Community Media Development Problems

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1 Community Media Development Challenges

Community media has been described as "filling the void" vacated by mainstream media organisations in a deregulated marketplace (Barker-Plummer & Kidd, 2010, p. 318), and as a "practical approach" by which "context-sensitive political change" can be brought about in various "community spheres" (Rennie, 2006, p. 7). Either way, the dominant perspectives and dispositions that are articulated in numerous debates and accounts of community media, are ones that seek to address the goals, strategies and techniques of communication that support engagement and participation in the democratic social process. Thus, changes in the structure of the media economy, it is argued, are said to be intrinsically linked to the structural processes of democratic communication and accountability.

However, in an age when digitisation and social networking practices are rapidly becoming the norm, and technologies of communication and association are becoming ever-more responsive to the creative practices of users and people in social networks, then there is a need to reassess and reframe the relationships between users of online, social, collaborative and community media, and the ideas that frame the learning priorities and policies associated with the development of these practices. As such, there is a need to reconceptualise the way that community media is accounted for, explained and taught (Sobers, 2010), especially in the light of the shift towards 'participation' as the dominant model of media engagement (Jenkins et al., 2013; Rheingold, 2013). However, it is the contention here, that it is possible to go further, and to take this reconceptualisation beyond the existing frameworks of expectation (i.e. the participative model), thereby securing community media's continued relevance in the shift from the *arbolic* to the *rhizomic*, the *participative* to the *generative*, and from a *media studies* model to a *community development and sustainability* model.

The interdependent relationships of technology, symbolic representation, social dispositions, perspectives of association, and frameworks of evaluation, are always shifting and changing. Hence, there is a continuing necessity to revaluate the current framework "trade-offs" that are set-out when calculating the effectiveness of any planned community media undertakings, either as practice or as study. Andrew Feenberg argues in relation to community development and sustainability, that "the current value we place on the various elements of trade-offs may not make much sense in scientific or human terms," but they may make sense when we apply a different framework of sustainability and social development (Feenberg, 2016, p. 271). For example, what are often regarded as

insubstantial estimations of costs and benefits in one framework of evaluation, might have a profound but different impact on the core reasons for investing in an alternative model of community media.

High on the agenda of community media practitioners is their desire to address issues of social justice, voice poverty and marginalisation. However, these are issues and concerns that cannot be addressed using instrumental or simple economic models of accountability alone, i.e. transactional models of cause-and-effect. Addressing exclusion from the mainstream process of communication has been a long-term concern for advocates and supporters of community media. This is an ethical and moral motivation which uses a social justice framework of analysis, aimed at addressing the imbalances inherent in the media and civic ecology. To address these imbalances the focus has up to now been placed on media literacies, opportunities to participate, access to material resources, and the 'know-how' of informal and ad-hoc groups (Commision, 2007; Everitt, 2003). These groups are said to emerge from the grass-roots to take forms of representation into their own hands, and thereby address the imbalance created by mainstream, mass, public service broadcasting and commercial media models (Atton, 2002; Bailey et al., 2008).

When specific groups, publics and communities feel that they have no voice in the civic, economic and political realms, then it is community media practitioners and advocates who have been prepared to step-forward and take advantage of the possibilities that new forms of communication practice offer. As long as the nascent practitioners are smart-enough, and well-equipped enough, to take advantage of the affordances that these new forms of media technology offer. For example, how they work, how they are shared, and how they are made meaningful? With the introduction of new forms of media technology, however, with new forms of communication practice, and emerging forms of dispersed self-representation, then the existing flows of communication are being disrupted. Howard Rheingold's view is that social "networks are no longer simple, rigid, or tightly bounded as power elites have been throughout history," instead, "alternative networks now disrupt and contend with older power structures" (Rheingold, 2012, p. 202).

This implies a considerable shift in the expectations that underpin the existing models of community media, both in terms of the literacies and skills practices that are built-in to community media focused projects, and the policy expectations and the resource priorities of the bodies that fund, support and validate community media practices. For example, the issue of marginalisation as a social justice issue is not one that can be addressed by community media alone, but will have more lasting impact if it is integrated with other community development practices and sustainability models. If community media projects are only conceived, developed and undertaken in isolation, then they run

the risk of being brittle and fragile, and not able to “make larger scale infrastructure changes and investments,” or to “extend rights and voice to marginalised communities” (Oden, 2016, p. 39).

