

New Currents and New Concepts in Community Development

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We may be witnessing the most profound redirection of federal policy toward local government in this century. Since the inception of the republic there has been a creative tension regarding the role the federal government can and should play in local affairs. This tension, at times, has resulted in bitter political battles and in one instance a civil war. However, in spite of disagreements over form there has been a gradual but noticeable drift toward national problem solving and away from initiative in the individual states and communities. This trend was reinforced in the early part of this century with the obvious need to use federal resources in a *pan-federal* approach to the development and expansion of transportation, marketing systems and activities related to industrial growth. Community Development in this period was thought to be the development and diffusion of technology to aid in national expansion.

The pattern of federal intervention was buttressed more recently by a depression, two world wars and subsequent "police action." By the end of the Second World War, federal intervention in local affairs formed the core of the national development thrust. However, to a great extent, this was a latent policy reflecting a philosophy among federal bureaucrats that local governmental apparatuses were inefficient and/or ineffective in attacking most large scale community problems such as housing, employment, income security, and health. In addition, the immense resources of the national government, fiscal and human, provided greater latitude in problem identification, priority setting and resource mobilization than states or local jurisdictions possessed.

However, by the early 1960's the disadvantages of federal intervention in local problems were becoming increasingly evident. Just to cite a few common illustrations: local policy makers were either unable or unwilling to attack many locally generated problems and sought federal assistance before assessing and exhausting local resources; civic leadership, as measured by the caliber of local citizens seeking public office and partaking in civic organizations, was dwindling as a partial result of the perceived inability to affect local events; and the requisite local governmental infrastructures to resolve local issues were not being developed in most communities; i.e., planning agencies, fiscal systems etc. [Wirt, p. IX]

The Johnson Administration recognized this phenomenon and in response initiated a series of bold experiments to return some fiscal resources and limited control to the local level. The Great Society plan was a *tranfederal* approach to provide communities via special or categorical grants funds to initiate certain specified activities designed to assist local residents and particularly the poor take great control over their own community's destiny. The federal government determined the need in great Society programs as well as the overall strategy and federal funds used as a catalyst to promote the desired program or project with local sponsorship such as the Community Action Programs (OEO) and Model Cities (HUD) efforts. Similar programs were developed in a wide range of endeavors directly related to the governance of cities, counties, and states.

The role of community developers in this period shifted from resource and information providers to active interventionist and change agents. In fact a new cadre of community developers emerged within the land grant college system's Cooperative Extension Service and in the cities and counties designated as "change agents."

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It soon became evident, however, that the new change agents were working in a system nearly impervious to change because local governments had no significant political or fiscal resources to share. In addition, the federal requirement of some form of citizen participation in local programs spawned a set of unrealistic expectations among local residents which few communities were able to successfully accommodate. [Yin & Yates]

By the mid 60's the federal government was genuinely pressed to shift the locus of problem identification from the national to the local level without altering its financial commitments. Thus, when Richard Nixon assumed office and proposed the "New Federalism" with additional alterations in the federal structure to provide greater local flexibility, the idea was generally well received.

The New Federalism was a continuation of the transfederal approaches initiated earlier in the Kennedy-Johnson era. The new approach was based on the observations by the Council on Executive Organization chaired by Roy Ash (subsequently director of the Office of Management and Budget) that "most Americans (were) simply fed up with government at all levels. . . good people cannot do good things with bad mechanisms" [Raap]. Ash suggested that the best means of restoring faith in government, as well as solving local problems, was to provide greater resources at the local (city) level for elected officials and civic leaders to solve the problems of their constituents. The red tape involved in filing for a grant application, for instance, for one of over 500 (by 1972) categorical grant programs paralyzed all but the most sophisticated municipalities [Waldhorn]. Priorities at the local level were being shaped not by local need but in response to federal funding sources. This situation led to several suggestions that the entire federal government be re-organized. In 1971 Congress in response to local pressures passed the first of these proposals the General Revenue Sharing Act. This Act provided a means to transfer federal funds to local communities without imposing national remedies or "attaching strings" to funding.

Further, Congress enacted the Rural Development Act in 1972 to stimulate a more balanced pattern of national development. In essence, this Act was designed to revitalize rural America which was becoming a social casualty of industrial and technological progress [Padfield]. Recently (1974)

as a follow-up to the needs of the cities, both urban and rural, Congress passed the Housing and Community Development Act. These two acts combined with Revenue Sharing, mentioned earlier, provide a new framework for adjusting national resources without federal prescriptions for resolution.

