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The Concept of Community Governance: A Preliminary Review

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**Refereed paper presented at the GovNet Conference, Monash University, Melbourne,
28-30th November, 2005**

ABSTRACT

An emerging model of governance gaining popularity within the public and community sectors is that of *Community Governance*. The concept usually refers to community participation, engagement and decision-making in public matters and is related to terms such as local governance, social governance, network governance and participatory governance. This paper provides a review of Australian and international literature related to the concept of community governance to assist understanding of the accumulating and sometimes confusing literature in this field. The paper begins with a workable definition of community governance, provides a discussion of some theoretical and historical aspects of 'community' from a community psychology perspective and presents an overview of the distinction between corporate, public and community governance to provide a context to the review. The remainder of the article presents the themes of: models and perspectives, network governance and community and community sector governance. A major conclusion is that community governance, by definition, is about community management and decision making but also implicates the broader aims of addressing community needs and building community capacity and well being.

¹ Acknowledgments: The author (Vicky Totikidis) wishes to thank Professor Anona Armstrong, Director, and Professor Ronald Francis, Professorial Fellow, Centre for International Corporate Governance Research, Faculty of Business and Law, Victoria University for their support and helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

**Keywords: Community Governance; Community Psychology; Public Sector;
Community Sector.**

INTRODUCTION

An emerging model of governance gaining popularity within the public and community sectors is *Community Governance*. Community governance is sometimes used to refer to community participation, engagement and decision making in public matters and is related to terms such as local governance, social governance, network governance and participatory governance. Community governance is an important concept that needs further clarification. A study on the community governance of crime prevention and community safety in Victoria, was recently conducted by Victoria University in partnership with Crime Prevention Victoria (see Armstrong, Francis, Bourne & Dussuyer, 2002, Armstrong, Francis & Totikidis, 2004). One of the definitions offered in this research was as follows:

[Community governance may be defined as] community level management and decision-making that is undertaken by, with, or on behalf of a community, by a group of community stakeholders. The focus on ‘community’ rather than on a corporation, organisation, local government or the public sector is the distinguishing feature of community governance vis a vis these other forms of governance (Totikidis, Armstrong & Francis, 2005).

The ‘by, with or on behalf of a community’ in the definition may be seen as a continuum by which to assess community governance theories and interventions. This idea is illustrated in Figure 1. The question arising from this tool is: Is the *management and decision making* of this particular community issue or intervention undertaken independently *by* community members at the “grass roots” level; *with* assistance from some community or government agency; or *for* or on behalf of the community by those who have the power and authority to do so.

Community Management and Decision Making

BY?	WITH?	FOR?
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Community

Figure 1. Community governance continuum tool for assessing community governance theories and interventions

A critical question in community governance is therefore about the degree to which community members are involved in this decision making process or what is commonly referred to as citizen or community engagement. Literature in the field seems to indicate a shift away from the extreme right of the continuum to the middle (where decisions are made ‘with’ community members) in Western countries such as Australia, America, Canada and the United Kingdom. This will be demonstrated in this paper by means of a review of literature on community governance and related concepts.

Figure 1 is a basic definition and not a complete theory; it outlines what community governance is and who can be involved but not how it should be done or the overall purpose or goals. A richer understanding of the concept of community governance will be an outcome of this review. The following two sections consist of a discussion of some theoretical and historical aspects of ‘community’ from a community psychology perspective and a discussion on the distinction between corporate, public and community governance to provide a context to the review.

The Community Context

The rise of community governance can be better understood in reference to some basic theory and history of community. Community can be defined in various ways and while definitions about community are often debated, many community psychologists agree with the distinction of *relational* communities and *geographical* communities (Rudkin, 2003). In her book on community psychology, Rudkin also discusses the advent and presence of *virtual* communities.

