Community Development, Quality of Life, and Community Well-Being: Three Fields Ripe with Opportunities for Future Research and Practice

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Cover Page Footnote
A Report from the CDS Fellows Initiative. Contributing authors: Daniel Kahl, PhD, and Kristina Hains, PhD, University of Kentucky. Special thanks go to Drs. Kristina Hains and Daniel Kahl for coordinating the Community Development Society (CDS) Fellows program and this special issue, which brought forth this article. Additional thanks go to the Drs. Rhonda Phillips and Kai Ludwig for their collaborations, and Chelsea Maupin for her help with previous presentations of the CDS Fellows' work. Additional thanks go to Jill Johnson, Manager of the International Society of Quality of Life Studies (ISQOLS), for ongoing assistance and support of this CDS Fellows project. Finally, Cindy Warren at Hobart & William Smith Colleges is thanked for her help editing this manuscript.

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Community Development, Quality of Life, and Community Well-Being: Three Fields Ripe with Opportunities for Future Research and Practice

Craig A. Talmage
Hobart & William Smith Colleges

Background and Purpose
Community transcends place-based and physical characteristics to encompass abundant diverse psychological, social, and environmental attributes, cultures, and histories found among individuals and groups. The fields of quality of life (QoL) and community well-being (CWB) have much to offer community development (CD) scholarship and practice. QoL and Community Well-Being (CWB) scholars and practitioners also explore the aforementioned aspects of communities across the world. This article discusses intersections between CD and the CWB and QoL fields searching for current and future commonalities and opportunities.

QoL as a concept considers both objective and subjective indicators of the many facets of communities and community life (Talmage, Hagen, Pijawak, & Nassar, 2018; Talmage, Pijawka, & Hagen, 2019). QoL can be rooted in place-based assessments concerning the sustainability and livability of the community environment, but QoL can also look at how individuals perceive their community environment (Talmage et al., 2018; Talmage et al., 2019). In general, quality of life can be seen as an indicator of positive and negative impact that interventions (e.g., development interventions) have on individuals and communities (Talmage et al., 2019). From the QoL field and the CD field, CWB has emerged as a new concept and field of research and practice.

Champions have emerged in the literature calling for greater intersections between the three fields (e.g., Lee, Kim, & Phillips, 2015a; 2015b). Seung Jong Lee, Yunji Kim, and Rhonda Phillips recently published a short academic book aimed at defining CWB and connecting the CWB field with CD. In their first chapter, they defined CWB in terms of fulfilling community desires and needs and provided a number of indicators from both the individual and community levels to explore. They also saw CD as a tool to help communities reach and realize higher levels of CWB. Finally, they concluded that applied research and practice provide essential intersectional points for well-being and development fields (Lee et al., 2015).

In a case study of practitioners, Coburn and Gormally (2020) identified five themes related to CWB that they tied to CD practice. These five themes were (1) sense of community, (2) volunteering, (3) networks and partnerships, (4) language, and (5) relationships. CD practice can and should create or enhance these five aspects of well-being. Coburn and Gormally (2020) call for well-being to be understood at the grassroots level, echoing Lee, Kim, and Phillips’s (2015b)
and Cloutier, Ehlenz, and Afinowich’s (2019) emphases on application when looking at where CD, QoL, and CWB intersect.

In his 2017 Community Development Society conference presidential address, Chris Marko (2018) highlighted that CWB is an integral concept to be considered in future CD research and practice. Following Marko’s address on the future of CD, the Community Development Society (CDS) established the CDS Fellows program to re-examine the roles of CD professionals (Kahl & Hains, 2018). One group involved in the Fellows program was dedicated to exploring the intersections of CD, QoL, and CWB and opportunities where collaboration can occur. This perspective article is a deliverable from that group’s work.

**Where to Find the Three Fields?**
The professional field of CD has two main societies: Community Development Society (CDS) and the International Association for Community Development (IACD). Both societies house and/or support one research- and one practice-focused publications (see Table 1). QoL and CWB work is mainly supported and/or endorsed by the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies (ISQOLS). ISQOLS directly sponsors the *Applied Research in Quality-of-Life (ARQOL)* journal, but affiliates with six other journals focused on QoL and well-being research. These societies and their publications aim to move inquiries of QoL away from reductionist focuses on suffering and detriment towards more positive and holistic understandings of CWB.

