31 October 2009

***Community Development Journal* International Symposium**
Community development in an age of uncertainty: Connections and fragmentations
London, 3-5 September 2009

What became of *The Local State*? Neo-liberalism, community development and local government

Martin Mowbray
Emeritus Professor
RMIT, Melbourne

Abstract

In 1977 Cynthia Cockburn published *The Local State*, a critique of the relationship between community development and corporate management in local government. This work prefigured wider and continuing attention to how depoliticized forms of community development can assist in the implementation of neoliberal agendas, particularly by focussing responsibility for social provision away from the state.

However, in this process those who write and teach about community development have largely lost sight of the role of local government, which has itself been reformed internationally under heavy neoliberal influence. This is a serious problem because local government sponsors and shapes so much community development practice, and also because it is an institution through which wider social reform may be pursued.

The implications of overlooking neoliberal localized control agendas for community development are explored via a case study from Victoria, Australia, where local government has become a principal vehicle for promoting participative 'community planning'. As in other countries, close analysis reveals that what is represented as inclusive and empowering community engagement is effectively about containment and control.

Community development intellectuals need to address the nature and implications of such policies and programs, as well as the evolving nature of the local state and the opportunities for change that may be available. If its analysts and educators were to take up this challenge, community development would be better placed to reach beyond its marginalized status in local government, to try to use the institution as a whole in the pursuit of social justice. A valuable stimulus for such endeavour could come from a special issue of the *Community Development Journal* which revisits the relationship between community development and the 'local state'.

DRAFT

***Community Development Journal* International Symposium**
Community development in an age of uncertainty: Connections and fragmentations
London, 3-5 September 2009

What became of *The Local State*? Neoliberalism, community development and local government

Martin Mowbray
Emeritus Professor
RMIT, Melbourne

DRAFT

Introduction

In 1977 Cynthia Cockburn published *The Local State*, an account of 'the new management' in local government. The latter was about 'integration, control from the top, more efficient use of money and labour, forward planning' … 'effectiveness and efficiency' (pp.13,16). Cockburn's central concern was with 'the relationship between two new trends in local government: corporate management and community development'. She addressed the question, 'Do corporate management and community development pull in opposite directions – or are they the tough and tender aspects of the one principle: management? (p.2)

Hailed as 'the best book now available on the immediate political context of community work' (Baldock, 1978:56) *The Local State* appeared in a period when other books on the nature of the state, urban politics and urban sociology, and radical local government commanded considerable attention amongst community workers, particularly in the United Kingdom but also in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. This work prefigured continuing attention within community development to the rise of neoliberalism and the 'new public management' (NPM).[i] But, community development's interest in local government as an institution has faded. This, I will argue, creates a serious challenge, both in terms of understanding community development's context, and its interventive possibilities.

Community development: of, with or against neoliberalism

In his review of the first forty years of the *Community Development Journal*, Keith Popple (2008) views the 1980s as the decade when community development acquired a critique of the impact of neoliberalism. Since that period some commentators have also critiqued the penetration of neoliberal ideology into community development theory and practice. Mayer and Rankin (2002) observed that 'after years of cuts in traditional welfare state programs', community development flourished with the support of government and international bodies such as the World Bank, the Ford Foundation, and the European Union – aided by the neoliberal friendly concept of social capital. In 2005 Midgley and Livermore (2005:160-1) noted the 'rise of the political right in the 1980s and the formulation of a neoliberal localism' focussed on 'promoting self reliance and local enterprize' as a 'framework for community development'. Geoghegan and Powell's (2008) *Community Development Journal* article on 'ways in which community development is, or normatively could be, oriented towards neoliberalism' is another example.

James DeFilippis (2008) argues that the 'community development industry in the 1990s and 2000s' has been dominated by 'non-confrontational forms of engagement and organizing' compatible with the needs of capital, 'market-based perspectives' and neoliberal ideology. These, he suggests, include consensually styled approaches that feature notions of community assets, social capital,

community building and partnerships, and stress shared interests between disadvantaged and advantaged sectors – ignoring fundamentally unequal power relations. Beside Amitai Etzioni, DeFilippis names 'two principal figures in this understanding of community' – John McKnight and Robert Putnam. He says that this 'neoliberal communitarianism' has, at its core' a belief that society is conflict-free' and 'represents the fruition of the de-politicization of community development' (DeFilippis, 2008, 33-34; DeFilippis, Fisher and Shragge, 2006, 676-78; see also Stoeker, 2004:57). This de-politicization, is seen as 'both a product, and producer, of' government support for such approaches (DeFilippis, 2008, 34).

With Robert Fisher and Eric Shragge, DeFilippis follows this up in the *Community Development Journal* with case studies to demonstrate that, despite dominant neoliberal communitarian policy trajectories, community organizations can help build opposition to neoliberal capitalism (DeFilippis, Fisher and Shragge, 2009; see also 2006). Critical amongst the lessons drawn from their case studies is the capacity of community organizations to appreciate the barriers and opportunities offered within the current political and economic context. It is important, DeFillipis *et al* argue, that through their work community organizations act politically, do not 'de-responsibilize' the state, and demand government intervention 'to either regulate the market or provide programmes to improve social and economic conditions' (DeFilippis, Fisher and Shragge, 2009, 48).

In an age when neoliberal ideology dominates public policy, depoliticization of community development theory and practice has considerable momentum. To this Putnam makes a particular, and ostensibly a-political, contribution. He concludes his most influential book *Bowling Alone* with a chapter 'Towards an agenda for social capitalists'. The central message is that citizens should all resolve to participate more (2000:414). Remarkably for a professor of public policy, Putnam displays virtually no interest in power and politics or any fundamental political or economic policy reforms (Navarro, 2002:427). Though occasionally Putnam rejects the view that 'civil society alone can solve public issues' (eg Putnam and Feldstein, 2003:273) this caveat is overshadowed by the body of Putnam's work – focussed as it is on the virtue of civic participation.

