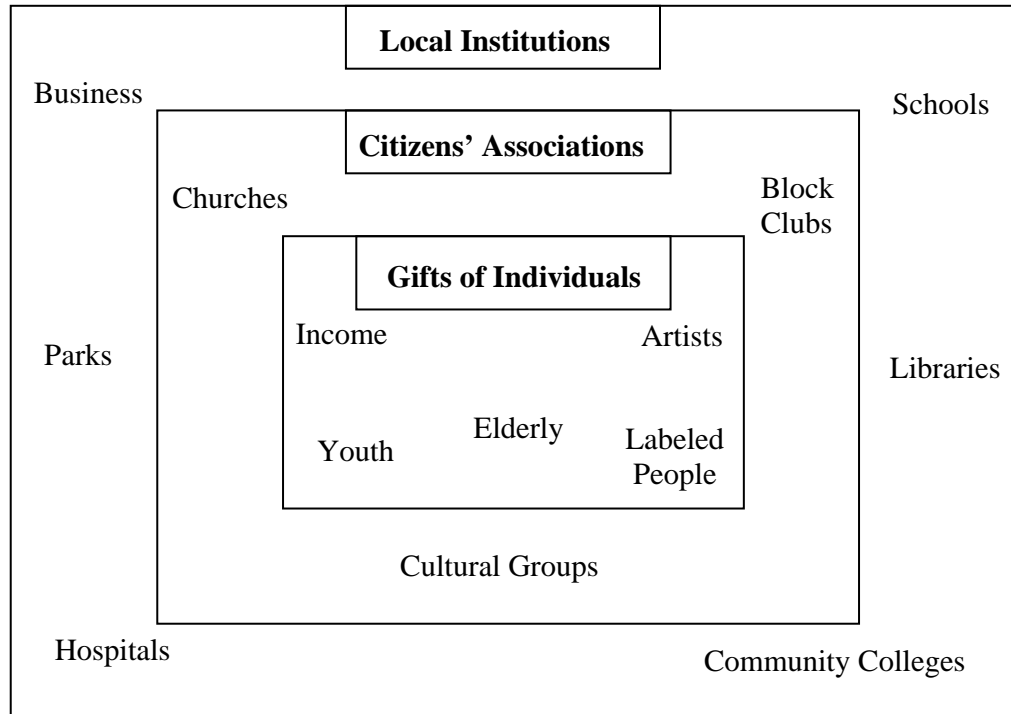
forces attempting to implement plans for community change. As was the intention of this review, the information presented illustrates the importance and value of asset-based community development strategies and initiatives to overall community well-being.

Neighborhood Needs Map



(Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993)

Community Assets Map



(Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993)

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