Community development today: engaging challenges through cosmopolitanism?

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Abstract  This article begins by outlining some of the challenges and opportunities for community development theory and practice today. Some of these have been present from the 1960s and 70s, some have been evident for several decades, others are new and some demand urgent attention. The second part of the paper notes three types of responses to the challenges. It argues the case for embracing one specific response, namely a deepening of a cosmopolitan outlook in both the theory and practice of community development. While acknowledging that community development is in some ways already a cosmopolitan endeavour, the paper concludes with a call for exploration of the ways in which embracing a broader and deeper cosmopolitanism might enhance community development as it responds to contemporary challenges.

Introduction

On the 50th anniversary of the Community Development Journal, this article uses the occasion to consider some of the challenges and opportunities for community development theory and practice today. The first part discusses a number of challenges, some of which, including organizing around the somewhat vexed conception of community and dealing with the legacies of western colonialism, have been present from the early days of community development in the 1960s and 70s. Other challenges, such as critiquing and navigating agendas associated with neoliberalism and identifying the contribution of community development to the delivery of humanitarian aid,
have been acknowledged for several decades. More recent challenges include finding ways of harnessing rapidly changing communication technologies for the empowerment of disadvantaged sections of society and developing appropriate responses to environmental degradation and climate change, the latter having become increasingly urgent. Several of the challenges bring with them opportunities, which are also discussed. The second part of the article begins by noting possible responses to these challenges. It focuses on one particular response, namely strengthening the cosmopolitan outlook within community development.

**Challenging community: diversity and fluidity**

A central tenet of community development practice is commitment to empowering disadvantaged communities. In the long history of debates in community development, assumptions about the relative solidity and homogeneity of communities have often been irritants. For example, while there is usually some agreement that a community is based around commonality derived from place, shared identity or common interest, the concrete parameters of community have tended to remain vague (see Biddle, 1966). This has perhaps not mattered significantly when practitioners have worked in relatively stable settings, such as traditional working class neighbourhoods and rural villages, where solidarity tends to be constructed around all three forms of commonality. But even in these circumstances, communities are not uncomplicated homogeneous entities. They are multidimensional and fragmented by different inequalities and competing interests, and at times they are fractured by overt conflict (Brint, 2001; Brent, 2004; Dixon, Dogan and Sanderson, 2005).

For Zygmunt Bauman, the notion of a stable, place-based community of like-minded citizens has become increasingly problematic as both the associational and spatial dimensions that have been conventionally used to define community are eroded. For Bauman (2001, pp. 1–4), the normative idea of community is an expression of a nostalgic yearning for outdated solidarity and security. He contends that life in the twenty-first century is characterized by increasing fluidity, with the continual reshaping of life opportunities and identities (Bauman, 2000, 2005). Applying the metaphor of fluidity, he argues that contemporary life, like liquids, ‘flows’ and ‘spills’ (Bauman, 2000, p. 2). *Inter alia*, social groupings are no longer solid or centred. Boundaries shift or are dissolved altogether. Established ideas of how the determining effects of common place have worked to pull people together socially, politically and culturally, are challenged. Through the changing transcultural and geographical mobility patterns we find that urban society, in particular, is increasingly made up of people with different
ethnicities, identities and loyalties, prompting the practical question of how solidarities can be developed today. This world, characterized by what Bauman calls ‘liquid modernity’, confronts the solidarities arising out of common place that we have understood through the concept of community. From this perspective, how can community development practitioners reconcile the traditional place-based idea of stable community with the notion of multiple and hybrid identities and the fluid, often boundless and network based reality of our community ties today?

To be sure, there are important criticisms of Bauman’s tracts on liquid modernity. Many of his claims generalize without empirical backing. He overstates the case for the fluidity of contemporary life. Place-based communities persist and not all aspects of life are liquid. There are still many groups of people who live their lives much as their parents did and who identify meaningfully as part of place and common interest-based communities. There remain millions of people with limited life chances, trapped in cycles of poverty and war. Yet, the fluidity of aspects of life in the contemporary period cannot be ignored, whether it occurs through voluntary transcultural encounters, such as business travel, global activism and international academic exchanges, or through the involuntary experiences of war and conflict, which trigger the forced geographical mobility of millions of refugees and asylum seekers.

