Community Economic Development outside the capitalist square

Jacques Boulet (Borderlands Cooperative, Melbourne, Australia)
(with input from Ting Wai-fong; Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

[This is an enlarged version of a presentation, held at the 2003-4 Bi-annual Conference IUCISD in Mumbai end-December 2003; it has meanwhile been adopted as the conceptual basis for a major collaborative research project in Hong Kong and Mainland China and several additions have been made to update it with newer ‘arrivals’ on the scene of the community-based economy projects and initiatives.]

Introduction

It is, of course, a rather impossible task to cover in few pages the various elements and parameters of a subject as vast as community economic development (C.E.D.), especially when one would want to offer critical perspectives as to its possibility ‘outside the capitalist square’. When faced with a task like that, one has the choice of

- either, being descriptive and provide, with more or less colourful detail, various examples and incidences of Community Economic Development (C.E.D.) from wherever one ever has been or read about (and in the process demonstrate how widely read and travelled one is),
- or, be abstract and theoretical and provide, with more or less reference to the Great Authors, a learned way of looking at C.E.D. as a ‘societal’ phenomenon (and in the process demonstrate what deep thinker one is and how far one is elevated from the hurly-burly of the every-day problems of C.E.D. activists, workers, funders and assumed beneficiaries).

Obviously, both approaches are open for a lot of justified criticism; on the other hand, given the limitations of space and in the hope that readers will look for more concrete examples via the bibliography or by trying Google, I try and do a bit of both – some examples and some general reflection - and thereby risk that I incur your wrath because of insufficient attention to either. In the following pages, I will

- first, locate the historical emergence of the use of ‘community’ for economic purposes; a bit of history around the notion and reality of ‘community’ and its demise at the hands of a combination of historical and contemporary economic and political powers.
- Derived from that history, I offer a simplified picture of how to conceive of the location of community interventions, especially since the beginning of the so-called ‘modern age’ and I will suggest some examples to illustrate our point.
- In a third step, I turn to providing some examples of C.E.D. initiatives, as they have become part of what is being called (especially in Europe) the ‘new social economy’ (or increasingly, the ‘solidarity economy’); I will deal successively with
  - work/employment centred initiatives;
• local business-creation initiatives;
• co-operatives old and new;
• community currency schemes (or LETS) and other attempts to create economic activities and ‘circulation’ in local communities;
• initiatives arising from the practical and conceptual overlap between our ecological, economic and (re-) localisation efforts and interests, notably the Transition Town initiatives, and finally,
• truly alternative-communal – co-location, co-habitation, intentional - approaches

- Lastly, I will attempt and derive some general criteria for helping us to assess the societal locus of C.E.D. projects and their potential to create responses which we might plot on a continuum, spanning the gamut from ‘solutions’ to ‘alternatives’ to the predicaments of the members of communities as they face the vagaries of an ever deepening crisis of a globalising ‘suicide economy’ (David Korten, 1998) and with which many of us deal in our daily work.

I. The Story of ‘community’ and its demise at the hands of a coalition of economic and political powers.

Much of what I am saying here is based on an enormous amount of community literature and research, but more recently and more particularly, on the very important work of Curry and McGuire (2002), Community on Land: community ecology and the public interest, and that of Robert Marks (2009) The Origins of the Modern World (3d edition), who both describe in much more detail and documented with the adequate references and primary materials and who do so – importantly – from a ‘de-centred’ (i.e. a not-just-western) and an ecological perspective. More recently, Raj Patel, in his quite marvellous The Value of Nothing (2010), also picked up the thread connecting the loss of the commons across most European nations and regions between the 1400s and 1600s with its global consequences as they are felt till today.

Very briefly and abbreviated - and thus vulnerable to all kinds of justified criticism - the combined effects of the ‘Enclosure Acts’ in early 17th Century England denied access to the ‘Commons’ for the common people. The latter, whilst of course being subjected to the many whims of the feudal lords who possessed the lands, as they were deemed given to them by god (or his representative, the king or emperor), could at least ‘enjoy’ a subsistence living as they had the right to use the land (hence called ‘commons’) for that purpose. The new laws allowed the lords and those in charge of the management of their lands, to ‘enclose’ them and prevent people from using them for their livelihoods, instead running sheep and other ‘productive’ activities on them. Apart from the early emergence of the phenomenon we now refer to as ‘privatisation’, (see Bollier, 2002) it created an instant welfare population of – probably – millions, who were then to go and (often individually as they had lost the support of their community and extended families) fight for their survival in the growing industrial towns and harbours, often through theft, begging, vagrant and occasional work, through prostitution and other dangerous activities (hence, the creation of the ‘dangerous classes’). In order to control them, the 14th Century
Poor Laws were updated under Elizabeth I, setting the (ideological and systemic) tone even for our present-day conceptions of welfare and of the welfare state and, in the process, creating, what Bauman (1998), in *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, has called

