

# Researching the local politics and practices of radical Community Development Projects in 1970s Britain

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**Abstract** This article introduces a themed section of the *Community Development Journal* that re-evaluates the British Community Development Project (CDP) of the 1970s, with particular reference to three local ‘radical’ CDPs. It sets the national Community Development Project in context, as an experimental programme of action-research in twelve ‘deprived’ areas, set up in response to the rediscovery of poverty in the late 1960s. It explains the rationale for revisiting the CDPs from the vantage point of the second decade of the twenty-first century, when the structural problems of neoliberal capitalism (especially deindustrialization and globalization), identified as emergent by the CDP teams in the 1970s, continue to impact on disadvantaged neighbourhoods in negative ways. While some commentators have criticized CDPs for focussing more on political analyses than community development practice, this article argues that the long-standing significance of CDPs lies in the way their issue-focussed research informed their radical practice in local neighbourhoods. The article introduces three following papers in the themed section, which illustrate this through case studies of local CDPs in Coventry, Newcastle and North Tyneside, largely based on research conducted during 2014–2016 as part of an Economic and Social Research Council-funded project, *Imagine – connecting communities through research*.

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## Introduction

... historians will deal harshly with the influence of the CDPs on community work as an occupation. (Thomas, 1983, p. 57)

Overall it [the national Community Development Project] was one of the most important and defining initiatives in the evolution of British community development. (Popple, 2015, p. 34)

These two statements epitomize the controversies that surrounded the Community Development Projects (CDPs) in 1970s Britain and the following decade, and their continuing iconic status in the community development literature and folk memory. While at first sight, these quotations may seem contradictory – they certainly stem from different ideological positions – both offer significant insights into the nature and significance of the British CDPs for the theory and practice of community development. Thomas's critique is based on his view that the CDPs focused excessive attention on developing a structural analysis of the problems of 'deprived' communities, missing the opportunity to create new insights, theories and skills about how to do community development work on the ground. This was, he felt, a lost chance for community (development) work to professionalize. On the other hand, Popple argues that it was precisely the political analysis that made the CDPs so significant – they showed clearly that the location of the problems experienced by residents in declining industrial areas lay outside those places, and that there were severe limitations to what neighbourhood community development work on its own could achieve. As Craig (2011, p. 6), who worked for Benwell CDP, rightly points out, the CDP workers did a great deal of very intensive and effective neighbourhood work. However, they did this in the context of their broader structural analyses of poverty, inequality and unemployment, which informed the development and support of local residents' groups, campaigns and community action. Nevertheless, the reports they left behind and the reflections on their work at the time and subsequently, focused more on the political analyses of the economic and social context, than on the development of local groups and accounts of how to do mainstream community development work. The aim of the three following articles, as case studies of three 'radical' CDPs, is therefore to offer more detailed accounts of how the CDPs operated on the ground, and to re-evaluate their legacies from the vantage point of the second decade of the twenty-first century.

This themed section focussing on the CDPs is both fitting and timely. The *Community Development Journal* has a long track record as a vehicle for reporting, debating and analysing the work of the CDPs – both as

they were happening and in subsequent decades. For example, in 1974 a 24-page overview and analysis of the work of the national CDP to date was published ([Community Development Project Working Group, 1974](#)); during 1981–1982, a series of four review articles was included on the literature generated by the CDPs ([Loney, 1981](#); [Sharman, 1981](#); [Lambert, 1981](#); [Kraushaar, 1982](#)); and in the early 1990s, [Green and Chapman \(1992\)](#) offered a retrospective account of the lessons of the national CDP. From the vantage point of early twenty-first century Britain, we now offer a fresh evaluation of the work and legacies of local CDPs. As [Hill \(1991, p. 15\)](#) observed:

History has to be rewritten in every generation, because although the past does not change, the present does; each generation asks new questions of the past and finds new areas of sympathy as it re-lives different aspects of the experiences of its predecessors.

Our analysis is from our contemporary location in a society where increasing poverty and inequality are all too manifest, yet the blame is once again being primarily attributed to the worst affected families and communities. Once again, the localized and inevitably ineffectual remedies advanced wilfully ignore the prime structural causes. We have much potentially to learn from examining in detail how the CDPs came to work with, and outwards from, the local, to develop a powerful challenge to central government's victim-blaming prescriptions.

## **Background to the research**

The three following articles in this themed section of the *Community Development Journal* focus on the local politics and practices of three of the twelve local projects that comprised the national CDP in 1970s Britain. In addition to the published reports, the authors have also consulted grey literature and interviewed former CDP workers, activists and residents, hence enabling some of the local politics and its inter-relationship with practice to be made visible.