The choice between community development that is more or less aligned with neoliberalism, and practice consciously opposed to it is pursued by Geoghegan and Powell (2008). They make a three fold distinction between practice that is 'of', 'with' or 'against' neoliberalism. Such distinctions about orientation to neoliberalism are, of course, difficult to reconcile with the standard definitions that suggest community development is unambiguously about people being empowered (and building community) through collective resolution of needs experienced at community level – all for the common good (eg Chile, 2007:21; Clague, 1997:100; Hughes *et al*, 2007:140; Ife, 2002:160; Kenny, 1999:3; Weeks, Hoatson and Dixon, 2003:5).

Also confounding critiques of community development that are aligned with neoliberalism are intellectuals who suggest that the intensification of communitarian discourse means that the forces of goodness and light may be winning through. John Wiseman, for example, said (in 2003) that though it is too early to conclude that neoliberalism is dead, there is evidence that 'a post neoliberal public policy paradigm' is approaching. To substantiate this wishful claim, Wiseman pointed to a number of emerging themes, one being movement away from 'blind faith in privatisation and market mechanisms to reinvesting in community and public sector capacity, performance and partnerships.' Another emerging theme is a shift 'to effectively engaging citizens, communities and stakeholders in policy development and implementation' (Wiseman, 2003; Adams and Wiseman, 2003:21).

In 2001 Adams and Hess, began a paper on communitarian policy by noting that 'after 15 years of discourse about the NPM and economic rationalism a much older discourse is slipping back into public policy.' This, they said, is a normative discourse 'in which the idea of community is central' and gives rise to 'new policy tools . . . such as partnerships, place management, and a raft of

DRAFT

community consultation mechanisms'. These they styled as part of 'an altogether softer more people centred (third way) approach than is possible under either state intervention or market realities' (Adams and Hess, 2001:13,14,19-20).

The after-neoliberalism theme is also a feature of conservative social policy campaigning by the Centre for Civil Society, part of which is reflected in its framing of a (October 2009) conference, 'After Neo-Liberalism: Ownership, Participation and Community – The New Policy Paradigm'.[ii] Behind allegedly transcendent 'end-of-ideology' and 'beyond-left-and-right' discourses, Thompson (2009) identifies a continuing right wing agenda that warrants vigilance and careful attention.

The major issue for community development that this prompts is about how the practice is to be interpreted. Does it stand opposed to neoliberalism as definitions, too simplistically, imply? Is it in the vanguard of a new alternative to neoliberal policy? Or may community development practice be 'of', 'with' or 'against' neoliberalism, as Geoghegan and Powell argue? Perhaps particular programs might be a mixture of these alternatives, changing with circumstances? As Shragge (2003:123) puts it, 'The concept of capacity building and related processes of community development are not the problem; it is the context in which they are practices that is key' (DeFilippis, Fisher and Shragge, 2006:678).

A challenge that follows is about how community development workers are to resolve these questions. Obviously, general exposure in their education to political theory and analysis should be helpful. But it is also important that there be ready access to informed discourse on particular arenas of practice. One of these arenas is local government, because it is a major host of community development programs – and for important other reasons to which I will turn later. First, however, I want to present a case study that illustrates how what is represented as an empowering and inclusive community planning process, turns out to be one that is really about containment and control.

Community planning and state control:
'a context in which community empowerment' is virtually government policy' (Shaw, 2008:24)

Following its election in 1999 the Labor government of the state of Victoria proclaimed a deep commitment to community building. One minister boasted that social capital and building stronger communities is 'a front and centre issue for modern governments' and at the 'heart' of her own government's agenda. She declared a state-wide "explosion of community strengthening … in what is the biggest effort by any Australian Government to elevate community strengthening to the centre of the public policy agenda" (Broad 2003:2, 6, 12).

The then Minister for Victorian Communities, and Deputy Premier, asserted that 'community building is…fundamentally what Governments should be about' (Thwaites 2004:5-6) and that 'Community strengthening lies at the heart of our approach to Government in Victoria. We want to harness the energy of communities so that they can shape their own futures' (Thwaites, 2006).

On launching his government's Community Capacity Building Initiative (CCBI) the then Premier stretched credulity in pronouncing that 'it's about communities working out their own needs, and developing solutions to turn around their fortunes' – enabling 'small rural communities to take charge of their future' (Phillips and Oxley, 2002:8).

The CCBI was not even meant to be political. Indeed, it was designed and directed in such a way that it could not support or advocate anything electorally sensitive. Noticeably absent from CCBI action plans were activities recognizably directed at challenging government or corporate interests, or the distribution of wealth or power. This tightly controlled short term, low budget ($3 million across 11 rural towns) state intervention made up of unassuming and integrative social activities was subsequently declared a resounding success. The government claimed that the CCBI produced

DRAFT

a wave of community visions that resulted in innovative projects, new links within communities and a renewed sense of local pride in 55 small Victorian towns and settlements (DVC 2006b).

Despite assurances that the CCBI would be seriously evaluated, this did not occur. Nevertheless, the government still felt qualified to declare that due to the 'successes and learnings generated in the last four years' it would provide $10 million (over four years) for a new Community Building Initiative, entailing 19 projects across 102 rural localities (Mowbray, 2004; 2009).

In August 2007 the Department for Victorian Communities became the Department of Planning and Community Development, incorporating Local Government Victoria, and the state's Office of Planning and Urban Design. The new Department boasts responsibility for 'putting people at the heart of Victorian Government efforts to plan for liveability and growth by focusing on … the liveability of our neighbourhoods, and the strength of our communities.'[iii] The Department's responsibilities range across managing the state's urban planning regulatory framework, and oversight of local government, and community development. On the Department website[iv] the Community Development team is said to play an implausibly broad integrative role, embracing whole of government and wider civil society, offering

> strategic direction for community strengthening work … across government, and in local communities … by supporting and coordinating local and state-wide initiatives in partnership with government, non-government, academic and business groups.

'Community strengthening' is said to stem from 'a ten year vision' statement, *Growing Victoria Together*,[v] 'which aims to increase community participation (building friendly, confident and safe communities) and to provide more opportunities for Victorians to have a say about issues that matter to them'. One device for the government's continuing community building mission is through encouragement of local governments to develop and implement Community Plans with 'community strengthening as a goal and community participation as a central feature of the planning process' (West and Raysmith, 2007:3).