“our stubborn insistence, in spite of the massive evidence to the contrary, that breaking the norm of universal work-for-living is … the prime cause of poverty and **that the cure must be sought in leading the unemployed back to the labour market**” (p. 89 my emphasis)

A remarkable sentence, which we will do well to keep in mind for our reflections on C.E.D. initiatives and their ‘chances’ of succeeding. Simultaneously, money can also been thought about as ‘setting us free’ and liberating us as individuals from social restrictions; indeed, Henry VII in the late 1400s started to systematically ‘monetise’ what previously was part and parcel of a (feudal as well as localised) system of ‘mutual obligations’, where local peasants had rather little use for ‘transportable’ money. Simmel, the German early sociologist, thus saw money as a rational tool to opt for relationships beyond those based on solidarity and hierarchies of mutual obligation; it had the capability to ‘set us free’. Of course, such view of money (potentially) leads us to turning everything into a commodity, even such ‘things’ for which money cannot possibly be an appropriate way of calculating their value (North, 2010 – for other good discussions of the use and misuse of money, see AMI and…).

Returning to our story of the demise of community, England had meanwhile been gaining the upper hand in her often fierce battles with the other European colonial powers and their competing attempts at ‘discovering’ (read: invading) and then subsequently economically ‘developing’ (read: exploiting and subjugating) the lands and the peoples of Asia, the Americas and, later, Africa and Australia (the latter, coincidentally, also becoming the dumping ground for large amounts of members of the previously mentioned ‘dangerous classes’…).

It was the Dutch who had – again in the early 1600s – invented the new institutional and organisational framework of the ‘company’, intended to assist the proto-capitalist ‘burghers’ in the economic ‘exploitation’ of the resources of the ‘discovered’ lands. Briefly, the creation of the ‘company’ employed the feudal ideology of ‘granting’ certain rights, protections (especially of the military kind) and supports on behalf of the king/queen to *subjects*-merchants, who went on to establish trading posts (in often – understandably – rather hostile territory) and to establish an infrastructure to sustain the extraction of local resources and to ship them off to the (better-off classes in the) European homelands. The merchants and their associations (the *Companies*, later evolving into *Corporations*) needed a degree of ‘elbow space’ to manoeuvre and adapt to the local circumstances, power structures and arrangements and the royal house(s) therefore granted them the status of ‘persons-in-law’. This allowed them to use – both – the power of the royals as well as their own power (which kept on growing, as they – in the process – acquired often huge amounts of capital) and resources on which the royals eventually became dependent themselves. They even raised their own armies, which, in the case of the English Corporations in their ‘New World’, North America, eventually led
to political independence of those colonies and allowed the paragon of the political economy of capitalism, the United States, to come into being.

The creation of the legal entity of the Corporation thus tied the (profit making) interests of the newly emerging merchant classes with those of the (empire building) “thrones” in various European nations and – in the process – gave the merchants free hand in displacing anything and everyone who came in their way and was not willing to become a subservient actor in this ‘venture’: local communities, local nations, local everything and everyone, subjugating them, eradicating them, or, where possible, tying them into the colonial-imperial and – gradually emerging – global economic-capitalist system, whereby and wherein most of the thus subjugated ended up: at the very bottom rung.

Unbeknownst to them, their brothers and sisters in the ‘centre(s)’ of the European – and later ‘Western’ – lands, who had been equally robbed of their communities and of their access to land – the commons - which had sustained them in one way or another, became ‘the poor’, the ‘unemployed’ and both, in similar but also unique ways, were ‘kept’ at the previously mentioned bottom rung of the political-economic order with the help of a handy ideology, drenched in darwinist-malthusian and – indeed – Christian, sexist and racist assumptions (‘the white man’s burden’!), which often proved lethal for those on their receiving end (see Ziauddin Sardar’s work, 1998).

And the rest, as they say, is history…. and, of course, still ‘present’ in so many ways.

As the western ‘revolutions’ of the later 18th and 19th centuries saw many countries rid themselves of the absolutist structures associated with royal and imperial power and ‘gain’ instead, what we now call, ‘liberal democratic’ systems, led by elected elites, often recruited amongst the economically powerful, they gave themselves constitutions and other legal frameworks which would favour the positioning of the Corporation as a legal ‘person’ and construct a ‘modern’ legal system, build around the imperative of ‘private property’ as the utmost principle governing social life. Gradually, the Corporation thus

replaced communities as the vital mediating entities between the individuals, their daily survival practices and relationships, and the governing structures and processes (and indeed, groups) of society.

