The Pursuit of the Future of Community Development

Does the future happen or do we bring it about? As Community Development Society's 50th Anniversary approaches, we as community development professionals must address how we bring about better futures for our communities. In today's communities, there remain great opportunities to be discovered and great opportunities to be created by community development professionals. We must pursue the future, not wait for it to come to us.

This twenty-second issue of Community Development Practice provides approaches, insights, and tools that can help us bring about better futures for our communities. It is easy for us to be divided, to turn on each other, and to hoard resources. The articles in this issue challenge us to come together and invite others into our community development work. As a community of community development professionals, we need to come together and invite others into our work. Diversity, inclusion, innovation, and entrepreneurialism are needed as we, together, pursue the future of community development.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and please consider submitting your future work to Community Development Practice. I wish you all a productive and community-filled summer.

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The Future of Community Development
Chris Marko
Collaborative Property Condition Assessment for Neighborhood Change: An Example of “Community Geography” in Buffalo, New York

Abstract
Community organizations and stakeholders engaged in neighborhood stabilization through housing and real property acquisition, development, and management are served well by accurate, reliable property data. However, these needs present organizations and stakeholders with at least three key challenges: (1) data access and acquisition; (2) technical expertise; and (3) financial costs. At the same time, institutions of higher education with embedded expertise in geographic information systems (GIS) offer a potential partner to help community organizations and stakeholders overcome these three challenges. In the West Side neighborhood of Buffalo, NY, housing organizations that once found relatively affordable and quality housing are finding it financially challenging to compete for properties as demand and prices increase. The authors collected and analyzed property data to assist a community-based organization in understanding the housing market in its neighborhood to support their need for better data-driven decision-making. The authors developed and utilized a simple, effective, and cost-efficient method to collect property conditions in the field; conducted analyses of the data; and created an easy-to-use web-based mapping tool.

Keywords
community development; affordable housing; community geography; geographic information systems; data collection

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Introduction

Community-based organizations (CBOs) that focus on local housing issues require accurate and reliable real property data for many of their essential functions, including community planning, programming, and applying for grant funding. Many such organizations aim to stabilize and improve their neighborhoods through housing redevelopment, property acquisition, and affordable housing provision. Access to property data and information thus empowers these organizations by supporting their strategic planning and decision-making activities (Sawicki & Craig, 1996).

As it stands, the largest repositories of high-quality real property data in the U.S. are often local governments. Municipal and county agencies, especially tax assessors, maintain micro-level databases. These databases track individual real property tax parcels, which are linked to precise geographic boundaries, ownership records, taxable values, zoning classes, and other fundamental attributes that enable community practitioners to describe and analyze local real property conditions. Moreover, these databases tend to be updated on rolling bases, so that changes in conditions can be evaluated over time (e.g., Weaver, 2014). Somewhat problematically, however, no uniform national standards exist to govern the ways in which local governments store and make available these data. Thus, although there appears to be a trend toward “open data” portals in many large U.S. cities, real property data inaccessibility is still a major challenge for housing-oriented CBOs and other community researchers and practitioners (e.g., Kingsley, Coulton, & Pettit, 2014).

Furthermore, even when real property data are readily available from local governments, the data are generally created for agency-specific purposes. In this way, the data may not provide detailed (or any) information on issues important to housing CBOs, such as vacancy, blight, or community perception (e.g., Kingsley et al., 2014). For that reason, several well-funded community partnerships have performed large-scale property inventories to identify these and related conditions. Two examples are the Trenton, NJ Vacant Property Inventory (TVPI) (http://www.restoringtrenton.org/) and the Motor City Mapping (MCM) project in Detroit, MI (https://www.motorcitymapping.org). TVPI is a comprehensive, parcel-level survey of vacant properties in Trenton, the data from which are mapped, published, and regularly updated on an interactive mapping website. TVPI resulted from an intentional collaboration between local agencies, activists, and policy advocates that were working on vacant and abandoned properties. MCM is also an online data-mapping portal featuring multiple (specialized) property variables that resulted from a complete survey by 150 Detroit stakeholders and included property information and photographs.

While the TPVI and MCM offer models for housing-oriented CBOs to follow, it is important to note that replicating such efforts is costly. Comprehensive property surveys and the creation of online data portals clearly require financial capital; but they presumably also require inputs of more intangible forms of capital, such as social (with respect to community participation in surveys) and human (in terms of knowledge required to, among other things, collect and publish data). As such, not all CBOs have the internal capacity and expertise to facilitate these projects. Accordingly, it is useful to explore ways of creating and democratizing specialized neighborhood property data with fewer inputs. In the remainder of this paper, we describe one such exploration—a community geography exercise—from a distressed, but gentrifying, neighborhood in Buffalo, NY. More precisely, the authors collaborated with the Buffalo Neighborhood Stabilization Corporation (BNSC) to create geospatial data and databases to support organizational efforts to strengthen and stabilize Buffalo’s West Side.

Three Major Data-Related Challenges Facing Housing CBOs

To summarize the preceding section, at least three key data-related challenges face CBOs that work on housing issues:

1. Data availability.

Open data and data sharing is growing in many cities, but there are still places where local organizations have limited or restricted access to important data. And in some domains, important data are unavailable.

2. Technical expertise and organizational capacity.

Many CBOs do not have the internal technical expertise and/or capacity to collect, manage, and analyze large neighborhood datasets.

3. Cost.

A universal truth in community development practice is that funding is limited; hence, funds are not always available for data collection and analysis. The cost of obtaining commercial Geographic Information System (GIS) software for such projects is particularly burdensome, with a single use license for ArcGIS Desktop software costing $1,500.

Notwithstanding that [housing] CBOs are pivotal players in the landscape of community development (Green & Haines, 2015), when they are unable to adequately overcome the above challenges, the voices of such institutions can be softened or distorted in local political and decision-making processes and deliberations. One promising means for avoiding such outcomes and breaking down barriers is for CBOs and their constituencies to collaborate with local colleges/universities that can augment a CBO’s existing capacities and human capital.
While university-community collaborations have a long history, the growing subfield of community geography shows movement in this line of work. In short, community geography is:

An emerging subfield of geography that...[seeks] to enhance long-term community planning and decision-making by engaging residents, governments, and organizations...in geospatial problem-identification and problem-solving (Hawthorne, Atchinson, & LanBruttig, 2014: 221; emphasis added).

More specifically, community geography is “a field of inquiry in which research topics and questions are proposed by community members, groups, and organizations” (Robinson, 2010, p. 6). The overarching goal of this variety of citizen science is to:

Create spatial knowledge that [can be used] to affect positive community change, in a variety of ways, whether it is to visualize challenges and assets, improve service delivery, or more accurately identify geographic disparities (Robinson, 2010: 6; emphasis added).

Thus, community geography brings the science and technologies of geography to bear on collaborative community-based research partnerships. Above all, such partnerships adhere to the core community development principles of: representative, inclusive, and democratic processes; public education; self-help; leadership development; action research; and building sustained capacity (TX CGC, n.d.). At least one community-based partner institution must be engaged in a community geography collaboration; this partner institution shares a commitment to these principles.

For the present article, a partner was found in a housing-oriented CBO rooted in the West Side of Buffalo, NY. Explicitly, the Buffalo Neighborhood Stabilization Company (BNSC) is a “non-profit housing corporation dedicated to creating affordable housing units on...Buffalo’s West Side” (PUSH, n.d.-a). Among the activities central to BNSC’s mission are: (1) increasing access to quality, affordable housing; (2) making localized investments into infrastructure and rehabilitating vacant lots; (3) preventing gentrification and displacement of longtime residents; (4) promoting public education of local housing issues; and (5) strategically acquiring vacant housing and vacant lots for coordinated redevelopment purposes (PUSH, n.d.-a).

Recognizing that timely and reliable property data are thus essential to the BNSC’s mission, researchers affiliated with the Geography and Planning Department at the State University of New York (SUNY) Buffalo State—an anchor institution rooted in close proximity to Buffalo’s West Side—opened discussions with BNSC about opportunities for a community geography collaboration. The resulting project, many details of which are explicated below, involved field-based spatial data collection, geodatabase development, geovisualization, and spatial analysis.

Project Context: Buffalo and its West Side

Buffalo, NY is a classic case of urban decline, racked by decades of depopulation, disinvestment, and physical deterioration. Since 1950, the city has shed more than 50.0 percent of its population, and, as a result, demolished thousands of abandoned structures in hollowed out neighborhoods. It is one of the most impoverished large cities in America, with an overall poverty rate of 33.0 percent and a 53.9 percent poverty rate for children 17 and under (Rey, 2016; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015b). Buffalo remains one of the most racially and ethnically segregated cities in the United States (Frey, 2015), perhaps with the exception of the relatively diverse West Side neighborhood (Figure 1; see below).

Figure 1
Historically, Buffalo's West Side has faced challenges related to gentrification and related issues of urban living (DiNatale, 2014; Sommer, 2016). Significant influxes of public dollars supporting downtown housing (Sommer, 2016); and job growth on a highly-subsidized downtown medical campus (Watson, 2015). Arguably, though, the greatest neighborhood success story is the Elmwood Village (Figure 1). Elmwood consists of large, architecturally unique homes that straddle a vibrant commercial corridor filled with bars, restaurants, and shops. In 2007, it was named a Top 10 Neighborhood by the American Planning Association (APA, 2007). Real estate prices in Elmwood have increased rapidly in recent years, with bidding wars and cash purchases commonplace and access for many now out of reach (Epstein, 2014).

The West Side and the BNSC

The effects of upward residential prices and rising demand in Elmwood appears to be spilling over its western border and into the adjacent West Side neighborhood (Figure 1). Indeed, the West Side is now squarely in the crosshairs of buyers interested in urban living but unable to afford homes in nearby Elmwood and other high demand neighborhoods (WBFO, n.d.). In the last few years, for instance, the West Side has become one of the hotter housing markets in the city for millennials and young professionals seeking to purchase low cost (but often costly-to-rehabilitate) homes that offer the promise of amenity-rich urban living (Epstein, 2016).

As such patterns of reinvestment, which are largely driven by outsiders, continue to explode, long-term residents and neighborhood stakeholders are being forced to engage issues of gentrification and related challenges (WBFO, n.d.). Historically, Buffalo's West Side has been a distressed neighborhood—home to lower income individuals of multiple ethnicities, as well as thousands of refugees (PUSH, n.d.-b). With respect to the latter, since 2003, more than 10,000 refugees have settled in Buffalo, mainly on the West Side (Ali, 2016). As rents and sale prices increase, these ethnic enclaves that function as support systems could potentially be broken apart. For these and related reasons—both of gentrification and of property stabilization and redevelopment—organizations like the Buffalo Neighborhood Stabilization Corporation (BNSC) have established themselves as key community-based development entities on the West Side.

Among the many, diverse CBOs on Buffalo's West Side, arguably the most prominent is the BNSC. Founded in 2009, BNSC's core mission is to develop and provide affordable housing units, while working in other capacities to stabilize the West Side's property stock and make the neighborhood a high quality living environment for all of its existing residents (PUSH, n.d.-a). Toward those ends, in its signature community plan, BNSC declares a commitment to utilize "all available public and private sources to continue property acquisition to ensure a constant pipeline of available properties for new projects" (PUSH & BNSC, n.d.)

BNSC’s extant property acquisition strategy has relied heavily on the City of Buffalo’s tax foreclosure auction, as well as properties in the City's inventory and to a lesser extent the private market. In the meantime, demand for property in the neighborhood continues to escalate, rendering the supply of properties, especially at the once cost-friendly City tax foreclosure auction, very low. At its inception, which coincides with the collapse of the housing market and subsequent recession, BNSC was able to acquire properties relatively cheaply as demand for the neighborhood and these distressed auction properties was low. This allowed BNSC to have numerous options to bid on at auction, being selective in acquiring properties with lower acquisition and redevelopment costs.

Since BNSC’s founding in 2009, however, City tax auctions have seen a evident drop in the supply and increase in the costs of West Side properties. In 2009, 102 of 191 (53.4%) of properties in BNSC’s neighborhood (Figure 1) were sold. The highest sale was $80,000 but 90 of the 102 (88.2%) properties sold for less than $10,000. BNSC acquired 14 properties for a total of $33,200, an average of $2,371. By the 2015 tax auction, the number of properties at auction dropped to 60. Unlike just six years early when 47% of the property went unsold, only four (6.6%) went unsold. As it turned out, BNSC struck out at the auction in 2015, getting outbid on each property it sought to acquire. In 2016, BNSC was only able to acquire two properties from the auction.

On that backdrop, BNSC realized that it needed to update its property acquisition strategy to reflect existing market conditions in a once unsung neighborhood. The financial formula for BNSC had relied on leveraged low acquisition costs to offset high redevelopment costs. With limited funding, increases in acquisition costs—and reduced success of acquiring auction properties—invariably undermine BNSC’s goal of providing a continuous stream of affordable housing units. Consequently, BNSC wished to explore possibilities linked to purchasing properties directly from the City, and/or competing in the private market. If the organization was to be effective in these markets, however, it needed access to high-quality and timely property data, beyond that available from City agencies. As such, BNSC saw value in collaborating with SUNY Buffalo State to acquire, map, and analyze on-the-ground property data as a means to inform their decision-making processes.
Community Geography in Action

Prior to the kickoff of the community geography project, BNSC discovered that access to real property data from the City of Buffalo is limited to a rudimentary parcel-viewer that offers simple data on ownership, land use, assessed value, and other characteristics. It and other publicly accessible data are not particularly useful for CBOs that would like to analyze collections of parcels, such as their neighborhoods (Gee, 2015), as they do not offer the ability to download batch data. More so, the City’s platform does not keep data on vacancy, property conditions, or tax foreclosure auction results, all of which would allow users like BNSC to improve their geospatial problem-identification and problem-solving abilities.

On a related note, Buffalo is somewhat notorious for guarding its data, often only releasing data in response to lawsuits (Keith, 2015). The Empire Center for Public Policy, an Albany, NY-based government accountability organization, issued Buffalo an F grade for its open data efforts (Keith, 2014). New York’s other large upstate cities also fared poorly, with Albany and Syracuse earning Fs as well and Rochester earning a D. Together, these factors conspire to ensure that the BNSC faces the first of the key data-related issues identified above: data availability. The remaining two challenges—concerning technical expertise and cost, respectively—further limited BNSC’s ability to unilaterally seek data options apart from the City’s rudimentary parcel viewer. As such, a mutually beneficial community geography collaboration was born. SUNY Buffalo State researchers partnered with the BNSC to overcome fundamental data challenges in the following ways:

- Data availability. The community geography team identified priority variables that would help inform BNSC strategy.
- Technical expertise and organizational capacity. SUNY Buffalo State provided student labor, as well as computer hardware and software, to collect and organize the desired data in the field. The primary data were collected specifically to support BNSC’s self-identified goals and objectives.
- Cost. SUNY Buffalo State researchers used in-house and grant support to provide the aforementioned expertise and technological resources. In total, the financial cost to Buffalo State was $5,300: $4,800 in an undergraduate research grant to fund a student data collector, and $500 in field data collection equipment. The upshot is that effective community geography collaborations can be funded on relatively small budgets.

In order to choose the variables on which it needed the community geography team to collect data, the BNSC identified five key questions:

1. Where and how many vacant structures are in West Side?
2. What are the property conditions like in the West Side?
3. Where are the properties that have sold since 2009 at the City tax foreclosure auction?
4. Where are the properties the City has demolished in the West Side?
5. Where are all City-owned properties?

To date, the student data collectors have gathered data with respect to these questions; however, the deliverables and analyses completed thus far relate exclusively to questions 1 and 2. Accordingly, the remainder of the paper sketches out the key data products that were delivered to BNSC with respect to these two questions.

Field Data Collection

To build the data collection tool, the collaborators discussed the BNSC’s specific needs, and also surveyed “best practices” from similar property mapping projects conducted in cities experiencing similar problems as the West Side (Drake, Ravit, & Lawson, 2016; Forrest, 2015; Western Reserve Land Conservancy, 2015; Western Reserve Land Conservancy & Loveland Technologies, 2015). Subsequent to these proceedings, the project came to life as follows.