2 Adapting to the Post-Broadcast Age

The shift in perspective and dispositions that are emerging in the post-broadcast mediascape have significant implications for the policy and educational regimes that are associated with community media and media practices more generally. In deterministic models of technology there is the view that media platforms, which offer more freedom and greater opportunities for participation, will compromise the quality and the established social utility of the communicative practices that we are familiar with. The anxiety is that the proliferation of user-generated-content will result in the break-up of the established media organisations, such as news and entertainment channels, and will disrupt the tradition of critical thinking that they represent (Gillmor, 2006; Keen, 2013). This assumes that there is a direct correlation between the inputs to this system, and the outputs that are witnessed at the other end. By taking a pragmatic approach to the deployment and use of media, however, as it is articulated by people acting socially and meaningfully in all sorts of different reference communities, it is possible to further understand the underlying disruption that emerging communication technologies offer. Moreover, by returning to some earlier pragmatic assumptions about social communication, such as the symbolic interactionist tradition, that are drawn from empirical observation of what people do in their life experiences, it is possible to learn and propose alternative practices that draw on different traditions of social interaction and community development (Becker & McCall, 1990; Blumer, 1969; Charon, 1995; Denzin, 1992; Hewitt, 1979).

Andrew Feenberg suggests that there is an “assumption in the background of the trade-off approach,” whereby when we “talk about trade-offs, all other things must remain equal,” or ‘*ceteris paribus*.’ This suggests that if the principles of social communication change, and if the cost-base and access charges change, then the original balance that was achieved within the framework of evaluation will also change, and the “original calculation of the trade-off is invalidated” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 272). The challenge to existing and taken-for-granted trade-off positions comes, however, when the timespan is expanded and the context is revaluated, thereby exposing the contemporary regulating features demonstrated within their limited and contingent context. While it would be disingenuous to suggest that the individual aspirations of social agents acting alone will disrupt the mainstream media ecology, it is possible to argue that a sufficient aggregation of the emergent practices of these agents will have the potential to promote change, as in the ‘crowdsourcing’ and ‘tipping-point’ thesis (Gladwell, 2000; Leadbeater, 2009).

Social change, it seems, is the only certainty. If models of social and technological structure are restrained in deterministic trade-off models of cause-and-effect, then there is a risk that the cultural dimensions that fuel change remain unexplored and unaccounted for. The social goals and objectives of our times change and adapt to new circumstances and new associations of people who are engaging with them, assessing them, remembering them, prioritising them, and seeking to accomplish them. The conflict that is generated from enforced conformity to legacy media practices is counterproductive, and results only in a culture that is sterile and subordinate to its established and assumed sense of hierarchy. In the case of community media, in which decisions and meanings are articulated socially, it is possible to imagine different outcomes from those decisions and meaning that are the product of either individual or corporate thinking and meaning making. The goals of the individual are not the same as the goals of the social group, though they are enacted and explained in a reciprocal process that is related to both the individual, the social group, and the tools of symbolic representation that are available.

Community media practices, therefore, can be conceived as a series of goals that are formed in 'nested hierarchies,' through which different meanings and pathways are made available. Questioning the goals of the different actors and communities of participants is likely to reveal a diverse series of goal-achieving procedures and decision-making processes. The frustration that is occasionally manifested between different agents and practitioners of varying dispositions engaged in creative media activity, is a result of a lack of recognition of, and accommodation with, the different goals that these groups seek to achieve: i.e. order and efficiency, harmony and meaning, security and well-being or action and performance, for example. This is a socially constructive view of the challenges of dealing with social inequity and marginalisation which suggests that no one 'sector' of social engagement can deal with the problem in its totality. As Michael Oden asserts:

> "It is not inequalities within individual spheres that constitute the principle problem of equity, rather it is inequalities in one sphere spilling over and shaping distributions in another sphere with different values and standards of distribution" (Oden, 2016, p. 34).

Hence, inequality and marginalisation are not issues that can be addressed in the context of the mainstream media studies approach alone, because they are not looking at the context and the interrelationships within the communities and the life experiences of the people who are involved. Social inequality is deeply ingrained in many Western economies, the process of addressing these inequalities is complex and often politically, economically and morally fraught. Where community media has significant potential to play a crucial role, however, is in the promotion of the citizens voice,

not just as a way of enabling a sense of meaningful participation, but principally to enact and practice the habit of “mutual respect between citizens of a liberal democracy” (Oden, 2016, p. 34).