We are now witnessing the final stages of – on the one hand – the globalisation of the imposition of the above mentioned corporatising structures and processes at every ‘nook and corner’ of the universe (WTO, WEF, World Bank and IMF, etc.) and of its associated ideologies and - on the other - the commensurate fragmentations of the life worlds and – we would like to suggest – mental worlds of individuals and communities alike (Richard Sennett’s (1999) quite masterful Erosion of Character and his more recent (2006) The culture of the new Capitalism, as well as Zygmunt Bauman’s (1991; 2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2005) vast work on the ‘fluidity’ of the (post-) modern times should stand for many other works supporting this statement). And to which, parenthetically, many if not all of the new ‘models’, strategies, ‘alternatives’ (social capital, social entrepreneurs, community
enterprises, cooperatives, etc.) I will be referring to later, have been and are assumed to be responses if not solutions…. (or, as I shall argue, possible forms of resistance!)

II. Where do ‘community development’ interventions and programs ‘fit’ in this scenario?

Community Development and associated interventions – including many of the at-present fashionable programs and ‘models’ – have been and continue to be brought about when structurally and culturally imposed changes (‘from above’ and often accompanied by violence) are being resisted by those upon whom they are imposed or when resistance to them is anticipated by those who do the ‘imposing’. Whilst many of us will have trouble with the notion of ‘resistance’ - since we’re all victims of the acceptance of the ‘normalcy’ of many of the norms we impose on ourselves and on others, including, as we pointed out before with Bauman, the normalcy of ‘universal work-for-living’ and the normalcy of doing that in an employer-employee relationship – we would do well to reflect a bit deeper on this. Indeed, instead of labelling and understanding human reactions to such impositions-from-above as deviance, pathology, apathy or ‘dysfunction’ (or a ‘primitive’ resistance to innovation, development and progress...), we could think differently about them as – probably very sane! – reactions against the imposition of often rather inhumane living and working conditions and injustices (like working for less than one US dollar-a-day when producing Niké shoes in Indonesia; or engaging in ‘income generating’ activities, only to join a meanwhile global sub-proletariat of precariously surviving poor …).

I am proposing to understand community interventions of any kind as being situated – indeed, as being created or ‘enacted’ - between two opposing force fields, summarised in the following picture; whilst I cannot go into any detail, let alone provide scientific ‘proof’ of what I am suggesting, the historical and more recent record does provide a wealth of programs and examples which do ‘prove the point’. Great amounts of literature, both from the west and the developed parts of the non-West and the ‘developing’ world would be available to help us make that point and I cannot even start to provide examples in this text but refer to the appended reference list.

![Diagram of force fields](Diagram.png)
If we can agree that this picture at least approximates an adequate representation of the relationship between

- those who, from a position of power and often from a position which rests on control over a vast (and growing, meanwhile ‘global’) scale across which this power is and can be exercised (e.g. the nation, the Empire, the state, multi-national corporations, the World Bank, the WTO, etc...) impose their structures/culture/practices, and
- those who submit to or resist (often violently, often pathologically, often apathetically...) this imposition in ‘communities’ and/or individually, locally or across localities and based on their common interests (land, ‘workers’, homeless, unemployed, poor, women, young people, the displaced, those whose villages are flooded for the construction of dams, low-income consumers, etc....)

… if we can agree on the essence of this suggested power relationship, the structural and operational positioning of Community Development (and of those who are expected to engage in the practice of ‘doing’ it) must be fraught with inherent contradictions, tensions and frustrations, as each of the ‘opposing’ sides will have their own conception as to what CD should be doing and – indeed – should be ‘about’.

The attempts by academics and writers to talk about different ‘models’ of Community Development (from ‘social action’, via ‘social planning’ to ‘local development’, to ‘walk’ the above picture from its right to its left side in the company of one of the first theoreticians to attempt such distinctions, Jack Rothman, ever since the mid-sixties) have been cold comfort for many practitioners who were struggling ‘in the middle’, being torn apart by competing demands for loyalty to and understanding of mostly irreconcilable interests. Again, the literature of Community and Social Development internationally and nationally and in most schemes and examples we know of is littered with examples of all of this.

This inherent tension in Community Development has also often been ignored by those who develop programs and expect them to reach their ‘objectives’, often not reflecting on the contradictory nature of these objectives, once they are translated into the objectives of those who are supposed to be their ‘beneficiaries’ – on the one hand - and those who expect the programs to contribute to the ‘broader’ societal goals which are attached to them and which often have justified their funding, on the other (again, examples across the national and international spheres are numerous).