**Global interconnectedness**

The blurring of the traditional boundaries of identity, community and culture is part of the inexorable process of global interconnectedness affecting human societies and cultures today. The intensification of transnational activity is challenging both nation state and locally based realms of authority and identity. In particular, neoliberal globalization weakens the sovereignty of nation states, ushering in new transnational economic and political configurations such as those based around ‘free trade’ agreements and regional treaties. As Gaventa and Tandon (2010, pp. 3–4) remark, new transnational political configurations can be understood as part of changing patterns of global governance, involving different layers, arenas and jurisdictions. These layers of power can limit possibilities for local action. With shifting global power structures, and the erosion of locally constructed identities and loyalties mentioned above, the efficacy of working at the traditional community level to secure self-determination becomes increasingly questionable.

There are indeed significant challenges to community development that derive from global interconnectedness. But, there are also opportunities. New transcultural identities and forms of solidarity are forged as global
interconnectedness opens up different arenas for the empowerment of disadvantaged groups and prompts a rethinking of traditional ideas of citizen engagement. One commentator who has reflected on how global interconnectedness requires different ways of thinking about human relationships is Ulrich Beck. Beck has drawn on the idea of cosmopolitanization to describe some of the key forces that are reshaping the human relationships today. He argues that cosmopolitanization is an irreversible process, through which people, cultures and groups are becoming more and more interdependent, and where there is increasing engagement with strangers (Beck, 2006, p. 9, 2009, p. xi). Cosmopolitanization is discussed further below.

**Information communication technologies**

To understand the forms of interconnectedness in the current period, we need to consider information communication technologies or ICTs. In this paper, the term ICT refers to the technological tools used to create, develop, communicate, disseminate, store, manage and retrieve information. ICTs include the internet, broadcasting technologies (radio and television), telephones (particularly mobile phones), satellite systems and of course, computers. New ITCs are a central plank of current configurations of globalization. They are critical to the forms of interconnectedness that involve the shrinking of time and space. Importantly, new ICTs are changing how we communicate with others and the ways in which we access and share information about the world. They are transforming the contexts of experience, and they set up new frameworks for citizen participation and activism. For example, community development activism now often takes place ‘online’, through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter and personal Blogs, all of which provide sites to articulate viewpoints, organize activism and generate support.

ICTs have also increased the speed and breadth of knowledge turnover so that ordinary people are beginning to have almost immediate access to vast repositories of knowledge, including knowledge of alternative ‘ways of doing things’. Central to such access to knowledge is the internet. Schmidt and Cohen (2013, p. 3) argue that the internet is changing nearly every aspect of our lives, ‘from the minuitiae of our daily lives to more fundamental questions about identity, relationships and even our own security’. For them, the internet has become the world’s largest ‘ungoverned space’. Many of the established educational institutions and traditional forms of news, as well as their gate-keepers, can now be by-passed by anyone who can access an internet connection and has an iphone or computer. Schmidt and Cohen (2013, pp. 2–4) contend that if the current pace of technological innovation is maintained, by 2025 most of the projected eight billion people on Earth
will be able to connect to the internet. From this perspective, the established obstacles to human interaction, such as geography, literacy, language and limited information can for the most part be overcome. Largely uncontrolled information exchanges can open the way for a diversity of viewpoints, undermine centralized control of attitudes and behaviours and expose corruption, exploitation and state surveillance. Global on-line campaigns such as those organized by Avaaz (https://avaaz.org/en/) (15 December 2015) are able to harness the power and resources of literally millions of activists, both as signatories for on-line petitions and for ‘crowd’ funding of global campaigns. Indeed, working together, ordinary people can be heard in new ways, counted and be taken seriously. As Lovink (2011, pp. 1–2) argues, the power of ‘the many’ can replace the ‘rusty institutions’ of the old public sphere with new on-line public discourse, participatory news sites and on-line journalism. From this perspective, the internet can be seen as one of the great democratizers of our time.