First, the team agreed that a mobile GIS application called Collector for ArcGIS was well-suited to its data collection needs. Specifically, mobile “apps” such as Collector allow project participants to collect data in the field quickly and in a consistent fashion. The goal was to record property characteristics in the field by editing an interactive map, within the Collector app, that displays the boundary and street address of each parcel (Fig. 2). The team wished for surveyors to be capable of touching a given parcel on an iPad to call up a data entry box for that parcel. From there, observations made from the public right-of-way (i.e., sidewalk or street) would be entered for a set of specific questions using drop-down menus, comments would be entered into a text box, and a picture would be taken for the parcel. Additionally, a mobile Wi-Fi device was desired to allow for live data synchronizing in ArcGIS Online. This specification would enable surveyors to track their progress on the street and view real-time progress both in the field and online through a web-based map.

1As this paper was being finalized, the Buffalo Mayor called for an open data law, although specifics on that proposal have yet to emerge (Schulman, 2017).
With the mobile app’s architecture decided, the team next had to think through the precise property characteristics to be collected. To this the collaborators determined that a useful starting point would be classifying each parcel as either containing a structure or not containing a structure (Fig. 3). Following that straightforward classification, surveyors would be asked to impute one of several perceived property uses (e.g., residential, commercial, industrial for “structure” type properties; vacant lot, park, parking lot for “no structure” type properties) for each parcel. At least one photograph was to be taken of the front of each property to support these (and any other) imputations.

For lots containing structures, occupancy status and structure condition were desired data points. Properties with obvious signs of vacancy, such as boarded windows and doors, overgrown weeds, fire damage, foreclosure notices posted to the door, or structures that were open to the elements, were to be marked as unoccupied. Unoccupied structures that had their doors and windows securely boarded and locked were to be classified as “unoccupied and secured,” while those with doors and windows un-boarded and open to potential vandalism or deterioration from exposure to the elements were to be classified as “unoccupied and unsecured” (Crump, 2003). Properties were to be marked occupied if any part of the structure had signs of occupation.

The community geography team felt that a well-established structure condition grading scale was needed to ensure that the property condition data would be reliable and valid, and so that the survey could be easily replicated to track changes in the neighborhood across time and space. The collaborators decided to adopt a property grading scheme used by the New York State Office of Real Property Services Assessor’s Manual (NYSORPS, 2002), which is used by property tax assessors throughout the state to evaluate the exterior condition of structures1. Structure conditions were to be evaluated on a scale of one (“poor”) to five (“excellent”).

Following best practices, a structure’s roof, siding, and doors and windows were to be assessed as individual components, and then an overall structure condition was assigned. Obvious evidence of recent or active major improvements to the structure (e.g., presence of building permits or new siding, paint, windows, or structural work) (Crump, 2003) was also to be recorded. For both “structure” and “no structure” properties, the presence of “for sale” or “for rent” signs, the number of street trees, and the presence of solar panels were requested, and other observations and information obtained from speaking with residents and neighbors were to be documented in a “notes” field in the mobile app.

A geodatabase was built in ArcGIS Desktop as a repository for field data. The 2015 tax assessment parcel polygon shapefile containing parcel addresses for the City was obtained from the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning’s GIS Division. New fields were added to the feature class to record the field-collected parcel characteristics. Two parcel subtypes (“structure” and “no structure”) and attribute domains for each of the fields were added to the feature class to generate the parcel classification scheme. Subtypes and domains help maintain data integrity by defining the allowable attribute values for different types of parcels, and they simplify data entry because these allowable values appear in drop-down menus for parcel characteristics in the collection application. The feature class was then shared as an editable feature layer in ArcGIS Online and a web map was configured to allow surveyors to view and edit the parcels on mobile devices.

Figure 2
The Collector for ArcGIS map interface (left) and data input window (right).
through the free Collector for ArcGIS mobile app.

After survey criteria and characteristics were determined, data collection proceeded. Four surveyors from Buffalo State’s Geography and Planning Department were involved in data collection. Some characteristics were directly observable, such as the number of street trees and the presence or absence of solar panels, “for sale” signs, and “for rent” signs. Other characteristics required the surveyor to make an informed judgment based on observations. To maintain objectivity and consistency among surveyors, a survey guide containing descriptions of each characteristic was developed for surveyors to reference in the field (see Appendix). A short classroom training session was also held whereby surveyors were shown pictures of representative structures for each structure condition, and new surveyors shadowed experienced surveyors prior to independent data collection to ensure that all surveyors were adhering to the same procedures and grading schemes and ensure properties were being evaluated accurately and consistently. Although neighborhood organizations and community members were not directly involved with data collection during this pilot study, the simple hardware (iPads or personal smartphones), software (free Collector app), and methods used allows for the survey to be replicated by organizations or stakeholders with minimal training required.

See the Appendix for the full property condition grading criteria adapted from the New York State Assessor’s Manual.
Data Collected to Date

In all, 5,143 parcels were surveyed between May and November 2015 out of 5,539 in the study area (Table 1). Of these, 4,563 parcels (82.4%) contained a structure. Of the 580 parcels with no structure present, 311 (5.6%) were “vacant lots”. Figure 4 shows the geographic distribution of all structures by overall exterior condition. Structure conditions vary across the study area, with the best overall property conditions occurring along Richmond Avenue and adjacent streets, particularly in the northeast corner of the study area. These streets contain mostly “normal” and “good” condition properties. Property conditions generally deteriorate west of Richmond Avenue. There is also a cluster of “good” and newly-constructed “excellent” properties in the southeast portion of the study area between Massachusetts Avenue and West Ferry Street. This area is in transition and has very mixed structural conditions, with many “fair” and several “poor” structures alongside properties that have recently been rehabilitated or are actively being improved. Crucially, the area is part of the West Side’s “Green Development Zone” (GDZ), where BNSC concentrates its affordable housing efforts and is widely recognized for its work. Many of the newly rehabilitated “good” and brand new “excellent” homes and apartments are properties that BNSC acquired and redeveloped.

Table 1
Summarized survey results by parcel type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parcel Type</th>
<th>Number of Parcels</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PARCELS WITH A STRUCTURE</td>
<td>4,563</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent condition</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good condition</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal condition</td>
<td>3,445</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair condition</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor condition</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARCELS WITHOUT A STRUCTURE</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant lots</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other lots (e.g. parks, parking lots, gardens):</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSURVEYED PARCELS</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>5,539</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4
Overall exterior condition for properties with a structure. Data source: Erie County Department of Real Property Tax Services (2015).
Developing an Accessible Web App

Following data collection, a web mapping application was developed to allow users to view the full property inventory data overlaid corresponding socioeconomic and housing information from US Census data. Presently, the web map is still in a pilot phase, and conversations continue with BNSC and other organizations to improve the user interface and identify additional secondary source data to be integrated. The end goal is for the application to become a robust community data repository and community engagement resource accessible to CBOs, activists, residents, and decision-makers.

The web app is on pace to be a useful tool for neighborhood groups to practice geospatial problem identification in the real property inventory, track property ownership (spatially), and visualize physical changes in the neighborhood over time. Further, it will allow organizations like BNSC to geographically target and, ultimately, evaluate the impacts of their community development efforts.

Challenges and Limitations

The data collection effort got off to a slow start due to unexpected challenges implementing the ArcGIS Online mapping application and using the iPads in the field. Transitioning between the desktop ArcGIS software, the ArcGIS Online platform, and the mobile app on the iPads was not as seamless as was originally expected, and several weeks of troubleshooting and testing the application in the field was required before the iPads were able to reliably display the survey and synchronize data.

The mobile app also had a tendency to freeze up in the field, which may have been caused in part by spotty Wi-Fi from the mobile Wi-Fi device used and the large size of the parcel feature layer which had to load on the iPads. With a larger project budget, more reliable mobile data plans could have been purchased for the iPads or surveyors could have used their smartphones connected to mobile data. The Collector app allows for pre-downloading part of a map and surveying while offline, storing edits on the device and uploading to ArcGIS Online after the device has been reconnected to the Internet, but data synchronization problems persisted even when this strategy was used. Progress was also hindered by poor weather in the early stages of the project and many field days were lost due to heavy rain, so efforts had to be redoubled in the last few weeks of the project.

Due to these delays and a tight schedule and budget for data collection and project completion, only around 81% of the parcels in the intended study area were surveyed. While some of these problems may be mitigated by finding the survey strategy which works best for an individual project and allocating ample time to test the app in the field, delays due to technical difficulties and other uncontrollable factors should be expected and factored into a project’s timeline.

On a more substantive point, occupancy status was often difficult to gauge in the field based on visual cues alone as boarded doors and windows or utility shutoff notices that would indicate vacancy are not evident on every potentially vacant property. Therefore, only 130 structures, or less than 3% of all properties with a structure, were determined to be unoccupied. The occupancy rate for the study area’s 21 constituent block groups was 20.0% in the 2011-2015 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015a), so there may be reason to view the field-collected occupancy variable with some skepticism.
Conclusions and Next Steps

Given the rapid increase in property prices and decreasing supply of tax auction parcels, the Buffalo Neighborhood Stabilization Corporation (BNSC) wishes to develop an effective spatial strategy with which to make decisions about its future activities and affordable housing projects. Within a community geography framework, researchers and students at SUNY Buffalo State collaborated with BNSC to collect novel, primary field data on real property occupancy and quality in a targeted neighborhood. The data were then turned over to BNSC as a spatial database, and published to a web mapping application for free and democratic use by the BNSC and other local residents, institutions, and decision-makers. Even though some of the objectives of the community geography collaboration have yet to be realized (see above), BNSC expressed gratitude for the data products delivered thus far, noting that mapping real property data offers them a better understanding of neighborhood market dynamics and can support decision-making in the future.

As the partnership moves forward, the community geography team members are focused on bringing the web application out of beta testing and make it readily available to the public. Team members have also expressed a desire to spatially analyze the data that were collected, to identify areas most affected by gentrification, as well as by poor property conditions. Supplementing the field data with additional secondary data is also a near-term objective, so that existing property conditions can be better understood in their demographic and socioeconomic spatial contexts.

In the longer term, BNSC recently indicated—after purchasing its first property outside of its targeted redevelopment area—that it would benefit from more data on the preferences of potential tenants. In the past, with supplies higher and with a limited geographic focus, BNSC property selection was simpler and often made without much data. However, given the large geographic area of the West Side and the varying neighborhood conditions uncovered in our property survey, BNSC sees value in matching tenant preferences to on-the-ground conditions. Thus, the team is working to incorporate additional data on crime and other known spatially-based disadvantages into its geographic information system and web application.

In sum, the ongoing collaboration between the BNSC and SUNY Buffalo State—as captured in the outputs already realized and the remaining tasks that are under way—offers an example of a workable, mutually beneficial exercise in community geography. By design, the efforts described herein—before and planned for the future are creating spatial knowledge to affect positive community change (see Robinson, 2010), and enhancing long-term community planning and decision-making (Hawthorne et al., 2014)—all on a relatively negligible budget and carried out by partners from anchor institutions that are geographically rooted in the community targeted for positive change.
Appendix

Property condition grading criteria.

Exterior Condition

This item is used to record the extent in which exterior physical condition of the residence is used as an additional value determinant. Careful consideration should be given to exterior foundation, chimneys, porches, siding, windows and roofing.

Exterior Condition Codes

1 - Poor
2 - Fair
3 - Normal
4 - Good
5 - Excellent

Exterior Condition Code Definitions

1 - Poor - This indicates that the outer surfaces are severely dilapidated and are badly in need of repair. The roof may be missing shingles or have "homemade" repairs. The siding may be rotten, have pieces missing, or be in dire need of paint. The windows may be in poor condition, have glass panes missing, or have some boarded-up openings. The foundation may be missing pieces or be sinking noticeably, and daylight may be visible from inside. This home may be "barely habitable" (depending on the interior condition) and is often found abandoned. Uncleanliness does not always indicate actual deterioration of exterior building components.

2 - Fair - This indicates that the exterior shows definite signs of deferred maintenance. The functional utility of the exterior components are somewhat diminished but the house is usable as is. Shingles may be curled, but in place. Siding may be warped and need painting, but is firmly in place. Foundation may be in need of pointing-up. It could be characterized as "needing work" i.e. new paint, siding, roof, upgraded windows, etc. Clutter or uncleanliness does not always indicate actual deterioration of exterior building components.

3 - Normal - This indicates that the exterior shows only minor signs of deterioration caused by normal "wear and tear". The residence is usable and reflects an ordinary standard of maintenance. Exterior needs only "patch and paint" to look like new.

4 - Good - This indicates that the residence exterior is in "like-new" condition. It shows no signs of deferred maintenance and reflects above normal upkeep. Older homes may have undergone major exterior remodeling, such as new roof, new siding, replacement windows, etc.

5 - Excellent - This indicates that the residence exterior does not require any work at all and appears to be in "new" condition. Usually this condition is found in expensively constructed residences that show professional care and constant maintenance.

Adapted from New York State Office of Real Property Services Assessor's Manual, Residential Building Section 8.00, pp. 48.00-49.00.
References


Radical Walking: Tool, Practice, and Implications for Community Development

Abstract
This article presents Radical Walking as an engagement tool and a process to entice individuals to examine their surroundings in more creative and holistic ways. Radical Walking as a process stems from psychogeography, which has been structured as a tool to enliven engagement in community and economic development. The article illustrates how Radical Walking was used in a multi-ethnic urban neighborhood in Kentucky, concluding with examples of outcomes and lessons for other communities interested in using the tool. Finally, the potential and limitations of Radical Walking are discussed in relation to community development practice efforts to enhance community vibrancy.

Keywords
Radical Walking, Neighborhood Development, Cultural Plan Development, Public Spaces

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Background

Conventional town hall meetings, workshops, and invited comment media have strengths and weaknesses in bringing people together to discuss issues, needs, and visions for community projects of various forms and sizes. As much as these engagement methods and strategies work for and benefit many audiences, there are other times when they may not work effectively or at all. This issue makes it challenging for community development practitioners and stakeholders to gather information and act on a complete set of community needs that should be effectively reflected in strategic planning processes. Sometimes the limitations of community development processes may make projects difficult to pursue when appropriate means to engage people in the projects do not turn out the way as practitioners intended (Cornwall, 2008).

At times, community meetings and larger gatherings can be alienating, due to the fact that they can be dominated by a handful of outspoken people, while those who are shy or reticent are often silenced. These meetings may also be difficult for those participants who are unfamiliar with agendas or who do not understand how citizens can be actively involved.

What should a community do when conventional meetings, gatherings, tools, and techniques are unsuccessful in creating change? How should one approach facilitating and leading a community vision? These key questions led to the identification and structuring of Radical Walking as a community development practice that integrates portions of a variety of mapping exercises, such as asset mapping, inventory, and cognitive mapping among others, that are utilized in a range of fields. Although asset mapping is a conventional strategy for community development, there are challenges such as mobilizing inclusive participation and changes in associations and networks of leadership and members within communities (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). To overcome limitations to gathering stakeholder input in a large setting, we reversed conventional input strategies by emphasizing the engagement of people in multiple smaller discussions in familiar groupings to explore the very environment to improve upon.
Radical Walking: A Brief History and Description

The initial concept of Radical Walking emerged from the works of Guy Debord, a French geographer and Situationist Internationalist from the mid-20th Century, who claimed that we need to recapture our understanding of everyday spaces through dérive (French for drifting or otherwise sauntering or slow walking) (Debord, 1955; 1956). Since the 1930s critical walking has been used as a mode of political inquiry and aesthetic practice. Modern planning at the time was dividing cities into functional zones around the automobile and giant shopping malls. Debord (1956) argued that we are so dependent on public or private transportation that we do not pay attention to how our public spaces attract or repel us. He wanted to bring a sense of playfulness and creativity to the environment in which individuals would move from passive acceptance of their surroundings to more active involvement. He organized walks to explore how people really lived and to provide the groundwork for revolution ary theory and practice. The walking was a drift or saunter involving an abandonment of the terrain and what one encounters there. Debord (1956) believed that small groups were preferable for these walks, with an aim to shed class and other allegiances, thereby developing a more critical attitude. The activity avoided tourist destinations and favored walks through more marginal areas of the city. Participants were open to wander in places that generated awe, joy, or terror. Debord (1956) also believed that emotions could stimulate more critical thinking about one's surroundings, which involved questioning the status quo (see also Bassett, 2004). Debord's 'The Naked City' became part of the psychogeographic practice of a form of cognitive mapping of an environment that has re-emerged in recent years.

