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Narrowing the Expanse;
An Investigation of Community Development

There are two things that interest me: the relationship of people to each other and the relationship of people to the land.
- Aldo Leopold

Description of the Field

Community Development is everything that people do to improve the quality of their community. Human interaction is the foundation of all communities. It is the people of the community who have the greatest insight to their issues, needs, desires, and strengths. It is the people who must determine a community's development options, make decisions, and take action—it is those who work in the expansive field of community development who help mobilize the tools and resources needed for a community to patch, re-vision, renovate, or revolutionize themselves.

Community development professional's job is to know what questions to ask the community and when to ask them: What are our problems? Who are the stakeholders? What are the causes? What are our resources? What are our possible solutions? Are those solutions the best way to address our root problems? What are alternatives? What are our goals? What did we learn from our efforts? What shall we try now? Who should be at the planning table?

Cara Gleason explained her work as bringing people in crisis to a point where they can think about wellness, breaking the habits that often keep people in a cycle of poverty and crisis, and creating opportunities for healthier rhythms. I think that this is both inspiring and poignant—community development is about providing the resources and space to break bad habits, even if not crisis, or create new cycles and opportunities.

Work Conditions

In larger cities Community Development Corporations are often the entities doing community development work. CDCs write grants to foundations, the state, and the federal government to fund the work that they do. CDCs tend to have a geographic area on which they focus and the size of the area normally shrinks as the population density rises. For example, there are around 30 CDCs working in Boston, Massachusetts alone. Burlington, however, because of its size has the unique opportunity of its community development department (CEDO – Community and Economic Development Office) being one of the cities' offices. CEDO is a good model to use for looking at the typical combinations of funding avenues for many community development programs. CEDO has a 5 million dollar budget none of which comes through city taxes. They receive some federal funds from Housing and Urban Development (HUD), they receive part of the one million dollar block grant that is awarded to the city of Burlington for community development work, and they receive federal funds for running the VISTA program, and also write private grants.

My interview with Brian Pine the assistant director of CEDO is a really good example to use concerning how one advances in the field of community development. Brian graduated from the Environmental Studies Program at UVM, and like all who I interviewed, found an entry-level job and then volunteered, organized, and sat on boards to get more experience. Entry-level jobs in community development normally mean doing work where one is in the field and has a more experienced supervisor directing one and doing much of the bigger picture planning. The two most recommended entry level jobs, to provide one with a lot of experience, were the VISTA Americorps position here in Burlington, which is organized through CEDO, or for international work the Peace Corps. Brian Pine began his journey as a supervised employee for the Burlington Youth Employment Project, he then took his experience and became the jobs coordinator at a high school for troubled youth. Meanwhile, he was volunteering a lot of his time organizing a tenant's rights campaign in Burlington, which successfully saw the State Tenant Law pass and protection for tenants added into the cities ordinances. Brian then combined his work and volunteer experience to move into a position as the affordable housing loan officer for the VT Community Loan Fund. He then moved into his first director position at the King Street Youth Center where he was to plan and fund a job training program for teenagers. Brian then moved to CEDO to work with the Urban Enterprise Community Program and as the money and work was coming to a close for making Burlington an enterprise city he was offered his current position as the Housing Director at CEDO in 1997. What sticks with me most is that by staying in Vermont, mostly working in the Burlington area, Brian has formed many relationships and networks that allow him to be a more effective organizer at the community level. Like all

who I interviewed he built his resume through experience more than formal education, which was the more promoted method of advancing ones career in community development. The method is to have a hard skill or build a special understanding in one area that gives you expertise, one can then land a position that requires their skills and more so they reinforce and broaden their skill set experience by experience.

Career Paths

Community development as an independent field of study is still an emerging phenomenon. The University of Vermont's Community Development and Applied Economics program was highly recommended for its Masters program in CDAE by people outside of the university. People working in the community development field have a diverse educational background. The diversity of educational experiences is apparent amongst the people I interviewed, for example: Beth Ruzansky, a neighborhood specialist at CEDO, was an undergraduate in the Environmental Studies program at the University of Vermont. She then worked for three years in youth leadership development before moving into the position of Neighborhood Organizer at CEDO. For her work she spends more time behind the scenes—planning events, managing crises, retrieving information, developing publications, and the Community and Neighborhoods quarterly newsletter. Beth spends a lot of time making the city more navigable, trying "to take the beaurocracy out" for community members. While she was talking about the different projects, block parties, neighborhood clean-ups…, she shared the piece of wisdom that I remember most: "you just have to watch and see what makes people excited and try to

create a sense of pride in the neighborhood, pride is the base from which all is built. The residents are always the best tools because they have been thinking about their problems for years".