3 Beyond Audiences, Institutions, Texts

Where the traditional framework of community media evaluation and trade-offs is clearly being challenged, however, is our understanding that media has stopped being a resource of scarcity, and has become, instead, a resource that is plentiful. Ellie Rennie made that point appropriate to the time, that while community broadcasting has sought to serve the needs of local communities, it is also supported by a “desire for access that drives local content as much as need”(Rennie, 2006, p. 121). As non-broadcast, non-mainstream and socially connected digital media platforms and services proliferate, this view may no longer be tenable. As the need for access declines, moreover, there remains the question of the driving rationale that community media projects are conceived in-regards to, and what allows them to move forward?

As we enter the era of abundant distributed social media technology, there is a need to apply what Andrew Feenberg calls an “exercise to free up our imagination of the future in which our present prejudices will become obvious for what they are” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 277). This implies a deep-rooted questioning of the assumptions that are taken for granted about community media: the established technical disciplines, goals and codes of social relationships; the inherited practices and the commons stocks of knowledge that are cultivated in the academy; the emergent practices that are given in the moment, and the received and collective memories of the people who forge and condense these practices. This means being vigilant about the mutual concerns of people and communities that are not being articulated and practiced in the mainstream and commercially driven models of media. It also means questioning how it is possible to displace the indifference that is too often shown to social justice concerns, or economic fairness, or ecological sustainability and responsibility. What will be the practices and the concerns that are codified today that will become the inherited norms in the future? What kind of ethical and sustainable framework will these practices be evaluated by, so as to ensure the maximum social utility and benefit?

The virtues of community media as a community development practice, however, are not self-evident and cannot be taken for granted, so they have to be structured into the learning curriculums of a broader range of practitioners and designers, who in the future will be designing the new social systems. Where is community media in the environmental and ecological sustainability debates? They share many aspirations and concerns, but community media is seldom mentioned in advice

and instruction given to trainee urban planners, architects, education managers, healthcare workers or social administrators. And while there is no single or best way to undertake community media, only a range of different approaches that seem plausible and which fit the circumstances and struggles that they are borne from, so at the end of the day there will be no historical refutation of what has been achieved or avoided, only a humanistic account of what these opportunities represented and what the consequences of the unknown actions could be. Community media is at a crossroads in which practitioners can opt to maintain the differentials associated with mainstream and established media practice. Community media practitioners and advocates are well placed, however, to embrace new approaches that take advantage of the new technological affordances of social technology, thereby opening-up the social system of communication and engagement in ways that are fundamentally disruptive.

4 Pragmatic Frameworks

The opportunity to explore these alternative pathways suggest that there are innovative routes to be found that stretch and reshape how the media practices and activities are taken-up by people who have otherwise been excluded from these networks. There is, however, no unbiased point from which we are able to assess or validate these practices, only the sense that they will change over time, and that we are likely to forget the lessons of the past if we don't make efforts to describe and explain what was happening at any given point. As we approach the task of assessing the new goals and aims of community media, it will be useful to compare them with the aspirations and experiences of those who came before us. However, asking how we *used* to live and use media, is not the same as asking how we *want* to live and use media? Richard Rorty suggests that instead of looking for fixed and immovable accounts of social experience, we should instead seek those things that are historically contingent, that can be described in their transience, and which can be theoretically revised. With its heightened emphasis on collaboration and shared techniques of production, that are not expected of more conventional forms of media, community and collaborative media occupies a territory that is distinctive and challenging. This distinction is characterised as a set of working and conceptual practices that are grounded in a real-world environment, in which *individual* and *collaborative* knowledge is blurred and indeterminate.

The importance of the every-day practices and experiences of the participants who volunteer in community media groups can be usefully explained, on the one hand, as a form of social knowledge that is exchanged within a '*societas,*' that is a group of people who share their corresponding life ex-

periences together; or alternatively, as a set of social arrangements that takes the form of a '*universitas*', in which there is a mutual self-interest between a group of people who want to achieve a particular goal or outcome (Oakeshott, 1975). To put this in some context, and as Richard Rorty explains:

> "Epistemology views the participants [of a community] as united in what Oakeshott calls an universitas – a group united by mutual interests in achieving a common end. Hermeneutics views them as united in what he calls a societas – persons whose path through life have fallen together, united by civility rather than by a common goal, much less by common ground" (Rorty, 2009 p.318).

