

# **The Language of Community in Canada**

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Social Relationships: Communities Paper

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Relations sociales : Les journaux communautaires.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community has become an important theme in political rhetoric in Canada: building strong communities, partnership with community, strengthening community involvement. Such language has resonated in political campaigns and has increasingly been the basis of programming across the political spectrum and at federal, provincial and local levels of government. The activation of community by the state is framed as a response to the pressures of the information age, where traditional borders are becoming increasingly porous and the relevance of traditional systems of governance are called into question. Community is portrayed as a means by which individuals can remain connected to a larger collective and is portrayed as both a counterweight to the stark individuality of the free market and the bureaucratic subjugation of the welfare state. In this conception, membership and participation in community is less a function of demography or geography and more a matter of personal choice and agency in a world of multi-layered and diverse communities.

But what do we mean by 'community'? How is a community defined and by whom? What are the dynamics at play when the state engages communities in the process of decision-making and governance?

This paper investigates these questions by exploring four dyadic themes which highlight the main contradictions present within the language of community in Canada: place/people; bottom up/top down; inclusion/exclusion; representation/participation. The background material for this paper was drawn from academic literature, case studies, government documents and materials produced by community development practitioners. In addition, this literature review was supplemented with ten interviews held with leaders, representatives, and active members of a variety of communities, including 'traditional' geographic and 'virtual' communities.



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# I. Introduction

Drawing conclusions about the nature of community in Canada is no easy task. The identities, structures and relationships which obtain within and among the groups and organizations in Canadian society who call themselves or are called 'communities' reflect the country's geographic and cultural diversity as well as the evolution of Canadian institutions. "With two founding nations joining our earliest Aboriginal peoples, and with citizens arriving from every corner of the world, there are many ways to be Canadian."<sup>1</sup>

## A. The Language of Community

Any exploration of community in Canada must also be undertaken with the awareness that the term is not politically neutral and has taken on important rhetorical meanings in affluent Western democracies in recent years. The idea of community has received renewed attention across the political spectrum as a new locus for political and public engagement: in this new language of governance, community is conceived as a positive force. Partnership with community, building strong communities, participation through community: such phrases which offer a new way of governing ourselves have become commonplace. Community is represented as a means of countering both the stark individualism of a market economy and the bureaucratic facelessness of an oppressive welfare state. Ivan Illich, John McKnight and others have argued that in the post-war years, with the expansion of government into everyday life, a monolithic state turned citizens into 'client populations' who were atomized and disempowered by the very act of having their needs defined by outsiders and experts.<sup>2,3</sup> Social service

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Synard, "When Canadians Connect" (2000) Spring FCM Supplement: Report on Sharing Municipal Best Practices 2 at 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ivan Illich, "Needs" in W. Sachs, (ed.) *The Development Dictionary* (London: Zed Books, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> John McKnight. *The Careless Society: Community and its Counterfeits* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995).

institutions removed people's capacity and will to take action singly or jointly.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the market economy placed individuals into the lonely role of self-interested profit maximizers with no link to a collective or public good. Seeking a remedy, social scientists have reinvigorated the notions of civil society and community: social networks which tie people to each other and "grease" the wheels of the economy and society in a way which the state and the market alone cannot. Wellman notes:

Networks are an important form of social capital in every society, including affluent core Western societies. Everywhere they are an essential way by which people, households, and organizations survive and thrive, along with the more visible means of market exchanges and state distributions.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, the work of Robert Putnam suggests that communities which possess strong social networks and active membership tend to benefit from higher levels of social trust, are more economically successful, suffer less corruption and enjoy a higher quality of life.<sup>6</sup>

Much of the so-called communitarian work is based on the sociologist's assumption that no individual exists outside of a social context. Individuals are not isolated beings acting independently on society: "society's characteristics are not derived from its many individuals, rather the characteristics of the individual are derived from society."<sup>7</sup> Humans, in short, are the product of their social environment and are formed by the norms, beliefs, traditions, and attitudes of the society which surrounds them. This understanding of the world co-exists uncomfortably with neo-liberal principles based on the primacy of the individual in society and this conceptual divide regarding the role of the individual within the collective is at the heart of

<sup>4</sup> Jim Ward, *Organizing for the Homeless* (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 1989) at 81.

<sup>5</sup> Barry Wellman. *Networks in the global village: Life in contemporary communities* (Boulder Co.: Westview Press. 1999) at 226.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Putnam addresses these issues in both of the following works: Robert Putnam with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti. *Making democracy work : civic traditions in modern Italy*. (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1993.) and Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Jim Ward, *Organizing for the Homeless* (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 1989) at 69.

debates on the communitarian agenda and the role and rights of communities – as opposed to individuals – within the state.

Charles Taylor, in critiquing neo-liberalism, asserts that the individual is shaped and tempered by membership in community and derives values from that membership: “We-identities are not merely an aggregate of I-identities.”<sup>8</sup> The community whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Etzioni writes that “the social fabric sustains, nourishes and enables individuality rather than diminishes it.”<sup>9</sup> For community to thrive, it does not necessarily require the subordination of the individual to the rule of the collective, communitarians argue, but quite the opposite: it is the breakdown of community which threatens individual freedoms:

The greatest danger to autonomy arises when the social moorings of individuals are severed. The atomization of individuals or the reduction of communities to mobs, which result in the individual's loss of competence and self-identity, has historically generated societal conditions that led to totalitarianism...<sup>10</sup>

It is important to note that the work of many communitarian writers is descriptive not necessarily prescriptive: society functions more effectively, they argue, when individuals are linked into strong, supportive communities. The language of governance through community takes this descriptive analysis a step further: community itself becomes an instrument. Through activating community, a wide range of tasks can be accomplished: building a stronger society and economy, facilitating a better disposition of public funds, combating the ills of modern society

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Taylor cited in Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1996) at 27.

<sup>9</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1996) at 26.

<sup>10</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1996) at 27.

from anomie, substance abuse or crime; in short, providing a response to an increasingly bureaucratized, marketized, urbanized existence.<sup>11, 12, 13</sup>

This re-focusing of public policy on community as a target and an instrument has had appeal on both the left and right of the political spectrum. On the left, it is seen as a way to reconfigure the relationship between the individual and the collective to meet the needs of all members of society. In 1995, Tony Blair of the British Labour party, a leading proponent of community-based policies, noted in an interview that: “[it is] the task of the left the whole world over: finding a new relationship between society and individual that moves beyond either old-style collectivism or the crude market dogma of the right”<sup>14</sup> and suggested that “community is an expression of that.”<sup>15</sup> Anthony Giddens similarly argues that community is the key instrumentality for the so-called “third way” politics. In his conception, the inclusion of marginalized members of society in active communities provides a more effective means of eliminating inequality than old-style welfare systems: “active citizenship and an active welfare state are therefore vital to third way politics, as is an insistence on the recovery of community in the arena of civil society.”<sup>16</sup>

On the political right, the language of community is similarly utilized to frame a new form of governance. Empowering communities increases personal responsibility, a sense of committed volunteerism and decreases the role of the central government. Control is

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<sup>11</sup> Raymond Breton, *The Governance of Ethnic Communities: Political Structures and Processes in Canada* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Louis Wirth, *Community Life and Social Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

<sup>13</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> P. Anderson, "Nearly There" (1995) 8 *The New Statesman* 24 at 25.

<sup>15</sup> P. Anderson, "Nearly There" (1995) 8 *The New Statesman* 24 at 25.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Global Third Way Debate* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001) at 23.

decentralized to citizens thereby lessening bureaucratic interference, allowing for greater freedom and accountability.<sup>17</sup> George W. Bush's "compassionate conservatism" in this way calls for the devolution of resources "not just to states, but to charities and neighborhood healers,"<sup>18</sup> and calls for strengthening moral community.

This rhetoric of community thus recasts the relationship between citizen and the state: community becomes the means through which individuals reconnect with a larger society through participation and service, recognizing responsibilities for self and for others. Policies based on these ideas involve more than simply consultation with communities but an active orientation toward strengthening communities as well as contracting with communities for program implementation. In Canada, similar language has emerged at all levels of government – federal, provincial and local – and across the political spectrum. For example, the federal government department, Canadian Heritage, under a Liberal party government declares that

More than ever before, the Government of Canada is pursuing partnerships with other governments, institutions, businesses, associations and community groups. New combinations of partners generate new ideas. Different organizations working together to address common issues strengthens communities. It is through this collaboration that we bridge differences, bring down barriers created by racism, discrimination and hate, and help more Canadians participate fully in our society.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, Canadian Heritage portrays the aims of the its Community Partnership Program which "supports... the objectives of building community capacity to sustain and promote social

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<sup>17</sup> Jane Jenson. "Mapping Social Cohesion: the State of Canadian Research"; Canadian Policy Research Networks Study No F/03 (Ottawa: Renouf Publishing, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> John J. Dilulio Jr., "The Political Theory of Compassionate Conservatism" (Center for the Study of Compassionate Conservatism, 2001) <http://www.compassionateconservative.cc/philospohy> accessed 31/05/2001.

<sup>19</sup> Canadian Heritage, "Message from the Secretary of State (Multiculturalism)" (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2000) [http://www.pch.gc.ca/multi/message\\_e.shtml](http://www.pch.gc.ca/multi/message_e.shtml) accessed 31/05/2001

cohesion and to help Canadians and their diverse communities to bridge differences and deepen their understanding of each other and build shared values."<sup>20</sup>

In Ontario, a Progressive Conservative government has adopted the language of community. For example, the aims of The Trillium Foundation, operated under the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Recreation, are so described:

The Ontario Trillium Foundation's focus is the development of a vision which provides opportunity, and promotes both individual and collective responsibility.... We encourage innovation and experimentation, cross-sectoral collaboration, citizen participation, and systemic change.... Today Trillium's focus is on building healthy, sustainable and caring communities, described in our vision as 'communities marked by personal contribution, an abundance of accessible activities and services, and deep and respectful public discussion.'<sup>21</sup>

Another program at the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship which directs government funds to support volunteerism is based on the notion that "volunteering helps build strong and prosperous communities."<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, a Progressive Conservative government in Alberta began providing grants in 1999 to non-governmental groups in that province "to enhance and enrich project-based community initiatives...to empower local citizens, community organizations and municipalities to work together in addressing their local and regional needs and priorities."<sup>23</sup> The financial resources for this grant fund are derived from gambling and lottery revenues and the funds are

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<sup>20</sup> Canadian Heritage, "Community Partnerships Program" (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2000) <http://www.pch.gc.ca/cp-pc/partners.htm> accessed 24/5/01.

<sup>21</sup> Ontario Trillium Foundation. "About Trillium" <http://www.trilliumfoundation.org/english/trillium.html>, accessed on July 22, 2001

<sup>22</sup> Ontario Ministry of Citizenship. "Volunteer @ction.Online – Projects Funded in 1999" (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario: 2001). <http://www.gov.on.ca/MCZCR/english/citdiv/voluntar/vao-1999projects-list.htm> accessed 15/7/2001).

<sup>23</sup> Alberta Gaming. "Community Lottery Board Grant Program" (St. Albert: Alberta Gaming, 2001) [http://www.gaming.gov.ab.ca/who/clb\\_grant\\_program.asp](http://www.gaming.gov.ab.ca/who/clb_grant_program.asp) accessed 03/07/2001

earmarked for projects which improve local parks, libraries, social services, children's' services, or environmental conditions. Community groups and other non-governmental organizations in this way become responsible for services which were previously under the management of state agencies. State monies are still involved; power, oversight and the process of financing these services has, however, shifted.

Beginning in the late 1990s, similar programming was implemented in both Quebec and British Columbia. In Quebec, in 1995, under a Parti Quebecois government, the *Secretariat a l'action communautaire autonome du Quebec* (SACA) was established with the express purpose of supporting community groups: "the Secrétariat à l'action communautaire du Québec (SACA) was created by the Government in 1995 to further the recognition of community action. At the same time, the Fonds d'aide à l'action communautaire autonome (fund to assist autonomous community action) was established to ensure year-to-year continuity in community action funding. SACA's mandate is to facilitate community groups' access to government resources."<sup>24</sup> In the year 2000, following a broad public consultation process, an official policy on community support and action was passed in Quebec for the first time. In BC, during the same period, a number of grant programs targeting communities such as InVOLve BC and Community Solutions were operating under the NDP government's Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers (now disbanded).<sup>25</sup>

Such programming presupposes that community is a more natural site for addressing society's needs than other traditional social systems or constructs – the nation, the province, the municipality. Community provides a more appropriate way of deciding matters of public interest

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<sup>24</sup> Ministère de L'Emploi et de la Solidarite Sociale. "SACA – Objective" (Quebec: Gouvernement du Quebec, 2000) <http://mess.gouv.qc.ca/francais/saca/index.htm> accessed 03/07/2001

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers. "Programs & Services – Involve BC" (Government of British Columbia: 2000) <http://www.cdcv.gov.bc.ca/Volunteers/default.htm> accessed 03/07/2000.

and meeting the needs of citizens than the structures of government. The experience of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in affluent Western nations and elsewhere has demonstrated that the claim for community involvement in public decision-making is not only compelling but, more simply, a political reality. The post-war decades saw the expansion of powerful social movements, based in communities, pressuring for more participatory and inclusive decision-making to counter insulated bureaucratic planning processes. Citizens demanded to be involved in determining issues of public interest. Civic advocacy groups questioned the expertise of planners and bureaucrats, and argued for the power over decision-making to be devolved back to the people.<sup>26,27</sup> Numerous success stories emerged from the pressure which community-based groups placed on the state to be included in decision-making processes. Toronto's civic organizing in the 1970s against the Spadina expressway is an example: the community movement based in the city's Annex neighbourhood has been credited with saving the city's downtown and in playing a key role in the revitalization of the city's centre.<sup>28</sup> Edmonton's 1995 Boyle-McCauley Area Redevelopment Plan provides a more recent example of community involvement in consultative processes, where community is assumed to be a partner from the outset. It is said to be:

...more than just a good map for bureaucrats. It is the product of two years of community-led consultation and collaboration between often opposing interests. Unlike other city plans, it was drawn up not by bureaucrats but by members of the community.<sup>29</sup>

Putnam asserts that in the United States, "research has found that high levels of grassroots involvement tend to blunt patronage politics and secure a fairer distribution of federal

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<sup>26</sup> R. Roberts. "Public Involvement: From Consultation to Participation" in Frank Vanclay and Daniel A. Bronstein (eds.) *Environmental and Social Impact Assessment*. (US & Canada: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1995).

<sup>27</sup> R. Hester, "A Refrain With a View" (Winter 1999) *12 Places: A Forum of Environmental Design* 12– 25.

<sup>28</sup> Roberta Brandes Gratz. *The Living City* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1989).

<sup>29</sup> Anita Elash, "By the Community, For the Community" (1995) *2 Front & Centre* 1-2, 9.

development grants. And cities that have institutionalized neighbourhood organizations, such as Portland (Oregon) or St. Paul (Minnesota) are more effective at passing proposals that local people want."<sup>30</sup> In short, he argues, there is a collective benefit from organized community engagement in public affairs: less corruption, greater transparency, more accountability, and fairer outcomes in decision-making.

The policies of governance through community are based on these positive interpretations of community participation - both in *consultation* and in the *implementation* of policy and programming. The assumption is that more involved - and stronger - communities equal better governance, greater prosperity, increased personal responsibility, a core of shared values and a more cohesive society: a wide range of good but often contradictory aims. But what do we mean by 'community'? How is a community defined and by whom? And how, in practical terms, does the state engage with community ?

These are particularly salient questions in the Canadian context. As a vast confederation of provinces and territories; as a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic nation where immigrant and aboriginal populations co-exist; as a state which is officially bilingual and encompasses two legal systems; as a country which recognizes the right to equal protection and benefit under the law without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability, Canada represents a complex, layered web of intersecting communities which enjoy varying rights and recognition under the law. As Yasmin Alibhai Brown has noted, more than any other western democracy, Canada has supported a diversity of communities within its borders.<sup>31</sup> Community policies now popular in the US and

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<sup>30</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).at 347

<sup>31</sup> Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *True Colours: Attitudes to Multiculturalism and the Role of the Government* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 1999).

Europe, have, to a certain extent, been implemented in Canada for decades, notably since the establishment of the official multi-culturalism policy in 1971.