Variations of the process have been used in Europe and large cities, such as New York, as part of development efforts or community studies with students (Bassett, 2004; Debord, 1957; Jacks, 2006; Nold, 2009). Bassett (2004) further explored the various dimensions of how walking has been used as a critical and aesthetic practice in urban areas. He worked with university students in Paris in the early 2000s, using tape recorders and cameras in multi-ethnic and gentrified areas. On their walks, students explored gender dimensions and how different genders responded to the environment. They also recorded the senses of calm/dislocation and attraction/repulsion in cartographic forms. While some groups saw sterile environments, others had different responses. Bassett (2004) suggested these walks involved an opening of eyes and ears to what they had taken for granted. The project raised the students' consciousness about Paris and significant issues they were able to recognize during the walks.

The project also prompted students to question Paris tourist guides and what they recommended visitors to see or consume (Bassett, 2004). There are many versions of Radical Walking that can enliven community and economic development work by recognizing how the use of the five senses and emotions can provide new insights, often unable to be captured through other tools that do not immerse participants directly into the community environment. The act of walking, sensory observations and natural dialogue in small groups can be intertwined to help groups explore how space, particularly public space, should address the needs of diverse groups in such areas as recreation, safety, expression, commerce and other aspects of life.

Public spaces are part of an open democracy and are essential to building strong communities. They belong to all members of the community and everyone has a right to use these ordinary public spaces, such as parks, streets, sidewalks, public plazas, or squares. Oftentimes these spaces even serve as gathering spots (Jacobs, 1961). Such public spaces can vary in temperament. For example, streets may be flexible and blocked off for temporary gatherings like parades, civic and social events, or celebrations, while murals or buildings may serve as more permanent artistic expressions. People also gather in private spaces, such as a place of worship, parking lot, or restaurant, that also serve to enliven our communities and function as shared community places. To facilitate and lead strong communities, it is necessary to identify and clarify which shared spaces should be considered. By gaining input about community spaces from those who live and work in the community, practitioners will be better equipped to support structuring shared visions. Oftentimes, shared views toward public spaces in a neighborhood or community can solidify a guiding vision to collaboratively work towards.

Radical Walking is therefore a process that includes a tool to guide, facilitate, and entice individuals within a community towards examining their surroundings in a more structured, creative, and exciting way. The Radical Walking process helps individuals see their spaces from a more holistic perspective by using their bodies as collection devices that enable them to use the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch to facilitate a better understanding of their surroundings. Our bodily senses put things together in ways that no other device can; we can map sound-scapes, smell-scapes or taste-scapes that conventional maps cannot capture. We can also map how emotions such as terror, pleasure, and joy are related to a space (Nold 2009). The emotions associated with features and aesthetics of public realms are important findings that can inform and help communities more holistically enhance the physical environment and culture of their community.
Radical Walking in Practice

Radical Walking: Tailored Engagement

The North Limestone Community Development Corporation (NoLi CDC) is a multi-ethnic urban neighborhood organization focused on development. It was established in 2013 in the North End neighborhood in Lexington, Kentucky. The ethnically diverse neighborhood is situated in a comparatively lower-income area where historical districts and gentrification are imposing threats to the neighborhood’s livelihood. After NoLi CDC discovered that community members in the area were not interested in conventional meetings such as town halls, they reached out to University of Kentucky (UK) community and leadership development and landscape architecture faculty and students to address this challenge of community engagement in their neighborhood. A Radical Walking experience was structured to set the stage for a community development project to create a cultural plan for the neighborhood. This first step, Radical Walking, was a project funded through the UK Office of Sustainability, Tracy Farmer Institute of Sustainability and the Environment, and the Student Government Association. The eventual overall cultural plan was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Knight Foundation among others (Figure 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Source</th>
<th>Roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Endowment for the Arts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Grass Community Foundation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Kentucky, Sustainability Challenge Grant (1)</td>
<td>Radical Walking (Youth, Adults)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Kentucky, Sustainability Challenge Grant (2)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Kresge Foundation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The S.L. Gimbel Foundation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Kenan Foundation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Different Collaborators from the same institution.

Figure 1. Funding sources for the overall North Limestone Cultural Plan project highlighting the relationship of Radical Walking in the project process.
Process, Tools, and Activities

Based on psychogeographical thought, the UK research team structured a Radical Walking experience into a dual-phase process: the actual walk of the neighborhood's public spaces and multiple post-walk activities. The Radical Walking project provided a structured walking facilitation guide and schedule of activities including structured mixed-method surveys, both quantitative and qualitative. These tools enabled community development practitioners to train volunteers to facilitate discussions about the community's public and/or shared spaces. Volunteers convened community participants in small groups, articulating their experiences by directly sensing and visioning ideas for the places.

Participants were asked to take a leisurely walk, lasting no more than two hours, with a group through the neighborhood's shared and/or public spaces. Although walks could be completed in a large group setting, it was concluded a best practice was to organize participants into smaller groups of three to five people. The structured walking facilitation guide in the form of a script provided a background for why and how to guide participants through an informal group walk, while still providing a formal process for sharing observations, findings, and discussions of aspects that contribute to community capacity. The script included questions that encouraged observation, articulation, critique, and visioning of one's surrounding environment, neighborhood, or workplace, particularly in the realm of shared or public spaces. The following are some overall guiding questions for the walks, particularly for the projects related to community public space:

- Where do you normally gather with others in the neighborhood?
- What do you value the most about our public spaces?
- What would you like to see changed in the community/neighborhood public spaces?
- What opportunities do we have for using our public spaces more creatively and to bring out the best in us and who we are?

Each participant used their own body and the five senses associated with emotions – sight, sound, smell, taste and touch – to collect and effectively integrate their senses with corresponding emotions when observing or learning about a particular place during the walk. Maps were provided on the walk; however, they served as more abstract devices to help participants situate themselves and understand the neighborhood or community in a fairly limited fashion. Facilitators asked participants to note both their senses and the emotions triggered as they experienced the neighborhood's built environments. The questions in the structured walking facilitation guide were delineated based on the five bodily senses (see Table 1). During the walks, participants were encouraged to discuss their observations, critiques and visions of the public spaces. After the walks, a post-walk survey questionnaire and other activities provided opportunities for community members and participants to focus on their own observations and findings without others' influence. In addition to identifying what participants sensed, participants were also directed to address what they would like to experience on a walk. In some cases, participants expressed a greater concern for safety and the need for more public art, landscaping or recreational opportunities. In other cases, they wanted changes that might only last for a few days such as a local food festival or temporary musical venue. The themes derived from the post-survey questionnaire were incorporated into the neighborhood's cultural plan for public or shared community spaces.

Radical Walking, with its shared experience yet personal nature, enabled broad participation from all segments of the community, ranging in ethnicity and age, from individuals to families, students to teachers, and long-time residents to those recently moved in. Participation also included individuals who just worked in the neighborhood and/or valued the neighborhood's public spaces and natural gathering spots.

The results of this project suggest that community leaders could use this process to reach out to individuals who may influence the future of the neighborhood, including potential stakeholders and decision-makers. It is also important to note that through this process some community members may voice their observations for the first time, providing fresh ideas and experiences that others may not have considered previously.

Available as toolkits on the following websites: (Adult) North Limestone Cultural Plan (https://www.northlimestoneculturalplan.org/) and (Youth) University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, Food and Environment’s Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky (CEDIK) (https://cedik.ca.uky.edu/community-design/tools).
### Example questions based on the five senses used as prompts during guided *Radical Walking.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense</th>
<th>Questions guiding the sensory of public spaces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>VISUAL-SCAPE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sight is typically expressed by depth or range of vision</td>
<td>A typical human’s monocular visual field ranges 30 degrees centrally to an extended 100 degrees laterally, and 60 degrees upward and 75 degrees downward from the standard line*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounds are vibrations that are picked up by tiny hair fibers in the inner ear</td>
<td>Typically, humans hear within a range of 20Hz to 20kHz **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOUND-SCAPE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smelling is a chemical sense</td>
<td>What kinds of odors do you smell in the neighborhood?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odor molecules have a variety of features that can trigger olfactory receptors</td>
<td>What smells triggered your emotions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SMELL-SCAPE</strong></td>
<td>What would a smell-scale map look like?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (Source: Spector, 1990)
** (Source: Davis, 2011)
**TASTE-SCAPE**

Taste is a chemical sense

There are four major types of taste that the tongue can detect: sweet, salt, sour and bitter

One can also taste textures, edible and non-edible items or even the saltiness of the air on the sea

What do you taste during the walk?
What tastes surprised you?

**Future**

What tastes can we enhance or add to the neighborhood?
What would you like to tell people about the tastes of the neighborhood's public spaces?

---

**TOUCH-SCAPE**

Touch involves a sense of pressure, usually with the skin

It is often expressed as a texture

What do you feel if you rub against built or non-built places in the landscape?
What do you feel when your feet touch the pavement, grass or dirt?
What does the touch of the bark on a tree, fence, wall or fountain feel like?
What happens when you experience people, animals or insects touching you or not touching you?
If you led a blind person through the neighborhood, what would you want them to touch?

**Future**

What would you like your feet to touch?
What would you change about the built or natural environment that would encourage people to touch?
Facilitation and Collaboration

The NoLi CDC collaborated with researchers at the University of Kentucky to apply Radical Walking in their neighborhood, which is situated in a contested area of the larger urban fabric. As a community capacity building and development process, the role of the facilitator for Radical Walking was essential for the effective engagement and initial empowerment stages. Facilitators were responsible for initially recruiting their peers to go on walks. They were also expected to serve as neutral guides and ask unbiased questions that were not prescriptive nor judgmental. The collaborators in the North Limestone Cultural Plan project viewed the reflections from Radical Walking as forms of storytelling that could be incorporated into the cultural plan.

Storytelling

Radical Walking enabled participants to share insights and fresh ideas that others may or may not have considered or previously voiced. Some participants shared stories about public places in the neighborhood that provided an understanding about the area’s history or sense of place. Follow-up questions during the Radical Walks also highlighted parts of the story that stakeholders vocalized should be kept alive, while other parts should be forgotten. Questions included what type of action(s) may be needed to enhance the neighborhood’s public spaces. For example, participants discussed that sidewalks were poorly maintained and unsafe in the neighborhood. In other cases, there were indications that parks were underutilized because they were not considered inviting or safe. Participants also viewed some public art as a reflection of the neighborhood’s history, while at the same time they saw other artwork as part of an external culture that was imposed on the neighborhood.

The Arts

The Radical Walking process can help groups identify and critique the types of art that are found in the neighborhood. It is well-known that public places are expressions of who we are and what we want in our communities to make us stronger. Depending on particular places or times of the year, various types of arts in the form of music, dance, visual arts, written word, street theatre, or other expressions can reflect the community’s diversity and cultures. In this project, some forms of art attracted a particular group, while others found some forms disturbing. The walks helped elucidate the types of artistic expression that stakeholders appreciated in comparison to what outsiders thought possibly reflected the neighborhood. This opportunity also highlights the enhanced artistic or cultural strengths of a neighborhood that groups may want to see in the future.

Post-Walk

After the informal group walk, participants were asked to reflect on their experience through a survey instrument and other activities as part of a structured dialogue in an enclosed meeting space. Participants placed dot stickers denoting frequently used public spaces and how they accessed them on large maps that were placed on the walls. Participants also wrote their observations about the public spaces on sticky-notes and posted them on blank sheets so others could see their remarks. They were then guided through a debrief about what they had learned. These activities were intentionally designed to provide participants with several opportunities to strengthen and articulate their experiences so they would be represented as part of the collective community perspective and vision. The survey instrument (see Table 2) has two alternative templates which

Table 2
Overview of Radical Walking survey contents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Template 1</th>
<th>Template 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRIMARY TARGET AUDIENCE</td>
<td>Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUMBER OF DISTINCT SECTIONS</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUMBER OF TOTAL QUESTIONS</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TYPES OF QUESTIONS</td>
<td>11 Open-ended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Drawing Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTICIPATED COMPLETION TIME</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
included questions reflecting the core of the community public spaces, arts project goals, and/or target audiences. One survey format balanced open-ended questions with multiple choice questions; the other was comprised of primarily open-ended questions. While Template 1 focused on youth, Template 2 targeted a primarily adult audience; however, both surveys addressed content and topics that broadened the scope of public spaces and arts in order to convey a neighborhood’s short and long-term cultural vision.

After Radical Walking

The research team, along with NoLi CDC, initially anticipated that participants would have conversations in their smaller groups about what they experienced during the walks and summarize their experiences through a group drawing, a short skit, or some alternative approach. However, the organizers neglected to provide an adequate framework to encourage such activities. In hindsight, the post-walk reflections should have included an activity to encourage participants to take some type of collaborative action towards making the arts become more fully alive in the neighborhood. The NoLi CDC planned to follow what groups decided to do collectively and was available to provide additional assistance if needed. The end goal and hope was that Radical Walking would build consensus through democratic participation and a greater sense of solidarity in the neighborhood.

To underscore the importance of youth involvement in the Radical Walking process, University of Kentucky landscape architecture students used the ideas from middle and high school students to develop visual plans for public spaces in the neighborhood. This effort occurred in the fall of 2015 as part of a university service-learning collaboration. The inputs from both adults and youth were reflected in the North Limestone Cultural Plan, completed by the neighborhood organization (North Limestone CDC, 2016).
Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Over the course of nine months, more than 100 walkers were guided through the neighborhood in small groups. Walkers represented a broad cross-section of the working class neighborhood - including homeowners and renters, both generational and newcomers - as well as organizations and groups who have a stake in the neighborhood: social service organizations, artists, business people, faith-based institutions, middle and high school students, teachers, immigrant groups, and city planners (see Table 3).

The walks provided community members with a visceral understanding of the neighborhood, leading to a greater awareness of public spaces and natural gathering spots. While conventional public meetings are limited in their imaginative scope, Radical Walking allowed for a more honest, emotional, and engaged reaction as it immerses participants directly in the community that is being planned for. This immersion seems to trigger memories, reactions, and thoughts more directly than traditional public meetings. In addition, the process allows individuals who might not feel comfortable engaging in a dynamic group conversation to participate as equally as individuals who feel comfortable in traditional settings.

The post-walk questionnaire and activities led to greater clarity about the issues that mattered the most to people. As mentioned earlier, the organizers should have capitalized on the Radical Walking activities with more exercises to stimulate group action. The need for neighborhood input into the cultural plan tended to overshadow the need for collective action. The organizers assumed that ‘action’ would come about after the cultural plan was published or summarized through neighborhood meetings.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of groups, stakeholders, and other participants engaged in Radical Walking in the North End neighborhood.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle school students, teachers, staff, volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school students, teachers, staff, volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education students, faculty, staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood associations and members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood/local business owners, staff, patrons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit organization staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government agency staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local religious organization members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee/immigrant groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The service-learning project conducted by the University of Kentucky landscape architecture students further utilized the ideas gathered from the youth participants. They used this information to develop a range of conceptual public space plans and designs that enhanced the spatial functions of the neighborhood. In addition, the North Limestone Cultural Plan contained 28 recommendations about local public spaces as well as proposed implementation plans as a result of the Radical Walking process (North Limestone CDC, 2016). As of the end of 2017, nine out of the 28 recommendations have either been completed or are in progress, five of which are focused on public art.