In a report on local government planning commissioned by the Department of Planning and Community Development, one state sponsored consultant explained: 'community planning can be understood as having a key community development role; most specifically in the fostering of social capital'. More enigmatically, he adds, 'Community Planning provides a contemporary basis and rationale for a community development role for local governments' (Carins, 2008:6).

The Department of Planning and Community Development is said to promote community planning 'through a range of initiatives such as Community Renewal and Community Building Initiatives … the Local Area Planning Support Program and Community Support Grants' as well as through several local government peak bodies. To 'capture the emerging community planning practices within local governments supported by these initiatives and the lessons learnt to date', the Department created a 'Local Government and Community Planning project' (West and Raysmith, 2007:3).

Select councils were supported to participate by developing case studies of their community planning. These were to be guided by a specially developed 'common template' or 'planning self assessment tool' for councils to document their Community Plans and 'a set of guidelines about the process for their development' (West and Raysmith, 2007:12). Drawing on the case studies,[vi] the consultants appointed to facilitate the project reported on 'the community planning experiences of eleven Victorian local governments in order to increase the knowledge and understanding of community planning'

'Trouble at the interface'[vii]

DRAFT

Limits of community planning

West and Raysmith find that the key limitations of community planning concern what happens after the planning. Local governments appear happy with community planning as a process, and the embodied efforts to incorporate various interests and wishes. Amongst other things, it 'improves council's reputation in the community' (West and Raysmith, 2007:27). The problem is with the challenge of implementation, where other priorities are likely to conflict and take precedence.

The 2003 amendments to the Victorian *Local Government Act 1989*[viii] oblige all municipalities to adopt four year Council Plans, supported by a Strategic Resource Plan.[ix] With statutory backing and mandated resources, these are the only plans that legally matter. Local governments must lodge their Council Plans with the Minister, and are then obliged to implement them. The Council Plan is a NPM management tool, with objectives focussed on questions of cost-effectiveness and cost-efficiency, with narrow performance measures tied to budgets, timelines and milestones, rather than social or environmental impacts.

While Council Planning is meant to be about public accountability or market-emulating drivers such as 'customer satisfaction', their nature and scope are essentially determined by government. Further, only the government judges the adequacy of the plan and acceptability of performance reporting. There is no need for a Council Plan to reflect what is in a Community Plan. In fact, the government's 'guidance to councils on how to integrate their accountability framework through key documents required under the (Local Government) Act' does not even mention Community Plans. Instead, its stated concern is with 'performance management, including performance measurement and reporting, and how it can be used to enhance both accountability and transparency across the sector' (Horrocks, 2009:2).

Those few consultants prepared to make politically sensitive observations about their employer's programs must be cautious, and West and Raysmith are understandably circumspect in their overall assessment of community planning in Victoria. Reminiscent of the curate's nimble comment that the egg served at his bishop's table was not entirely bad, they cagily conclude that the available evidence about community planning in Victorian local government 'did not suggest that the current system was fundamentally flawed, but rather that it had not reached its full potential! It has, they suggest 'unresolved issues that needed to be addressed' (p.39), and that 'the weakness of community planning is that it may be ill-defined at the outset and may be poorly connected to implementation at the other end' (p.41). What's in between is presumably OK.

The unresolved issues, according to West and Raysmith, are 'the connection between community planning and the Council Plan', as well as the uncoordinated connection of both with the independent and overriding 'policy frameworks and priorities' of the state government (p.39). At a time, with the term 'whole of government' so much in vogue, the authors might have added the 'policy frameworks and priorities' of the federal government as well.

Essentially, West and Raysmith's finding is that there is a breakdown 'between the vision and implementation'. Community planning, or 'Engaging the community in expressing values, shaping a vision and setting priorities' is a first stage'. But 'Moving that into a broader strategic framework and implementation plan was another'. For this reason, the consultants are able to nominate benefits of the community planning process, such as that people develop a 'sense of empowerment as their views are listened to', but this does not extend to its operationalization.

> In part this is another way to express the difficult connection between community planning and the Council Plan, but it is far more than this. The nexus between Stage one and Stage two is also about the legitimacy and authority of the Community Plan, the ability to get others to respond to its priorities and the capacity of council and the community to leverage support from other levels of government and other sectors. This goes to the heart of

DRAFT

> community planning and where it might go next if it is to move beyond being an elaborate form of amateurism trying to shape the hearts and minds of hard nosed managers and decision makers. (West and Raysmith, 2007, p.34)

The 'hard nosed managers and decision makers' need not, however, be understood as simply making rational or objective choices. As West and Raysmith point out (p.25) some do not even consider community planning as legitimate or relevant. Some decisions are primarily influenced, sometimes illicitly,[x] by political, financial and career interests, the local economy, property values and development opportunities. The consultants' observation that in their analysis 'Community planning did not sit well with land use planners' (p.33) can best be read as wry understatement.

In any case, major decisions about local land use are frequently taken by persons in ministerial or other state offices and beyond the jurisdiction of local government. While it has been promoting community and council planning, the state government has been sidelining councils and public rights to object to planning decisions. In 2008 the Planning Minister announced that planning decisions for 27 key commercial centres … would be taken from councils and given to specially appointed development assessment committees'. To July 2009 'he has also seized planning control for 11 major housing and commercial developments', as well as announcing the government would fast-track A$3 billion in housing and education projects. These decisions followed lobbying by large business (Dowling, 2009a:1-2; Millar, 2009). The measures were accompanied by the Planning Minister's unilateral decision to vary urban growth boundaries, bypassing the existing planning parameters to which local governments worked. Government explanations have been minimal, centred on claims about protecting jobs, the economy and the global financial crisis (Dowling, 2009b:11; Dowling, 2009c:9). In a published letter a broad coalition of local government councillors accuses the government of demolishing 'the cornerstone of this state's planning system – the rights of residents to have a say about their neighbourhood' (*The Age*, 9 June 2008:10).

