



COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN AN URBAN CONTEXT

THE POTENTIAL OF A
CAPACITY-ENHANCEMENT
PERSPECTIVE

MELVIN DELGADO

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*The Potential of a
Capacity-Enhancement Perspective*

Melvin Delgado

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To Denise, Laura, and Barbara

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COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORK
PRACTICE IN AN URBAN CONTEXT

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I

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Section 1 establishes a foundation for viewing community capacity enhancement as a legitimate form of practice for community social work. Chapter 1 (Introduction) introduces the goals of the book, examines the concept of community capacity enhancement, and places this approach within an urban context. In addition to describing the research methods used and the limitations of the book, Chapter 2 (Setting the Context for Urban Community Social Work Practice) examines the nature and definition of cities and several key concepts that play critical roles in increasing our understanding of a model of community capacity enhancement.

Chapter 3 (A Foundation for Community Capacity-Enhancement Practice) describes how community capacity enhancement has been conceptualized and grounds this model in the professional literature. Chapter 4 (Framework for Community Capacity-Enhancement Practice) presents a practice framework that lends itself to capacity-enhancement work within an urban context. Finally, Chapter 5, (Guiding Principles for Community Capacity-Enhancement Practice) lays out a set of six principles that should guide any form of community capacity-enhancement initiatives.

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1

Introduction

This chapter gives the reader a context from which to understand the importance of urban-centered practice for the social work profession in the twenty-first century. It traces how the author became interested in a community-assets perspective and why the development of urban-specific interventions are so critical to community social work practice. In addition, it outlines the goals for the book, defines some of the key terms that are used, and describes the research methods used in selecting and analyzing case studies.

A Context for Urban Practice

The practice of macro social work—defined here as the purposeful design of interventions that target organizations and communities—has received renewed attention in the professional literature (Jeffries, 1996; Mondros & Wilson, 1994; Rothman, 1996; Weil, 1996). A number of new textbooks and a journal specifically devoted to community practice (*Journal of Community Practice*) have been published in the past few years (Brueggemann, 1996; Delgado, 1998c; Hardcastle, Wenocur, & Powers, 1997; Medoff & Sklar, 1994; Netting, Kettner, & McMurty, 1993; Rivera & Erlich, 1998a).

These scholarly publications have injected the field of social work with new techniques, critiques, and paradigms and have stimulated important dialogues on macro practice. These developments, including widespread recognition that the social work profession cannot consist solely of interventions focused on individuals and small groups, have generated excitement about macro practice and captured the imagination of practitioners and academics alike. Although these recent publications have made significant contributions

to the profession, their focus, with some exceptions, has been on generic macro practice, and they have only indirectly targeted urban areas, low-income communities of color, and other undervalued groups.

Knowledge of urban environment is critical for enhancing social workers' understanding of low-income communities of color (Leadbeater & Way, 1996); this is not to say that low-income groups of color do not reside in suburban or rural communities across the United States. Undervalued groups reside in all areas of the United States and are by no means restricted to urban areas. Those who live in rural areas or suburbia also face considerable challenges in obtaining social and economic justice.

Surburban and rural areas share all the problems found in cities and struggle to address issues of substance abuse, family violence, HIV/AIDS, delinquency, crime, gangs, and under- and unemployment. However, an urban context presents a series of challenges that the profession must acknowledge and respond to accordingly. The sheer magnitude of social problems found in urban areas is compounded by residential segregation, increased vigilance by the police and criminal justice system, and limited formal resources to address issues (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Butterfield, 1992, 1994; Jackson, 1989; Leary, 1994; Purdy, 1995; Terry, 1994a, 1994b; Wilkerson, 1994). For example, in the United States, household crime rates are the highest in central-city sections of metropolitan areas, and so are arrest and incarceration rates (Walker, Spohn, & DeLone, 1996). These rates, in turn, fall disproportionately on communities of color. Because of this situation, urban communities have a heightened sense of suspicion and an increased sense of "helplessness."