This themed section draws on research undertaken during 2014–2016 by academics at Durham University, the University of Warwick and community partner organizations, alongside long-term research by Judith Green, on the history and legacies of the three projects based in Tyneside and Coventry. It is part of a larger, longer research project, *Imagine – Connecting Communities Through Research*, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). *Imagine* is a five-year programme of research running from 2013 to 2017, bringing together a range of different research projects working across universities in collaboration with their, mostly

local, communities. The focus of *Imagine* is 'civic participation' – how people get involved and influence life in their communities. The aim is to use the new knowledge we gather, to imagine how communities might be different and, by implication, better, in the future (see <http://www.imaginecommunity.org.uk/>, accessed 13 December 2016). The *Imagine* project itself is divided into teams researching the social, cultural, democratic and historical contexts of civic participation. Our team was responsible for researching the history of different ways of re-imagining past communities, focusing on the significant example of CDPs, but in doing so we have, of course, examined their social, economic, cultural and political dimensions.

The articles here focus on the relatively hidden politics and practice of three case study local CDPs. As it happens, these all defined themselves as towards the 'radical' end of the spectrum of CDPs: Hillfields in Coventry in the English West Midlands, and two in North East England, Benwell in West Newcastle and parts of North Shields in North Tyneside. Hillfields ran from 1970 to 1975 and was one of the four first wave projects, while Benwell and North Tyneside started in 1972 and ended in 1978. The articles show the similarities and differences in the strategies that local projects adopted. Variations were due to a range of influences, including specific local socio-economic challenges, the nature of local political institutions, the ideologies and personal characteristics of CDP workers, and the nature of the communities with which they interacted.

We did not set out to skew our research in the direction of radical projects. Rather they were chosen because of the proximity to the local universities involved. This facilitated our other project aim, which was to work with community organizations today to co-produce knowledge between university researchers and community members about the past and present of the three localities, and construct contemporary visions for the future. In the case of Hillfields, this involved collaborating with community-based agencies such as WATCH (Working Actively to Change Hillfields), ACCOL (African Caribbean Community Organisation Ltd) and the Hillfields History Group, as well as agencies such as the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum and FarGo (Far Gosford Street Village) a local regeneration project, culminating in a major photographic exhibition at FarGo Village in 2015 (see [http://www.kyneswood.com/Imagine\\_Coventry/?page\\_id=339](http://www.kyneswood.com/Imagine_Coventry/?page_id=339), accessed 12 December 2016). The community organizations involved in *Imagine North East* in Benwell were the Patchwork Project (youth), Pendower Good Neighbour Project, Riverside Community Health Project, Search Project (older people), St James' Heritage and Environment Group, St James' Centre for Heritage and Culture and West Newcastle

Picture History Collection. In North Shields, the community organizations were Cedarwood Trust, Meadow Well Connected, Phoenix Detached Youth Project and Remembering the Past, Resourcing the Future. Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM) was also a partner, with the Discovery Museum (Newcastle) playing a role in collecting digital archives and hosting exhibitions and events (see <https://www.dur.ac.uk/socialjustice/imagine/>, accessed 19 December 2016). Several of these projects were a legacy of organizations originally initiated during the period of the CDPs.

## **The national Community Development Project**

The national CDP was established by the Home Office in 1969 during Prime Minister Harold Wilson's 1964–1970 Labour government. Inspired by the *War on Poverty* programme in the United States (Clark and Hopkins, 1969; Loney, 1980), at the time the CDP was the largest and boldest initiative of its kind ever mounted in Britain, estimated to have cost £5 million (Loney, 1983, p. 4) – over £74 million in 2016 prices. A total of twelve experimental local projects were established in economically deprived areas across Britain, the Government's chief explicit aim being to find with better ways of dealing with what were then regarded as resistant 'pockets' of poverty in a generally 'affluent' society. However, in the wake of Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech in 1968, there were also concerns to channel resources to urban areas for fear of US-style 'race riots'. Although the projects were area based, the deprivation they dealt with was initially seen by Government as primarily a 'social services' problem located in individuals and families, with solutions thought to lie in self-help and joined-up services. Indeed, the experiment was aimed at enhancing other government reforms seeking to deal with educational disadvantage and the reform of social work. The Cabinet papers for the Ministerial Committee on Social Services, Sub-Committee on the Community Development Project, 29 January 1969, introduce the CDP as follows:

The community development project marks a new departure in the development of British social services.