**Table 1. CD, QoL, and CWB publications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Society</th>
<th>Publications or Journals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Development (CD)</td>
<td>Community Development Society (CDS)</td>
<td>Community Development*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International Association for Community Development (IACD)</td>
<td>Community Development Practice*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Well-Being (CWB)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Indicators Research*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Journal of Happiness Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quality of Life Research*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Psychology of Well-Being</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Health and Well-Being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>International Journal of Well-Being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>International Journal of Community Well-Being*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Denotes journals used for the keyword scan of the literature; not all issues contained the keywords searched.
+The second issue of the *Practice Insights* magazine was unavailable on the IACD website to analyze.

Only one journal affiliated with ISQOLS, the *International Journal of Community Well-Being (IJCW)*, explicitly conceptualizes CWB as a field distinctly different from, but still related, to the QoL field. This distinction and this article build on Lee and Kim’s (2015) work found in the second chapter of *Community Well-Being and Community Development*, which compares and contrasts CD, CWB, happiness, and QoL. While ISQOLS does not have a
practice-focused publication, all three aforementioned societies and publications hold missions that aim to bridge divides between research, policy, and practice.

These three organizations and journals were selected because the aforementioned CDS Fellows group focused on the intersections of CD, QoL, and CWB consisted of individuals affiliated with all three professional associations. There are other journals that concern CD, QoL, and CWB indicators, but only ISQOLS, CDS, and IACD journals are considered in this piece; these organizations are discussed at the end of this article as instrumental organizations for furthering intersections between the three fields. Moreover, this article utilizes the flagship journals of all three organizations and the two community development practice publications. *IJCW* and *Social Indicators Research (SIR)* are also considered as they purport QoL and CWB as unique and distinct research fields. *Quality of Life Research (QoLR)* was also searched because it considers quality of life; however, only one article directly concerned CD, as the journal is mostly focused on health-related QoL.

**Search Methods and Findings**

A keyword search of the articles found across the six publications (see Table 1) was undertaken to reveal commonalities across the fields. Google Scholar was used as the search engine to explore potential overlaps in the research publications. The practice publications were not indexed in Google Scholar, so a keyword search was undertaken within each issue of the practice publications. These practice publications were accessed via CDS and IACD websites. Within the CD publications, the keywords of “quality of life” and “community well-being” were searched. Both hyphenated and unhyphenated versions of these words were utilized. Within the QoL and CWB journals, the term “community development” was searched. In this high-level scan of the literature, only articles that explicitly addressed concepts of CD, QoL, and CWB are identified or discussed, thus excluding articles with cursory or casual mentions of the terms.

Three tables were constructed following this process (Tables 1, 2, and 3). These tables highlight themes (i.e., content/topics) found across the respective publications and fields where attention was given to CWB and QoL in CD and CD in CWB and QoL. In all three tables, citations are provided, so readers have a robust and target list of over 170 resources to explore. The number of citations indicates greater attention paid in the respective fields, which is discussed later using a graphic illustrating the different levels of attention across fields.

The CD research publications were searched first. Table 2 contains a summary of eighteen themes apparent in the CD literature regarding QoL and CWB. These eighteen themes are not an exhaustive list, but were reflected in three or more publications. Next, the CD practice publications were searched. Table 3 contains a summary of eight themes apparent in practice. A theme mentioned in at least one publication is noted in the table; this is done because the number of practice articles available to search was less than the number of research articles available.

The QoL and CWB research publications were searched next, specifically *ARQOL*, *QoLR*, and *IJCW*. CD shows early roots in the QoL literature (e.g.,
Barnard & Van Der Merwe, 1991; Blakely, Schutz, & Harvey, 1977). Notably, *IJCW*'s editors have consistently highlighted intersections of CD and CWB in their introductions to each issue (Phillips & Lee, 2018; 2019a; 2019b; 2019c). Table 4 contains a summary of nine themes apparent in the QoL and CWB literature regarding CD. These nine themes were reflected in three or more publications.

