

The Knowledge Bottleneck

Community Economic Development: Building for Social Change,
edited by Eric Shragge & Michael Toye

REVIEWED BY JOHN HANRATTY

In CED, the connection between theory and practice is extremely important. However those heavily involved in practice or project implementation find that accessing theory or analysis is often too difficult, off-putting and time-consuming. The literature is not user-friendly. Practitioners are typically pragmatic people interested in ideas, but ideas in a hurry.

So I approached *Building for Social Change* wondering how much of it would be written with these hard-pressed practitioners in mind.

What I found is a mixed bag. There is undeniably a lot of valuable information or stimulating content in the book. I found many parts engaging, relevant, and absorbing. I am concerned that not enough of it will reach the practitioners who could benefit from it, however.

The editors and authors might argue that it's been written with at least two audiences in mind: academic and popular (the practitioner). That's a laudable, challenging ambition but it's not consistently achieved. I think the balance swings toward those with more academic interests.

Perhaps with a little creative reading, practitioners will appreciate the book more. The reader in a hurry might put aside the first four chapters (and first 107 pages) which concentrate on the theoretical, and instead jump into some of the later chapters first. They might make better entry points to the discussion, after which readers could return to the first chapters. That's the order in which my review deals with the contents.

Chapter 5, "Urban perspectives on CED practice: the Montreal experience," for instance, is a well-written look at the strong commitment to CED among communities and governments in Québec. It examines the story of the Community Economic Development Corporations (CDÉCs), as well as changes in democratic control, and evolving relations and tensions with government. The sketches of government funding programs for CED are very instructive. As elsewhere throughout the book, insights about universal issues are introduced or discussed effectively within the context of a particular CED organization and area of interest.

In Chapter 6, Melanie Conn asks "Why Women?" and touches on a number of intriguing projects across the country. To read about a venture in northeast British Columbia in which a farmers' and artisans' market also houses a women's centre is something that I find stimulating and encouraging. You also get a good sense of CED as an important strategy choice available for activists such as those interested in women's issues, as well as many others.

Two chapters on Aboriginal experiences of CED offer good case studies and reflections on how CED can be applied in diverse circumstances. David Newhouse helps to bridge the gap between academics and practitioners with his reference to Star Trek's "Borg." The Borg are a race with a collective consciousness

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that is relentless in its pursuit of targets for assimilation and withstands the most devastating blows – a juggernaut against which "resistance is futile." What better way to capture the forces that Aboriginal communities are up against as they seek authentic, appropriate forms of development?

Chapter 9's discussion of "survivor" economic development, on the other hand, does not derive from a popular TV show. But Kathryn Church's contribution grabbed me and took me right into a whole new community I hadn't imagined before: CED for and by psychiatric survivors or mental health self-help groups. It's another indication of the power and universality of CED as a concept and approach. This chapter is succinct and appealing – written for lay readers, not gnomes in the back stacks of the library.

Another neglected "sector" is tackled in Chapter 12, "Worker Ownership as a Strategy for Community Development." Gayle

Résumé : Le goulot d'étranglement des connaissances

Building for Social Change [Créer le changement social]

rassemble une variété impressionnante d'information sur le développement économique communautaire. Toutefois, il limite son public et son impact en utilisant un niveau de langage de manuel universitaire. (Vous seriez peut-être bien avisé de lire la dernière moitié en premier, et la première en second lieu.) Alors que c'est probablement ce que les éditeurs Eric Shragge et Michael Toye veulent faire, est-ce sage?

Dans le développement économique communautaire, le lien entre la théorie et la pratique est extrêmement important. Alors pourquoi est-ce que la théorie et l'analyse du DÉC sont si souvent écrites de façon à exclure les personnes impliquées dans les projets et les stratégies de DÉC? La littérature sérieuse peut être polie et couler sans devoir être laborieusement théorique tels que certains chapitres de ce même livre le démontrent.

Un goulot d'étranglement limite la circulation des idées et de l'information entre les théoriciens et praticiens du DÉC. Les deux côtés doivent travailler pour résoudre cette situation, mais les théoriciens doivent montrer le chemin. ■



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Broad and Linda Savory-Gordon present an in-depth, fascinating account of the takeover of Algoma Steel by its employees in the 1990s. While this action was a success in many respects, the authors make a strong argument that Algoma was not a great candidate for a lasting worker takeover. They identify the circumstances where worker ownership has the best chance of succeeding and deserves serious consideration.

Chapter 13, "State of the Art: The Third Option," by Gertrude Anne MacIntyre and Jim Lotz is filled with pragmatic insights and realism about the challenges of CED, focusing mostly on Nova Scotian illustrations. The authors also have a good historic perspective on how community development has evolved and what remains important.

It's often helpful to stand back and look at trends in CED practice outside of Canada, especially when guided by skilled observers. Chapter 14, "CED practice in the United States" shows how the American experience has been much different from ours in some ways, and very sophisticated. The authors look at the limitations of CED, as well as some strengths and weaknesses. By

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contrast, the next chapter is devoted to CED projects in Kenya, showing how CED and democratic principles work effectively regardless of the level of wealth or poverty of the community, or its location.

Now let us return to the book's first chapter, that some readers will find more relevant after having examined specific, concrete case material. Authors Eric Shragge and Michael Toye intend to set the context for the book, but it could equally serve as a review of some of the major themes: globalization, neoliberalism, the welfare state and the place of CED in all of this.

The book's second chapter revisits a Profile of CED Practice in Canada published in 2003 and offers some helpful considerations of definitions and distinctions within CED.

The third chapter, "Economics for CED Practitioners," I found intriguing but difficult. It offers a plausible explanation as to why orthodox economics has no interest in CED (or in many other huge areas of our national economy, such as the "care economy").

Authors John Loxley and Laura Lamb then return to the question of defining CED.

They consider how theory intertwines with choices made in practice and with the assumptions we make. The chapter gets quite abstract. Readers would do well first to consult the final summary and conclusion in order to determine if they want to plough through the whole chapter.

Finally, Chapter 4, "Taking care of business?," offers a lot of data and analysis regarding the world of work, and the huge changes taking place in it. Author Andrea Levy does an impressive job of integrating wide-ranging and multi-layered social trends, positive and negative. Among the topics she touches on are offloading of social services to the nonprofit sector, the latest effects of automation, and outsourcing both industrially and even domestically. It all amounts to "the decomposition of the world of work as we have known it in the latter half of the 20th century." A provocative chapter for sure.

Building for Social Change brings together an impressive array of data and outlooks. But its quasi-textbook style will limit its audience and impact. As MacIntyre and Lotz demonstrate in their chapter, serious non-fiction can be polished and flowing, and needn't be laboriously academic. Similarly, Conn shows that even the title of a workshop can make a lot of difference. "Counting Women In" or "Making the Economy Work for Us" generate a much better response than prosaic titles like "Women and Community Economic Development." If this seems trivial, I beg to differ. It reminds me in a very down-to-earth way about the importance of language in a practice that identifies itself with the needs and aspirations of ordinary people.

Admittedly, the book is published by a university printing house and presumably is intended for people active in post-secondary institutions. However, I still hoped to see more effort at overcoming the humps and bumps that deter non-academic readers from tapping at least some of the core theoretical reflections and insights. That way the discussion the editors seek would be leavened and stimulated and made as inclusive as possible.

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