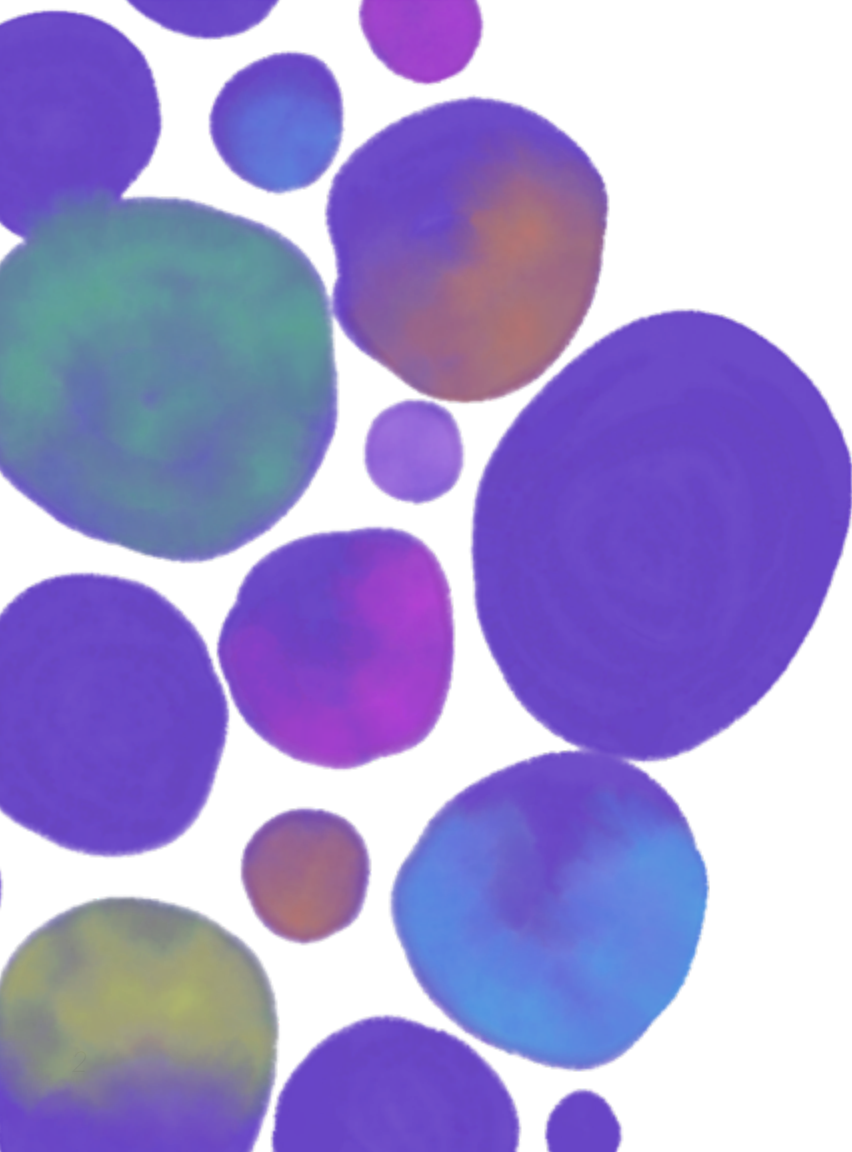


Episode #4

Boundary stories

PurposePhil
concept book





What you'll find here

- Introduction
- 1 Defining community / page 8
- 2 Understanding boundaries / page 20
- 3 Working with difference / page 30
- 4 Furthering participation / page 42
- 5 Artists reflections / page 50
- 6 Reflection questions / page 56



“ ...There remains something about [community] that is inherently mysterious, miraculous, unfathomable. Thus there is no adequate one-sentence definition of genuine community. Community is something more than the sum of its parts, its individual members. What is this “something more?” Even to begin to answer that, we enter a realm that is not so much abstract as almost mystical. It is a realm where words are never fully suitable and language itself falls short. ”



M. Scott
Peck

Way back in 5th century Mesopotamia, when Western-style philanthropy first emerged, there was this idea that giving away grain surpluses to local people in need could foster solidarity, preventing unrest and stabilizing power. Fast forward several centuries, to the early 1900s, and the birth of community foundations. Community foundations arose to responsively steward local resources to meet local needs over generations. Of course, who makes up a community has evolved over time.

In an increasingly plural context, with people not only of different ages and classes, but races, ethnicities, religions, genders, sexualities, abilities, ideologies and interests, this module explores what makes a community and what that means for community foundations. When is it their role to identify shared interests and reinforce solidarity? When is it their role to further minority interests and challenge power dynamics? Are both simultaneously possible?





