"Community Building"

Ruth Crow, *Community Representative*

Community Matters Conference
15/ 9/ '98
Contribution from Ruth Crow AM
Let's Face the Contradictions.

SUMMARY

This paper will present some ideas on the strategic contradiction between community of interest and localised community, and then examine three tactical contradictions which continually have to be resolved to promote the process of creating community. It also examines how the process of creating community is affected by the prevailing values of society (privatism acquisitiveness and competition)

. . . .

PROFILE OP PRESENTER.

Ruth Crow AM is a life member of the Town and Country Planning Association and Community Child Care. The citation on the Order of Australia award (1993) stated that it was for her *contribution to the promotion of participative social and environmental planning.* She is an Associate of the Victoria University of Technology.
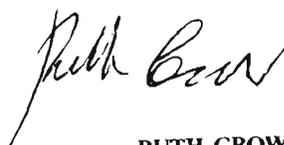
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BUILDING COMMUNITIES
Contribution from Ruth Crow
to
THE COMMUNITY MATTERS CONFERENCE
15/ 9/ '98

INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s I belonged to organisations with names such as
Action for Better Education and Action for Adequate Child Care.
The titles implied "more-of-the-same". Quite suddenly young
people like Joan Kirner, Ann Morrow and Winsome McCaughey were
campaigning for "something-different" using emotive words, for
example, Community Child Care, Community Learning Centres,
Community Health Centres, Coalitions and Collectives.

 For the first half of this century community was taken for
granted. Forty years ago a conference called COMMUNITY MATTERS
would not have attracted an audience, but today people have come
together to discuss community matters because matters relating to
the community are now a matter of public concern.

* How does today's society differ from the 1950/60s ?
* What are the challenges today ?
* What can be achieved in the not too distant future ?

BUILDING COMMUNITIES PART 1.
SETTING THE CONTEXT
WHAT IS DIFFERENT IN THE LAST HALF OF 20TH CENTURY ?

i. Immensity :- globalisation, telecommunications amalgamations,
freeways, huge sport complexes, mega projects .

ii. Poverty Gap :- unemployment, privatisation of welfare and
educational services, redundancies, escalation of housing prices,
colonisation of the home (marketing of goods and services previously
provided through family and neighbourhood support systems).

iii. A Shorter Proportion of Life Spent Earning :- entering
employment later, earlier retirement, longer life span.

1B. CONTEXT - THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

i. The Prevailing Concept is that our main purpose in life is to
earn more and more money so that we can acquire more and more
material goods. Such self-centredness results in piecemeal
concerns. This lays the basis for resentment and scapegoating.
and an escalation in consumerism, (people trying to fulfil their
yearning for human relationships by buying more and more goods and services).

ii. An Alternative Concept is that it is possible to try to have
some control over our own lives, to spend our working hours
contributing useful goods and services, to find opportunities for
self-improvement and to enjoy some form of social life.
These three elements of life are interconnected, for example,
ensuring a satisfying work relations (ie through a involvement
in a union) is one form of social life.

> My Choice is the Alternative Concept
> because
> I believe in making COMMUNITY MATTER
> through being involved in COMMUNITY MATTERS

1C. THE CONTEXT - THE EMOTIVE WORD "COMMUNITY"

What do we mean by the word COMMUNITY ? Are we talking about COMMUNITY OF INTEREST or COMMUNITY in a SPECIFIC LOCALITY ?

Community of interest is favoured by prevailing conditions:-

    sprawling suburbanisation,
        scattered location of community service and facilities.
            cuts to community funding,
                modern technology,
                    home based work,
                        and many more.

Resources Used to Meet Social Needs

Community of Interest Privately Owned Resourses	Localised Community Publicly Owned Resources
computers	the streets
telephones	the schools
cars	playgrounds and parks
private pools	public buidlings
videos	neighbourhood centres
and so on and on........	other public places

> Community of interest needs no favouring
> It has its own imperative
> Localised community needs favouring
> It is being diminished by prevailing trends

Favouring localised communities is a process which depends on the following inter-locking main factors :-
    SOCIAL MIX,
        COLLECTIVES
            VALUE JUDGEMENTS
                COMMUNITY ACTION
                    COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
                      COALITIONS....