It is important to note that the assumptions underlying this language of governance through community are several. First, there is the assumption that 'community' in and of itself is good. With this interpretation, community becomes more than a neutral sociological fact, a by-product of human social nature, but takes on a moral aspect. Stemming from this assumption comes the notion that communities are better at managing themselves than the experts employed by the state. The affective bonds and shared values of community members, it is assumed, will create conditions which are more responsive and appropriate to the needs of members. This is one of the fundamental and powerfully compelling underpinnings of classic community-based development approaches "that people are capable of both perceiving and judging the condition of their lives; that they have the will and capacity to plan together in accordance with these judgments to change that condition for the better; that they can act together in accordance with these plans."<sup>32</sup>

Secondly, inherent in the language of community, is the assumption that group interests are better represented by a member of one's own group – whether defined geographically, ethnically, or on the basis of certain lifestyle traits. This notion has not found direct expression in the Canadian democratic system. There are no seats in parliament ear-marked for certain ethnic minorities or special communities as in, for example, Hungary where "under a 1993 law, Hungary allows for an elaborate system of minority representation at a local and national level."<sup>33</sup> In Canada, there is rather a notion that community representation can occur by

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<sup>32</sup> Jim Ward, *Organizing for the Homeless* (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 1989) at 91.

<sup>33</sup> European Roma Rights Center, "Snapshots from Around Europe - National Gypsy Minority Self-Government elections in Hungary" in 1 Roma Rights 1999 [http://errc.org/rr\\_nr1\\_1999/snap18.shtml](http://errc.org/rr_nr1_1999/snap18.shtml) accessed on June 22, 2001.

developing systems of participatory democracy alongside and within existing representative systems. The normative community development literature frequently describes how these relations between representative government and communities should work:

Working for a sustainable community has to be a team effort between the people of the community and their governments, municipal, provincial and even federal: but the initiative and the leadership must come from within the community, which best understands its own circumstances and needs.<sup>34</sup>

There is an animated debate in the academic literature about the assumptions underlying the language of community, however. On one hand, there are the compelling arguments about the need to strengthen community networks and ‘social capital’ to restore a healthy and functional society along traditional lines.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, there are those who claim that community is already alive and well, fluid and functional in the information age.<sup>36</sup> For some, community is the instrument through which social cohesion is built; others lament the fragmentation of society into separately constituted enclaves. Greater involvement of communities in public decision-making processes is, for some, the means to better disposition of public funds, while others express concerns over accountability and legitimacy. Commentators such as Anthony Giddens and Amitai Etzioni argue that in a globalized, multi-cultural world where boundaries are increasingly porous, the notion of community offers a more natural way for individuals to “belong” and to exercise their citizenship and, in turn, for governments to engage with citizens.<sup>37, 38</sup> On the other hand, critics such as Alan Finlayson and Nikolas Rose counter with the position that the world has not significantly changed and that governance through community, in the wake of neo-

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<sup>34</sup> Nigel H Richardson, *Sustainable Communities Resource Package* (Ottawa: Ontario Round Table on Environment and Economy, 1994) (<http://www.web.apc.org/users/ortee/scrp/index.html>) accessed Jan. 17, 2001.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> M. Adams, *Sex in the Snow* (Toronto: Viking Press, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Anthony Giddens, (ed.) *The Global Third Way Debate* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community* (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1993).

liberal policies of recent decades, further marginalizes disadvantaged members of society and serves as a poor alternative to the universality of the “social.”<sup>39,40</sup> While community development models, which promote marginalized individuals joining together to take control of their own is evocative, on the other hand community empowerment is criticized for carving up the public sphere.

This paper explores aspects of this debate as it relates to the lived experience of Canadian community members. In Canada – unlike many countries where community rhetoric has recently resonated - pluralism and multi-culturalism are not perceived to be new threats to the integrity or unity of the state but are rather fundamentally imbedded in the country’s sense of itself. In many ways the community-based policies of Tony Blair’s “third way” and George Bush’s “compassionate conservatism” have been in place in this country for years through language, heritage, and health care programming, to name but a few.

## B. Community: A Fuzzy Concept

Despite the repositioning of community as a central theme in political discourse, the term itself is becoming increasingly difficult to define: it spans numerous disciplines and has changed in significance through time. It has meaning for planners, doctors, political scientists and sociologists. As Louis Wirth commented, the term, “like other concepts taken from common sense usage, has been used with an abandon reminiscent of poetic license.”<sup>41</sup> This lack of precision of the term is recognized in the community development literature, such that

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<sup>39</sup> Alan Finlayson, “Third Way Theory” (1999) 70 *The Political Quarterly*

<sup>40</sup> Nikolas Rose, “The death of the social? Re-figuring the territory of government” (1996) 25 *Economy and Society*

<sup>41</sup> Louis Wirth, *Community Life and Social Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) at 9.

different people tend to understand the concept of community differently ... a politician may focus on communities defined by political constituencies; an urban planner may focus on communities defined by agreed geographical boundaries; a public health physician may focus on communities of risk groups; and a member of the public may focus on a community or communities of which he or she feels to be a part – whether defined by the local neighbourhood, shared use of facilities or affinity with a particular population group.<sup>42</sup>

And while the message of building strong community has resonated in political campaigns and policy debates, the notion of community has paradoxically been deconstructed along racial, gender, ethnic, spatial and other lines and become less tangible. It no longer means what it once did: a local group of citizens, lead by ‘village elders’ or elites. As the role of women and families has changed and as rights-based advocacy has emerged, community development can no longer assume a common local interest and traditional social structures, but must recognize "more disparate forms of organizing around different identities."<sup>43</sup>

Critics have argued that the elusiveness of a definition renders the concept meaningless. ‘Community’ can be used by anyone to mean anything. The authors of this study acknowledge these criticisms and respond that while the concept is fuzzy, it is not meaningless. At its most basic level, community is invested with meaning by those people who define themselves as members of a community. The breadth of application is at once its conceptual strength and weakness.

For the purposes of this exploration of community in Canada, the authors have also understood community as a ‘layer’ in society existing between the state and private life. Similar to the related notion of civil society, we understand communities to inhabit the social space

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<sup>42</sup> European Sustainable Cities & Towns Campaign, *Community Participation in Local Health and Sustainable Development: A Working Document on Approaches and Techniques* (European Sustainable Development and Health Series (No. 4) for Europe Healthy Cities Network) at 9.

<sup>43</sup> Marilyn Taylor, “Community Work and the State: The Changing Context of UK Practice” in Gary Craig and Marjorie Mayo, eds., *Community Empowerment: A Reader in Participation and Development* (London: ZED Books, 1995).

between the individual and the society, separate but not existing in isolation from the state. Individuals do not exist in solitude:"a central dimension of 'community' is the existence of a public life beyond the private lives of the individuals, families and small groups that constitute a community."<sup>44</sup> Etzioni posits that communities are more than interest groups or voluntary associations but possess stronger bonds of shared values and affective ties; while this distinction is compelling, often the boundaries are blurry.<sup>45</sup>

In popular usage - and in much of the literature on community development - the term community has come to be synonymous with "benevolent" or "friendly" and strongly associated with middle class values. Communities are places where people greet each other on the street and smile at strangers. Unlike this popular conceptualization, we also explicitly recognize that communities can adhere to repellent values and be repressive and exclusionary in ways that are not in keeping with democratic values.

To explore community in Canada and highlight the arguments and tensions underlying governance based on community, this paper is divided into four sections: people/ place; bottom up/top down; inclusion/exclusion; and participation/representation. These four dyadic themes embody many of the fundamental tensions or contradictions inherent in the current discussions on community. These tensions, in turn, bring into focus the main arguments and paradoxes central to the debate on governance through community.

The background material for this paper has been drawn from academic articles, government documents, case studies, and from the published materials of organizations

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<sup>44</sup> Raymond Breton, *The Governance of Ethnic Communities: Political Structures and Processes in Canada* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) at 1.

<sup>45</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community* (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1993).

working in the community development field (see Appendix A for a full bibliography). In surveying these documents, we have attempted to distinguish between normative and descriptive material, recognizing that much of the academic and popular literature on community is written with a bias and sense of advocacy. We have attempted to discern between information that describes 'that which is' versus 'that which should be'

In addition, the literature review has been supplemented with 10 interviews held with leaders, representatives, and active members of a variety of communities, including 'traditional' geographic and other communities which are formed around identity and interest (see Appendix B for a full list of interview respondents). These interviews were not intended to impart quantitative data, but provide in-depth qualitative information to complement the arguments drawn from the literature review and provide an 'insider's' anecdotal perspective on issues that are raised in the literature.<sup>46</sup> The respondents were well-placed individuals in their respective communities – serving as formal or informal leaders or active in community institutions. They were able not only to report on their own experiences as members of a given community, but were also able to comment on the challenges and conditions faced by the community as a whole. Interviews took the form of conversations which covered our major research themes – place and people; membership and relationship with official structures, inclusion and exclusion, and participation and representation (see Appendix C for a full list of questions used to guide the interviews). The structure of the interviews also allowed for emerging issues to be explored.

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<sup>46</sup> Renata, Tesch, *Qualitative Research: Analysis Types and Software Tools* (New York: Falmer Press, 1990).

## II. Place/People

The traditional definition of 'community' strongly links people to place. The early-20<sup>th</sup> Century sociologist Louis Wirth who wrote abundantly on the subject defined community as "a distribution in space of men [sic], institutions and activities, close living together on the basis of kinship and organic interdependence, and a common life based upon the mutual correspondence of interests."<sup>47</sup> According to this traditional conceptualization, communities exist in a bounded physical area in which people interact as "little groups of neighbours intensively socializing, supporting and controlling one another."<sup>48</sup> This relationship of people to place in a legible 'local' context – based essentially on a village model – has endured in academia as a way of formulating or understanding community since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century;<sup>49</sup> it is both powerfully nostalgic and truly compelling and still dominates the popular literature and public discourse on community. Community in such texts refers to a place: a municipality, neighbourhood, or other geographic area. "Often when we think of the term community, we think in geographic terms. Our community is the location (i.e. city, town or village) where we live."<sup>50</sup>

Anecdotally, many of the interview respondents recounted that the built form and local geography were central to their own sense of community identity. The respondent from the urban neighbourhood spoke of the importance of the trees, streetscape and the local park in defining the community; the respondent from Cape Breton spoke both of the geographic characteristics of the island that first drew Scottish settlers to the area and the urban decay of

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<sup>47</sup> Louis Wirth, *Community Life and Social Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) at 10.

<sup>48</sup> K. Hampton and B. Wellman, "Netville Online and Offline: Observing and Surveying a Wired Suburb" (November/December 1999) 43 *American Behavioural Scientist* at 476.

<sup>49</sup> K. Hampton and B. Wellman, "Netville Online and Offline: Observing and Surveying a Wired Suburb" (November/December 1999) 43 *American Behavioural Scientist*.

<sup>50</sup> Flo Frank and Anne Smith, *The Community Development Handbook: A Tool to Build Community Capacity* (Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada, 1999) at 6.

Sydney, Nova Scotia as fundamental to the population's sense of identity. For the rural respondent from Northern Saskatchewan - an area with a majority population of First Nations' inhabitants - place was fundamental to the sense of identity.<sup>51,52,53</sup>

This traditional conceptualization of community based in a local place, many now argue, is limited. Communities need no longer be local; social networks are spread across the globe. Hampton and Wellman state that "since the 1970s, some have argued that it is the sociable, supportive and identity-giving interactions that define community and not the local space in which they take place."<sup>54</sup> Humans are social animals and establish networks – local or dispersed – as a matter of course. While place may play a role in an individual's sense of self and connection to others, that connection can be maintained across large distances and through time. One need not be in a place to feel connected to it; one can remain attached to like-minded people from afar. Thus, individuals living abroad can maintain a strong link to the homeland and remain integrated into their own ethnic community. Similarly, within Canada, the respondent from Cape Breton commented that members of that community maintained powerful ties to the island even from afar: "My community has a very strong identity. When we're away, we're Cape Bretoners – Capers. When one of us moves away, they can always find a Caper Club wherever they end up."<sup>55</sup> Similarly the respondent from the Latin American community

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<sup>51</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from urban neighbourhood. Respondent is active in local business improvement association and local area resident. April 2001.

<sup>52</sup> In-person interview with respondent from Cape Breton. Respondent is community development worker In Sydney, Nova Scotia. March 2001.

<sup>53</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from a northern, rural, isolated island community of about 2000 people, with a significant First Nations population. Respondent is active in community organizations and a municipal politician. May 2001.

<sup>54</sup> K. Hampton and B. Wellman, "Netville Online and Offline: Observing and Surveying a Wired Suburb." (November/December 1999) 43 *American Behavioural Scientist* at 477.

<sup>55</sup> In-person interview with respondent from Cape Breton. Respondent is community development worker In Sydney, Nova Scotia. March 2001.

noted “our identity is more about being Latino than it is about Ottawa; it’s just that circumstances put us in the same place.”<sup>56</sup>

The rapid change in communications technologies has been credited by many with this re-conceptualization of how humans form and maintain communities. Not surprisingly, the notion of community liberated from place is nowhere so evident as in the discussions around internet-based or ‘Web’ communities: “new communication technologies are driving out of fashion the traditional belief that community can only be found locally.”<sup>57</sup> Giddens terms the phenomenon of maintaining supportive social relations across vast geographical distance - liberated from the constraints of time and space - as ‘disembeddedness.’ He suggests that it is an aspect of the process of globalization<sup>58</sup> and characteristic of a fundamental change in global structures which he argues has occurred in the past decade: “the information age has different dynamics, structures and systems of belief from the industrial period. It is producing a society marked by the declining hold of traditional beliefs, coupled to a more active orientation to the world on the part of most citizens.”<sup>59</sup> This new world, he argues, requires new forms of governance.

## A. Place and Liberation from Place

This question of whether community is ‘place-based’ or ‘place-liberated’ - and whether it is thriving, in decline or has fundamentally mutated - constitutes a lively debate within sociology

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<sup>56</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from Latin American community active in both local and Canadawide initiatives. Respondent is community organizer and activist. April 2001.

<sup>57</sup> K. Hampton and B. Wellman, "Netville Online and Offline: Observing and Surveying a Wired Suburb" (November/December 1999) 43 *American Behavioural Scientist* 475 at 476.

<sup>58</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*, (Cambridge, England: Polity, 1991).

<sup>59</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Global Third Way Debate* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001) at 23.

as well as other social sciences.<sup>60</sup> On one hand, academics and popular commentators stress the importance of local place in solidifying a sense of community and belonging. Place allows for contact and connection among like and unlike individuals. They likewise deplore the withering of community through the loss of local public places to sprawl, suburbanization, privatization and corporatization. Sidewalks, public squares, parks and playgrounds and locally-owned community institutions – shops, bookstores, restaurants, pubs, and theatres – are disappearing, they argue. Housing projects and car-dependent suburbs discourage mingling and informal meetings. Without places where serendipitous encounters among citizens of diverse backgrounds can take place, a sense of community cohesion suffers and individuals withdraw from society. Benjamin Barber writes:

In our mostly privatized, suburbanized world, there are not enough physical places where citizenship can be easily exercised and civil society's free activities can be pursued. Citizens need physical spaces where they can interact and work to solve public problems... There can be no civic activity without a palpable civic geography. Ducks, to be ducks, need their pond, and the public needs its town square.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, Gratz notes that in the United States,

the malling of America has so homogenized us, so franchised our places of work, residence, and leisure, and so separated our daily functions from each other that there are fewer and fewer places in downtown America and in the rural countryside where people can connect as individuals, as neighbors..... Suspicion and fear of "them" (whatever race, nationality or minority distinction is the local "them") has replaced familiarity and comfort among neighbours. Isolated homogenous enclaves have replaced connected or adjacent heterogeneous communities. Local stores owned by familiar members of a community have been replaced by anonymous corporate entities that drain resources from that local economy.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Barry Wellman. *Networks in the global village: life in contemporary communities* (Boulder Co.: Westview Press, 1999).

<sup>61</sup> Benjamin R. Barber (2000) "Civil Society and Strong Democracy," in A. Giddens (ed.) *The Global Third Way Debate* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001) at 274.

<sup>62</sup> Roberta Brandes Gratz, *Cities Back from the Edge* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998) at 35.

Such critics argue that without local shared places, community dies, civility declines and society suffers.<sup>63, 64, 65, 66, 67</sup>

There are two essential strands of argument which are often conflated in this discourse on place and its centrality to community. First, there is a conviction that a broader, more inclusive sense of community among diverse members of society can be built through the restoration of public, shared places where different people can encounter one other. Through place, social cohesion and community can be fostered across racial, class or cultural divides. Secondly, sounding a different note, it is argued that place plays a role in solidifying the values within groups – pre-existing communities of “insiders” – who must encounter each other in the physical world.<sup>68</sup>

Echoing the first notion – that the quality of the built environment is critical to a broader sense of shared community - the respondent from the community of sex workers noted eloquently:

if the streets were more user friendly – if streets encouraged people to stop and talk rather than being thoroughfares that people just use to drive through... If public spaces were more comfortable and people were encouraged to use those spaces, that would improve the quality of our community.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Benjamin R. Barber (2000) “Civil Society and Strong Democracy,” in A. Giddens (ed.) *The Global Third Way Debate* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

<sup>64</sup> Roberta Brades Gratz, *Cities Back from the Edge* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998).