The challenge going ahead, then, is to understand the role and the function of community media as a lived social experience, and how is it might be possible to note the different forms of participation in community media activities that help agents and activists to engage in community media production practices and organisations with corresponding, rather than enforced goals.

So, the aim of studies of community media in the future might usefully develop a pragmatic picture of the casual correspondence and contingent relationships that 'fall together' within field sites of community and collaborative development, with the assumption that this picture will open-up space for further discussion about the basis on which *collaborative purpose* is arrived at in accommodating communities. In attempting to locate this presumed sense of common purpose, either as a society based on shared goals that are sometimes articulated in radical dreams of critical emancipation and utilitarian efficiency; or alternatively, as a society of correspondence, in which people just rub-along together, it will be necessary for future investigations to focus on the practical tasks that have been useful to people undertaking similar tasks or study. These include: "predicting the behaviour of inhabitants" of the unfamiliar cultures of community media groups, learning to talk with different agents within overlapping community media groups, despite the "incommensurability of [their] language" (Rorty, 2009 p.350); and the development of practical models that participants, students and supporters of community media can reflect on to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their ethical and practical operations. As Rorty argues, "the notion of culture as a conversation rather than as a structure erected upon foundations fits well with the hermeneutical notion of knowledge, since getting into a conversation with strangers is like acquiring a new virtue or skill by imitating models" (Rorty, 2009, p. 319).

The aim of pragmatic social thinking, according to Rorty, is to provide a space through which "commonsensical practical imperatives" can be validated against "the standard current theory about sub-

jects" (Rorty, 2009 p.385). Besides, as McCarthy and Wright affirm, "pragmatists theorising is a practical, consequential activity geared toward change, not representation" (McCarthy & Wright, 2004 p.20). Hence, the task at hand will be to link and validate the commonsensical practical imperatives of people who are working in community media groups and networks, with the standard ideas and concepts that are associated with the analysis of community media, and then come up with some practical suggestions that might help in pursuing change on the ground – both in the community media groups in practice, and in the formulation of the prevailing ideas and concepts associated with the study of community media (Forster, 2010).

A pragmatic outlook and perspective, according to Jim Ife, is better able to deal with a world of unpredictability and uncertainty, rather than trying to impose order and fixity within a social system, so that "social justice ends can be realised" (Ife, 2013, p. 109). A focus on *process*, therefore, rather than *outcome*, signifies a substantial shift, and the search for a sense of social justice is a work in progress that is continually being worked-out and explained within its embedded context. This means that community media can prioritise the practical exploration of these issues, rather than the empty search without question for extended meta-narratives, or without examination of the way that they are socially constructed in the context of their articulation. Social justice is a rich topic of discussion in social and community development circles, but it needs to be understood in an immediate, local, relational and contextual sense, and thereby become a "topic for dialogue and discussion, rather than a mantra to be repeated" (Ife, 2013, p. 108).

In adopting a pragmatic disposition, then, with its roll-back of concern with meta-narratives, discourse and ideology, community media can be examined free from rigid conceptual parameters that suggests that community media serves a specific purpose or function. Instead, community media can be recognised as serving many purposes and functions that are relevant to the diverse interests of the people who are involved and associated with them. There is no one path, but many directions through which social life might be accomplished and experienced. Advocates and practitioners of community media can be better served, therefore, if they are able to work across the broader range of those possible routes, especially if they are equipped with the skills and analytical approaches that allow them to navigate the different lifeworld conditions and experiences that they might encounter, regardless of the sense of predictability that is offered in other forms of critical thinking.

5 Generative Media Paradigm

The need to change and adapt to more open platforms and technologies is perhaps the greatest challenge in this reorientation of community media. Being able to specify, adjust and modify the functions of a technology, and the outputs of that technology in terms of meaningful content, will require that we change our expectations of all forms of media technology. In adapting the functional comprehensibility of media services and tools, the expectation is that the majority of the media services and tools might also be adaptable. This quickly becomes an expectation of emergent media users who do not have the memory of when the world existed before the new forms of communication (McLuhan, 1967). Pierre Levy explains that

> "Whether we are producing useful documents, clarifying or improving shared symbolic structures, spreading the most effective methods and practices or raising individual and collective awareness of the emergent cognition for the community, we will almost always find our-selves confronted with the problem of explicating implicit knowledge and processes" (Levy, 2013, p. 104).