The concept of community governance has not been widely recognised in the field of community psychology; however, cross-disciplinary literature on the community governance almost always refers (implicitly or explicitly) to geographical communities. This may be because relational and virtual communities are more elusive and cannot be ‘governed’ in the

same sense. An important geographical community in the Australian context is the local government area (LGA). Community workers need to be aware that the LGA is both a *political construction and a holistic concept* consisting of social, cultural, environmental, economic and political dimensions.

Community psychology emerged in the 1960's in America in the midst of some important community movements, including anti-war, community health, civil rights and women's movements. It was as if 'community' had suddenly gained a voice during this time. Prilleltensky and Nelson (2005) suggested however, that social unrest and problems related to immigration, industrialization, urbanization and poverty had been escalating prior to this time in the US and were especially rife during the period 1890-1914. Social problems were increasing in many other parts of the world as well and while community psychology began in the US, the growth of the development of community psychology as a response to various social problems in Canada, the United Kingdom, Continental Europe has also been recognised.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of the term 'community governance' because it is bound up with so many related ideas about community relations and improvement; however, it also appears to have been around during the revolutionary 60s. For example, Thomas (1966) used the term in his research which explored community decision making in Texas. The following questions posed by Thomas allude to his conception of community governance: "Who governs? Who makes decisions? What kind of people have the greatest influence on the decision makers? How are important political decisions actually made?" (1966, foreword). Thomas also questioned the interrelationships among decision makers and recognised both the formal (government agencies, special services such as police and fire departments, schools and city councils) and informal (neighbourhood clubs, church groups, civic associations and service organizations) dimensions of the decision making system. Nevertheless, the concept of community did not seem to gain widespread popularity until the 1990's in another US movement called communitarianism, which called for a shift in the emphasis on individual rights to be balanced by attention to social and collective responsibilities (Rudkin, 2003).

Whilst communitarianism has had as many critics as it has supporters, the idea of *community* has entered public sector discourse in a major way. Even so, the adoption of community ideology may have less to do with communitarian values and more to do with the growing recognition in government that communities have different needs that require specialised community level interventions.

Corporate, Public Sector and Community Governance

According to the OECD: Corporate governance is a key element in improving economic efficiency and growth as well as enhancing investor confidence. Corporate governance involves a set of relationships between a company's management, its board, its shareholders and other stakeholders; provides the structure through which the objectives of the company are set, and the means of attaining those objectives and monitoring performance (2004). The OECD has set out 32 principles for corporate governance which address ways of ensuring the basis for an effective corporate governance framework; the rights of shareholders and key ownership functions; the equitable treatment of shareholders; the role of stakeholders in corporate governance; disclosure and transparency; and the responsibilities of the board.

Corporate governance relates to private sector activity with the term public sector governance used in reference to the public (or government) sector. The term 'corporate governance' is also often applied to the public sector, however, as illustrated in Figure 1, the underlying aims of the private and public sectors are different. Quoting from the ANAO Better Practice Guide on Public Sector Governance, the Auditor-General for Australia, Pat Barrett, stated that corporate governance is understood to encompass "how an organisation is managed, its corporate and other structures, its culture, its policies and strategies, and the ways in which it deals with its various stakeholders" (Barrett, 2000, p.5). Following a review of corporate governance literature, Barrett, identified six main elements that public sector entities must adhere to in order to effectively apply the elements of corporate governance to achieve better practice governance: leadership, integrity and commitment (which relate to the personal qualities of those in the organization); and accountability, integration and transparency (which relate to the strategies, systems, policies and processes in place).

The terms corporate and public sector governance both apply to the organization or corporation whereas the term community governance refers to activities and interventions in

relation to the community. The community sector includes various not for profit and non-government community organisations (NPOs & NGOs) commonly referred to as the 'third sector' (Bucek & Smith, 2000, Casey, 2002, Casey, 2004, Lyons, 2005). However, a difficulty lies in defining the community sector. As well as the NPOs and NGOs, does it include community workers from the public sector as well as community groups and the wider community involved in community governance and community engagement?