<sup>65</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2000).

<sup>66</sup> Jan Gehl. *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*. 3rd ed. (Copenhagen: Arkitektens Forlag, 1996).

<sup>67</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).

<sup>68</sup> Benjamin R. Barber (2000) “Civil Society and Strong Democracy,” in A. Giddens (ed.) *The Global Third Way Debate* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

<sup>69</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

Supporting the second notion – that communities need a physical meeting place in order to consolidate their own sense of identity – the respondents from the injection-drug user community and the Latin American community reported that:

If the government would legalize a safe drug shooting gallery – there could be services there, a needle exchange program, different support services – a place where people could use drugs safely and get health services at the same time. Word of mouth would get people to start coming in, which then is the basis for creating a cohesive community. You meet other people, feel comfortable talking, get support from outreach workers - support groups would begin to be created for talking, cooking, crafts.... Then at the same time we could do health education and so on – we can create the community. With the needle exchange program, we were pushing for a storefront so we could have a drop-in...a place where people can come in and have coffee, do acupuncture.... Once you get people through the door and help them feel empowered and starting to talk, that's when you have the opportunity to create community.<sup>70</sup>

And

People talk about wanting to have a permanent café or bar that would always be a Latin American space – not a salsa place, where the environment can become cheesy and heavy. Right now, people lend us their restaurants for events and get-togethers, but we want our own place with our own images and music and food, representing the part of Latin American cultures that aren't represented by Ricky Martin, or by salsa bars – a working class place, an encounter place, kind of like the native crisis centres where you can just hang out.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly the member of the gay and lesbian community commented on the importance of a local street in promoting a sense of belonging:

Oppression is a part of it, we all want to visit a place that's safe and comfortable....Often a gay community will have a main drag that is inhabited with gay bars of all different kinds ... [with] AIDS and social services, some art thrown in, some culture. Physical places keep us linked. [The street] is really important to us.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Telephone interview with respondent who is an outreach worker with street injection-drug users in a city in Northern Ontario. May 2001.

<sup>71</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from Latin American community active in both local and Canadawide initiatives. Respondent is community organizer and activist. April 2001.

<sup>72</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. Respondent is community outreach worker at a community centre that caters to the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. June 2001.

Though seldom acknowledged, there is a tension between these two aims of building broader community and strengthening the internal network within a community. The example of the intentional eco-housing community provides an illustration. The respondent from that community described how the collective had purposely planned their shared spaces with the intention of strengthening community spirit. The community's design encourages encounters.

The community put in place

Architectural elements that are designed to support our sense of community, such as the way our homes relate to each other, our common space, and the pedestrian street... There are 34 townhomes on either side of a glassed-in pedestrian street. We have a 5,000 square foot commonhouse... There's no real way that improvements could be made, except in minor ways. This is a 3<sup>d</sup> generation style of cohousing, and it's better than the first 2. 1<sup>st</sup> generation involves large private homes and a small common house. 2<sup>d</sup> generation has small private homes and a large common house. 3<sup>d</sup> generation is characterized by small private residences, large common houses, and a large enclosed street that connects them... People can encounter each other as much or as little as they want.<sup>73</sup>

It is interesting to note, however, that while the public spaces of the community were organized to maximize the random, serendipitous encounters among inhabitants, the community itself has very important physical boundaries delineating the inside from the outside:

The boundaries are important – our 6-acre site is identified and registered. We are bounded, just outside our site, by areas of single-family homes on one side and townhomes on the other...<sup>74</sup>

Thus, while the processes internal to a community such as this might be supportive of active engagement and participation, with respect to the 'outside', the community may be as inaccessible as any other private community. Critics contend that for place-based policies to counter fragmentation and the withdrawal of sub-groups from a larger society, attention must

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<sup>73</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from intentional eco-housing community in British Columbia, also involved in Canada-wide cohousing initiatives. April 2001.

<sup>74</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from intentional eco-housing community in British Columbia, also involved in Canada-wide cohousing initiatives. April 2001

therefore be paid to ensuring full access to place for all members of society. While advocates of 'place' proclaim that public spaces provide a forum for people from all walks of life to encounter one another, it is also argued that in fact many people do not have access to these places. Thus, critics of the battery of new community policies which focus on place -- from new urbanism to smart growth programs to 'safe streets' campaigns -- note that often in implementation the side-effect of such policies can be to further exclude members of society who are already marginalized.

Interestingly, the issue of access is equally relevant to virtual communities. The nature and configuration of a community's infrastructure – or the 'architecture' of the collective – remain relevant. Who owns or controls the space – whether physical or virtual? How is the site structured for the interaction of community members? These are critical questions even in cyber space. Mary Rowe suggests that just as "built form and the way in which neighbourhoods are actually planned and developed have seemed to have had an impact on the values of people who live within them,"<sup>75</sup> the structure, organization and patterns of ownership of collective infrastructure matters in non-traditional communities, like those based in the internet. The values according to which collective sites are created – whether corporately-owned and managed sites or sites managed jointly in 'commonsplace' – affect how members of the community interact.<sup>76</sup> The respondent from an internet community made this distinction between privately-controlled and collectively-managed sites, noting that "in many ways there are relationships between costs and how genuine the community is. Expensive online communities

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<sup>75</sup> M.W. Rowe, "Shape-shifting Values: Does the Internet Spell the End of the Commons? A conversation with Paulina Borsook" 1 *Ideas that Matter* at 25.

<sup>76</sup> M. Surman and D. Wershler-Henry, *Commonspace: Beyond Virtual Community* (Toronto: FT.Com Financial Times, 2001)

are usually intentionally constructed, they are corporate online communities,”<sup>77</sup> and the respondent implied, less concerned with active community citizenship and more focused on passive consumption.

Critics also argue that the strength of ‘local’ community is a double-edged sword. In a study on the ethnic Portuguese community in Toronto, Teixeira demonstrates a correlation between the proximity of community members to one another within a particular neighbourhood and the maintenance of a strong cultural and linguistic identity in the face of pressures to assimilate. He suggests that other communities in Canada also follow this pattern – citing the Italian and Jewish communities of Toronto.<sup>78</sup> While a strong sense of shared identity is maintained through proximity, the very maintenance of these strong bonds in spatial terms can also isolate the community from the surrounding society, highlighting yet again the eternal tension between the goals of in-group solidarity and broader social integration.

Finally, there are critics of the theories of place-based community who argue that changes in the physical characteristics and patterns of ownership of shared public place have caused no decline in community. They argue that the focus on local, traditional place as the locus for generating a sense of community is misleading, highly nostalgic, ahistorical and often restrictive in practice.<sup>79</sup> Such commentators argue that community is alive and well, mediated by information technologies, and offering choice and flexibility in lifestyle in a more democratic fashion than ever before. In his popular, if controversial, 1997 book *Sex in the Snow* on the changing demographics of Canada Michael Adams writes of ‘liberated’ communities:

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<sup>77</sup> In-person interview with respondent active in local and Canada-wide internet community. Respondent is consultant and writer specializing in setting up and participating in online web-based communities. April 2001.

<sup>78</sup> Carlos Teixeira, “Cultural Resources and Ethnic Entrepreneurship: A Case Study of the Portuguese Real Estate Industry in Toronto” (1998) 42 *Canadian Geographer* 267.

<sup>79</sup> Graham Fennell, “Local lives – distant ties: Researching community under globalized conditions.” In John Eade (ed.) *Living in the global city: Globalization as local process*, (London: Routledge, 1997) at 108.

Canadians are now forming new attachments with a diversity of communities, within and without Canada. These include the new on-line communities that disregard national borders and individual stereotypes... Once defined by our race, religion or region, now we define ourselves by our values, by our personal priorities and by our life choices.<sup>80</sup>

Community is not withering, according to such writers; it is alive and well and no longer restricted by place or demography, tradition or convention.

## B. Governance through Local and Virtual Community

Interestingly, the rhetoric of governance through community in many ways sidesteps this debate and borrows generously from both sides of the argument. It draws on the concerns of 'place-based' commentators who lament the loss of community and focus on the need for strengthening community bonds; at the same time, the language of community is built on the notion that community is fluid and flexible, a matter of voluntary choice and personal agency. Rose notes that both geographical communities and 'virtual' communities (by which he means not only internet communities but all non-traditional groups who have formed or are identified according to some shared characteristic or value) are recognized in the language of community:

Sometimes [communities] are defined in terms of the geographical coordinates of a micro-locale. Sometimes they are 'virtual communities' associated in neither 'real' space or 'real' time but through a network of relays of communication, symbols, images, styles of dress and other devices of identification: the gay community, the disabled community, the Asian community.<sup>81</sup>

Community in this language refers equally to a local place as to groups of people united by interest, occupation, gender, culture, or other markers. Students, AIDS patients, workers, fans

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<sup>80</sup> M. Adams, *Sex in the Snow* (Toronto: Viking Press, 1997) at 19.

<sup>81</sup> Nikolas Rose. "The death of the social? Re-figuring the territory of government" (1996) 25 *Economy and Society*, at 333.

of hiphop or the Latino population of Edmonton may all be members of a community – the community of their choosing or affinity.

The focus in the language of community is thus not where to find community but how to activate it. The fundamental assumption is that community – in its multiple forms -- is salutary. Communities nurture members, they provide support, they afford a grounding for individuals that neither the state nor the market can provide. While individuals interact with each through the structures of the market and the state, these transactions do not afford the affective bonds and shared values which community offers. This, Nikolas Rose argues, puts the language of community outside the debate on place into a different field:

Today community is not primarily a geographical space, a social space, a sociological space... community is...an affective and ethical field... it is a space of emotional relationships through which individual identities are constructed through their bonds to microcultures of values and meanings.<sup>82</sup>

Communities are understood to be heterogeneous, overlapping and based on affinity and choice. One may both be an active member of a local community and simultaneously identify with other collectives along the lines of ethnicity, interest, sexual preference or other identities.

Thus, the language of community is articulated both in terms of local place and at the same time community is discussed as a social rather than a geographical construct. Systems of governance through community are founded on the notion that the rapid economic and social changes of the 'information age' and the pressures of globalization, have rendered the nation state and traditional systems of governance insufficient.<sup>83</sup> The new world is "too complex, fluid

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<sup>82</sup> Nikolas Rose, "Community, Citizenship and the Third Way (2000) 43 *American Behavioural Scientist* 1395-1411 at 1401.

<sup>83</sup> Anthony Giddens, "After the left's paralysis" 11 *New Statesman*, 18 – 21.

and diverse to be managed by a central state<sup>84</sup> and it is through the instrumentality of community that the state can interact with the individual to ensure a continuance of the public realm. Giddens argues that governance through community and civil society is appropriate as “globalization not only pulls away from the local arena, but it ‘pushes down’ on it, too, creating both new pressures towards and new opportunities for the restoration of community.”<sup>85</sup> In the conditions of a ‘new world order’, community provides a way for the individual to belong to the collective, a means through which the individual’s sense of self is enhanced and which offers a framework and a moral compass for the individual: “communities also share sets of values and reaffirm them, encourage their members to abide by these values, and censure the members when they do not. Communities have a moral voice that is external to the ego’s own voice, that serves to reinforce the inner voice.”<sup>86</sup>

Despite the fact that the language of community encompasses or incorporates both traditional and non-traditional forms of community, the distinction between place-based and ‘virtual’ communities – in the broadest sense of the term ‘virtual’ – nevertheless remains important in how relations are structured between the state and community. First, it must be recognized that place continues to play a powerful role in how the state interacts with and intervenes in communities. The policies which invoke community -- from newly-popular ‘smart growth’ strategies which “will help strengthen our economy, strengthen our communities and make sure our children inherit a clean, healthy environment”<sup>87</sup> to community health care initiatives -- are implemented locally. Administrative systems for the provision of public services

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<sup>84</sup> Alan Finlayson, “Third Way Theory” (1999) 70 *The Political Quarterly* at 274.

<sup>85</sup> Anthony Giddens, “After the left’s paralysis” 11 *New Statesman* at 20.

<sup>86</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1996) at 48.

<sup>87</sup> Government of Ontario: Mike Harris Premier “Harris Outlines Plan for Smart Growth” released April 25, 2001 (Toronto: Queen’s Printer for Ontario: 1999) <http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/english/news/Smart042501.htm> accessed 15/07/2001

continue to exist spatially. Communities continue to be defined primarily according to geographical borders and place remains an important feature in how communities are recognized and consulted even *across* communities of interest, ethnic communities and other groups. For example, injection drug users are identified at a municipal level;<sup>88</sup> sex workers distinguish between conditions in Vancouver and Toronto.<sup>89</sup> Though local place is perhaps less important a factor in how humans *form* community, many of the public services which are fundamental to how citizens perceive quality of life – from waste management, transportation, and schooling to justice and policing – are provided or managed locally or spatially.<sup>90</sup> As the fiscal responsibility for such services becomes increasingly devolved to local forms of the state – local government, agencies and commissions – place will continue to be important to the way in which communities and citizens relate to their governments.<sup>91</sup>

Much of the popular community development literature is accordingly preoccupied with how decisions over public infrastructure – roads and buildings and parks and schools – can best be taken in consultation with community or with the participation of the community.<sup>92</sup> There is a strong tendency in this literature to present participatory processes as resulting in optimal decisions for all parties:

Taken together, the voices of communities and professionals provide a convincing argument for giving priority to community participation as an active two-way process that may be initiated and sustained both by individuals and communities and by local and health authorities and other local organizations.

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<sup>88</sup> Telephone interview with respondent who is an outreach worker with street injection-drug users in a city in Northern Ontario . May 2001.

<sup>89</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

<sup>90</sup> Katherine Graham, Susan Phillips, Alan Maslove. *Urban Governance in Canada: Representation, Resources and Restructuring*. (Toronto: Harcourt, Brace & Company Canada, 1998)

<sup>91</sup> Simon Szreter. "A New Political Economy: The Importance of Social Capital" in Anthony Giddens (ed.) *The Global Third Way Debate* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001)

<sup>92</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities, *Building a Better Quality of Life: Proposal* (Federal Budget Submission to Finance Minister Paul Martin, October 6 th, 2000).

Community participation can increase democracy, empower people, mobilize resources and energy, develop holistic and integrated approaches, achieve better decisions and more effective services and ensure the ownership and sustainability of programmes.<sup>93</sup>

It is important to note, however, that consultation and partnership with community will not always result in an optimum distribution of public goods. Hester has noted that, with its beginnings in the civil rights and environmental advocacy movements, community-based participation in decision-making around issues of public service provision can tend to 'carve up' the public interest instead of strengthening it.<sup>94</sup> This is eminently apparent in the case of public goods which stretch across neighbourhood, district, municipal or other geographical boundaries. The siting of homeless shelters, public transportation corridors and landfill sites, for example, has become virtually impossible in many areas as fragmented local community groups protect their own interests and space. While specific local community interests are met, general public interest may be undermined by an undersupply of public goods and services. This dilemma is captured by the respondent from an urban neighbourhood:

I've had discussions with the province and City officials who all agree that [the large nearby social housing project] should never have been done, but of course once something's been done, it's hard to change. I am one of the people that is pushing for it to be gone, and rebuilt with the more typical maximum of 15% social housing, rather than 100%, and that would have a dynamic change on the entire east end of the city. We have so many services for the homeless, hostels for single men, etc. – 81% of all these services are located in [our] area. We are trying to stop them from putting more in this area, we are proponents of the idea that everybody should accept their fair share, spread them out a bit.<sup>95</sup>

Similarly, the difficulty of reconciling specific local interest with the general public interest was illustrated by the respondent from Northern Saskatchewan, who discussed how the planning of

<sup>93</sup> Richard E. Sclove, Madeleine L. Scammell, and Breena Holland, *Community-Based Research in the United States: An Introductory Reconnaissance, Including Twelve Organizational Case Studies and Comparison with the Dutch Science Shops and the Mainstream American Research System* (Amherst, Massachusetts: The Loka Institute, 1998) at 9-10.

<sup>94</sup> R. Hester, "A Refrain With a View" (Winter 1999) 12 *Places: A Forum of Environmental Design* 12.

<sup>95</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from urban neighbourhood. Respondent is active in local bus iness improvement association and local area resident. April 2001.

a provincial roadway deeply affected local conditions.<sup>96</sup> The story captured the essential difficulty of meeting both particular needs and serving the general interest. Building a road for this community may well cause another community to suffer. Local interests may not always be reconciled with the general public interest.