> WHAT ARE TODAY'S CHALLENGES ?
>
> Communities of interest flourish in a humanised community
> BUT
> Humanised communities flourish in localised communities
> BUT
> WHAT ARE THE PROCESSES FOR BUILDING LOCALISED COMMUNITIES ?

BUILDING COMMUNITIES. PART 2.
WHAT ARE TODAYS'S CHALLENGES ?

3A. THE CHALLENGES - SOCIAL MIX

> An Historical Fact. Dr Vera Scantlebury Browne, the founder of one of our earliest social services, the Victorian Baby Health Centres, strongly advocated the location of the centres in the main shopping centres, close to the Town Hall (which were then in the hubs) so the mothers could meet their neighbours.

There are many differences between human beings, accepting each other humanises society. Today, the prevailing social conditions tend to reduce opportunities for formal and informal associations with those whose life styles are different from our own, therefore special attention needs be given to **promoting social mix.**

Human beings seek socialising activities in all sorts of ways, The most primitive is the **nodded greeting** (indicating a "live and let live" relationship). However opportunities to nod to neighbours are rapidly disappearing. The car-way-of-life and the consequent decrease in areas of neighbourhood focus means that neighbours do not see each other frequently enough to smile at each other and to be rewarded by each feeling that they belong in the neighbourhood.

Social mix depends on a mixture of social and physical planning measures, for example the clustering of social facilities in mixed urban hubs which are served by public transport.

2B. THE CHALLENGES - COLLECTIVES

> An Historical Fact, Until the beginning of the 1970 most community organistion modelled themselves on what was popularly called **parliamentary democracy.** Such formal and bureaucratic procedures were rejected by the new-type participative social movements. Thus the word **collective** was coined.

The intrinsic value of collectives is that they enable participants to tackle problems which are impossible for individuals to undertake by themselves, alone. Members of groups, acting together, can achieve results which are qualititatively and **quantitatively** different from what could be achieved by people working as isolated individuals

When people come together in a collective they may have rapid changes in their thinking and acting in a relatively short time. New members, with their new ideas can enliven a group. A vital collective thrives on this *exhilaration* of change.

On the otherhand, new members may bring with them values and aspirations which, in the initial stages, may be directed at serving their own self-interest. Also they may have exaggerated expectations of how the collective will change their lives for the better. In any case, there is no stage in anyone's life when they have completely set aside the dominant influences of our competitive, ambitious and aggressive society.

To overcome this constraint it is crucial to find ways of sharing
attitudes and experiences through formal and informal discussions
to work the *how, when. where and why* the collective is meeting
This process fosters bonds between participants, helping them
learn skills of co-operation, caring and accountability. Such
processes set the base for gradually formulating *value
judgement.*

2C. THE CHALLENGES - VALUE JUDGEMENTS

An Historical Fact. More than 150 years ago the trade union movement adopted the
motto :- *United we stand divided we fall* and individual unions had specific aims
to implement this **value judgement**. This has greatly contributed to humaning
society. However, to date, the community movement has no such unifying motto, and
community organisations sometimes promote parochial objectives. A value
judgement such as that adopted by the North Melbourne Association (NMA) in 1973
could promote a more humanistic ethic throughout the community movement... **A life
that sees human values as distinct from economic one as the prime objective.**

The successful long-term functioning of collectives depend on the
conscious sharing of value judgements enabling participants to :-
..

* fuse their personal needs with the hopes and ideas of
  others.

* solve personal needs socially

* begin to envisage the future

* find common ground with participants in other
  organisation which have different immediate aims but share
  basic values.

2D. THE CHALLENGES - COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

An Historical Fact. The term community development came into existence about 30
years ago as the result of campaigns by such organisations as Community Child Care,
Women's Electoral Lobby, Urban Action Associations. These organisations drew
attention to the destructive isolation which was resulting from the breakdown of
neighbourly supportive relationships.