Levy suggests that in developing a disposition to information and cultural association that is inherently social, one has to look at the way that it supports conversation and the sharing of tacit knowledge, as much as the way that it shares formal and previously established knowledge. Levy suggests that "we need to promote organisational and technical environments conductive to transparency, flexible reorganisation of skill networks and continuous collaborative creation of immediately usable knowledge."

As has been widely established, community media can be viewed from a number of different perspectives (alternative, DIY, hyperlocal), and is regarded as both an oppositional form of media and as a form of participatory media. Baily *et al* suggest that "alternative media are articulated in many different ways – not only in relation to the mainstream media, but also as community media, as civil society media, and as rhizomatic media" (Bailey et al., 2008, p. xii). The concept of the rhizome is most closely associated with the work of Deleuze and Guattari, who suggest that rhizomes are a useful metaphor for the "juxtaposition of rhizomatic and arbolic thinking." An arbolic structure is said to be linear, and relies on "hierarchic and sedentary" thinking, and is said to resemble the "tree-like structure of a genealogy," with "branches that continue to subdivide into smaller and lesser categories"' (Bailey et al., 2008; Wray, 1998). The arbolic is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the attitude of the mainstream, whereas the rhizome is "non-linear, anarchic and nomadic" (Bailey et al., 2008; Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, p. 19).

So, while the rhizome connects different points at any other point, the arbolic structure, in contrast, must follow its established linear connections. Underpinning alternative, collaborative and community media, then, are links with civil society that form *intersection points* with other structures. So, rather than viewing community media and alternative media as fixed, it becomes possible to see these as organisational configurations where unconventional media organisations can remain grounded in local communities and become concurrently employed in translocal networks. These translocal networks are fluid and diverse, and have been established so that they avoid the "dichotomised positioning of alternative media in relationship to the local and the global," or the market and the progressive, or the consumer and the producer. Thus the rhizome highlights a different way to speculate about how the "local and global touch and strengthen each other within alternative media" (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 27).

Chris Atton suggests, this "points to non-deterministic perspective with regard to media, technology and society, as well as a breaking down of the dichotomies between different kinds of media, as implied by the metaphor of the rhizome. Which render "rhizomatic enterprises fragile and make them liable to collapse, disruption and incoherence," but which itself gives way to "open (discursive) spaces for the more fluid aspects of mainstream media identities" (Atton, 2002, p. 149).This is a process of *dettritorialisation* in which the mainstream media acts in a linked relation with alternative media, because the process is more fluid, more problematic and vulnerable, and with increasingly sequestered base positions. Rhizomatic clusters, moreover, are focused on diversity, heterogeneity, ad-hoc organisational arrangements and network interconnections. They use a wide variety of different forms of technology, and are agnostic about standards, so they are able to recognise a wide range of positions, while also utilising the multiplicity of identities and sense-making routines that people use to steer through community life. Those organisations that are rigid and homogenous are not likely to be able to adapt and respond to changes in the social world, such as the relationships between the local and the global. Nor are they able to respond to, or "overcome the confinement of locality," and as such have very little to say about the "elusive and diversified" forms of engagement that are typical of alternative forms of media (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 124).

The point is, according to Bailey *et al*, that "creating an arbolic structure would simply imply the creation of a copy of mainstream and large-scale media, and would not generate a map, with its multiple entryways and adaptability" (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 124). The rhizome emphasises "connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, and a signifying rupture," that allows for complexity, and which makes no attempt to smooth community and network relationships into simplistic structures or bonds. This

means that community-based media can "remain grounded in local communities and become simultaneously engaged in translocal networks characterised by the fluid articulation of media organisation." This approach, therefore, becomes key to avoiding the "dichotomised positioning of alternative media in relationship to the local and the global," (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 124), as each are recognised for the role that they play in opening up ways to think about how each can strengthen the other within alternative, collaborative and community media fields.