Discussion

Implications for Community Development

The overall Radical Walking process was both enlightening and energizing for the participants because it engaged their senses and ideas and eventually led to the creation of the community-wide cultural plan development effort. Participants were excited to observe the special features and characteristics of everyday spaces often taken for granted. During the Radical Walks, individuals and groups evidenced a sense of delight and pleasure in the data collection process, while also contrasting their data with each other.

Through data compilation via post-walk surveys and activities, the research team learned more about the concerns that participants wanted to address in the neighborhood as well as suggestions to support its culture and identity. These outcomes led to discussions regarding potential community-based actions about public spaces in the North End neighborhood. The walks provided a form of asset mapping by identifying the strengths or assets of the neighborhood.

The process also triggered discussions about additional data needed for cultural development as well as insights into economic development. For example, the participants recommended there should be incentives for the creation of minority-owned businesses in the neighborhood. Community members also wanted to profile, document and share stories of successful businesses within the neighborhood. They wanted to include artists in conversations about the community development process at all stages, including during conceptual planning, engagement and execution.

In essence, Radical Walking stimulated deep discussions about changes needed in the neighborhood while also strengthening the sense of neighborhood unity. These discussions led to 59 policy recommendations emerging to deal with community services; business
development; streets and sidewalks; community gardens; privately owned public spaces such as parking lots; and arts, culture and creativity. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many residents feel a stronger sense of identity with the neighborhood after the walks.

Limitations and Further Applications

The Radical Walking participation rate and number of representative groups could have been higher with an extended project timeline. Also, logistical limitations impacting participation occurred such as weather, academic schedules, and seasonal work patterns. Although the structure of the process and tool provided clear guidance, the walks were most effective when participants were given both beginning and ending point/destinations as well as a time frame, rather than being guided in a linear fashion.

It may be necessary to facilitate dozens of walks to accommodate a variety of groups in order to maximize public input. One population not adequately represented in this project, because of unsafe sidewalks and pedestrian crossings, was people in wheelchairs or otherwise physically challenged. In addition, the researchers could have introduced other aspects into the walks; for example, some walks could have been conducted with blindfolds to heighten other senses. It is important to note that research should not be confined to just the five senses. Economic, demographic and historic data were also used to complement the information gathered from the walks.

Another way to incorporate the walks into the community development plan engagement process would be as an activity during community dinners, small study groups or house meetings. Walks conducted during different seasons, weather conditions and time of day also will produce different observations. For instance, a nighttime walk during a city festival will be distinct from a quiet early morning walk, and a winter walk will differ from a summer walk. Inclement weather during a walk could affect how and what participants might experience or even lead to the cancellation of walks.

In summary, Radical Walking is a form of structured sauntering in which participants use the five senses to identify strengths and opportunities, and provide critiques about what is needed in a particular space. The walks take place in small groups which are perceived to be more people-friendly than large public meetings. It is essential that Radical Walking experiences be accompanied by post-walk reflections or surveys in order to maximize participant input.

Conclusion

Radical Walking has long been underutilized as an engagement tool in the community development process. Radical Walking can open new opportunities for community development practitioners. Instead of traditional town hall processes, which tend to reinforce already existing power dynamics in communities, Radical Walking provides a more equitable groundwork for gathering community input - creating an even playing field for participation. Furthermore, Radical Walking is a more personal and intimate form of community development planning - by validating and honoring the direct reactions that people have to the places they call home. Radical Walking's direct exposure techniques can be visceral, honest, and imaginative - a framework more closely linked to the lived human experience than a traditional town hall meeting context.
References


Debord, G. [1957]. The naked city: illustration de hypothèse des plaques tournantes en psychogéographique / G.-E. Debord. Permill &amp; Rosengren. [The illustration is housed at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.]


Abstract
This paper explores building of youth entrepreneurial spirit through education at (SCDE), University of Ghana. Considering youth unemployment problem confronting Ghana, building their entrepreneurial spirit to create jobs for themselves is one good strategy. A mixed method research design was adopted. Thus 51 students participated in the study. Purposive and convenience sampling procedures were adopted in selecting the sample for the study. Percentages and descriptive-narratives approaches were used in presenting the results. The youth largely bought into the idea of building their capacities and skills in entrepreneurship. Even as they were passionate in doing so, were equally worried about the costs of credit for start-ups and continuing education. It recommends that families, banks, higher education institutions and government should support the youth build entrepreneurial capacities to create sustainable jobs for themselves and many others.

Keywords
Youth, Education, Entrepreneurial Spirit, Empowerment, Job Creation, Development
Introduction

Unemployment has been found, globally, to be closely related to lack of adequate education. It is much more of a problem to school dropouts and to those with a minimum education than to those who have attended schools and succeeded academically (Brimley and Garfield, 2002). This observation held sway for some time due essentially to the fact that the higher education institutions were few, and the educated population at the time, were not many. Many new jobs were created to take care of the educated population. Yet, the International Labour Organisation (cited in The Economist, 2013) reports that 75m young people globally are looking for jobs. In fact, in the U.S. economy, unemployment in the late 1990s for workers 25 years and older was 7.2 percent among those who had not graduated from high school. High school graduates’ unemployment was 3.9 percent. For those with high school diplomas but less than a bachelor’s degree, it was 3.2 percent. Unemployment was only 1.9 percent for college graduates, making it absolutely clear that people with adequate education are usually able to adjust to new jobs and new occupations more easily and with less frustration than those with limited schooling (Brimley and Garfield, 2002). Africa has a population of over one billion people. One in five people are aged between (15 and 35) and this cohort constitute youth in sub-Saharan Africa. They account for 37 percent of the working-age population, yet constitute 60 percent of the continent’s unemployed (Amoaf, 2011), Ghana, as a country, admits that education is imperative and human development precedes economic development. No wonder, the Government of Ghana’s spending on education rose from GHc503 million to GHc1.7 billion between 2003 and 2011. The figure represents 18 to 27 percent of public expenditure (Kaly-Dery, 2011).

As a developing country, Ghana has a youthful population structure (33 percent) which is typical of sub-Saharan Africa, and continues to grow. Today, Ghana has in existence “Unemployed University Graduate Association.” Jonah (2011) asserts that the National Labour Commission estimates a staggering unemployed graduate figure of 700,000 to an estimated population of nearly 25 million (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, the working age population (15–55 years), which used to be around 50 percent since the 1960s, now constitutes 55 percent of the population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). The proliferation of social ills, including increased conflict, mental and financial stress, drug abuse, higher divorce rates, and higher crime rates (Sharp, et al. 2002, cited in Biney, et. al. 2014) being witnessed today constitutes some of the challenges of unemployment facing the youth. This represents a serious waste of time, energy, intellect and talent bearing in mind the private and public investment made in the schooling of those involved. Another research conducted by Trade Union Congress (TUC) of Ghana revealed that between 250,000 and 300,000 graduates were produced every year by the [more than forty-eight] universities for the job market (Donkor, 2014). It appears that there are no coordinated strategies fashioned to address the unemployment problem confronting today’s youth. Meanwhile, the advancement in information communication technology (ICT) today is seen as the age of entrepreneur- ship. However, successful entrepreneurs are hardworking people, and as the old saying goes: success is 99 percent perspiration and one percent inspiration. As observed by Gilbert and Eryng (2011), entrepreneurs must prove to be managers who constantly identify risks and find creative ways to remove them. That certainly should serve as a guiding principle to potential youth entre- preneurs in Ghana.

Hence, entrepreneurship holds the key to addressing unemployment challenges currently facing the youth in Ghana. Empowering the youth to start and grow their businesses beyond the limit of hawking, street vending, letter writing, knife sharpening, junk collecting to selling dog chains can only be realised through education. Though some of the youth have found jobs as mechanics, carpenters, small artisans, barbers and personal servant, but that is about all. The most important thing about young people is the way their minds work. Young people are [adventurous and take informed risk, and are in a] better [position of] driving innovation (Gates, 2016). In fact, innovation and entrepreneurship is the name of the game. Young people seem innovative, and also possess enter- prising mindset. Jones (2015) asserts that an enterprising mindset is about having a way of thinking which sees opportunities rather barriers, that sees possibilities rather than failure and wants to do something to make a differ- ence rather than sit and complain about the problems. Lyons (2015) asserts that he has long been an advocate of entre- preneurship as a mindset, process, skill set, and tool kit that can help us solve the economic, environmental and social challenges that our communities face. He adds that “people who get help [in] building their entrepreneurship skills develop self-efficacy, and that self-effi- cacy empowers them to think bigger about their enterprises, and to manage the necessary risks required for success” (p. 458). As a researcher and lecturer in adult education, community develop- ment and entrepreneurship, finds Lyons assertion appropriate and apt in the face of unemployment and poverty facing us presently in Ghana. The youth must be taught to gain self-confidence and desire to persevere and create sustainable jobs for themselves.

I served as one of the facilitators that tackled the youth unemployment challenge through an education programme dubbed “Commonwealth Youth Development Work,” which started as a collaboration programme between Commonwealth Secretariat and University of Ghana in 2000/2001 academic year. The products of the programme have been educated to acquire entrepreneurial characteristics.
as visionaries, passionate, independent thinkers who share business ideas, and are goal-oriented persons. The youth are also taught to be leaders, creative, persistent and moderate risk-takers who have the entrepreneurial eye to recognise an unrecognised need and create business out of the situation. They are also trained to become agent of change in the provision of goods and services to communities in which they operate. These skills built in the youth have largely empowered them in whatever ventures they established. The skills acquired largely aid them to establish enterprises for themselves and many others across the length and breadth of Ghana. After all, entrepreneurs are widely diverse groups, perhaps as diverse as the businesses that they launch (Davidson, 2009; Gartner, 1989 cited in Fortunato & Alter, 2015). However, the youth trained in entrepreneurship could do more granted that they secure credit at reasonable cost to finance both their education and businesses.

The small business entrepreneurs are the fuel of the private enterprise system. The youth in particular, are to be equipped with entrepreneurial skills to generate jobs for themselves, and many others. The Ghana National Youth Policy, as pertains in South Africa, defines ‘youth’ as ‘persons’ who are within the age bracket of fifteen (15) and thirty-five (35) years. The study also captured middle adult population whose ages were beyond 35 years. However, providing entrepreneurial education to the youth that constitutes about (33 percent) of the population in Ghana, is critical to be instituted by both Commonwealth Secretariat and University of Ghana. This approach of providing entrepreneurial education to the youth by the School of Continuing and Distance Education (SCDE) possesses the power of addressing, to some extent, the state of youth unemployment in Ghana. This is significant to the extent that the state of unemployment and poverty confronting today’s youth is alarming.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2005) State of the World Population Report revealed that nearly half the world’s population, about 3 billion people, was under the age of 25 years. Thus, over 500 million youth aged 15 – 24 live on less than $2 a day; those at work are mainly trapped in low wages, low-skill sectors with little chance of anything better or any way out of poverty, and are often abused and exploited (Williams, 2007). From the business perspective, one of the key ways of alleviating poverty in developing world, including Ghana, is by spreading entrepreneurial talent through education to engender growth of small and medium sized enterprise (Biney, 2009). In the midst of challenges raised, there is no doubt that the future of the World, and Africa in particular, will depend greatly on the entrepreneurial investments made in education of the youth to engender their smooth transition to productive adulthood. In any case, entrepreneurs provide the competitive zeal, create jobs, new ventures, and opportunities for others, and improve the economic growth and social harmony. Youth entrepreneurs are visionaries and self-starters who love the adventure of a new enterprise. They have the talent, knowledge, skills, ideas, attitude of providing a spirit of energy, initiative, and potential for progress. Above all, they are agents of change, thus, doers who see a market need and satisfy that need by translating it into a successful business (Cordeiro, 2007). The broad-based knowledge and skills acquired through entrepreneurial education provided by SCDE to the youth can successfully be translated into job creation in the communities. Although laudable the effort being made by SCDE in building the capacity of the youth in this direction, it appears that the youth have some challenges in securing cost effective credits to fund both their education and small-scale businesses established. On the basis of the above supposition, the questions to be answered then are: How can the youth become meaningfully equipped with entrepreneurial skills to create jobs for themselves and others? and What strategies should be put into place to address challenges potential young entrepreneurs encounter in driving their small-scale businesses? The researcher next takes a look at objectives underpinning the study.

**Statement of the Problem**
Research objectives

The main objective of the study is to find out how the SCDE has been building the entrepreneurial spirit of the youth through education. On the basis of the major issue raised, the specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify skills youth entrepreneurs can be equipped with to start small-scale businesses.
2. Find out challenges potential entrepreneurs face in operating their businesses.
3. Identify strategies youth entrepreneurs could adopt to address challenges facing their businesses.

Literature Review

The 21st Century has been described as the age of entrepreneurs, and this description seems appropriate considering the state of unemployment, poverty, lack of skills and near hopelessness facing a large number of the youth. Thus effort necessarily has to be made to address these challenges, probably, through entrepreneurship. Simpson (2014) observes that many young women and men are unable to secure formal employment opportunities; encouraging entrepreneurship is an ever more important way of harnessing their enthusiasm, energy and ambition to contribute to economic development. He adds that the majority of the world’s young people are in developing economies, where formal jobs are scarce and even informal jobs may be hard to find. Micro, small and medium-sized businesses are the drivers of new jobs, and behind every enterprise lies the spirit and imagination of an entrepreneur. Ryan (2006, cited in Cordeiro, 2007) asserts that “on average, 60 percent of the populations of Commonwealth countries are under the age of 30” (p. 38). Indeed, countries such as Australia, United Kingdom, and Canada inclusive as per Ryan assertion. He adds that as a consequence of history, the majority of the young people are poorly educated, inappropriately trained and unskilled. For instance, about a third (33 percent) of Ghana’s population falls within the youthful ages of 15 to 35 years. Such a large cohort of youth needs to be provided solid education and training in entrepreneurship to create jobs for themselves and many others. This is significant to the extent that “entrepreneurs are widely considered to be an economic growth engine, catalysts of change and innovation, and often times powerful contributors to the local society” (Baumol, Litan & Schramm, 2007; Schumpeter, 1934 cited in Fortunato & Alter, 2015, p. 444).

The question one may ask is: Why focusing attention only on the youth, but not the children? The answer is that they are the largest cohort of the population globally and locally, and constitutes the future leaders, and so offering them education and training in entrepreneurship is a laudable intervention to be instituted by SCDE. Thus being daring, adventurous and passionate, the youth entrepreneurs will learn to take a calculated risk whenever embarking on ventures in which they have the desire, interest, adequate information, facts, skills, broad and rich knowledge base. In taking such decisions, acquisition of knowledge in entrepreneurship matters, because it will largely empower them to recognise unrecognised needs, gain new experiences, and address unmet needs in both communities and societies.

Entrepreneurship has evolved over time to embrace creativity, innovation and risk taking, as well as the ability to set-up and run a business (Debyser, 2013). This scholar adds that entrepreneurship is now considered as a key competence for all, [and] should be promoted at all levels of education (from primary school to university), as well as through lifelong learning. It is often perceived as a driver for growth and job creation as well as a means to make economies more competitive and innovative. However, supporting entrepreneurship goes beyond merely helping entrepreneurs or would-be entrepreneurs, and providing administrative and financial conditions conducive to business creation. It further embraces developing and boosting entrepreneurial spirit throughout society, in particular amongst young people, stimulating their creativity, initiative, and sense of responsibility as well as providing the skills and knowledge needed to set up and run a business. Hence education and training are vital for changing cultures and igniting entrepreneurial mindsets at an early age. This observation is significant because when the critical mass of the population, I mean the youth, are sufficiently provided with entrepreneurial education and training, many of them will become empowered to create sustainable businesses for themselves and many others. It was not for nothing
that the European Commission adopted two framework documents highlighting the importance of entrepreneurship education and training.

