

## Book Review

### M2 Models and Methodologies for Community Engagement Edited by: Reena Tiwari, Marina Lommerse and Dianne Smith

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The debate over both community and planning and the large issue of their coming together in community planning reflected the economic and political changes since the 1970s. In the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century socially-driven planning more broadly addressed the issues and concerns of what community is in a locally given context and in a globally transforming world. Lived difference and situated knowledge distinguish one community from another community. The effects of globalisation, neocolonialism, neoliberalism and austerity impact communities around the globe.

Drawing on locally situated knowledge and paying attention to difference has critically expanded the repertoire of planning methods to achieve community involvement and transfer of power. This, in turn, has produced a growing body of theoretical reflections on community engagement. Reena Tiwari, Marina Lommerse and Dianne Smith, the three editors, shaped the volume *M2 Models and Methodologies for Community Engagement* through carefully chosen international contributions ranging from listening to the local knowledge of village women in rural India to pro bono work in suburban Australia, from hypothetical urban planning in Japan to women's health knowledge in rural Uganda. All the examples chosen embrace an embedded and locally informed knowledge. The examples allow insights into the growing complexities profoundly challenging communities in different parts of the world. Equally, the becoming of a community is under threat. Community

building requires resources, time and space. These are under threat and extremely unevenly allocated. All the more, methods and practices of community engagement need to be swift, alert, resourceful and critical.

Bridging the commitment to community involvement, capacity building, teaching, design and planning, the editorial team is astutely aware of the legacies and histories of community planning. They critically expound these in order to broaden the basis of knowledge for a critically informed and reflective future practice. Reena Tiwari teaches at the Departments of Urban & Regional Planning and Architecture at Curtin University and focuses on community involvement in the integration of urban development; Marina Lommerse teaches at Curtin University and works with creative people and communities to strengthen individual and collective capacity and agency; Dianne Smith teaches at Curtin University and was previously at Queensland University of Technology, and focuses on design for the cognitively impaired. Their teaching, research, and creative practices cross back and forth between theory and practice, between people, communities, capacities and shared concerns. The book is as much a reflection on community engagement and capacity as it is a tool supporting future practices.

Knowledge is key to a renewed transdisciplinary and community-based practice. It is commonly held that knowledge and the capacity to work and to act are deeply bound up with the demands of cognitive capitalism and its accelerating global expansion. Therefore, the shared production knowledge as a community-based activity has to fight to take back the knowledge and its economies. This makes community-based knowledge production matter and has to secure ways keep the gains for the communities who are in fact producing the knowledge together and should therefore rightly be the ones who benefit from it.

The editors write:

Although a transdisciplinary approach is not new in itself, by making it explicit as an aspiration, we highlight the possible limitation of those projects that only bring together differing contributors at core moments for their expertise, without reflecting or planning for the potentially new ways of conceptualizing and of actioning what needs to be done. By constructing a project as transdisciplinary, all people are ongoing contributors, who are able to wander into others' discipline-specific arenas and vice versa.

This commitment to wandering is something the book offers to its readers. They wander and learn. The transdisciplinary community of readers is invited to put to use the book's knowledge. This will be of help to expand both community planning and transdisciplinary practice. The book is a useful tool ready for teachers and students alike. Equally, the ways of doing things explicated in the global case studies are of relevance for community organisers, activists, researchers, planners, administrators, but also funders and donors.