What we have here is a scenario in which a government cynically proclaims its communitarian credentials while determinedly pursuing underlying neoliberal policy. To project a commitment to social capital, community building and community planning, the government's Department of Planning and Community Development maintains a small suite of short term, low budget and low key community building programs about which it makes unsubstantiated claims that there are extensive economic and social benefits.[xi] One such venture is the promotion of participatory community planning processes under local government auspices. However, when it comes to implementation, such processes are revealed as ineffectual. For one thing, they exist in the shadow of state driven statutory council planning, a process which does not need to take into account Community Plans. In contrast, and in practice, Council Plans are narrow managerial devices that are meant to be implemented and overseen by the state. Overlaying all this is a political environment in which the state government sidesteps councils over local planning issues as it sees fit, particularly when large capital is at stake. Relevant decisions are made without consultation and minimal explanation. Local public opinion, especially if it is not electorally threatening, and that of local government does not count.

Community planning in context

It is important, however, to understand these developments in a wider perspective. As one senior Melbourne journalist explains:

> The scaling back of planning democracy is not unique to Victoria, or even Australia. Nor is it simply a response to the global financial crisis. It has been a trend across the Western world as deregulation has permeated all spheres of public policy since the 1980s. Other states are moving in the same direction. (Millar, 2008)

DRAFT

Substantiating Millar's observation, international parallels to the Victorian experience are easy to find. An article 'Dilemmas of community planning: Lessons from Scotland' is a case in point, where Stephen Sinclair (2008) addresses Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) as 'a central feature of … local government modernization and public service reform in Scotland'. These, Sinclair says, 'have much in common with similar initiatives in other parts of the UK, such as communities strategies, Local Strategic Partnerships, and proposals contained in the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill in England'.

Sinclair's article 'identifies systemic dilemmas, if not contradictions, encountered in implementing community planning'. In terms reminiscent of the Victorian experience, he describes the tensions 'between community engagement and the practical demands of policy making; and between central government direction and local partnership autonomy'. Similarly, he speaks of 'an uneasy circumscribed and conditional autonomy … where central government expresses the desire to increase local decision-making while simultaneously imposing a performance and inspection regime that restricts local freedom of action' (Sinclair, 2008:373,384).

Fuller and Geddes (2008) address the key question about the extent to which the urban state restructuring in the United Kingdom is an extension of the neoliberalism of conservative governments, or some social democratic / neoliberal hybrid. They examine the government's Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and New Deal for Communities (NDC) programs in England, and conclude that these programs are best understood as part of the reproduction or 'roll-out' of neoliberalism. Embedded in this process, however, are various 'contradictions and tensions'. Fuller and Geddes note that while LSPs and NDCs offer limited devolved responsibility to set some local objectives 'they are simultaneously subject to processes of monitoring, auditing, targeting and tight budgetary management which leaves the neoliberal state in effective control. This is despite prolific use of disingenuous communitarian terms like 'cohesion', 'communities in charge', 'inclusion', 'joined up' and 'partnership'. They continue,

> Local networked governance in the shape of LSPs and NDCs is, therefore, part of multi-level governance arrangements which are managed and controlled from the top down, largely through a new public management approach. (Fuller and Geddes, 2008:264)

Local government and community development: conceptual alignment and divergence

The type of experience just described has important ramifications for understanding contemporary community development. Unfortunately, however, current critical analysis of the interface between the local state, such as that modelled by Cynthia Cockburn, is difficult to find. Indeed, serious attention even to local government is rare, a point I have made in the pages of the *Community Development Journal* before (Mowbray, 1996; 2000). This is all the more peculiar, given how conceptually close local government and community development may be seen to be.

An article about Nigeria in the *Community Development Journal* opens with the low key suggestion that 'Local government and community development are closely related concepts. The authors continue: 'Each is primarily concerned with the development of local areas through community effort' (Olowu and Ayo, 1985:283). At first take these observations are unremarkable. Notionally at least, local government institutions and community development practices have much in common. In colonial settings such as British administered Africa (Akpan, 1956; Lee, 1967) and the Northern Territory of Australia (Mowbray, 1986; 1989; 1994) they have been part of the same project, even with interchangeable terminology. Local governments, called community governments or councils, have often operated within state determined community development policy and organizational frameworks.

DRAFT

Characteristic of most definitions of community development is that it is about people being empowered through collective participation in democratic processes to improve the lives of those in whose interests they purport to act. This effort is focussed on accessing or providing amenities and services, or affecting constructed environments, generally at the local level. Such definitions heavily overlap with the ways in which local government is typically characterized.

Local governments are generally portrayed as democratically constituted agencies charged with protecting or enhancing the lives, and representing the interests, of their constituents. Again, this is generally through planning to meet community needs, supply of amenities and services and environmental management on a local basis.[xii] The activities referred to here are hardly distinct from those of community development. Though local governments are incorporated or statutory bodies, so too have been plenty of community development agencies.

Very curiously, despite the striking conceptual commonalities between local government and community development, in most countries the two areas of practice are now quite distinct. That is, other than where community development operates in a specific local government service area alongside, but mostly in the shadow of, others such as public works and public health, land use planning and environmental management, and in some jurisdictions education and policing.

As unexceptional as these observations may be, in the context of community development discourse they are rare. Paradoxically, the intellectuals who research, write and teach about community development generally ignore local government. That is, unless the latter is recognized rather simply as a host institution for community development programs.

The gulf between the two areas of practice is nowhere more evident than in their largely separate realms of discourse. Content analysis demonstrates that intellectuals who write texts about local government generally ignore community development and vice versa. Not only do major examples of the local government literature ignore community development, they also tend to overlook issues central to its practice. A good case in point is Dollery, Garcea and LeSage's (2008) collection *Local Government Reform: A Comparative Analysis of Advanced Anglo-American Countries*. Here the focus of concern is on process or 'efficiency and effectiveness' reforms, rather than social outcomes. Key analytic categories such as class, race and gender escape attention, as do distributive or other impacts – along with environmental change.

Another example is Wollmann's description of 'Changes, ruptures, and continuities in European local government systems'. His account of the 'profound' reforms in 'local government systems and structures in both western and eastern European countries' is similar to that of Dollery, Garcea and LeSage. Wollmann sees the changes in crucial institutional dimensions as fundamentally motivated by a concern with efficiency. These changes are largely based on the sort of governance principles that constitute the NPM – taking 'the organizational principles of the private business sector and its market principles as the basic frame of reference' (Wollmann, 2007:16).

