University of Technology, Sydney.

Community Emergent

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Business
for the Degree of
Master of Business

by

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1995

I am convinced that communal life can flourish only if it exists for an aim outside of itself. Community is viable if it is the outgrowth of a deep involvement in a purpose which is other than or outside that of being a community.

Bruno Bettleheim

Acknowledgments

A full acknowledgement of the many people who contributed to the decision to undertake this work, provided the motivation for its continuation and contributed to its content would mean a list which would rival the length of the thesis itself. There are some however whose particular contribution requires specific and grateful mention.

Firstly there are those colleagues whose insistence over the years that a group of paid professionals and a handful of ideologically reconstructed residents could be called a Community, and was a sufficient basis to defend the legitimacy of the Community Management Model. Thank you for the conflict and frustrations that impelled me to look for something better.

Then, to the academic staff at the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur and the old Kuringai CAE who got tired of seeing my face in undergraduate courses and told me to get myself out and give something back to the knowledge of the field, I hope this does it.

On the substance of the work itself, there are many people without whose professional and personal help and co-operation nothing could have happened. The people, the politicians, the newspapers, the libraries and the local government bodies of both Corowa and Chullora opened their files, their workplaces, their homes and often their hearts to allow the research to go where it needed to. Without in any way diminishing the role of the scores of people who remain anonymous contributors to this process very special thanks are due to Annie and Rudy, who made their home available as a base in Corowa.

Then comes that stalwart or foolhardy group who stayed closely circled around me during the whole process. Not only did they not move to another state but somehow found the resources to actively support me:

My mother, Pat Beresford, who early in my life instilled the desire for knowledge and education and supported me in this direction throughout my life, including this latest venture.

My employers; the Board of Directors of Bankstown Community Services Co-operative, who were ridiculously indulgent in the amount of study leave given, in allowing me to change my work patterns at a moment's notice and in tolerating my being an absentee manager in the concluding stages of the work. Similarly, to those I work with, who at times didn't know when, where, or if, they could find me - with particular apologies to that group who came to believe that I had gone off quietly to have a nervous breakdown, which conclusion wasn't quite true. My deepest gratitude to Fay Brown who took on much of my workload, acted as a buffer and

liaison person between me and the rest of the world during that latter period and gave me immense personal support throughout.

To Janet Cosgrove and Tina Rendell who assisted me in layout and presentation problems at critical times of the physical production of the thesis, and a variety of computer wizards, notably David Robertson, who dragged it all back from the edge of the cyberspace abyss far too many times. Heartfelt thanks to you all.

Deep thanks to my proof readers-cum-editors; Anne Simmons, Ken Matthews, Graham Rendell and Jenny Onyx. Despite your emergence as an anal retentive lot who annoyingly insisted on every sentence having a verb, and your attempts to limit me to no more than five or six primary concepts in each sentence, many thanks for your time, perseverance and helpful criticism.

Two of these have to be singled out for special mention. Graham, who saw the process through from its germinal stages in conversations on his verandah to the finished product and acted as sounding board and counsellor throughout. Jenny, who agreed to supervise the work and amazingly stuck by this even when I disappeared for months at a time. For your particularly apt blend of academic skill and personal support, and your belief in the importance of the work at those times when I was about ready to walk away, Thank You.

Preface

On Rationalism, Economic, or Other, the Social Stop-Gap

Reason is the organ of calculation, of planning; it is neutral in regard to ends,...a purposeless purposiveness which might then be attached to all ends.

Enlightenment is Totalitarianism

Adorno & Horkheimer

~

The spontaneous affections of the heart, the hatreds of the moment, the comely and honourable ways of tradition are all forbidden. Reason illuminates all being with a shadowless and clinical light before which fly poetry, faith and myth. One does not even find in the merciless light of reason the consolation of injustice: Reason is its own justification, the legitimator of its own necessities.

D.G. MacRae

(on Max Weber on Rationalism)

~

This thesis was commenced in the early part of 1991: The thought processes that led to it, and the experiences that gave birth to them began some years before then.

The motives for the work that accrued over that time, and as the thesis was underway, were principally to understand the phenomenon of community; to be able to work with it more productively; that remains the primary focus of this work. Increasingly though, over that time another agenda assumed importance: The imperative to be able to articulate 'things communitarian' more clearly to an increasingly unreceptive audience. To put it not too bluntly; to be able to talk to the enemy.