Cara Gleason is the Community Justice Coordinator at CEDO. She was a graduate of St. Michael's College with a degree in journalism. She then herself became an Americore VISTA. After her VISTA experience Cara returned to school to get a Masters degree in Social Work. She then worked with both domestic violence and housing development for two different community development corporations and has been with CEDO for 4 years. Cara oversees a cutting edge community justice program that is overseen by an elected community board. The center allows Burlington citizens to actively engage in restoring harm done by conflict and harm in the community. The Community Justice Center is comprised of restorative justice panels, which link willing victims and offenders of low-level crimes to see if a deeper restoration can be made outside of the court system. There is the victim justice project, an emerging field that is also known as parallel justice, which seeks to provide more support, consideration, involvement, and explanation to the victims of crime. There is also the first response team that dispatches to any vandalized sites to oversee the clean-up process. Lastly, there is an offender reentry pilot project that supports both the offenders' efforts to become a productive member of the community. It also supports a continued accountability of restoration on the offender's part and supports the people of the community in their role of holding the offender accountable. This work, like having offenders write letters from the perspective of their victims, is fascinating, refreshing, and emerging. Cara spoke about her delicate relationship with the Department of Corrections, which according to

Cara has “insane” rehabilitation methods, but is also where her funds come from. It is crucial to Cara that she neither spends an inordinate amount of time changing the state DOC nor ignores their faults, she is still struggling to find this balance. Cara’s excellent advice was to not “fall into the trap of being defensive or territorial” because it only ruins valuable collaboration.

My own search in educational opportunities uncovered a Master degree program at the University of Boston that is very intriguing to me. B.U. offers a duel maters degree in Social Work (MSW) and Public Health (MPH). The reason this program is unique and is worth highlighting as a discovery is because its Social Work curriculum focus’ much more on community organizing and development than clinical therapy, this concentration on Macro Social Work is not common. With this Macro Social Work theory in ones first year they do 18 hours of fieldwork per week and in ones second year they do 24 hours of fieldwork.

Paul Costello is the director of The Vermont Council on Rural Development. He ended up at VCRD due to an experience he had revolutionizing a school without any extra financial requirements. The change happened only by rallying the community and building social capitol. After that Paul said that he was “volunteering on about ten different boards and learning about community development from many angles”. Paul really allowed me to understand how a diverse and well chosen board is crucial to the success of any non-profit, it is the board’s job to oversee financial health and stay cutting-edge in order to remain abreast and in control of how the organization needs to evolve. It is the board that helps phone calls be returned and gives an organization initial credibility. A board needs to be able to work together and be diverse, Paul makes sure he

always has representatives of the State, Federal, local, private, non-profit, and educators on the VCRD board. This interview was extremely useful in maturing my appreciation for the importance and benefits of having good relationships with the government. In Vermont, Paul pointed out, we have an amazing advantage of intimacy. Here one can actually organize a planning meeting with the Secretary of Agriculture where in other states, Paul used Illinois as his example, a Secretaries presence in a community is unheard of. VCRD work is to manage policy and vision discussions; VCRD does not try to control any outcomes, they ask questions like—what should Vermont's forest policy be? They decide who needs to come together to analyze problems to create the most representative and well thought out policy. If a vision or policy is concluded Paul then introduces it to the legislature, asks the Governor to supply the needed pieces, shows it to the senator's offices, mails it to policy makers, and creates a marketing, outreach, and education campaign for the public. Policy is not easy to do fundraising or mass promotion for, it is not as easy to describe as services like helping battered women or the homeless. Paul's work is faced paced and extremely diverse; he may run a policy meeting in the morning, in the afternoon talk to a community about water and sewage issues, and then evaluate grant proposals. Paul allowed me to see the value in pointing out the deeper underlying agreements in order to unify a group that seems to have only disagreements. His art is helping people sacrifice edges in order to move bigger issues forward and Paul says that one must be convinced oneself that there is a way to see positive change before one can help other people to believe it is possible as well. Paul is an Evangelist for communities and a wonderful inspiration for me.