1. Defining community

Community is another one of those words we often use, and seldom define. Every few years, community foundations across Canada run a survey called *Vital Signs* to measure the health of their local communities. Here's part of the introduction to Vancouver Foundation's 2019 *Vital Signs*.

“ At Vancouver Foundation, we take seriously our commitment to listening to, learning from, and collaborating with communities across BC. This report gives us some important insight to help guide our work moving forward. Most importantly, we note that people are holding back from community participation because they feel unwelcome or unsure of how they can contribute. We commit to using our voice to continue championing communities where we can all feel like we belong. ”

Vital Signs, 2019.

Which communities is Vancouver Foundation talking about? The term 'community' is not explained. The assumption is that all of us understand, more or less, what we mean by community and belonging. But, do we?



Which communities is Vancouver Foundation talking about?

According to rural sociologist George Hillery there are at least 94 different definitions of community! In the aptly titled article, 'What is Community?', community is likened to jello because it's rather hard to pin down.

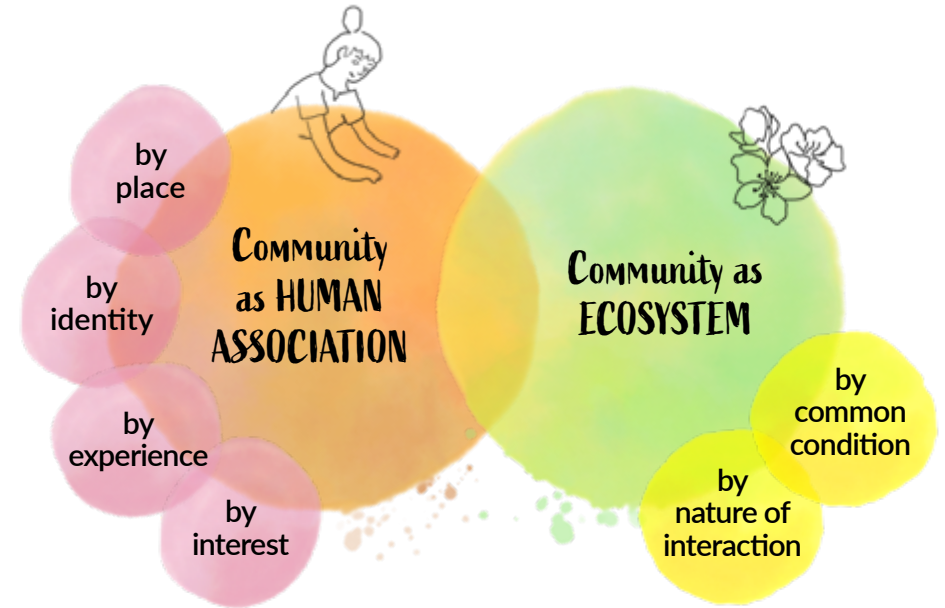
“Community is a concept with a messy history. It emerges ... as a product of the ideological conflict between tradition and modernity that took place in the 19th century. In the context created by the democratic political revolutions of France and North America and the process of industrialization, the concept of community was a way of praising the past in order to blame the present. Rather than an objective, analytic concept -- what community 'is' --, it became a normative concept -- what it 'should be.’”

