

Afterword

CREATIVITY UNDER PRESSURE

by Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard

Community cultural development is a global phenomenon, always manifest in highly specific, localized forms. Many, many more projects and organizations exist than could be mentioned in this volume, and many more will inevitably come into being.

The artists and activists included in this anthology typify the two principal paths into the community cultural development field, which in turn indicate the field's wide boundaries. Some of these practitioners have come to their cultural work through a commitment to social development. They have wanted to help communities articulate critiques and aspirations, thus raising their own voices and expanding social opportunities; they have focused on arts and media for their expressive and mobilizing power. Others always saw themselves as artists, but were disenchanted with the marginalization of conventional artistic expression and chose to use their gifts for community emancipation and development. Coming from remarkably different beginnings, the territory where they meet is the overarching subject of this volume—community cultural development.

In Africa, Asia and Latin America, support for community cultural development has always been scarce; elsewhere, even where support levels may have been significant in the past, public funding has shrunk in recent years as part of imposed austerity measures or in response to the global trend toward privatization. Yet around the world, community cultural development practitioners have demonstrated remarkable ingenuity under intense economic (and often political) pressure. An enormous amount of voluntary, small-scale

work—including projects such as those described here by Maribel Legarda, Mok Chiu Yu and Nitin Paranjape—is sustained by little more than the passion and commitment of participants. Powerful arguments have been made for culture's essential role in development. Inventive community artists have taken advantage of the new attention to development issues galvanized by resistance to globalization's negative effects, successfully obtaining funding for, say, a participatory theater project that addresses a funding agency's interest in reproductive health or a participatory video project that serves another funder's HIV/AIDS education goals.

The upside of this new situation is that any funding is available at all, allowing some groups to continue their essential work. Working within limitations can be a spur to creativity, can even extend the work's impact. But the downside is that when the work is supported for some secondary purpose rather than its intrinsic value, funding entails distortion: the funder's priorities drive the work, leading to such dangers as David Kerr and Masitha Hoeane describe in their chapters.

It is now clear that one of the impacts of globalization will be ongoing (and perhaps expanded) attention to issues related to development—improving living conditions, strengthening social infrastructure, assisting violence-torn communities to rebuild, addressing both rural and urban needs in the face of accelerated migration and so on. There will be funding for nongovernmental organizations involved in such development work. The persistence and growth of both calls for democracy and critiques of conventional development approaches point to the need for a better way. Community cultural development practitioners pose a challenge and an opportunity for development funders: give culture its rightful place. Enter into a dialogue with the community cultural development field. Use the power of this practice to address questions of identity, autonomy and culture, ensuring that development efforts help rather than harm local capability and resilience.

We live in a new world. Everyone—everything, every place—is connected now. All our strategies and understandings must be guided by this knowledge. The either/or thinking of an earlier era must yield to a greater openness to experimentation, a greater willingness to enter into partnerships, if this useful work is to survive and flourish. Despite its persistence, community cultural development is in a precarious situation for reasons unsurprisingly linked to the phenomenon of globalization. Like other sectors of economic and social enterprise, this field must find balance in a period of restructuring.

In every region of the world, community cultural development's historic periods of growth and stability have come about mainly in response to the presence of public funding, but for reasons political, economic and social,

we are still in a time of privatization. The more that governments are committed to enabling democracy, the more likely it is that their support of cultural programs will reach beyond sustaining prestige arts institutions to serve broader public objectives. Since World War II, public cultural policy in almost every nation has at least given lip service—and only occasionally much more—to the aims of broadening public participation and nurturing cultural diversity. But that is not to say there are many healthy public programs at this point to inspire and emulate.

The democratic embrace of community cultural development has been deepest—and its beneficial impact has been greatest—at times of widespread social breakdown, when culture's capacity to heal and unite has been seen as advancing broad social goals. In the 1960s, for instance, liberation movements of cultural minorities and youth throughout the world persuaded public officials to consider the question of social and cultural inclusion, re-examining public cultural institutions and programs with an eye to making them more responsive and effective in serving non-elite audience interests. It was this period of worldwide social ferment—anti-colonial struggles, movements for the civil rights of cultural minorities, of women, of gay and lesbian people and of local and regional cultures within nation-states—that brought the most focused attention to the emerging movement to promote community cultural development.

In response to the rising expectations and increasing population mobility that followed World War II, cultural ministers around the world had tried various means of democratizing existing cultural institutions. In the industrialized world, the aim was to lure more substantial cross sections of their populations into established museums and concert halls. But these efforts produced very little. As so many of the authors in this volume point out, cultural needs and aspirations of the disenfranchised are seldom satisfied by transporting the culture of the “center” to the “margins.” In the post-colonial developing world, the aim was to shoehorn elements of heritage culture into colonial institutions such as the national theaters of Francophone Africa previously devoted to Molière and Racine. There, too, success has been limited unless policies have been deeply reconceived to reflect new realities. To paraphrase Paulo Freire, it became clear throughout the world that people were not content to listen to the words of the powerful, but wanted to “speak with their own voices and say their own words.”