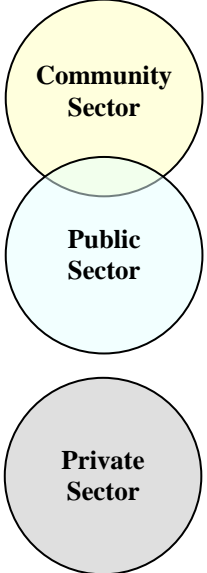
Governance	Sector	Party	Aim
Community Governance →		NPOs, NGOs, community workers and community?	Social, Environmental & Economic Improvement (Community Level)
Public Sector Governance →		Government	Social, Environmental & Economic Improvement. Workforce Management. (National & State Levels)
Corporate Governance → ↗		Business	Economic Improvement (Personal, Shareholder & Company Levels)

Figure 2. The aims of the private, public and community sector

As shown in the diagram, a major reason why the boundaries between government and the community sector overlap is because of the shared aims of community (social and environmental) improvement. As explained by Wiseman (2002) in relation to the Victorian context, there has been a shift in government to ‘triple bottom line’ thinking. That is, from an emphasis on economic priorities being addressed first and then compensating the losers and repairing the environment; to a way of thinking, making policy and doing business which respects the integrity and interdependence of *economic, social and environmental* values, objectives and processes. The public sector can also be described as a *workforce*, with around 1.5million people in four sectors employed in the Australian public sector (Victoria has 170,000 staff in full time positions), therefore the public sector is also about managing and providing policy directions to a diverse workforce.

There are in fact many issues and areas in which overlapping of sectorial boundaries occurs. Kramer (2000) discussed the idea of merging and blurring of sectorial boundaries in greater detail in his paper and alluded to the partnerships between government and the non-profit sector in the three areas of: provision of human services; promotion of culture and the arts; and advocate and core of civil society. Although Kramer describes the merging of boundaries

across all three sectors, including the private, it can be argued that much of this is superficial and that the economic motive or aim still underlies the bulk of private sector activity. While it cannot be denied that overlapping occurs across all three sectors, distinguishing the sectors by their overall macro aims or motives makes the boundaries clearer.

A REVIEW OF COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

Models and Perspectives

Like community, the concept of community governance also gained greater popularity during the 1990's and beyond. Clark and Stewart are commonly cited for their theory of community governance. In one of their earlier works on the topic (Clarke & Stewart, 1994) claimed that a new pattern of community governance emerged largely because of fragmentation in local government. While they note that the local authority (government) in the UK has always existed alongside various other organisations and agencies, the creation of various special purpose agencies (e.g., health, education & housing agencies) had caused fragmentation by removing responsibilities from parts of local government. This fragmentation was further complicated within local government as a result of competitive tendering and a contract culture; and by increased use of local authority services (Clarke & Stewart, 1998). In a later publication, Clarke and Stewart (1998) proposed six principles for community governance:

- The concern of the local authority should extend beyond the services provided to the overall welfare of the area
- The local authority's role in community governance is only justified if it is close to and empowers the communities within and the citizens which constitute them
- The local authority must recognise the contribution of other organisations - public, private and voluntary - and see its task as enabling (not controlling) that contribution
- The local authority should ensure that the whole range of resources in the community is used to the full for the good of its area;
- To make best use of those resources the local authorities will need to review rigorously how needs are best met and to be prepared to act in many different ways
- In showing leadership, the local authority must seek to reconcile, to balance and in the final resort to judge the diversity of use and interests (Clarke & Stewart, 1998, vi).

Clarke and Stewart concluded that underlying these principles and their approach to community governance is a common theme - the need for power to be exercised as close as possible to citizens and local communities. This in turn underlines the importance of devolution of power from central government to the local level in order to resolve local issues and furthermore to communities themselves (1998).