In a society with a political-economic system and cultural context which puts all its bets on the capacity and duty of the individual to ‘make it’ in the survival, competition and progress stakes (the latter based on the sanctity of ‘growth’ and ‘profit maximisation’), anything starting with ‘com...’ or ‘coop...’ – and thus signifying the possibility of social intent as possibly superseding individual appropriation - can only have residual, instrumental or even rhetorical value – if not being eyed with deep-seated suspicion! That is the reason why many on the left will talk about community programs as ‘spray-on solutions’ (Bryson and Mowbray, 1981, in Australia, but many authors elsewhere), put in place ‘for’ the poor and oppressed and ideologically phrased to make them believe in the
possibility of pulling themselves out of the doldrums by their own effort. It also has the function, according to those critics, to only have themselves left to blame when they don’t ‘make it’, as they have been given so many chances and opportunities by a benevolent society…

Those on the right of the ideological spectrum – by contrast - will often use Community and Social Development as strategic means to devolve responsibility for initial ‘progress’ to the people in (often disadvantaged or ‘under-developed’) local areas, suggesting that – after the initial ‘funded’ phase – individuals in that community ought to be ‘ready’ for competition in the ‘real’ world. Community and Social Development is, by those authors and policy makers, thus often used as an adaptive mechanism and as a means of deflecting people’s attention from the fact that the justice and equality promises associated with the existing political-economic system cannot be fulfilled, not for large groups of the population anyway.

Those on the left thus often resist community and social programs as they hope and suggest that real change can only come from a total overhaul of societal power relationships, in the past most often at the state level but meanwhile globally; those on the right often resist community and social development programs as they believe them to maintain old and create new dependencies in individuals (often looked at as the ‘underclass’…) and thus detract from their ‘obligation’ to make it on their own and in competition with everyone else.

All of which, in the end, sees a curious amalgam of people meet in the ‘middle’ and remain ‘true’ believers in the capacity of community programs to achieve anything meaningful at all (even if they often are not sure what…). One will find believers in the small, local community and its capacity to create happy and safe havens against many evils; radical communards and anarchists; and, yes, lots of community and social workers, who, being paid to do the impossible and often seeing the conceptual and practical limits of individualised explanations of ‘social’ problems and ‘deviance’, try to serve two ‘bosses’. They try not to ‘bite the hand that feeds’ (given that they are government employees or employed by government-funded NGOs) and they try to make the people affected by the programs aware that all is not well with the ways in which those who control ‘the system’ treat them and their rights to livelihood and that the choice between acceptance of their ‘fate’ and resistance to it is not straightforward – and certainly not without dangers. Not to speak about the rather cavalier way in which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is often used to justify about anything which comes to the mind of ‘developers’ of any persuasion!

After having provided a rather broad – and at times probably even sceptical – historical and broadly analytical picture, what are some of the broad areas within which – internationally – Community Economic Development has been cast?

III. Community Economic Development and the ‘new social economy’.
The content of this section mainly relies on some work in which I have been involved in various countries, from Europe, the US and Australia, Hong Kong and Asia, to different countries in the developing world, mainly in Africa. Again, there’s a danger of overload in what I try to share and I have to rely on some of the references append to this article.

Examples of C.E.D. have been organised along a spectrum of six ‘clusters’ of initiatives, starting with attempts at ‘solving’ the (local) economic problems and fallout of the existing (global-capitalist) political-economy from ‘within’ that system (or at least attempting to contain those problems, especially on the ideological level and on the level of people’s perception of the legitimacy of the existing political economic system), through to such attempts aiming to overcome the ‘system’ itself, or – more modestly – who clearly include the macro- and global realities in their purview and in their strategic orientation and - at least partly – intend to create alternative modes of (local) economic subsistence and development.

The following six sets of examples should also not be looked at as ‘typologies’ or ‘models’, as many of them will overlap in practice or the approaches they suggest will be combined in many on-the-ground programs or projects. They are rather ‘foci’ or ‘levers’ which are privileged in the implementation of programs of Community Economic Development and, as such, reveal indirectly their sponsors’ or initiators’ ideological and theoretical understanding of the context in which they are to be implemented and the goals and objectives they are meant to achieve both for people and in relation to the (respective) ‘system’ they are operating within.

1. work/employment centred initiatives

Where to start…? Many government-funded programs in industrialised societies, especially since the Great Depression and after WW II and many so-called aid-and-development approaches in the developing world should be included here. A great number of those have been evaluated as to their ‘real’ benefits and the outcomes of these studies have not always been easy to reconcile, as many studies were ‘pre-loaded’ with the assumptions of those who either paid for them or executed them and then evaluated their ‘impact’, usually uncritically of their own assumptions.