This state of crisis is, arguable, not felt by suburban or rural areas, although they, too, share many of the same struggles as De Vita (1996, p. 11) noted: "Although both whites and minorities have left the cities for the suburbs, the exodus of whites has been much more rapid. The result is an increasing concentration of minority residents in central cities. Left behind, especially in the older cities of the Frostbelt, were large numbers of minorities—many of them poor, unskilled, and unable to follow the employment opportunities that were shifting to the suburbs, exurbs, and Sunbelt. This concentration of poor and disadvantaged minorities in distressed urban neighborhoods has been cited as an important factor in the growth of an isolated 'urban underclass.'" When people of color, particularly African Americans and Latinos, move to the suburbs, they continue to face residential segregation (DeVita, 1996).

A renewed emphasis on community-based practice presents a series of opportunities and challenges for social work practice. The community as an arena for practice provides practitioners with sufficient flexibility to initiate various types of interventions that are informed and determined by a community's assets and needs. Thus, practitioners do not have to be "problem driven" in the conventional sense of the term as it is often used in issue-based organizing.

The use of the community to build, in turn, is an often-overlooked strategy for achieving multiple community-focused goals. "What is community built? Community built is a dynamic new process of creation based on old community traditions: a collaboration between professionals and community volunteers resulting in a structure that transforms the public space; be it a mural, playground, park, museum, public garden, neighborhood center, historic restoration, housing or other project accomplished through community initiative and collective energy" (Community Built Conference, 1997, p. 1).

Community capacity enhancement, as is noted in Chapter 3, offers social workers the best of all worlds for practice—an opportunity to tap community assets in addressing community concerns and needs. In commenting on the importance of community capacity enhancement, Poole (1997, p. 169) stated: "We have now entered the era of community renewal in the United States. Although there is reason to fear a return to the 'lost world of community,' it is urgent that we find ways to strengthen those characteristics of communities that enable them to care for their members, especially those who are most vulnerable to dramatic shifts in national policy." Thus, enhancement should never be confused with letting a community address its needs and problems without outside assistance; enhancement-centered intervention, in turn, must be conceptualized as a collaborative partnership between the practitioner and the community.

Historically, this society has underestimated the importance of urban areas in the well-being of the country and, in so doing, has undervalued the importance and experiences of those who have sought social and political refuge in cities (Abrahamson, 1996; Halpern, 1995; Weisbrod & Worthy, 1997). Keating, Krumholz, and Starr (1996) noted that neighborhood initiatives are both a strategy and a metaphor for how America deals with its most significant urban problems, unfortunately with dismal results. Furthermore, some (see, for example, Hynes, 1995) argue that economically, U.S. inner cities have much more in common with the cities of Third World countries and should be viewed from that perspective in making the case for attention and intervention.

In 1995, approximately 37 percent of the world's population lived in cities; in 1995, that proportion increased to 45 percent, and it should reach 50 percent in 2000 and 65 percent (8 billion people) in 2025 (Dow, 1997; Badshah, 1996; Kirdar, 1997b; Streeten, 1997). Moreover, about 75 percent of the populations of industrialized countries and of Latin America reside in cities (Emmerij, 1997).

From a slightly different perspective it is estimated that as late as 1800, only 3 percent of the world's population lived in cities with 100,000 or more residents (Lofland, 1998). The number of metropolises in the world with populations over 1 million has tripled over the past thirty-five years, with estimates that there will be 611 by 2010 and 40 added every five years thereafter; if this rate of increase materializes, there will be 639 metropolises of

this size by 2025 (Lofland, 1998). In the United States during the 1980s, the population of urban areas increased by over 20 million, from 167.1 million to 187.1 million (12 percent). By 1990, approximately 75.2 percent of the U.S. population lived in urban areas, up from 73.7 percent in 1980, with California having the highest percentage of its total population (92.6 percent) living in urban areas (Andrews & Fonseca, 1995; Wright, 1997). Furthermore, the percentage of people in urban areas is projected to continue to increase in the future ("America in the '90s," 1991; Rusk, 1995). Communities of color, particularly those that are low income, a population group that social work is invested in serving, are even more urbanized than the general population. This fact increases the importance of urban areas for social work practice (Barringer, 1997; Delgado, 1998b, *in press*; Fellin, 1995; Pear, 1992; Roberts, 1994).

