



View *Engage!* online at: <http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/newsletter/engage.htm>!

## Community as Identity By: Paul Born



©istockphoto.com/

My community: these two simple words can say so much about a person. They can reveal where you come from and, by association, what you believe – or at least the context in which your beliefs were shaped. They can give us insights into your friends and connections, who your family is and your lifestyle.

The words “my community” can also label a person as in: “they are part of the gay community, disability community or feminist community” – which helps to define aspects of a person’s identity. Four concepts that describe how identity is shaped by community are outlined below:

*Ubuntu* – This African term, widely used and rich in meaning, describes the interconnection among people – “I am human because I belong.” Desmond Tutu describes Ubuntu as a concept to mean “my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.” We belong in a bundle of life. We say that “a person is a person through other persons.”

Beautiful thinking for  
**JULY**  
In this issue you'll find...

- Community as Identity - By Paul Born
- Social Analysis Systems - By Mark Cabaj
- Coady Institute Celebrates its 50th Birthday - By Anne Makoul
- Peacock Poverty: Giving Poverty a Voice - By Sylvia Cheuy with Cheryl Smith
- Celebrating Citizens: The Power of Public Festivals – By Dr. Joanna Ashworth
- Welcoming Liz Weaver - By Mark Cabaj

*Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft* – The German words *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* were used by Ferdinand Tönnies to describe a connectedness and to distinguish people who act primarily with a group from those who act for their own self-interest.

*Family* – Being part of a family and extended family can be a powerful source of community identity. To identify with a particular family provides a context of relationships. In some cultures, links to families go back many generations and bring with them status. These links to family can at times be good and at other times be detrimental.

*Association* – Association with a particular cause can be another powerful source of identity – particularly if the cause provides a sense of solidarity and brings feelings of belonging. Communities of association are not restricted by geography but rather provide a context for identifying with others who share similar beliefs about the way things should be.

I am currently on sabbatical exploring these themes and others as part of the research for my forthcoming book, *Seeking Community: Finding Belonging in Chaotic Times*. Watch for it and the launch of our Seeking Community website later this year.



[Learn more about Paul's upcoming book on seeking community](#)

#### **Related Links:**

- [Learn more about The Seeking Community Initiative in our Why Community? online seminar](#)
- [Register here to be among the first to see \[www.seekingcommunity.ca\]\(http://www.seekingcommunity.ca\)](#)

## Social Analysis Systems By: Mark Cabaj

---

Communities are wise. They have an abundance of experience, knowledge and skills required to tackle complex issues such as preventable disease, educational achievement, economic well-being, and community safety.



©istockphoto.com/  
\*Creative Archetype

The challenge is to make communities smart. Over the last fifteen years there has been a renaissance in community engagement, with mainstream institutions and grassroots organizations eager to develop new ways to tap into this community wisdom.

Jacques Chevalier and Daniel Buckles from Carleton University have made a big contribution to the field with Social Analysis Systems (SAS). They draw upon the diverse fields of psychology, policy analysis and anthropology, blending it with first-hand experiences in international development, to create a methodology and pool of techniques that can be used to address almost any community change initiative.

There are dozens of SAS tools. Most of them are organized into three overlapping general types. Tools that relate to *problems* focus on helping stakeholders better understand the nature of the issue being addressed, such as its inter-related root causes, and where a group concerned with change might begin to focus their efforts. Tools that focus on *actors* are used to understand the values, interests, positions and relationships among the stakeholders involved in an issue. These tools support the finding or creation of common ground. Finally, many of the tools focus on *options*, which are designed to surface, sort through and rate different approaches that might be employed to address an issue.

These tools and techniques are multi-purpose, reinforce each other, and can be used throughout the conventional “change cycle” of defining the issues, surfacing and selecting options, planning, monitoring and evaluation. They are rigorous and Chevalier and Buckles provide excellent step-by-step instructions for each one. In many cases, examples of their use are also included.

Are these tools rigorous? Yes. Are they easy to use? Not always. Last year, I joined two experienced facilitators in a meeting of people who were trying to determine how they might work together to dramatically improve services to senior

citizens. Despite the fact that all of us had been through SAS training, we struggled to stay on top of the technique we had chosen to use. We got through it and the exercise ended up being a fruitful one for the group, but we were surprised about how much effort and focus it required.

Chevaliers and Buckles are well aware of this. They emphasize the development of “skillful means,” a process of developing the capacity to select and adapt the appropriate technique, through a process of reading, training and practice. In a soon-to-be published new book this “skillful means” process will be more fully outlined.

For all its rigour and precision, SAS is an evolving methodology. Buckles and Chevalier continue to refine existing techniques and craft new ones. Practitioners can download the tools and offer their own experiences on the SAS webpage. Some SAS trainees have developed informal communities of practice.

A single methodology – even one as thorough and sophisticated as SAS – cannot bear the burden of unleashing the entire capacity of a community. The SAS founders encourage people to use the approach alongside other methodologies. However, I think the SAS methodology may well be the most significant and accessible methodology for people interested in community and social change in the last twenty years.

**Related Links:**

- [Visit the SAS \(Social Analysis Systems\) website](#)
- [Learn more about comprehensive thinking and action to address complex community issues](#)

## *Ideas we're following...*

### **Coady Institute Celebrates its 50th Birthday** By: [Anne Makoul](#)

---

Moses Coady would have been proud to participate in recent discussions on deepening the practice of asset-based, citizen-led community development. From July 7-10, 2009, the man who inspired the founding of the 50-year-old Coady International Institute at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish would have met 100 community development-minded guests from more than a dozen countries.