As noted above, recognition and relations with non-traditional communities tends also to occur through place. So that they are legible, boundaries are placed around such groups: the Chinese Community of Toronto, the Asian community of British Columbia. A different set of issues face the state in interacting with 'non-traditional' – or virtual – communities, however. Similar to traditional place-based communities, such groups – whether formed around ethnicity, interest or another characteristic – are embraced by the language and rhetoric of community. The interface with such groups is complex, however. The nation state, existing according to established physical boundaries and defined rules of citizenship, is challenged by the fluid nature of virtual communities, and faces difficult questions regarding the accountability and legitimacy of the groups with which it partners from civil society.

In the essay "Our home and native land? Canadian ethnic scholarship and the challenge of transnationalism," this disconnect between policies based on definable borders in a world where boundaries are increasingly porous is highlighted.<sup>97</sup> Winland argues that scholars and official bodies alike have tended to treat ethnic communities as discrete and freshly-constituted entities established in a new Canadian homeland; such communities may have sentimental and cultural links to a past place of origin, but they are understood to behave essentially in a Canadian context. Winland believes that there is an implicit assumption among

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<sup>96</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from a northern, rural, isolated island community of about 2000 people, with a significant First Nations population. Respondent is active in community organizations and a municipal politician. May 2001.

<sup>97</sup> Daphne Winland, "Our Home and Native Land?" (1998) 35 *Canadian Ethnic Scholarship and the Challenge of Transnationalism: The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 555.

the scholars and officials working in the field of multi-culturalism that “the establishment of ethnic communities involves a gradual shift, from culturally coherent and homogenous settings in the country/region of origin, to the host country, where immigrants either assimilate to the dominant way of life or selectively appropriate new patterns and symbols in efforts to accommodate to their new context...the bounded conceptual universe of minority/majority relations persists.”<sup>98</sup>

This approach, she argues, fails to take into account that networks which bind these communities together are based on relationships rather than on territory.<sup>99</sup> Ethnic communities in Canada –like other virtual communities – are not bound by geographical designations within this country.<sup>100</sup> They are ‘disembedded’ to use Giddens’ term. In Winland’s study of the Croatian community of Canada and its relationship to the newly-established Croatian state, she notes that “diasporas often function as the source of ideological, financial, and political support for national movements that aim at the renewal of the homeland” and are an active and often important political force outside the borders of Canada. There has been a lack of attention paid to the ways in which communities in Canada are engaged in global processes, and scholars and official structures alike have focused largely on the internal dynamics of such communities. This connection to global processes was reflected in our conversation with the respondent from the Latin American community, who told us that:

Our community was born from the diaspora after the Chilean civil war. Our community was established around 2 activities: the urgency of finding ways to accommodate and receive incoming Chileans... [and] political solidarity – many of us arrived from small villages and started to live and work in exile; a lot of what

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<sup>98</sup> Daphne Winland, "Our Home and Native Land?" (1998) 35 *Canadian Ethnic Scholarship and the Challenge of Transnationalism: The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 555.

<sup>99</sup> Daphne Winland, "Our Home and Native Land?" (1998) 35 *Canadian Ethnic Scholarship and the Challenge of Transnationalism: The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 555.

<sup>100</sup> Raymond Breton, *The Governance of Ethnic Communities: Political Structures and Processes in Canada* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

we did had to do with raising awareness and money about and for political prisoners, torture, etc... We're together because we're in the same place, but it doesn't restrict us.<sup>101</sup>

The 'mosaic' understanding of Canadian communities – a peaceful interweaving of harmonious, culturally-diverse groups within defined boundaries – does not take into account the divisions within communities nor the role which communities based in Canada play outside this country's borders.

## C. Summary

While there is a debate in both academic and popular literature about the role of place in the maintenance of a healthy and vibrant community, the language of community in governance sidesteps this argument. Community policies incorporate both the local and the 'virtual'. The language of community draws both on the notion that community needs to be strengthened and at the same assumes that communities now exist as flexible networks of active individuals, choosing affiliations and membership.

The rhetoric of community avoids two critical issues in considering the interaction of community and the state: first, place is not neutral. Administrative systems are defined geographically and many of the services which determine quality of life are increasingly delivered locally. Consultation and interaction with communities – whether geographical or virtual – occurs in place. And while community consultation and participation is presented in the language of community as the key to more equitable and appropriate decisions in the public sphere, this does not take into account the potential for a carving up of the public interest and a

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<sup>101</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from Latin American community active in both local and Canadawide initiatives. Respondent is community organizer and activist. April 2001.

resulting undersupply or oversupply of certain public goods as communities seek to protect their local interest.

Secondly, the interaction of the state with virtual communities is also affected by place. While boundaries are increasingly porous and virtual communities exist in a 'disembedded' world, the state nonetheless remains the primary framework in which policies are implemented. In Canada, for example, ethnic communities and other communities of interest are understood to exist as domestic entities in an integrated, multi-cultural mosaic within the boundaries of this country. The state in partnering with such communities is limited in its capacity to comprehend the impact which such communities have outside of the boundaries of this country.

Finally, whether virtual or geographical, accessibility and the ownership and control of the community 'architecture' or infrastructure is an important factor in how the community members interact.

### III. Bottom Up/Top Down

Communities exist in a context; a community is both a reflection of the individuals who comprise it and it is shaped by the framework and values of the surrounding society. Breton's observations regarding ethnic communities apply generally: "the environment of an ethnic community consists of the multiplicity of attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours of members of other groups and of institutional agents. It includes laws, practices and regulations in industry, government and schools and other societal institutions."<sup>102</sup> How do current communitarian policies comprehend these two processes which shape communities: the coming together 'from

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<sup>102</sup> Raymond Breton, *The Governance of Ethnic Communities: Political Structures and Processes in Canada* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) at 43.

below' to form a collective and, conversely, the impact of the 'top down' environment – the overarching social and administrative framework? These countervailing dynamics are of particular import as the state increasingly engages in community building and 'activating' community to take responsibility for projects in the name of the public good.

## A. Voluntary and Passive Membership

Traditional community has been conceptualized as a stable and static entity with membership largely pre-determined by birth. Michael Adams has suggested that until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, demography to a great extent determined destiny: an individual was born into a community and remained a member for life.<sup>103</sup> This traditional understanding of community as a 'given' throws into relief a fundamental dilemma for students of community: can individuals exercise choice in the formation of communities? Is membership in community a matter of volition or simply providence?

The essential 'community question', as Wellman has termed it, relates to these questions of human agency in the formation of community.<sup>104</sup> Hampton and Wellman note that an important pre-occupation in sociology for decades has been the question of whether communities are decaying or mutating, and what such developments mean for society at large. They point out that "for more than 100 years, researchers have confronted fears that community is falling apart by searching for it in localities: rural and urban villages. For the most part, their investigations have adhered to the traditional model of community...."<sup>105</sup> This is short-sighted, they suggest. Look elsewhere and you will find community, liberated from nostalgia and

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<sup>103</sup> Michael Adams, *Sex in the Snow* (Toronto: Viking Press, 1997).

<sup>104</sup> Barry Wellman. *Networks in the global village: Life in contemporary communities* (Boulder Co.: Westview Press, 1999).

<sup>105</sup> K. Hampton and B. Wellman, "Netville Online and Offline: Observing and Surveying a Wired Suburb") 43 *American Behavioural Scientist* (1999) at 476.

tradition, continuing to thrive. Instead of being conceptualized as a dense, bounded entity, community can now be theorized as an interlocking web of personal networks: “little Ptolemaic social systems in which the focal person is the sun and the network members are the planets,”<sup>106</sup> and where the individual’s capacity to build networks is a crucial variable in the strength of his or her personal community.

The work of communitarian theorists rests in part on this notion that community can be formed by individuals voluntarily and intentionally exercising their personal agency. In articulating his model of ‘voluntary communitarianism’, Etzioni advances the idea that individuals now have the option to choose their community affiliation and can simultaneously be involved with multiple, over-lapping and interconnected communities.<sup>107</sup> This vision of layered, diverse connections in multiple communities is echoed by other commentators. Giddens terms it ‘active citizenship.’<sup>108</sup> Michael Adams portrays a similar image of fluid membership in communities of self-selection within this country:

A new social fabric of communities is now being woven on the basis of values rather than on the basis of ethnic or demographic identities. *I am connected with my family and my ethnic tribe, but on my own terms and not uncritically. I connect with strangers through technology, networks and participation in mass events.* [emphasis in original]... The movement to post-individualism does not mean a regression to the ethnic tribalism of the past but rather, a progression to communities of choice based on mutual interest, affinity and need, as well as greater flexibility of personality, and even of race and gender identity.<sup>109</sup>

The language of fluid, activated citizenship in community assumes at least two pre-conditions, however. First, an individual must have the capacity and the means to choose. We must be

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<sup>106</sup> Barry Wellman. *Networks in the global village: Life in contemporary communities* (Boulder Co.: Westview Press, 1999) at 73.

<sup>107</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

<sup>108</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Global Third Way Debate* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

<sup>109</sup> Michael Adams, *Sex in the Snow* (Toronto: Viking Press, 1997) at 34 – 35.

aware – or made aware – of our affinities and we must be able to exercise our choice. Secondly, a variety of options must exist from which to choose: society must be multi-layered and diverse. This vision of strong, self-selecting communities requires a robust civil society which is permitted by the state to flourish.

The degree to which members can choose to enter into their communities was discussed in interviews with respondents. The member of the eco-community suggested that membership in that community was a matter of choice: “we come from a place of welcome and acceptance. The process itself is self-selecting – some people don’t like the fact that we have no leaders and so decide not to live here.”<sup>110</sup> Similarly, membership in the internet community was fully “intentional” a matter of choice and self-interest: “on-line communities are oriented for self-selection – no one is ever forced to be a member.”<sup>111</sup> To a certain extent, membership in the middle-class urban neighbourhood was also a matter of lifestyle choice – open to those with means to ‘buy in.’ As the respondent noted: “[the neighbourhood] began to change around 1971 or so...Renovators started coming into the area and renovating the houses, and up-and-coming people, artists and so on, started moving in.”<sup>112</sup>

Unlike participation or membership in an internet group – an “immediate” form of community that can be entered into or terminated with ease – membership in traditional place-based communities such as Cape Breton or the rural community in northern Saskatchewan was much less a matter of self-selection, respondents suggested. The connection to the collective was passively acquired: a matter of birth or circumstance. The respondent from Cape Breton shared the opinion that “any island community would have stronger identity, sense of self. We

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<sup>110</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from intentional eco-housing community in British Columbia, also involved in Canada-wide cohousing initiatives. April 2001

<sup>111</sup> In-person interview with respondent active in local and Canada-wide internet community. Respondent is consultant and writer specializing in setting up and participating in online web-based communities. April 2001.

<sup>112</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from urban neighbourhood. Respondent is active in local business improvement association and local area resident. April 2001.

don't have a lot of new immigrant groups – it adds to people knowing who and where they are. More insular.”<sup>113</sup>

The notion of potential membership in community -- different from traditional communities or those comprised of active self-selecting members -- was also discussed by a number of respondents. The respondent from the gay community noted that statistically “one in ten people is gay/lesbian/bisexual or transgendered” and later commented that a person may have a choice in whether or not to “out” themselves publicly “but no choice in being gay.”<sup>114</sup> Such people may or may not identify themselves as members of a distinct community. Similarly, the sex worker noted that “prostitutes have obviously been around for quite some time, but they haven't been defined and neither have they defined themselves as a community until the late 70s or early 80s” also noting that “in terms of the broader community, there are people who are sex workers but who do not identify themselves as such.”<sup>115</sup> Finally, injection-drug users in the experience of our respondent, basically constituted a community only in name with an entirely potential membership. The respondent noted:

Part of what we need is just for the community itself to become an active group, develop some leaders, people who are willing to speak up to say what they need for support.<sup>116</sup>

Particularly with stigmatized communities – like sex workers or injection drug users – there is often only a small number of active members. These people define the community and seek to

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<sup>113</sup> In-person interview with respondent from Cape Breton. Respondent is community development worker in Sydney, Nova Scotia. March 2001.

<sup>114</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. Respondent is community outreach worker at a community centre that caters to the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. June 2001.

<sup>115</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

<sup>116</sup> Telephone interview with respondent who is an outreach worker with street injection-drug users in a city in Northern Ontario. May 2001.

engage potential members who are often reluctant to identify themselves as being members of a larger community or consciously stay away to avoid negative stereotypes or legal repercussions:

It can be difficult to communicate [with the community] because so many sex workers are closeted... prostitutes are undocumented workers. They face the risk of detection... so many of them are very careful about whom they interact with – they actively avoid networking. Participation is encouraged through our efforts to make involvement safer – so when we fight for the decriminalization of prostitution, we are fighting for an atmosphere where sex workers can come out and participate without risk of prosecution... People also have experiences of betrayal in the media, and may be worried about being ‘outed’ or investigated. For instance, I’ve had my phone tapped many times, and I can only imagine it’s because of my sex worker activism.<sup>117</sup>

And

The problem with [our city] is that because we are a small community, people don’t want to speak out and be labeled as a drug user – so it’s a very secretive community... we need to work on developing societal acceptance of drug use and not stigmatizing – the government can do their part with legalization and public education.<sup>118</sup>

The community leaders who were interviewed from such communities suggested that in order to take control of their lives, these individuals must be made aware of their community affiliation.

Such conclusions reflect a classic approach to community development which presupposes that through collective action marginalized populations can find a way to articulate or address their own needs. Through community, disadvantaged individuals can find a voice and articulate solutions appropriate to their conditions. The sex worker respondent, for example, spoke of the courageous efforts of leaders in that community who dared to speak out, in order for the interests of this stigmatized population to be heard:

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<sup>117</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

<sup>118</sup> Telephone interview with respondent who is an outreach worker with street injection-drug users in a city in Northern Ontario . May 2001.

[Our] leaders are sex workers, who are overwhelmingly prostitutes, who made a personal decision to advance their own rights as sex workers or the rights of sex workers at large. In some situations it was a personal decision made as a result of a personal experience – somebody getting busted or jailed or evicted... Part of why we got organized was so we could speak out with our own voice. Some people are very active in terms of sex workers rights, but then there are other people who take a stand for sex workers in their own work. For example, at strip clubs, there may be one or more women who are willing to speak out and take a stand.<sup>119</sup>

Nikolas Rose has interpreted the activation of community through government action from another perspective, however. He suggests that in the absence of a universal social sphere the reconfiguring of assistance to marginalized individuals through community does not necessarily empower people or provide them with assistance that is more appropriate to their needs. He asserts that the provision of assistance through community requires that recipients of public assistance – the elderly, the unemployed, the ill – be categorized as ‘belonging’ to a pre-existing collective. There is an expectation that everyone has an ‘affinity group’ and that there is a need which draws people together. If individuals do not immediately associate with a group, they must be ‘activated’ to join. It is no longer sufficient to provide ‘the needy’ – whether they exist in a locale or as a virtual community – with assistance which they receive passively; instead they must learn – or be taught – to perceive themselves as a part of a community, in order to receive state assistance. Rose argues:

Each assertion of community refers itself to something that already exists and has a claim on us: our common fate as gay people, as women of colour, as people with AIDS, as members of an ethnic group; as residents in a village or a suburb, as people with a disability. Yet our allegiance to each of these particular communities is something that we have to be made aware of, requiring the work of educators, campaigns, activists...<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

<sup>120</sup> Nikolas Rose. “The death of the social? Re-figuring the territory of government” (1996) 25 *Economy and Society*, at 334.

There is a new – and uncomfortable – moral imperative, he argues, which is attached to the language of governance through community.<sup>121</sup> The reconfiguration of the state's relationship to citizens through diverse and voluntary community membership also changes the nature of the state, he further argues. Within this construct, individuals no longer “belong” to the nation, but are conceived of as voluntary citizens of a range of communities: “neighbourhoods, associations, regions, networks, subcultures, age groups, ethnicities, and lifestyle sectors – in short, communities.”<sup>122</sup>

A distinction between the two interpretations, perhaps, is in the role of the state as activator. Is community development, when initiated by an internal process more authentic than when it is generated by the state as a means for the delivery of social services?

In the Canadian context, we see state funding being channeled toward building in communities and information dissemination so that potential members can become aware, involved and integrated into affinity groups in order that their condition in life may be improved. For example, the community-building initiative with injection drug users was co-funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and the municipal government as an innovative approach to harm reduction. An outreach worker, who was not a drug-user, was paid to help build a community identity.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, under the *Volunteer @ction.online* program which was established at the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship in 1999 and will distribute \$13.5 million over 5 years, grants are distributed to groups like the not-for-profit Canadian Cambodian Association of Ontario to create web sites in Khmer and Laotian languages in order to encourage individuals to “work together

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<sup>121</sup> Nikolas Rose, “The death of the social? Re-figuring the territory of government” (1996) 25 *Economy and Society*, 327-356.