It assumes, first that social dependency and ineffective social services has geographical concentration as one of their characteristics. Secondly, it assumes that 'more of the same', in the sense of added resources to the same structure of social services, though no doubt useful, is not enough. Third, behind this assumption is the theory that there are immobilised or untapped welfare and 'self-help' resources in communities, of such a character that a multiplier effect in reducing dependency on statutory services may be achieved by appropriate social action. A fourth assumption is that the actual need for welfare is greater than the effective demand. Finally, it is assumed that the

optimal methods of improving the standard of life and welfare in poor communities are by no means completely known. (Cabinet Papers, 1969)

The four 'first wave' projects starting in 1970 were (listed according to the name of the local area followed by the name of the local authority<sup>1</sup>) Hillfields in Coventry; Vauxhall in Liverpool; Newington in Southwark in London and Glyncothrog in West Glamorgan (Upper Afan) in Wales. Eight further projects were announced during 1971, with the final two not starting until October 1972: Canning Town in Newham in London; Batley in the W. Riding of Yorkshire (Kirklees); Ferguslie Park in Paisley (Strathclyde) in Scotland; Benwell in Newcastle upon Tyne; Cleator Moor, Arlecdon/Frizington in Cumberland (Cumbria); Saltley in Birmingham; Percy and Trinity in Tynemouth (North Tyneside) and Clarksfield in Oldham (information drawn from: Loney, 1983, p. 4; Community Development Project Working Group, 1974, p. 186; Lees and Smith, 1975, p. xii).

The local projects were expected to run for about five years, but staggered starting dates meant that the CDP experiment as a whole ran until the closure of the last project in 1978. As the Cabinet papers indicate, local CDPs were expected to facilitate more coordinated and effective responses by local agencies to the needs of people in disadvantaged communities, who were regarded as often remote from them whether by choice or neglect. However, on the assumption that the state could not do everything, particular emphasis was placed on mobilizing the mutual self-help capacities within local communities. The key catalysts for achieving these ambitious and optimistic aims would be teams of local authority-employed community development workers acting as intermediaries between agencies and communities. Aided by local university social research teams, they would undertake 'action-research'. The model was that the research team would assist the action team in assessing the needs of the area and how they could be met (Lees, 1975, p. 59), while community workers would take innovative action to stimulate communities and agencies, helping them to work better separately and jointly. The initial idea was that university researchers would then evaluate the extent to which this had been successful, with the lessons then used to help to change both local and central government social policies. It is interesting to note the hyphen in 'action-research'. According to John Benington (personal communication), who worked for the first CDP in Coventry:

It was the CDP workers who argued for the hyphen to demonstrate the linking of action and research in real time – not post-hoc evaluation of

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1 Some local authority boundaries and names changed during the course of the projects, with the new name listed in brackets.

the action by detached researchers. The Coventry team insisted that the researchers were based physically alongside the action team, not in a University ivory tower.

The CDP was described as 'experimental' and, as the largest such project undertaken in Britain at that time, great hopes were vested in it. However, by the time the four 'first wave' projects were launched, the Labour government had been replaced by Edward Heath's Conservative government (1970–1974). Although it decided to continue with the experiment, this political change had a significant impact on national support for the project. Additionally, as the decade progressed, the work of CDPs was impacted by a shift in the national climate away from managing poverty within affluence towards dealing with a pressing national economic crisis. Despite there being a Labour government in power again from 1974 to 1979, public sector austerity policies were in force, which had particularly deleterious effects on poor communities, including those in which CDPs were situated. Thus, by the late 1970s, the experiment ended in atmosphere of acrimony, just before the openly neoliberal Thatcher government came to power, and deindustrialization driven by globalization accelerated. Towards the end of the CDP era, the published reports by the National CDP Information and Intelligence Unit had clearly identified these trends as the 'structural' root cause of many of the problems that declining industrial areas were experiencing, beyond the capacity of either self-help or better aligned local public services to deal with (National CDP, 1977a, 1977b). This analysis was not popular with government and contributed to the early closure of some projects.

## **Understanding CDPs in historical and political context**

Although they still have a currency in certain circles, including the readership of this journal, CDPs have been forgotten by many national and local policymakers and also largely, we found, by current residents in the areas where they once operated. Today, they are chiefly remembered and perpetuated through the attractively produced reports they spawned, which were widely distributed in university, Leftist and Labour movement circles at the time. Many are still available through library copies, some can be purchased from St James' Heritage and Environment Group (<https://stjameschurchnewcastle.wordpress.com/cdp-booklets/>, accessed 13 December 2016) and some are online due to the initiative of Sue Hyatt at the University of Indiana-Purdue University Indianapolis, United States (<http://ulib.iupui.edu/collections/CDP>, accessed 13 December 2016). Two of the most influential were *The Costs of Industrial Change* (National CDP,

1977a), reviewed in this Issue by Matt Scott, and *Gilding the Ghetto* (National CDP, 1977b), which was enthusiastically reviewed in this journal by Shaw (1983) as a classic 'inspirational' text.

