The definition of community development sociology essay

In the last chapter, the researcher introduced the research background, stated the research aims and described the research problem. This chapter starts with the definition of community development, general concepts of community development and explores the community development framework. It also discusses community development in Belfast, Northern Ireland and links it to the basis of the study, which is the perception of residents on community development in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

The Definition of community development, general concepts of community and community development

Community as a unit of action can play the lead in development of Belfast communities. The basic process of planning community development is to identify needs of communities in Belfast, establish mutually agreeable goals and objectives, and implement plans by mobilizing accessible resources and community coalitions for community betterment. Accordingly, a variety of community planning strategies and actions can be created and actively implemented with the involvement of Belfast residents.

The definition of " community" has been discussed in a variety of ways for many decades. Hillery (1955); Kaufman (1959); Bell and Newby (1972); Wilkinson (1972) agreed that the three general components of a community include a shared territory, a local society, and a process of locality-oriented collective actions. Belfast as a city or community is made up of inner communities or neighbourhoods.

A shared territory refers to a geographic location, such as a neighbourhood, town, city, county, region, country, and so forth. A local society is an

integrated union in which the daily activities of people and a complement of social structures embody all aspects of a common life. A process of locality-oriented collective actions can be understood as the local residents exerting effort collectively on behalf of their common interests. In this research, I specifically focus on the town/city community levels in Belfast to better understand whether this level of community forms a strong sense of belonging, thereby binding its residents together and joining their inner effort in response to external social and economic changes, as well as the demands of community development in general.

Fawcett et al. (1984) emphasized on local residents' self-motivation to establish their development agendas for the community. The last element mentioned here is the opportunity of community members to participate in public discussion. It is important for community development to involve many individuals, segments, classes, and groups within the community, and that each member has an equal chance to speak up and take part in the public forum. In addition, democracy, rationality, and the orientation toward accomplishment of community development agendas in which Belfast residents participate are key factors.

Communication and power structure within the community are also important aspects. Since a community is understood to be a living place manifesting the physical characteristics of a setting and a social and historical context, community development should be considered in terms of the meaning of locality through personal activities, experiences, shared values, and the common historical memory. As a result, the concepts of community and community development adopted in this study consist of a

shared territory, a local society, and the process of community autonomy and empowerment for a general purpose of community betterment.

2. 3 Community Development Frameworks

The main focus of community development has been the normal concept of solving problems and betterment of quality of life in rural communities. The way to improve rural life and life in Belfast is to identify problems and then solve them by enhancing community empowerment and advancement.

Sanders (1958) considers the importance of social organizations in Community development, which are in charge of certain missions within communities. Sanders identified the role of hierarchical structure in communities in terms of detecting problems, setting agendas, and implementing plans. His view of development emphasizes social channels through which community programs can be carried out. The social channels refer to a well-developed organization with a clear division of labour, resource accessibility, and members sharing common values and pursuing the same objectives. Social organizations are the primary agents participating in community process and mobilizing resources to implement plans for their common goal.

Community development, according to Sanders, is equivalent to development of organizations in Belfast that effectively implement " subject-matter specialties such as health, welfare, agriculture, industry, recreation, etc" across all levels from groups and associations to communities and regions (Sanders 1958: 5).

*Rothman (1979) identified the social planning approach as one of the ways to understand community development. He argued that the social planning approach is a technical process with regard to a certain community problem and emphasized " rational, deliberately planned, and controlled change" within communities (Rothman 1979: 27).

The rationality approach helps to manipulate the process of community development into standard phases of identifying problems, mobilizing resources, and setting agendas to implement programs for the goal of social betterment.

There must be a constant interaction between identifying a problem, making a decision, and taking action to share and express concerns or community problems for communities in Belfast to experience change.

Community development provides a good opportunity to explore issues of poverty in Belfast. The emphasis is on the opportunity for creating jobs, thereby raising the real incomes of residents. Hence, Belfast as a community is seen as a collection of micro units, and these units, their interactions, and their relationships with external units comprise the community economic system.

Since communities in Belfast have increasingly engaged in their economic development, there are at least two different strategies adopted: community-oriented self-development and exogenous industrial recruitment (Summers and Branch 1984). Exogenous industrial recruitment refers to a form of development that encourages outside investors and firms to locate their businesses in the rural communities where local residents might expect

to have the power to set substantial management strategies to promote the community's common benefit.