The period of the thesis' genesis embraced the ascendancy of the New Right, the decline of the Left , and allied schools of humanism as a meaningful body of thought and consequently social influence; the rise of Economic Rationalism and New Managerialism; the argued End of Ideology, the denial of the social whole and promotion of the self-interestedly rational individual: A context inimical to a discipline, and an industry, whose historical validation lies in a cycle of ideology, aspiration and action, all fundamentally premised on social gregariousness and altruism, the informal and the personal.

The broad political environment growing out of the humanist strand in conservative and social democratic philosophies, favourable to, or manipulable by, loosely but

forcefully expressed communitarian sentiments, had changed. With that change the common language of community organisations and governments which supported them was lost. The new language dealt with the concretely measurable, the specific, the planned and predictable, the linear transaction, the pre-defined package; those things which Community was not . It was increasingly however, the only language of currency and it, and the forms and practices it referred to, were adopted by Community Organisations in the interests of their own survival. The adoption was, of course, a subterfuge - for a while.

Social welfare service provision had alway been part of the agenda of the Community Organisation, an important part, and was the most measurable aspect of their operations: It didn't appear to matter if you emphasised this in your reports, rather than the more ephemeral agendas of empowerment and consciousness raising. It seemed to be okay if you adopted some of the artifices of the new regime in doing this while you went on doing the things that really mattered in the background.

Except that language and practice of convenience become reality and intent; staff and management change but systems remain and inform the newcomers Then it gets to the point where the only thing about you that is recognised is the tangibles, the packages, the services that you 'sell'. Then, when the system identifies you as only another vendor in the market your claims to be something else seem a little thin. The intention of going underground until it all went away seems a little vague as you enter your next competitive tender as a government sub-contractor, and consider whether it might be better to privatise after all...

In this environment, attempting to resolve the confused theoretical base of Community and Community Practice seemed to be imperative if the strength and integrity of the sector was to survive: To be able to, dare I say - rationally, articulate the parameters and purpose of our practice; to spell out clearly and in detail, the whys and wherefores; the gains, for the participating individuals and the social whole.

And the social whole does gain; Community is not just a local game or one for limited vested interests. The, ground level collective, the communal, predates the rationally ordered institution and throughout history has cyclically, formed and informed, critiqued and reformed it, and overthrown it. Periodically in western history, at times of ideological impasse, rationalism, in its varying forms assumes a dominant stance and then slips back to its more useful role, which is that of helping to do the things that need to be done, rather than itself being the supervening need. Our current need is to survive that phase intact, and to contribute to its end by denying its false claims to primacy.

I hope that this work may play a part in the better understanding of Community - the non-rational part of our social living - and that such an understanding may strengthen the claims, and willingness, of the Community Sector to stay with its roots.

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Abstract

The thesis arises from fourteen years field practice as a Community Worker and a manager of Community Based services.

It was driven primarily by dissatisfaction with the focus, contradictions, and ultimate inconclusiveness of the body of theory concerned with Community, and the consequent failure of the theoretical base to inform the models of practice. The thesis explores a way of viewing Community, in the conceptual sense, that would give a clearer means of identifying and understanding specific Communities in practice; and consequently inform the methods of working with them.

The theoretical perspective explored is that Community is a temporary psycho-sociological function: It is the convergence of like-affected individuals into a social formation; in response to a perceived hostility in the prevailing broader environment and in opposition to it. That perspective inherently holds that Community is not the primary phenomenon that it is generally regarded as in the literature, nor is it the stable and permanent social unit that it has similarly been treated. It consequently stands in the face of the majority position.

In view of that the early chapters (One & Two), in the process of introducing and establishing the theory review the current state of Community studies and delve into the history of the concept to examine biases which may have entered into the discourse to bring this about; to establish the possibility that Community is something other than has been conventionally held.

In the process of examining that possibility, two detailed case studies of geographically defined areas were conducted. These were Corowa and Chullora, which had circumstantially similar experiences leading to the rejection of proposed hazardous waste high temperature incinerators. Both cases had been cited publicly as action by the Community. The research investigated the hypothesis above in examining the individual cases, with a comparative analysis against the base of the Community - Society dichotomy. The cases demonstrably fell into those two social

categories, rather than being two instances of the one category, Community. The comparison illustrates the validity of the theory in the generation of a Community in Corowa and in identifying the elements which prevented such a formation in Chullora.

The work concludes with a consideration of the implications that such a theoretical shift would have for the professional Community Sector and suggests ways in which practice might be enhanced by its adoption.