By no means all local CDPs considered themselves 'radical'. Kraushaar (1982, p. 62), examining the final project reports of the twelve CDPs, argued that 'roughly three groupings of projects emerge': *local ameliorations* – recognizing the structural nature of problems but ignoring this in their strategies and activities (Liverpool, Oldham and Paisley); *traditional responses* – attempting to address wider issues using traditional community work responses (Southwark, Upper Afan, Batley, Cumbria) and *radical responses* – evolving new strategies to address new problem perceptions (North Tyneside, Benwell, Coventry, Newham, Birmingham). Although the reality was somewhat more complex than Kraushaar's analysis, the 'radical' CDPs (along with some of the others) produced coordinated reports rooted in local projects which went on to critique the emerging tendencies in central government economic and social policy – now very familiar – towards an individual or community pathology approach to poverty. They countered this with the 'structural approach' asserting the primacy of social and economic causes, and in particular the continuing relevance of a class analysis and a wider emancipatory class politics. They asserted that the problems experienced by poor communities were not restricted to isolated 'pockets', but experienced by much wider layers of working class people. From this overall critique, the radical CDP movement sought (in addition to other levels of analysis and intervention, e.g. at the local authority level) to counter the prevailing efforts at top-down management of the poor, through bottom-up linkage to the wider struggle for working class emancipation through self-organized institutions like tenants' organizations, unemployed associations, local Trades Councils and shop stewards committees. They rejected their allotted role as uncritical servants of the local state, helping to oil its wheels with 'public participation' to make it work better. This critique of tokenistic participation as a 'manipulative' effort to shore up rather than transform power structures was part of a wider global challenge from below by radical social movements, supported by critical social scientists such as Arnstein (1969) in the United States. Instead of viewing themselves as state intermediaries, radical CDP workers began to see themselves as 'organic intellectuals', working 'in and against the state', and facilitators of working class mobilization to challenge the power structures that caused the problems people experienced. They raised the alarm that rapid economic restructuring was undermining the established way of life of working class communities, through what today we know to be deindustrialization, rapidly accelerated by neo-liberal globalization.



The circumstances the CDPs confronted have in some senses, of course, changed. The radical CDPs emerged in a social democratic era at the end of the post Second World War boom and can in retrospect be seen as part of a wider 'new urban Left' movement to reinvigorate social democracy from below and above through 'popular planning'. This involved a radical reshaping of the local state that was attempted in places such as the 'socialist republic' of South Yorkshire and the Greater London Council (GLC) in the early 1980s, with numbers of ex-CDP workers involved in leading these efforts. However, the emerging radical local state that these represented was vigorously repressed by the Thatcher government through 'restructuring' (i.e. abolition) of troublesome metropolitan councils in 1986, and rigid enforcement of local government expenditure limits such as rate capping. This was part of a global shift towards neoliberalism occurring with the parallel election of President Reagan in the United States in 1981, which involved removing the constraints on business and shackling any collective working class efforts to resist this through 'countervailing power'.

With the demise of the Soviet Union and its East European satellites in the 1990s, and China's integration into the world market, the hegemony of neoliberalism seemed to have no bounds. We were, according to some, at the 'end of history' as all alternative avenues of change were now closed (Fukuyama, 1992). What did it matter that society was fragmenting, inequality was widening and old communal ways of life ending, given the rapid growth of prosperity that was unleashed? This was the age in which confidence in 'trickle down' economics reigned supreme. One of the most profound effects of this was on the Left, which adapted to neoliberalism by the development of 'third way' politics (Giddens, 1998). Some aspects of fragmentation and individualism were even welcomed, including the shift from class to identity politics and celebration of 'diversity'. In the UK under the 1997–2010 Labour governments, there were efforts to revive incorporative forms of 'community development' for those most marginalized by these processes. However, the setting of targets, measurement of quantifiable outcomes and other forms of performance management and external inspection restricted the ability of regeneration, neighbourhood renewal and community empowerment programmes to challenge the wider neoliberal framework (Wilks-Heeg, 2016). The government did not want to repeat the mistake made with the CDPs, by giving communities and front-line workers too much latitude. Community 'empowerment' was therefore carefully channelled and not allowed to proceed too far, and alongside it went increasingly punitive forms of 'welfare to work' to drive the most disadvantaged poor people into low-paid, insecure work. This integrated economic and social policy, but not in the transformative way

that radical CDPs had imagined. Rather, social policy was subordinated to economics, instead of the reverse.