Self-development has come with the awakening of community empowerment because the strategy of industrial recruitment for facilitating development has been criticized. The main factors that spur self-development were the exodus of factories and the stagnating economy in communities. Still, the effect of the flourishing grassroots movement cannot be ignored.

For many communities in Belfast, self-development strategies offer potential benefits for maintaining or improving their economic activities. According to Flora et al., community-oriented self-development strategies " involve cooperation between the public and private sectors to create locally-controlled jobs and new sources of income" (1991: 20). These authors also identified three characteristics of the self-development model: (1) involvement by a local government, (2) investment of substantial local resources, and (3) the control of enterprises or activities locally (Flora et al. 1991). As such, broad community involvement revitalizes local economic activities by financing and organizational effort. At the same time, local residents can choose businesses according to characteristics that fit their demand closely and that will not damage their natural resources permanently, alter their landscape irrevocably, or change their lifestyle dramatically. For example, Flora et al. (1991) categorized community-oriented self-development projects based on major activities and found that the most popular projects involve tourism, arts and crafts fairs, and recreational or cultural activity. Following that, existing business retention

and expansion and downtown revitalization are also seen as important projects (Flora et al. 1991). In other words, by developing clean/hospitality industry and revitalizing/individualizing their hometown, communities in Belfast can re-launch local economic activities with the goal of sustainably utilizing their natural resources and community assets.

Since economic considerations that are dominant in modern societies have also been prevalent in community development studies, Belfast residents' demand for a certain level of economic expansion to improve their economic conditions that reflects the core theme of this economic development approach. Since areas that depend on a single source of income are vulnerable to economic restructuring, the key is to provide them with diverse sources of economic sufficiency.

Studies of community economic development illustrate how the structural disadvantages of community economic development influence the ways community members respond to local development paths and what strategies they adopt to solve problems. For example, according to Blakely (1994), communities have faced difficult and overwhelming circumstances in local economic development, and must be aware of the problems affecting the local economy and its consequences; local economic development and employment generation should be initiated at the community level to deal more effectively with these local problems facing the community (Blakely 1994: 27).

2. 4 Community as a field for development

The community should be seen as a whole, rather than as the sum of its parts, wherein the interconnections among individuals, groups, associations, and organizations form concrete social forces to cope with external and internal changes facing the community (Fawcett et al. 1995).

Kaufman (1959) argued that development must go beyond planned economic programs and place more priority on improving and increasing community residents' identification with the locality in order to get them involved in the process of local development. This process empowers the local community. To carry out such identification with the locality, collaborative action and mutual identity are emphasized prominently in this theoretical orientation.

Elaborating extensively on Kaufman's interactional perspective on community, Wilkinson (1970) tied social structure in to the context of community development. He claimed that social structure is defined in an interactional context as observable relationships built up through an action process by members. The role and position of members in a given interactional network are identified and classified to evaluate the pattern of the structure, which determines the continuity of social processes and the direction of social change. It is a network structure-building orientation of community development that focuses on integrative and generalizing networks in the local society (Wilkinson 1970, 1972). This interactional orientation of community development argued that the instrumental orientation of development sees project achievement as the ultimate goal of community development, but, in fact, development should be seen as a

dynamic, ongoing process. There are inherent problems behind material demands and physical construction, and there are no substantial, permanent solutions for them. Planned programs for community development are only one of many solutions to achieve social betterment and should focus on building the community field in which the collaborative capacity to pursue locality-oriented common interests is more crucial to the process of community development than solving the immediate physical problems.

Wilkinson (1986) argued that empowered collective-oriented community action is the fundamental basis for community development and that community attachment plays an important role in fostering such processes of empowerment. Therefore, exploring the determinants of local residents' attachment to their communities becomes an essential step to building up local capacity to deal with community development issues.

It is not urbanization or industrialization that directly changes the relationships among local residents or their sense of community.