Yet there are other aspects of new ICTs that are quite troublesome, both for society at large and for community development. The democratization of information and communication is not always a clear positive for society. Communication platforms can be used by protagonists of all persuasions, not only to mobilize around issues associated with traditional Left and Right political leanings, but also for new forms of xenophobic nationalism and hate and terrorist groups. These latter groups draw attention to the challenges of the problematic, and even ‘dark’ sides of solidarity in communities, such as the politics of exclusivity, discrimination against ‘the other’ and the rise of new forms of fundamentalism. Pervasive forms of individual and collective surveillance are also opened up, such as cyber bullying and data collection for government control, policing and marketing purposes. On-line activism is also criticized on the basis of its shallow and intermittent nature, pejoratively known as slacktivism, placebo activism and clicktivism (Ricketts, 2012), although for others it is a new mode of political engagement and a legitimate political act (Halupka, 2014). In any case, it can be complementary to the deeper activism of committed organizers.

Because access to information on the internet is so easy, we have developed the desire for simple and quick answers, which means that complex answers and understandings are avoided. Simple answers, seeing issues in ‘black and white’ and ignoring nuances and paradoxes can encourage ‘knee jerk’ reactions, and substitute careful analysis with moral outrage (Lovink, 2011, p. 3). Tsoukas (1997) argues that in the information society, knowledge is understood as objective information, existing independently of human beings. There is a belief that generating more and more information will increase transparency and lead to the rational management of social problems. He contends that to the contrary, more information may lead to
less understanding and may make society less rationally governable. It is important then, to understand the limitations of the information provided by the internet. The quality of knowledge input, of course, depends on the values, integrity and scholarship of the people who upload the information. That is, knowledge through the internet, like all knowledge production, is largely dependent on the people who set the frameworks in which people can communicate, and indeed, construct the information and analyses.

Community development practitioners need to recognize how ICTs are reshaping aspects of contemporary life and how they can challenge established ways of practising community development. Understanding the power and dangers of the use of ICTs and deciding how to use the various forms of ICT wisely and strategically is a major challenge for community development today.

**Humanitarian aid and community development in extremis**

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges to humankind today is the increasing number of people in situations of extremis resulting from oppression, conflict or natural disaster. Recent UNHCR estimates put the total number of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people worldwide was 51.2 million people (UNHCR, 2014). Of these there were an estimated 33.3 million displaced persons living in perilous conditions as a result of human conflict and violence, an increase of 16 per cent on the previous year (Internal Displaced Monitoring Centre, 2014). Policies, where they exist, for dealing with the mounting problems associated with the growing number of what Bauman (2004, p. 5) identifies as ‘wasted’ or ‘redundant’ populations, are constructed by international agencies and national governments in a top-down fashion rather than through the participation of the refugees themselves.

One significant aspect of expanding information communication technologies is the way in which the global reach of the internet means that we can both access information about what is going on in far flung places and also have the means by which we can communicate with our fellow humans in these places. These two developments have assisted in drawing attention to the potential of community development approaches and practices in situations of extremis, which begin with the experiences and viewpoints of those actually surviving in such situations. There is an important role here for community development practitioners to influence the ways in which humanitarian interventions are developed.

However, aid interventions today are not as straightforward as they once seemed. One tension is between those who, following the principle established by the International Committee of the Red Cross, argue that all aid
programmes should be given in the spirit of political neutrality, and alternatively, those who point out that humanitarian action does not take place in a political vacuum (Terry, 2003, p. 283; Duffield, 2005, p. 75), and that political neutrality can even prolong conflict. One rationale for providing aid to all sides of a conflict has been that it ensures the safety of aid workers. Yet, it is clear that aid workers today cannot assume that they are protected on the basis of neutrality or their benevolent activities. Humanitarian workers have become targets of kidnapping, bombings and even public execution. To practise community development in these conditions is a major challenge for practitioners today, and we are just beginning to understand and map out roles for community development in such precarious situations.

There is another issue concerning the potential role of community development practitioners in aid interventions and this relates to working in ‘non-western’ countries. Some argue that all aid and development interventions, including community development, are essentially attempts to secure or maintain the ideological, political and economic interests of western countries (Latouche, 1993; Escobar, 1995; Rist, 2008). From the perspective of this type of the ‘westernization thesis’, community development, like other development interventions, is deeply embedded in western values and western notions of how to organize society, which are ‘out of place’ in many regions of the world. Community development practitioners need to understand the attraction of this critique of western culture and the ways in which this (often well founded) critique nourishes antagonism to ‘western aid and development projects’.