The most common frustration voiced by everyone was the lack of and instability of funds. Followed closely by the sometimes painful slowness of change. As Cara says, "nothing is revolutionary" all change has often unseen history, hard work, failures, and time behind it. The challenge is to keep things moving along in steps so that people stay interested and inspired. The politics that much development work is entrenched in was another frustration, but as Yiota emphasizes "neither complaining nor making enemies is ever productive" and she recommends always functioning with that awareness.

I have compiled a list of both the hard and soft skills that people identified as their most valuable: Asking good questions, good listening, the ability to prioritize, the ability to engage people, writing well, public speaking, budgeting, making people feel that they matter, the ability to be neutral, compassion, moderation skills, cutting through jargon and seeing the real problems, and being a passionate communicator.

The most desired hard skills, which are especially good to think about when one is in school, were: Better small business skills, non-profit accounting, GIS mapping skills, and better writing skills.

Lifestyle

Community Development is more of a lifestyle than a 9 to 5 job. It is the way in which you interact, observe, and listen to the people around you. Judging from my interviews I am delighted to report that Community Development is truly a field that people work in because they personally value the importance of healthy communities.

Cara Gleason says that she has had to practice telling people politely in the grocery store who want to talk about community politics or problems to "please call [her] at work" to make sure that she maintains some privacy and space. Beth made the excellent point that ideals, like fighting poverty, must translate into daily inspirations even when the work seems mundane. This is crucial to staying healthy and sane while doing community development work.

Brian Pine, the Housing Director at CEDO, said that ones personal experience is ones mode for understanding change and directs how one understands their work in community development. He used the specific example of how reading Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* changed his understanding of people, which in community development changes your work. Upon Brian's recommendation I looked into Alinsky's book, *Rules for Radicals.* Alinsky says that a community is "an arena of power politics moved primarily by perceived immediate self-interests" (Alinsky 1971: 12). Power is never given away; it must be taken: "change means movement. Movement means friction" (Alinsky 1971: 21). The idea is to build people's organization to allow those without power to gain it through action, their strength relies on numbers that in turn relies on organizational strength. The part of Alinsky's work that effects my thinking the most is the way he talks about the peoples need to participate in organization because denial from participation is central to why they are "Have Nots". Dignity arises through participation. People need to feel empowered on a small scale before they can address larger issues. Little victories are what allow people to build confidence and trust the power of collective change.

Ones lifestyle and ones work in community development are inseparable. If one doesn't deeply feel, in their gut, a passion and an ability to be a change-agent then how can they help others to be visionary, mobilize resources, and work for change? They can't!

Research Methods of the Field

The most inspiring way that I found people gaining and sharing information was the model of the Problem Properties Meeting that I attended. The meeting is convened monthly by Jean Bergman, the Assistant City Attorney, and attended by representatives from: Burlington Housing, CEDO (Community Development Specialists), Conflict Intervention, Probation and Parole , Police of the Old North End, and VISTA. Problem properties are homes that have continual complaints from neighbors, reported suspicious behavior, police dispatches, or unsanitary/rundown conditions. The purpose of the meeting is to organize all of the people that are involved in identifying and addressing problem properties. It is a collaboration of pieces of individual knowledge to form a more complete understanding of what is occurring around these properties and what actions should be taken to address the issues raised. For example the police are a key factor to identifying problem properties as they are the people called upon to address problems, police records are very useful as they clearly reveal patterns—like 12 police cruisers being dispatched to Bright Street in the past month. The parole officers have historical, or current, relationships with many of the residents of identified problem properties. Burlington Housing knows who is participating in housing welfare programs and needs to see that the rules are being followed. For example, if you are receiving

Section 8 aid on your rent you are not allowed to simultaneously rent out rooms. Beth Ruzansky from CEDO is the one who needs to address ameliorating the identified problem areas, the first step may be sending a VISTA from house to house in order to ask questions and listen to what the community says about itself. A major question addressed during the meeting was what perspectives or players are still unrepresented and would add to or gain from attending the meeting? The presence of child protection services and landlords were unanimously agreed upon needed additions. With so many players the best way to be efficient was identified as E-mailing Mr. Bergman agenda points to be organized a week before the meeting. The tone of the meeting was sometimes a bit difficult for me as improving problem properties does not always involve long-term rehabilitation of the humans causing the problems—often the main goal is to move people out in order to renovate and improve the properties. This of course does not address the ultimate problem but is the reason why CEDO is present at these meetings. The picture painted, with a historical and present component, was complete due to the knowledge that was brought together by the diverse attendees. Most cities don't share information like this and the police continue to respond to calls, while the government continues to pay the rent of tenants running illegal brothels, all while the community developer is working in an area with less pressing need. The small size of Burlington is what makes the collaboration and the efficiency that results a possibility.