- P. Diaz

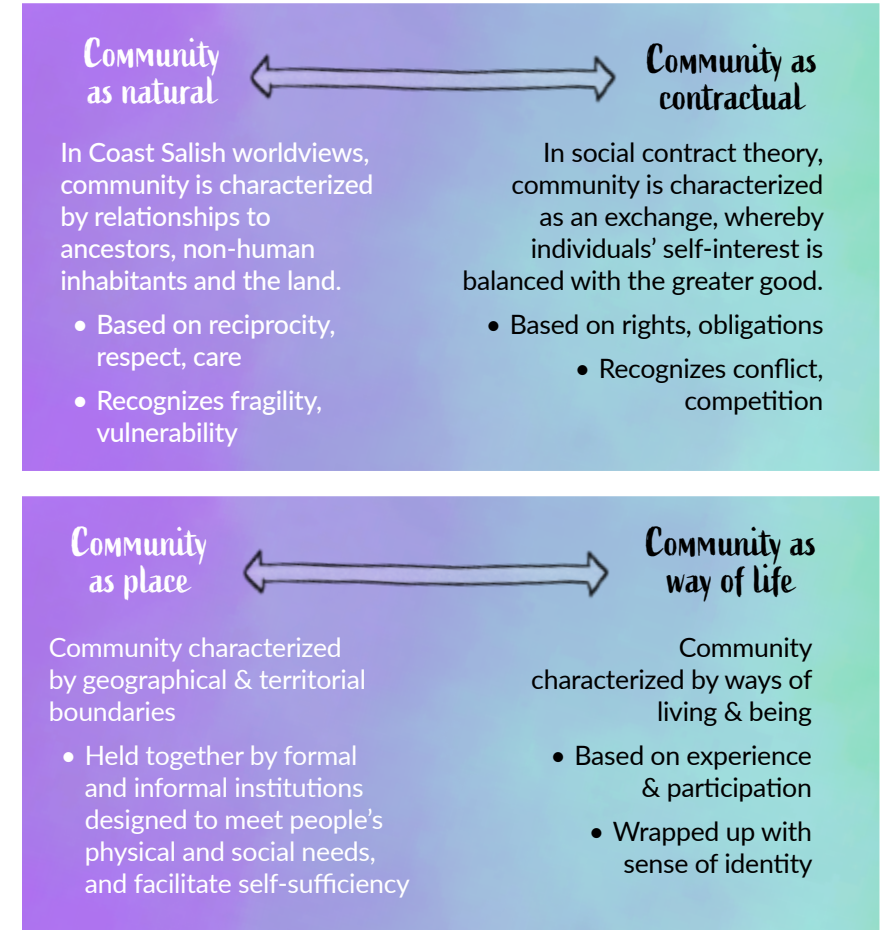
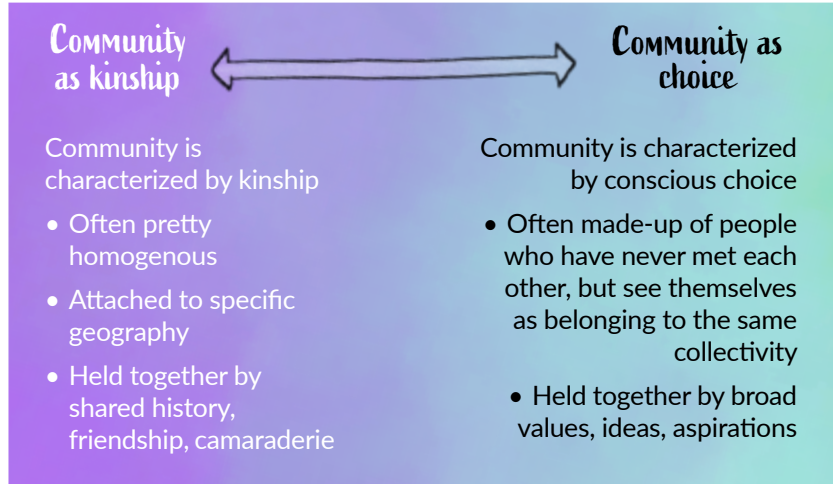
In other words, we often use the word 'community' nostalgically, to harken back to the 'good old days' when relations between people were governed by natural ties, familiarity, habit, and custom. Diaz calls this conception '*community as communion*' in contrast to '*community as commodity*' where friendship and loyalty are replaced by rules, contracts, exchanges, and competition. Both of these conceptions of community are based in human relationships, albeit distinct kinds.



An alternative conception, grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, anchors community in ecosystems. A community is more than a group of humans who share a space, an identity, or an interest. A community is an association of interacting plants and animals, defined by the nature of their interactions and/or by common conditions (Pierotti, 2010). From an ecosystem perspective, communities include humans and non-humans, and are more than the sum of their parts.



Digging deeper into these contrasting conceptions, we can pull out some of the tensions and dimensions which shape everyday experiences of community.



Most of us exist within multiple communities, and therefore encounter multiple dimensions at once. David Chavis and Kien Lee, in their *Stanford Social Innovation Review* article, use the metaphor of Russian Matryoshka dolls to highlight how we fit within nesting communities. A community foundation, then, is a misnomer. Community is not singular. Communities are plural.

When we are not explicit about what we mean by community, we cannot identify who is present versus missing, who holds power versus who is sidelined, and whose interests are assumed versus hidden. In other words, we cannot interrogate boundaries.





2. Understanding boundaries

“Figuratively, a boundary marks the limits of an activity or experience; in this meaning it is often modified by an adjective such as ‘religious’ or a noun such as ‘class’. As an extension of this meaning, a boundary is also an imaginary point that separates different qualities or ideas. In this sense it is often followed by the preposition ‘between’. If you say that something knows no boundaries, it has no real or imagined limits.”



Community, at least as a human association, implies a boundary: there is some sort of marker -- be it territorial or categorical (e.g gender, race) -- that separates one group from another, thereby engendering a sense of belonging. Indeed, belonging comes from a sense of likeness: “we” not “them.”

As real as boundaries feel, they are largely socially constructed. They offer a way to slice and dice reality so we can grasp and make meaning from it. Understanding how different people and cultures construe and perceive boundaries is a starting point for building bridges, sharing power, and deepening cross-community ties. This is the work that can enable us to live in the tension between communities of choice and communities of kinship.