## **CDPs and the ‘making’ of post-industrial neoliberal capitalism**

What, therefore, makes the CDP experiment of the 1970s of more than purely historical interest? If it is the case that ‘the past is a different country: they do things differently there’ (Hartley, 1953, p. 5) perhaps the CDPs of the 1970s might be understood in their context, but not necessarily have any particular lessons for us today in how to go about community development, given very different circumstances. In this respect, at least, the CDP experiment must first be understood in terms of:

- how it was conceived by its political initiators within the ideological and political-economic climate of the late 1960s;
- how it then developed in the changed circumstances of the 1970s in unanticipated and unscripted ways, led by CDP workers on the ground, as well as local communities and politicians, often working with a different imaginary;
- how it came to a conclusion in either satisfactory or satisfactory ways for those involved;
- finally, some assessment of what continuing and even enduring effects it had.

In investigating these issues, we have been mindful of Thompson’s (1963, p. 12) injunction not to dismiss either the defensive or ‘utopian’ struggles of the past from the ‘enormous condescension of posterity’. He was talking about an earlier era, the response of working class workers and communities to the imposition of the capitalist factory system in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The CDP experiment was launched and implemented in another transitional era, which with the benefit of hindsight we can now see as the shift from a nationally based, social democratic form of industrial capitalism to a deregulated form of global neoliberal capitalism associated in the Global North with accelerated post-industrialization (Harvey, 2005). We would now see the CDP experiment as part of a contested, and ultimately failed, attempt – at least in the immediate sense – by reformist and radical wings of the Left to resolve the inherent contradictions that were becoming increasingly visible in the classic welfare state. This failure arguably occurred partly because of an inability to resolve these differences adequately, which facilitated an enforced ‘regime change’ by stronger political forces on the Right, whose triumph was not

necessarily inevitable (see [Beckett, 2010, 2016](#)). The 'failure' of the CDP, therefore, was part of the larger narrative of the 'making' of the neoliberal post-industrial capitalism under which we now live.

Our research found that both elite policymakers and radical CDP activists were aware the world was changing around them, each seeking to construct a new one which, had they succeeded, would have been rather different from the one in which we now find ourselves. The central government architects of the CDP experiment were aware that the classic social democratic solutions to poverty were not working, especially for the most disadvantaged, and were seeking to develop innovative means of tackling poverty. Their vision was a new productive relationship between central government, local government, public agencies and communities, brokered by community workers, as part of the overall reforming politics of the 1964–1970 Labour government. The radical CDP community workers in the 1970s of course took this further and challenged the limitations of the role allotted to them by constructing a more radical vision, which critiqued the 'social pathology' explanation of community poverty, seeing this as part of a wider system of class inequality.

Understanding how context shaped the actions of the government policymakers and local activists and communities involved in the CDP experiment, and their efforts to reshape it, is a story worth telling in its own right. One thing that is particularly striking today is the boundless optimism of both groups. Elite policymakers were confident that the combination of an organizational revolution in the state and reinvigorated mutual self-help by communities could resolve the problems that were starting to emerge in the welfare state. While radical activists were more pessimistic about what could be achieved through the existing local state and voluntary action, they were nevertheless equally upbeat about what could be achieved by wider political action at the local and national levels. While we may marvel at such optimism, this may say less about them and more about us, living latterly in 'capitalist realist' times which deflate notions that there are alternatives to the prevailing neoliberal order ([Fisher, 2009](#)). Thus, revisiting the optimism of the past might inspire us to develop collective visions today. We are not, however, advocating mere imitation, as we face different circumstances. The former industrial communities have all but disappeared and the unified central and local state that initiated this project has been substantially hollowed out by neoliberalism and fragmented into a complex web of partnering relationships ([Rhodes, 1994](#); [Powell, 2002](#)).