<sup>122</sup> Nikolas Rose, “Community, Citizenship and the Third Way (2000) 43 *American Behavioural Scientist* at 1398.

<sup>123</sup> Telephone interview with respondent who is an outreach worker with street injection-drug users in a city in Northern Ontario . May 2001.

online to provide services which will allow new Cambodian and Laotian-Canadians adapt to life in Canada.”<sup>124</sup> Similar grants were provided to the Chinese Community Centre of Ontario, Groupe Jeunesse Francophone de Toronto, and the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians. This funding allows these small non-governmental organizations to reach out to potential members and disseminate information about access to community-based services and support.<sup>125</sup>

## B. Interaction with State and Society

Communities that are created by individuals coming together to form community from the ‘bottom up’, are also profoundly shaped by surrounding and overarching society and systems of governance.<sup>126</sup> The existing mores and values of the larger society have an impact on how communities function; administrative frameworks and the modes of disposition of public funds similarly are a determining factor in how communities behave and operate. This relationship between the overarching environment and community is of particular import when considering models of governance through community where communities are both the object of government policy – to be strengthened or animated – at the same time as seeming to remain external to politics, a tempering force, a counterweight to be consulted.<sup>127</sup> In the interaction of the state and community, however, a number of questions are raised about the processes of recognition of communities, their accountability, authenticity and homogeneity.

<sup>124</sup> Ontario Ministry of Citizenship. “Volunteerism” (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2001) <http://www.gov.on.ca/MCZCR/english/citdiv/voluntar/index.htm> accessed on 03/07/2001.

<sup>125</sup> Ontario Ministry of Citizenship. “Volunteerism” (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2001) <http://www.gov.on.ca/MCZCR/english/citdiv/voluntar/index.htm> accessed on 03/07/2001.

<sup>126</sup> Raymond Breton, *The Governance of Ethnic Communities: Political Structures and Processes in Canada* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

<sup>127</sup> Nikolas Rose, “Community, Citizenship and the Third Way (2000) 43 *American Behavioural Scientist* at 1401.

All communities are shaped by the values and perceptions of the surrounding society, whether encoded in law or practice. For some groups, because of the nature of their membership or values, recognition by the broader society or state is difficult. It was reported, for example, that one of the challenges for the sex worker community to be accepted as a legitimate group, lies in the lack of understanding of the surrounding society:

The problem is that the society at large doesn't recognize us as workers the way we recognize ourselves, or as a community – there's a concept that sex workers are a negative social phenomenon that needs to be limited or contained. We're either victims or criminals – there's no recognition that we need to be consulted or assisted in a way that isn't destructive.<sup>128</sup>

A similar opinion was voiced about injection drug users:

There are users who are politically active. But it's hard – a junkie with a needle in his or her arm is not a poster child for political activism.<sup>129</sup>

Finding a strong common voice is also difficult for groups which exist in fact, but who are not explicitly recognized by the state. While Ukrainian Canadians or AIDS patients are acknowledged by and communicate with the state through myriad organizations, such as the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, the Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada, the Canadian AIDS Society or the AIDS committee of Ottawa, other communities may not receive the same recognition. For example, while ethnic Roma asylum seekers hailing from a number of post-communist states in Central Europe reportedly comprise the largest single population of homeless people living on the street outside the shelter system in the City of Toronto, these individuals are officially identified according to their states of origin and not in terms of a common ethnic identity.<sup>130</sup> This group has weak, if any, associational ties and no instrument

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<sup>128</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

<sup>129</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from street injection-drug user community in Ontario. Respondent is outreach worker. May 2001.

<sup>130</sup> Reported during in-person conversation with employee of city of Toronto, February 2, 2001.

through which to voice their common claims. Similarly, while it was reported that activists from the sex worker community are now frequently invited to participate in decision-making processes of relevance to their situation, they are by no means recognized as primary stakeholders or given official status on issues that relate directly to their livelihood and safety.

The respondent from that community noted:

The government still sees us as nominal stakeholders, so it is useful to get support from other stakeholders and the general public in order to have greater standing and credibility... Most of the attention we get from the government is of the negative sort – there is lots of legislation, and discussions around how to curtail the sex trade and sex workers, so we are often talked about rather than being included in those discussions, and when we are included, there's the concern that we can be tokenized... Recently there was a federal–territorial working group on prostitution that lasted from about 1992-1998. There were cross-Canada consultations as part of that project about street prostitution and youth prostitution. Sex workers were invited to those consultations at the local meetings. I have served as an expert witness several times, for instance... Because sex workers' groups have a long-standing presence and this has been recognized, more often than not sex worker groups are seen as a valuable resource, particularly by other women's groups. If sex workers were not consulted, that would be a slight – and non-sex worker activists are expected to consult us. [But] no level of government would develop a policy or position around prostitution solely around the position of sex workers – a prostitute's position about her work and her life wouldn't have any more effect than the police officer who works on "morality" issues or the church, for example.<sup>131</sup>

The recognition of participants is both a function of the community's internal capacity and the prerogative of the officials, who can confer status or not. Importantly, the partnership between community and state is not equal and always exists within a context of power.

Interlocutors from communities may also simply be 'fabricated' or named by officials in order for there to be an identifiable partner with whom the state can communicate and collaborate: "external agencies may promote or structure community organizations not because the local residents are isolated, disorganized or anomic but because [the external agencies]

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<sup>131</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

need local 'representatives' to talk to."<sup>132</sup> Often the needs of the state require at least a façade of unity from the community in order for the relations to appear to be accountable and credible. In such cases, the degree to which the community spokespeople are representative or have the broader support of a community is secondary. This underscores a fundamental dilemma: is it better for a community to be represented by someone – anyone – though perhaps not truly representative than to have no voice at all?

The 'creation' or identification of a 'legitimate' partner is extremely sensitive. Researchers in the United States have observed that the participation or interaction of First Nations communities' with the Federal government or with researchers has been profoundly difficult as "these communities feel that they have been victimized by the federal government and scientists for over 40 years."<sup>133</sup> These experiences are shared by First Nations communities in Canada for whom a satisfactory process of community consultation has been difficult to develop. After years of frustration, few can buy into the rules of the game or have faith in positive outcomes. Such frustration is echoed by the member of the sex worker community, who pointed out that:

This is especially true of sex workers who have been researched and theorized ad nauseum.

And

It is very difficult to engage in a balanced and meaningful dialogue with the government when they have laws that can allow for our possessions to be seized, our employer to be jailed, and for you yourself to be incarcerated. For us now it might be what it was like 20 or 30 years ago as a lesbian, trying to

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<sup>132</sup> Raymond Breton, *The Governance of Ethnic Communities: Political Structures and Processes in Canada* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) at 55.

<sup>133</sup> Richard E. Sclove, Madeleine L. Scammell, and Breana Holland, *Community-Based Research in the United States: An Introductory Reconnaissance, Including Twelve Organizational Case Studies and Comparison with the Dutch Science Shops and the Mainstream American Research System* (Amherst, Massachusetts: The Loka Institute, 1998).

negotiate with the government when the government didn't see them as people being worthy of having their basic human rights protected... The government doesn't have to like us or feel that it's right, but they need to put our concerns and issues in a labour and labour rights context....<sup>134</sup>

The necessity for unanimity and legible systems of formal organization for the state may also result in the imposition of structures on communities. Such arrangements may have little relevance for the communities themselves, but characterize legitimate and accountable structures for public purposes. Our contact from the eco-housing initiative informed us that

Right now we have presidential campaigns – [we are required to] have a president and treasurer, and so on, but we have no use for those roles in the formal sense, so we do it in name only... we have mock campaigns. One guy recently had a campaign dinner where he cooked for the whole community and made a speech about giving back to the people. The other woman is the incumbent and we call her the High Queen, and she holds formal High Teas... I think this legislated need for structure is just so people in the government know who their contact is within the community. We only interact with government when we try to get approvals for something. Getting the right zoning in the beginning was not a problem, all the local councillors agreed with our proposal, so we had 100% agreement right from the start.<sup>135</sup>

Sounding a different note, our respondent from an internet community reported to us that the government's current system of communications with on-line communities was not in-keeping with the 'flatter and looser' structures of the internet:

Government disdains or is confused by online communities – they see them as uncontrollable and unpredictable, they are suspicious as to their representativeness – they see online communities as just creating more work for governments. Government is afraid of that level of engagement with citizens. Governments want to discredit online communities, not recognize them. ...Government needs to be more accepting of diverse opinions and dissent, without becoming defensive. Government has to become less anal, has to have a paradigm shift to really engage with online communities.... Hyper-control over communications can't continue to happen if governments want to engage with internet communities. If government doesn't engage with online communities,

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<sup>134</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

<sup>135</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from intentional eco-housing community in British Columbia. April 2001.

that feeds the agenda of the political right to make government smaller. Government will begin to lose its job in society.<sup>136</sup>

The action of the state also shapes the functioning or formation of community where financial or other inducements are involved. In the field of ethnic community studies, for example, there is a debate regarding the impact of Canadian multi-culturalism policy on the structure and functioning of communities. Critics of the provision of financial support to ethnic groups “argue that by institutionalizing ethnicity, governments provide a set of opportunities for potential ethnic entrepreneurs. The impetus for action comes from above, so to speak, rather than from the grassroots of the community.”<sup>137</sup> On the other hand, those in favour of state support believe that the funding allows community leaders to address real community needs and problems.

A number of respondents noted that significant amounts of the community's financial resources were received from the state. For example the respondent from the sex worker community noted that “all the money comes from the government, but the cost of much of the work that's done is done voluntarily without external financing. If we had better money and resources, we could do a whole lot more”<sup>138</sup> and the respondent from Cape Breton noted that the community is “very reliant”<sup>139</sup> on state assistance.

When communities receive public funds, accountability and independence become paramount issues. It is generally recognized that communities must have the capacity to meet

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<sup>136</sup> In-person interview with respondent active in local and Canada-wide internet community. Respondent is consultant and writer specializing in setting up and participating in online web-based communities. April 2001.

<sup>137</sup> Raymond Breton, *The Governance of Ethnic Communities: Political Structures and Processes in Canada* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) at 55.

<sup>138</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

<sup>139</sup> In-person interview with respondent from Cape Breton. Respondent is community development worker In Sydney, Nova Scotia. March 2001.

financial reporting requirements and to fulfill the tasks for which they are taking responsibility.<sup>140</sup> But there is a paradox herein. For as administrative and reporting burdens are placed on communities and community groups, there is a tendency for communities themselves to become bureaucratized, professionalized and distanced from the grassroots membership. The affective, 'natural' bonds of community which are purported to provide a counterbalance to the mechanisms of the state become in turn rationalized and bureaucratized. Additionally, to ensure that communities are accountable and able to meet the reporting and management requirements of the state, communities in turn become the target of government programming to build their internal organizational capacities. The community development literature calls for this kind of capacity building:

For community participation to develop and grow in influence, it is also important to facilitate the development of infrastructure within communities through which communities can network and build alliances. This enables communities to share common experiences, to learn from one another, to build competencies and strengthen capacities and to harness and channel resources. Statutory agencies need to recognize such work explicitly and to dedicate resources and employee time for coordination and development.<sup>141</sup>

While the objective of developing internal management skills within communities is laudable, there is an irony herein. As government spending on a whole range of services is being diminished – budgets for everything from housing to public transportation to public libraries are under pressure – funds are being channeled into communities to assist them in creating parallel capacities and bureaucracies. Rose has suggested that, under the rubric of community-based policies, the traditional civil service is being diminished while a whole new set of structures is being created:

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<sup>140</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

<sup>141</sup> European Sustainable Cities & Towns Campaign, *Community Participation in Local Health and Sustainable Development: A Working Document on Approaches and Techniques* (European Sustainable Development and Health Series (No. 4) for Europe Healthy Cities Network) at 13.

focus groups, citizens' juries, boards of directors chosen to represent different sectors and interests, partnerships of all sorts, between the public services and those wanting to make profits, between public, profit-making and not-for-profit organizations, between professionals and lay persons, between political institutions and voluntary organizations, and much more. These new hybrid mechanisms, more flexible and closer to local needs than the bureaucratized organs of the central or local state will, it seems, ensure accountability, reconcile competing interests, and transcend the harmful split between state and society.<sup>142</sup>

Meanwhile, it is suggested that the shortfalls in financing for public services are to be made up from voluntary contributions of time or resources from communities as an economical and appropriate solution to public deficits.<sup>143</sup>

This devolution of the functions of government to the community may also affect the quality of social programming. Communitarians argue that community management of services like nursery schools, recreation centers, drop-in centers and low-income housing facilities will make them more responsive to the real needs 'on the ground.'<sup>144</sup> Critics respond with the charge that community management of public services can result in the provision of badly-regulated services of lower quality delivered on the backs of unpaid volunteers. Community empowerment can become, in effect, volunteerism for the government. The question arises: should communities uncritically and voluntarily provide social and other services for the state when the process of post-war development was directed toward undifferentiated, universal social programming?<sup>145 146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Nikolas Rose, "Community, Citizenship and the Third Way" (2000) 43 *American Behavioural Scientist* at 1405.

<sup>143</sup> The "Community Solutions" program of the former BC Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers, described in Funding Guidelines accessible at <http://www.cdcv.gov.bc.ca> provides an illustration. The program offers grant support for projects aimed that 'strengthen and support' the capacity of marginalized communities to address their problems. At the same time, the program explicitly prohibits funding for "on-going service-based programs."

<sup>144</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community* (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1993).

<sup>145</sup> G. Craig, M. Mayo, "Community Participation and Empowerment: The Human Face of Structural Adjustment or Tools for Democratic Transformation?" in Gary Craig and Marjorie Mayo, eds., *Community Empowerment: A Reader in Participation and Development* (London: ZED Books, 1995) at 79.

With public financing, community groups are also placed in the position of acting as conduits for the state, which may threaten their independence. Control of the purse-strings very often lies in the hands of the state, despite the rhetoric of 'community empowerment.'<sup>147</sup> As the community development worker from Cape Breton noted:

[one community development organization] stays away from politics because they don't want to lose control.<sup>148</sup>

Finally, despite the state's need for legible, unified and accountable community counterparts, unanimity within communities is, at best, ephemeral. There must always be questions regarding the degree to which communities are homogeneous. The degree to which a community shares interests and values – or is fractured – can never be fully resolved. At the core is the eternal tension between individual interest and shared collective interest; this tension cannot be 'solved;' it can only be mediated. While, at a macro level, commonality and shared experience can be identified among, say, Ukrainian Canadians or Sex Workers, at the micro level competing interests and fissures always exist.<sup>149</sup> The respondent from the Latin American community illustrated this point in noting that the collective is made up of smaller communities that identify themselves according to their country of origin, within a larger over-arching sense of their shared Latin American culture, which they identify with more or less strongly.<sup>150</sup> Similarly

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<sup>146</sup> Marilyn Taylor, "Community Work and the State: The Changing Context of UK Practice" in Gary Craig and Marjorie Mayo, eds., *Community Empowerment: A Reader in Participation and Development* (London: ZED Books, 1995).

<sup>147</sup> Jenny Onyx and Pam Benton "Empowerment and Ageing: Toward Honoured Places for Crones and Sages" in Gary Craig and Marjorie Mayo, eds., *Community Empowerment: a Reader in Participation and Development* (London: ZED Books, 1995) at 52.

<sup>148</sup> In-person interview with respondent from Cape Breton. Respondent is community development worker in Sydney, Nova Scotia. March 2001.

<sup>149</sup> Raymond Breton, *The Governance of Ethnic Communities: Political Structures and Processes in Canada* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

<sup>150</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from Latin American community active in both local and Canadawide initiatives. Respondent is community organizer and activist. April 2001.

noting the existence of diversity and differences within the gay community, the respondent expressed the following opinion:

Because there are so many different kinds of people in the community, lots of people always feel left out in certain situations.... Because the gay community works out of the idea that they're oppressed, people assume that we have something in common, but I have nothing in common with a transsexual. I don't know their pain... Lots of times this whole idea of solidarity is good, but the context has to be really, really broad, has to come from a feeling of all being one huge group This happens when a gay or lesbian or queer person gets murdered: then every member of that community thinks about that in the same way.<sup>151</sup>

The definition and identification of community is fluid, often dependent on a particular situation, a fact which renders the structuring of state-community relations difficult.