As podcast guests Miu Yan, Handel Wright, and Ryane Nickens argue, we need a multiplicity of spaces.

We need spaces where our identities, lived experiences, and worldviews are understood and appreciated. And, we need to cross lines of difference to question boundaries and find points of connection. Otherwise, community becomes an isolating ghetto, too much defined by conflicts with other communities.

Indeed, so many of society's most wicked social problems are characterized by boundary disputes. Whether it's issues like child protection, addiction, or homelessness, boundaries between informal and formal community institutions, professional and cultural communities, the middle class and the poor, etc. keep patterns of marginalization in place.

So, where do community foundations fit into the mix? When and how do they support healthy boundaries or challenge unhealthy boundaries? For example, what's necessary for bridge-building initiatives like Vancouver Foundation's *On the Table* to succeed at boundary spanning? And where do they end up as islands or as bridges to nowhere?



For two scholars, embedded within distinct Indigenous cultures and geographies, navigating boundary disputes starts with reimagining boundaries and belonging. This perspective leads to a different question:

What would it look like for community foundations to intentionally (re)build our capacity to see each other in terms of our relationality, vulnerabilities and all?

A Coast Salish approach

“The cartographic practice of representing Indigenous territories as discrete, mutually exclusive units contrasts starkly with Indigenous discourse, which frames the notion of territory within a pervasive ideology of sharing. In the case of the Coast Salish in British Columbia, territorial relations are underwritten by a relational epistemology—a way of knowing the world through relationships. Can boundaries so seemingly permeable be thought of as “boundaries” at all?”



Brian
Thom



A Zulu approach

"The idea of belonging, who belongs who doesn't, this is a challenge that is ongoing... That idea that there are 'Others' who are not seen as belonging here. Even though in our own Indigenous philosophies, this idea of self and other really does not exist, and if you explore Zulu philosophy or Zulu ideas about identity, the idea that there are strangers, that there is... even the word "citizenship," "citizen," we don't have that word in my language, it does not exist, we don't have a word for "citizen." The word that we use instead of citizen is [Zulu word], which literally means one who has built an abode, who has built a house, who has built a place of residence."



Mvuselelo
Ngcoya



"So you are basically 'in' as long as you have declared that you reside here. It's not based on some natural or some legalistic notion that you belong here because you hold a book, a passport, or a document that declares that you belong here... That's what I always remind people when I meet in spaces where people are decrying the amount of people, the numbers of people who have "invaded" South Africa, as some people put it, that well, actually, I mean, they come here, because this is how we are supposed to treat them: welcome them because there is no Other, there is no foreign Other in our traditional ways of thinking.

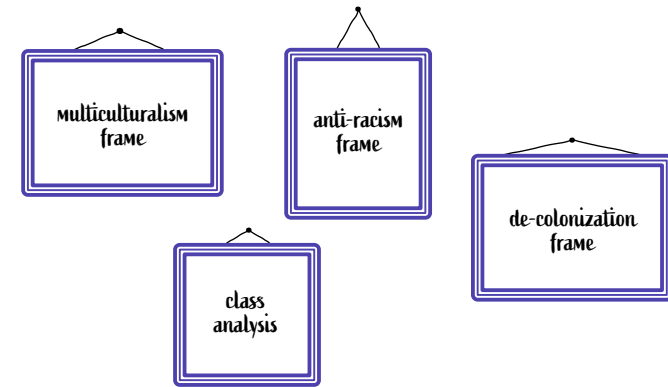
Sure, traditional ways of thinking are never really fully fixed, so they change. But it's important to remind people that actually, you know, historically, this is how we've always behaved. **The idea of strangers, the idea of outsiders, we don't have these...** People are judged by their actions and by their intentions: how they choose to categorize themselves. And if they show that they belong, by establishing a residence in a place, therefore they are part of the community. So we have that, I would say that that's one of the most difficult things at this present moment: the idea of outsiders."



3. Working with difference

It's all too easy to accept binaries, and view boundaries as *either* fixed or permeable rather than as *both* fixed *and* permeable. While many of us may aspire to inhabit societies grounded in fluid relationality, we have inherited a society in which boundaries bluntly separate and segregate, with profound consequences. **What are some other ways to see and attend to differences?**

Podcast guest and Professor Handel Kashope Wright, who is the Senior Advisor to the President of the University of British Columbia on Anti-Racism and Inclusive Excellence, says that the frame through which we work with difference matters. If we take diversity as the starting point of many Western communities -- including within minority communities -- then the way we contextualize diversity shifts how we understand the problem of inequality and its solutions.



While multiculturalism is the quintessential Canadian frame, Professor Wright argues that it is inherently limiting, casting inequality as a byproduct of individual circumstance, which institutions like philanthropy address through targeted granting. In this way, multiculturalism and meritocracy are intertwined. Regardless of your background, if you get educated and work hard, you will be tolerated and fare well.