Indeed, in November 2012, a new strategy on education and training entitled "Rethinking Education" and, in January 2013, an “Entrepreneurship Action Plan” was developed by the Commission. The Commission ascertaining the essence of the concept of entrepreneurship invited Member States to reinforce entrepreneurship education at all levels and to strengthen the links between education and employers. In fact, the European Union is not alone here. The Commonwealth Secretariat, also aside developing the comprehensive Diploma Module “Promoting Enterprise and Economic Development” for the youth in the Commonwealth Countries to invest in entrepreneurship in 2007, has also developed a number of Online Modules, including “International Perspectives in Youth Entrepreneurship Training”; “Perspectives on Youth Entrepreneurship Training”; and “International Programme on Youth Entrepreneurship Training” in 2011 and 2013 respectively. All these documents seek to motivate, encourage, and provide the youth knowledge, skills, attitudes and strategies to adopt to vigorously drive their entrepreneurial spirit and mindset. It is therefore not surprising to learn that the concept entrepreneurship is further perceived as a process that fuels innovation and creates value in economic and social settings. Hence an entrepreneur is a business-person who not only conceives, initiates and organises ventures, but also frequently takes risks in doing so. But not all independent business people are true entrepreneurs, and not all entrepreneurs are created through education and training in formal and non-formal education institutions equally. There are different degrees or levels of entrepreneurial intensity and drive, and this essentially depend upon how much independence one exhibits, the level of leadership and innovation they demonstrate in their businesses, how much responsibility they shoulder, and how creative they become in envisioning and executing their business plans. Hundreds of research studies have attempted to determine the common skills, personality and behaviour traits of successful entrepreneurs and the simple deduction from all this research is that entrepreneurs cannot be cloned (Knowles, 2003). Indeed, entrepreneurs tend to defy stereotyping and broad-brush labeling. Drucker (cited in Knowles, 2003) asserts that he has seen people of the most diverse personalities and temperaments perform well in entrepreneurial challenges. Ball (1995) aptly observes that:

an enterprising individual has a positive, flexible and adaptable disposition towards change, seeing it as normal, and as an opportunity rather than a problem...an enterprising individual has a security born of self-confidence...when dealing with risks, difficulty and the unknown. An enterprising individual has the capacity to initiate creative ideas, develop them through into action in a determined manner. An enterprising individual is able, even anxious, to take responsibility and is an effective communicator, negotiator, influencer, planner and organiser. An enterprising individual is active, confident and purposeful, not passive, uncertain and dependent (cited in Cordeiro, 2007: 77).

If generalization must be made, however, one can say that most of the youth entrepreneurs possess certain key characteristics, including vision, passion, independence, sharing, people-oriented and goal-oriented. They are also creative, persistent, agent of change and moderate risk-takers. Indeed, successful entrepreneurs have learned to visualise. They have a complete mental picture of where they and their ideas are going. Hence youth entrepreneurs are visionaries, but it appears that many have not been able to translate their great ideas into creating jobs. This may be due to lack of education and availability of funds to drive their ideas and visions. Providing the youth skills in planning their business, research on markets for their products or services, and keeping records alone are not enough. Alertness to unexploited business opportunities, access to technology and reliable credit facility must be made available to the youth entrepreneurs at the right time and in sufficient quantities to pursue their dreams. The term enterprise as used in this paper can be equated or used interchangeably with the term small business in this context of youth entrepreneurship. The term small business is defined in terms of factors like the number of persons employed, the number of customers, turnover of funds, capital employed, and amount of sales, among others. It sometimes refers to business activity in the informal sector of the economy (Cordeiro, 2007). These definitions by Cordeiro may be limiting, hence Gatewood et al. (1995) define small business looking at it from the following characteristics:

- It has a small share of the market.
- It employs a small number of people.
- It is independently owned with the management and control in the hands of its owners.
- Management is personalised rather than formal.
- It is not part of a large group.

Osei, Baah-Nuakoh, Tutu and Sowa (1993, cited in Biney, 2009), defining small-scale enterprise in Ghana, used an employment cut-off point of 30 employees to indicate small medium enterprise (SMEs). They disaggregated SMEs into categories; micro business employing less than 6 people; very small employing 6-9 people; and small business employing between 10 and 29 employees. It is safe to infer from the various definitions aforementioned that most small scale enterprises employ not...
more than 30 employees if the criterion of number of employees the business has is the yardstick used. It is also a fact that youth entrepreneurs are passionate and they are driven by a compelling vision they possess, but I daresay that acquisition of education and training in entrepreneurship matter, if they are to successfully realise their vision. After all, entrepreneurs are made, not born, and everyone has innate abilities to succeed in entrepreneurship. In Ghana, small-scale businesses are widespread, and can be found in all the three sectors of the economy—agriculture, industry and service sectors. These days, the telecommunication sub-sector is strongly coming up, following the information age era that we find ourselves in now. Hence, participating in education and training programs, seminars, workshops on management of small-businesses are important in this direction. It has also been observed that entrepreneurs are independent thinkers.

Knowles (2003) asserts that entrepreneurs have a need for freedom, a need to control their own destiny and be their own boss. But even as they are independent thinkers, they also believe in sharing ideas, views and thoughts on ways of executing projects and business plans. In that sense, building the youth entrepreneurs’ skills in developing realistic business plans are laudable things to do. This is because, as a kind of roadmap, business plans guides the youth largely to drive, and also succeed in their business endeavours. It further enables them acquire skills of analysing their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) in managing businesses established. Astute entrepreneurs are risk-takers; however, they take moderate or calculated risks to successfully drive their businesses. It is instructive to learn that great entrepreneurs trust their instincts, but they listen to others, as well. The reasons often attributed to failure of small businesses, include uncertainties in many communities. There is a lot of conservatism, thus, the older people in our communities seem not to accept new ways of life and ideas espoused by the youth. The adults’ population in Ghana, who almost always expect absolute obedience, respect from the youth feel threatened, sometimes, by the style of music, new fashions in clothes and hairstyle young people exhibit. Lack of government support in terms of tax holidays or incentives is a challenge. Lack of access to credit, land and technology as well as the top-down methods of many funding agencies and adverse government regulations pose problems to youth entrepreneurs. The absence of integrated support systems, poor management skills and lack of realistic market research also pose a lot of challenges to the youth entrepreneurs in their business operations. These challenges must sufficiently be tackled; after all, the combined skills, knowledge, and information of entrepreneurs called intellectual capital, largely make enterprises’ succeed in their drive.
Hence the provision of planning skills, management skills, accounting and bookkeeping skills to youth entrepreneurs is the approach the education and training should take. The acquisition of skills in financial literacy, investment and financial risk management are equally important in their education. The skills enumerated are taught in a course I facilitate dubbed: ‘Promoting Enterprise and Economic Development’ as part of ‘Youth Development Work’ programme run at SCDE, University of Ghana. The students are taught to gather as much information and support as possible on businesses they are interested in before making a move to invest their investible funds in them. They are also encouraged to start their businesses in a small-scale, and further taught to raise the initial capital for the business from their own savings or family support. In this way, they can build safety net skills for themselves so as to decrease the amount of financial risk involved in the businesses they engage themselves in. Getting the youth entrepreneurs’ adequate education, training and skills in operating their businesses to maximise profit is significant, especially in the communities in Ghana, where poverty and unemployment appear to be extremely prevalent. This is significant because Cordeiro (2007) observes that small businesses have a high failure rate, ranging from 35 percent to 80 percent. He adds that as many as 90 percent of small businesses fail within five years. Even in U.K. where the environment is generally supportive of small, medium enterprises (SMEs), it is suggested that about 30 percent fail within the first two years. If a degree of such business failure is happening in Ghana; such a situation would certainly be a great loss to a developing economy, such as Ghana. Loss of tax revenue and loss of employment would be incalculable. It is equally a shattering experience for the young entrepreneurs themselves. That in itself requires that the youth entrepreneurs continue to build their capacity through education and training so that they can go into establishing ventures with both eyes wide open. This is important because Scarborough (2012) opines that “people with more education are more likely to start businesses than those with little education” (p. 16). He adds that a rapidly growing number of college students see owning a business as an attractive career option, and many of them are launching companies while in school. This should be expected because United States of America (U.S.A) is a land of opportunities. The same can be done in Ghana. However, small businesses require capital investment. In so doing, the youth entrepreneurs can anticipate problems, reduce the possibility of loss, and increase their chances of success. In fact, the prospect of failure should serve as a warning to youth entrepreneurs, such that they can adequately position themselves to overcome the situation. The researcher turns his attention next to the methods employed in designing the study.

Method

Students formed the sampling units and unit of analysis in the design. This study was conducted at University of Ghana, School of Continuing and Distance Education (SCDE), Accra Learning Center (ALC) between June 5th and 28th September, 2016. A mixed method design was adopted. Aspects of quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted at several stages throughout the study. However, the study is largely qualitative. Convenience procedure was sought in selecting the sample. The names of the accessible students, who were 240 in number, were compiled and serially labelled on pieces of papers. They were put into a container and reshuffled and 60 of them were randomly selected for the study. This sample size of 60 respondents out of the accessible population of 240 was typical attendees in terms of the institution under study. My intention as a researcher was to understand, analyse and explore the building of entrepreneurial spirit of the youth by using education as a tool as it is being carried out by the SCDE, University of Ghana, Legon. My intention was, therefore, to get a deeper insight into how the respondents assessed the entrepreneurial skills acquired throughout their education and training, the challenges they anticipate facing in operating their business enterprise, and strategies they intend to put in place to successfully address problems that confront them.

This was an exploratory study which gathered data through semi-structured interview instrument to conduct the in-depth interview of the respondents. The results were presented qualitatively in terms of themes and quantitatively in terms of statistics. Thematic analyzes was performed on the qualitative data and the quantitative data were equally analyzed following the steps recommended by Creswell (2012, 2013). These exercises were carried out by the researcher with support from two (2) research assistants. The data collected from closed-ended questions were analyzed using percentages. The responses from the open-ended questions were summarised, organised and interpreted in the form of tables. A
Analysis and discussion

In all, fifty-one (51) students in the School of Continuing and Distance Education (SCDE), Accra Learning Center (ALC) participated in the study. The majority (65 percent) were males, and the remaining (35 percent) represented the female respondents, participated in the study. The number of male participants on Youth Development Work program almost always outnumbers that of the female participants. Of the diploma I and II students numbering 240, the male students were 155 compared to female students of 85. This is a distance education programme and tutorials are held on weekends. The male participants seem less burdened over the weekends as compared to the females who are over-burdened with home/household chores. The male students also appear more adventurous in taking informed risks as compared to their female counterpart, and thus participated in the study. That notwithstanding, in Ghana, parents or families give equal premium and attention to female education as they do to male education. In certain programs at University of Ghana, the number of female student enrollment out-numbers that of the male student enrollment. On age, the majority (52 percent) of the respondents fell within 18-35 years age groups, indicating that they were young adults. However, another (42 percent) and (6 percent) of the respondents were within the age ranges of 36-40 and 41-50 respectively. Although the program is branded as youth program, it is more of intergenerational type than that of youth focused program. This is because people who are beyond the age of 35 found the program attractive. Hence many are desirous to build their entrepreneurial capacities, knowledge and skills to own and manage their businesses. In terms of education, more than half (58 percent) of the respondents were diploma students. The diploma in youth development work program is read at University of Ghana, and is lower to that of degree program. Students who excel stand a chance for pursuing post-diploma programs to be awarded degree certificates in either education or humanities related programs.
Skills Youth Entrepreneurs are equipped with to start Small-scale Businesses

Four key entrepreneurial skills comprising management, planning, financial and accounting as well as research and evaluation skills were listed to be categorised from lower level of (1) to higher level of (4). Table 1 presents the results as categorised by the respondents.

From Table 1, as per the evaluation of the program, youth entrepreneurs were occasionally equipped with all the four entrepreneurial skills, except financial and accounting skills which they were seldom (35) equipped with. For instance, it was revealed by less than half (35) of the respondents that youth entrepreneurs were occasionally equipped with management skills in small-scale businesses. Another (35) percent of the respondents indicated that they were frequently equipped with marketable management skills in small-scale businesses. In terms of research and evaluation skills, less than one-third (31 percent) of the respondents indicated that they were occasionally equipped with all the four entrepreneurial skills to avoid unnecessary failure of their businesses. This is because the aforementioned skills are critical for success of any business enterprise established; else they cannot make any headway. When young entrepreneurs are made to acquire these skills, they would be in a better position of analysing their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT), and can learn fast enough to become astute entrepreneurs. On two processes in which youth entrepreneurs’ capacity can be built, multiple responses were offered. The majority (90 percent) of the respondents found education as very critical in their survival and success in their business endeavours. More than half (60 percent) of the respondents also indicated that training programs, including workshops, seminars, fora, mentorship and apprenticeship on the management of small-scale businesses should be instituted. They emphasised on the acquisition of computing and social media skills to promote and market their services and products. This should be expected, because we are in an era of ‘information age,’ making it necessary to be proficient in the use of current information technologies. The findings confirm Debyser (2013) assertion that entrepreneurship is now considered as a key competence for all, [and] should be promoted at all levels of education (from primary school to university), as well as through lifelong learning. Education is globally perceived as the key that unlocks human potential; hence it must continuously and regularly be offered, such that the youth entrepreneurs will be on top of managing their businesses efficiently and effectively. It is equally critical that the youth entrepreneurs take advantage of some short training programs in the form of seminars, workshops, lectures and fora to build their entrepreneurial capacities. Inferring from the data [since nearly all the participants found participation in education programs crucial], it can safely be concluded that potential youth entrepreneurs should not stop learning, but perceive learning as lifelong and life-wide as far as managing and succeeding in small-scale businesses are concerned.

| Table 1 |
|-------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Entrepreneurial Skills   | Never    | Seldom   | Occasionally | Frequently | Total (100%) |
| MANAGEMENT SKILLS        | 4%       | 31%      | 35%        | 29%       | 100%         |
| PLANNING SKILLS          | 10%      | 18%      | 37%        | 35%       | 100%         |
| FINANCIAL AND ACCOUNTING SKILLS | 12% | 35% | 27% | 26% | 100% |
| RESEARCH AND EVALUATION SKILLS  | 18% | 29% | 31% | 22% | 100% |

Source: Field Data, 2016
Challenges Entrepreneurs face in operating Businesses

When respondents were asked to categorise challenges that confront youth entrepreneurs in operating or managing their businesses from no challenge (1) to major challenge (4), the results that emerged are explained in Table 2.

From Table 2, majority (90 percent) of the respondents found high cost of credit as major challenge confronting youth entrepreneurs in Ghana. This observation confirms my overall understanding on the credit/loan climate in Ghana, where banks interest rate charges on loans ranges between 30 percent to 36 percent. These charges are on the high side considering the fact that whatever products or services offered here in Ghana are facing stiff competition with products and services from other parts of the globe. This high cost of credit makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to produce or render services to make profit or break even. Nearly two-thirds (66 percent) of the respondents also indicated the unfriendly tax regime as another major challenge confronting youth entrepreneurs in Ghana. Stamp duty, tolls, income tax, and tax on profit among other taxes that small businesses pay, keep varying following the fall of the value of the cedi, the currency of Ghana, every now and then. These taxes which need reform, make operating of small-scale businesses extremely difficult. In the face of such difficulties, it becomes impossible for the small businesses to save substantial sum of money to expand the base of their businesses. Technical and commercial support in the form of business incubators and tax holidays to small business are not largely provided in our part of the world as it is done elsewhere. The implications are that many people cannot be employed, and new lines of small businesses cannot be created to offer employment to the teeming unemployed youth.

More than half (54 percent) of the respondents indicated that negative adult attitude towards youth ideas are a major challenge. This result is to be expected because in many of our communities, there seems to be a lot of conservatism among the adult population, thus, the older people not accepting the new ways of life and new ideas of the youth. They feel a bit restful when young people take leadership roles and try to push society in new directions. Half (50 percent) of the respondents revealed that poor managerial skills are major challenge in managing small-scale businesses in Ghana. Astute youth entrepreneurs must equally be good managers else they will drive their businesses underground. Indeed, entrepreneurs must make the most of the limited resources they have, be its people (the human resources) and its equipment and facilities (the capital resources). In fact, the survival of small business in Ghana often depends on people working in it. Selecting and managing people in the business is a critical task that small-scale youth entrepreneurs should not take for granted. The people should be organised, directed, led and controlled to ensure survival and profitability of the businesses.