The Works Progress Administration’s employment creation initiatives during the Great Depression in the US – mainly conceived to stimulate a capitalist economy, which was truly on its backside – were inserted in major public works (notably the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) scheme, which – parenthetically - not only provided a rich treasure trove of community development ‘stories’, but also created enough energy through the damming of the waters of the Tennessee River, to enable the development of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs at the end of World War II and which initiated a global political process of untold and still unfolding destruction and human misery…; such are the contradictions of community development, local development, job creation
schemes, and so on! Creating jobs in the arms industry \textit{does} generate such unfortunate side-effects – or should we call them ‘\textit{collateral damage}’…?)

The CETA initiatives in the US during the seventies attempted to create public service jobs and programs and they have been accused by later administrations (from Reagan onwards) to maintain and create welfare dependency and to ‘inflate’ the state bureaucracies and sustain the myth of the ‘nanny state’. Economic rationalism and its associate philosophies and ‘practical-political’ philosophers took care of the rest… But more sympathetic analyses (1997, by Johnson and Lopez from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in Washington DC) of still existing programs in that country have given far more positive accounts of the experiences and results (outcomes) of many of these programs.

In Australia, during the mid- to late eighties, several employment creation programs were initiated, ranging from those focusing on preparing individuals and members of certain ‘at-risk’ groups to become more ‘employable’ (and several of those are still around, albeit in modified and much more stringent formats) to creating (local) jobs and new (local) enterprises or businesses.

The present emphasis on so-called ‘\textit{income-generating}’ schemes in development programs across the developing world are other examples of ‘work-focused’ approaches, even if some of those would equally ‘fit’ within the next cluster of C.E.D. initiatives. In general – and particularly related to the latter area of application – one has to wonder whether inserting people in a – meanwhile global – hierarchy of capitalist exploitation of – more often than not – \textit{very} cheap labour (or of mini-enterprises dependent on the charity and exotic fancies of more or less sympathetic and aware \textit{western} consumers), is the way to go, especially when that happens at the expense of local communities in the ‘developing’ world, giving up their subsistence ‘labour’ – and therewith their capacity to survive - in exchange for uncertain ‘cash’ income to be spent for food and other essentials being produced elsewhere. The old ‘cash crops’ over ‘subsistence crops’ imposition is very much alive and unwell! (see Bennholdt-Thomsen, Farclas and Von Werlhof (eds., 2001)

2. \textbf{local business-creation initiatives}

Again, where to start? There are lots of schemes and funding opportunities – both in the developed and the developing worlds - for those who want to have a go at starting their own (local/small) business; many come with enormous strings attached as to the conditions and – especially – the costs to be repaid for loans and they can be an enormous and badly-anticipated burden as well as a new source of dependency to the global system of exploitation, as we argued before.

The President Johnson-era “Great Society” programs in the US in the Sixties were probably a good first example of such programs, put in place as a hoped-for response to
the persistent poverty and welfare ‘dependency’ of many, living in African-American
neighbourhoods in the big cities of the US. They were variously referred to as
neighbourhood development initiatives or focused on the development of business
acumen amongst black people, providing them - sometimes - with starting capital and
some logistical support. But the general consensus is that these programs – pretty much
like so many ‘income generating schemes’ in the Third World, whereby local people are
given credit to start or otherwise engage in business activities and which we obliquely
referred to above – are often doomed as they make little chance of ‘competing’ with
influxes of products produced much more cheaply elsewhere; as well, as they are not
assisted by any type of export infrastructure to be able to sell their products elsewhere
(for example in the ‘developed’ world), many of them falter, leaving their initiators some
dreams and a lot of money, efforts and illusions poorer – and without the resources they
used to have to produce for their subsistence needs!

Still, there are present-day examples of this kind of C.E.D. ‘pitched’ at the ‘social
enterprise’ variety of business-creation initiatives, especially in developed societies
which are worth examining. As ‘social entrepreneurship’ has reached somewhat of a
fashion status across the Anglo-Saxon worlds, we refer to one example in Australia,
auspiced and supported by a Christian NGO – the Adelaide City Mission in South
Australia – with a rather realistic assessment of the potential of this approach in the
context of the present (and already long lasting!) crisis of industrial capitalism (Tregilgas,
2003; Talbot, 2000; also Nyssens, 2006). Readers of this example will notice that this
C.E.D. initiative includes various ideas which are referred to elsewhere in this paper in
the context of other ‘sets’ of initiatives.

Strong criticisms of the Grameen-bank type credit initiatives in the developing world
(Laxmi Murthy, 2002; Rahman, 1999) and about the social enterprise approach to
‘business creation’ in the industrialised societies, the latter, again Australian (Leitmann
and Crawford, 2002), have been written recently and are worth examining. One critique
both share – and which we like to join our voices to - is the rather astounding absence of
any reflection on the historical antecedents of attempts at creating economic alternatives
through local and community-based processes and – importantly – the lack of much
reflection on the macro political-economic context within which both the suggested
alternatives and the local economies operate.