Nevertheless, what strikes us in looking at the conflicts over the CDP experiment among national policymakers and local CDPs is that these reflect perennial community development dilemmas rather than historically specific ones. These include, for example, achieving the right balance

between strong national frameworks and flexible forms of local implementation, including appropriate degrees of delegation and discretion to those at the grassroots while ensuring public accountability. As a result, it is normal for community development workers to be caught in conflicting pressures between central policymakers, local agencies and the communities who are ultimately supposed to benefit (Banks, 2003; Hoggett, Mayo and Miller, 2008). In particular, they are in the front line of contradictions in policy objectives between incorporation within existing authority structures and transformative forms of empowerment. Such projects give rise to basically unresolvable questions as to whether it is necessary to take sides or best to try to find equitable pathways through the often conflicting interests of different partners. These issues are now familiar to us, having almost become clichés of community development theory and practice. However, in the 1970s, central and local CDP actors were discovering these issues for the first time, and seeking to find ways through them. That is why we found it beneficial to conduct detailed local-level research through interviews with surviving CDP workers and activists, and examination of documentary sources. As already stated, CDPs are chiefly remembered for the national reports like *Gilding the Ghetto* (National CDP, 1977b) that sought to distil local experiences into a single compelling argument in order to mount national political challenges. While laudable, this tended to obscure some significant and interesting issues about what they did on the ground. Additionally, whereas the singular collective voice of the national reports seems to indicate all CDPs were singing from the same radical hymn sheet, as we have seen this was not always the case. In the articles that follow on three local CDPs, more details are given of the very significant local reports and the actions of the CDP teams with and within the local authorities, which included pioneering work on schooling, adult education, ageing, legal and income rights, in addition to the local neighbourhood-based activity.

### **Revisiting the local and national politics of CDPs in context**

As well as being interesting in its own right, and because it shows us how a previous generation sought to grapple with enduring dilemmas and contradictions, it is also useful to revisit the politics of community development at a time when, since the economic crash of 2008, we are in another transitional era, the outcome of which is uncertain (Mason, 2015). As a result of the crash and the onset of the 'Great Recession', it is no longer plausible to argue that there might be a pragmatic bargain with neoliberalism, with progressive politics working with a wealth-creating economy

that widens inequality, but, through a rising tide, 'lifts all boats'. Instead many of the most disadvantaged people and communities are in a state of distress, not just because of the autonomous workings of the economic system, but because of public policies of austerity which have poured trillions of pounds into shoring up the financial system, but cut support to the weakest. It is clear that this has been manifested in popular opposition to globalization, some of which involves resurgent nativist conceptions of 'community' that lie behind the dangerous rise of right-wing populism that in 2016 delivered Brexit (the vote to leave the European Union) in the UK and the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States. This has involved efforts at 'fake' community mobilization, orchestrated mainly from above by wealthy conservative business interests (Monbiot, 2016). Underlying this is also a distorted politics of 'class', seeking to appeal to those layers of society most affected by deindustrialization and globalization. In these circumstances, we might gain inspiration from the emphasis that the CDP radicals in the 1970s placed on the need to understand the poverty of poor communities not as an isolated phenomenon, but as part of a wider class inequality that needed to be tackled by bringing community action, trade unionism and Left politics together to achieve equality and social justice.

We do not have space here to rewrite the whole history of the 1970s CDP experiment, having focused in particular on three local case studies. However, we take issue in some respects with Loney's (1983) impressive and comprehensive account of the CDP (reviewed in this Issue by Matt Scott). The characterization of radical CDPs as 'community against government', and their alleged failure as due to 'government incompetence' implied by the title of his study, is too simplistic and in fact a more subtle interpretation does emerge in the course of his book. Drawing also on the work of Mayo (1975), Popple (2011) and Welshman (2013, esp. Chs 5, 6), it can be seen that the broader context was one in which the reforming Labour government of Harold Wilson sought to address a perceived national economic decline by centralized planning, and also sought a more integrated and centralized approach to the public sector. In social policy, the post-war settlement was challenged as incomplete, through Left Fabian critiques by Titmuss (1962), who laid bare the hidden forms of inequality in an apparently egalitarian welfare state, and by Abel-Smith and Townsend (1966), who 'rediscovered' poverty in the midst of affluence.

The successes of the 1960s reforming era included the introduction of compulsory comprehensive secondary education, legislation against race discrimination, equal pay, abortion rights, divorce reform and the decriminalization of adult male homosexuality. Unsuccessful pressure from the Left to do more to extend the post-war settlement led to disappointment, and after 1967, the government was restricted by the enforced devaluation

of the pound. Therefore, instead of responding to the growing calls of the newly formed 'poverty lobby' for more extensive redistributive measures, it introduced ameliorative measures. The most significant of these were support to primary schools in economically deprived Educational Priority Areas (EPAs) ([Plowden Report, 1967](#)), and the [Seebohm \(1968\)](#) reform of social services which created unified local services departments decentralized to neighbourhood offices. The [Skeffington Report \(1969\)](#) also placed greater emphasis on the need for citizen participation in local planning decisions. At the central government level, social security, health and social services were brought together in a huge umbrella Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), headed by Richard Crossman as Secretary of State.