Handel
Kashope Wright



Multiculturalism

"Multiculturalism is a dominant philosophical way of thinking about diversity. And it's the common shorthand that we use with one another, even as laypeople, but for thinking about our coexistence in society. So we're very proud of the fact that [Canada] is the first nation to establish official multiculturalism... It's our philosophy and our claim to tolerance of difference and celebration of ethno-racial and many other forms of diversity. So what multiculturalism means is that Canada is characterized by tolerance, by equality, by meritocracy, etc. So that problems such as intolerance and discrimination, or poverty or other forms of inequality are an aberration. They're due to ignorance or due to unfortunate circumstances. Now with such a conception, philanthropy can contribute to strengthen the positive qualities of multiculturalism and also contribute to ameliorate the problems that are faced by the unfortunate in community and society ...Like things are okay in general, and you just help those who might need some help."

- Handel Kashope Wright

Professor Wright contrasts multiculturalism with anti-racism and decolonization, which start from the premise that neither merit or tolerance is enough to compensate for the uneven field on which people from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds live, work, play and love one another. Based on each of these distinct frames, community institutions are responsible for centering BIPOC (anti-racism) and Indigenous experiences (decolonization), and defining problems and solutions in reference to a longer arc of history.



Anti-racism

"Anti-racism is a stronger deviation from national multiculturalism. The proponents of anti-racism are people who are frustrated with the apparent failure of dominant -- the liberal celebratory multiculturalism -- to take seriously the fact that Canada has a perennial problem of racism, that rather than a level playing field or a flat mosaic of cultures, Canada is actually characterized by a hierarchy of races and cultures, with the English and the French at the top, and other ethnic whites below them, and other People of Colour below those, and maybe Indigenous people probably at the very bottom. So Canada is a vertical mosaic, as one of the texts says, built on a foundation of racist exclusion of racialized others, and the nation state still practices systemic racism against Indigenous, Black and People of Colour..."

So to undertake philanthropy within an anti-racism framework, to my mind, is to work consciously with race and especially minoritized racial groups and to place the task of addressing Indigenous and visible minority or racialized groups and vulnerable communities as a priority to contribute to community groups from and working to address racism and related problems that make for intersectional racism; that is the inextricable combination of racism, sexism, xenophobia, religious intolerance, all of those kinds of things that sometimes people simply refer to as Islamophobia, for example, that is faced by Muslim women who wear the hijab."

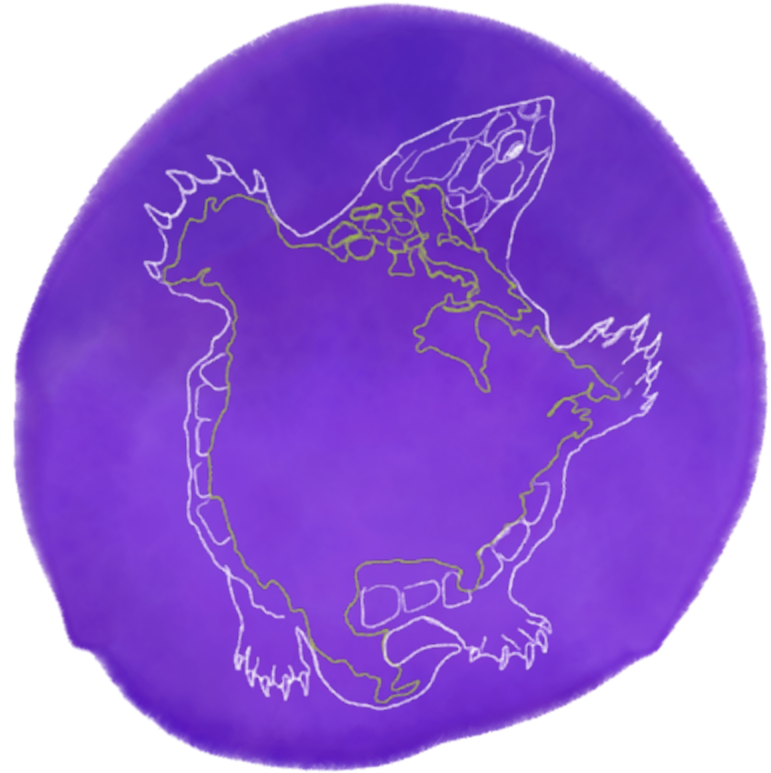
- Handel Kashope Wright

De-colonization

"To work with an Indigenous and decolonial frame is to turn away from thinking of Canada's origins in French and English arrival that, added to the existing Indigenous Peoples, to make for three founding nations. Rather, the invitation is to think of Canada as Turtle Island, a land to which Indigenous people have always belonged. And to think of English and French as colonizers, to think of the coming of Europeans to Turtle Island as an invasion, and to think of the continued settlement of non-Indigenous peoples in general and whatever laws, institutions and policies they have developed as extensions of colonization. Rather than think of the largesse of Canada in its tolerance and welcoming of immigrants, we need to think of this as deeply ironic, deeply an extension of colonization rather like invading someone's home and then inviting others to join you in squatting there, right?"