The contributions do not privilege one knowledge or one method over the other, staying true to transdisciplinarity as a community. Contributors include Mohammed Ali, at Curtin University, who focuses on health and nutrition in Bangladesh and in Australian Indigenous people; Denise da Luca, who works at the Sustainable Design Program at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and communicates nature's principles to business organisations in search of radical transformation; Salvatore di Mauro, who teaches at Griffith University and focuses on public art and design with communities; Jaya Ernest, a leading expert in International Health who teaches at Griffith and focuses on post-conflict adversity and resilience among migrant and refugee communities; Anne Farren, who is the director of the Fashion Design and Research Hub at Curtin University; Mark Jones, who is Professor of Transcultural Health Improvement at Curtin and works with health care systems of developing countries; May Lample, who is a research assistant at Kimanya-Ngeyo Foundation for Science and Education in Jinja, Uganda; Damian Madigan, who lectures architecture at the University of South Australia and focuses on models of flexible housing; Carmen Mendoza-Arroyo, who is a professor at the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya and focuses on sustainable urban regeneration and development; Sarah McGann, who lectures at Curtin University and focuses on designing health, hospitality and recreation projects; Barbara Milech, who is Curtin University's Humanities Director of Graduate Studies and combines creative production research with feminist and Lacanian studies; David Morris, who focuses on designs for Indigenous communities and directs the Student Construction Program in the School of Art, Architecture and Design at the University of South Australia; Yatin Pandya, who is an author, activist, and architect whose firm FOOTPRINTS E.A.R.T.H. (Environment Architecture Research Technology Housing) is in Ahmedabad; Bob Pokrant who is Professor of Anthropology at Curtin University with a focus on community adaptation to climate change in South Asia; Veena Poonacha, who is Professor and Director of the Research Centre for Women's Studies at SNDT Women's University in Mumbai and works on empowerment projects for rural women in Southern Gujarat, Western India; Mokhesur Rahman, who is a development practitioner in community-based natural resource management in Bangladesh; Clancy Read, who cofounded I.D.E.A. Global Consulting and focuses on humanitarian organisations; Debra Singh who is a medical doctor and cofounder of the Kimanya-Ngeyo Foundation for Science and Education in Jinja, Uganda; Nancy Spanbroek, who teaches at Curtin University and explores the interface between design pedagogy, community and exhibitions; Pere Vall-Casas, who teaches at Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura de la Universitat Internacional de Catalunya and focuses on urban sprawl repair. The areas of the expertise of all the contributors clearly demonstrate their specialisation in health, creativity, the environment, alliance building, and feminist and critical methods. This mix brings to the fore the most challenging and troubling areas of uneven development owed to the precarity of space, time and bodies under the conditions of neoliberalisation and globalisation.

Currently, we are witnessing an ever more accelerating process of uneven development paralleled by newly emerging zones of accumulation. Underprivileged communities pay the

lion's share of the price. Their access to material resources and their knowledge gains are restricted. Uneven development is understood as the deepening of injustice and the unequal distribution of resources and wealth across societies. All the more, actions of support grounded in community engagement have to re-capture and re-appropriate community knowledge and capacity building. Drastic measures of neoliberal market economies and austerity measures implemented by neoliberal governments are increasingly damaging to communities and to the time-intensive practices of capacity building. In essence, the globalisation advocated by the neoliberal economists is damaging to what is at the core of community building. Time and space together are in jeopardy, but they are needed in order to build lasting and resilient structures. The time invested together (rather than spent together!) in the transdisciplinary practices of community planning and capacity building is crucial to strengthen resistance against the increasing precarity of community. Therefore, community planning and capacity building have taken on an unprecedented urgency in the twenty-first century.

With regard to the knowledge communities that are brought together in this book, the community of authors and the people who are part of their projects, the editors rightly position community as a discipline in its own right, or rather, as I prefer to name it, a trans-discipline. The politics of community involvement throughout the contributions in this volume move from the participant or recipient model of community members to a knowledge-based collaboration. 'We propose that the individual community members, alone or as a group, bring their own core knowledge and skills to any project. They are able to sit comfortably within a transdisciplinary context as equal yet unique players and contributors – not just participants or recipients.' In order to address pressing matters of urban injustice, rural and environmental precarity, health issues and uneven development, the disciplinary character of community as a trans-discipline needs to be strengthened and strategically employed. The three parts of the book on firstly *Narratives on Models, Methodologies and Methods*, secondly *Unfolding Challenges and Removing Barriers in the Community Engagement Process: Opportunities for Transdisciplinary and Translocational Applications* and thirdly *Community Engagement and Capacity Building: a Transdisciplinary Perspective*, allow for its critical and strategic use in teaching, theory, and practice. As much as social and material infrastructures are needed for capacity building, knowledge infrastructures are equally needed. *M2 Models and Methodologies for Community Engagement* is a timely contribution to supporting this much-needed knowledge infrastructure.