These are very hesitant steps indeed; however, since much control remains at the federal level. While this legislation represents a genuinely positive thrust in federal policy toward local communities, it is not the entire story. The Rural Development Act, to date, has still not been funded to the level of its authorization. The comprehensive strategies proposed in the Rural Development legislation to bring "new life to the Country" remain hollow promises and legislative rhetoric. The Housing and Community Development Act, the latest scheme, is a long way from becoming a reality.

As the federal governance system alters, the field of community development is shifting to meet the challenge of restoring local government as a pivotal institution in American life. This paper raises some of the issues to be discussed by my colleagues related to the currents and cross currents of New Federalism community development and its implications for Community Development professionals.

Structural Dimensions

In initiating New Federalism the Nixon and subsequently the Ford Administration's posture has been that local government, i.e. counties and cities, are in fact ordered governmental entities with duties, powers and responsibilities. Floyd Hyde, the Administration's chief architect of the New Federalism Community Development Strategy defined "community development" as:

...a process of identifying and dealing with the full range of problems confronting a city in a coordinated way. The city is a complex organism. Its parts are delicately interwoven. . . Thus community development is a process that is broader than any one city department, or for that matter any federal department. . . It shapes all available funds into a concerted effort to make our cities better places to live and work. [Hyde, p. 5]

This somewhat simplistic notion set forth by Hyde and other federal bureaucrats of the arrangement of local government has led to enormous

confusion over the intent and direction of New Federalism programs. In fact, local government is an extremely disorderly set of institutions with very limited powers and even more limited delivery capacity [Kepler, p. 9]. Local government is a morass of disconnected activities and enterprises which do not interconnect in any convenient way except through the states. The county is the only local governmental body which is fairly uniform in its powers and duties, yet it suffers in most states from being considered a creature of the state with only limited self-autonomy. Recent work by a variety of policy scientists depicts the counties as not very effective instruments of government [Mason]. Further, in studies of county governments' responses to revenue sharing the county seems not to be an effective or efficient instrument of socio-economic change. In addition, in the area in which counties should have the greatest impact—land use—via planning commission activities, they have not used this authority wisely or fully [Shiffman]. While the county, due to its greater share of human resources, (welfare and health) responsibilities should be more responsive to the poor, research indicates that it is even less responsive and more distant from citizen input than municipalities [Kepler, p. 11].

Cities and towns are arranged in so many different ways that little comparative analyses can take place on a national basis. However, we do know that cities have almost no powers beyond "police power." That is, the city can fine, tax, issue permits, etc. but it has only limited ability to even deliver basic services. For example, school, fire, sewage, water and even industrial development districts with separate powers to tax and deliver services have boundaries in common with the city but have no required linkage with municipal government. This crazy quilt of over-lapping governmental entities is hidden from most citizens so the city is perceived as invisible. Milton Kotler so aptly notes,

The process of city administration is invisible to the citizen who sees little evidence of its human components but feels the sharp pain of taxation. With increasingly poor public services, his desires are more insistently expressed. Yet his expression of needs seems to issue into thin air for government does not appear to be attentive to his needs [Kotler].

In fact, the city was ranked 7th in a Roper poll of public credibility of local institutions in 1974. The saving grace was the poll was conducted during

Watergate and the federal government fell below the cities on the same scale. Research attempting to measure what political scientists term "affect" or the degree of confidence people feel in their public institutions indicates that city government has little support as a political institution in spite of or because of revenue sharing and other New Federalism schemes [Groth, Schutz, and Blakely].

In essence, the basic structural arrangements or disarray of local government needs further study before massive transfers of resources can be considered. A similar observation was made as early as 1837 during the federal government's first revenue sharing attempt. The result of sharing \$37,468,000 among the twenty-six states and localities by President Jackson was "a considerable increase in government expenses—legitimate and illegitimate, an astonishing prevalence of official recklessness and dishonesty in government finances, not to mention gigantic frauds and bare-faced plundering of the treasury." Similarly the National Revenue Sharing project reported most of Revenue Sharing has gone not to improving the quality of community life but to the maintenance and expansion of current governmental operations.