This concentration, in combination with a host of social problems, makes urban areas a high priority for targeting interventions. As (Emmerij, 1997, p. 105) stated: "The urban question has many dimensions, including poverty, housing, unemployment and underemployment, slums, crime, drugs, and street children. But the urban question amounts to more than the sum total of its different problem areas. It is difficult to express what this 'value added' is, but it certainly has a lot to do with the quality of life, or the lack of it, in the urban setting. The quality of life affects both the poor and rich, as the urban situation deteriorates."

The importance of social work practice in urban areas has historical, current, and future significance. The profession's origins are deeply rooted in urban areas across the United States, and the founders of the profession developed and advanced practice with urban areas as a focus. Jane Addams and her colleagues played a significant role in the creation of the settlement house movement in the late nineteenth century. One of the primary goals of the movement was environmental reform, which was accomplished through the creation of groups that stressed action at the community level (Lubove, 1983), such as community gardening and other activities, that can be labeled community capacity enhancement today (Balgopal & Vassil, 1983). Currently, the profession plays an active role in attempting to address a myriad of social problems that are heavily concentrated in cities (Ewalt, 1997). In addition, the future of the profession will rest on how well social work can address urban issues, particularly as the populations it has historically served and the country become more urbanized. Nevertheless, the profession has been challenged to develop interventions that have a specific urban focus and effectively address the needs of population groups that are of color, undocumented, low income, and considered marginal by policy makers and key stakeholders.

Social work has not succeeded in this regard for a variety of reasons, two of which are the lack of vision and its inability to develop appropriate paradigms for engaging and serving these communities (Iglehart & Becerra, 1995; Specht & Courtney, 1994). Thus, there is a desperate need for the

profession to reexamine urban-based community practice with undervalued communities. Delgado (1998c) addressed this need in *Social Work Practice in Nontraditional Urban Settings*. This book examined the role and importance of informal settings that social workers often overlook in their search for culturally meaningful service delivery strategies and focused on urban areas and communities of color. However, *Community Social Work Practice in an Urban Context* takes a different, yet complementary, perspective on urban practice by stressing an ecological and community-specific approach to intervention.

The need to develop urban-focused social work practice also requires the creation of models that build on community assets. These models must be sensitive to changing community conditions and the composition of residents and require the development of culturally competent practice methods. A model, according to Jeffries (1996, pp. 101–102), “is a simplification of reality that is encapsulating in its essential characteristics. To have analytical value a model should specify key variables to be considered in assessing a situation in order to develop and evaluate possible action plans. Thus a model should enable prediction of likely outcomes if a particular plan of action is pursued.” Furthermore, a model serves to advance knowledge and generate competing explanations for events; hence, the field of urban-focused community practice, as the case in point in this book, benefits from this systematic attention.

An analysis of urban areas will reveal “unconventional” “assets” that provide a window through which a community shares its priorities, concerns, and hopes with the outside world (McKnight, 1997; McKnight & Kretzmann, 1990). Lewis Mumford (quoted in Kirdar, (1997a, p. 105)) viewed the city as a marvelous place to live in: “The city is the most precious collective invention of civilization . . . second to language itself in the manifestation of culture.” Community asset-focused markers and projects lead to a better understanding of a community’s capacities and are interventions that actively build upon and involve residents in addressing their concerns.