In terms of the cost of training the youth entrepreneurs, nearly half (47 percent) of the respondents said the cost of their training was high. However, another (27 percent) and (26 percent) of the respondents respectively admitted that the cost of training youth entrepreneurs were moderate and low. To train many youth entrepreneurs, the SCDE should have a second look at the cost involved in training them, so as to attract as many youth as possible to be trained in enterprise promotion in Ghana. This is significant if it is viewed against the backdrop of massive and staggering unemployment figures, and excruciating poverty situation facing the youth of Ghana to address the challenges confronting them, and government support to be offered to the youth entrepreneurs to drive their businesses, successfully. On what the youth entrepreneurs should do to drive their businesses, multiple views were expressed by respondents. The results are presented and clearly explained in Table 3.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>No Challenge</th>
<th>Low Challenge</th>
<th>Moderate Challenge</th>
<th>Major Challenge</th>
<th>Total (100%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIGH COST OF CREDIT</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFRIENDLY TAX REGIME</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGATIVE ADULT ATTITUDE TO YOUTH IDEAS</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POOR MANAGERIAL SKILLS</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POOR PLANNING SKILLS</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INAPPROPRIATE EDUCATION</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multiple responses
N= 50
Source: Field Data, 2016
Strategies to address Challenges facing Youth Entrepreneurs

This section took a look at exactly what the potential youth entrepreneurs should do to address the challenges confronting them and government support to be offered to the youth entrepreneurs to drive their businesses successfully. On what the youth entrepreneurs should do to drive their businesses, multiple views were expressed by respondents. An open-ended question posed to the participants on what specific strategies they could adopt to improve management of their business, the results or responses are presented, and clearly explained in Table 3.

From Table 3, the results demonstrate that the majority (65 percent) of the respondents indicated that the acquisition of effective managerial skills and practices are keys when it comes to ensuring the survival and profitability of businesses. But because many of the youth entrepreneurs lacked critical managerial skills and good practices in managing their businesses, such businesses keep failing to make progress. In so doing, some of the small businesses fail to capture the niche market to sell and promote their products and services. Good managers of small businesses take informed and calculated risk to drive their businesses. Thus, they engage in divergent and convergent thinking even as they plan for their businesses. They learn very fast on the business and operate to maximise their profit. More than half (55 percent) of the respondents assert that to improve on small-scale business management, the youth entrepreneurs should engage in lifelong learning. They should learn, educate and continue to engage in short training programmes to build their capacities in managing businesses. Although, apprenticeship and mentorship (20 percent), attracting more funding (12 percent), strong savings culture (8) and building of partnership (4) attracted low respondents response, they are equally important measures entrepreneurs who are ‘self-starters’ and ‘up and going’ should be concerned with. An open-ended question posed to the participants on the kind of support to be offered by government to see to the growth of small businesses to entice many of the youth to small-scale businesses operations, the respondents provided multiple answers. Table 4 explicitly presents the results.

From Table 4, the majority (78 percent) of the respondents indicated that the creation of enabling business environment will help improve the growth of small-scale business operations in Ghana. The finding confirms Cordeiro (2007) assertion that entrepreneurs wishing to establish enterprises often face bureaucratic barriers and little supports in terms of securing licences, permits, registration, negotiate paper work, run contract and source supplies. This observation is significant because provision of administrative support in the form of easing registration difficulties, licensing and provision of permits to businesses and removal of other barriers and bottlenecks in business operations are critical to the growth of business enterprise. More than half (59 percent) of the respondents respectively indicated that government provision of education and training as well as provision of zero taxation for start-ups/incubators are critical to the survival and growth of small-scale enterprises. Provision of education in critical managerial skills-planning, setting aims and objectives, setting time tables, financing and budgeting, researching, monitoring and evaluation are all critical managerial skills/areas that the youth entrepreneurs must be educated and trained on. More so, start-ups must be granted tax holidays to gain foothold in the market before they are brought to the tax net. This, in a way, will free the small enterprises to gain some breather and marshal both the human and non-human resources, combine them effectively to produce or renders services. Provision of soft loans/credit facilities (43 percent) and institution of reward systems (10 percent), though critical, received low responses. Perhaps the youth entrepreneurs perceived

Table 3
Youth Entrepreneurs should be instituted to improve management of business

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies Youth Entrepreneurs should institute to improve management of business</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADOPT AND ACQUIRE EFFECTIVE MANAGERIAL SKILLS AND PRACTICES ON SMALL BUSINESSES</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEARN, EDUCATE AND TRAIN MORE ON MANAGING SMALL-SCALE BUSINESSES</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEEK FOR APPRENTICESHIP AND MENTORSHIP</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEEK OR ATTRACT MORE FUNDING</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUILD STRONG SAVINGS CULTURE</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUILD PARTNERSHIP</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Data, 2016
that when the business environment is made favourable and also granted tax holidays, they can nurture and grow their businesses to the extent that they easily plough back the profit to grow their businesses.

Table 4
What Government support be provided for Youth Enterprise Promotion?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government Support</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CREATE ENABLING/FAVOURABLE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROVISION OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZERO TAXATION FOR START-UPS/INCUBATORS</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROVISION OF SOFT LOANS/CREDIT FACILITIES</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSTITUTION OF REWARD SYSTEMS</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multiple responses
N= 51
Source: Field Data, 2016
Conclusions and recommendations

The paper explored how the SCDE has helped built the entrepreneurial capacities of the youth using the tool of education. It also looked at the challenges confronting youth entrepreneurs in managing their businesses and strategies to bolster the entrepreneurial acumen of the potential youth entrepreneurs were examined. As an exploratory study, the findings that emerged cannot be generalised. There is, therefore, the need for a quantitative study to be conducted to validate the findings that emerged from this exploratory study. I served as a facilitator, handling Module 11: ‘Promoting Enterprise and Economic Development,’ one of the courses in training the youth on a Diploma program “Youth Development Work.” I also found the need to explore how this education program has contributed in building the entrepreneurial spirit of the youth. The findings of the study were that the youth were occasionally equipped with entrepreneurial skills, including managerial, planning, financial and accounting as well as research and evaluation skills in managing their enterprises. One would have expected that these critical entrepreneurial skills were provided the youth frequently. On challenges the youth entrepreneurs faced in running their businesses, not only was the cost of credit being high, but there was also an unfriendly tax regime to contend with. As to the strategies put in place to contain the situation, effective acquisition of managerial skills and practices as well as continuous engagement in lifelong learning in managing small businesses were advocated for the youth entrepreneurs. The government was asked to create favourable business climate or environment to improve the growth of small businesses in Ghana. The study revealed that education is very critical in the survival and success in the youth business endeavors. In that sense, the cost of education as far as entrepreneurship is concerned, should be brought within the reach of potential youth entrepreneurs. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

In order to equip the youth with entrepreneurial skills to jump-start small-scale businesses, it is recommended that SCDE:

- Should frequently build and improve upon the youth entrepreneurs managerial skills and practices with current developments in business management.
- Should build in youth entrepreneurs the drive and zeal to make learning a lifelong venture.

In order to address challenges potential youth entrepreneurs face in operating their businesses, it is recommended the financial institutions:

- Should design special product in the form of soft loans to target youth entrepreneurs who go into creating and establishing small-scale businesses.

In terms of strategies youth entrepreneurs could adopt to address challenges facing their businesses, it is recommended that government:

- Should develop business policy that seeks to create favourable business environment that will entice as many youth as possible to access important business entrepreneurial education and training to manage small enterprises.
- Should ensure that incubators and start-ups created by youth entrepreneurs are granted tax holidays and exceptions for at least, two years, to enable them gain some foothold and make a niche in the market so as to engender their survival and growth.

Considering the findings of the study and recommendations made, I suggest that further research could be conducted to validate some of the findings of the study. To be able to do that, it is my wish that a study is designed to interrogate adult learning and entrepreneurship. Such a study should factor into the
References


Word Clouds as a Community Development Tool: Promises and Pitfalls

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*Peer-reviewers were selected by another board member of Community Development Society for this manuscript to decrease potential bias or conflicts of interest.

Abstract

Word clouds are a data visualization technique that have been used for over a decade in a variety of different capacities. However, the utility of word clouds in a community development context has not been explored. This study is meant to provide insights into how professionals working in the field of community development view the use of word clouds. Online surveys from subject matter experts (SMEs) in the field were collected, and results were analyzed to answer three research questions: 1) How frequently do community development and evaluation professionals use word clouds in their work?, 2) How do community development professionals see word clouds used in their field?, and 3) What are the best practices in community development and evaluation in regards to word clouds? There was near parity in the utilization and non-utilization of word clouds in professional work, and the SMEs offered several promises and pitfalls associated with using this visualization method. This study is meant to encourage future utilization of word clouds in community development, and disseminate information about the best practices.
Introduction

Access to software for the generation of word clouds continues to grow, and there is no shortage of companies offering access to word cloud generating software. Word Clouds, Wordcul, Tagul, and ABCyå, all provide free services for the development of word clouds. Even online survey companies like Survey Monkey have them built into their analysis tools. Perhaps most famously, Wordle has quickly become one of the most widely utilized sources for word cloud visualization. Wordle, created in 2008, had 600,000 word clouds created within its first six months of operation, and the use of this website and other similar sites continues to grow (Viegas, Wattenberg, & Feinberg, 2009). Despite the numerous options for the development of word clouds, they are still a source of some disagreement among data visualization experts regarding their utility (Miley & Read, 2011).

With ever increasing access and utilization, word clouds have been used in a variety of contexts like education, journalism, and research. Despite the successful utilization of these tools in a variety of disciplines, there has been little attention given to the potential for word clouds in a community development context. In light of this context, the Community Development Society (CDS) promotes five Principles of Good Practice, which overall emphasize the need to engage and enhance the capacities of diverse communities and their members by also helping those members meaningfully make decisions about their communities (Community Development Society, n.d.). CDS’ revitalized journal, Community Development Practice, has aimed to showcase more tools to community development practitioners (e.g., Talmage, 2016; Talmage, Pstross, & Knopf, 2016), but do cloud visualizations merit being among those tools?

This article will focus on the two most common types of cloud visualizations: Word Clouds and Tag Clouds. Though these visualizations are similar, there is a distinction that can be made between the two constructs. The first distinction is seen in regards to how these visualizations are developed. Tag clouds generate their output based on labels, or tags, assigned to each item and that is why they are commonly used in social tagging and networking websites (Carmel, Uziel, Guy, Mass, & Roitman, 2012). On the other hand, a word cloud is created by selecting key terms from the item descriptions like websites or text files (e.g., .doc, .docx, .pages, .rtf, .txt) (Carmel, Uziel, Guy, Mass, & Roitman, 2012). Further, the orientation of tag clouds and word clouds differ. Most tag clouds arrange tags horizontally by lines and sort the tags alphabetically or according to frequency (Koh, Lee, Kim, & Seo, 2010). Word clouds, like the visualizations generated by Wordle, arrange words at different angles and orientations without much focus on alignment. This paper will focus primarily on the use of word clouds, and the promises and pitfalls associated with this particular data visualization technique.
Brief History of Word Clouds

Cloud visualizations, like word clouds and tag clouds, are not new concepts. The lineage of cloud visualizations can be traced back several decades. The roots of cloud visualizations began in Soviet Constructivism, and later in the work of Stanley Milgram (Viegas & Wattenberg, 2008). More recently cloud visualizations, specifically tag clouds, were used for data visualization on websites like Flickr, Delicious or Technorati (Cui, Wu, Liu, Wei, Zhou, & Qu, 2010; Rivadeneira, Gruen, Muller, & Millen, 2007; Viegas & Wattenberg, 2008). With these websites, word clouds function as aggregators of the activities being conducted by users (Viegas & Wattenberg, 2008). These early forms of tag clouds enable users to place content within categories, or tags, which are freely chosen key-words meant to enable users to easily reference certain tags easily and quickly (Hassan-Montero & Herrero-Solana, 2006). As word clouds and tag clouds both have their roots in community-oriented websites, it seems logical that these types of tools could also be useful in the community development context.

There are numerous websites that enable users to create a variety of word clouds, with each utilizing proprietary algorithms to generate these visualizations. Although each site offers different functionality, there are some aspects of the software that are fundamental to word cloud generation. Broadly speaking, all word clouds depict the frequency of word usage. Word clouds provide a visual depiction of the frequency of words from any written material like lectures, textbooks, or websites, and usually indicate frequency of usage with larger font sizes (Miley & Read, 2011). The earliest tag clouds often listed the tags in alphabetical order, with the words varying in color and size (Hassan-Montero & Herrero-Solana, 2006). Currently, word clouds offer a tremendous variety of layouts and shapes to improve the user experience.

Figure 1 shows an example of what a tag cloud downloaded from a google image search. However, there have been several developments in regards to the aesthetics of word clouds, and current software is capable of generating more sophisticated visualizations. The tools currently available offer users the ability to customize their word cloud visualizations including the ability to change typography, color, word orientation, and the general shape of the word cloud (Heimerl, Lohmann, Lange, & Ertl, 2014). Figure 2 shows a more elaborate word cloud generated using Tagxedo to depict the responses to the question about word cloud best practices. Finally, Table 1 lists various websites that construct tag or word clouds, but this list is not all-inclusive.
Table 1
Tag and Word Cloud Websites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Weblink</th>
<th>Weblink</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABCYA</td>
<td><a href="http://www.abcya.com/word_clouds.htm">http://www.abcya.com/word_clouds.htm</a></td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENERATOR BY JASON DAVIES</td>
<td><a href="https://www.jasondavies.com/wordcloud/">https://www.jasondavies.com/wordcloud/</a></td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
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<td>Free</td>
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<td>VOCABGRABBER</td>
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<tr>
<td>WORDCLOUD.COM</td>
<td><a href="http://www.wordclouds.com/">http://www.wordclouds.com/</a></td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Promises of Word Clouds for CD

In community development, disseminating data back to community partners can be a critical step for engaging the community and ensuring sustainable action. This dissemination does however pose a unique challenge, as community members who may benefit from these data may have varying degrees of data literacy. Therefore, it is important that the data be presented in a digestible way to the intended audience. This is one potential advantage of word clouds, as they create a simple visual image that is easily understood and enables the viewer to focus and reflect on the materials being presented (Miley & Read, 2011).

Word clouds have put complex information visualization research in the hands of non-expert users and enabled the creation of own artistic interpretations of a variety of data sources (Ramsden & Bate 2008). Further, word clouds provide graphical representations of knowledge that enable viewers to form quick interpretations of high-level data without information overload (DePaolo & Wilkinson 2014). The ability to create visually pleasing, and user friendly, data visualizations could be an extremely useful tool for community development. Further, beyond the accessibility of word clouds and ease of use, there are other potential advantages which can be drawn from the usage of word clouds in education and research activities.

Multiple studies have examined the impact and uses of word clouds in an educational setting, with many showing promising results. One study conducted by Miley & Read (2011) had undergraduate accounting students create word clouds as a study tool to help them remain abreast of developments in the business landscape. Those in the study indicated they not only enjoyed word clouds, but were also able to adapt the tool to fit their own learning style. The research by Miley and Read (2011) suggests that word clouds are a useful supplement for other learning tools and can help students prepare for examinations. The flexibility of word clouds to adapt to a variety of learning styles could be potentially useful in a community setting as those participating in community development research often represent diverse populations with differing learning needs.

The use of word clouds in an educational setting could offer some potential insights into how these visualization tools might be useful in a community development context. Word clouds are also a useful tool in examining key ideas from open-ended questions (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014), and as qualitative data is often used in community development research it could be a useful tool in understanding important themes (Williams, Parkes, & Davies, 2013).

Although seemingly unrelated to community development, the use of word clouds as an educational aid does provide some insight into how this tool may be used in that field. Word clouds could facilitate in the illumination of some community level experiences, illustrate key ideas brought forward by the community, and afford researchers the ability to recap findings to community members.

