

Community Development Research and Education: It is making a Difference, It Matters

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Good morning. I feel honored today to have a few minutes to talk about where Cooperative Extension is today in the area of community and economic development. As Scott explained this is not a new area for the Land Grant University. In fact it has often been the core of work conducted by cooperative Extension professionals.

This morning I want to spend a few minutes talking about what we know from the science of community and economic development and how Cooperative Extension is playing a very important role in the future of communities across this vast nation. Given the breadth of areas we work in I will focus on just a few. I have selected the areas of community capacity building, the fundamental base for the future of communities; maintaining and enhancing the economic base; public and private roles at the community level and entrepreneurship; including the utilization of information technologies to overcome geographic isolation. I want to highlight several programs across the country. As you know this is a bit dangerous. With almost 400 experts in the audience who develop and manage community development programs it is impossible for me to list or talk about

them all. So, if you don't hear your program it is not that I don't value it I just have a time constraint this morning. I could talk about the programs of Cooperative Extension for the rest of the day, but I'm afraid I might very well be the last person in this room if that was the case.

After highlighting what we are learning from the science, and how we are engaging the communities within these areas I will spend just a few minutes playing a very dangerous game, that of speculating where we might be in ten years.

First I want to take us aback 50 years or so. When some in our society were saying that community no longer mattered.

A Stumbling Block

In the 1950's many social scientist declared the eclipse of community (Stein, 1960). Stein and others saw the social forces transforming Western society from 1920 through the late 50's converging. The three processes were urbanization, industrialization, and bureaucratization. Many saw these forces as diminishing the importance of community in the lives of American citizens. Many have interpreted Stein's work to insinuate that the study of community was no longer a viable area of research and that community as a unit of analysis was no longer useful in understanding human behavior. Yet, Stein closes his historical book by saying, ...the situation of the community sociologist appears to be quite promising (Stein, 1960, p. 336). The role of community was changing, but it was

not dead. People still lived in places, they still had strong attachment to place. What my neighbors think still influenced behavior and many solutions to problems, whether created locally or globally would be solved at the local level.

Why do I open a presentation in 2005 with a forty year old book. To begin with I would suggest that many individuals within the Land Grant University system inadvertently bought into the idea that community was dead and that the LGU should focus on technology transfer. So, the coincidence of a down turn in community development within Extension was linked to an overall misunderstanding in American society of the role of community in fostering a strong economy and quality of life for its citizens. Many in this room did not follow a mistaken direction, moving away from people and the communities where they lived.

It is you that I will reference as I briefly look at where we are on understanding community and how Cooperative Extension is responding. I plan to draw upon journals such as the *Community Development Journal* and the *Journal of Extension*, *The Journal of the Community Development Society*, *Rural Sociology* and others.

I want to begin my comments this morning focusing on community capacity building. The process that is the most important aspect of community development but also one of the most difficult to evaluate for impact in a short term time frame.

Community Capacity Building

What do we know about community capacity building? We know that building community capacity influences a community's ability to manage its forms of capital. The Floras' have done a magnificent job in keeping us focused on the roles of capital within a community setting. In addition, Green and Haines in their book *Asset Building & Community Development (2002)* expand upon the early work by Kretzmann and McNight (1993) where they highlighted the concept of building community capacity through organizing around community assets (Kretzman & McNight, (1993).

Lyn Simpson and co-authors Leanne Wood and Leonie Daws write about community capacity building where you start with people not projects (Simpson, 2003). They argue that the challenge for government and those institutions representing government is how to enable processes of capacity building, consultation, and community ownership without creating unreasonable pressures on residents of rural communities.

Newman et al. show us that community development is also stretching to examine the role that the arts play in development as a form of managing capital(Newman, et al. 2003). Their review of the literature suggests that arts projects have become an important part of community development strategies. The literature suggests that not only do these projects have creative achievements but are expected to have positive and measurable impacts on local social capital. These authors suggest that quantifying social capital is

methodologically problematic. Yet, it raises some interesting questions of should we manage or control the artistic process for community development benefits.