Wollmann also recognizes the driving role of 'neoliberal policy discourse' in pursuing efficiency and 'modernizing the public sector' (p.26). He aligns these goals with NPM and 'attacking the scope and operations of the advanced ('social democratic') welfare state' reducing its role to 'core functions' – purchasing rather than providing services and 'allowing free market forces to take over' (Wollmann, 2007:27).

The fragmentation of authority created by privatization, 'outsourcing', use of single purpose authorities and partnerships has the effect of undermining' local government's more traditional responsibilities. At the same time it weakens political accountability and strengthens the authority of central government. Wollmann writes:

DRAFT

> A key strategy of NPM is directed at overcoming the basic inflexibility and economic inefficiency of traditional public administration. Instead, NPM aims to instil efficiency-centred managerial principles drawn from the private sector. (Wollmann, 2007:25)

Like Dollery, Garcea and LeSage, Wollmann's overview is descriptive, rather than analytic and critical. He assumes that the promised efficiencies follow the reforms, but ignores questions about social impacts or outcomes. All this is consistent with Wolman's (1995:143) observation that discourse around local government in the UK and US has focussed on relatively 'narrow efficiency concerns', questions like 'which structural features will result in allocative efficiency and / or efficiency in a least cost sense?'

Local state overlooked

The content of the *Community Development Journal* is indicative of the limited attention accorded to local government in community development literature. A search of the journal's titles and abstracts since 1966 suggests that only about one percent of articles entailed more than passing interest in local government. Of over 180 issues and in excess of 1500 articles across 43 years, local government (or local authorities and the local state) is mentioned in the title or abstract less than 20 times. Two retrospectives on the *Community Development Journal* reflect local government's relative obscurity in its pages since its launch over 40 years ago (Popple, 2008; Craig, Popple and Shaw, 2008). Cockburn's *The Local State* is mentioned in 28 articles, mostly early after its publication, generally only incidentally, and not necessarily with any particular regard to local government.

The content of the mainly US oriented *Journal of the Community Development Society* is not dissimilar. In the titles and abstracts of 78 articles published between 2002 and 2007[xiii] local government is mentioned in four. Only one reference is more than incidental – about means by which participation can be increased.

Community development courses in universities mirror this scenario. A recent issue of the *Community Development Journal* features an article about community development in social work education, describing the objectives and content of one course in detail (Mendes, 2009). Despite defining community development as 'the employment of community structures to address social needs and empower groups of people', there is no reference to local government. An internet cruise of university programs with learning units concerned with community development (or community work) suggests that this is normal. Whether the context of study be community development itself, international development, public health or social work, it is virtually impossible to find even passing mention of local government, let alone any specific attention.

Texts commonly used in these programs enlarge the same picture. The two best known Australian community development texts (Ife and Tesoriero, 2006; and Kenny, 2006) are both in their third editions and each neglects local government. From the titles of Ife and Tesoriero's 375 references – none appear to be about local government. Of the authors' 91 'Discussion questions' and 50 'Reflective questions' distributed throughout the book there is no mention of local government. Nor is local government mentioned in the table of contents or index.

In her 400 page text Kenny mentions local government as a setting for community development practice (p.132). She does not elaborate, but includes (p.133) an unexplained 'matrix' (derived from another source) to assist in understanding 'relations between communities and local government'. In this table, local government is portrayed as an entity distinct from community. Local government is not listed in the table of contents or index. Of the book's 350 or so references, only three have any obvious concern with local government (Boddy and Fudge 1984; Cockburn, 1977; and Gyford, 1985). Each of these references is British and over 20 years old. Local government goes

DRAFT

unmentioned in the list of 240 publications listed for further reading, and in the 150 or so 'summary points' spread throughout the book.

From its title, *Community and Local Governance in Australia* (Smyth, Reddel and Jones, 2005) one Australian text looks as if it could offer more. Curiously though, even here, there is no discussion let alone analysis, of local government.

From a random selection, international texts do not appear very different. For example, DeFilippis and Saegert's *The Community Development Reader* (2008) is a community development text with an unusual amount of attention to urban action and programs. However, of 39 chapters, only one (15: 'Collaborating to Reduce Poverty: Views from City Halls and Community-Based Organizations') deals explicitly with local government.

Taylor's *Public policy in the community* is something of an exception. While not examining local government in any depth, the author analyses neoliberal programs which local government engages of implements. She also offers examples of alternative approaches, most notably the Porto Alegre (Brazil) participatory budgeting model (2003:171).

Generally, where local government figures at all in the community development literature, it is as a program host or sponsor of community development programs, largely within or in partnership with civil society. Such programs are most likely to be about social, cultural or recreational services rather than policies with any significant implications for distribution, such as urban and environmental planning or budgets. Examples of this are Henderson and Thomas' *Skills in neighbourhood work* (2002), and Hughes *et al*'s *Building stronger communities* (2007).

Another example is in Wharf and Clague's *Community organizing: Canadian experiences* (1997:320-322). In deriving lessons from their collection for future community development, the editors identify 'four crucial components' for 'communities to care for their residents'. One is that municipal governments should support community organizing. As a principal example, they cite a Seattle 'commitment to enhance the quality of life in neighbourhoods' through creating 'neighbourhood service centres'. The latter 'provide seed money for neighbourhood-initiated projects' and sometimes 'community development workers' as staff. The 'outstanding' results are 'community gardens and recreational programs', clean ups, and a neighbourhood 'sense of control over their areas and lives'.

Why does it matter?