To undertake philanthropy within this frame, is to place Indigenous peoples - First Nations, Inuit and Métis - to place them first. It is to rethink the organization and its working from a new perspective, from an Indigenous perspective. It is to engage, support, and collaborate with Indigenous people in all the work, to make it about them, or to take their perspectives and ways of knowing and doing into account in how the work is done and how it addresses the issues of all groups."

- Handel Kashope Wright



Finally, Professor Wright offers class as a forgotten and out-of-favour frame. This frame rests in social hierarchy, and unequal access to material resources, power, and influence. Community institutions steeped in a class analysis would look at how society itself is organized and monetized, and explicitly address the flow of dollars, no matter how uncomfortable or seemingly crass.



Class Analysis

"A lot of [philanthropic work] is about class division, and some of it is uncomfortable which might be part of why people don't do the work. Which is to say, you're mostly talking about relatively rich people trying to help relatively poor people, right? So if we don't talk about our class situation, we don't talk about people who are doing this work being upper middle class or rich, and we don't talk about the groups that we're helping being working class or even poor, then then we feel better about the conversation. But we're lacking ...or, we take it for granted and, and as something that is impolite to talk about. When in fact, this is the nitty gritty of the work."

- Handel Kashope Wright

Beyond class, anti-racism, decolonization, and multiculturalism: **What other frames could community institutions look through to name and work with difference?**



4. Furthering participation

How community institutions define community, draw boundaries, and frame difference determines with whom they interact, engage, and share power.

Nina Simon, author of *The Participatory Museum*, says that museums are analogous to community foundations. Both are historically oriented around problematic objects - be they artifacts (often stolen) or money (often exploitative) -- and both have a remit to preserve resources in order to add value to local communities over the long-term.

Simon argues that the only credible way for community institutions to meet their remit, over time, is to become a participatory institution. By that she means,

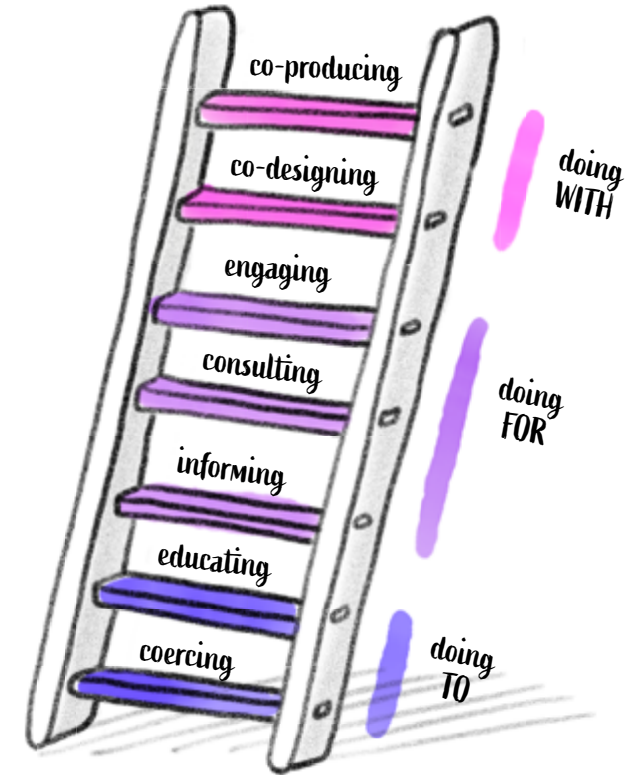


"If we're building community institutions, communities change, and therefore, the only way to sort of future proof an institution that purports to serve a changing community is to always be open to and designing opportunities for that community to change the institution."

There's a big difference between an institution servicing a vaguely defined community by opening its doors and an institution willing to be changed by specifically defined communities by going outside its doors and de-centering itself.



While community institutions typically have boards and advisory committees made-up of community members that doesn't inherently make them participatory. To be participatory is to commit to 'doing with' clearly named communities, not 'doing for' and 'doing to' a general community. This is what the New Economics Foundation's co-production ladder communicates.