In this context, the creation in 1969 of the CDP experiment sought to create local flexibility and better responsiveness in poor localities, particularly in assisting the Seebohm reforms to be more effective, while also generating lessons for policy that could feed upwards to help inform the work of the new systems of central administration. The product of contradictory 'centralizing' and 'participative' turns in social policy, the CDP was the particular brainchild of one of the most talented civil servants of his generation, Derek Morrell, who had played a significant part in the development of post-war welfare services. He wished to introduce a 'revolution' in social services in order to achieve greater efficiency and liberate the potential for community mutual self-help. His opportunity came partly because these ideas were in tune with the general context, and also specifically because the Labour government sought to expand its programme of Urban Aid after Enoch Powell's notorious 'rivers of blood' speech in 1968 caused fears of US-style race riots in UK cities.

While then-fashionable theories of a 'culture of poverty' played some part, i.e. the notion that poor communities resist economic opportunities open to them, Morrell was equally mindful of the classic Fabian concerns with 'the problem family' ([Welshman, 2013](#), Ch. 5). We should be cautious in seeing the CDP as anticipating a 'new right' approach to poverty, as mutual self-help was combined with an expansion in targeted public spending on poor communities. However, Urban Aid could be seen as a shift towards a more selective and piecemeal approach to poverty, based on false premises that deprivation was restricted to particular areas, as an alternative to more extensive redistribution, a point made often in radical CDP publications such as *Gilding the Ghetto*. Although the CDP experiment ended in 1978, it was not the end of such area-based approaches to urban policy, which continued down the years, including during the Thatcher era, through various urban regeneration and renewal programmes (see [Robinson and Townsend, 2016a, 2016b](#) for accounts of subsequent regeneration in Benwell and N. Tyneside). Thus, the 'turn to the community'

continued, with the subsequent development of area-based policies (Loney, 1983, p. 164), although governments sought firmer governance structures to avoid the overt conflicts that had emerged with CDPs.

Many of these social policy reforms came towards the end of the 1964–1970 Labour government's period of office. When Labour left power in 1970, CDPs found themselves left behind under the aegis of the Home Office, whose main responsibility was dealing with crime, while children's services migrated to the DHSS. The project's champion, Derek Morrell, died unexpectedly in 1969. There was much change of personnel and disagreement in the central team as outlined by Mayo's (1975, p. 11) account of 'difficulties at the centre'. The weakness in the Home Office-based Central Team was exploited by local projects, as reported by prominent figures such as John Berington in Coventry and John O'Malley in Canning Town (interviews for Hillfields, Coventry research). While the Home Office wanted to deal vertically in an individual way with each project, the CDP teams refused and insisted on meeting separately and presenting a collective voice. After a review in 1972, the Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling, allowed projects to go their own way. From 1973, the Central Team was replaced by what became the Central Information and Intelligence Unit (CIU), which increasingly helped to provide a voice for the radical CDP movement and provided editorial assistance to produce some of the most well-known and challenging reports. This change, however, essentially marked the end of the CDP as a national project that would provide immediate lessons for central government, due primarily to a lack of interest by the Conservative government, which set about creating other community initiatives of its own (Lees and Smith, 1975, p. viii).

A Labour government returned in 1974, initially promising a renewed effort to promote a more equal society, with its Manifesto declaring that its 'first objective' was to bring about 'a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families'. However, the impact of the oil recession of the 1970s and inflationary pressures, led it to bring in incomes policies and impose public sector cuts, under pressure in 1976 from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Radical CDPs and those successor organizations that had migrated elsewhere to bodies linked to the trades union movement (see articles in this Issue on Hillfields, Coventry and North Tyneside) participated in the trade union struggles and anti-cuts campaigns, many of which persisted after the Labour government fell in 1979 and Thatcher's conservative government came into power.

There is, of course, no one correct way to interpret this experience. However, from the perspective of our time, in the midst of the Great Recession, the analysis of the growing problems of community poverty as linked to an underlying structural class inequality has much to commend it, especially since there has been a resurgence in cruel and ineffective



'victim-blaming' poverty policies. Evidence from the UK government's own [National Audit Office \(2016\)](#) showed that benefit sanctions cost more than they saved. Similarly, the national evaluation of the 2010–2015 Coalition Government's Troubled Families Initiative ([Ecorys, 2014](#)), which targeted intensive inter-agency help on 120,000 'chaotic and disruptive' families, found little evidence of any impact of this contemporary reinvention of long-standing failed 'problem family' initiatives. Such policies, as CDPs correctly pointed out, are doomed to failure because they are not aiming at the right targets. A familiar criticism, however, is also that the singular emphasis of radical CDPs on social class was deficient in neglecting the significance of other divisions and forms of identity, including gender, sexuality, disability and 'race'/ethnicity. The challenge for us, therefore, in developing our own visions of community development in a period of crisis, is to overcome a dangerous polarization that has emerged between class and 'identity' politics, which was clearly a factor in Trump's victory in the 2016 US presidential election. The dangers of not developing an intersectional community politics that gives equal theoretical and practical weight to both class and identity are very great.