The presence of four types of what the author calls “community asset markers” serve this function extremely well: (1) murals, (2) gardens, (3) community-initiated playgrounds, and (4) sculptures. These markers provide a perspective on urban communities that, with rare exceptions, is often overlooked or undervalued by social workers and other human service providers. Yet, when these markers examined within the context in which they are found or initiated, they have profound implications for social work practice. Hynes (1995, p. 156) noted the importance of viewing gardens through a different lens: “At first glance, community gardens may seem an unlikely and unremarkable means of urban renewal. An anachronism? A naive throwback to preindustrial times? . . . In fact, the urban community garden, with its potential for feeding households, and generating local cottage industry, with its power to restore a measure of community life, and with its capacity to recycle organic wastes, is thriving throughout the world.”

An urban ecological model of community social work practice, like any model based on ecological factors, stresses the delineation of multiple key factors that are interrelated and affect how individuals and communities interact with each other. Each part of this ecology exerts influences on the other parts. This model also stresses that the identification of indigenous resources and the involvement of the community in all aspects of intervention, empowerment, and capacity enhancement are central to any meaningful intervention or initiative. The social work literature includes numerous publications on strengths, empowerment, and participation. However, the concept of capacity enhancement, a key element of this book, is still in desperate need of conceptualization and operationalization (Poole, 1997).

Author's Interest in the Topic

The author became actively interested in murals, gardens, playgrounds, and sculptures when he conducted research on urban-based nontraditional settings. Initially, the presence of murals near nontraditional settings made them a subject of interest because they portrayed the community to an "outsider." However, field-based research uncovered numerous occasions in which murals served as backdrops for gardens and sculptures were centrally located within the gardens. This integration highlighted their presence in a community. Nevertheless, the author initially focused only on murals and gardens and thought of sculptures merely as "decorative." However, Nancy Abbate, a colleague (personal communication, November 13, 1996) in Chicago pointed out that community-built sculptures are much more than decorative—that they, too, fulfill other expressive and instrumental goals of a community. This point leads to the topic of community-initiated playgrounds.

A graduate student (Myrna Chan MacRae) introduced the author to the topic of playgrounds. In conducting a review of the literature on murals, gardens, and sculptures, she uncovered several newspaper articles describing and attesting to the importance of playgrounds in uniting communities, urban as well as suburban. These four projects—murals, gardens, sculptures, and playgrounds—can exist in isolation or in various combinations with each other.

The primary lesson the author wants to share with readers is that social work practice is, in many ways, a journey with a series of unexpected stops and detours. The topic of this book was never "planned" in the conventional use of the word in macro practice. It just happened. However, it happened because of the author's commitment to communities and willingness and desire to visit communities throughout the United States. This propensity gave him the opportunity to "stumble" across this important dimension of community that has profound implications for social work practice.

The writing of this book represented an opportunity for the author to bring together various topics of interest into a form that makes it accessible to students as well as practitioners. Although he has published articles on

many of the topics addressed in this book, the limitations of article writing (most notably limited space), did not allow him to explore murals, particularly the relationship among murals, gardens, playgrounds, and sculptures, fully. Thus, he was inspired to devote a considerable amount of time, energy, and other resources to this endeavor, with the aim of conveying to the profession a different way of looking at communities—a perspective predicated on community assets.

Goals of the Book

This book has three primary goals: (1) to ground social workers within a community-practice, urban context, from which to gain a better understanding of urban-based communities of color; (2) to examine, from an ecological perspective, the role of murals, gardens, playgrounds, and sculptures (as examples of community assets, when present) and capacity-enhancement strategies (when nonexistent as projects); and (3) to provide a practice framework, case examples, and detailed strategies for assessing, mapping, engaging, and evaluating communities in the development of murals, gardens, playgrounds, and sculptures. As a result, this book provides both descriptions and prescriptions to inform community practice based on an assets perspective.