The model above was the focus of an invitation only forum on community governance in New Zealand in 1999, hosted by Christchurch City Council on behalf of Canterbury Local Government. Attendees included Mayors, Councillors, Community Board Chairs and Chief Executives from Canterbury/West Coast local government, a cross-section of Mayors, Chief Executives and others from New Zealand local government more generally, academics, local government consultants, central government civil servants and a range of representatives from the community sector (Christchurch City Council, 1999). A paper drawing on the Clarke and Stewart principles entitled "Taking the Canterbury Communities into the New Millennium, the Role of Local Government" (Richardson, 1999) was circulated before the forum. As well as adopting the Clarke and Stewart principles of community governance and discussing the role of government, the paper outlined four important areas or 'policy objectives' which community members seek to work together on. These were: Environmental sustainability; Community and social well being; Wealth creation; Sense of commitment to the community and its processes including the health of, and confidence in, the democratic and policy processes themselves (Richardson, 1999).

Hutchinson also supported community governance as a "legitimate and important function of local government" (1999, p.7) at the forum. As shown in the following quote Hutchinson maintained that 'community building' was central to community governance:

Community-building is the soul work of governance. It is about creating support and connection amidst a local and global landscape which is increasingly insecure and fragmented. As we "take our communities into the new millennium" — the theme of this forum — the leadership task of ensuring connection and participation, from all members of our community, will become an important face of the local governance role (Hutchinson, 1999, p.1).

Also at the NZ forum, (Reid, 1999) argued that the capacity of the ‘centrist’ model of government to continue to deliver positive community outcomes has become a matter for debate over recent years and that it was time to consider whether the constitutional balance between central and local governments was right. He discussed the implications of five factors in relation to the need for a new paradigm including: increasing diversity in NZ; the place of civil society; wicked issues (e.g., environmental issues, sustainable development and community safety); checks and balances; and globalisation and the importance of place.

Gates (1999) expressed a similar call for a shift from ‘government to governance’. According to Gates, American politics has become dysfunctional and citizens have lost trust in their political leaders and feel that political institutions have become unresponsive and corrupted by power and money. At the same time, devolution at the federal and state levels has forced local governments to take greater responsibility for solving local problems. In this environment, community governance is seen as the preferred model whereby government, business, community groups and citizens work together and leaders share power to reach collaborative consensus based decisions.

The idea of community governance as people working together is a commonly held view, with McKieran, Kim and Lasker (2000) also defining community governance as collaboration. Community governance, they explain is based on the recognition that the complex issues facing communities cannot be solved by any one person or sector alone but requires collaboration. As such, it brings together a broad range of stakeholders – community residents, elected officials, businesses, civic, faith, health and human service, and professional services (McKieran et al., 2000). Similarly, Bowles and Gintis (2002) use the term community governance as an alternative to “social capital” claiming that it better captures aspects of good governance and focuses attention on what groups do rather than what people own. According to them: “Communities are part of good governance because they address certain problems that cannot be handled either by individuals acting alone or by markets and governments” (p.5).

Auckland City Council (2002) in NZ have developed a comprehensive position on community governance which incorporates the community governance model summarised below. According to this Council, the model provides a framework for Council roles

activities, articulates the importance it places on people and communities and identifies ways of acting on the values and principles.

Table 1. The Auckland City Council Community Governance Model

Community Leadership	Community Empowerment	Community Ownership
Community Leadership reflects the concept of people and groups working together to achieve common goals and visions.	Empowered communities are ones which either have or are able to access resources. Resources are needed to meet a variety of needs falling along a continuum from basic needs (eg. food, shelter, income) to higher level needs (eg. social interaction, support, self-development). The link between social and economic capital is, therefore, made particularly apparent here.	This component of the model encompasses the way in which people are connected to their communities so they feel they belong and feel they want to look after their communities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ shared visions and understandings ▪ community participation ▪ co-operative behaviours ▪ community advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ access to resources ▪ power sharing ▪ devolution of decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ sense of belonging ▪ sense of caring ▪ sense of place ▪ valuing diversity

Adapted from (Auckland City Council, 2002, p.1-3)

Another model of community governance was developed by a Citizens League team from the United States following their review of over 30 communities involved in performance measurement and citizen engagement throughout the US and other countries (Marshall, Wray, Epstein & Grifel, 2000). Marshall et al., state that complex issues like crime and youth

violence, neighborhood conditions, smart growth, and sustainable economic development require more than just the provision government services. They claimed that their review showed numerous examples of leadership for community betterment coming from both government and citizens and that the model developed can help communities address important issues more effectively. The model proposes the three elements of citizen engagement; performance measurement; and government policy and implementation as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

Elements of the Effective Governance Model (Marshall et al., 2000).