I attended the Neighborhood Improvement Night for ward one, which UVM is a part of, this event was put on by CEDO as a mode of research and outreach. The slogan was "It's your neighborhood – improve it!". CEDO wanted to provide information about their programs and let people know about the $50,000 allocated every year to be awarded

to community grant applications. CEDO also wanted to receive feedback on their projects, on neighborhood quality of life issues, on local employment and business support issues, and on affordable housing and housing improvement opportunities. A community meal was first on the agenda. Then there was a presentation about CEDO by the director Michael Monte and a question and answer period. A facilitated small group discussion and a group reporting wrapped up the evening. Our small groups focused on the questions: what are ways CEDO can work with residents to improve your neighborhood? What are the neighborhood's strengths you would like to see built upon? What is missing that you would like to see developed? This town-meeting style forum is really powerful and gets people interacting, which I would say was clearly the most important outcome of this particular meeting—the ideas themselves were fairly predictable – traffic, affordable housing, green spaces…

Beth Ruzansky was the first, of several people, to state that her research philosophy is the Asset Based Community Development model. This model could also be discussed under the Issues section of this paper as its value is currently gaining much creed and recognition. The model is simple and the gains are significant. The asset based model means that when a community is trying to develop the first step must be to evaluate and locate the assets that already exist in the community. As Beth says, the question is not what do we lack but instead what do we have to work with? One must look at physical assets like a river, an unused site with industrial energy capacity, skilled carpenters, quintessential farms… One must also look at more abstract assets like a strong community tradition, cohesiveness, broad participation in the volunteer fire department… When trying to make change instead of starting with the community's

deficits one looks at the positive and builds off existing assets. The idea is to observe where the energy and interest already exists and use that energy to build greater momentum.

Yiota made the point that her first step of research in any development project is always to examine the stakeholders. Are their people who oppose this project? Why? Can we address their concerns? Who are we trying to help? Who else will this project affect?

Cara Gleason from the Community Justice Center pointed out the importance of reading local publications and newspapers. The importance of a newspaper that is willing to fairly report and legitimize controversy was highlighted by Cara as a key to building community. Fiery editorials and coverage of real news—school board or town planning meetings and emerging controversies are crucial to a good newspaper. Taking the risk to offend people, openly air problems, and provide facts are all ways a newspaper can enhance a community's strength and its potential for building social capitol (discussed under the issues section). Freedom of the press of course always seemed crucial to me but the ability of a strong local newspaper to bond and create a strong community has really become more poignant through this investigation.

Stephanie Lahar as a free-lance community development consultant receives much of her work from organizations who want her to research and do evaluations of communities for them. Stephanie does not recommend free-lance consulting for people just beginning because ones success is based on connections, which one does not have in the beginning of their career. Stephanie is currently working for an organization called the Civic Engagement Institute, which is actually a compilation of: The Vermont

Sustainable Jobs Fund, Woodbury College, and Community Solutions Partnership. Her research for CEI was crucial as she discovered that what the community of Alburg, Vermont felt they needed did not match what the Civic Engagement Institute thought Alburg needed. CEI wanted to provide a town that had already done project visioning with leadership training so that those people could begin taking the steps to actualize the town's vision. CEI saw this as a niche not being met by any current organizations. The case in Alburg, however, was that Alburg felt they did not have a well resourced base of volunteers, with spare time, to implement the projects and in fact needed a coordinator who would have stable energy and commitment. CEI, Stephanie, and Alburg are currently discussing how CEI might be able to find matching funds to help the town hire a coordinator. This request is a hot topic as several other Vermont towns have recently agreed about the crucial need for a town coordinator, which I believe is linked to the 'hot' topic of weakening civic engagement and volunteerism that I speak more about in the Issues section below.