The hostility or boredom evoked by attempts to recruit wider participation for existing institutions led cultural policymakers to realize that larger forces were threatening the vitality of cultural life. Urbanization, the proliferation of commercial mass media and the other forces associated with Americanization or globalization of culture were discouraging active participation in community

cultural life. Alarmed at the implications of these trends, beginning in the late '60s, policymakers articulated a new goal for public cultural policy: cultural democracy.

Cultural democracy envisaged a world where active cultural participation would become the overriding goal of policy. With such a policy, people are encouraged to engage in live, face-to-face cultural activities rather than entirely succumbing to passive consumption of cultural products. Instead of prescribing a presumably superior form of fine-arts culture, cultural democracy posits a goal of respect for cultural diversity—encouraging the preservation and development of diverse cultural traditions, as against the lionization of one culture (often a version of high-art Western tradition or top-dollar Western commercial culture). Cultural democracy also challenged policymakers to open up their own spheres of responsibility to democratic participation, enabling community members to exert a greater measure of control over conditions of cultural life, decentralizing decision making wherever possible and providing access to the means of cultural participation (such as facilities, artistic and organizational leadership and material support) rather than focusing solely on professionally produced end products. Key to the realization of these idealistic aims was the introduction of a new sphere of professional work: *animation socio-culturelle*, socio-cultural community development, what we call “community cultural development,” the subject of the present volume.

These ideals were the centerpiece of a vigorous international cultural-policy discourse that lasted into the early '80s. But even during this time, once the cultural ministers returned home from their international meetings and stimulating collegial discussions, this dialogue seldom had much impact on domestic cultural budgets. The greatest share of public cultural subsidy continued to flow to mainstream, flagship institutions. Nevertheless, these new ideas inspired smaller-scale experimental initiatives in many countries to animate community cultural life. Even in the United States, where the public arts-support apparatus has been consistently unfriendly to the infusion of wider social goals in culture, public funding for nonarts purposes—for example, to redirect the energies of youth from rioting or gang violence, to stimulate new employment opportunities through public-service projects or to encourage community development—provided seed money to establish the kinds of projects described in this book and its companion volume, “Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development.”

Such publicly funded experimentation in cultural development is now largely a thing of the past. In the 1980s, the United States under Ronald Reagan led a backlash against such public funding. Reagan's Hollywood friends and other industry and ideological allies opposed UNESCO's role as a forum for criticism of the commercial cultural industries, its call for a “new world

information order” to counter global centralization of news media and its moral support for liberationist movements of black South Africans, Palestinians and others. UNESCO’s punishment for offending official U.S. interests was the withdrawal in the early ’80s of several Western nations from the United Nations’ cultural agency. Except for the United States, most have returned. But their actions forced a realignment in UNESCO that effectively quashed talk of cultural democracy in that primary international cultural policy forum.

Around the world, public cultural budgets declined through the 1990s. By the time UNESCO convened the world’s cultural ministers for the first time since the U.S. withdrawal—for the World Conference on Cultural Policies for Development in Stockholm in 1998—the ministers’ attention had been refocused on the privatization of former public institutions and support programs. The protection of cultural diversity against the homogenizing forces of globalization was put forward as a key theme of this meeting, but, in fact, more attention in the ministers’ deliberations went to how countries where public funding had always been primary could refocus on stimulating private-sector support through earned income and private contributions.

The shift toward privatization does not bode well for community cultural development. When cultural subvention is an element of public policy, the questions that guide policy relate to public meaning: What aspects of our heritage should be preserved and extended? What cultural expressions exemplify our people? What makes up our nation’s cultural commonwealth? How can artistic expression best represent our nation around the world? Although the answers will almost certainly be contested, the questions themselves are recognized as valid for the public sphere. But when privatization occurs, the guiding questions shrink: What artists are safe to support and likely to reflect well on the image of a corporation? What type of underwriting is likely to return the most value to the corporate or individual donor in the currency of public relations? Which projects advance the specific agenda of a philanthropic organization or individual, as opposed to the broad public agenda?

This has left the community cultural development field in a quandary. In one sense, community cultural work has always relied on nongovernmental initiative. Funding doesn’t call culture into being; it merely supports what emerges organically from human creativity. Projects such as those described in this anthology have been created not by government fiat, but by public-spirited artists, by community leaders concerned about cultural issues and by issue-based organizations. But when it comes time to pay the bills, it has been hard to rely on private initiative, especially from marginalized and poor communities. Communities under stress are likely to lack surplus resources; while participants often contribute time and effort, they seldom provide much cash. Wealthier donors tend to prefer highly visible, concrete and noncontroversial

projects. Community cultural development work very often stimulates criticism of the status quo and, these days, few patrons—and this is true equally of governments and private individuals—are enlightened enough to see the long-term advantage in underwriting their own critics. The idea of a healthy opposition has clearly lost whatever cachet it might once have carried.