One of Australia's first **Community Development Officers** was **Meredith Sussex**
who was appointed to that position by the Sunshine Council in 1974.

Community development organisations aim at creating conditions
for people to relate to each other. The original main motive for
community development was to overcome suburban isolation, In more
recent years community development has greatly fostered multi-
cultural relationships.

Currently two basic societal changes are affecting local communities :-

i. Work Practices

Modern work-practices are resulting in more home-based work (less socialising on the job). There is a decrease in the proportion of a time spent in the work-force during a life-time. The workforce is tending to be more mobile resulting in more residential mobility. Involvement in some form of community development can provide creative "leisure-time" activities and also give support to those who are living in a locality which is new to them.

ii. Information Technologies.

The global nature of tele-technolgies is marginalising those citizens who do not have access to it. Thère is an urgent need to reverse this trend by developing projects which demonstrate that informationn technologies can be used to enhance local community rather than to diminish it.

Paid staff are needed to promote community development. For the past 30 or more years governments at all levels have recognised that they have some responsibility for community development and have provided funding. The term Community Development Officer (CDO) is often used to describe those who are employed in this field.

In the early 1970s CDOs were given the name "Catalysts", implying that they brought different elements together with the result that the elements combined to form something quite different, but the catalyst remains outside the change, and can be re-used again and again. Thus :-

The role of the CDO is to raise the quality of life of theparticipants not to replace the efforts of the collective but to complement it and/or make it possible.

Currently there are four main ways community development is affected by economic rationalism :-

i. Funding.

Mercernary outcomes are now the way everything is being measured, but the worth of social relationships cannot be calculated by exact measuring the dollars and cents. In the present political climate government funding cannot be taken for granted. Thus there is the challenge of how to ensure adequate finances.

ii. Relationships Between Paid and Unpaid Participants

The trend towards privatised individualism affects the ethics of all citizens. Thus constant attention need to be given to ensure that community development is promoted and not the careers of participant(s) and/or staff.

iii   In our increasingly competitive, ambitious society community development projects can be used as "political footballs", Thus constant attention needs to be given to ensuring that precedence is given to accountability to the community rather than to the funding organisation (the government and/or charity institution).

iv   There is a current tendancy to use **economic terms to describe social relationships.** The community movement needs to continually popularise humanised language using words (or strings of several words) ...collectives. catalysts, the *process of creating community, community development projects, social mix,* which were coined in the 1970s. There is also the need to creatively add to this humanising vocabulary.

2E. THE CHALLENGES - COMMUNITY ACTION

An Historical Fact :- For hundreds of years, to defend their living standards, citizens have created a great variety of voluntary organisations. For more than half a century the main Victorian organisations were **Progress Associations, School Committees, Tenants Leagues, Mothers' Clubs,** and the **Country Women's Association.** Since the beginning of the 1970s there has been a proliferation of **community** action organisations as more and more people seek ways of participating on social issues.

The essential feature of a community action group is that people **choose** to come together because they have a desire to solve some issue. In all localities there is an endless variety of issues, for example :-

employment
        education
                culture and recreation,
                        neigbourhood social activities
                                health and welfare
                                        the natural environment
                                                and many others

The potential constituency of community actions groups includes people who **live, work,** are being **educated** or have an **interest in** the locality. Thus the membership of a community action group is likely to include people who are involved in educational organisations, unions, environmental groups and so on,

Community organisations are strengthened by the social **dynamism** which can be **sparked** off when people with **diverse organisational experience** meet together. On the other hand a narrow focus, on one issue, for example on **residential issues,** tends to diminishes the strength of local organisation, **robbing participants** of the opportunity of using the knowledge and skills they have gained in other social spheres, and robbing the **community movements** of the social **dynamism** which can be **sparked** off when people from diverse backgrounds meet together.

2F. THE CHALLENGES - COALITIONS

An Historical Fact. In July 1998 the Victoria University of circulated a document called Proposal for a Community Partnerships Model and Approach at Victoria University. The document reported :- Over the years, University staff have developed a large network of relationships with many of the communities that make up our society, although not highly profiled perhaps, they are an integral part of the functions of the University.