Archon Fung's democracy cube offers another way to break down the elements of participation. The three axes reflect the three choices institutions face:

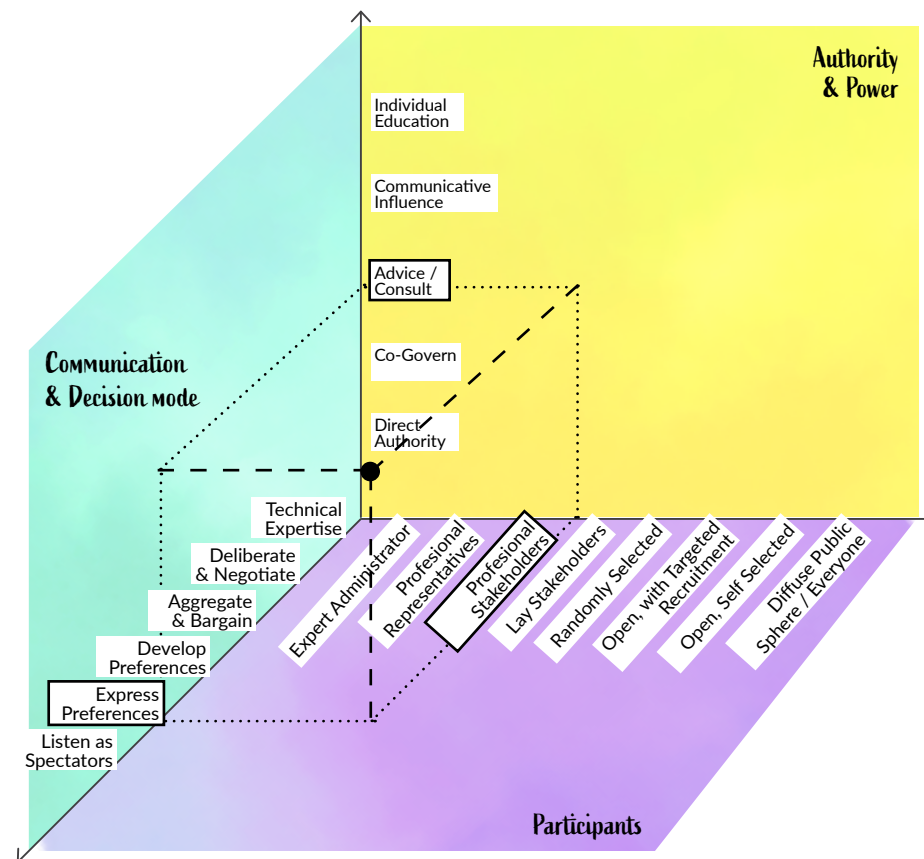
1. **Participants** - who to invite to participate
2. **Influence** - what authority or influence participants will have
3. **Communication & decision mode** - how participants will communicate and make decisions

For example, Vancouver Foundation's community advisory committees typically draw on the 'professional stakeholder' class on axis one; advising & consulting on axis two; and expressing/developing preferences on axis three.

The absence of mechanisms for engaging the 'diffuse' public sphere -- i.e everyday folks -- and giving them the authority to deliberately make, and be accountable, for decisions -- keeps institutions, more or less, as they are. Not changing, Simon says, will eventually make community institutions irrelevant and obsolete.