The entire scenario of Alburg presents many poignant lessons, especially when one looks at Alburg in comparison to other towns that have managed to revitalize themselves. There are two crucial observations: The first observation is supported by everyone that I interviewed—that changes in a community occur due to the energy of one or two people who have the vision and the financial flexibility, or sheer passion, to find the time needed to plan and execute any change. I have grasped that consistent individual energy is often the crucial component lacking in unsuccessful attempts at change. The second observation is that individual energy without any community support is futile. In Alburg their challenge seems to not only be the lack of a coordinator but more

importantly a distinct separation between 'the locals'(born and raised in Alburg), 'the new comers' (25-30yrs. In town), and 'the really new comers' (10yrs or less in town). The locals feel threatened and don't want to start feeling like they are no longer local or comfortable in their town and the new-comers feel un-welcome and frustrated by the lack of involvement, or clear boycotts, of certain events. Why have other towns with locals and newcomers been able to evolve together? Was the evolution wanted by the locals or based on new power structures that came with the outsiders? Is change as an inevitable event a valid argument for development? How do people find common ground? This is a deeply complicated, emotional, timeless scenario and only some of the questions that community developers must ask and work to address in a situation like Alburg's.

Issues

Any community concern is a hot topic for those working in community development. Vermont's hottest issues are: racism, homelessness, loss of jobs, immigration, substance abuse, and transportation. Below I will examine several emerging areas and topics that have been enlightening and helpful to me in thinking about community development.

One crucial hot topic was identified by Yiota Ahladas, she spoke of the broadening recognition and concern in the steady decline of community engagement. "since 1965 time spent on informal socializing and visiting is down (perhaps by one-quarter) and time devoted to clubs and organizations is down even more sharply (by roughly half)…The GSS (General Social Survey) demonstrates, at all levels of education and among both men and women a drop of roughly one-third in social trust since 1972"

(Flora 2004: pg. 55). In his book *Bowling Alone,* Robert Putnam linked this civic disengagement to an increase in television viewing. Putnam promotes that people's lifelong civic engagement is formed by the events of ones youth and that youth are less and less engaged in their community and therefore no norm of reciprocity is fostered in their habit forming years. "The downward trend in joining, trusting, voting, newspaper reading, church attending, volunteering and being interested in politics continues almost uninterruptedly for nearly 40 years" (Putnam 2000:254). The push to understand and address this disturbing decline in civic engagement is directly related to the increasing attention being given to redefine and better understand the role of social capitol, which is both a hot and emerging topic.

During my research I encountered seven different forms of capitol that are present in a community—cultural, human, political, natural, built, financial, and social capitol. Each one of these forms of capitol is interconnected and has the ability to enhance the productivity of the others. Through my research, in both the library and the field, I find that the most pressing role of those working in community development is to first understand and then work to build social capitol. The most meaningful emerging area in community development is the understanding of social capitol.

The ideas presented by Cornelia Butler Flora, Jan L. Flora, and Susan Fey in their book *Rural Communities Legacy and Change* are cutting-edge and will be what power the growing emergence understanding of social capitol. It is their discussion of the various balances between bonding and bridging social capitol that revolutionizes previous understanding and is crucial to the budding interest. I must thank Fred Schmidt of the

Center for Rural Studies for suggesting this book as an essential resource to any plunge into social capitol.

The idea of social capital, although not labeled as such, is not new. Alexis de Toqueville and his two volume work *Democracy in America*, published in 1835 and 1840, arose during database searches on social capitol. Toqueville speaks about the way in which Americans organize themselves to accomplish different collective purposes and that through this organizing people form an identity around shared values and goals, which checks the "tyranny of the majority". Pierre Bourdieu gives the following interesting definition of social capitol " a durable network of more of less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group –which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capitol" (1986: 248-249). This seems like a cold definition but I think it is really just very straightforward because Bourdieu also says that these networks must always be reinforced by emotions of gratitude and friendship. What Bourdieu seems to really miss that Flora and Fey recognize completely is that these community networks can be negative if they are exclusive, keeping some citizens from community resources that should be shared. Narayan depicts this well:

> While primary groups and networks undoubtedly provide opportunities to those who belong, they also reinforce pre-existing social stratification, prevent mobility of excluded groups, minorities or poor people, and become the bases of corruption and co-optation of power by the dominant social groups. Cross-cutting ties which are dense and voluntary, though not necessarily strong…[community organizers must] help connect people with access to different information, resources and opportunities. (Narayan 1999: 13)

Flora and Fey say "it [social capitol] is the quality of community social capital that affects the extent to which people expand their scope of concern beyond self-interest and

beyond their family to include the community as a whole" (Flora 2004: 51). Rich social capitol means rich civic engagement and more importantly a sense of concern that extends beyond ones own front gate. Communities that lack social capital are said to be more likely to suffer from mental health problems, high crime, and insecurity—because a major component of social capitol is trust. Putnam aided my understanding of social capitol when he explained it as the "features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam 1993:35-36). Social capitol is such a crucial concept for community mobilizers because it is their job to strengthen communication, build networks, and create opportunities where community-wide relationships can begin to form.