Coalitions are formed for three main purposes :-

   i. To link organisations around an issue in a particular
      neighbourhood, for example "Save Albert Park"

   ii. To form an "umbrella" organisation for groups that are
      promoting common issues but based in diffrent
      localities, for example, "Anti-Freeway" organisations.

   iii, To Seek common ground with organisations with
      different main aims. For example links between unions
      and community based organisations such as in "Green
      Bans"

There are all sorts of vays people seek common action. Therefore, often, coalitions have elements of each of these groupings.

Coalitions are strongest when there is both grass roots action and a top-level-agreement. In today's world such parallel actions can play a crucial role in helping large organisations to be reminded of their reponsibilities to their constituencies.

The expansion of tertiary education means that the base for developing closer links between the universities and the local community is growing rapidly. (See attachments).
. . . .

Part 3 of this paper makes some proposals on WHAT CAN BE DONE IN THE NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE ? The emerging, big problem is how to cope with the escalation of use of micro-technology.

Here is a challenging quote from Reflections from the Information Roadside by Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newell, published in Media Information Australia, Nov 19994.

THE CHALLENGE FROM INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES
The Information Superhighway

In Australian government planning to date, fundamental concepts of access and equity for all residential consumers are certainly being left by the roadside.

The global nature of information superhighways and the hegemony of international markets and transnational interest rasies issues for many Australians.

It is not just the interest of ordinary and marginalised resident consumers which are at stake. Indeed Australia faces a challenge to organise a social fabric and provision of public good so as the superhighway will be to the benefit of all Australians rather than the transnational interest. (emphasis added)

BUILDING COMMUNITIES - PART 3.
WHAT CAN BE DONE IN THE NOT DISTANT FUTURE ?

SOME PRACTICAL PROPOSALS

i. Promote the implementation of the **clustering** and **connect** planning principles - ie locating social facilities and services in **mixed use urban hubs** served by public transport.

ii. Recognise and popularise the need to employ **people with special skills** to make participation possible.

iii. Encourage community organisations to clearly state and popularise their **value judgements,**

iv. Provide opportunities for organisations with diverse aims to find **areas of agreement** fostering the **formation of coalitions,** both long term and short term.

v. Give special attention to developing **closer, many-sided links** between community organisations, universities and unions.

vi. Find innovative ways of providng **community access to information technolgy.**

vii. Promote **humanising words** and discourage words which reflect **market-place relationships**

vii Think **globally** and act locally !

These seven policies points are interlinked. Implementing one will help with the implementation of the others.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Page from *Less Energy with More Enjoyment* published by the North Melbourne Association.

2. *Ecoso Supplement* published by the Crow Collection Association.

3. An extract from *Proposal for a Community Partnership Approach at Victoia University.*

4. Extracts from reports by Ruth and Maurie Crow

* Documents referred to in this report are available in the Crow Collection

ACCESS TO THE CROW COLLECTION

The Collection is located in the Footscray Campus Library at the Victoria University of Technology. There is access to the Collection during library hours, Help from the Co-odinator (Ruth Crow) is available on request.

Phone :- (03) 9329.8685, Fax :- (03) 9688.4324, Email :- CROWCOLL@VUT.EDU.AU.
VutNet, :- WWW.VUT.EDU.AU/ζLIBRARY/COLLECTIONS/CROW.HTML.
. . . .