Capacity Enhancement versus Development

The author has deliberately used the term *enhancement*, rather than the conventional term *development*, in this book. The difference between capacity enhancement and development may seem artificial to the reader, since both terms seem to have the same meaning. And, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1972) there is no discernable difference between the two. *Enhancement* is to “lift, raise up, set up . . . or increase in price value, importance attractiveness” (p. 869), whereas *development* refers to the process used to achieve and end “result or product; a . . . form of some earlier and more rudimentary organism, structure or system” (p. 708).

Kretzmann and McKnight (1996a, p. 1), two influential and outspoken proponents of the use of community assets, defined asset-based community development as “the range of approaches that work from the principle that a community can be built only by focusing on the strengths and capacities of the citizens and associations that call that community ‘home.’” The reader, like the author, can feel comfortable with the manner in which Kretzmann and McKnight used the term *development*. However, the concept of development is rarely used this way.

Despite the seemingly minimal difference in the definitions of these two terms, the author prefers the term *enhancement* because it fundamentally implies that there is a resource-asset in place and that all one needs to do is foster its growth. To use the metaphor of a seed, after a seed is planted, all it needs is water and sunshine. With *development*, the assumption is that there

is no resource and, as a consequence, the practitioner must create it through some form of active intervention. To use the same metaphor, at first there is no seed; it must be created. Then the seed can be planted and nourished for it to grow. The conventional manner in which *development* is used is generally, with some important exceptions, deficit driven. The use of *enhancement*, in contrast, forces the individual to think only from an assets perspective.

Research Methods

Any effort to gain a better understanding of how community capacity-enhancement initiatives work must, by necessity, use a variety of approaches (quantitative and qualitative) and techniques that capture the richness, intricacies, and complexities of community-based interventions (Andranovich & Riposa, 1993; Marin & Marin, 1991; Patton, 1987; Stanfield & Dennis, 1993). Multiple lenses provide viewers, in this case researchers and practitioners, with an appreciation of how major community stakeholders, including residents, experience and view a particular phenomenon.

The work of Kingry-Westergaard and Kelly (1990) has stressed the need to use multiple methods to study ecological phenomena because of the complexities of relationships and systems. These methods are best utilized in collaboration between the researcher and the participants. As Jason (1997, p. 103) stated: "The ecological endeavor is a discovery process in which researchers and participants share the different constructions of their contexts, learn about events and processes that help define their understanding of their contexts, and work together to define the research activity."

A focus on community assets, however, presents an additional set of challenges because of the paucity of studies that have specifically targeted the strengths of low-income urban-based communities. Unfortunately, quantitative data are usually collected by governmental entities with a focus on problems (the deficit paradigm) and hence are of limited use in developing or understanding community capacity enhancement. This limitation, which is by no means minor, severely constricts the usefulness of existing data. Qualitative methods, particularly those that incorporate ethnographic techniques, offer the most promise for understanding community capacity-enhancement practice.

Ethnographic research takes into account both tangible and intangible factors and acknowledges that local people have the most in-depth knowledge of local circumstances (Facio, 1993; Martinez-Brawley, 1990; Williams, 1993). In addition, ethnography acknowledges and embraces the diversity of groups and communities. In so doing, it stresses the importance of the researcher developing collaborative relationships with community residents, local stakeholders, and other interested parties (Burawoy, 1991a, 1991b; Sells, Smith, & Newfield, 1997; Spradley, 1979). This collaborative approach to research necessitates that the researcher approach the subject matter being studied from a perspective of respect, a willingness to be open minded

about local interpretations of acts and behaviors, and an understanding that it takes a certain amount of time (in some instances, less time and in others, more time) before a group or community comes to trust and feel confident in the researcher's ability to reflect their reality. Thus, ethnographic research offers the greatest potential for use in communities that are marginal and thus distrustful of outsiders, particularly academics who wish to "study" them.