Flora and Fey in *Rural Communities Legacy and Change* weigh the outcomes of different balances of bonding and bridging social capitol in a fashion that once understood I believe is an amazing tool for people interested in the dynamics of a community. Bonding social capitol means ties among persons (or organizations made up of persons) who are similar socially and economically. Bridging social capitol refers to ties that connect diverse groups. In a community there must be a balance between both bonding and bridging social capitol: "Communities lacking bonding or bridging social capital also lack the capacity for change" (Flora 2004: 64). When bonding capitol is high and bridging is low, communities resist change. Communities build blockades to those on the outside—Alburg I believe is a community that suffers from this as it creates the newcomer versus locals divide, spoken of above, which hinders its ability to make change. The different groups have different perspectives on the kind of change that might benefit the community and the groups do not trust one another and are therefore

unwilling to cooperate. Conflict in high bonding situations is internal and makes carrying out action at the community level difficult. We see this in Alburg where the town is able to have a very strong local fire department and an active downtown revitalization committee but the two never communicate on a community level, they remain individually bonded with no connecting bridges.

Where bridging social capitol is high but bonding capitol is low, some amount of control from outside the community is exercised through community elites. Power is normally concentrated and relationships are vertical rather that horizontal. The presence of social capitol in this form is often what unfolds during projects in 'developing' countries or in any place where a specialist is coming in to oversee a change and then leaving just as quickly. Flora and Fey look at urban-gangs and boss-run political machines—situations like these, where favors owe loyalty, discourage horizontal networks. The more "modern" power elite model, is where a ruling clique is disconnected from the rest of the community but maintains political influence "directly or through pliable middle – or working class officeholders" (pg.65: 2004). There is a clear link between this phenomenon of the power elite and the decrease in civic engagement that I spoke about as a hot topic—the power of collectivity has been beaten senseless, to the point that people no longer believe in their power, by the unforgiving fist of corporate domination. The result is a system that breeds dependency and lacks empowered people with initiative—this is where I feel many of our communities are today.

High bridging and bonding social capitol results in a community where everyone is deemed capable of sharing something valuable and one is expected to give and receive but not in a direct, gang-boss, fashion. There is a connection to outside sources that can

be used to generate resources without them exercising control over the community. It is the ability of a community to partner internally, externally, and use its resources collectively to create security and a healthy place to live.

It is building social capitol and understanding the delicate balance needed between bridging and bonding social capitol that makes community development work effective. I have begun to create common indicators with which to investigate the social capitol in ones community. Measuring social capitol is a challenge, it is difficult to measure something like trust, but I feel that with clear questions a community can begin evaluating their social capitol. Below I outline indicators of ways social capitol is being built by the Vermont Council on Rural Development, a program that I find both incredibly exciting and effective. One major outcome of this project is my clear desire to be involved with VCRD in the future. An internship position, my schedule permitting, was a very exciting result of my lively interview with Paul Costello. Below is the description of a successfully planned network, which I think VCRD has mastered:

> First, networks include a horizontal dimension. Lateral learning is critical in networks; communities learn best from each other…Second, networks include a vertical dimension. It is critical that communities be linked to regional, state , and national resources and organizations… Third, networks are flexible; being part of a network should not be a lifetime commitment… Fourth, networks have permeable boundaries; the community of interest is expanded and the community of place grows larger as new partnerships and collaborations are formed.
> (Flora 2004: pg.63)

The Vermont Council on Rural Development promotes the viability of alternatives. It organizes councils that are made up of stakeholders on all sides of an issue, for example there was a council created to address the agricultural viability of Vermont. During these forums all are given a chance to voice their viewpoints while Paul depersonalizes politics and moderates through clear questioning allowing people to think about solutions and not

differences in opinion. Through this process of creating councils VCRD aims to bring together people with diverse backgrounds, values, goals, and perspectives. This is a situation where new issues can be brought forward and a truly representative vision of the future can be shared. The community visit program helps individual communities define their own vision of progress. A panel of professionals from the state, federal, private, , and non-profit sectors come together with a local committee, that has done prep work with VCRD, to listen to the community's definition of their problems and develop suggestions for action. My one major critique of VCRD is that it could work on its methods for involving excluded groups, currently it is normally top thinkers from all sides of an issue that are representatives on the councils.