### **Case studies of three radical CDPs: the articles in this issue**

We therefore hope that the articles in this issue, based on detailed research into the local politics of community development of three radical CDPs, will foster better understanding of the past, and assist the development of progressive visions for community development appropriate to our times. The first article by Mick Carpenter and Ben Kyneswood examines the political influences that shaped the choice of Hillfields in Coventry as a CDP area. It then focuses centrally on how the CDP team went about their task, in particular how as a first wave project they developed the structural analysis that led them to reject the original assumptions on which the CDP was based, and point to a very different way forward in their Final Report of 1975. While generally sympathetic to the CDP class analysis, Carpenter and Kyneswood draw attention to the failure to address gender and 'race' in a multicultural locality. The Coventry CDP Final Reports perhaps overplayed the structural analysis and tended to underplay the extent to which CDP workers had collaborated effectively with local agencies and the City Council to produce real improvements and innovations in services (e.g. housing, planning, community schooling, play centres, and legal and income rights) for local residents. The next article, by Judith Green, is written from the perspective of someone who was a worker in the Benwell CDP, although her account is also triangulated against other evidence,



including that collected through the ESRC *Imagine* project. This too draws attention to the ways in which Benwell CDP, like Hillfields, produced many practical benefits for local residents across fronts such as housing, employment, welfare rights and legal services, within the historical context of the time. It provides fascinating insights into the practical ways in which workers went about their tasks, making use of the technological means available at the time. It concludes by considering the relevance of the approach taken to community development today. The third and final article, by Andrea Armstrong and Sarah Banks, examines the work of North Tyneside CDP in the fields of industry/employment and housing, drawing attention to its distinctive 'radical reformist' approach. It shows that within this there was also substantial focus by women CDP workers on gender issues, and this CDP was one of the few that placed an emphasis on work with young people and the importance of play. It then turns to consider the 'legacy' of North Tyneside CDP, including the six-volume final report which detailed its ways of working, as well as the enduring local impacts of CDP workers and CDP-initiated institutions. The article concludes by arguing that the structural analysis of the CDP remains highly relevant to the continuing problems experienced in North Tyneside down to the present day.

Together, these articles show the new insights and contemporary relevance that comes from focusing on the local politics and practice of three radical CDPs. They illustrate the processes by which CDP teams, by testing their briefs and developing strategies of action-research, reached a 'structural' analysis and adopted associated political strategies. The articles also start to correct some of the myths that still persist about CDPs. One of the most widespread, as mentioned at the start of this article, is that their structural analysis and call for a broader societal intervention to tackle the root causes of poverty was necessarily in opposition to more ameliorative community development at neighbourhood level. Our local research has shown ample evidence that this was not the case. However, it has also indicated that the radical CDP national reports have perhaps unwittingly played a part in helping to construct this myth by downplaying their own local successes to bolster their broader political case. The second myth is that the CDP experiment ended in 'failure'. In the immediate terms, and at the national level, this may have been the case, in the sense that clear progressive outcomes in terms, for example, of policy change might be identified. However, our research has pointed to numerous 'legacies' both in concrete terms through the reports themselves, which are interesting, accessible and make points that are still pertinent, and in more diffuse practical ways at local levels and beyond, not least through the continuing work of many local projects and organizations.

Thus, we hope that our three case studies will help to stimulate further empirical research into the CDP experiment and its local manifestations,

which at the time certainly punched above their weight and, as we have argued, speak urgently to our challenges today. In doing so, our project was lucky to rediscover what was thought to be a lost archive of the records of the twelve local CDPs, donated at the end of the CDP experiment by the CDP Workers' Association to the library of the Polytechnic of North London (later University of North London). Thought to have been lost when the University merged into London Metropolitan University, we were excited to discover that the records were in the personal safekeeping of Dr John Twineham, a former student and lecturer at the University. In concluding this Editorial Introduction, we are therefore pleased to announce that with his agreement they have now been acquired by the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick, where they are safely stored and available for further scholarly research into the extraordinary 1970s CDP experiment (<http://mrc-catalogue.warwick.ac.uk/records/CDV>, accessed 21 December 2016).

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