Case studies, which may be defined as the strategic use of materials and information that illustrate key conceptual constructs with practice implications, are an excellent tool for bringing together multiple approaches and methods and weaving the results into a coherent "story" (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Case studies must address five key elements to be useful for practitioners. They must give (1) sufficient detail to allow the reader to grasp the context in which the intervention occurred, (2) provide sufficient details on the intervention itself (theoretical underpinnings and operationalization), (3) highlight critical aspects that needed to be surmounted to achieve success, (4) illustrate techniques and approaches to help practitioners transfer newly acquired knowledge to their particular situations, and (5) summarize the lessons learned to facilitate the exchange of knowledge between the writer and the practitioners.

Due to limited financial resources, this book used existing data whenever possible and useful. Every effort was made to locate and use research and case studies to increase the generalizability of the model and thereby reduce costs. Follow-up with key informants identified in the chapters and the solicitation of materials were also used to enhance the stories. Last, the book relies on primary research utilizing ethnomethodological techniques that was specifically conducted for this book.

Photographs

The author was fortunate to get permission from the publisher to include photographs that were supplied through the generosity of many artists and provide an important visual perspective that is often missing from social work books. Of the eighteen photographs that are included, eight are of murals.

The author thought that although the other capacity-enhancement projects covered in this book lent themselves to visual representation, murals did so to a much greater extent. Furthermore, no amount of description of the images in murals could do justice to their actual manifestation. The author hopes that these visual images will help the reader to appreciate more fully the powerful messages that community capacity-enhancement projects transmit to their communities.

Words of Caution

Caution is needed whenever any paradigm is embraced that actively seeks to involve a community in designing and implementing changes that reflect

their hopes and needs. Paradigms that are based upon self-help, natural supports, and the like are appealing to all interested parties because they affirm an individual's ability and need to address areas of concern actively. However, a number of authors have questioned whether an emphasis on locally driven initiatives may lead the government to stop providing resources and assistance (Delgado, *in press*).

A focus on community capacity enhancement, which ultimately results in residents playing active and significant roles in developing murals, gardens, playgrounds, and sculptures, must not be used as an excuse for providers and funders to disengage from communities in which these projects are conducted. Any shift in focus that results in local initiatives must not place a disproportionate onus on a community.

This book focuses on exploring the types of assets that can be found in communities (economic, social, cultural, and political resources) and how they can be used in the creation of a partnership with social workers and other helping professionals. This partnership, however, must be based on mutual respect and trust, with an understanding that the community is the best judge of what it needs and what is good for it. This orientation necessitates a radical rethinking of what social workers think about the people they serve (Delgado, 1998c, *in press*).

Expected Criticism of the Book

Although this book stresses four types of urban community capacity-enhancement projects, this does not mean that these types are the only ones that are possible or advisable. Such a statement would be foolhardy and misleading. Furthermore, the book would appeal only to those social workers who are interested in murals, gardens, playgrounds, and sculptures. Rather, these projects are meant to serve as examples. The attractiveness of community capacity enhancement is its limitless potential for work with undervalued communities.

These four types of projects are highlighted to illustrate their use in assessments and interventions. The author hopes that these projects awaken in the reader a spark that will lead to the creation of other types of community-enhancement projects that are based upon the cultural backgrounds of the community residents they seek to engage—the true meaning of cultural competence! Local circumstances must dictate the nature of these projects, and residents' backgrounds must be taken into account.

This book is not about turning social workers into part-time muralists, gardeners, builders, and sculptors, although these occupations are appealing and fulfill important roles in society. At the least, they present opportunities for channeling creative energies. However, it is not possible to conceive of using murals, gardens, playgrounds, and sculptures without having some knowledge of the kind of planning that they entail. Most social workers probably do not have these types of skills or knowledge of these areas. Con-

sequently, it is essential to develop an appreciation of what these types of projects and activities require of participants.

There is a tremendous need in the field to develop community asset-based interventions that take into account local-based hopes, concerns, needs, circumstances, and abilities. Social work has moved slowly, but steadily, toward using, if not embracing, a strengths perspective in practice. However, the literature has focused inordinately on strength-based work with individuals and has often neglected communities. Because of this propensity, the field is in desperate need of examples of the use of strength-based principles in work with communities, especially communities that are urban based, of color, and low income. There are many undervalued groups in urban areas that do not have these characteristics. Thus, the book is limited by its focus on one sector, although it is a significant and growing community that has great importance to the profession.