Table 2. QoL and CWB overlaps found within CD research publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Citation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social inequality, social quality, social cohesion, and social inclusion</td>
<td>Evanson et al. (2006); Hiranandani et al. (2014); MacTavish (2007); Phillips &amp; Berman (2003); Takhar (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community capacity, social capital, and psychological social capital</td>
<td>Gruidel &amp; Hustedde (2015) Knapp et al. (2012); Knotts (2005); Murray (2000); Perkins et al. (2002); Penn (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community attachment, community satisfaction, and sense of place</td>
<td>Theodori (2000; 2004); Thomas et al. (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community stress, resilience, and resiliency</td>
<td>Allen (1993); Parisi et al. (2008); Vaneeckhaute et al. (2017); Zautra et al. (2008); Wheeler (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement, civic engagement, and public participation</td>
<td>Brennan et al. (2009); Jarvis et al. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frameworks and approaches like the community capitals frameworks, collective wellness, collective impact, and sustainable livelihoods approaches</td>
<td>D’Abundo &amp; Carden (2008); Flora &amp; Gillespie (2009); Guiterrez-Montes et al. (2009); Perez (2002); Walzer et al. (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research methods and indicators</td>
<td>Blanke &amp; Walzer (2013); Pstross et al. (2014); Schafft &amp; Greenwood (2003); Steele et al. (2001); Stoecker (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International development (i.e., outside of the U.S.)</td>
<td>Brennan (2006); Brown (1999); Buccus et al. (2008); Chaplin (2010); Gilchrist (2003); Nartova et al. (2019); Patsiorkaski &amp; O'Brien (1997); Takhar (2011); Tang (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community partnerships, college/university partnerships, community/block organizations, unions, nonprofits, and NGOs</td>
<td>Bratt &amp; Rohe (2005); Cook &amp; Nation (2016); Loughry (2002); Mizrahi et al. (2008); Nartova et al. (2019); Snably &amp; Beck (1993); Vyas (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic development, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial communities, and tourism</td>
<td>Arku (2015); Barkley et al. (1991); Besser &amp; Hanson (2004); Christensen &amp; Phillips (2016); Darger et al. (2017); Lichenstein &amp; Lyons (2012); Lichenstein et al. (2004); Lukkarinen (2005); Pittman et al. (2009); Skipper (2016); Zhang &amp; Warner (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Buccus et al. (2008); Onyx et al. (1992); Myers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Accessibility, responsiveness, and infrastructure of public services

- Besser & Ravesloot (2016); Steinnes (1990); Wellman (2012)
- Besser & Hanson (2004); Becker (2006); Courtney-Pratt et al. (2018); Flora & Gillespie (2009); Majee et al. (2014); Tang (2016)

### Community health

- Bridger & Alter (2008); Harley et al. (2000); Kemp (2009); Shortall & Shucksmith (2001)
- Lobao & Thomas (1988); Pine & Bennett (2014); Robinson et al. (2007); Wright Morton & Miller (2007)

### Place-based and local development

- Besser & Hanson (2004); Becker (2006); Courtney-Pratt et al. (2018); Flora & Gillespie (2009); Majee et al. (2014); Tang (2016)
- Apaliyah et al. (2012); Courtney-Pratt et al. (2018); Mannarini & Talò (2013)
- Besser et al. (2006); Bini (2018); Gregory (2017); Scorsone & Powers (2005?)
- Christensen (2018); Mayo (2012); Mikelbank & Chase (2016); Murdoch (2012)

### Agriculture systems, food systems, and food security

- Brennan & Israel (2008); Buzin & Cibin et al. (2018); Chaplin (2010); Nartova et al. (2019); Schlaepfer et al. (1994); Stevens et al. (2003)

### Community power, community justice, social activism, social action, and social movements

- Adkins et al. (2012); Courtney-Pratt et al. (2018); Takhar (2011); Zanbar (2018)
- Besser et al. (2006); Bini (2018); Gregory (2017); Scorsone & Powers (2005?)

### Leadership development and community leadership

- Brennan et al. (2007); Brown (1999); Buzin & Cibin et al. (2018); Courtney-Pratt et al. (2018); Cushing (2015); Hicks (2011); Hiranandani et al. (2014); Takhar (2011); Zanbar (2018)
- Besser et al. (2006); Bini (2018); Gregory (2017); Scorsone & Powers (2005?)

### Empowerment of underrepresented, overlooked, and/or marginalized persons or groups

- Besser et al. (2006); Bini (2018); Gregory (2017); Scorsone & Powers (2005?)
- Apaliyah et al. (2012); Courtney-Pratt et al. (2018); Mannarini & Talò (2013)
- Besser et al. (2006); Bini (2018); Gregory (2017); Scorsone & Powers (2005?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Citation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addressing and reducing poverty and inequality</td>
<td>Murdoch (2012; 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with local authorities/officials</td>
<td>Christensen (2018); Mayo (2012); Mikelbank &amp; Chase (2016); Murdoch (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating capacity-building, network-building, self-reliance, resilience, and empowerment</td>
<td>Adams (2016); Besser et al. (2006); Diers &amp; Rivers (2014); Karamarkos et al. (2014); Haliru &amp; Samah (2018); Lachapelle (2011); MacGillivray (2019); Matthias (2012); Milne (2014); Murdoch (2015); Shevellar et al. (2014); Pace (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to disasters and emergencies</td>
<td>Pace (2017); Shevellar et al. (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building community wealth and leveraging social</td>
<td>Burkett (2015); Murdoch (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering sustainable economic development and local entrepreneurship</td>
<td>Besser et al. (2006); Bini (2018); Gregory (2017); Scorsone &amp; Powers (2005?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Working with rural communities and enhancing well-being through enhancing extension services