This lack of interest by community development intellectuals in local government as other than social service planner and facilitator is curious for a number of reasons. Not the least is that through its roles in land use planning and building design, local government is often vitally implicated in the means by which property related wealth is accumulated and defended. Local government is also relevant to persons professing a commitment to social reform in other ways. These include its part in:

- locating and controlling access to urban amenities and services, including transport;
- influencing the overall supply of housing and other accommodation, social and private;
- shaping the built and natural environment, affecting liveability and climate;
- collecting local taxes and revenues;
- implementing and extending wider economic policy, including neoliberal priorities such as privatization of public services;
- providing institutional means through which people are included or excluded from hierarchies of status, power and influence, affecting overall social relations;
- regulating behaviour, directly and indirectly, through law enforcement and urban design;

DRAFT

- advocating or pursuing sectional interests over potentially diverse social, economic and political issues.

The neglect of such dimensions of local government by community development intellectuals, in favour of seeing it as little more than a facilitator of local services or of consensual community planning, has a conservative effect. It helps affirm the argument of critics about the dominance of 'non-confrontational forms of engagement and organizing' compatible with the needs of capital, 'market-based perspectives' and neoliberal ideology (DeFilippis, 2008, 33-34).

Also as suggested earlier in this paper it is important that community development practice does not avoid political tensions and equips itself to challenge neoliberal policy trajectories, such as those pursued through local government. Community organizations need to be prepared to act politically, and not 'de-responsibilize' the state by focusing on local service provision associated participative or integrative activity, including so-called partnerships. It is important that community development is not confined to civil society and sees engagement of the state as a key continuing responsibility.

Unfortunately, this is not what is happening. A recently advertised[xiv] 'Manager Community Development' position in a Victorian shire council nicely typifies the dominant of conceptualization of the proper place of community development within local government. The position is given as being about 'community engagement', to 'lead and strengthen partnerships' with policy development responsibilities for 'youth', 'recreation, arts and community events strategies'. Responsibility for 'and use planning, for example, rests in an altogether separate section of the council.

The quiescence of community development intellectuals about local government makes it easy for this state of containment to be accepted as normal. That is, for community development workers to concentrate their attention and imagination on integrative activities and civil society – away from the state – and exempt from the sort of critical attention that Cockburn modelled over thirty years ago.

Conclusion

The typical characterization of community development's current interface with local government is that which we have noted – where the latter is viewed as a more or less generous sponsor or host of consensual community development programs. In this role a council is able to fund other agencies, undertake community development work as an employer, or act in some sort of partnership. Generally, this work is directed at the provision of low key integrative services. It may also involve public participation in community planning, also largely around social, cultural and recreational services.

More critical observations about the relationship between community development and local government command little attention. This is a problem that community development intellectuals need to re-engage. They should try to shift the practice beyond its marginal status in local government. An ideal would be that community development practitioners are equipped to engage local government fundamentally – to try to move it towards becoming an institution better structured to pursue social justice and environmental sustainability. This would also entail local government being used as a vehicle for change in the wider political economy, counteracting dominant neoliberal ideology. That is, instead of being an institution engaged in extending the neoliberal priorities of central governments and capital.

To achieve such an ideal, community development intellectuals need to take up questions and engage debate around the overall nature of local government. Its scope, or legal and geographic jurisdiction, constitutional status and powers are all dimensions that should be seen as directly

DRAFT

relevant to community development. So too are matters like alternative decision making structures, electoral arrangements, accountabilities, reporting systems and revenue generation. Community development also needs to be prepared to use municipal offices and resources for advocacy and pursuit of constituent interests, including those concerning distribution, beyond the immediate sphere of local government.

Early in this paper I noted DeFilippis, Fisher and Shragge's (2009) exploration of community based organizing in opposition to dominant neoliberal policy. Their examples embodied locality based work which also focussed on 'goals of social and economic justice' and the need for change 'in the larger political economy'. Such explorations could be undertaken in relation to local government. As a start, perhaps there could be a special issue of the *Community Development Journal* focussed on local government – or the local state. Along with some theoretical analysis and critique of local government as an institution, and consideration of alternative local government models, contributions might explore the potential of progressive policies and programs, building from the 'participatory budgeting' process popularized in Porto Alegre from the 1990s (see eg Avritzer, 2006). There might also be articles on efforts to use particular local governments as vehicles for social change, and perhaps a review of some historical examples, such as work of the Greater London Council and others internationally.[xv] Possibly the special issue could also include one of the Classic Texts revisited series, focussed on *The Local State*.

DRAFT

References

Adams, David, and Michael Hess (2001) 'Community in public policy: Fad or foundation?' *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 60(2) June, 13-23.

Adams, David, and John Wiseman (2003) 'Navigating the future: A case study of Growing Victoria Together', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 62(2) June, 11-23.

Akpan, Ntieyong U. (1956) *Epitaph to Direct Rule: A Discourse on Local Government in Africa*, London, Cassell.

Avritzer, Leonardo (2006) 'New Public Spheres in Brazil: Local Democracy and Deliberative Politics, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 30(3) September, 623-637.

Baldock, Peter (1978) Book review, *Community Development Journal*, 13, 55-56.

Boddy, Martin, and Colin Fudge (eds) (1984) *Local Socialism? Labour councils and new left alternatives*, London, Macmillan.

Brimbank City Council (2009) Community Plan: 2009 – 2030, Final Draft

Broad, Candy (2003) 'The Victorian government agenda for building stronger communities', address to Capacity Building and Social Capital Forum, Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne, 9 September 2003.

Brouwer, G.E., (Ombudsman Victoria) (2009) Investigation into the alleged improper conduct of councillors at Brimbank City Council, *Whistleblowers Protection Act 2001*, May. http://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/resources/documents/Investigation_into_the_alleged_improper_conduct_of_councillors_at_Brimbank_City_Council_P1-P19

Carins, Brendan (Brendan Carins Consulting) (2008) *Embedding Community Priorities into Council Planning: Guidelines for the Integration of Community and Council Planning*, Melbourne, Local Government Professionals (LGPro) Corporate Planner's Network, with the Department of Planning and Community Development, May. http://www.dvc.vic.gov.au/Web20/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Embedding+Comm+Prior+word/$file/Embedding+Community+Priorities+into+Council+Planning+-+May08.doc

Chile, Love M. (ed.) (2007) *Community development practice in New Zealand*, Auckland, AUT University.

Clague, Michael (1997) 'Thirty turbulent years: Community development and the organization of health and social services in British Columbia', in Wharf and Clague, 1997, 91-112.