The author is fully prepared for a wide range of criticisms of this book. Many critics will say that the issues confronting low-income communities of color are no different from those confronting other low-income groups or not sufficiently different to warrant an entire book devoted to them. Other critics will say that the issues that low-income communities of color face are not restricted to urban areas and can be found in suburbia and rural areas as well. Still others will say that any social work text that focuses on urban practice is misguided because most social workers do not practice in cities. Last, critics may also say that a "scholarly" book must be based on "scholarly" sources, and that this book relies too much on unconventional sources—namely, newspaper articles; locally written documents, such as newsletters; and the like.

The author contends that the issues confronting low-income communities of color are dramatically different when placed in an urban, rather than a suburban or rural, context. To say otherwise is to say that interventions do not have to take context into account—that what works in a rural setting must also work in an urban setting. To deny context, however, is to deny the history and experiences of urban low-income communities of color in the United States.

Cities often represented a refuge for many undervalued groups because of the perceived opportunities for advancement and their hopes of finding social acceptance. The author argues that cities are a unique context in which social problems are manifested in a way that takes the environment into account. He wrote this book for a specific audience—social workers and other helping professionals, who have an interest and commitment to working in urban areas using an assets approach to undervalued communities. This is not to say that undervalued groups are not struggling to address a host of social problems in suburban and rural areas. Nevertheless, they have assets that must be identified and enhanced at every opportunity.

Finally, the author makes no apologies for using popular media sources in this book. In fact, the paucity of professional publications on the projects addressed here was the rationale for writing such a book. It would be a sad

day for the field if it was said that major developments occurring in communities must be reported in the scholarly literature before it is legitimate to include them in a social work curriculum. The social work academic community was slow to respond to the AIDS epidemic because of this bias. In short, the author believes that social work is at least six years behind what is reported in the popular literature. This book represents an attempt to cut that time by a few years regarding urban-based communities.

Limitations of the Book

The process of writing a book about a new practice paradigm and just four types of urban-based community enhancement projects is not without its share of limitations, which the author must openly acknowledge. Any new paradigm will be subject to increased scrutiny concerning its ideology, applicability, and effectiveness. A paradigm based on community assets is still in its infancy and, as a result, requires much more thought, research, and critique before it is widely embraced. The author would have preferred to have drawn upon extensive research studies and in-depth cases to buttress the worthiness of a community capacity-enhancement paradigm. However, it was not possible to do so because of the dearth of such materials. It is hoped that this situation will change in the future.

The four types of projects outlined in this book were selected because of the author's experience with them and contacts in the field and because they were representative of the types of projects that are possible in urban open spaces. These projects all require the use of physical space, some more than others, and are accomplishments (physical development) that can be viewed, studied, and debated within and outside a community.

These projects essentially rely on volunteers giving their time, money, and expertise on behalf of a community. This is not to say that this is the only or, for that matter, the most frequent, form of volunteerism in a community. However, volunteerism related to murals, gardens, playgrounds, and sculptures results in a physical "artifact" that is visible to the entire community. Yes, volunteers can play important roles in soup kitchens and visiting the frail and isolated for example, which are important tasks in a community's life. However, this form of involvement does not necessarily enhance the volunteers' capacity to help or result in an artifact that stands as a testament of a community's will not only to survive, but to thrive.

There are countless other types of community capacity-enhancement projects that social workers and other providers can initiate. This book is limited by the selection of just four types. Although it could have taken a broader perspective and addressed many other types of projects, such an approach, although appealing from a generalizability point of view, would have sacrificed depth for breadth. Consequently, one of the strengths of this book is also its major weakness—namely, that it is highly focused, or, as some critics would say, too narrow.