Arlo Biere and John Sjo in their paper suggest community developers should become involved in research related to the structural barriers (financial and management) that inhibit local government from allocating its current resource and alteration necessary to make it more responsive and responsible. This is not to say that Community developers need to become political scientists, but if the fiscal process, i.e. revenue sharing and related mechanisms, is to be the principal device for community change the input-output capacity must be studied in relationship to these structural variables.

The Policy and Program

Policy, administrative structure as well as program implementation should be closely inter-linked concepts. To date, the federal government has behaved as though these were quite distinct entities. For example, the Community Action Program (CAP's) sponsored by OEO operated programs in many localities until recently without any connection with local jurisdiction's political structure. Some observers suggest this is what led to the demise of the early OEO efforts. Without entering

that debate, it might be well for us to focus on some key issues relating to new programs or the absences of programs that seem contradictory or at least debilitating to the latest national community development thrust.

On one level the federal government's rhetoric emphasizes the desirability and necessity for local autonomy. At the same time federal funds are being used to develop a myriad of regional planning and governance institutions and agencies. The Council of Government (CoG) is the most famous or infamous strategy in this area. CoG's are technically supposed to provide regional or area-wide planning in land use, transportation, social service, health, public safety, and employment programs. However for a CoG and other regional agencies to initiate these activities and have a reasonable chance to succeed it needs some staff capacity and authority. The Federal government's intentions for CoG's is not clear but the cities view them as regional governments [Blakely and Zone]. What is clear to researchers at this point is that CoG's are a mixed blessing. Booner emphasizes the naturalness of regionality in America and the need for as well as the benefits from regionalism [Bonner, p. 30]. On the other hand the Ostrom's extensive at the University of Indiana have not shown regionalism to be less expensive or more efficient [Ostrom]. In our research endeavors in California, we have found the development of CoG's is related to pace of internal municipal government capacity in planning and related areas. In essence, while building one structure we may or may not aid the development of another. Clearly we need to know what the trade-offs are in terms of cost/benefits and the structural alternatives available.

The work of Frank and Ruth Young and others at Cornell suggest that community development is a "building block" process related to the development of certain internal capacities in a community. If the Youngs' hypothesis is correct for more or less primitive or small communities in developing countries and rural America, then certainly a "support capacity" should, in fact must be, present in local governments for New Federalism projects and programs to survive and thrive. "Supporting Capacity" is a term I borrowed from ecologists in an effort to describe the internal organizational network required to initiate and sustain a project or program [Ammerman, p. 219].

The complex network relationships within any local jurisdiction are in fact as Kenneth Benson, a sociologist, suggests "an emergent phenomenon, delineating a kind of analysis with distinctive features and concerns" [Benson, p. 22]. In other words, the interorganizational network of CoG's, County, City, Special District, School District, regional health, manpower and other units is a new emerging single entity that has characteristics in its own right and acts as an institution. Network analyses may be the only relevant mechanisms for community development practice in the future rather than the leadership and political behavior paradigms of the 1950's and 1960's. What we are finding is that there is some minimal network bureaucracy or management system required to efficiently and effectively operate at the local level. Transferring funds to local entities without any understanding of these support levels may lead to continued failures on a large scale (e.g., New York City) and/or a small scale in cities under 5,000.

It seems reasonable, at least to me, that Economists, Sociologist and Community Development practitioners start examining, as Phil Martin suggests in his discussion of rural labor, inter- and intragovernmental systems for program operation that will sustain rural growth. Such a research emphasis proceeds from my earlier assumption that there is a structural dimension associated with rural and community development which can be affected by national policy. Phil Martin illustrates this well with the manpower programs and their impacts on rural areas.

Socio/Psychological Dimension

The applied behavioral science literature is very well developed in the area of local leadership development and/or citizen participation. In fact, if one read the case studies on planned change it would appear that the majority of such efforts were successful. Unfortunately the bad cases, the failures, do not generally reach the journals. Further most of the worst examples are terminated relatively early. Field studies in community participation do not substantiate the optimism of the case studies or the theoretical premises related to citizen involvement. In fact, there seems to be very little empirical evidence to entirely justify

many of the tenets of community involvement. Nonetheless, the current federal strategy is very much tied to the assumption that citizen leadership is available and interested in making input in local government. In fact, most of the recent research suggests that "citizen activity does not translate into citizen impact" [Kepler, p. 11]. Further, researchers, including myself, observe that "while elected officials complain of citizen apathy and proclaim their willingness to listen, few are eager for citizen involvement outside the normal electoral process" [Kepler, p. 12]. Notwithstanding these pessimistic observations, it is hopefully in the best interest of a democracy to foster citizen involvement as an integral part of all its social-political processes. Just saying that citizen participation is *not* working is scarcely enough. Don Sorenson suggests that the recent population shift provides new opportunities to strengthen the notion of community and build local institutions.