Cockburn, Cynthia (1977) *The Local State: The Management of Cities and People*, London, Pluto Press.

Craig, Gary, Keith Popple and Mae Shaw (eds) (2008) *Community Development in Theory and Practice: An International Reader*, Spokesman, 2008

DeFilippis, James, Robert Fisher and Eric Shragge (2006) 'Neither romance nor regulation: Re-evaluating community', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 30(3) September, 673-89.

DeFilippis, James (2008) 'Community control and development', chapter 3 in DeFilippis and Susan Saegert.

DeFilippis, James, Robert Fisher and Eric Shragge (2009) 'What's left in the community? Oppositional politics in contemporary practice', *Community Development Journal*, 44(1) January, 38-52.

DeFilippis, James, and Susan Saegert (eds) (2008) *The community development reader*, New York, Routledge, 28-35.

Dollery, Brian E., Joseph Garcea and Edward C. LeSage (eds) *Local Government Reform: A Comparative Analysis of Advanced Anglo-American Countries*, Cheltenham (UK) Edward Elgar, 2008.

Dowling, Jason (2009a) 'Planning: Brumby bypasses residents', *The Age*, 21 May: 1-2. See too, *Editorial* in the same issue – 'Responsible planning involves hearing all sides, p.14.

Dowling, Jason (2009b) 'Wedge politics', *The Age*, 9 June: 11. See too, *Editorial* in the same issue – 'Melbourne's 2030 plan will be dead on arrival', p.12.

Dowling, Jason (2009c) 'They're rubbish', *The Age*, 7 July: 9.

DRAFT

Fuller, Crispian, and Mike Geddes (2008) 'Urban governance under neoliberalism: New Labour and the restructuring of state-space', *Antipode*, 40(2) March, 252-82.

Geoghegan, Martin, and Fred Powell (2008) 'Community development and the contested politics of the late modern *agora*: of, alongside or against neoliberalism?' *Community Development Journal*, Advance Access, published online, 14 July.

Gyford, John (1985) *The politics of local socialism*, London, George Allen and Unwin.

Henderson, Paul, and David N. Thomas (2002) *Skills in Neighbourhood Work*, Third Edition, London, Routledge.

Horrocks, Bill & Heather (2009) Measuring up: linking planning and performance, Melbourne, Local Government Victoria, Department of Planning and Community Development, April

Hughes, Philip, Alan Black, Peter Kaldor, John Bellamy, and Keith Castle (2007) *Building stronger communities*, Sydney, University of New South Wales Press.

Ife, Jim (2002) *Community Development: Community-based alternatives in an age of globalization*, 2nd edition, Sydney, Pearson.

Ife, Jim, and Frank Tesoriero (2006) *Community Development: Community-based alternatives in an age of globalization*, 3rd edition, Sydney, Pearson.

Kenny, Susan (1999) *Developing Communities for the Future: Community Development in Australia*, 2nd edition, Melbourne, Nelson.

Kenny, Sue (2002) 'Tensions and dilemmas in community development: new discourses, new Trojans?' *Community Development Journal* 37:284-299.

Kenny, Susan (2006) *Developing Communities for the Future: Community Development in Australia*, 3rd edition, Melbourne, Thomson.

Lazin, Fred, Matt Evans, Vincent Hoffmann-Martinot and Hellmut Wollmann (eds) (2007) *Local government reforms in countries in transition : a global perspective*, Lanham, Lexington Books.

Lee, J.M. (1967) *Colonial Development and Good Government: A study of the ideas expressed by the British official classes in planning decolonization 1939-1964*, Oxford, Clarendon.

Mayer, Margit and Katherine N Rankin (2002) 'Social Capital and (Community) Development: A North/South Perspective', *Antipode*, 34(4) 804-8.

Mendes, Philip (2009) 'Teaching community development to social work students: a critical reflection', *Community Development Journal*, 44(2) April, 248-62.

Midgley, James, and Michelle Livermore (2005) 'Development theory and community practice', chapter 7, in Marie Weil (ed.) *Handbook of Community Practice*, Thousand Oaks, Sage, 153-68.

Millar, Royce (2009) 'Playing hardball: the trouble with Harry', *The Age*, 13 June.

Mowbray, Martin (1986) 'The Red Shire of Kearsley, 1944-1947: Communists in Local Government', *Labour History*, 51, November, 83-94.

Mowbray, Martin (1986) 'State Control or Self-Regulation? On the political economy of local government in remote Aboriginal townships', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2/1986, 31-9.

Mowbray, Martin (1989) 'Contemporary Colonial Administration: the Northern Territory's Community Government Schemes and Aboriginal Development', in Peter Loveday and Ann Webb (eds) *Small Towns in North Australia*, Australian National University North Australia Research Unit, Darwin, 144-5.

Mowbray, Martin (1994) 'Colonization, Local Government and Aboriginal Communities in the Northern Territory', *Community Development Journal*, 29(1) 21-28.

Mowbray, Martin (1996) 'Problems in Australian Community Work Literature', *Community Development Journal*, 31(2) April, 174-81.

DRAFT

Mowbray, Martin (1997) 'Intellectuals and the local state: The Australian local government literature' *Urban Policy and Research*, 15(4) 247-58.

Mowbray, Martin (2000) 'Alternative visions? Community Development in Canada', *Community Development Journal*, 35(3) July, 306-9.

Mowbray, Martin (2000) 'Community development and local government: An Australian response to globalization and economic fundamentalism', *Community Development Journal*, 35(3) July, 215-223.

Mowbray, Martin (2004) 'The new communitarianism: Building great communities or Brigadoonery?' *Just Policy*, 32, June, 11-20.

Mowbray, Martin (2009) 'Faking social capital: State intellectuals as spin-doctors', Chapter 4 in Geoff Woolcock and Lenore Manderson (eds) *Social capital and social justice: Critical Australian perspectives*, Darwin, Charles Darwin University Press, forthcoming

Navarro, Vicente (2002) 'A critique of social capital', *International Journal of Health Services*, 32, 3, 423-432. http://www.fhi.se/pdf/Critiqueofsocialcpital.pdf

Olowu, Dele, and S. Bamidele Ayo (1985) 'Local government and community development in Nigeria: Developments since the 1976 local government reform', *Community Development Journal*, 20, October, 283-92.