Archon Fung's democracy cube

Community advisory committees example





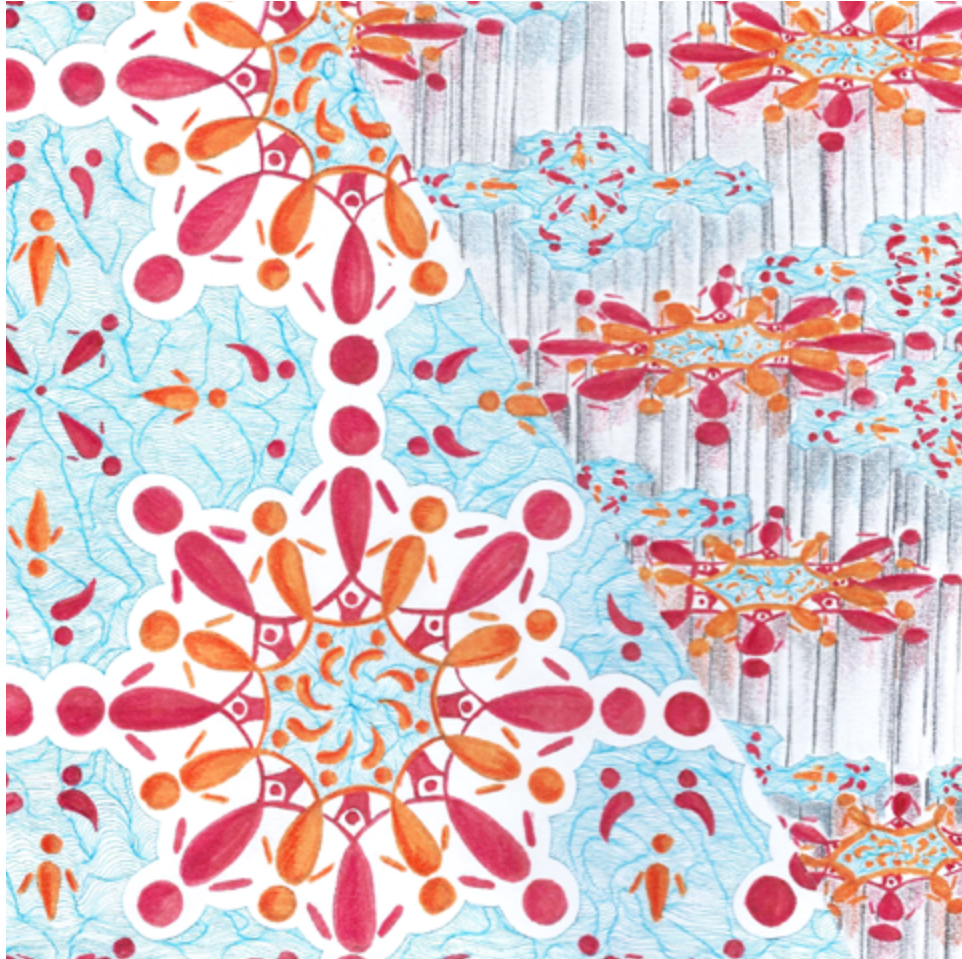
5. Artists' reflections



Episode #4: Boundary stories

Episode cover by Randall Bear Barnettson

The main theme that stood out to me was community. It kept jumping off the page at me. In my Indigenous community each clan helps each other during ceremonies. Other clans will take roles assisting the clan who is hosting. The system of reciprocity is the most important thing in our community. So we show up for each other, knowing that when we need help, other will help us. Just as we helped them. So I chose to depict a wolf pack to exemplify this connection and cyclical reciprocity.



Episode #4: Boundary stories

Complementary piece by Rawan Hassan

This artwork responds to the questions of what is community and what is the role of hierarchy in today's context? By playing with perspective, the artwork is composed of two opposing sides, illustrating the tension within Canada's perceived identity as a mosaic. On the left side of the artwork, displays the organic nature of what community could be, along with the multicultural mosaic Canada claims itself to be. While the right side of the artwork displays the reality that though there is community, hierarchy still plays a dominating role. As reflected from Professor Handel Wright's words, "Canada is actually...a hierarchy of race and cultures... [with] people of colour below...Canada is a vertical mosaic". The illustration of the two perspectives showcases the ongoing tension of what Canada views itself to be, versus the harsh reality that many communities are still marginalised.

The background of the slide is composed of numerous overlapping circles in various shades of yellow and orange, creating a vibrant, abstract pattern. A large, semi-transparent orange circle is positioned on the right side, serving as a backdrop for the title text.

6. Reflection



REFLECTIONS Looking Inside

Experiences & Observations

1. What are your own inclinations when it comes to the frames you actively apply to philanthropy (multiculturalism, interculturalism, anti-racism, decolonialism, class consciousness), or have an interest in exploring? Where do you feel the compatibility or incompatibility of frames in your work? What barriers do you experience to further exploring these frames?



Reactions & Impressions

2. Where do you feel opposition to different frames? What's at the root of that reaction? Resentment, fear, cynicism, or another emotion? Try the '5 whys' (asking 'why' of your initial response until you get to a deeper response, x5).

Questions & Hunches to Test

3. Imagine VF whole-heartedly adopted a different dominant frame. What is one thing you would start doing and one thing you would stop doing if that were true?



REFLECTIONS Looking Outside

Experiences & Observations

4. Which frames -- multiculturalism, interculturalism, anti-racism, colonialism, class consciousness -- critical or celebratory, do you see at work in Vancouver Foundation? What is the dominant frame? What other inclinations towards other frames do you see? Is the dominant frame clear, or is it a 'bit of a mishmash?'

Reactions & Impressions

5. Handel Kashope Wright talks about his experience with UBC as an institution that is on a growth journey in its relationship to Indigenous community, and questions whether any institution is really up for a decolonial approach. What do you observe about Vancouver Foundation's work in this area?

- Do you see a difference between frameworks animating specific programmatic initiatives vs. the organization as a whole?
- What growth have you seen? What does VF stop short of? Where do you see the best opportunities for growth?

Questions & Hunches to Test

6. How would philanthropy look different, as a sector, if all foundations adopted a decolonial or radically participatory frame? What 'problems' that take up space today would no longer be as important? What new challenges would take their place?

Boundary stories / PurposePhil

Concept Book / Episode #4



Produced in partnership between:

vancouver
foundation