In addition to educational settings, word clouds have also been utilized in a research capacity, which is potentially important for those working in community development. One way word clouds have proven useful in the research process is in the analysis of qualitative data of transcribed or spoken text (McNaught & Lam, 2010). In qualitative data, it is very important to identify key themes and ideas which exist in the data, and McNaught & Lam (2010) directly identified word clouds as a useful tool in extracting themes from written or transcribed text. Further, word clouds have been identified as a useful tool for preliminary data analysis, and a means to quickly highlight important ideas (McNaught & Lam 2010).

However, there are multiple uses for word clouds in research beyond preliminary analysis, which have implications for community development work. Word clouds serve as a useful tool in the analysis of focus group data, a common research method in community development, and greatly facilitate the process of result coding. Using word clouds enables researchers to hone in on the important ideas brought forward during focus groups and enable quicker and easier coding as researchers would be aware of the most common words (McNaught & Lam, 2010). Further, McNaught & Lam (2010) identified word clouds as a tool for providing outlines of data and as a tool for validating previous findings.

Finally, Rivadeneira, Gruen, Muller, and Millen (2007) identified several potential uses for word clouds, which may be useful in data dissemination activities associated with community development research. The uses identified by Rivadeneira, Gruen, Muller, and Millen (2007) are: Locating specific terms or concepts of interest (search), looking through a broad array of ideas (browsing), formulating impressions of the data (impression formation), and recognizing information or entities based on the word clouds (matching). All of these uses enable users to make a quick interpretation of potentially complexed data, which would be beneficial in community development research.
The Pitfalls of Word Clouds for CD

Despite the numerous promising uses for word clouds, there are also several potential issues with this type of data visualization. First, existing word cloud generation software is unable to take the input into context, and therefore may misrepresent what the original sentiment of the data (Williams, Parkes, & Davies, 2013). For example, an individual may describe something as “not great”, but the word cloud software only recognizes the frequency and not the original meaning of the statement, thus making potential invalidating the output. Worse yet, by analyzing the statements out of context this could potentially create misleading visualizations (Harris, 2011). Additionally, it is almost impossible to trace the words used in the generation of word clouds back to their original statement, making it difficult to determine the actual opinions of those terms in the word clouds (Williams, Parkes, & Davies, 2013).

While some word cloud generating software offers editing functionality, it can be somewhat limited. While it may be possible to have the software ignore common words such as conjunctions and prepositions, it is difficult to delete nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs without going to the data source (Miley & Read 2011). Additionally, the structure of word clouds can make it challenging to compare words. Words of a similar size are difficult to compare, and longer words can appear more prominent, so word length can be conflated with importance. Also, frequency does not always equate to importance. Finally, the accuracy of the word cloud is contingent on the data being input into the software, and it is therefore important to have direct text from participants as opposed to researchers summaries as that would impact the word cloud output (McNaught & Lam 2010). As transcription services can be costly and time consuming, this could be a potential hurdle to accurately representing qualitative data like interviews and focus groups using word clouds for those working in community development.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain a more thorough understanding of how word clouds are currently being used in community development and evaluation work. Additionally, this study will explore best practices and methods currently being utilized in data dissemination in community development using word clouds. Currently, there is no literature on the utilization of word clouds in community development and evaluation work. The paucity of research on this topic represents a missed opportunity to examine an innovative data visualization technique in a field where it could be extremely useful.

This study will attempt to answer a series of research questions about word clouds in community development and evaluation work. The study questions are:

1. How frequently do community development and evaluation professionals use word clouds in their work;
2. How do community development professionals see word clouds used in their field; and,
3. What are the best practices in community development and evaluation in regards to word clouds?
Methods

To help answer the research questions associated with this study, a brief survey was developed about word clouds in community development and evaluation. The survey was designed for subject matter experts (SMEs) working in the community development field, and aimed to gain insights about how word cloud visualization methods were being utilized in community development. The survey consisted of one dichotomous question to determine if the survey participant had ever used word clouds, as well as four five-point Likert-type scale questions that were used to assess a variety of other opinions about word clouds. Finally, eight open-ended questions were asked to gather more qualitative insights about word cloud visualizations. The survey was uploaded to Qualtrics Survey Software, and all responses were completely anonymous.

The survey instrument and consent letter all received Institutional Review Board approval prior to distribution.

This study used a convenience sampling methodology in an effort to reach community development professionals. Links to the online survey were distributed via Facebook and email to a variety of community development organizations including Community Development Society, International Association for Community Development, and numerous others. A detailed list of distribution channels for the Word Cloud survey are shown in Table 2. These organizations were chosen as they are large networks of individuals working in the community development field and ensured a large number of individuals had access to the survey. There were a total of \( n = 25 \) SMEs who completed the survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Weblink</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY</td>
<td>Facebook and Email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH ON NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AND VOLUNTARY ACTION</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMERICAN EVALUATION ASSOCIATION</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARIZONA EVALUATION NETWORK</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Research Question 1:
How frequently do community development and evaluation professionals use word clouds in their work?

The survey instrument developed for this study had multiple questions designed to capture the frequency with which, and reasons why, community developers utilize word clouds. There was near parity in the number of SMEs who had previously used word clouds, and those who had not. This was beneficial, as the study was able to incorporate the perspectives of those individuals who had not utilized the word cloud visualization method.

The first question on the survey asked ‘Have you ever used Word Clouds in your work?’ This was a dichotomous question with the only responses being yes and no. Only a slight majority of the participants (56%) stated Yes, they had used the word clouds, and the remaining (44%) said No, they had not. Later questions would expand on the frequency with which those individuals who had used word clouds currently utilize them.

Although not directly related to the frequency of use, participants were also asked to ‘Describe your reasons for using word clouds.’ This was an open-ended question, and 16 individuals provided responses. The most common reason cited for using word clouds was as a technique to visualize data. Participants elaborated that word clouds were an excellent way to visualize qualitative data. Other survey respondents shared they used word clouds with data from surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Participants also indicated that they used word clouds in presentations, report writing, and in-course instruction. Further, participants described word clouds as a method for engaging communities with one participant explaining: “Such visualizations help to incite interest in and engagement with data…” Additionally, participants expressed that word clouds were a useful way to review inputs from evaluations. Multiple participants explained they had never used, or preferred not to use word clouds. One individual who preferred not using word clouds stating: “I don’t believe they’re an effective tool for conveying my work;” however, the individual provided no justifying reason.

Participants were also asked ‘How frequently have you used word clouds in evaluation reports?’ This question utilized a Likert-type scale with the answers: Always, Very often, Sometimes, Rarely, and Never. No survey participants indicated they Always used word clouds, and only 8% shared they used word clouds Very Often. More participants, 20%, stated they used word clouds Sometimes, and 16% said they used word clouds Rarely. The majority of participants, 56%, said they Never used word clouds in evaluation reports.

The next question asked participants ‘How have community members/clients responded to your use of word clouds?’ This question used a Likert-type scale with the answers: Very favorably, Favorably, Neutral, Unfavorably, and Very unfavorably. The majority of participants, 52.9%, indicated that the community members responded Favorably, 11.8% indicated the community responded Very favorably, and 35.3% indicated that the community was Neutral. No respondents indicated that the community responded Very unfavorably or Unfavorably.

Further, participants were asked to answer ‘How likely are you to use word clouds in your future work?’ This question also used a Likert-type scale, with responses: Extremely likely, Somewhat likely, Neither likely nor unlikely, Somewhat unlikely, and Extremely unlikely. The majority of those participants who answered this question, 56%, indicated they were Somewhat likely and an additional 20% said they were Extremely likely to recommend using word clouds. An additional 12% of participants stated they were Neither likely nor unlikely or Somewhat unlikely to use word clouds in the future.

Participants expressed low utilization of word clouds in evaluation reports, with 56.0% stating they never use them. Despite the low utilization of word clouds in evaluation reports, those who had used word clouds indicated that they were met positively by clients, with 52.9% stating they were met Favorably by clients. The majority of participants, 56.0%, stated they were Somewhat likely to use word clouds in their future work. Further, 54.2% of participants expressed that they were Somewhat likely to recommend word clouds to others working in community development. The results from these questions indicate that although there is not widespread utilization of word clouds, there are positive perceptions by both those working in community development and community members/clients. This could indicate the potential for increased utilization of word clouds with community development professionals.
Research Question 2: How do community development professionals see word clouds being used in the field?

The SMEs were asked ‘What role(s) (if any) do you see word clouds playing in helping community development efforts?’. This was an open-ended question meant to generate insights about the potential use of word clouds in community development, and participants had several suggestions for how word clouds could be used in community development efforts. Participants saw word clouds as a method for engaging communities. Those individuals espousing this point explained that word clouds are an effective method to elicit participation, and a useful tool for explaining values or visions. They also pointed out that word clouds help community members see the ideas of others around them and determine where their ideas overlap and understand the perspectives of others. One participant indicated they like to encourage community members to create their own word clouds for these comparison exercises.

It was also explained that word clouds could be a useful method for presenting information back to communities. A few participants again pointed to word clouds as an interesting method for visualizing qualitative data. Some saw word clouds as a source of inspiration for community members, and an easy way to provide emphasis to ideas brought forward in community inquiry. Others saw word clouds as a useful way to graphically represent community ideas. The SMEs viewed word clouds as a method for presenting data that was easily understood. The accessibility of word clouds is something that stood out to several individuals, as they enabled community members to easily recognize and understand findings. It was also seen as a means to elicit public and academic discussion.

Further, participants saw word clouds as a useful tool to help identify themes from community inquiry. Those completing the survey also explained word clouds are a helpful tool for presenting the key themes expressed by community members into reports, posters, presentations, and infographics. This was seen as particularly useful when a researcher returns to a community to present the findings of a needs assessment.

Another question asked ‘Why should community development professionals utilize (or not utilize) word clouds in their work?’ This was another open-ended question, and generated similar results as the previous questions. Participants recognized the utility of word clouds in visualizing data, identifying themes, and as being accessible and easily understood data visualization tool. However, beyond these key themes, participants also highlighted the attractiveness of word clouds. Further, multiple individuals identified word clouds as a “fun” method for visualizing data. Participants also stated that word clouds should be utilized as a tool for inspiring communities. They noted that word clouds also help community members and leaders focus on the meaning and purpose of their work.

There were also several reasons brought forward as to why some individuals do not use word clouds in their work. The most common explanation for not utilizing word clouds was because the lack of context. With one individual saying: ‘...But without context, sharing a word cloud form clients doesn’t communicate much...’ One individual pointed out that while visually appealing, they do not communicate “specific impacts”. Finally, one individual pointed out “I am not a fan - it’s just a way to make quantitative data (frequency of words) look seemingly-qualitative.”

Participants also offered several specific opinions about when and when not to use word clouds. It was explained that: “Useful for general use, may not be appropriate for formal evaluation reports unless the methodology is made clear”. Further, one participant cautioned that word clouds should not merely be used as a way to fill space, and explained the importance of providing an explanation to accompany the word cloud. Additionally, one individual pointed out that the literacy level of the intended audience should be considered when determining if word clouds are an appropriate methodology.

Additionally, SMEs were asked ‘How likely are you to recommend using word clouds to others who work in community development?’. This question used a Likert-type scale with the answers Extremely likely, Somewhat likely, Neither likely nor unlikely, Somewhat unlikely, and Extremely unlikely. The majority of participants, 54.2%, stated they were Somewhat likely, and 20.8% stated they were Extremely likely to recommend word clouds to others. Fewer individuals, 12%, stated they were Neither likely nor unlikely or Somewhat unlikely to recommend word clouds. Finally, 4.2% of participants stated they were Extremely unlikely to recommend.

There were several reasons participants identified for using word clouds in their work. Word clouds were brought forward as a method for engaging communities, presenting data to communities, and tool for identifying major themes in data. They were identified as a useful method for presenting research findings to communities and as a tool to stimulate conversation. Though many identified word clouds as a useful tool, there were also some concerns expressed about this visualization technique. Several individuals indicated that the lack of context associated with word clouds is a major shortcoming for the tool. It was also explained that word clouds may not be an appropriate tool for formal evaluation report writing, especially if the source data is not included. Additionally, when participants were asked if they would recommend word clouds the majority, 54.2%, said it was Somewhat likely.
that they would. The results from these questions indicate that there are several major reasons for utilizing word clouds in the community development context, but there are still some concerns with the visualization technique. Despite these concerns, over half of participants stated they would most recommend word clouds.

potential for increased utilization of word clouds with community development professionals.

Research Question 3: What are the best practices in community development and evaluation in regards to word clouds?

The next set of questions were meant to determine the current best practices for using word clouds in community development. The first directly asking ‘Please suggest some best practices for using word clouds in community development work.’ This was an open-ended question, and SMEs provided several ideas for how word clouds can best be utilized. They offered technical tips, reporting suggestions, as well as suggestions for how to format the word cloud inputs.

Participants offered several specific technical tips for using word clouds. There were multiple suggestions for removing some words from the visualization including articles (a, the, etc.) as well as other common or irrelevant words. Additionally, participants offered several stylistic suggestions for word clouds usage. It was suggested that word clouds should not be overused, and if they are used, it is important to ensure that they are large and dark enough to be interpreted. Participants provided additional suggestions for how to color word clouds, and it was suggested that a color scheme be selected that works to highlight the data. Another individual suggested the colors should be determined based on the audience.

SMEs also provided best practices for when and how to use word clouds in reporting. One SME suggested that word clouds be used as a method to illustrate issues to the community, specifically when analyzing social media data or stakeholder discussions. In the same theme, it was suggested that word clouds be used as a tool for brainstorming and conducting visioning sessions to help ease tense community discussions. One participant also pointed out that word clouds are a useful tool for pulling out themes in qualitative data.

Survey participants also had several points of caution for using word clouds. It was explained that word clouds should be seen as a snapshot, and not used to draw hard conclusions. It was once again emphasized that word clouds should have a purpose, and not be used as a means of filling space. Further, it was pointed out that an explanation is necessary to explain what a word cloud is and how frequency is determined when using word clouds in reporting. One participant went further with this idea and stated that when reporting the source tables used to create the word clouds should be included.

There were also several suggestions for how to handle the inputs that go into the development of word clouds. One participant suggested that short open ended responses were the best questions for word cloud development. The method of data collection was also indicated to be an important aspect of developing word clouds, as data should be systematically and rigorously collected. It was further pointed out that the development of survey questions used in the creation of word clouds should be thought out and inspire some type of action. SMEs also explained that the community should have input in the development of word clouds. Participants also cautioned that the relative size of the word could overstate its importance when depicted in a word cloud.

When asked ‘Which website do you generally use to create word clouds?’ the most common responses were Wordle and Tagxedo. NVivo and Infogram were also mentioned as software used to develop word clouds, though less frequently. When participants were asked why they used a particular word cloud software, the free price and ease of use were the only rational given.
Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the utility of word cloud visualizations in the context of community development. Though many of the findings indicated positive implications for the use of word clouds, there were also several reservations associated with using this data visualization method. For that reason it is necessary to explore both the promises and pitfalls associated with using word clouds. In regards to the promises, a model was developed to help future community developers determine if word clouds would be an effective tool for their purposes. The pitfalls identified from the literature and survey findings will provide community developers enough information necessary to determine the appropriateness and approach for using word clouds.

Promises of Word Clouds

Those individuals working in the field of community development are constantly striving for ways to engage community members in the research process, and there were several ideas brought forward by survey participants relevant to this point. Multiple survey participants corroborated previous findings that identified word clouds as a useful tool for disseminating research findings (Miley & Read, 2011; Ramsden & Bate, 2008; DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014). Participants went further with these ideas and identified word clouds as a useful tool for stimulating conversations in the community. Word clouds were also identified as a useful method for helping community members come to a consensus about community issues. These findings have major implications for those individuals working in community development. Those individuals that have used word clouds held generally positive attitudes about future utilization, as well as positive beliefs about the perceived satisfaction of community members. The ability to stimulate conversation and help reach a consensus in the community make word clouds a valuable tool for individuals working in community development.