**Neoliberalism**

In its more recent iteration, the westernization thesis places the contemporary western hegemonic impulse in the context of the globalization of neoliberalism. There are many elements to the view that the globalization of neoliberalism affects humanitarian aid. For example, Klein (2007) points out the ways in which post disaster reconstruction provides new terrain for capitalist enterprise, as donors, including governments, fund private contractors to deliver services and rebuild. The nongovernment sector is often complicit in establishing the global hegemony of neoliberalism. As the number of international nongovernment organizations (INGOs) taking responsibility for the delivery of aid has increased (Riddell, 2007, pp. 53–54; Banks and Hulme, 2012), they have also become increasingly connected to the economic and foreign policies of western countries. There is a growing number of publications illuminating the links between the rise of the INGO sector and the expansion of neoliberal economics and values (Fernando, 2003; Kaldor, 2003; Choudry and Kapoor, 2013).
Certainly, in the last two decades, neoliberalism has set the context for a vast number of the challenges to community development, wherever it has been practised. Fifteen years ago in this journal, Craig, Mayo and Taylor (2000, p. 325) discussed how the economic hegemony of the ‘free’ market as the mechanism of development has resulted in social division and immiserization, and the way in which the discourse of community had been called into service ‘Third Way’ agendas. Indeed, through the emphases on individual responsibility for wellbeing, decentralization of government and public–private partnerships, ‘Third Way’ policies have been championed as providing a path for development that avoids both top-down traditional socialist approaches to wellbeing and the excesses of global capital.

Since 2000, there has been continuing discussion of the various impacts of neoliberal ideas and policies on civil society and community development (Geoghegan and Powell, 2009; Gaynor, 2011; Mowbray, 2011). For example, on one level the popular discourses of community capacity building and community control resonate with the community development principle of community self-determination. However, when these discourses are attached to the neoliberal commitments to reducing the role of the state and the development of a culture based on individual self-reliance, where individuals must take responsibility for their own welfare (understood sociologically as individualization), they undercut the community development commitment to the collective and resourced empowerment of disadvantaged groups. As a number of commentators have pointed out, in the context of the maintenance of existing inequalities and removing state commitment to resourcing all its citizens, this call for self-reliance is hollow indeed (Berner and Phillips, 2005, p. 27; Ledwith, 2005, p. 24).

The identification of market processes as the best way of organizing economic development has brought with it the application of particular management methods, often used in both the public sector and non-profit sector (or third sector). From this new management perspective (often known as ‘new public management’), social and political issues should be resolved by following business organizational models, with their emphasis on management prerogatives and technical solutions (Shaw and Crowther, 2014, pp. 399–400). The major reference points of this approach are the efficiency and effectiveness of financial and performance management (Clarke and Newman, 1997, p. 58). Yet as Edwards (2008, p. x) argues, business approaches and markets are not designed to rebuild cohesion in communities, strengthen the ways in which people care for each other or push for fundamental change. Given the co-option of the discourse of community, the processes of individualization and the promotion of new managerialism, it is no wonder that a major element in neoliberalism is depoliticization (Gaynor, 2011). However, despite the global financial crisis of 2007–2010
and growing awareness of climate change, the neoliberal precepts of economic growth, the mantra of competition and faith in the mechanism of the market to drive economic development continue to challenge the principles of sustainability, collaboration and social justice which underpin community development.

Now while many community development practitioners continue to experience the challenges wrought by the policies and ideologies of neoliberalism, it is important to remember its spread is not uniform, or even universal. Despite ideological erosion, a left culture has not disappeared entirely; rather it has been reshaped by local conditions, as in Latin American countries, and by globally networked social movements, such as ‘Occupy’. The reshaping of Left agendas in Europe is illustrated in the popular support for anti-austerity campaigns in Greece and Spain. Such popular campaigns invite further consideration of how community development practitioners can work with activists, both within and across nation states, to challenge the hegemony of neoliberalism.