Element	Definition
Citizen engagement	The involvement of citizens, using the term "citizens" in the broadest sense to include individuals, groups, nonprofit organizations, and even businesses as corporate citizens.
Performance measurement	The development of indicators and collection of data to describe, report on, and analyze performance. Measurement can apply to government services or community conditions (e.g., physical or environmental conditions, public health and safety, or economic and social conditions) or to both.
Government policy and implementation	The development of public policy decisions about the issues government chooses to address, the strategies it employs, the resources it commits, and the actions it takes to carry out these decisions. This element encompasses the full cycle of planning, budgeting, implementing, and evaluating government operations.

Adapted from (Marshall et al., 2000)

Network Governance

The concept of network governance is often used to refer to community governance, or at least, a very similar process. Although a thorough literature review would be necessary to unravel the exact meaning and usage of the term, local or community governance seem to be the preferred terms (and focus) in local government; community and social governance in the community sector; and network governance in the broader public sector or by those specifically interested in the partnership arrangements in place. Network governance, or self-

organizing interorganizational networks as coined by Rhodes (1996) was identified as one of six types of governance in common usage, with the other types referring to: the minimal state, corporate governance, new public management, good governance and socio-cybernetic systems. Indeed various other lesser known local governance models have been proposed, for example, Local Agenda 21 (Freeman & Littlewood, 1996) and organic planning (Plein, Green & Williams, 1998). Rhodes identified network governance as an alternative to hierarchies (government bureaucracy) and market models in the context of government, private, non-profit, and other individuals and organizations working in partnerships for service delivery in Britain (1996)².

Three examples demonstrating current thinking on network governance at a recent Victorian public sector conference are given following. Mr Terry Moran, *Secretary, Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet* said in his speech:

Now, we need to be very clear about what we are talking about when we say network governance and as we move beyond debates about top down and bottom up to build new forms of partnership that work for communities. Network governance is the best of both worlds, arguably. Using network governance, we would evolve to become more than the sum of our two most powerful public sector predecessors, hierarchical ... rules and processes, and narrow market centric public management, the initiatives of the late 80s and 90s being in that last category. Where local communities are strong, governments should empower them to drive their own future. Where local communities are weak, governments should be active in capacity building. Advanced network governance is about building the capacity of our communities, by sharing the learnings of strong communities with weak communities. These advances can only be achieved through a joined up, whole of community approach (Moran, 2005, p.12-13).

Professor Elizabeth Harman, the *Vice Chancellor of Victoria University* noted that: the language of network governance is resonating into university dialogues. Two mega trends in society 'civic society and network governance' are converging and may change Australian

² For an earlier discussion on these three systems see: Thompson, G., Frances, J., Levacic, R. & Mitchell, J. (Eds.) (1991) *Markets, hierarchies and networks: the coordination of social life*, London: Sage, in association

universities and their governance yet again – so that engagement (with community) is a feature of universities (Harman, 2005).

Professor Brian Head, *Centre for Governance, Griffith University* discussed the prospects and pitfalls of network governance and collaboration at the conference. According to him:

Networks can be quite fluid, they can operate within one sector or across sectors and policy domains. My view is they can't replace bureaucratic authority, they supplement it, and so that's why I am quite sceptical about the language that talks about the new paradigm for governance in the 21st century... Different types of cooperation and collaboration are suitable for different challenges, and only some issues require full collaboration (Head, 2005, p.13).

Networks are an intrinsic part of social capital and community governance. As stated by Armstrong and Francis (2004) the community governance process requires collaboration and marshalling of the social capital resources of networks and stakeholders. Successful networking and community governance leads to improved social capital and community well being (Armstrong et al., 2004).