The emergence and strong growth of so-called ‘micro-finance’ initiatives in Australia and
across the world (e.g. the non-interest loan schemes, recently refunded with a
considerable grant by the Federal Government) are partly oriented to allowing the needed
purchase of consumer goods by those unable to do so because of existing disadvantage or
life events, partly geared at supporting the creation of ‘micro-enterprises’, quite similar to
the initiatives referred to in the previous paragraph. A number of research projects are
meanwhile available in this area and, one has to say, their findings as to the success of
such initiatives are mixed (Burkett, 2003; Burkett & Sheehan, 2009; Borderlands and
Good Shepherd, forthcoming).
Whilst I cannot go into any detail here, suffice it to mention that the ‘modern’ microfinance industry began in the 1970s with ACCION (Otero, 1999) in Latin America, somewhat later the Grameen Bank (Yunus, 1991; Rahman, 1999) in Bangladesh and the SEWA Bank (SEWA, 2003) in India, and they now constitute a growing feature of the community-based economic sector, encompassing specialist banks, credit unions, cooperatives, village credit societies, NGO’s and self-help groups across the globe. Whilst microfinance usually intends to address issues of disadvantage, poverty and exclusion by providing those who cannot access them from mainstream institutions, small and affordable loans, savings, insurance and other financial services – such as financial literacy, counseling and management training and assistance. Whilst it was initially conceived as a tool for achieving social justice objectives, microfinance now is being more generally accepted as one of many avenues to support social enterprises as well as the funding of ecologically-responsible, re-localised and interconnected Transition-Town-type alternatives (see below; also Burkett and Sheehan, 2009).

3. co-operatives old and new

This section offers a good opportunity to mention the evolution of the concept of the ‘new social economy’ (or, more recently referred to as solidarity economy) and its associated practices and projects in Europe and elsewhere. New forms of cooperatives have emerged in the context of the movements of the ‘sixties’ (which equally brought a revival of communal ways of living – both producing, consuming and reproducing ‘communes’ – and which we will mention in the last point of this ‘listing’ of C.E.D. initiatives) and the then newly emerging expressions of the crises in the globalising capitalist system. Various attempts at ‘re-gaining control’ over the vagaries of the ‘labour market’ and therewith over one’s capacity to survive by getting an income, led to the programs and groups of people trying to ‘set up business of their own’ as described in the previous section. They also led to attempts at resisting the demise of local employment opportunities because of the closing down of ‘old’ factories or ‘ageing’ infrastructure (in real terms, of course, many of those jobs were ‘shipped off’ to countries where labour costs were much lower, either because of the political system keeping them that way or because of the general nature of ‘non-developed’ economies). Workers took over their factories and put them under self-management structures, in many cases, with great success. These attempts constitute a remarkable continuity with many of the older self-management experiences of the sixties (and some even earlier!), notably the Yugoslav system before the ‘collapse’ (or ‘implosion’) of that nation, the Granja del Pueblo in Cuba, the original Kibbutz in Israel before they were usurped by state-creation ideologies and other ir-rationalities, and some self-management experiences and experiments in China of the sixties/seventies, unfortunately marred by the excesses of the Cultural Revolution.

Again, time and space are not available to have any chance of deepening out some of these examples and experiences; but there is a big literature which illustrates vividly these experiences and draws lessons from them; unfortunately, much of that literature is
not written in English, even though recent US- and UK-based work attempts to critically receive some of these past experiences and has started to incorporate them in their respective attempts to re-vitalise alternative approaches to local development (Williamson, T. et al., 2002 as well as many publications of Zed Books in the UK and publications from Kumarian and Rowman & Littlefield – see some of their publications in the Bibliography).

In as far as cooperatives are concerned, there seems to be a worldwide renewal in interest in this form or organising social activities of all kinds, from production, to consumption to distribution and the International Cooperative Alliance (http://ica.coop) has recently strongly confirmed the original philosophical principles of the original ‘Brotherly Weavers of Rochdale’, who, in the early 1800-s set up the first cooperatives to protect themselves and other labourers from the multiple exploitations they were exposed to during that phase of expanding capitalism. Mondragon certainly has helped to re-vitalise this interest as has the work of other activists in Nova Scotia (Mathews, 1999; Alexander, 1997 and Whyte and Whyte, 1991; for a summary, see Boulet, 2003)

The co-operative described by Boulet (2003) is somehow unusual, as it attempts to create a cooperative structure with a group of people usually not ‘prone’ to such (ad)ventures: intellectuals and (ex-)academic workers. After twelve years of experience with the trials and tribulations of this initiative, we are somewhat wiser and more hopeful that it does offer a new way of organising alternative practices in societies like those we inhabit (see http://www.borderlands.org.au). Another similar initiative is the ‘Community Praxis Cooperative’ group operating from Queensland (see http://www.communitypraxis.org and Westoby and Dowling, 2009).