Finally, it is important to note that the state's efforts at community development may also not include members of the community at all. While community development and community capacity building are often conflated with participatory or community-based initiatives, in fact, community development is not always driven by community members. An example of this is when government and industry are in control of the economic and social development of a community. Jobs are created, programs and services are provided and yet the community members often have little input. In this situation, the community's economic wealth might be improved but the community has not been involved in a meaningful way in management, decision-making or in determining if there is alternative development that might not include that particular industry.<sup>152</sup> This viewpoint was strongly supported by our respondent from Cape Breton, who pointed out that

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<sup>151</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. Respondent is community outreach worker at a community centre that caters to the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. June 2001.

<sup>152</sup> Flo Frank and Anne Smith, *The Community Development Handbook: A Tool to Build Community Capacity* (Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada, 1999).

New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and PEI have been attracting more call centres, but it's still driven by government subsidies – although it's supposed to be a loan rather than a grant, if the business meets certain objectives, they don't have to pay the loan back. So, once the conditions have been met, the businesses leave. It needs to be community people starting these businesses; [loans and grants] shouldn't be given to people from elsewhere in Canada or the U.S. [The benefits are that] call centres pay well, relatively speaking, have benefits packages, raises, employ 900 people – the incomes from call centres are often a family's 2<sup>nd</sup> income. Plus you then have all the spin-offs of having more money in the local economy etc. But call centres are still not the answer.<sup>153</sup>

One of the eternal tensions in the activation of community in governance is highlighted by this experience. As we have enumerated above, the challenges involved in reconciling systems of representative government with community are great. Communities are inherently unstable, unanimity is fleeting, accountability and legitimacy in communities are only possible to determine in the particular and the public interest is often undermined by community interests. At the other extreme, no community consultation or participation in public decisions is even less satisfactory. As the leader from a rural community in northern Saskatchewan articulated:

We need government help in making our communities better, a better place to live. The dam had a major impact and caused great destruction to our community; trapping and fishing have been virtually taken away. We got a settlement from the provincial government from Saskatchewan Power, in recognition of the damage the dam caused to us. In my eyes, the money from the settlement wasn't properly administered. It didn't have the beneficial effect it could have had, if there had been the proper structure and administration.<sup>154</sup>

Keane suggests that it is in the interplay between state and civil society that the potential for more democratic development processes lie. Each is less without the other, he suggests; together a capable state and a strong civil society offer the potential for more democratic and equitable outcomes in the public realm:

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<sup>153</sup> In-person interview with respondent from Cape Breton. Respondent is community development worker in Sydney, Nova Scotia. March 2001.

<sup>154</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from a northern, rural, isolated island community of about 2000 people, with a significant First Nations population. Respondent is active in community organizations and a municipal politician. May 2001.

Without a secure and independent civil society of autonomous public spheres, goals such as freedom and equality, participatory planning and community decision-making will be nothing but empty slogans. But without the protective and redistributive and conflict-mediating functions of the state, struggles to transform civil society will become ghettoized, divided and stagnant, or will spawn their own new forms of inequality and unfreedom.<sup>155</sup>

## C. Summary

Membership in community is no longer conceived of as an affiliation for life, an enduring relationship to a stable and static entity. Membership has rather become a matter of personal agency and volition. Governance through community is based on this notion of personal choice and the activation of community is achieved through facilitating the engagement of individuals in their communities of choice. This understanding of a vibrant community assumes two conditions: that society is multi-layered and robust – people have options from which to choose – and that people have the capacity to choose. What this notion does not take account of is passive or potential membership or that there are members of society – with limited personal options – who do not have a choice of affiliation. How are such people to be governed or to participate in society? Rose suggests that in conditions of decreasing public involvement in the provision of social services, governance through community will increase marginalization.

The intervention of the state in activating community is also problematic given the practical difficulties associated with the recognition of legitimate community and ensuring accountability. Community homogeneity and unity are fleeting. Community is inherently unstable and changes through time – rendering it a difficult partner for formal interaction with the state.

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<sup>155</sup>

J. Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society* (London: Verso, 1988) at 15.

## IV. Inclusion/Exclusion

Communities are constituted of individuals who tacitly or explicitly express shared values or characteristics. The very fact of a group of individuals that shares common traits however implies that ‘outsiders’ or non-members also exist. Thus while communities are defined by what members have in common, they are similarly defined by what makes them different from non-members, or indeed are defined by the very fact of exclusion. How do notions of governance through voluntary, fluid and self-selecting community membership comprehend these dynamics of inclusion and exclusion?

### A. Inclusion

In the course of interviews with community members, the theme of “inclusion” resounded. By meeting a very basic set of conditions – founded essentially on will and desire – respondents suggested that membership in their particular community was open to all. The respondent from an urban neighbourhood commented that “anyone who moves in becomes a member of the...community.”<sup>156</sup> Similarly the leader of a rural northern community noted: “Whoever lives there is a member. They’re automatically members by virtue of living in the community.”<sup>157</sup> The Latin American community leader stated that to become a member, one need “just show up and show interest in being involved, it’s very informal.”<sup>158</sup> In a like fashion, membership in the eco-housing community is declared to be open: “we do not select people or

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<sup>156</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from urban neighbourhood. Respondent is active in local business improvement association and local area resident. April 2001.

<sup>157</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from a northern, rural, isolated island community of about 2000 people, with a significant First Nations population. Respondent is active in community organizations and a municipal politician. May 2001.

<sup>158</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from Latin American community active in both local and Canadawide initiatives. Respondent is community organizer and activist. April 2001.

refuse entry to anyone.”<sup>159</sup> Similarly, we were told that “one doesn’t have to be gay to be part of the community...it’s a state of mind, a politics.”<sup>160</sup> To be involved in the drug-users community or the sex worker community requires simply that you are engaged in those activities or interested in the lives of those people who are.<sup>161, 162</sup> As the respondent from the sex worker community noted “there are many supporters of sex workers rights who are not themselves sex workers.”<sup>163</sup> Membership in such communities is thus perceived to be accessible to all, open to willing or interested individuals.

As noted above, this idea of inclusive, voluntary, and self-selecting membership in a community of ‘belonging’ is central to the policies of governance through community. But the dynamics of inclusion and membership in a community are, in truth, less straightforward. Whether explicitly acknowledged, barriers to membership often exist. Not everyone can be a member of the community of his or her choice. Not all people have the capacity to choose. Thus, while the respondent from an urban community claimed that all who live in the neighbourhood are members, it was also acknowledged that this community “has very important boundaries, delineated by the communities around us which are so different.”<sup>164</sup> Similarly, the respondent from Cape Breton reported candidly that while “officially, everybody’s open and welcoming” in reality being accepted as a member of the community is more complicated:

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<sup>159</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from intentional eco-housing community in British Columbia. April 2001.

<sup>160</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. Respondent is community outreach worker at a community centre that caters to the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. June 2001.

<sup>161</sup> Telephone interview with respondent who is an outreach worker with street injection-drug users in a city in Northern Ontario. May 2001.

<sup>162</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

<sup>163</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

<sup>164</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from urban neighbourhood. Respondent is active in local business improvement association and local area resident. April 2001.

It depends on your attitude – a professor friend of mine from Toronto [lived in Cape Breton] for 3 or 4 years and thought he was a member – people liked him, he fit in well - but he wasn't really a full member, although nobody said that to him. But now he is because he's been there 7 years, he's dating somebody from [Cape Breton], and he's a good professor – if he'd been a bad professor, acceptance would have been much more difficult.<sup>165</sup>

Similarly, the respondent from the Latin American community noted that “a certain political affinity is understood” among members of that community and the political activity which was an important common bond among members – might, in fact, keep some potential members away, such as “the old revolutionaries that we've forgotten about... some of them want to forget what they suffered in the war – it's a lot of work to attract them.”<sup>166</sup> While membership is open, it is open to those who share and care about the issues that bond the other members. Membership in communities is available, in short, to like-minded individuals; outsiders are less likely to be welcome or will, quite simply, stay away.

The respondent from a web-based community put it succinctly by noting that “by nature, on-line communities don't include everybody” adding that these communities are “primarily based on conversation....you can only have so much of it before it becomes noise.”<sup>167</sup>

## B. Exclusion

It is difficult to reconcile this dynamic of exclusion and difference with the notion of governance through voluntary, active communities. Communities may be deeply affected by discrimination or the perception thereof. As Wirth, in the 1930s, noted with respect to minority groups, perceived differences may be as powerful as real ones,

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<sup>165</sup> In-person interview with respondent from Cape Breton. Respondent is community development worker In Sydney, Nova Scotia. March 2001.

<sup>166</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from Latin American community active in both local and Canadawide initiatives. Respondent is community organizer and activist. April 2001.

<sup>167</sup> In-person interview with respondent active in local and Canada-wide internet community. Respondent is consultant and writer specializing in setting up and participating in online web-based communities. April 2001.

...a minority group is one which, whether or not it suffers from discrimination and exclusion, conceives itself as the object of such differential treatment and is regarded by others as such...<sup>168</sup>

Discrimination against a collective is a form of community definition that originates external to the community. In some cases, these external definitions can have a catalytic effect. As Ward notes, conflict or opposition is not always a negative influence: “opposing force helps those within a group to find common cause through opposition to the other group.”<sup>169</sup> The respondent from the sex worker community noted that the group’s identity “developed in conjunction with the growth of prostitutes’ rights movements, as a result of oppression of various kinds: social stigma, police oppression, the laws – there was organizing around that, and the concept of community was born.” This happened partially in recognition of and response to the fact that the recent “change in [public] perception of ‘prostitute as criminal’ to ‘prostitute as victim’ is not necessarily better,”<sup>170</sup> and therefore, the community sought its own voice, to speak for itself. One of the specific outcomes was that the community adopted the term “sex work.” The term, the respondent noted, is consciously used to encourage broader membership instead of focusing on differences or negative stereotypes:

It’s inclusive. It’s an umbrella term, and puts the emphasis on the work and the labour issues. This is important for the effort to build community and it’s important for the organizers and the policy makers. But it’s also important for the community of sex workers; this is a term that seems to help bring people into active organizations. Interestingly, people whose work is clearly prostitution often don’t define themselves as prostitutes or join the organizations, because of the stigma attached to the term and the concept, and because of the public image of what prostitutes are and do. So people [who engage in sex work] who feel they don’t fit [the] mold [of prostitution] stay away from the term and the organizations.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Louis Wirth, *Community Life and Social Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) at 220.

<sup>169</sup> Jim Ward, *Organizing for the Homeless* (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 1989) at 78.

<sup>170</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

<sup>171</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

The respondent from the gay/lesbian community similarly commented:

The gay/lesbian community formed out of people who were entirely oppressed because they loved someone of the same sex. They started to seek each other out, and so the community formed out of their oppression. Oppression pulls people in and makes them want to get involved for their own good, for the sake of survival.<sup>172</sup>

Communities also galvanize around crises: “weekly meetings of a local association may garner 10 or 12 participants, until a dump is proposed nearby and 75 people show up,”<sup>173</sup> one respondent noted. Again the respondent from the sex worker community commented: “our experience has been that unless there is a very concrete reason for a meeting – such as a police raid or proposed changes to the law that will have a big impact – it’s very hard to get people involved.”<sup>174</sup> Communities can become more cohesive when they are faced with a threat. The converse may, however, also be true. With the disappearance of an opposing force, a community’s bond may weaken. The respondent from the Latin American community indicated that when the nature of the political struggles in Central and Latin America diminished at the end of the cold war, much of the original sense of identity of the community, which was largely formed around political solidarity, disappeared as well: “In recent times, the end of the dictatorship in Chile and the fall of the Berlin Wall happened around the same time, and it put a lot of community activities to sleep for a while – people felt that the dictatorship was over, the wall was down - what do we do now?”<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. Respondent is community outreach worker at a community centre that caters to the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. June 2001.

<sup>173</sup> In-person interview with respondent from Cape Breton. Respondent is community development worker In Sydney, Nova Scotia. March 2001.

<sup>174</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

<sup>175</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from Latin American community active in both local and Canadawide initiatives. Respondent is community organizer and activist. April 2001.

It is interesting to consider the role of an explicit and ever-present “other” in a community’s sense of identity. While the member of the urban neighbourhood listed the importance of the physical environment such as the farm, the trees, and the park to the community’s sense of identity,<sup>176</sup> the community was also defined according to the strict border with adjacent neighbourhoods. What would happen if these different communities suddenly disappeared – in this case if the affordable housing was torn down and replaced by market housing, as is being proposed? Would the community’s boundaries become arbitrary as the areas immediately outside the boundaries became more “like-self?” Would the community reach out to embrace and accept these new areas, thus redefining itself in the process? If so, what is the process by which a community decides to expand its boundaries, whether geographic or conceptual, to accept “others” or new members that meet the criteria to be community members?

This influx of new members is a particularly salient issue to community formation and operation. How does a community maintain an identity with changing membership? The sex worker noted “a difficulty is that there are many women coming to Toronto for sex work. This is a big issue – how are the leaders going to communicate to migrant workers [for instance] and be open to them? Like any community, ours can be resistant to newcomers.”<sup>177</sup> Is it viable to expect a community to be able to welcome all potential new members, when doing so may mean that the community’s identity may be in a constant state of flux? As one respondent

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<sup>176</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from urban neighbourhood. Respondent is active in the local business improvement association and local area resident. April 2001.

<sup>177</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

noted: “the one thing that strikes me is... that community is really unstable; that it can mean a lot of different things and can change over time.”<sup>178</sup>

While communities may form around or be strengthened by forces of exclusion or discrimination, they may also exist as the result of an imposition from outsiders whether through law or in practice. The characteristics and conditions of communities like ‘the homeless’ or ‘drug users’ are often created externally. The ‘elderly’ similarly provide an example. This ‘community’ – its attributes, its needs and problems - has largely been defined by those who are not themselves elderly. Onyx and Benton write compellingly of the ways in which the state has defined this group “...older people [are] objectified into an undifferentiated ‘other’ whose fate is determined by professionals working within a state policy framework.”<sup>179</sup> By defining “aging” as a process of declining health, older people are viewed essentially as a medical problem. Uncomfortable questions follow: Who is responsible for this definition? Who are the beneficiaries? Onyx and Benton suggest that the health industry is a major purveyor of stereotypes in this regard.<sup>180</sup>

### C. Fragmentation and Competing Claims

Finally, the notion of governance through inclusive communities of active self-selecting individuals does not take into account the difficulty of reconciling competing claims among different communities. This dilemma was illustrated in several discussions with respondents,

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<sup>178</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. Respondent is community outreach worker at a community centre that caters to the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. June 2001.

<sup>179</sup> Jenny Onyx and Pam Benton “Empowerment and Ageing: Toward Honoured Places for Crones and Sages” in Gary Craig and Marjorie Mayo, eds., *Community Empowerment: a Reader in Participation and Development* (London: ZED Books, 1995).

<sup>180</sup> Jenny Onyx and Pam Benton “Empowerment and Ageing: Toward Honoured Places for Crones and Sages” in Gary Craig and Marjorie Mayo, eds., *Community Empowerment: a Reader in Participation and Development* (London: ZED Books, 1995).

notably from the sex worker and drug-user groups who recognized that their objectives were in conflict with the values of other groups in society or general government policy.<sup>181, 182</sup> While these communities are built around the positive values of wanting to create healthy, safe and humane conditions for members, their aims are often perceived to be in conflict with other public goals such as eliminating prostitution and drug use. A similar dynamic was suggested by the resident from the urban neighbourhood who was concerned about the high number of social housing units and homeless shelters in the community's environs. The community aims to ensure a safe, economically viable, and attractive downtown neighbourhood; these positive goals, however, are difficult to reconcile with the equal and opposite "good" of accommodating marginalized members of society.<sup>183</sup>

While the language of community claims to promote 'social cohesion' by activating individuals to connect with each other in the public sphere, at the same time a diversity of voices is being empowered, all of whom are clamouring for particular – and sometimes irreconcilable – rights and interests. Critics of governance through community highlight this portioning up of interests, claiming it leads to fragmentation and "conflicts over the mutually exclusive 'rights' and values of different communities."<sup>184</sup> While the objective of community policy is to activate and strengthen communities, in the absence of clear criteria it is impossible to determine which communities are more legitimate and whose aims are more salutary. As Carothers notes,

Although many civic activists may feel they speak for the public good, the public interest is a highly contested domain. Clean air is a public good, but so are low

<sup>181</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

<sup>182</sup> Telephone interview with respondent who is an outreach worker with street injection-drug users in a city in Northern Ontario. May 2001.

<sup>183</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from urban neighbourhood. Respondent is active in the local business improvement association and local area resident. April 2001.