Less Energy with More Enjoyment in North and West Melbourne
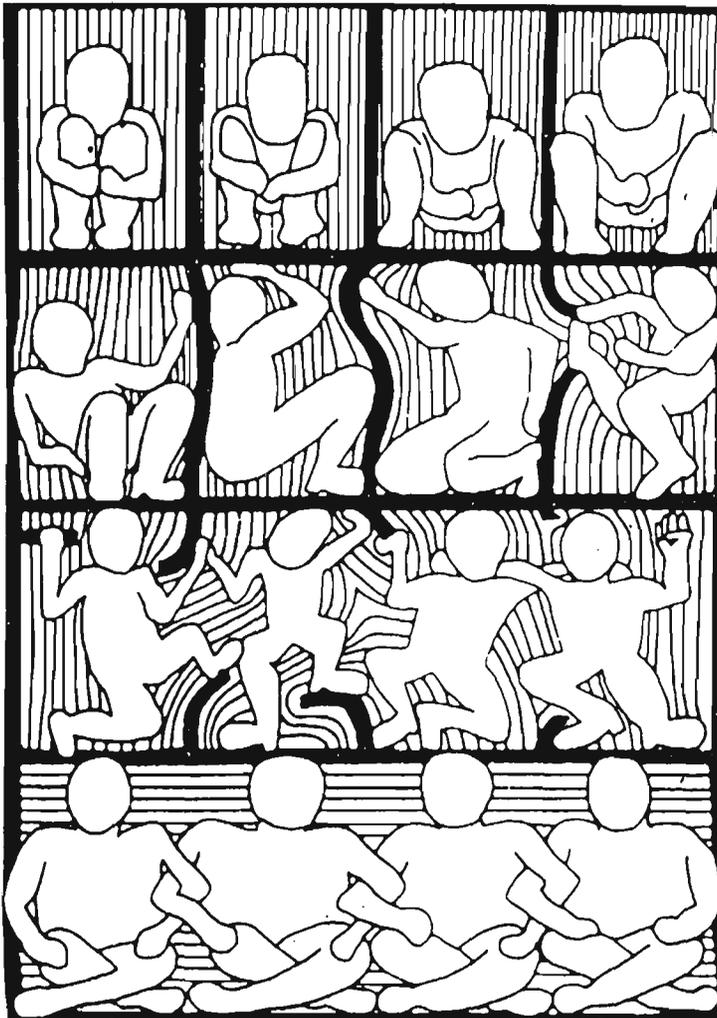
"......community involvement cannot be imposed from above. This does not mean that this process can typically take place spontaneously, without any particular people being responsible.....There needs to be some people..... with the direct responsibility of making it possible for people to come together in both formal and informal ways."

These words occur in our remarks on Housing Commission estates, but they apply with equal force to all who live or work in North or West Melbourne.

But, by its very nature, community involvement cannot be imposed from above. This does new mean that this process can typically take place spontaneously, without any particular people being responsible, or without spaces in which they can meet each other. Therefore, as well as people being employed to supply the traditional services, there needs to be some people who are employed with the direct responsibility of making it possible for people to come together in both formal and informal ways.

Experiences in other Housing Commission estates, for example, shows that for gatherings of women to get to know each other to help to meet their own special needs a "catalyst" was necessary. That is, a person whose job it is to create the conditions for bringing people together so that they can develop their own supportive networks, in their own way (ref. 9). Ideally, the continuing attention of a catalyst is no longer needed after the process of gathering people together has been put into action. In estates where families are living in flats, there would seem to be even more need for catalysts if participation is to be developed amongst such fluctuating occupiers.

The first step in modifying Hotham services is the recognition of the need to provide opportunities for the development of supportive services by surrounding or re-surrounding families with neighbours they know, and friends of their choosing. Building on these supportive networks, it is then possible to make more permanent modifications to the services provided. Continuous consultation with the widest possible community participation is essential if services are to be shaped to meet the ever-changing needs of the people they are meant to serve.

How existing services can be modified to provide more supportive functions, and whether drop-in places are needed, where these should be and their character should be carefully examined by the residents on or near the estate as well as those working in specialist services. The distribution of different blocks of flats (some high-rise, some walk-up), and even more important, the character of the occupants of different blocks (some predominantly single-parent families, or ethnic groups, or elderly citizens) would all have to be taken into account.

COMMUNITY MATTERS CONFERENCE, 15/ 9/ '98.
Building Communities, a Paper by Ruth Crow
Attachment
on
REVIVING EARLIER THEORIES

The ideas in this paper are based on three main reports with which Maurie Crow and I have been involved.