4. community currency schemes (or LETS) and other attempts to create economic activities and circulation in local communities;

Again, I will not delve too deeply into this set of initiatives, rather referring to various journals and ‘chat-rooms’ and to a series of websites, journals and – especially – to the Journal YES! A Journal for Positive Futures, edited and published by a group of people including David Korten whose work is probably exemplary for the kinds of alternative thinking about community and ‘work’ which I am trying to bring to readers’ attention and the criteria of which we can fully underwrite.

LETS or Local Energy (or Economic) Trading System(s) are essentially ‘bartering’ systems, whereby groups of local people develop other-than-pecuniary-based modes of exchange of goods and services. Importantly, these initiatives also attempt to develop another way of thinking about the value of ‘human work’, other than in the simplistic – and discriminating! – terms of ‘paid’ work. We can only refer to the work of feminists who have insistently pointed out that women’s work ‘Counts for Nothing’ (as the title of Marilyn Waring’s 1988 book suggests), as it is for its major part not ‘paid’.
Addressing that issue has, for example, led members of the Borderlands Cooperative, to think about and ‘mix-and-match’ work modes in our various projects, programs and other activities:

1. as (often badly) paid work (the money deriving from the projects we undertake),
2. as voluntary work (either ‘compulsorily voluntary’ as we have members and co-workers who are ‘forced’ to do voluntary work because of their – assumed – obligations towards the State and if they want to continue to receive unemployment benefits…, or as ‘truly’ voluntary),
3. as apprenticeship work (the many – social work, community development and other - students who come and spend their required placement time with us or people who just want to learn certain skills) and
4. as bartering work, whereby the work is paid equally per hour – irrespective of its ‘value’ in the ‘real’ market economy; this occurs through the mechanisms of the LETS system which we have started three years ago and to which many Borderlands Cooperative members also belong.

We can only refer to few sources for further information; Bernard Lietaer (2001) is probably the best and most easily understood and comprehensive introduction and readers should be referred to an international ‘online’ discussion group managed by members of the International Journal of Community Currency Research (http://www.geog.le.ac.uk/ijccr/index.html), where all the ‘big names’ in the debate about alternative local economic systems engage in often quite interesting debates (see also in this issue, Lucie Ozanne’s 2010 reprinted article from the IJCCR, illustrating a LETS project in New Zealand).

As well, this ‘cluster’ of initiatives relates intrinsically to other attempts at re-valuing human ‘labour’, as this journal has also attempted at discussing in a previous issue, one which concerned itself with volunteering, civil society work and community development (Healey et al, 2006) and another contribution in which I was involved as a researcher (Boulet et al, 2008).

5. **Transition Towns and other eco-conscious community-economic initiatives**

Next to eco-villages and eco-inspired co-housing projects which this journal has regularly given pride of space to – and which very much overlap with the communal approaches addressed in the final section of this article – there have emerged numerous attempts worldwide to redevelop existing towns, villages, suburbs into more socially and ecologically sustainable places. Such initiatives often incorporate many of the previously discussed elements – LETS, cooperatives, social enterprises, eco-businesses, attempts at re-localising employment, etc. – but what makes them stand out is their full orientation to ‘peak-oil’, the associated anticipated energy crisis and the consequences for humanity of we refuse to adapt into more sustainable lifestyles (Hopkins, 2008). What also makes Transition Town initiatives stand out is that they fully incorporate consciousness-raising and -changing work, behavioural change and relational restorative work in their holistic
approach to ‘transitional’ (or, as other would prefer, transformational) processes deemed necessary for the survival of our species.

They have, on the other hand, also been criticised for not going far enough in their analysis of the *causes* of our predicaments – both in the economic, the ecological and the political-economic realms - and that, therefore, their employed strategies fall (more or less far) short of the necessary adjustments and ‘revolutions’ we need to engage in and generate to have any chance at all to survive (James, 2009). Approaches advocated for in the context of the World Social Forums seem to – at least – have some complementary dimensions which could infuse the Transition Town movement with – what some would call – more realism about the structural impediments systemically working against the intended and hoped-for changes.

6. **truly alternative-communal – co-location, co-habitation, intentional - approaches**

Here, I will just indicate that the alternative communal – or the ‘*intentional community*’ movement is alive and well; I am aware that participants in this alternative are often just referred to as ‘hippies’ or ‘communists’ or ‘anarchists’ or worse; on the other hand, I do not believe that *true alternatives to the ‘evils’ of any one system will ever come from its centre or from its top*; they will always emerge from the true laboratories of the next social arrangements we call ‘society’ and they are mostly located at its margins or its periphery.