<sup>184</sup> Nikolas Rose. "The death of the social? Re-figuring the territory of government" (1996) 25 *Economy and Society* at 333.

energy costs... Struggles over the public interest are not between civil society on the one hand and bad guys on the other but within civil society itself.<sup>185</sup>

## D. Summary

Governance through community is based on the idea of inclusive, intentional, conscious membership. This conceptualization of community does not take into account that many communities are formed by exclusion, strengthened by conflict or exist largely because they have been named by external forces. Communities are by definition exclusive; their boundaries and their differences from others are a crucial means of maintaining identity. Conflict is not necessarily bad – it both helps communities to galvanize and it serves as a means to define issues of public good in the broader society – but concerns exist over the fragmentation of society into separate community enclaves, each clamouring for its specific rights. The language of community does not address the inherent inconsistency in seeking to support “strong communities” while at the same time seeking to promote social cohesion to bridge differences among communities.

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<sup>185</sup>

Thomas Carothers, "Think Again: Civil Society" 117 *Foreign Policy* (Winter 1999-2000) Policy 18 – 29 at 20.

## V. Representation/Participation

How are communities represented in their interactions with the state and the surrounding society? Who speaks for communities and how do these individuals emerge?<sup>186</sup> Much community development literature presents a common sense approach to answering these questions: community leaders are individuals, it is suggested, who have been members in a community for a long period of time and have been involved in a number of community issues over the years<sup>187</sup>. The characteristics which define a good community leader include a broad and mature perspective, an ability to keep the community focused on the collective mission, and an ability to sustain a sense of community through the implementation of projects and initiatives.<sup>188</sup> While the literature thus describes leadership with relative ease, it is more difficult to describe the complex process of how leaders come into being and how they represent their constituents. As the respondent from an internet community noted: "leadership comes from the strangest places."<sup>189</sup>

### A. Leadership and Individual Initiative

It is, indeed, one of the paradoxes and dilemmas of the literature on community, that while it is the interests of a collective which are at issue, those interests are very often voiced or even determined by a small handful of people, or indeed a single person. Richardson has

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<sup>186</sup> Joan Nuffield, *Issues in Urban Corrections for Aboriginal People: Report on a Focus Group And an Overview of the Literature and Experience* (Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada, 1998).

<sup>187</sup> Nigel H Richardson, *Sustainable Communities Resource Package* (Ottawa: Ontario Round Table on Environment and Economy, 1994) (<http://www.web.apc.org/users/ortee/scrp/index.html>) accessed Jan. 17, 2001.

<sup>188</sup> Richard E. Sclove, Madeleine L. Scammell, and Breena Holland, *Community-Based Research in the United States: An Introductory Reconnaissance, Including Twelve Organizational Case Studies and Comparison with the Dutch Science Shops and the Mainstream American Research System* (Amherst, Massachusetts: The Loka Institute, 1998).

<sup>189</sup> In-person interview with respondent active in local and Canada-wide internet community. Respondent is consultant and writer specializing in setting up and participating in online web-based communities. April 2001.

written: “[The] essential initiative and leadership usually starts with one person, or at most a small group, with the will and the sense of responsibility to try to change their community’s future.”<sup>190</sup> This interesting relationship between individual initiative and group interest was captured by the respondent from the eco-housing community who explained:

One person had the vision to do something different and found out about the cohousing process through a book. We did outreach, got 8 people, and started a joint venture with a developer.<sup>191</sup>

Similarly, the respondents from the injection drug users community-building initiative and the community of sex workers noted:

[All of our work] started from one person in the injection-drug user community who asked for it, and one person...who started funding it under the table.<sup>192</sup>

and

Sometimes people become leaders by joining an existing sex worker organization and taking on key roles and developing new programs. There are also leaders who get known by the broader public, who are asked to speak on issues about the sex trade or speak about sex workers in studies such as this one. I think the people who are most respected and successful as leaders in terms of what they can accomplish could be grouped in all of those categories – they have the respect of individual sex workers, they are involved in organizations, and they are also those who speak out to the public in various ways.<sup>193</sup>

The respondent from the internet community also recognized the central role of a handful of people in creating community:

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<sup>190</sup> Nigel H Richardson, *Sustainable Communities Resource Package* (Ottawa: Ontario Round Table on Environment and Economy, 1994) (<http://www.web.apc.org/users/ortee/scrp/index.html>) accessed Jan. 17, 2001.

<sup>191</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from intentional eco-housing community in British Columbia, also involved in Canada-wide cohousing initiatives. April 2001.

<sup>192</sup> Telephone interview with respondent who is an outreach worker with street injection-drug users in a city in Northern Ontario. May 2001.

<sup>193</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

Leaders are mostly the people who are willing to take the ball and run with it – they create communities and animate them, encourage participation...<sup>194</sup>

This relationship between the broader community and a single person or a handful of committed individuals also pervades the on-going management of community affairs. For example, one respondent who, together with a few other local area parents, started a day-care centre for the children of the neighbourhood, noted that the number of decision-makers leading the centre, must, by necessity, be circumscribed:

There are annual elections of the officers and I believe that they have the motivation and support of the members..... Nine people as members of the board of directors are sufficient in order to have the points of view of a wider group of people represented and to generate new ideas. More than nine, and we wouldn't be able to make any decisions!<sup>195</sup>

For practical purposes, the respondent emphasized, decision-making must be undertaken by a smaller group. Other respondents echoed this point, such as the person from Cape Breton who remarked that, "though more involvement is always better, we can often get more done with 15 people than we can with 75."<sup>196</sup>

Conversely, not all members of the community want to be involved in decision-making. The sex worker noted that the number of activists in the community, compared to the overall population of sex workers, constituted a tiny fraction:

In terms of the sex workers rights community, across Canada there are about 10 key people, and there are fewer than 100 people involved in any comprehensive capacity.... The leaders try as much as possible, but it can be difficult because there are such a small number of leaders in relation to a very large community,

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<sup>194</sup> In-person interview with respondent active in local and Canada-wide internet community. Respondent is consultant and writer specializing in setting up and participating in online web-based communities. April 2001.

<sup>195</sup> E-mail survey with respondent from francophone community. Respondent was instrumental in organizing local urban neighbourhood to provide community-based child-care services. July 2001.

<sup>196</sup> In-person interview with respondent from Cape Breton. Respondent is community development worker In Sydney, Nova Scotia. March 2001.

many of whom do not have formal connections with the formal movement or any interest in it.<sup>197</sup>

In some communities there is fear of involvement. In others, there is simply a lack of motivation. Members must have a reason to be involved or perceive some benefit accruing from their involvement in the public life of the community. As the respondent speaking about internet communities pointed out,

There has to be a practical reason to be online – it's important in understanding how communities work. With the collective sphere, people need a motivation to enter – that might be that they can collaborate, be better organized – that can have a concrete work impact, which is usually what's required as a motivator.<sup>198</sup>

If community membership is voluntary and not mandatory or coerced, most individuals will remain passive unless they perceive a concrete need for their participation. Putnam posits that it is in this perception of what constitutes self-interest that distinguishes healthy communities from those which are less successful: “in communities that are rich in social capital, civic norms sustain an expanded sense of ‘self-interest’ and a firmer confidence in reciprocity.”<sup>199</sup> Members in a healthy community have a broader understanding of the benefits from participation, he argues. In such communities, a general public benefit can also be construed as serving self-interest.

Without a handful of active community members to organize and animate the public life of the community, the group can wither. Leaders often fill a role that the community wants and needs but which few individuals are prepared to fill themselves “Usually, if somebody wants

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<sup>197</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

<sup>198</sup> In-person interview with respondent active in local and Canada-wide internet community. Respondent is consultant and writer specializing in setting up and participating in online web-based communities. April 2001.

<sup>199</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2000) at 349.

something organized, they call one of us - most people just want to show up.”<sup>200</sup> This same state of affairs was reported by our respondent from the isolated rural Saskatchewan town, who commented that once the community elected its leaders, “they pretty much let us do whatever we want. They come to us if there is something crucial to be done.”<sup>201</sup> The absence of these animators may signal the collapse of the community, but conversely, without the community, these active individuals would have no basis for their activity. John McMurray, philosopher of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, whose work is often cited as a theoretical foundation of ‘third way’ community policies, has illustrated the contradictory role of those who serve:

If we say that goodness consists of serving the community, then everybody must serve. If I want to serve other people, I can’t do it unless they are willing to be served. If everybody is to serve, then there is nobody to accept this service. We cannot be unselfish if nobody is willing to be selfish.<sup>202</sup>

Leaders need members as much as members need leaders. Leaders in communities thus play a sensitive role: they are both animators and representatives, taking initiative yet themselves dependent on a broader constituency without whom they lack the legitimacy to act. They create community and at the same time are accountable to it: they are not acting at their own behest. The respondent from Cape Breton captured this delicate relationship, noting that in this community a workable balance had been struck: “some very strong leaders take the lead – but they get a lot of input from the community. They always see a need for it before they act on anything, so in a sense [the initiative] always comes from the community.”<sup>203</sup>

<sup>200</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from Latin American community active in both local and Canadawide initiatives. Respondent is community organizer and activist. April 2001.

<sup>201</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from a northern, rural, isolated island community of about 2000 people, with a significant First Nations population. Respondent is active in community organizations and a municipal politician. May 2001.

<sup>202</sup> Samuel Brittan “Tony Blair’s real guru” 10 New Statesman at 19.

<sup>203</sup> In-person interview with respondent from Cape Breton. Respondent is community development worker In Sydney, Nova Scotia. March 2001.

## B. Representing or Capturing Community Interest

Where then do leaders come from? In communities where no formal processes of representation exist – and even in those where there are formal processes – the literature recognizes that it is largely through self-selection that leaders emerge in communities. Those who are willing, able and inclined to devote their time and energy to community public life are those who become the community's representatives.

As one respondent noted, active leadership in the community was a matter of commitment of time, energy, knowledge and expertise:

...people leading the community organizations are the people who are willing to give of their own time, which is a really significant thing... People become leaders simply by jumping in and becoming involved. Some people created their own projects and got involved that way.

Further adding that

It has to do with how many meetings you can stand.... I've been in my position for a long time, but it's an elected position, and any time anybody wants it, they can have it – I'd probably just give it to them.<sup>204</sup>

Similarly the respondent from the internet community commented that:

[it is] important for the leader to have expertise, the ability to provide knowledge, or the ability to encourage it to be provided by others, because right now internet communities are all about words, and you get respect for being smart and helpful – that's really key... Leaders are those who are confident and smart...<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from urban neighbourhood. Respondent is active in the local business improvement association and local area resident. April 2001.

<sup>205</sup> In-person interview with respondent active in local and Canada-wide internet community. Respondent is consultant and writer specializing in setting up and participating in online web-based communities. April 2001.

Notably, in much of the literature on community development, the position of ‘community leader’ is seldom associated with an elected official – mayor, councillor or higher-level representative – but rather placed in opposition to official structures. Jane Jacobs has captured this adversarial relationship of community leaders with officials in her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*: “Sometimes the city is not the potential helper, but the antagonist of the street, and again, unless the street contains extraordinarily influential citizens, it is usually helpless alone...”<sup>206</sup> When asked who the community’s leaders were, the respondent from Cape Breton, a community development worker, echoed this skepticism of elected representatives:

That’s a tricky question. There are certain leaders in the community development field, such as... [some] Catholic priests [who] have a large say because of the Antigonish cooperative movement. Some say politicians are the leaders, but that’s a whole different story. [Community development leaders] support community projects, see the flaws in the top-down government projects that have plagued the community for the last 70 years. These leaders are in organizations and the organizations have boards... They try not to have typical politicians or other business leaders as board members, they try to have miners, housewives, and small-business owners.

And

We have always made kings out of our politicians ... [This reliance on our leaders] can cause a lot of problems because people expect them to do more and more, and people become dependent and passive.<sup>207</sup>

The image of committed individuals drawn from regular life to represent their neighbours and cohorts in finding appropriate solutions for the common good – in contrast to a distant politician – is powerful. The re-jigging of government as a process of tapping into the energies and creativity of active members of the community has become a common theme in outreach

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<sup>206</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*. (New York: Random House, 1961) at 124.

<sup>207</sup> In-person interview with respondent from Cape Breton. Respondent is community development worker In Sydney, Nova Scotia. March 2001.

materials of government agencies. The City of Toronto promotes civic engagement in city affairs thus:

People want to get involved and have input into decisions that affect their own lives and the strength and vitality of their communities.<sup>208</sup>

Similarly the government of Canada declares its “commitment to ensure and encourage Canadians’ participation in and contribution to Canadian society...” and its desire “to promote citizens’ participation and engagement in Canadian society through volunteering and community involvement.”<sup>209</sup>

Rose has suggested that in this language, leadership and management of community affairs are placed outside of the institutional framework of representative democracy. The effectiveness of the traditional public service is called into question, while the infrastructure of communities is presented as more appropriate for making decisions about public affairs and the disposition of public funds.<sup>210</sup> This infers a profound suspicion of state bureaucracy: civil servants – social workers, land-use planners, public health officers – are no longer perceived to be acting in the public interest, but are, at best, inefficient and inflexible and, at worst, an oppressive force. There is a sense that leaders, drawn from regular life, care more about outcomes; and are more accountable to a constituency which is ‘closer to home.’

In reality, the means by which communities are represented and the relationships which civic leaders have with their wider communities are less straightforward. Leaders may not only

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<sup>208</sup> City of Toronto. “Building the New City of Toronto: Reflections on Civic Engagement” (Toronto: City of Toronto. 1998-200) [http://www.city.Toronto.on.ca/civic\\_engagement/home.htm](http://www.city.Toronto.on.ca/civic_engagement/home.htm) accessed on July 22, 2001.

<sup>209</sup> Canadian Heritage, “Community Partnerships Program” (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2000) <http://www.pch.gc.ca/cp-pc/partners.htm> accessed 24/5/01.

<sup>210</sup> Nikolas Rose, “Community, Citizenship and the Third Way (2000) 43 *American Behavioural Scientist* 1395-1411.

have the collective interest in mind, but may also act in their own self-interest; individual and group interests may not always overlap perfectly; accountability may be lacking; dissenting voices in the broader community may not be heard. There is no guarantee that individual community leaders will be more responsible or responsive than elected leaders. Cottrell, discussing ethnic communities, posits that while leadership may develop from the 'grassroots' as a result of an organic process of a community coming together to express their shared needs, a community may also be the outcome of the entrepreneurial activity of 'elites' who engage in community building for the entrenchment of their own power positions.<sup>211</sup>

This capture of the community's interest by self-appointed leaders is a phenomenon that is recognized as a problem in community development literature. The 'do-gooder' or 'professional' community activist, by virtue of her or his greater commitment of time or personal resources, as members of volunteer committees or on community boards, can come to speak on behalf of the entire community:

A well-recognized dilemma is how to move beyond engaging self-appointed leaders and those most vocal within the community to enable widespread participation of the real community.... many community members lack the confidence, self-esteem, skills and resources that professional workers may take for granted. Community development must therefore be viewed as a long-term process.<sup>212</sup>

As mentioned earlier, it is often those people who have the time, energy and capacity who take on the active leadership roles. Not surprisingly, research in the United States has shown that there tends to be a bias in favour of the participation of more affluent individuals in community processes:

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<sup>211</sup> Cottrell, cited in Raymond Breton, *The Governance of Ethnic Communities: Political Structures and Processes in Canada* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

<sup>212</sup> Nigel H Richardson, *Sustainable Communities Resource Package* (Ottawa: Ontario Round Table on Environment and Economy, 1994) (<http://www.web.apc.org/users/ortee/scrp/index.html>) accessed Jan. 17, 2001.

Associational ties benefit those who are best equipped by nature or circumstance to organize and make their voices heard. People with education, money, status, and close ties with fellow members of their community of interest will be far more likely to benefit politically under pluralism than will the uneducated, the poor and the unconnected. As long as associationalism is class biased, as virtually every study suggests it is, then pluralist democracy will be less than egalitarian.<sup>213</sup>

Carothers similarly notes that decision-making processes which incorporate community participation can in fact reinforce bias as articulate and well-placed individuals usurp the process to secure their own interests at the expense of others.<sup>214</sup>

### C. Public Life and Vitality

The capture of community interest cannot be prevented through formal controls and is a challenge for the state in structuring relations with communities. There is no way to distinguish, except in each particular circumstance, whether a leader is ‘authentic’ or behaving in her own self-interest. When does altruistic organizing turn into unscrupulous self-aggrandizement? How can accountability be assured? Formalized processes are difficult to instill and, as noted earlier, when put in place such mechanisms often change the very nature of the community in question. As the sex worker respondent noted in her community:

There is no formal mechanism for accountability – except for the handful of organizations incorporated as nonprofits.<sup>215</sup>

The community development literature suggests that it is through greater participation by a greater number of people to generate a wider public discourse in the public realm that shared interests are defined and better served. When more people are involved in public life, extremist

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<sup>213</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2000) at 340.