Environmental degradation

This brings us to the final challenge to be considered in this paper, the most consequential for planet Earth, and perhaps the most perplexing when it comes to the role of community development practitioners. This concerns the role of community development theory and practice in combating the degradation of our habitat, and particularly in tackling climate change. While there have been many analyses that have identified the harmful effects of human activity on our physical environment, the scientific evidence today leads to the conclusion, expressed by Klein (2014, p. 15), that the human species is now facing ‘an existential crisis’.

Like most of the challenges that we have discussed so far, confronting the environmental destruction wrought by human activity is not new to community development practitioners. Yet, the dominant story of community development over the past fifty years, revolving around the quest for the empowerment of disadvantaged groups and human rights, has generally meant a focus on relationships between human beings themselves, rather than between human beings and their natural physical environments. A ‘green’ or ‘ecological’ perspective that emphasizes the interrelationships between all forms of life and the need to change the way in which we interact with the natural environment has generally been missing. While at one level it might seem obvious that there is a symbiotic link between ‘human centred’ community development and environmental sustainability, on another level, tensions can arise out of the different priorities of environmentalists and community development practitioners (Connors, 2008, p. 37). In
particular, supporters of ecological wisdom (Naess, 2002) argue that the human centered approach to development, where community development is generally located, is threatening the eco-system of our planet. These ecologists reject the anthropocentrism that places the satisfaction of human needs above all other values.

Another view focuses on how global capitalism and the profit motive, which are underpinned by the ideology of neoliberalism, have, as Klein (2014, p. 19) argues, ‘systematically sabotaged our collective response to climate change...’ Klein explains how it is in the interests of global capital, through corporate elites and right-wing think tanks, to deny climate change. For Klein, it is not possible to tackle climate change within the existing framework of capitalism.

But what is the role of community development practitioners in these immense challenges? The quandary is that while they might have developed a well-tuned ecological antennae, they are not always sure about the most effective ways of responding to climate change and other ecological threats. For example, how far should communities take responsibility for protecting the environment themselves by, for example, initiating relocalization projects such as local food production, and how far should they focus on putting pressure on the main producers of carbon emissions, the big corporations, or on governments to bring in policy changes to control these corporations? Indeed, how far should they put their energies, as Klein (2014) would argue, into challenging the existing framework of global capitalism?

Responding to the challenges

The preceding discussion of challenges to community development is of course, not exhaustive. However, it does indicate the range and complexity of issues facing those committed to community development theory and practice today, and this complexity is highlighted when we consider the interrelationships between the issues. While there are many possible responses to these challenges, this paper limits discussion to three responses. Two of these have recently been put to me in Australia. These are first, that there is a major fault line in community development between ameliorative and transformational roles, and given that this division is deepening, community development should either forego ameliorative activities and reclaim its radical edge (see Ledwith, 2005; Geoghegan and Powell, 2009) or bifurcate into ameliorative activities on one side and radical/transformational activities on the other. Ameliorative activities include building community capacities to enable people to take care of their own needs, or giving them more say in the planning of services within existing power relations and social structures (see Gilchrist and Taylor, 2011, p. 16). The radical/
transformative tradition involves actions that aim to transform society by strengthening critical analyses, challenging power holders and mobilizing against government policies with the aim of redistributing power and resources. However, the ameliorative/transformative dichotomy is problematic. How any intervention is understood depends on the context, and any intervention can be ameliorative in some respects and transformative in others.

The second response, particularly from those committed to the transformative potential of community development, is that it has lost its way. For example, community development practice has accommodated dominant precepts of the neoliberal socio-economic environment, including social policies based on individualization, and the new managerial imperatives of efficiency and effectiveness through top-down financial and performance management. Also, there is a view that the recent policies for ‘community strengthening’, which have been largely embraced by community development workers, are based on a misguided idea of a stable and well-ordered community. Where, these critics ask, are discussions of transformative ways of organizing? From this critical perspective then, community development as a method of changing power relations by ensuring that disadvantaged groups have greater control over resources and decisions that affect their lives, is becoming redundant. The demoralization of a number of community development workers in Australia resonates with Shaw and Crowther’s recent discussion of the loss of confidence in the purpose, politics and practice of community-based educational work in the United Kingdom (Shaw and Crowther, 2014, p. 391). Shaw and Crowther draw attention to how neoliberal ideology now shapes cultural life, hollowing out collective social and political imagination. They argue that the way in which community engagement is now enacted might suggest that democracy involves no more than top-down consensual and managerial procedures.