Forum participants sought to better understand the principles and practices by which communities – from neighbourhoods to large cities – can fulfill Coady's vision: "We desire above all that they will discover and develop their own capacities for creation. They will use what they have to secure what they have not" [Coady 1938].

The forum title – *From Clients to Citizens* – drew its inspiration from the recently published book of the same name. Written for community workers, researchers and policy-makers, it contains case studies of communities that built on their own assets and examines the common factors that helped these communities mobilize.

Plenary and small group discussions guided participants through a series of questions aimed at extending the impact of their work. They considered, for example, how the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model developed by John McKnight and collaborators from Northwestern University in Chicago could be better structured for use by practitioners inside and outside North America. They learned more about the collaborative relationship between Coady and the ABCD Institute that has helped "generate leadership and action for stronger communities and fairer societies."

#### **Related Links:**

- [Learn more about the \*From Clients to Citizens\* forum](#)
- [Click here for a recommended reading list from the forum](#)
- [More about the Coady Institute's Asset-Based Community Development Program](#)
- [More resources on community capacity building](#)

## Peacock Poverty: Giving Poverty a Voice

By: [Sylvia Cheuy with Cheryl Smith](#)

---

This month marked the launch of Peacock Poverty, an online forum created to showcase the talent and strength of the poor. All the effort needed to create this site came from poor people using pooled resources and hard work. No agency help or guidance was required.

Peacock Poverty's managing editor, Cheryl Smith believes there is no other forum quite like it. "As we worked together to create Peacock Poverty, a real community was created," she said. "We know of no other forum for this type of community engagement and consider ourselves unique in a number of ways."

Peacock Poverty offers a venue for sharing art, music and stories. By profiling the abilities of people living in poverty, it is refreshing the self-esteem and pride of its contributors and strengthening the feeling of community among them. It is also fighting stigma and changing the public perception of people living in poverty. The site also provides a place to share information and resources. Ultimately the hope is that this site will allow people living in poverty to educate and inform each other with the help of its "allies" or "friends."

Smith says, "We believe that ALL voices need to be at the table, not only those groomed by agency. We seek to tell the truth about our experiences, desires and needs, in a safe and supportive environment. We seek to partner with agencies in a way that maintains our autonomy and dignity."

Peacock has received nothing but praise in the weeks since its launch. Over the next year, the site will be expanded to include a skills exchange and education database, as well as establishing itself as the "voice" of this community. Contributions are warmly accepted by one and all.

### Related Links:

- [Visit the Peacock Poverty website](#)
- [Learn more about engaging people living in poverty](#)
- [More resources on social & economic inclusion](#)

## Celebrating Citizens: The Power of Public Festivals

By: [Dr. Joanna Ashworth](#)

---

Have you ever stopped to wonder about the impact of public celebrations on creating active and caring citizens? This question was at the centre of a recent dialogue called "Celebrating Citizens" at SFU's Wosk Centre for Dialogue – part of a series of conversations examining what it means to be an engaged citizen.

So what did we learn? Story after story was shared by festival-goers and festival producers alike, expressing gratitude for what is best about public celebrations. They awaken the senses – of wonder, connectedness, joy and care for our common humanity. They make us better.

What about the notion of "citizen" – what did we make of that? Well, it seems to matter a great deal that the celebrations take place in public and communal spaces. In these spaces we are not consumers or customers. We are citizens. We are equals. Together on the street or in the park we seem to recognize more fully, more powerfully that we are all human. When we see each other making something together – a lantern, a mask or lots of noise, or moving to the same rhythm – we see that we are not alone.

I am jolted by the realization that there are many people, many artists especially, who at great personal cost, offer us this opportunity to celebrate our humanity. Without the public celebration, what would become of us?

### Related Links:

- [Simon Fraser University launches Certificate in Dialogue and Civic Engagement this fall](#)
- [Learn more about dialogue](#)
- [More resources on civil society](#)

## Welcoming Liz Weaver By: Mark Cabaj

---

It is with great joy that we welcome Liz Weaver to Vibrant Communities Canada. Her new role – which will begin on August 23rd – will be to work with and coach emerging roundtables throughout Ontario. She will support them to maximize the opportunities offered by the Province's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

As the Director of the *Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction* for the past three years, Liz has been instrumental in establishing the Roundtable as a model for community planning and decision-making that has inspired other collaborative planning tables and communities provincially, nationally and internationally.

Under Liz's leadership, the Roundtable grew from 42 members to over 300 volunteers engaged around various partner tables and on working groups and committees. Today more than 900 organizations contribute to Hamilton's poverty reduction efforts through links to collaborative planning tables and community organizations.

Liz's new role with Vibrant Communities Canada allows her to contribute to poverty reduction and community collaboration efforts across Ontario and Canada by continuing to share her vast learning and experience. Welcome Liz!

### Related Links:

- [More about Vibrant Communities](#)
- [Read the Caledon story of the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction](#)
- [Visit the HRPR website](#)



*Engage!* is published by Tamarack to bring you inspiration, ideas, and the skills you need to envision and create vibrant communities. Learn more about Tamarack at:

<http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g1s2.html>