<sup>214</sup> Thomas Carothers, 1999.

<sup>215</sup> Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker and activist. May 2001.

views are tempered; a 'civic middle ground' is achieved.<sup>216</sup> The more leaders and 'animators', the better off the community is.

This notion of a vibrant community being marked by a plurality of voices and a diversity of leaders was underscored by the respondent from the gay/lesbian/transgendered community, who talked about the importance of having leaders drawn from a variety of backgrounds – academia, art, AIDS advocacy, and activism. This respondent further noted that

One of the greatest debates in the gay/lesbian community is who's accountable and who's not – how much responsibility should we take for this and how much for that, and so on....There is a recognition that there's always people on the margins. As long as the debate keeps going on, at least we don't solidify and say 'This is the way it is.'<sup>217</sup>

Similarly, the layers of participation of members of the intentional eco-community reflect the notion that a vibrant community consists of an active membership, engaging in the public life of the collective whether through undertaking seemingly trivial tasks or becoming involved in overtly political processes. The respondent informed us that their community enjoys

Various levels of participation. We all participate in making decisions at the monthly meetings, and co-housing processes are fully participatory in all areas of management and maintenance. Everybody, including the children, participates in maintenance such as gardening, recycling, and painting. A few people take more initiative than others, but basically, with cohousing, the community becomes the leader. Everyone does their part, and a huge abundance of participation is given. We break up into subteams, coordinate those subteams separately, have separate areas.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>217</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. Respondent is community outreach worker at a community centre that caters to the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. June 2001.

<sup>218</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from intentional eco-housing community in British Columbia, also involved in Canada-wide co-housing initiatives. April 2001.

While the normative 'pro-community' literature does highlight this need for widespread participation within the community, an important point that is often overlooked is that this participation consists of internal debates, conflicts, and controversies that shape the community.

Breton notes that

The ethnic community is an arena in which rival groups may confront each other over economic interests, political philosophy, organizational prerogatives, social status and whatever resources the collectivity has to offer...<sup>219</sup>

Community does not necessarily suggest cohesion or unity. It is inaccurate to assume that the existence of a community indicates order. Breton notes that the absence of debates and public discourse rather indicates a lack of vibrancy:

Community necessarily involves social and economic differentiation and, consequently, different and more or less divergent interests... when there are no controversies and debates over the state of affairs and possible courses of action, that is when there are no public issues, little is happening in the community...<sup>220</sup>

The divisions and differences existing within community were explicitly recognized by the respondent speaking of the gay and lesbian community. In a community marked by its diversity, the respondent noted that "there is a recognition that there are always people on the margins" and "there are so many different kinds of people in the community."<sup>221</sup> Debates and controversies are not necessarily negative; the important question to consider when attempting to assess a community's vigor is how the community manages these public debates and discussions:

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<sup>219</sup> Raymond Breton, *The Governance of Ethnic Communities: Political Structures and Processes in Canada* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) at 4.

<sup>220</sup> Raymond Breton, *The Governance of Ethnic Communities: Political Structures and Processes in Canada* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) at 4.

<sup>221</sup> Telephone interview with respondent from the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. Respondent is community outreach worker at a community centre that caters to the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. June 2001.

Social cleavages and opposition, instead of being considered obstacles to or destroyers of community, should be regarded as essential ingredients of the public affairs of any community... The crux is how they are dealt with that determines the health of a community. Claims of solidarity and 'single community interest' are often made for political reasons, not because of 'reality.'<sup>222</sup>

This presents, again, another paradox of community: while in each particular case, conflict and controversy can lead to the collapse of a community, from a broader perspective, it is through debate and discussion in the public sphere that communities remain vibrant. Conversely, it is in those groups where there is no debate or public discussion that the community lacks strength. The respondent who discussed the street injection-drug users community illustrated the problems facing a community with a dormant public life. This individual reported that:

One of the long-term goals of my program, my mandate, is to work with people to try to build a community so they become active in it... When I first was working with the needle exchange, my co-worker and I started a street paper for the community, but nobody wanted to contribute, and we were doing all the writing ourselves. We finally folded the paper.<sup>223</sup>

When there is no news, there is little life.

## D. Social Capital

The conclusion that the hallmark of vibrant community is more active participation by a greater number of members brings us full circle to the language of governance through community which assumes that through activated membership, stronger communities build a positive sense of belonging and connection to society. The work of Robert Putnam promotes this notion, suggesting that the existence of active networks is critical to a community's success. The network need not be political in the broad sense – focused on influencing decision-making

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<sup>222</sup> Raymond Breton, *The Governance of Ethnic Communities: Political Structures and Processes in Canada* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) at 4.

<sup>223</sup> Telephone interview with respondent who is an outreach worker with street injection-drug users in a city in Northern Ontario. May 2001.

– but he suggests, it is through active engagement in the public sphere that a community is able to engage effectively in public affairs. Putnam writes:

Research has found...that communities with strong social networks and grassroots associations are better at confronting unexpected crises than communities that lack such civic resources... Social capital, the evidence increasingly suggests, strengthens our better, more expansive selves. The performance of our democratic institutions depends in measurable ways upon social capital.<sup>224</sup>

What remains unclear is whether such social capital can be externally generated in communities which lack a vibrant public life. Can the state intervene in communities to engender social capital? It would appear that the task is more difficult than the rhetoric suggests.

## E. Summary

The paradox of community activation and animation is that it is the result of individual initiative. While legitimate leaders represent and speak for the interests of people who may otherwise have no voice, the capture of community interest by self-appointed spokespeople or “do-gooders” can also occur. In considering the external intervention in community by the state, it is difficult to protect against this capture of community interest except in particular instances. Formal methods of control for determining ‘authenticity’ are not possible. It is suggested in the literature and anecdotally that a remedy exists in ensuring a multiplicity of active participants, spokespeople, and leaders to ensure public discourse, debate and indeed, conflict, which should not be perceived as negative.

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<sup>224</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2000) at 349.

This conclusion closely parallels the arguments of Robert Putnam on the importance of social capital to a healthy community, but there are serious impediments to the state in its attempt to engender such social capital.

## VI. Concluding Remarks

The language of community proposed that the activation of community as a political objective involves not just consultation – bringing communities into public processes – but equally the stimulation of community. It involves generating participation through promotion of volunteerism and charitable activity; engaging community members to provide support and services to meet the collective needs and represent the interests of the group; encouraging groups to care for and take responsibility for the public domain by watching over and managing the playgrounds, parks, schools, community centers, hospices and libraries which serve the community.

It is understood that there are multiple benefits to be had from drawing communities into processes of governance. The inclusion of isolated or marginal members of society; improved social cohesion; the delivery of services which are tailored to the needs of real people at lower cost; and the restoration of a sense of shared values and belonging. Any and all of these advantages may be the result of activating communities in governance.

While the language of community is tinged with nostalgia for a simpler past, it is also founded upon a belief that we live in a new world which has been radically altered by the information revolution. Boundaries are porous, social relations have been disembedded from place and time, and the ties of work and family have become fluid and unstable. Communities

are no longer static and inert but multiple, open and over-lapping and an individual's relationship to community is flexible, active and intentional. One can choose one's affiliations. Correspondingly, old forms of governance based on an invariable, paternalistic state no longer obtain. Governance through community – a new form of partnership between community and the state – is thus appropriate.

There is a tension which runs through this investigation of the language of community in Canada. It is undertaken with the recognition that, as the past half-century has demonstrated, insulated, bureaucratic processes of governance have not only produced questionable outcomes and arguably hindered individual initiative, they have also proven to be politically unacceptable and have resulted in the emergence of powerful social movements based in communities. Community involvement is thus not only salutary but a political reality. Voting for local, provincial and federal representatives is no longer enough; participation is also necessary. On the other hand, the adoption of governance through community as a response to the breakdown of the welfare state, is also fraught with difficulty. Community, as such, is indefinable except in the particular, unstable, inherently exclusionary, and difficult to reconcile with systems of representative government.

To a certain extent, the 'new' policies of governance through communities associated with Tony Blair's 'Third Way' and George W. Bush's 'Compassionate Conservatism' have been implemented in Canada for decades – certainly since the establishment of an official policy on multiculturalism in 1971. There are basic assumptions underlying this language, however. There is a supposition that communities are more than simply a sociological reality, a by-product of the social nature of human beings. Communities are invested with 'goodness'. They are a positive force. There is a similar assumption that community is a more natural locus than traditional political institutions for addressing issues of collective concern. The affinities and

shared values of community will produce decisions which are more appropriate to collective needs. Finally, the language of community balances on a certain edge between the assumption that communities are good, strong and should be given power over public tasks and the notion that communities need to be activated and assisted. This highlights an important point: that effective communities do not just happen. Not all communities have the right kind of 'social capital'

This paper highlighted some of the inconsistencies of these assumptions. Consultation and activation of community may not result in the optimum provision of public goods; the protection of local or specific community interest may cause an undersupply of public goods, a carving-up of the public interest. Secondly, the assumption that community is more 'natural' or better at managing public resources must be critically examined. It is based in community development approaches popularized in the 1960s which focused on giving marginal groups a voice in decision-making, and tinged by a sentiment which is profoundly opposed to experts and bureaucrats. Does it make sense, however, to channel funds into the community sector for training and capacity building when, at the same time, financial support for public services – parks, libraries, public transportation and public housing, for example – is being reduced? Is the investment in community capacity in fact the creation of a parallel bureaucratic machinery?

The assumption that community is good or a positive force must also be examined critically. Communities do not necessarily represent the public good; rather they represent a range of equal and often opposing 'goods.' While sex work is reviled by many in society, the claims and interests which that community promotes are as legitimate as those of the Canada Family Action Coalition, a conservative Christian organization. The weakness of a model of governance based on citizenship in community is that it becomes difficult to establish universal values according to which some communities can be criticized. In Canada's multi-cultural and

diverse state this clash of equal and opposing communities has seen expression, for example in the antagonism between Greek and Macedonian communities at the time of the establishment of the Macedonian state during the collapse of the Yugoslav Federation in 1992 and the ongoing animosity between some religious communities and the gay community; these are merely high-profile examples of communities in dispute, each laying claim to the public good. The public good is not determined by individual communities but defined and winnowed down in the debate and public discourse between and among different communities. As such, the belief in improved social cohesion through investment in community misses the point. Activating communities may not necessarily bridge differences among people. The vibrancy of Canadian society is not inherently threatened by debate and conflict among communities, rather by how such debates are managed.

Finally, the recognition that not all communities are effective leads to an important question about whether it is possible for the state to strengthen or engage in communities through external intervention. Can vibrant communities be created? Is it possible to make community both the target and instrument of government policy at the same time allowing it to maintain its independence within civil society? This paper highlighted a number of the practical difficulties associated with such a policy.

First, while the language of community equally embraces geographical and virtual communities, in fact place is not a neutral factor. Government exists spatially and borders are important and limiting. In particular, the state must incorporate a more comprehensive – and critical – understanding of the cross-border implications of investing in ethnic, and other, communities of identity, beyond the borders of the nation state.

Accessibility to and control of the community's architecture or infrastructure is also important in both place-based communities and in virtual communities. The meaningful participation of community members – whether locally or on-line – occurs in sites which are accessible and encourage active engagement and not merely passive consumption.

Further, the notion that contemporary communities are based on individual agency and personal desire does not take into account that membership in communities may not necessarily be a matter of choice or personal agency. Not all individuals can afford – or have the capacity – to choose their affiliations. In the absence of a universal social system, citizenship through community may thus further exclude people on the margins of society. There is thus a friction which must be recognized between, on the one hand, engaging people in community to take control of their own lives and imposing values on them. The extent to which communities are built on exclusion and conflict as much as inclusion and shared values has similarly not been recognized in the conceptualization of governance through community.

There are, finally, a number of practical difficulties for the state in engaging with communities: the difficulty in recognizing of legitimate community, problems in identifying authentic representatives and leaders with whom to consult, potential deficiencies in formal structures and accountability, the lack of homogeneity and the fact that unanimity is ephemeral. Within communities there must always be those who disagree. While managed debate, conflict and discussion is at the heart of a lively community, it also makes interaction between the state and community a difficult proposition. While social capital, strong networks, a multiplicity of active and engaged leaders make for a healthy community, it remains a question whether these traits can be generated externally through a government policy of community activation.

# APPENDIX A

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## APPENDIX B

# SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

The following is a list of people who have been interviewed for this report.

1. Telephone interview with respondent involved in both local and Canada-wide organizing of sex workers. Respondent is sex worker. May 2001.
2. Telephone interview with respondent from Latin American community active in both local and Canada-wide initiatives. Respondent is community organizer and activist. April 2001.
3. Telephone interview with respondent from a northern, rural, isolated community of about 2000 people, with a significant First Nations population. Respondent is involved in municipal affairs and active in regional community initiatives. May 2001.
4. Telephone interview with respondent who has worked as an outreach worker with street injection-drug users in Northern Ontario community. May 2001.
5. In-person interview with respondent from Cape Breton. Respondent is community development worker in Sydney, Nova Scotia. March 2001.
6. In-person interview with respondent active in local and Canada-wide internet communities. Respondent is consultant and writer specializing in establishing online communities. April 2001.
7. Telephone interview with respondent from intentional eco-housing community in British Columbia who is also involved in Canada-wide co-housing initiatives. April 2001.
8. Telephone interview with respondent from urban neighbourhood. Respondent is active in the local business improvement association and local area resident. April 2001.

9. Telephone interview with respondent from the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. Respondent has worked community outreach worker at a community centre that caters to the gay/lesbian/transgendered community. June 2001.
  
10. E-mail survey with respondent from francophone community. Respondent was instrumental in organizing local urban neighbourhood to provide community-based child-care services. July 2001.

# APPENDIX C

## SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Members of a variety of Canadian communities were engaged in structured conversations to discuss their understanding and experience of living and operating within their own community. The information gathered through these conversations was used to supplement information drawn from the literature review. The list below represents general themes that were addressed during interviews and is not exhaustive.

### **Introduction**

1. How long has your community existed or been active?
2. How was your community formed?
3. How many members are there in your community?

### **Participation/representation**

1. Who are the leaders in your community?
2. How did they become leaders? What makes them leaders?
3. How do the leaders communicate with other community members?
4. Does your community meet formally on a regular basis?
5. Do members of the broader community get involved in making decisions?
6. How is participation supported or encouraged?
7. Are the leaders responsive and accountable to community members?
8. How could the decision-making and leadership structure be improved in your community?

### **Top-down/bottom-up**

1. Is your community recognized in any way by any level of government?
2. How could the relationship between government and your community be improved?

3. How dependent is your community on money or other help from outside the community itself? What are those resources, who provides them, and how?
4. Who manages the resources in your community?

### **People/place**

1. What are the geographical boundaries of your community? Are those boundaries important? Why or why not?
2. Is the physical environment in which your community exists important to your community? Why?
3. What kind of physical places, if any, are important to your community?
4. Is your community defined more by its members – who they are – or by physical location?
5. Where do you tend to encounter other members of your community, and under what circumstances (e.g. social functions, chance encounters on the street, pre-arranged meetings, etc.)?
6. What are the qualities of your community's physical environment that, if improved, might have an affect on the quality of your community? How would it be improved, and why would that be so?
7. What keeps you linked to other members of your community? What do you have in common?

### **Exclusion/inclusion**

1. Is there a need to gain new members in your community? Why?
2. How do people gain membership to your community?
3. Are there people who meet all the criteria to be members of your community and yet are not members? Why or why not?
4. How does your community interact with non-community members?

## APPENDIX D

# BIOGRAPHIES OF RESEARCHERS

Hannah Evans has experience in both program implementation and research on issues relating to civil society and community revitalization with a particular focus on the post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Recent written work includes *Local Development and the European Union: How the EU Structural Funds Affect Community* (Via Foundation, 2000) and "Regional Development, Civil Society and European Union Accession: Regional Policy in Transition in the Czech Republic" (2000). Evans speaks English, French and Czech fluently and possesses a Masters degree from the York University Faculty of Environmental Studies.

Eric Advokaat has expertise as an educator, researcher and facilitator of community and planning issues. Recently, he has been involved in the design and facilitation of a multi-stakeholder workshop on municipal solid waste, strategic planning for the Ministry of Health, the Toronto Joint Citizen's Committee for People with Disabilities and the St. James United Church. His area of interest focuses on community as a space for conflict management and collaboration. He speaks English and French fluently. Advokaat possesses a Masters degree from the York University Faculty of Environmental Studies.