Abenir (2019); Dougherty & Eades (2017); Kamuzhanje (2017); Harman (2018); Loden & Svenson (2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Citation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding and addressing community needs and desires</td>
<td>Brinkerhoff &amp; Frideres (1997); Cilliers &amp; Cornelius (2019); Qiao et al. (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood engagement and community action</td>
<td>Barbieri et al. (2018); Holden (2018); Eby et al. (2012); Gill (1991); Zekeri (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local governance, leadership, and planning</td>
<td>Eby et al. (2012); Gill (1991); Lee &amp; Kim (2018); Zekeri (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability, livability, walkability, and satisfaction</td>
<td>Arku et al. (2008); Hodge (1997); Magee et al. (2012); Matarrita-Cascante (2010); Parkins et al. (2001); Rogers et al. (2011); Talmage et al. (2019); Sirgy et al. (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interactions, social capital, and psychological social capital</td>
<td>Fernando &amp; Cooley (2016); Headey et al. (1985); Hoskins &amp; Mascherini (2009); Recker (2013); Rogers, Halstead et al. (2011); Prati et al. (2016); Ross &amp; Searle (2019); Ross et al. (2019); Taló (2018); Taló et al. (2014); Wise &amp; Driskell (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community economic development</td>
<td>Hodge (1997); Phillips &amp; Stein (2013); Rahman et al. (2016); Veleva (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community health</td>
<td>Arku et al. (2008); Barbieri et al. (2018); Halvorsen et al. (2018); Fotso &amp; Kuate-Defo (2005); Stone et al. (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local culture, cultural meaning, and cultural activities</td>
<td>Fotso &amp; Kuate-Defo (2005); Grossi et al. (2011); Liu (2014; 2017); Lupoli &amp; Morse (2015); Weeranakin &amp; Promphakping (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing socioeconomic status and reducing poverty</td>
<td>Ferriss (2006); Hameed et al. (2017); Haq &amp; Ali (2014)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Towards Interdisciplinary Research and Practice
The overlaps between the three fields showcase areas where the CD, QoL, and CWB are already heavily linked (Figure 1). These areas are likely easy starting points for researchers and practitioners in the three fields to increase collaboration. There are other areas where overlaps between the fields are less pronounced. These are opportunities require much more development.

High QoL/CWB Attention
Low CD Attention
- QoL and CWB indicators
- Global comparisons of communities

Low QoL/CWB Attention
Low CD Attention
- Community economic development
- Poverty reduction and alleviation

High QoL/CWB Attention
High CD Attention
- Community satisfaction
- Social capital and psychological social capital
- Community health
- Sustainability and livability
- Governance and public services
- Entrepreneurship and economic development
- Community engagement and civic participation

Low QoL/CWB Attention
High CD Attention
- Community resilience
- Community empowerment
- Community partnerships
- Development frameworks
- Food systems and security
- Social inequality, power, and action

Figure 1. Opportunities for collaboration between fields based on overlapping attention paid

The largest overlap between the three fields regarded social capital. Social capital theory has been widely researched in CD (Emery & Flora, 2006; Hustedde, 2009). CD can help supply QoL and CWB researchers with tested frameworks to develop social capital and other forms of community capital (Emery & Flora, 2006). Furthermore, psychological social capital, specifically sense of community, is also being considered more in CD research (Perkins, Hughey, & Speere, 2002; Talmage, Peterson, & Knopf, 2017). Thus, CD practice can aim to improve not only social networks and interactions, but also psychological well-being.

The three fields have devoted substantial attention to evaluating and improving the structural and functional aspects of communities. Such structures and their functions include sustainability, livability, governance, public services, and economic resources. The structures and functions of communities have long been a part of CD theory (Hustedde, 2009). All three fields would benefit from enhancing CD theory and evaluating how CD practice can improve the structures and functions of communities. Specifically, CD appears to consider
community resilience and disaster response, but QoL and CWB do not look at these aspects using a CD lens. In general, CD research and practice appear to provide more locally minded approaches, while CWB and QoL can offer global comparisons of the structures and functions of communities. Finally, CD has given substantial attention to food security and food systems, while QoL and CWB have not often used a CD lens to examine food-related phenomena. CD research and practice has much to offer in this regard.