Rhonda Philips located at the Center for Building Better Communities at the University of Florida, Gainesville writes that communities across the United States are integrating the arts into their development efforts. (Phillips, 2004).

She identifies a typology of arts-based community development approaches. They include; arts business incubators, artists' cooperatives, development of tourism venues and comprehensive approaches.

What is Extension doing? Extension is involved in linking the arts to development and an example is the Ohio State University Cooperative Extension system hiring a specialist focused on the arts.

An additional area of research and education that is growing in importance is the concept of community free spaces (King & Hustedde, 1993). King and Hustedde at the University of Kentucky draw upon Extension Leadership training and public policy education programs to nourish the capacity of citizens to solve local problems. These schools of democracy require a free space, according to King and Hustedde, where citizens can meet for public talk and actively contribute to solving public problems.

Drawing upon Flora's works on social capital many researchers and Extension professionals are developing models to engage Extension professionals and citizens in rural community development (Cartwright & Gallagher, 2003).

Cartwright and Gallagher argue in the *Journal of Extension* that the total rural capital model is theoretically sound and provides a mechanism for lay people to understand issues such as the priority of investments, maintenance costs of past or proposed investments, possible substitution of forms of capital, the value of conservation of capital for future use, and path dependence, where an investment today limits future opportunities. Using a case study from Oregon they present examples of working with communities in a holistic model drawing upon rural capitals as their foundation.

Cooperative Extension professionals are responding to the core fundamental needs of communities to build their capacity to respond to change. Those who believe that technology transfer is the only role of the Land Grant University are missing a fundamental point. Community is a social institution. It is maintained by social processes and the social processes are the key to their future. I have often said that community is much like a marriage. You do not simply sign the papers and take the vows and move on in life. It takes constant actions to maintain a marriage as it does to maintain a community. Often times these skills are not inherent in every individual. Therefore reinforcing and massaging the relationship is important in maintaining the relationship. Community is much like that. Constant vigilance is necessary to maintain the capacity to deal with crisis or opportunities. Extension plays an important role in this process.

Maintaining the economic base

What do we know about maintaining and enhancing the economic base of a community? We know that maintaining an economic base is important for rural communities. We know that the economy of the past is not the economy of the future. We know from research that relational markets are becoming more predominant and that markets are fragmenting. We also know that it will be the members of community who will create the economic base of the future.

Community planning is clearly imbedded in community development research and education. The planning of today provides tools for citizens to examine the costs and benefits of alternative scenarios. Today's research tools are often incorporating GIS and sophisticated visual technologies. Suen et al write in the *Journal of Extension* about a practice of using 3D Visualization in community based planning (Suen, 2004). Where needs assessments as well as some asset based planning have been the norm for many community development planers . Through the support of CSREES and the Extension Geographic Information Systems education program a new group of extension professionals has evolved called Geospatial Extension Specialists. Through support from the Orton Family Foundation linking with CSREES funded technology a new and vibrant way of linking GIS to an analytical model was created. This high tech tool provides residents with a way in which they can examine the consequences of alternative plans and decisions.

In the Northeast, under the leadership of Stephan Goetz at the Northeast Rural Development Center, research on land use planning has been extended to the public through Cooperative Extension. In the West , educational offerings on managing conflict over public lands have been used to help citizens think about their future economies.

Why is this important? The literature on planning continues to stress that it is often necessary to look beyond short term impacts. As the world has become more complex the consequences of actions at a community level are often difficult to evaluate. Cooperative Extension is continually looking for new ways to help citizens create their own positive futures. Using new technologies, Extension professionals are at the cutting edge of helping communities define their own futures.

We within in Extension have a long history of also focusing on business retention and expansion. Focusing on existing businesses within a community has proven an effective way to help stabilize a local economy. There are many reasons for this but the core reasons are that local businesses are more than economic enterprises. Local businesses are owned and operated by local citizens who have attachment to community, they are involved in civic associations, local churches and their children attend the schools. Their connection to the community is beyond strictly economics. They are members of a larger entity, the

community. Through the focus on local businesses Extension has help maintain an economic base that support the community and the economy.