But the argument that community development is redundant flies in the face of the continuing commitment to community development in many quarters, in Australia and internationally. Commitment to community development practice, in its various forms, is still championed in local government in educational institutions, and in journals such as the international Community Development Journal and New Community in Australia, as a way of empowering disadvantaged communities for the purpose of influencing and exerting greater control over resources and decisions that affect their lives.

The final, linked response, begins by highlighting this enduring nature of community development. But it emphasises how community development has always been a living and contested activity, full of tensions and challenges. One challenge, indicated above, is to understand how community
development is framed and how it operates in different contexts. There are possibly millions of initiatives globally (that are neither documented nor identified formally as community development projects), which involve people using community development approaches for collective empowerment. Discerning how community development practice takes place in very different contexts and how to work strategically across different cultural settings is becoming an important part of community development today. From this perspective, one possibly fruitful way of setting out to respond to the contemporary challenges to community development, and the one proposed in this paper, begins from the need for continual analysis of changing conditions, of taking stock of the various strands of community development, and where necessary, rethinking and reworking these. From this standpoint, it is timely to investigate ways in which we might rework some aspects of community development. The focus of the last section of this paper is one such investigation, involving an exploration of how community development might be strengthened by a deeper cosmopolitan outlook.

A cosmopolitan outlook

The concept of cosmopolitanism begins from the premise of the interconnectedness and interdependence of humans globally (Beck and Sznайдer, 2006). While cosmopolitan ideas have always been with us, current proponents suggest that the forms they take today are deeper and more pervasive than in the past. In its current manifestations, cosmopolitanism variously describes a socio-political condition; types of relationships; and a normative stance, which gives rise to a politico-ethical project (see Vertovec and Cohen, 2002; Beck, 2006; Delanty, 2006; Fine, 2007). As a socio-cultural condition, cosmopolitanism occurs when people of different cultural backgrounds interconnect and when established national, cultural and social boundaries are eroded, opening up continual flows of information and people. The erosion of boundaries facilitates different types of cross-cultural relationships, based on recognition of both difference and commonality. These relationships involve hospitality to strangers (Kant, 1991) and a disposition to openness to and respect for other people, cultures and the world around us (Nussbaum, 1996; Szerszynski and Urry, 2002). For Beck (2006, p. 3), these relationships also foster a ‘global sense’ which is an ‘everyday historically alert, reflexive awareness of ambivalences in a milieu of blurring and cultural contradictions... (and which) is simultaneously a sceptical, disillusioned, self-critical outlook’. This outlook is the basis of cosmopolitanism as a politico-ethical project, committed to humanity as such, over and beyond one’s particularistic attachments (Nussbaum, 1996; Nowicka and Rovisco, 2009).
Now like criticisms of the claims made about liquid modernity, there is an argument that claims about cosmopolitanism, and particularly claims concerning the normative significance and pervasiveness of processes of cosmopolitanization, are overstated. First, alongside evidence of processes of cosmopolitanization, there is evidence of activities which are anti-cosmopolitan in nature, such as rising anti-migrant and anti-refugee xenophobia, which is found for example in western societies today, as Beck himself acknowledges (Beck, 2009, p. xi). Second, as indicated above, boundary crossing through the internet does not necessarily nurture a cosmopolitan outlook. Take for example, the use of the internet for recruitment to Da’esh, or Islamic State (IS) militants, where such use contributes to their anti-cosmopolitan jihad, which is based on fanatical commitment to their own version(s) of Islam, rejection of the right to different cultural, and particularly religious beliefs, contempt for strangers, and rejection of any idea of common humanity that does not accord to their own particular cultural values. Third, a related issue concerns where the limits to cosmopolitanism lie. Clashes around ontologies and values, such as between and within religions, continue to undermine ideas of common humanity, as noted above. There are points at which ontological and epistemological differences and conflict over values preclude meaningful dialogue, such as when the Enlightenment values come up against quite different values subscribed to by religious fundamentalists. How can a cosmopolitan outlook be applied in such circumstances? Fourth, while Beck invokes a teleological approach (cosmopolitanization is an ‘irreversible process’), cosmopolitanization can, of course, be wound back. For example, the expressions of cosmopolitanization through networked solidarity found in the early days of the so-called Arab Spring have been overtaken by highly charged political, religious and ethnic sectarianism. Fifth, while attitudinal change to embrace ideas of difference, interconnectedness and hospitality to strangers might discursively erode boundaries and the dichotomies of ‘us’ and ‘them’, at another level it can gloss over underlying inequalities of power. Sixth, there is also the related argument that the processes of cosmopolitanization remain largely superficial: they can be interpreted either as no more than the luxuries of international travel, which can only be properly experienced by elites, or as banal cosmopolitanism through such experiences as tasting different cuisines. Such forms of superficial cosmopolitanism rarely translate into the deeper moral and ideological attitudinal change required for the cosmopolitan outlook (Skribis and Woodward, 2013, p. 25). Finally, in its most robust form, cosmopolitan theory sees globalization usurping the nation state. However, the nation state retains a powerful influence on global political alignments, as well as people’s lives in general.
It is important to acknowledge these criticisms. They certainly draw attention to the contested nature of cosmopolitanism. And as noted above, cosmopolitanism is not new. We have always had a mixing of cultures. The normative ideas of human interconnectedness, openness to others and the obligations to strangers are ubiquitous. Yet, cosmopolitanism has also waxed and waned as cultures intermix and then break up into sectarian conflict. While there are significant new factors shaping cosmopolitanism today, such as the range and intensity of interconnectedness and openness, perhaps we should be modest in our thinking about cosmopolitanization in the contemporary period, as an emerging and uneven process. Such modesty allows us to accept the authenticity of everyday cosmopolitanism, which can be promoted in such sites as neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces where there is a genuine openness towards and support for other cultures. This type of cosmopolitanization already forms much of the social and cultural backdrop of community development activities in many societies. It is evident in multicultural programmes when, for example, community development practitioners are involved in organizing local cultural festivals or activist campaigns supporting the rights of refugees, and when practitioners are involved in organizing global campaigns for the recognition of the human rights of women and girls.