So while the community artists included in this anthology might dream of the kind of no-strings-attached public subsidy that would allow them to enter into open-ended collaborations with even the most impoverished communities, waking reality has forced most of them to improvise, and they have been remarkably resourceful. These essays describe market-based support systems (for instance, Gary Stewart's discussion of youth music workshops supported by a commercially successful music group and Trilby Multimedia's base of contracts from education and other agencies described in Tony Stanley's essay); work funded by international aid groups (such as the projects in Botswana and Malawi described by David Kerr); projects in social institutions (for example, the Brazilian prison work discussed separately by Paul Heritage and Bárbara Santos); commissions from arts presenters (such as the projects Liz Lerman recounts); community cultural development work supported by academic posts (like Mary Marshall Clark's); activities undertaken in partnership with activist organizations (for instance, Nitin Paranjape's account of his group's work in opposition to dam construction that destroyed villages); and even government subsidy (where, as Sarah Moynihan and Norm Horton recount, Australia currently leads the world). Approaches to finding support are almost as diverse as community cultural development groups, with just one common theme: the greatest contributions are always made by volunteers.

Taking a long view, it is quite certain that the spirit of community cultural development cannot be destroyed. Augustin Girard, the French cultural minister who wrote the leading primer on cultural policy back in 1972, put it thus:

If cultural life is now to be dominated by cultural industries... will culture become merely another form of mass consumption, swallowed whole like the rest by a civilization unable to digest its leisure? This would be highly undesirable; but it is unlikely to happen.

People have a profound need to communicate. ... This can hardly be fulfilled by the mass media, which offer an abundance of material but no help in its choice or appreciation—nor any means of participation. ...

Man's higher purposes are creative: fulfillment with the means available to him, understanding and welcoming the creativity of his fellows which mirror and which mould him. Where this is lacking, the spirit dies. Art is not an optional extra, a frill, a luxury for the opulent. It is as basically human as morality and, like it, vital if man is to be at one with his environment. ... Art is not life's final flowering and effulgence but that by which one becomes what one is.¹

¹Augustin Girard in collaboration with Geneviève Gentil, *Cultural Development: Experiences and Policies*, second edition, (Paris: UNESCO, 1983), pp. 62, 76.

Whether or not public programs can be sustained, the spirit that animates community cultural development will survive and find its expression even when repressive forces try to snuff it out, because apart from cultural development as a professional practice, the responsibility to preserve, cultivate and extend culture is universal. Good parents do this when they nurture their children's growth as autonomous beings and encourage the lifelong process of discovering and using their own unique voices. The dedicated teacher, the engaged librarian, the imaginative recreation leader and the democratic political leader will deploy community cultural development skills in their efforts to involve people in constructing lives of meaning and service. Wherever people struggle to shake off the forces of repression, community cultural development will be crucial to their success.

Writing from a dark time in the Marcos dictatorship, Filipino theater activist Karl Gaspar put it this way:

It is a fact that no matter how remote a barrio is, there are local wise men who have kept the history, the richness and color of the local culture. There are men and women who have kept faith with the dreams of their people; have treasured these in their hearts. There are men and women who have kept the cultural ethos of their forefathers in terms of rich poetry, songs, dances and the like. It is there to be re-tapped, waiting to resurface and be appreciated as vital national treasures.²

²Karl Gaspar, "Creative Dramatics in Mindanao-Sulu (Philippines)," *Third World Popular Theatre Newsletter*, Dickson Mwansa, ed. (Kitwe, Zambia: *Third World Popular Theatre Network*, Jan. 1982), Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 23–24.

Globalization's rapid progress thus far in the 21st century suggests that defenders of the human subject against the machinery of exploitation are in for rough times. This is the work of community cultural development.

Meeting in Bellagio in May 2001, community cultural development practitioners agreed that many elements of the field need support if the current storehouse of skills and knowledge is to be preserved and extended. One idea was to create an archive so that the teachings of seasoned practitioners don't dissipate as they age and become less active; this was described as "seed stock" for the future, to provide resources and ideas as circumstances change. Another was to underwrite peer-education, much more effective than top-down approaches to training; practitioners agreed support was needed to move to a larger scale, educating those who can train others to train still others, encouraging groups to multiply. Everyone stressed the value of new technology to aid networking among community cultural development workers from around the world. Translation capabilities are needed to forge

truly international links. Exchange programs are essential. Above all, community artists—from those working under conditions of impoverishment in the developing world to those surviving in the industrialized world through a perpetual process of repackaging and reframing their work to attract short-term grants—ought to be richly supported—publicly, privately, imaginatively.

Toward the end of our meeting, Prosper Kompaore shared a proverb from his home country of Burkina Faso: “How is it that sky-high termite mounds can be made by such tiny insects?” he asked. The answer, counseling determination, endurance, commitment and plenty of sustenance: “It takes earth and earth and earth...”