It is the different opportunities and contexts for social interaction leading to different social dynamics that alter the connections between individuals and the society. Beggs et al. (1996) used a name generator method to gather information on respondents' social networks and analyzed how closely the respondents interacted in daily life, as well as the strength and duration of their social ties in order to define community attachment. Others, like Brehm, Eisenhauer, and Krannich (2004), adopted multi-dimensional methods to measure community attachment via collective action indicators (including land-based production and conservation involvement, social

involvement, and economic/development involvement) and natural environment attachment indicators. By considering two dimensions of community attachment, they found the concept of community attachment cannot be seen as simple social interaction, but as well-developed community cohesion through the linkage between individuals, organizations and their locality.

Rothman (1979: 26) contended that locality development should focus on " the broad participation of a wide spectrum of people at the local community level in goal determination and action." According to Rothman's (1979) argument, such broad citizen participation is not only instrumental in solving specific community problems, but also for more general activities, such as democratic procedures, voluntary cooperation, community empowerment, and development of indigenous leadership. This locality development approach emphasized the whole local system's capacity for building and maintaining in which a fundamental network structure should be built up by establishing cooperative relationships among groups by creating a self-help community problem solving system and stimulating residents' interest and participation in community affairs.

These goals of locality development emphasized community organizations and the harmonious interrelationships among them.

To integrate the arguments of community development as a process of interaction, community fields where the community capacity for collective action can be created for the common good and social betterment. Forms of interaction include formal and informal social contact within organized and

unorganized social activities. Through such purposeful and non-purposeful interactions, social forces are raised to respond to local issues. Specifically, a community field is manifested in the interactional structure among local residents, groups, and organizations contributing together to the accomplishment of specific objectives of community projects. The central focus of community field theory is on structurally oriented interactions through which communication occurs and fosters positive and cohesive relationships among community members.

In addition, Sharp (2001) analyzed community by for examining the concept of community field perspectives in the relationships between network structure and development. He found that these network structures can help community members to cooperate with local organizations, to access resources, to get information flowing among them, and to identify attributes of the community that enhance general capacity for local action. Pavey et al. (2007) contends that the ultimate goal of community development is to build the community's capacity to manage its own world based on members' own meaning systems. They focused on exploring whether sound social relationships were a driving force to stimulate community capacity and strengthen self-governance on community issues. In their findings, interactional field theory was confirmed by the positive relationship between the community field and economic development through horizontal linkages among community members.

The changes of social distance and degrees of community attachment among local residents influence the potential community cohesion and collaborative action that can be taken to approach the community common

good. Some empirical studies have examined this argument. Sharp (2001) focused on selected features of small-town social structure and its relationship to the community capacity for local action. Drawing on the interactional perspective, community network analysis, and community power research, he proposed an approach to measuring and evaluating the community field to understand more clearly the relationship between community structure and the capacity for local action. His findings complement the thinking on community social capital and social infrastructure and reveal that social relationships and local residents' interaction structure are importantly associated with the community capacity for local action.

Development should be focused on the community itself, rather than relying solely on neo-classical economics' individualism and political-economics' macro structuralism. Community development is as a means to an end, a process of guiding for a particular purpose that is eventually helpful to the local community.

Furthermore, community development has been realized as a social movement, a process of empowering community that tends to build up its own organizational structure, accepted procedures, and active practitioners within its territory. It stresses and promotes the idea of community development as interpreted by its local residents. In response to such an argument, we might ask that, in the process of building horizontal network ties, hierarchical inequality of power within class, gender, or other social structures could be minimized in order to pursue empowerment of each individual. Traditional community researchers simplify community

development as the process of community empowerment in which community capacity is crucial for a better life in the community.

2. 5 Research focus from the framework

Community development obviously has a variety of meanings to local residents and their personal attitudes toward the vision of their community future are influenced by their attitudes and opinions on issues facing the local community.

This research primarily focuses on individuals' attitudes toward their local community development through the five models. By examining the research hypotheses, this study analyzes rural residents' experiences in local community life to determine preferences for community development alternatives as guided by the five elements of the model.

In order to examine the research hypotheses in terms of the relationship between local residents' general attitudes toward the current conditions and local community attitudes toward development alternatives, as well as individuals' socio-demographic characteristics logistic regression modelling is applied. In five logistic regressions, individuals' major concerns with regard to community development issues are used as the dependent variable. Independent variables are used to examine the dependent models through five research hypotheses.

Resident attitudes towards community development preferences form the core theme in this research. Therefore, the significance of research is to examine observable changes that shape towards local community

circumstances in response to developments their own expectations and attitudes toward future community development alternatives.