In these circumstances emphasis has to be given to improving the fluidity of communication and to cultivating flow through the networks so that it will enhance the independent, unplanned and diverse accomplishments of different alternative media producers and activists. As long as these producers are making content that is attractive and comprehensible, as it is understood under the mantel of DIY media, then there is every chance that it will spread a sense of dissent formed through "just plain old independent thinking" (Atton, 2002, p. 127). Richard Rorty argues that as active participants in a developing language community we need to be aware of the contingent and historically located nature of our ideas. Rorty makes the point that

> We latecomers can tell the kind of story of progress which those who are actually making progress cannot. We can view these people as toolmakers rather than discoverers because we have a clear sense of the product which the use of those tools produced. The product is our conscience, our culture, our form of life. Those who made it possible could not have described the ends to which their work was a means. But we can (Rorty, 1989 p.135).

6 Adopting Community Development Dispositions

John Dewey was concerned that the impact of mass and industrial society was having a deleterious effect on inherited traditions of localised communal life. Dewey argued that if the publics' search for a sense of embedded identity was to be fruitful, it would:

> "Manifest a fullness, variety and freedom of possession and enjoyment of meanings and goods unknown in the contiguous associations of the past. For it will be alive and flexible as well as stable, responsive to the complex and world-wide scene in which it is enmeshed. While local, it will not be isolated. Its larger relationships will provide an inexhaustible and flowing fund of meanings upon which to draw, with assurance that its drafts will be honoured" (Dewey, 2016, p. 232).

In this respect, the experience of supporting a sense of community, according to Dewey, is a process of *fraternal* and *shared experiences* that are founded in sustained conversations, but which are emergent and changing as the conditions of association change, as the techniques of distribution change, and as the tools that are available to the actors change. The final realisation of this sense of

community, according to Dewey however, is to be “accomplished in face-to-face relationships by means of direct give-and-take” (Dewey, 2016, p. 232)..

This pragmatic outlook is echoed in Reingold’s ideas of virtual communities. According to Rheingold virtual communities are “technologies of cooperation” (Rheingold, 2012, p. 151) that enable people to collaborate more effectively because they are able to coordinate, share and give attention to their common goals. As Rheingold describes, “collaborators develop and agree on common goals, share responsibility and work together to achieve those goals, and contribute to resources to the effort” (Rheingold, 2012, p. 154). A virtual community, as with a face-to-face community, is bounded by principles of participative collaboration, according to Rheingold, that override “basic social dilemmas by constructing systems of norms and self-policing social contract” between collaborators (Rheingold, 2012, p. 152).

However, these norms are not easy to enact and take significant time, effort and social capital to create. Robert Putnam suggests that a strong sense of community is often best achieved “through extensive and time-consuming face-to-face conversations between two individuals or among small groups of people” (Putnam et al., 2003, p. 9). The question irises, subsequently, if we can’t go around promoting community identity and a sense of belonging on a person-to-person basis, what tools and media techniques can we use to assist us, at least partially, along the way to achieving this goal? Given community media’s “participatory ethos,” and community media’s history helping to form “vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable communities” (Howley, 2010, p. 181), it would be a missed opportunity if community media was not reoriented in its expectation that it can build trust, mutual understanding and sustained social relationships. The priority that is given in community media to access and participation are substantial strengths when aligned with other social and community development objectives. Abandoning the top-down models of media access and participation, then, is a priority and something that community media has a long and proud tradition of demonstrating.

What is needed, then, is a reframing of both the practical and the conceptual framework that community media is understood. Rather than viewing community media as a primarily textual, institutional or economic activity, a refreshed focus would see community media primarily as a social and community development tool, with origins in social work, welfare work and youth work. Community development practices and concepts are relevant because they are related to conversations and debates about social justice, economic and ecological sustainability. Community media, therefore, has a contribution to make to debates about what makes a “truly sustainable society” (Ife, 2013, p. 104). This implies that “instead of designing organisations around the characteristics of agents, we should

design organisations around the interactions between agents that create meaning and allow solutions to emerge and re-emerge" (Lanham et al., 2016, p. 56). Something that community media is well suited to.

In the community development mindset, then, change is likely to come from prodding and applied experience, as opposed to abstract, theory-based positivism. Agents working socially to form and support communities learn from association and the mutual-agreement reached through conversations of goals and objectives. This implies a strongly deliberative disposition that enables people to develop empathy and affinity with different members of their communities from the context and lifeworld's that are at hand. This is a set of "procedures of making sense of the world it unfolds" (Lanham et al., 2016, p. 56), rather than a search for the right key. The focus is on changes and patterns of adjustment that happen over time, which may be unpredictable, unconventional and which emerge from practical, *ad-hoc* relationships *in-situ*.

