



# Discipline within Diversity

## New Book Separates the Wheat from the Chaff in Canadian Local Development

Stewart E. Perry and Mike Lewis, *Reinventing the Local Economy: What 10 Canadian Initiatives Can Teach Us About Building Creative, Inclusive, & Sustainable Communities* (Vernon, B.C.: Centre for Community Enterprise, 1994), 233 pp. \$25.

One indication of the coming of age of a generation of ideas is the emergence of a literature that defines it and reflects on it critically. The desire to learn through experience comes well before the knowledge about how best to proceed. That, in turn, precedes a wider, more integrated understanding of how *technique* fits into the human experience.

Regular readers of *Making Waves* will be aware that a literature on CED's "Best Practice" has blossomed in the past five or so years. No longer do serious CED advocates have to act like (and be perceived as) a tribal cult whose fundamental premises can be dismissed as clap trap. Mainstream institutional recognition has come slowly, but come it has and appears to be growing.

This is in part because the way CED advocates define the problem has become much more widely accepted. Equally important, however, has been the fact that the CED solution—the reintegration of marginalized groups into economically productive and socially meaningful community life—has born fruit where more conventional development strategies have proven consistently barren.

But if CED's best practice is now well documented, the conceptual dimension remains muddled for lack of precise and concise definition of this perspective on economic distress and development. Clearly, the time has arrived to seriously take stock and achieve a synthesis between CED's practical and conceptual dimensions.

*Reinventing the Local Economy* aims at just such a synthesis. Two of CED's high achievers, Stewart Perry and Mike Lewis, have collaborated to research and then to encapsulate in this

book salient examples of CED within contemporary Canada. Each study represents a truly unique approach to CED. Yet despite their diversity, all demonstrably adhere to the CED concepts and principles defined and elaborated in the first chapter.

These concepts and principles are also revisited in the final two chapters. There, the authors reflect on the lessons to be learned from the case studies—particularly, the opportunities and pitfalls facing those who formulate CED strategies at the political and policy levels.

By specifying the significance of the "C" in "CED," the authors clear away a lot of the camouflage from socially alienating forms of development that pin the label of "community" on any population cluster, no matter how transient or mutually detached.

The conceptual encapsulation that these three "envelope" chapters supply is impressive in its own right, and crucial to the critical and analytical insight to be gained from the case studies. Through them, the authors avoid two common flaws of the stand-alone case study:

- leaving the impression that only one formula exists for successful development, or
- leaving the impression that each developmental situation is so unique that no conceptual boundaries apply.

To those who would seriously embark upon a CED journey, *Reinventing the Local Economy* provides a clear set of conceptual pathways, as well as a generous range of examples of how others applied these concepts in order to craft local solutions.

The authors do not shrink from specifying the significance of the "C" in "CED." It is argued that there can be no real community where there is no basis for creating or reinforcing social interaction and sharing core values. This in itself clears away a lot of the brush which camouflages socially alienating

forms of development by pinning the label of "community" on any population cluster, no matter how transient or mutually detached.

In addition, however, this key definition indicates that CED may proceed in terms of a *locality* to be benefited or in terms of a *category of individuals* to be benefited. Whichever the case may be (and both possibilities feature in the selection of examples), success depends on the recognition of community "as a matter of interaction around shared interests and values that are represented in institutions or organizations in which the interactors hold membership and by which they try to achieve common goals."

Having established the diverse forms that CED can take, it is also important to set it apart from the many development strategies that focus on individuals, as opposed to localities or groups. Given the current tendency to use CED as a buzz word, this distinction is far from academic.

Lewis and Perry separate Chapter 12's analysis, which is based on their own case research, from their broader observations in Chapter 13. The latter acts as a clincher to their portrait of CED's current and potential impact on the national political-economy. They eschew the "futurist" temptation to extrapolate unlikely, if sensational, future end points from today's unstable trends. Instead, the authors build upon their extensive experience in governmental policy processes to draw a revealing comparison of Canadian and U.S. approaches to CED policy formulation, as well as insights into provincial and NGO activity. It is a critical analysis that should provide senior public sector decision-makers with considerable food for thought, not to mention the increasing number of citizens who are becoming involved in local CED initiatives.✍

*Sandy Lockhart, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Trent University, currently works as a trainer and consultant in Prince George, B.C.*