Community and Community Sector Governance

Much of the review so far dealt with local government and public sector approaches to community governance. These approaches should be continued and encouraged in the public sector as they offer the promise of greater citizen participation and empowerment, greater social capital and solutions to community problems. At the same time, community and non-government community sector led initiatives should also be encouraged as these can hold the key to underlying community problems as well as solutions. This section provides a brief review of literature, providing an introduction to community and community sector issues.

In her work on participatory governance, Edwards (2001) discussed the relationships between the government and community or voluntary³ sectors in both Australia and Canada and presented a participatory governance framework that could allow the community sector to

with The Open University.

³ Edwards noted that the term voluntary sector is used in Canada and community sector in Australia

move beyond service delivery to a greater role in policy development in partnership with government. The framework is described as a consultation rectangle involving the community sector in problem identification in the initial stage, followed by decision-making, implementation and evaluation. The topic of third sector participation in the policy process has been further explored by Casey (2002, Casey, 2004).

The role of community organisations was also the focus of Stanley's (2004) discussion who claimed that non-government organizations play a vital role in social governance and the development of social policy and programs. Community organisations it was argued were closely in touch with the needs and strengths of the community, can provide the support to increase community capacity and can provide a formal structure to give feedback from the community to the government. Social governance was defined as a contrast to a bureaucratic, hierarchical structure, where:

... decision-making is decentralised and value is placed on citizen participation.

This way of governing

is facilitated through the formation of partnerships and networks within organisations and the community.

People are empowered to participate through government policies which address personal and community

disadvantages, commonly referred to as social exclusion and locational disadvantage (Stanley, 2004, p.1).

More recently, Casey and Dalton traced the development of compacts (also known as agreements or partnerships) which were described as formal written rules of engagement between governments and community organisations (2005). Compacts first emerged in the mid-1990s in the UK and have been implemented there at national and local levels and similar written agreements known as accords were also developed in Canada in the late 1990s (Casey & Dalton, 2005). The authors outlined the current status and future of such compacts in Australia and identify a number of restrictions that could affect an organisations' capacity to resource advocacy and willingness to engage in advocacy, as well as the new opportunities that compacts could bring. As yet it is unknown whether compacts will be adopted on a grand scale in Australia.

Other community sector workers that play an important role in advocacy often not recognised as such are indigenous and ethnic organizations. This topic deserves a separate in depth review and cannot be discussed at length in a paper of this scope, however, good discussions on indigenous community governance can be found in Shannon and Hendriks (2004) and Martin (2005). Both of these stress the need for a high level of community control and attention to addressing disadvantages. The former note that: “The concept of community capacity and associated discourse has permeated all levels of public policy and research in recent times, and clearly, in an Indigenous Australian context, it is inextricably linked to issues of governance” (Shannon & Hendriks, 2004, p.1). Similarly, Martin (2005) explains that governance and capacity building are seen as crucial precursors to addressing entrenched social and economic disadvantage.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper has offered a review of the concept of community governance while at the same time recognising that this can only be preliminary. Literature about community governance has been multiplying over the past decade or so and there is much that could not be incorporated in a review of this scope. For example, an increasing amount of literature on the topic also points to some of the doubts and possible problems and pitfalls of community governance/engagement. These should be included in future reviews and should be considered by any group or organisation embarking on community engagement strategies.

With the exception of the Marshall et al., (2000) model which linked citizens, government, and performance measurement in an applied model for action, much of this review also focussed predominantly on conceptual issues and on the meanings and values of community governance. Research on the practical applications of community governance is available and should also be reviewed in further work. Research on what works and what does not is also needed in this area. The present paper offered further amplification to the concept of community governance as a holistic, inclusive and targeted approach to community level issues. It may be concluded that while community governance is firstly about community management and decision making the concept of community governance also implicates the broader aims of addressing community needs and building community capacity and well being.

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