Many of these communal living arrangements can be thought of as ranging from ‘completely’ self-sufficient (in as far as their survival needs and their other rules of social reproduction are concerned) to ‘partly’ self-sufficient in that they address certain aspects of their social reproduction (for example, co-habitation, but not co-production; co-consumption but not co-habitation; etc). I am also aware that some of the historical and later examples have been known to engage in certain excesses of sexual or ‘mind-changing’ or even self-destructive behaviours, but they are few and they have - indeed and unfortunately - managed to taint the entire movement with a bad name. And that’s a pity; on the other hand, new initiatives are coming along every day and across all continents and systems and that, we think, is encouraging.

There’s a vibrant US-based Journal “*Communities: Journal of Cooperative Living*” connecting ‘Intentional Communities’ worldwide and an associated international network, providing a rich reservoir of experiences and strategic discussion around this theme and it is well worthwhile to explore some of these and learn from them for similar or other community initiatives. As well, the incessant research work of Bill Metcalf (1995 and 2004) has given us a great insight in the workings of 10 long-term Australian intentional communities (including the well-known Maleny and Nimbin communities) and international examples thereof respectively.

It appears that – especially – the ‘co-housing’ movement has been experiencing a great expansion, probably given its greater adaptability to a great variety of locational context
and the lesser emphasis on the range of factors which were to be included into the consensus surrounding the ‘intentionality’ and the ‘commonality’ (if not identity) of purpose(s) and modalities of co-habitation. Again, the previously mentioned Communities journal illustrates a great variety of co-housing approaches in a great diversity of living contexts, from highly urbanised to rural.

IV. Some conclusions as to the societal locus of C.E.D.-s and their potential to provide adequate responses to the ‘problems’ of our communities and – intentionally – to the ecological crises.

Many of the conclusions I will draw out more explicitly have already been mentioned before as I presented the various ‘types’ of C.E.D.-s; just some suggestive thoughts in the hope that they may generate reflection and discussion and – indeed - imitation.

• It is imperative to reflect about the nature of work and move our conception away from it merely being covered by the notion of ‘employment’, as we engage in developing community-based work initiatives. The same applies to the notion and practice of ‘business’: not all businesses need to be ‘for profit’ or exploitative of labour power and the environment…
• It is imperative to continue to consider the social and relational aspect of the – of any - community we are attempting to insert economic development programs into. The often exclusively individualistic focus of work and employment (in the ideological context of capitalism anyway) threatens to gain the overhand over all social goals and objectives one should have when becoming engaged in ‘community’.
• It is absolutely imperative to reflect on the macro- and global system in which the local economic development initiatives are inserted and within which they are operating. An economic system resting on the principles we have grown to adopt under the aegis of capitalism is not very well suited to achieve the social and human(e) goals associated with a ‘living’ economy; as long as local and community economic development projects are inserted in such an economy, the danger of subverting their human/social objectives remains paramount. The need to transform the overall structures of our political-economy MUST remain a priority also amongst those who engage in micro-reform and local initiatives. To conclude with Korten, (1999) his ‘cures’ for the system as we know it would have to include (and several of his suggestions have become almost prophetic given the benefit of our hindsight informed by the recent Global Financial Crisis):

1. end the legal fiction that corporations are entitled to the rights of persons and exclude corporations from political participation;
2. implement serious political campaign reform to reduce the influence of money on politics;
3. eliminate corporate welfare by eliminating direct subsidies and recovering other externalised costs through fees and taxes;
4. implement mechanisms to regulate international corporations and finance;
5. Use fiscal and regulatory policy to make financial speculation unprofitable and to give an economic advantage to human-scale, stakeholder-owned enterprises.

And here I come to one very final - and mostly whispered comment: we haven’t even talked about the ecological potential and impact needed to sustain any of the suggestions I have put in front of you, because, as the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post put in an article headline some time ago: “Doomsday nears, but the world is just not looking”…. The article reported about the latest findings and recommendations of the World Watch Institute, which, for decades now, has been ‘watching’ our ecological health and the sustainability of our (western) lifestyles and ways of making such lifestyles possible… and the picture is not nice…. And as many other contributions in the New Community Quarterly have insistently shown, before and after ‘Copenhagen’ and in this issue again, we seem to just not want to even seriously consider the changes necessary to make a dent in our destructive profligacy.

But thinking about alternatives to the existing systems of exploitation of our worldly resources to support our ‘growth’ and ‘development’ and its associated ‘lifestyles’, is utterly essential and paramount as we – in the process – are destroying all our livelihoods; in that sense, C.E.D.-s could and should be conceived as ecological and not just economic development alternatives. Indeed, they may become laboratories of humanity’s survival!

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