A rationalist planning approach to community development is unlikely, therefore, to have any impact on the ability of people acting-in or forming communities. Influencing the positive development of relationships that are capable of addressing social problems, such as urban regeneration, healthcare, hyper-commercialism, identity affiliations, social justice inequalities, voice poverty, ecological degeneration, and so on, require a response that is founded on a continuing ability to learn and modify social patterns of behaviour. As the world changes, and the disruptions of climate change, automation, globalisation, digitisation, and so on, continue to challenge the existing social structures, there is a need to innovate and to challenge the established routines of thinking and behaviour that have provided certainty in the past, but which are no unsuited to the tasks at hand. Community media is well positioned to play a significant role in future development reorientations, given that community media has been imbued with an appreciation for, and willingness to cultivate diversity. A willingness to foster relationships based on emergence and future problems that take nonlinear forms of engagement, a strong regard for self-organisation, coupled with a strong regard for co-development and interdependent networks of collaborators and participants, means that community media can play a significant role in the emerging, decentralised mediascape.

Community development concepts carry with them an appeal to holistic and integrated design principles that provide a vision of a better society, focused on the belief that "the new whole will be significantly greater than the sum of its parts" (Ife, 2013, p. 110). In adopting a pragmatic approach to social and community sustainability, then, it is possible to re-evaluate the conventional wisdoms associated with the prevailing social, economic and political order. An integrated, pragmatic approach to community development, and the role that community media can play in the long-term planning

for social sustainability is "therefore critical" (Ife, 2013, p. 110) if genuine change is to be brought about. These changes need to be founded on "integrated perspective, and genuine dialogue between advocates," including social rationalism, social holism, and social interactionism. None of which would be achievable without embracing uncertainty and "utilising more adaptive strategies such as insurgent planning and communicative planning." Social sustainability is, according to Lanham et al, "something which we must continuously strive through multiple, humble, iterative projects from which we learn. As we move towards sustainability, we change the world" (Lanham et al., 2016, p. 61).

7 Community

For Jim Ife the ecological, social justice and pragmatic perspective of social development forms the basis of a sustainable vision for a future society. At the heart of this vision is the "concept of community," which according to Ife, is "inevitably a fundamental concept" (Ife, 2013, p. 111). This is a because the

> "Community-based approach is reinforced by the ecological principle of diversity, as it enables different ways of doing things to be developed in different circumstances, and by the principle of sustainability, as small-scale structures are likely to be more sensitive to their immediate environments" (Ife, 2013, p. 111).

Community media consistently champions empowerment models of change, providing a framework for people to take effective decisions, combined with a needs-based perspective. Community media as a community development practice is thus able to help people to "define and articulate their felt needs and aspirations," which is "consistent with the idea of relational reality and the more collective understandings of Indigenous world views" (Ife, 2013, p. 111). However, if we try to pin-down the meanings of community in a strict definition, then we are likely to miss out on many of the potentialities that are associated with a more open, constructive worldview.

Successful community development happens because it is conducted on a *human scale*, and is therefore a counter to the impersonal and centralised structures that are prioritised in industrial and mass societies. This means, according to Ife, that the scale should be "limited to one where people will know each other or can readily get to know each other as needed, and where interactions are such that they are readily accessible to all." Where "structures are small enough for people to be able own and control them, thereby allowing for genuine empowerment" (Ife, 2013, p. 112). Practical

definitions of community usually incorporate a sense of belonging to a defined or otherwise indeterminate social group. Being accepted and valued within these group implies membership and recognition by other people who are loyal to the goals and the aims that are collectively accomplished. As Jim Ife suggests

> "Belonging to a community gives one a sense of identity. The community can become part of a person's self-concept, and is an important aspect of how one views one's place in the world. The lack of such personal identity is commonly perceived as one of the problems of modern society" (Ife, 2013, p. 113).

Community media has inherent potential, therefore, to form a new location for the nurturing of a sense of identity and belonging. But rather than this being based solely on ascribed identity of faith, ethnicity and locale, the sense of belonging that community media fosters is achieved through creative identity work, creative media collaboration, and the telling of stories of belonging that are associated with other aspects of life in which, rather than seeking social status, community media is primarily driven by feelings of social esteem – i.e. a generative model.