**Deepening cosmopolitanism**

What is considered in the following discussion is what a deepening of cosmopolitanism in community development theory and practice might look like or require. First, a deepening of cosmopolitanism would mean that while community development activities would continue to be organized in and through communities, a starting point for intervention would be investigation of how some communities might be relatively stable, others have shifting boundaries and yet others are transitory. And as indicated above, communities can be local constructs, such as place-based neighbourhoods, or they can be transnational and/or transcultural. They can be face-to-face or virtual. From a cosmopolitan perspective, it is appropriate to think of communities as hybrid entities, comprising multiple identities and loyalties, rather than as fixed entities. Mapping communities requires understanding their multifaceted characteristics and how members have varying needs, while at the same time focusing on the interconnections between members and exploring existing or possible sources of solidarity.

Second, while we can find much in the various practices of community development that is already committed to recognizing difference and validating the views of marginalized people, a deepening cosmopolitan approach could intensify this focus by always emphasizing openness to different
ways of thinking and acting, as well as identifying strategic interconnections and interdependencies. In such endeavours, community development practitioners could be assisted by the new ICTs. At the same time, to be able to chart differences, interconnections and interdependencies, community development practitioners need to be adept at ‘boundary crossing’. Indeed, as community development takes on a more transcultural and transnational character, practitioners will move increasingly across cultural and national borders. And as identities, interests and loyalties become transcultural, community development practitioners need to have intercultural skills. Interculturalism requires curiosity and dialogue to find areas of commonality and mutuality (Cantle, 2012). While intercultural expertise of course is always circumscribed by linguistic knowledge and skills, as far as possible it should be developed around a well-honed ability to ‘code-switch’ – ‘to know, command and enact a variety of cultural knowledges and repertoires…’ (Skrbis and Woodward, 2013, p. 15), with all their ambivalences and nuances. At the same time recognition and respect for other people and cultures does not preclude mutual critical evaluation (Turner, 2006, p. 44). And as indicated above, there are many values and epistemological aspects of different cultures that cannot be easily reconciled. Working our way through incompatibilities in values and beliefs and finding areas of agreement is an important part of the cosmopolitan outlook.