Phillips, Ian, and Carol Oxley (I & J Management Services) (2002) Community Capacity Building Initiative, Interim Review, Regional Development Victoria, December.

Popple, Keith (2008) 'The first forty years: the history of the Community Development Journal', *Community Development Journal* 43(1) 6-23.

Putnam, Robert D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, New York, Simon and Schuster.

Putnam, Robert D., and Lewis M. Feldstein (with Don Cohen) (2003) *Better Together: Restoring the American community*, New York, Simon and Schuster.

Shaw, Mae (2008) 'Community development and the politics of community', *Community Development Journal*, 43(1) January, 24–36.

Shragge, Eric (2003) *Activism and social change: Lessons for community and local organizing*, Toronto, Broadview Press.

Sinclair, Stephen (2008) 'Dilemmas of Community Planning: Lessons from Scotland, *Public Policy and Administration*, 23(4), 373-390.

Smyth, Paul, Tim Reddel and Andrew Jones (eds) (2005) *Community and Local Governance in Australia*, Sydney, University of New South Wales Press.

Stoeker, Randy (2004) 'The mystery of the missing social capital and the ghost of social structure: Why community development can't win', chapter 4 in Mark Silverman (ed.) *Community based organizations: The intersection of social capital and local context in contemporary urban society*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 53-66.

Taylor, Marilyn (2003) *Public policy and the community*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Thompson, Denise (2009) '"Beyond left and right" or "the end of ideology"? Comparing two discourses', paper for Australian Social Policy Conference 2009, University of New South Wales. http://www.sprc1.sprc.unsw.edu.au/ASPC2009/FullProgram2.asp

Thwaites, John (2004) Communities in control: Doing government better, Address to the Communities in control conference, Melbourne, 7 June.

Thwaites, John (2006) Minister's Message, Department for Victorian Communities website, 17 April. http://www.communitybuilding.vic.gov.au/graphic/vic_gov_approach/

Weeks, Wendy, Lesley Hoatson and Jane Dixon (eds) (2003) *Community Practices in Australia*, Sydney, Pearson.

DRAFT

West, Sue and Hayden Raysmith (2007) *Planning together: Lessons from local government community planning in Victoria*, Final Report of the Local Government and Community Planning Project, Local Government Victoria, Department of Planning and Community Development, December. http://www.dvc.vic.gov.au/Web20/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Planning+Together/$file/2007+Planning+Together.pdf

Wharf, Brian, and Michael Clague (1997) 'Lessons and legacies', Chapter 15 in Brian Wharf and Michael Clague (eds) *Community organizing: Canadian experiences*, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 302-325.

Wiseman, John (2003) 'Other worlds: Public policy after neo liberalism', Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) Congress, 14-15 August.

Wollmann, Hellmut (2007) 'Changes, ruptures, and continuities in European local government systems: Between government and governance', chapter 2 in Lazin, Evans, Hoffmann-Martinot and Wollmann, 2007, 15-38.

Wolman, Harold (1995) 'Local Government Institutions and democratic Governance', in David Judge, Gerry Stoker and Harold Wolman (eds) *Theories of Urban Politics*, London, Sage, 1995, 135-159.

Notes

[i] Essentially, the NPM approach to public administration is based on the view that the public sector becomes more efficient and cost-effective by imitating idealized constructions of market driven private enterprise.

[ii] A keynote speaker is the prominent English advocate of 'progressive conservatism' and 'capitalism for the poor', Phillip Blond.

[iii] http://www.dvc.vic.gov.au/Web14/dvc/dvcmain.nsf/allDocs/RWP1728DA86948774E8CA2570450025787A?OpenDocument

[iv] http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/web14/dvc/dvcmain.nsf/headingpagesdisplay/about+dpcdour+structure

[v] http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/CA256D8000265E1A/page/Growing+Victoria+Together!OpenDocument&1=30-Growing+Victoria+Together~&2=~&3=~

[vi] http://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/Web20/dvclgv.nsf/allDocs/RWPA8839CB9D0B964D7CA2571700031FF3C?OpenDocument

[vii] A subtitle used by Cynthia Cockburn for a section of her book (1977: 146-153) about tension in a promised 'special relationship' (read 'partnership') between neighbourhood councils and local government decision makers.

[viii] Through the *Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003*

[ix] A Strategic Resource Plan is a resource plan of the resources required to achieve the strategic objectives outlined in the Council Plan (Horrocks, 2009:5).

[x] Victoria's Brimbank City Council provides an excellent case in point. The (current) Final Draft of its Community Plan includes the statement: 'Council decision-making will exhibit transparency, honesty and probity' (p.3) Although it could hardly say the opposite, the plan could have taken account of complaints to government about council integrity made over a number of years. It was, after all, prepared while the state Ombudsman was investigating serious complaints about the council. The Ombudsman Victoria found an organizationally dysfunctional council under the influence of unelected persons, multiple conflicts of interest, improper use of powers, bullying and intimidation, misuse of funds and equipment, and improper use of information. Moreover, the Ombudsman found that the responsible state office, Local Government Victoria, had failed to respond to serious complaints of several years. He also found that Local Government Victoria 'is insufficiently resourced to meet its statutory requirements' (Brouwer, 2009: 195).

[xi] See Department of Planning and Community Development, Annual Report, 2007-08, section Community Planning.

[xii] See e.g. http://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/web22/dvclgg.nsf/headingpagesdisplay/how+councils+work http://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/web22/dvclgg.nsf/allDocs/RWP52F569144E396339CA257184001CA4F7?OpenDocument

[xiii] The last volume available on line to 9 June 2009. http://codewriters.com/asites/page.cfm?usr=commdev&pageid=1706

[xiv] *The Age*, 16 May 2009: News 4.

DRAFT

[xv] An example of a largely forgotten effort to turn local government resources towards meeting material interests of working class people is the post World War 2 New South Wales Shire of Kearsley (Mowbray, 1986).

DRAFT