What about the development model of attracting large scale industry?

Attracting large scale industry

What do we know about attracting large scale business to communities? We know that attracting large scale business is the form of rural development that receives the most attention in the media and among many policy makers at the state and local level. Shaeffer concludes that there are three ways of approaching industrial recruitment and yet he remains skeptical on the impact of this form of development (Schaefer, 2002 pp 136). The three models identified in his research are self improvement strategies focus ed on infrastructure “build it and they will come” orientation to development. The second is industrial recruitment where communities and states actively seek out industry, often with financial incentives. The third form is creating a favorable business climate. Shaeffer argues that this method is most effective when initiated by states where they use revisions in tax codes , labor laws and environmental de-regulation. Scientists such as Tom Harris at the University of Nevada-Reno, are developing community models so citizens can look at their competitive advantage and incorporate that with current labor markets and future quality of life issues. Attracting large scale businesses is not shown by empirical evidence to be the silver bullet of development. Cooperative Extensions educational programs

provide citizens the tools to make decisions as to how to balance their community economic actions.

Public versus private roles

What do we know about public and private roles at the community level? We know that it takes partnerships to realize a positive future for communities. The use of information technology as a tool for educating citizens and providing decision tools is also part of the menu of issues being researched and placed in action by Extension and community scholars (Barta, et al. 2004). In Oklahoma they have developed a web based resource for community development. This tool is a partnered effort with the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES), the Oklahoma Department of Commerce and the University of Oklahoma. Through this partnership of fifteen years data is available for communities to evaluate their economic development efforts and to modify current trends.

In Nebraska, Mississippi, New Mexico and Minnesota, as well as other states Cooperative Extension is engaged in e-commerce training, e-government etc. Drawing upon technical skills of Extension faculty new programs are emerging to transfer these skills to the public. With the support of the Southern Rural Development Center, under Bo Beaulieu leadership, new curricula are being developed to provide citizens with cutting edge skills in enhancing local economies through e-commerce.

Successful businesses and community entrepreneurship.

What do we know about successful business and entrepreneurial development?

Research on the role of community in fostering the emergence of entrepreneurship is a new area for many social scientists. Although in the early 1990's the Flora's were on the cutting edge of this area of inquiry with their article in *Sociological Practice* (Flora and Flora, 1990). Since that time there has been a lack of continued scholarly work in understanding how community plays a role in fostering economic and community development. Recent articles by Korsching, Allen and others have linked community theory to job creation and business expansion (Korsching and Allen, 2004). Drawing upon the experience of the EDGE program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln the authors expand on an action model developed by Ken Wilkinson to explain how local educational programs can influence job creation and business expansion.

The EDGE program, Enhancing Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs at the University of Nebraska has provided education to over 2000 nascent entrepreneurs. The job creation rate is well document and the business creation and expansion is memorable.

Other have also engaged in assessing the role of community asserting that providing entrepreneurial support at the community level is more than providing the basic tools of business. In fact community-based support and an entrepreneurial climate are also critical to the success of the new business owners (Scorsone, 2003). Scorsone writes in the *Journal of Extension* about a

University of Kentucky initiative where the short term goal is to help new entrepreneurs and the long term goal is to provide programs that stimulate the entrepreneurial culture within a community.

Cooperative Extension professionals are at the cutting edge in supporting local entrepreneurs. By using the knowledge of new research, our long history of working with adults in an education setting, and our local focus we continue to play an often difficult role. The role of including the diversity of community into the economic planning of a community.

Peter Drucker showed us decades ago that the future of the world was no longer based on industrial development. He talked of forces changing the economy. In some of my earlier writings with Don Dillman we also wrote about a shift from an agrarian society, to the mass society, where everyone could have a Ford as long as it was black, or in agriculture where yellow corn was a mass produced commodity with no differentiation, or mass produced meat and clothes. We argued that there was now a shift to an information society. Where niche markets would become powerful economic drivers. Where entrepreneurs would be engaged in networks with others, but that these economic networks would be temporary based on a market opening then closing. We also argued that the most important means of production would be information technology and human management.