However, membership of a community is not free, it is located with a set of rights and responsibilities that are founded on the expectation that an active contribution and participation in the life of a community is essential, not only in order to contribute to the maintenance of the community structure, but also because passive experiences of community life are destructive and negate the requirements of active engagement that determines if a community is able to survive and prosper. Ife provides the concept of gemeinschaft, or the close social relations between people. A "community will enable people to interact with each other in a greater variety of roles, which will be less differentiated and contractual, and which will encourage interactions with others as 'whole people' rather than as limited and defined roles or categories." This enhanced sense of sociability, with it's emphasis on personal relationships and trust, positions "self-enhancement, human contact and personal growth" is at the centre of the development model of sociability, as it "enables individuals to contribute to a wider range of talents and abilities for the benefit of others and the community as a whole" (Ife, 2013, p. 113).

As a result of these interacting obligations which we need to account for holistically and interdependently, it is possible for an enriched and creative approach to community life to offer an "antidote to the phenomenon of 'mass culture.'" As is well argued, the industrialised and large-scale principles of social efficiency have given way to a sterile and hollow form of uniform cultural application. However, Ife argues that a renewed sense of creative and sustainable community

> “Enables the valuing, production and expression of a local community-based culture, which will have unique characteristics associated with that community, which will enable people to become active producers of that culture rather than passive consumers, and which will thus encourage both diversity among communities and broad-based participation” (Ife, 2013, p. 113).

Community media as a facilitating operation for these characteristics, of a developmental and sustainable community, can play and integral role, along-side other responses to the challenges of modern ways of living, such as civic deliberation, urban renewal, health and wellbeing equity, social identity and inter-community representation, economic equity and social justice, as well as ecological and environmental sustainability concerns.

8 Forward Looking Questions

Many questions arise from this reconceptualisation which will need to be considered in greater depth. What are the ‘trade-offs’ in developing community media along this changed model? What are the changes that community media can bring about? To what extent is community media able to articulate alternative points of view? What are the social values that community media draws on? How is community media challenging dominant and mainstream media views? How ‘fixed’ or ‘determined’ are our expectations of community? What choices do we have ahead of us as communities change? What is the *know-how* and the *know-what* that we need in order to understand the different worldviews? Can we make predictions about community development? Do we have to invent a new conceptual scheme to make sense of these changes? What is likely to prompt a shift in our ways of thinking? Can we draw on shared assumptions about how communities work? What are we offering as evidence? If we change our perspective along these lines, will we be able to see and understand what it is that has made the difference?

According to John Dewey, “we lie… in the lap of an immense intelligence. But that intelligence is dormant and its communications are broken, inarticulate and faint until it possesses the local community as its medium” (Dewey, 2016, p. 233). Limits exist as to how far communities can be stretched and hollowed out, so a central concern for community media practitioners and advocates must be to look creatively at addressing the causes of the erosion of our sense of social life, and the structures that hold the “community together” (Simpson et al., 2003, p. 284). If ways can be found to shift social resources that focus on robustness and resilience, as in the social sustainability model, then community media has a vital role to play in securing the practices we need to live well tomorrow. This just might help both the planner and the citizen in their attempt to “negotiate the multiple

strands of wickedness" (Thompson, 2016, p. 25) that would otherwise prevail in a non-sustainable society. The behaviour that will underpin this activity is both generative and progressive, and will, according to Dewey, be a manifestation of the differential wants, purposes and methods of operation concerned (Dewey, 2016, p. 139). Dewey suggests that "Progress is not steady and continuous," and that retrogression is as likely to assert itself unless we are vigilant about the techniques that we use to craft the means to live well in the future. As Dewey argues, "industry and inventions in technology, for example, create means which alter the modes of associated behaviour and which radically change the quantity, character and place of impact of their indirect consequences" (Dewey, 2016, p. 80). Finally, Jim Ife suggests that "perhaps the most important points from this discussion are the need for collective rather than individual action ('What can we do?' rather than 'What can I do?'), and the importance of smaller-scale actions that can lead to larger-scale change." Community development principles, according to Ife, "recognise that effective change is gradual and organic, and this also applies to changing the organisation context of community development practice" (Ife, 2013, p. 364). As Dewey notes, "associated or joint activity is a condition of the creation of a community. But association itself is physical and organic, while communal life is moral, that is emotionally, intellectually, consciously sustained" (Dewey, 2016, p. 178).

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