NZ Local Authority Community Development in the 1970s and 1980s

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Context

• 1970s and 80s was a period of rapid social and economic change.
• Protests against NZ involvement in the Vietnam War.
• 1973 Britain joined the European Common Market (now the EU)
• Major social changes in the welfare system: domestic purposes benefit and accident compensation.
• Creation of the Waitangi Tribunal
• 1975 Hikoi
• 1975 United Women’s Convention (2000 attended)
• 1975 Values Party received 5% of the popular vote
• 1981 Springbok tour
Context (cont)

• Maori migration from rural to urban Auckland
• Pacific Island migration to Auckland
• Creation of isolated suburbs around Auckland: South and West in particular.
• Deinstitutionalisation policies
• Political turmoil from Muldoon’s command economy) to Lange/Douglas (neo-liberalism)
Muldoon and Lange
ROGERNOMICS
Local Authority Activities

• In the early 1970s, Auckland, Manukau, Wellington and Christchurch City Councils, appointed community advisers.

• Some of the issues they faced were:
  a. Rapid Urbanisation
  b. Housing shortage
  c. Inadequate community facilities
  d. Isolated suburbs
This was one respondent’s comments

“Isolated communities... and you throw a whole lot of young housewives particularly with young children with bugger all schools and bugger all preschool facilities, shitty parks, all the parks were left over bits of land that the developers found too difficult to deal with so that was their reserves contribution and over it all you had local authorities who ... thought that they had nothing to do with social issues.”
Participants

• 17 participants (12 male and 5 female)
• All had worked in community development for local authorities in the 70s and/or 80s.
They involved themselves initially in such things as:
Setting up community centres, community houses, citizens advice bureaux, emergency housing, school holiday programmes, marae development, and recreation. However, their key role was in bringing people together to work on the issues they identified.
Later in the 1980s they included work such as assisting in the setting up of women’s refuges, neighbourhood law centres, employment programmes and setting up childcare centres.
Community Adviser’s background

• 12 of the 17 considered themselves as coming from working class families and 5 had a professional family background.

• 13 of the 17 had university qualifications.

• 12 came from families with religious affiliations, in particular catholic. A number of this latter group had studied catholic social theory and works of Paulo Freire.

• Most had a family life where social and political debate was the norm.
• 15 had led an active time as volunteers in NZ and overseas.
• Most had travelled overseas and worked/studied/volunteered in other countries
• They were influenced by a number of writers/thinkers such as Freire, Alinsky, Schumacher and Illich.
• They also mentioned people who had supported them such as Professor John McCrearay, Betty Wark, Father Terry Dibble, Jack Luckock, John Rangihau, Rev Bob Scott and Bruce Hucker.
Other events that shaped them:
1. Second World War.
One was a pacifist and was placed in a work camp, scrub cutting for the duration of the war.
Another was a child in war torn Holland and saw the two sides of human nature: kindness and cruelty.

2. Overseas experience
One was a councillor in a poor London suburb and became a non-paid community worker.
Another took time to visit the homeless in London and listen to their life stories.
Two others were social workers in London and both recognised that they could be more effective working with communities rather than with individuals.
Support and Opposition

• Support came mainly from the political arm of local authorities. In Auckland City – Sir Dove Myer Robinson, Lindo Ferguson and Eric Salmond. These were the liberal conservatives on council and saw that they had responsibilities back to the community. Labour politicians in Auckland tended to take a fairly neutral position.

• Tim’s Team (Tim Shadbolt and Gary Taylor) in West Auckland. Muldoon called Tim’s Team “Labour in scruffy clothes”.

• Strong support from the mayor and council in Manukau.

• Opposition was motivated by jealousies, ideologies and just plain nastiness:
Opposition: examples

1. Language: One West Auckland councillor said that community advisers were ‘a cancer within the city.’ Another referred to a letter from the West Auckland Council of Social Service promoting the idea of appointing a community adviser as a ‘communist type’ pressure.

2. Threats: An Auckland City councillor came to a community adviser’s private home and used threatening behaviour to try to persuade him to withdraw a report on housing shortages.

3. Bullying: the mayor of Wellington City tried to control the community advisory team by closing their local offices and forcing them to set up office in the town hall.

4. General opposition: Comments such as ‘we know what the community needs’ and ‘welfare is government’s role’ were not uncommon.
5. When a community adviser reported the need for support for women’s refuges, the mayor said that domestic violence did not happen in his city.

6. Councillors constantly being critical of the community adviser e.g. why was his car seen in such and such a place?
1980s and the Neo-Liberal Agenda

Amalgamation of local authorities bringing user pays and a focus on efficiencies.

New Public Management (NPM) theory: bureaucrats and community advisers are self-serving, out to feather their own nests.

Community advisers now came under the direct control of the managers. Previously it had been more mixed with politicians having an important role.

New emphasis on reducing costs, contracts and measuring results.

The role of community advisers shifted from community development to service provision and providing information.
Where did they go?

A number went into academia. Others retired. Two left specifically because they objected to the new management style in local authorities. Five left to join the charity sector. Two left to work overseas.

The new language excluded citizens who became customers. The ideas of social inclusion, social justice, citizen action and community empowerment did not fit the new lexicon of managerialism.
The Future

Community Development is once again seen as a key social process.

After the excesses of NPM the torch of community development has been picked up in varying places:

• Many not for profits.
• Coordinating organisation like Community Waitakere
• Advisory groups like Inspiring Communities
• And to some extent Auckland Council.
References