It is clear that the economies of the past will not sustain the communities of the future. The rapid changing economies driven by new migration into the U.S. and the globalization of markets and enhanced incomes in what were once developing countries are creating new opportunities.

Rural residents, whether involved in agriculture, fishing logging or non-extractive activities such as tourism or service occupations are starting to capture some of these markets. Cooperative Extension is playing a very important role in providing education to those who are looking at creating businesses that allow them to control their own lives through being active entrepreneurs.

Yet, there are challenges facing communities and rural people.

Challenges Facing Rural Places

The challenges facing rural America have been highlighted in a new book edited by David Brown and Lou Swanson (Brown & Swanson, 2003). In this well thought out book they identify four major areas of change facing rural people and places. They include changing demographics highlighting population shifts and increased diversity, re-making the rural families; the transformation in the rural economy the movement from resource extraction to tourism and other mixed use development models; the issue of the interface between local rural community and urban areas. and the challenges of the global/local interface; people and the environment tradeoffs ; and changing national and international policies.

The diversity within rural places is a growing area of focus by Cooperative Extension . Tribal governments are partnering with Extension in Wyoming, New Mexico, Nebraska, South Dakota, and the list goes on to provide education on development. These partnerships are in direct response to the changing face of rural places and the growing responsibility of Extension to reach out to all citizens. Our values of equity and social justice drive these programs more than the political climate as many would suggest.

I don't have time in this brief discussion today to go into depth with each of these issues but they highlight the increased need for objective science and moving the science out to the decision makers. As these changing forces gain momentum the need for community development expertise will also grow.

The areas I have highlighted today emphasize that community is important and that the future of many rural places will depend on Extension continuing to move sound science based information and processes to those who are creating their futures.

The next decade

As we examine the challenges facing the future of rural people and places and re-examine our role as scientists and educators what does the future hold?

Those of us who study and work in communities know that we are making a difference. We also know that it is a long term process, not one of seasons, or crop cycles. We have a competitive advantage, part of that competitive advantage has been locational. We have or had educators in almost every

county in the country. We have or had scientists within the LGU who focused their science on community, development, and people. We also have a history of caring, a value system that says just because a population is isolated, aging, or becoming more diverse and the resource extractive economies upon which they were dependent no longer meets their economic or social needs doesn't mean we forget them.

Yet, as the cost of delivering educational programs has increased, the cost of conducting the research has increased and the size of the Land Grant University has declined we sit here today undergoing change. Accountability is the new mantra, quantitative measures of change are demanded, smaller numbers and a continued growing urban population are questioning the expenditure of resources.

As I gaze into a misty crystal ball it seems to me that we must maintain our core while changing. We must draw upon the core competitive advantage that we have,. That is the science with which we create and accumulate knowledge and the delivery of this information to the public. That means more of us will need to focus on creating the research. Where before we could draw upon a specialist who often created the science and was linked to other scholars in the university that may not be the case now. So I suggest that we need to clearly link to the other scholars in the University system. Without the science we can not survive as an institution. Where before we were the dominant outreach institution that is

no longer the case. Where we before could carry the Cooperative Extension flag as the leader in community development we are now challenged by community colleges, by tribal colleges, by private universities and by non-profits and government agencies. Does this mean we fight for dominance? I don't believe so. I think the opportunities today are greater than they have ever been. We need to change so that we are the collaborators, at times we are the lead but many times we will be a secondary collaborator.

You are the future of Extension. As the challenges facing the U.S. continue to grow the need for understanding community, the need to provide technical and educational assistance to manage the change will grow rapidly.

Today, I have touched on a bit of science and a few programs that are making a difference in the lives of people and places. If nothing else from this week I hope you return home, knowing more deeply that the work you do in the communities across the country matters, that it is the future and that you should be proud to be part of that future.

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