Conclusion

I continuously wrestle an internal battle between generalism and specialization; throughout this exploration I often thought about David Orr's insight that "the [ecological] problem is not one of knowledge. It never has been. Even though we don't know all the linkages and mechanisms of nature, we have always known enough to do better then we are doing now" (Orr 2004:42). It has been truly enlightening to trace with people the paths that led them to where they are and to see that the most valued skills are always the soft skills, not specific knowledge. My discussion with Stephanie Lahar left me, both of us I think, with several insights that hit a resonating tone with my personal struggle of generalization versus specialization. Stephanie pointed out that many jobs that exist today did not exist in the past—making synthesis and understanding connections more crucial than any given specific knowledge. Secondly, we spoke about

how large scale social problems breech discipline after discipline and to address these issues we need synthesis not division. I am reminded of when Fred Magdoff said that while we address symptoms we must be sure to see and understand the deeper roots—the whole picture. Synthesizers and specialists are mutually nourishing, and hopefully overlap, and I think we of course are not completely one or the other but I discover more and more that I enjoy bridging boundaries to put together pieces of a puzzle that address problems in a more honest holistic way—I enjoy synthesis, big pictures, unclear links being made—addressing the root causes of symptoms.

An important understanding I have taken from this experience, what I call the community development mantra, is the continual abuse, the depth of the importance, and the difficulty of listening to the community—not just state in mission statements but actually putting your ego and personal notions aside and listening to the community.

Due to this investigation I can define the type of community development work that most inspires me. It is not one place, people, or situation—it is the ability of a person to moderate, to work toward the resolution of conflict, and to unify disjointed visions so change can occur. The ability to ask poignant questions, to find common ground, to bring diversity together, and to be a passionate communicator, are the challenges and the pieces of community development that I have come to realize interest me the most. To help a community bond through collective action, bridge diversity, and empower unheard voices for community betterment is the work of building social capital—is the work that I want to pursue. Through this exploration I have become enraptured by the physicology of social change—of asking what is it that moves people to change? Possibly the base of a senior thesis and certainly a lifelong exploration.

I. Personal Contacts

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Pine, Brian. Assistant Director of CEDO; Housing Department. Burlington, VT. In-person interview on November 10th, 2004.

Ruzansky, Beth. Neighborhood Specialist for the Center for Community and Neighborhoods Staff through CEDO. Burlington, VT. In-person interview on November 5th, 2004.

Saez, Hector. Professor in UVM's Environmental Studies and Community Development and Applied Economics Program. Political Economist. Burlington, VT. In-person interview on Thursday October 14th , 2004

Schmidt,Fred. Co-director of the Center for Rural Studies. Burlington, VT. In-person interview on October 13th, 2004.

Posponed Personal Contact
Wayne Fawbush. Executive Director of the VT Sustainable Jobs Fund. Montpelier, VT. In-person interview and day of shadowing postponed the new date remains to be decided.

Readings recommended by personal contacts:
Rules for Radicals by Saul Alinsky; *A Language Older Than Words* and *The Culture of Make Believe* both by Derrick Jensen; *Leadership Without Easy Answers* by Ronald Haifetz; *The Spell of the Sentuists* by David Abram; *Roots to Power* by Lee Staples;

Environmentalism of the Poor by Joan Martinez Alier; *Democracy and Capitalism* by Sam Bowles and Herb Gintis.

Conferences/ Events/ Meetings

Community-Based Primary Health Care Conference. Sponsored by the Community-Based Primary Health Care Working Group International Health Section, American Public Health Association. Washington, DC. In-person attendance on November 6th.

Neighborhood Improvement Night. Hosted by the Community and Economic Development department of the City of Burlington, VT. Held at McCully Hall on the Trinity Campus in Burlington, VT. In-person attendance on November 10th, 2004.

Problem Properties Meeting. Convened by Jean Bergman the Assistant City Attorney. Attended by representatives from: Burlington Housing, CEDO Community Development Specialist, Community Support Program, Probation and Parol, Police Chief of the Old North End, VISTA. Convened at the Community Justice Center on 82 South Winooski Avenue, Burlington, VT. In-person attendance on November 5, 2004.

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