It is increasingly clear that the necessary interdependencies do not exist between citizens and local government. That is, local residents do not rely on their local government or local officials for very much. If the county delivers welfare; the state employment; the federal government food stamps, housing and education; with local public service districts providing water, light, and sewage; then, the city and resident have no mutually advantageous relationships. As described by Emerson.

Social relations commonly entail *ties of mutual dependence* between the parties. A *depends* upon B as he aspires to goals or gratifications whose achievement is facilitated by appropriate actions on B's part. By virtue of mutual dependency, it is more or less imperative to each party that he be able to control or influence the other's conduct. At the same time, these ties of mutual dependence imply that each party is in a position, to some degree, to grant or deny, facilitate or hinder, the other's gratification. Thus, it would appear that the power to control or influence the other resides in control over the things he values, which may range all the way from oil resources to ego-support, depending upon the relation in question. In short power resides implicitly in the other's dependency [Ammerman, p. 220].

The absence of such a mutual dependent structure in citizens' relationships with their area, community, city, or county governments will thwart any attempts at citizen participation or involvement in community goal setting. While

Agricultural Economists for the most part are not involved in such behavioral science questions, Don Sorenson raises important questions relating to the need to comprehend these issues, as basic to community development strategies in the seventies. In effect, the size, location, and social equity questions are all being considered together in public decision making related to rural development, land use, farm size, housing, etc. The advent of no growth or at least slow growth and the attendant social impact questions are taking precedents over efficiency as significant topics for applied economic research.

Don Sorenson suggests that community developers are already becoming involved in a significant number of matters that are social and behavioral in orientation. The merging of strategies, both research and action, into the process to link citizens to local institutions as well as how to cultivate leadership for those institutions is no longer beyond the role of Agricultural Economics as later presentations will illustrate. While the needs for action in the area of building better human communities is clear, the research methods and potential outcomes are hazy. Nevertheless, it is important for Agricultural Economists, Rural Sociologists, and Community Developers to begin to think how to produce better human places as well as how to produce better research.

Summary, Conclusions and Implication for Community Development

While there is some doubt among the Congress regarding the merits of Revenue Sharing as a political tool, few Congressmen or bureaucrats seem eager to reassert the federal presence in local affairs. As a result the New Federalism policies may well alter form, but the basic mechanisms will remain the same. This federal strategy combined with the altered pattern of migration provide new opportunities for the community development scholar and/or practitioner to contribute to the evaluation of national policy. Local government or more specifically the network of institutions both public and private that formulate policy at the local level need to be examined and strengthened in this new era. However, most political observers and researchers agree that after nearly four decades of federal and state intervention

most communities are ill prepared to meet the challenges of New Federalism or serve their new populations.

Agricultural Economists in this new era may provide research and service to strengthen the capacities of local governmental institutions in much the same way they have assisted in the development of the Agribusiness system. Clearly, the type and level of science to apply to community development in changing circumstances is as yet not specified. However, several areas seem to be appropriate. They are research and service projects designed to:

- Improve the capacity of rural institutions to support the new demographic shifts.
- Alter structural inequalities in federal funding formulas and consequences to various communities.
- Suggest methods of local government financing community development (e.g. bonds, taxes, fee structures, etc.)
- Cost/benefits analysis of alternative policy and program structures for community development at the regional or interjurisdictional level.
- Application of network analysis, evaluation systems, and social indicators to gauge the progress of community development activities.
- Analysis of impacts of similar federal programs on various communities to provide for policy adjustment and resource allocation.

In summary my colleagues and I are proposing a dynamic, policy-oriented role for Agricultural Economists interested in Community Development. The following papers will suggest the broad outlines of this approach. It is, our hope, that we will stimulate a revitalization of community development that is as powerful as the current revival of rural areas.

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