1. *Plan for Melbourne Part 1*, was written by Maurie Crow and several others in 1969 when the impact of the new social movements was beginning to be felt by people involved in both the the community movements and the trade unions. Here is a quote :-

To reach our full stature we all need a measure of privacy, a measure of casual, informal association with relatives, friends workmates, and neighbours, a measure of enjoyment where we are in an audience, and at its highest level, and on occasions, full participation in some form of organised social activity. To achieve these relationships we seek some way of participating in the community in the locality in which we live and at the same time seek out those who may share our interests.

The peculiarity of any high-class social life is not that it is based on a group of people voluntarily co-operating with the same interests and aims, but to operate at its highest, or often to operate at all, each such group requires skilled people to give instruction guidance and inspiration.

2. *Citizens Action Plan for North and West Melbourne* was prepared by fifty members of the North Melbourne Association in 1973 as one way of particpating in the preparation of the Melbourne City Council's strategy Plan, Here is a quote from that report :-

A neighbourhood focus is an area in a district which is distinguished by the fact that the people who live work or are being educated in the vicinity are attracted to come to it or to pass through it frequently. The more varied the "attractions" the wider the range of people who will be drawn to the focus and the longer the time they will spend there.

An essential feature of a nieghbourhood focus is that some of its spaces, either indoor or outdoor, are not privately owned. Such spaces can only be attractive if it has some objects or people to whom those living or working nearby can relate.

3. *Community Consumerism and Class – an Examination Localism* was written as an answer to some of the theories on the "death of local community" which were popularised in 1984. Maurie Crow and I collaborated in writing this booklet. Here is a quote :-

Who said the word "Community" conveys a romanticised concept of a harmonious benevolence, homgeneously diffused thgroughout a residential group ?

We use the word "community" with the opposite meaning of a "social mix"; its very essence is not a grouping of like-minded people but a grouping of people irrespective of their differences. They may take commonn action over an issue that affects them, but this does not obliterate the different life styles or different standpoints of individuals any more than, for example job action has such an effect.

(Working papers of these reports are in the Crow Collection)

COMMUNITY MATTERS CONFERENCE,
              15/ 9/ '98.
              Attachment
                  to
          Building Communities,
          a Paper by Ruth Crow

Extract from a document from
Deputy Vice-Chancellor,
Professor Paul Clark.
22/ 7/ '98.

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY
OF TECHNOLOGY
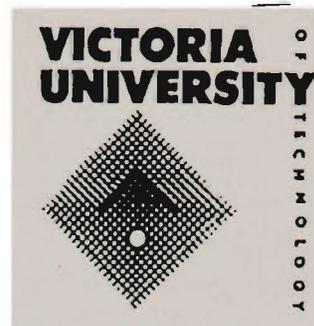
Proposal for a Community Partnership Model and Approach at Victoria University of Technology

Purpose:

The purpose of this paper is twofold:

(i)   to provide background information and an outline of a structure for implementing of a Victoria University of Technology Community Partnership approach in order to increase the participation of ethnic (and other) communities in University courses; and

(ii)   to provide advice about implementing a partnership project which is to be completed in December 1998.

Introduction and Background:

A partnership approach between the University and the community is a key component of the University's Personalised Access and Study (PAS) policy and strategy. The partnership approach emphasises equity as a key principle that underpins the University's partnership strategy of providing course and program offerings, which are designed to reflect as closely as possible the learning needs and study aspirations of students, as part of responding to the broader national and regional educational issues and goals.

This approach is consistent with State and Federal government policies, which emphasise the importance of fair and equitable participation in education and training for all, irrespective of gender, language and cultural background. For example, Australia's multicultural agenda (1989), which continues to enjoy bipartisan political support, places a major emphasis on participation (including participation in education) as a key principle in giving concrete expression to the government multicultural policies. The educational reforms introduced by Federal and State administrations since the mid-1980's have continued to emphasise participation in education for all Australians as a key principle and a central plank of their strategies in the promotion of a competitive and economically productive society. One example of this has been the Federal and State strategy of 'productive diversity', which has sought to harness the benefits that come from an ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse society.