It is important for those individuals working in community development to produce reports and presentations that are useful for the communities in which they work, as community members are an important audience. The SMEs identified word clouds as a useful tool for supplementing reports and presentations, and thus engaging members of the community. Multiple reasons were identified as to why word clouds are useful in report writing and presentations, but one frequently cited reason was the ease with which they are understood. Being easy to understand is important for those individuals working in community development, as the levels of education and literacy can vary greatly in different communities. Further, word clouds were described as being useful for the simplification of complex qualitative data. Word clouds by design identify the most frequently used words, which can help those individuals in the community understand important qualitative findings. The simplification of complex data has numerous implications for those working in community development. By incorporating visualizations that are easily understood, it can further foster the engagement of individuals in the community.

While working in communities, being able to present data in a quick and meaningful way can be important for community engagement. Community partners may not have time to engage and understand all relevant data collected in association with a project, and it is important to quickly engage relevant parties, and provide them with information. As discussed by DePaolo & Wilkinson (2014) word clouds enable viewers to form quick interpretations of data without information overload, an idea confirmed by this study’s findings. Participants described word clouds as a quick information summary, appropriate for a variety of audiences. Further, word clouds were described by multiple participants as visually pleasing and attractive. The attractiveness of this word clouds can help draw in the attention of community members, or other audiences, and further engage them with data. Being able to quickly convey salient information to community members in a visually pleasing manner, is an important objective for community developers, and word clouds could be a useful tool towards this end. Figure 3 outlines some of the several promises associated with the use of word clouds.

![Promises of Word Clouds](figure3.png)
Pitfalls of Word Clouds

While those individuals participating in the study had numerous positive opinions about the use of word clouds, they also identified several potential pitfalls of word clouds which could have implications for community development professionals. One major pitfall associated with word clouds, illustrated in the literature and corroborated by survey findings, is in connection to the lack of context associated with this visualization technique (Williams, Parkes, & Davies, 2013). This is true in regards to the lack of context within the data, i.e. misinterpreting the actual meaning, and the broader community context from which the data was collected. By failing to address the issue of context in the use of word clouds, there is the potential to disseminate inaccurate information (Harris 2011), and potentially mislead community partners. Providing inaccurate information to communities may potentially undermine the research objectives, and alienate potential research partners. It is therefore important for all those individuals involved in community development to use caution in utilizing word clouds, and take steps, outlined in the next section, to ensure the information disseminated is accurate.

Survey participants identified several other potential pitfalls which have implications for those working in community development. Though word clouds were identified as a useful tool for providing a quick snapshot, it is not useful for drawing hard conclusions. Expanding on this point, multiple survey participants indicated that word clouds are not sufficient as a stand alone reporting technique, and necessitate an explanation and supporting information. These points emphasize word clouds as a supplemental tool for data dissemination, not a tool to be used in isolation of other data explanations and visualizations. By recognizing the limitations as well as the utility of word clouds, those working in community development to disseminate data to community members and partners in the most effective and meaningful way.

Practice Tips

Researchers and practitioners now knowing what is out there about word clouds can benefit from the following tips below. This is not an comprehensive list, but it captures the findings of this study and previous work in the area. This list should be updated and revised in future publications.

1. Remember that word clouds are useful tools for data organization and visualization, but should not substitute for data analysis
2. Remember that word clouds do not capture the meaning of the individual words
3. Realize that the length of word can be conflated with importance
4. Realize that words with similar sizes are difficult to compare
5. Recognize that word clouds input may lack context, and the meaning of statement can be lost when looking at the individual components.
6. Consider that the questions used to generate the word cloud input need to be carefully crafted to provide meaningful results.
7. Realize that word clouds may not be appropriate for formal report writing, despite their visual appeal.
8. Recognize that word clouds should not be used as a means to fill space in a report and necessitate an explanation of what they visualize.
9. Consider that the creation of word clouds may necessitate some previous knowledge and experimentation with the software.
10. Recognize that data used in word cloud generation should be taken directly from participants, and not from the notes of observers.

Conclusion

This article provided a look into the use of word clouds in community development research and practice. Word clouds do have utility for researchers and practitioners alike as a data visualization tool. Perhaps most importantly, word clouds provide an easy to understand and accessible form of data visualization that allows community development professionals to better work and communicate with the citizens they serve. While word clouds may not replace current tools for data visualization, they are a community development tool that can complement and supplement any current efforts utilizing qualitative data in community development work. The hope of this study is that the lessons learned from this study provide guidance for their future use in communities.


The Future of Community Development

Commentary by Chris Marko
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This commentary addresses key concepts to consider for the future of community development. This is not an academic paper, and is primarily based on just over a half a century of life experience, and 25 years of work experience with communities, diverse populations, programs, policy, and networks primarily in Oregon, United States of America (USA), as well as the Western U.S., nationally, and to some degree, internationally. I have worked for local government, a council of governments (COG), a combined community action program (CAP) and community development corporation (CDC), and a non-profit organization serving rural communities through training, technical assistance, and financing, primarily for small water and wastewater projects, and economic development—celebrating my 20 year anniversary!. I have also led an advocacy team and have successfully advocated for community and economic development programs, housing programs, and water and wastewater infrastructure programs. To address the question, “what is the future of community development?”, one must consider that “community development” is about connecting people, primarily—and further connecting people with knowledge, skills, resources, to develop capacity (capability) to move forward with initiatives, activities, and projects to strengthen communities. Recently, the International Association of Community Development (IACD) adopted a definition of community development (a bold endeavor): community development is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, equality, economic opportunity and social justice, through the organization, education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings. The Community Development Society (CDS) adopted this definition following the CDS IACD Annual International Conference, Sustaining Community Change; Building Local Capacity to Sustain Community Development Initiatives in Bloomington, Minnesota, July, 2016. The National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) adopted the definition in conjunction with the CDS NACDEP Conference, Big Skies, Bold Partnerships; Moving Mountains Together in Big Sky, Montana, June, 2017. These events brought together hundreds of people involved with community development from around the world, and particularly the U.S., to share research, projects, programs, resources, challenges, and success stories to further the field of community development, and partnership—the basis for connecting people. So the future of community development must involve “partnership”. Partnerships help bridge divisions between people, groups, communities, organizations, agencies, business, etc. Partnerships are relationships based on understanding and agreements around principles, purposes, goals, processes, mutual benefits. Partnerships break down the silos we fall into with programs such that we can collaborate on initiatives, activities, and projects for greater impact in communities.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDC’s) adopted in 2016 also offer a plethora of areas to focus on for the future of community development—I believe “Goal 6, Clean Water and Sanitation” is the most important. Why? Because human beings cannot exist without water. In fact, water is so important that we cannot have life on earth without water. Water is arguably the most important element (air also) to survive. Since life is the foundation for human beings, and human beings make up communities, water must be in the top considerations for the future of community development.

So, while we are it, let’s talk about “climate change”. Whether or not you believe in “global warming”, let’s look at the world. Just this year, and last year, and the last few years, there have been larger storms, with greater intensity, with more frequency. The National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) routinely posts updates about records for the “hottest year” on record, the warmest spring, the coldest winter, which seem to be more and more common. There is no doubt that what we have seen this past summer into fall in the first part of hurricane season alone, the impacts of storms—and the need to be prepared for emergencies, and protection of water and health. Fires in northern California are the result of immediate adverse environmental conditions due to (dry conditions and wind) and several years of drought—it’s all about water.

Health. Health is another critical area for the future of community development, because health, like water (and food) is vital for biological survival. Without water, food, and health, all of which are inter-related of course, we die. Air too. Health care, access to health care, and preventive approaches to curbing risks, and costs, are key basic elements which we need to get a handle on for the future. Some may say we are in a crisis in the United States—some folks think our health care system is a disaster, others are making proposals which many think are disasters—bottom line, we need to expand the access to health care, particularly for people who cannot afford it, as these populations are most at risk for health problems—the cycle of poverty keeps people unstable. It becomes difficult to live in a house, which makes it difficult to find and keep a job, and buy food, and feed kids, and have time for family, and so on. Access to care to maintain decent health is a cornerstone for any civil society.

Housing. Homelessness in my city, Portland, Oregon, and in Oregon as a state, is becoming a greater, more noticeable problem. There was an area along a creek recently “swept” by the city which
yielded pounds of human waste, needles, and garbage throughout the area, and many of the people who “lived” there can be found along a neighborhood street corner, in a vehicle parked in a street, under the highway bridge, along the railroad tracks, and in neighborhoods throughout the city. Meanwhile, home prices are skyrocketing making homeownership more difficult, and most of the new housing is higher end condominium or town houses, rather than single family, or affordable housing. Portland is filling in, and people are finding it more difficult to find affordable rental, or homeownership, housing. At the League of Oregon Cities (LOC) Annual Conference in Portland, nearly every representative from every city I spoke with about needs mentioned “housing”. For a country where poverty is so severe, and resources so scarce, basic shelter may not even be possible. Humans need covered places for safety, warmth, and stability—even nomadic people had camps with shelter. Without it, human life cannot be stable.

Arts and Culture. People need to belong. We are social creatures who identify with others through groups, behaviors, common meaning through values, expression, symbols, language, music, customs, and art. I hesitate to even say what art “is”, given the wide range of interpretation (isn’t that the point?). I will suggest the ability to create leads to everything we develop. Everything we have ever invented comes from creativity! Economies come from creativity, solving problems or addressing needs—the foundation for entrepreneurship—comes from creativity, products and services come from creativity, money comes from creativity, and the idea to do something comes from creativity. People identify with each other through culture, and art, as intrinsic elements of our being. The CDS NACDEP Conference in Big Sky, Montana featured leadership through lyricism; hip hop culture and leadership in community development including two inspirational hip hop artists and teachers of culture about how expression of challenges in culture through art (i.e. rapping like poetry), can be a positive outlet for troubled youth. Arts and culture are often overlooked in communities, but they are the foundation of values in defining community. At the same time, the future of community development must embrace the challenge of diversity in culture, to foster acknowledgement and respect of differences, and to ensure community development professionals gain some degree of “cultural competence”—a significant challenge in our primarily English speaking society.

Technology – where we have been the past 25 years is an indication of how far we may go in the next 20 years technologically. We did not have the internet as a common medium for communication, we did not have wireless technology widely used, and we did not have smart phones. I remember having “Star Trek” toys as a kid—a communicator which reminds of the “clam” cell phone, and a “tri coder” which reminds me of google at the press of button, or Siri as Spock says “computer, how far is it to the Fred Meyer grocery store on SE Glisan St?” For those of you who know what I am talking about great, for those who do not, just remember there was an original Star Trek which existed before computers. Some of these items which have actually manifested in similar forms in our modern world. Still we do not beam down to planets and back to space ships, but who can really say what the next 25 years will bring? More social networking, more integrated audio-visual systems, more reality simulation experiences, more holoraphic and voice activated systems, auto–driving cars (?), new energy systems (?), drone monitoring (?). The possibilities seem literally endless. For a technophobe in the 1980’s, I am encouraged to see people still interacting, as we will always be social creatures. While I also see problems with people looking at screens more and more throughout the day, particularly children, with alienation, attention deficit, and potential impacts on social skills, I also see positive benefits of embracing technology, social media, and information systems. One thing is for sure, the future of community development needs to embrace, and even enhance, technology systems for greater connectivity, information sharing, and improving processes in delivering services—all of which is possible!

Well Being. The idea of well-being is that we have a positive mental state, hope, and faith. The CDS Annual International Conference in recent years has featured several sessions on individual, social, and community well-being. This is perhaps viewed as the “advanced” stage of community development, as one could consider Maslow’s hierarchy of needs—several of which are represented in key issues to consider for the future of community development—safety, shelter, belonging, and self-esteem (double check to make I got them). I have read about how positive thinking impacts health (positively), and negative thinking affects health negatively. Teams, or groups, which practice positive mental attitude are motivated to achieve—I remember playing soccer and Positive, Mental Attitude (PMA) was our mantra and meditation. We envisioned making it to the state championship, and did. So we lost, and even in that, we lost with grace and celebrated our magical journey. In order for communities to live well, people need to think well, have hope, and care. What else are we here for? Well that is perhaps another question for another commentary.

My intention is to address key issues I believe are important for the future of community development—some, but not all. I hope this helps you consider what the future of community development will be for you, and your communities. I leave you with some more to consider in my CDS Presidential address at the CDS NACDEP Conference in Big Sky, Montana, June 13th, 2017 in honor of community development.

Now is The Time for Community Development
CDS Presidential Address by Chris Marko
June 13, 2017 in Big Sky, Montana

Now is the time for community development. Why? Now more than ever we need solution oriented thinking to address the challenges of our time including fear of difference which manifests on multiple levels; racism, sexism, religious intolerance, political conflict, and economic disparity. We need people like you, like us, who can help bridge and heal divisions between each other, within communities, states, nations, and around the world. As community developers we engage others in discussion, promote collaborative decision-making, and develop a sense of community, not separation. CDS principles of good practice represent values which can help in this process. Community development models and approaches can help frame how we approach our work, and each other, including the community capitals framework and values of wealth. Culture and arts can also play a vital role in attracting youth, empowering people who are marginalized, and promoting expression of life experience to enrich our communities, and economies as we have learned at this conference. I will discuss how these three elements combined can help guide our path to creating a better world for each other and communities.

CDS Principles of Good Practice

- Promote active and representative participation toward enabling all community members to meaningfully influence the decisions that affect their lives. This is the foundation for democratic process and now more than ever we need to engage people in civil, constructive, and productive dialogue in a politically charged climate of polarity, division, and extremism.
- Engage community members in learning about and understanding community issues, and the economic, social, environmental, political, psychological, and other impacts associated with alternative courses of action. Communities are complex, and cannot be defined by one characteristic, or program, or single discipline. Now more than ever human beings need connection and that is what community development promotes: connection, not disconnection.
- Incorporate the diverse interests and cultures of the community in the community development process; and disengage from support of any effort that is likely to adversely affect the disadvantaged members of a community. Now more than ever we need acknowledgement, understanding, and appreciation of people’s differences. People cannot appreciate differences if they do not understand differences, and misunderstanding can lead to conflict and violence as we see more and more every day. We live in a world which must embrace diversity, and new leadership of CDS is taking initiative to promote diversity.
- Work actively to enhance the leadership capacity of community members, leaders, and groups within the community. CDS annual international conferences feature sessions on leadership, and now more than ever we need real leaders who can inspire others, share knowledge to create “legacy” as we heard at our conference in Big Sky to leave behind a positive impact on future life. Leadership is not just about elected officials, it is about positive action.
- Be open to using the full range of action strategies to work toward the long-term sustainability and well-being of the community. We are living in a world of incredible change. Our world views are being challenged more than ever and the reality that things are not how we thought is evident day after day. Community development is about adapting to change with various models, tools, and approaches in working with communities. No one community is exactly the same as another, and that is why utilizing a host of strategies is important.

Many of the CDS principles of good practice complement the Community Capitals Framework/Values of Wealth models of community development, which embrace multiple elements of community.

- Intellectual
- Individual
- Cultural
- Social
- Environmental
- Physical
- Financial
- Political
I will now leave you with some Lyrical Leadership as “Community Development Meets Hip Hop”:
Now is the time for community development
Peace, love, and unity need to become more relevant
Hip Hop we heard is here to stay
Like it or not is what Divine Carama had to say
Indeed, we have Supaman powers to save the day
Put your hands in the air and just say “hey!”
I embrace this art as a part of life
Representing struggle and dealing with strife
We need positive thinking, solution oriented minds
We need more caring and finding ways to be kind
Now I am not perfect, but I have something to say
I am President of CDS as long as today
Here in Big Sky, Montana, we’ve come a long way
But we must move on and cannot stay
So please consider these words
As expressions not so absurd
We are here to change the world and make a better place
Share in community and the best of the human race
So what is the message of my Presidential address?
Now is the time for CDS!
I thank you all and feel so blessed.
Peace Out
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