A cosmopolitan outlook based on strong intercultural skills can also assist in undermining the colonial legacies of community development. It can offer a corrective to the one-sided western lens of international development. The obligations of care for and stewardship of other cultures that are embedded in cosmopolitan outlook are linked to a standpoint, which involves a sceptical, self-critical and ironic view of one’s own traditions (Turner, 2006), an important standpoint for correcting patronizing views of the ‘Third World’. Of course, working across cultures and other boundaries, such as those of gender and class, should not mean ignoring inequalities of power. Perhaps taking a dual perspective, which acknowledges both power differentials and the cosmopolitan principles of interdependence and interconnectedness, offers a way through the labyrinth of competing gazes on the non-western ‘other’, in which the practice choices for community development practitioners are set out as condescending, victimizing, confessional or redemptive.

Third, what can a broader and deeper cosmopolitanism offer community development as it responds to the challenges of neoliberalism? A key element of a cosmopolitan outlook lies in its normative meanings, where its validation of interconnectedness and interdependence confronts the neoliberal commitments to individualization. And given that cosmopolitanism describes a commitment to practices and structures that reinforce our common humanity, it can draw attention to the social inequalities that are
validated by neoliberalism. It this sense a cosmopolitan outlook can form part of a reinvigorated political armoury of community development. The feature of openness to different cultures and commitment to investigate alternative ways of doing things also deny the TINA (There Is No Alternative) principle that is inscribed in neoliberalism, particularly in relation to the commitment to managerialism and economic growth as the only ways of organizing effective productive endeavours. However, perhaps the most important cosmopolitan response to neoliberalism lies in its global sensibility, where transnational connections can provide powerful political alliances that challenge the hegemony of neoliberalism.

Finally, as argued earlier in this paper, probably the most far-reaching challenge to community development today is how to respond effectively to the destruction of our existing habitat, and particularly the role of human development in climate change. What can a deepened cosmopolitan approach to community development offer here? It is necessary to begin by pointing out that community development, as a set of principles and practices, is of course just one player in the daunting task of responding to the current environmental challenges. Yet, there are now many community groups and organizations, such as the Climate Justice Programme, Amazon Watch and Greenpeace, organizing campaigns against the big corporate polluters. Moreover, there is a growing list of exemplars where communities have already taken up the challenge to organize and practise more sustainably in place-based communities, such as the redevelopment of Western Harbour, in Malmo, Sweden, which has turned to 100percent locally produced renewable energy (http://www.cleanenergyawards.com/top-navigation/nominees-projects/nominee-) (4 March 2015). Rejection of the TINA principle is also evident in the Transition Towns movement, which is based on a vision of communities as self-sufficient entities organized around a low-energy, minimally polluting future (Walker et al., 2007; Connors and McDonald, 2011). Importantly, while the Western Harbour and Transition Towns projects are locally based, the visions and experiences are shared globally. That is, they are examples of how a concern for our habitat can be framed as a cosmopolitan endeavour, which is expressed both locally and at the global level. Community development practitioners embracing this cosmopolitan outlook can play their part, both in consciousness-raising and in action, championing environmental sustainability and the shift to renewable energy to cut carbon emissions.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this paper has been to explore some of the key challenges and opportunities for community development today and to identify some
responses. One response has been singled out for detailed discussion: to engage with a deeper cosmopolitan outlook. Of course, a cosmopolitan approach does not provide ‘solutions’ to all of the challenges facing community development. However, it does offer a launching place for responding to our fluid and contradictory world. It opens up ways of stretching accepted concepts and established thinking about the scope and methods of community development practice, for example, by thinking critically about what borderlessness (through ICTs and forced and voluntary movements of people) means for community development; by challenging the principle of greed inscribed in neoliberalism with a normative commitment to humanity as a whole, over and beyond individual self-interest; and by sheeting home the responsibility of all humans to act in response to climate change. And while inculcating a recognition of human interconnectedness, a cosmopolitan outlook also involves critical mutual evaluation. In doing so, it offers a framework for the ‘difficult conversation’ of how to reconcile different assumptions and values about planet earth and the future of humanity.

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