Across the high-level scan of the literature, community health was a popular research topic; however, community health was not directly connected to QoL and CWB in the CD practice publications. CD practice can benefit from drawing greater links between community health and other QoL and CWB indicators. This noted disconnect between community health and other indicators may come from disconnects between research and practice. Thus, CD, QoL, and CWB research can and must together better inform CD practice regarding community health.

Theories of power, justice, and conflict are readily found across the CD field (Hustedde, 2009). CD research and practice can offer QoL and CWB greater understandings of community organizing, social action, and community empowerment, which all relate back to social capital. CD still needs indicators of success regarding acts of self-expression and elite-challenging action, which have been termed emancipative social capital (Talmage, Peterson, & Knopf, 2017; Welzel, Inglehart, & Deutsch, 2005). CD has much to offer QoL and CWB regarding addressing power and conflict in communities. QoL and CWB can also help CD researchers and practitioners develop and use indicators to assess power dynamics.

Low attention overlaps between the three fields fell in two interrelated areas: (1) community economic development and (2) poverty reduction and alleviation. Community economic development research and practice engages local community members in analyzing and addressing their needs (Phillips & Pittman, 2009). Perhaps the low overlapping attention to community economic development comes from disconnects and conflations between the community development and economic development fields, which Phillips and Pittman (2009) have noted. Dialogue between all three professional associations may be helpful here. The low overlapping attention to poverty is even more intriguing to this author. This low attention may come from disconnects between practices to reduce poverty and research on poverty. If this disconnect is real, then all three fields have much more work to do to fulfill the many recent calls for greater application across the three fields where CWB, QoL, and CD are posited to greatly intersect (Cloutier et al., 2019; Coburn & Gormally, 2020; Lee et al., 2015).

Forging New Pathways Together
Collaborations and partnerships can be cultivated between CDS, IACD, and ISQOLS to further research and enhance practice across the three fields. The CDS Fellows program was a first step to integrate all three organizations and the three fields. At the 2018 ISQOLS conference in Hong Kong, the CDS Fellows project
identified overlaps between CDS and ISQOLS when comparing CDS’s Principles of Good Practice¹ and ISQOLS’s general objectives² (Phillips, Talmage, Maupin, Ludwigs, & Johnson, 2018). Both organizations work towards facilitating positive social change and community engagement. Both societies aim to enhance leaders and community networks in order to positively impact communities (Phillips et al., 2018). The CDS Fellows presentation highlighted commonalities found across CDS’s and ISQOLS’s principles; however, this article goes a step further by exploring different themes found across publications.

This article provides insights found across publications on QoL, CWB, and CD, but the voice of individual practitioners must be heard. As a starting point, extension professionals in the U.S. and abroad have signaled integrations of QoL and CWB in their CD work (Abenir, 2019; Kamuzhanje, 2017; Majee et al., 2014), which can be further highlighted. Specifically, readers should draw on Majee and colleagues’ (2014) reflections on their extension work and calls for greater inter-organizational and inter-professional collaboration. Majee and colleagues (2014) showcase how their extension work strives to improve community health and well-being through the leadership development and health promotion programs in Missouri, USA. Their article serves as an exemplar that bridges research and practice regarding QoL, CWB, and CD.

CD, CWB, and QoL perspectives can and must be further broadened by bridging research and practice. Both rural and urban must be explored, and highly local case studies to cross-country comparisons should be made. For example, Brennan and colleagues (2009) compare youth civic engagement between Florida and Ireland yielding insights for CWB, QoL, and CD work. Additionally, Harmon’s (2018) work in rural Andean communities brings forth indigenous understandings of well-being, challenging how well-being is defined in research and practice. All three fields benefit from challenging both research and practice.

Community Development Practice, as a journal, aims to enhance CD practice and highlight CDS’s Principles of Good Practice. The CDS principle: “Be open to using the full range of action strategies to work toward the long-term sustainability and well-being of the community” (CDS, 2019, Bullet 5) states clearly the important linkage of CD for CWB. This article shows that interdisciplinary research and practice collaborations between ISQOLS, CDS, and IACD are not only possible, but also necessary to enhance all three fields’ realizations of CD, QoL, and CWB. The fields are ripe with opportunities to be better together.

References

¹ For more, visit: https://www.comm-dev.org/about/principles-of-good-practice.
² For more, visit: https://isqols.org/about.


