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Assessing Restorative Community Development Frameworks—A Meso-Level and Micro-Level Integrated Approach

Midas Hampton [1,*], Sabine O'Hara [2] and Elizabeth Gearin [2]

1   Strategic Spartanburg, Inc., Spartanburg, SC 29302, USA
2   College of Agriculture, Urban Sustainability and Environmental Sciences (CAUSES), University of the District of Columbia, Washington, DC 20008, USA
*   Correspondence: midashampton@strategicspartanburg.org; Tel.: +1-864-529-9410

Abstract: This study critically examines existing frameworks aimed at establishing restorative practices in community development by conducting a comparative analysis of a meso-level development framework called the Five Pillars of Development and a micro-level framework implemented by a grassroots initiative. Both frameworks were implemented in Washington, DC, and both seek to address the enduring negative externalities disinvested communities face and suggest the need for restorative practices in community development. Restorative development practices trace their roots to the field of restorative economics, which is a subfield of sustainable development. It argues that sustainability must also address the sins of the past and restore systems and systems components that have been negatively impacted by past development practices. This study aims to discern the adaptability of the more broadly applicable meso-level Five Pillars framework in capturing nuanced micro-level frameworks like the one devised by the grassroots organization in Ward 8. By identifying potential gaps, this study proposes strategies to enhance the utility of the more transferable meso-level framework, particularly for communities lacking resources to formulate their own micro-level framework. This study, therefore, contributes valuable insights and recommendations for bridging potential disparities between the meso-level and micro-level frameworks, as demonstrated in the Ward 8 case. The overarching objective is to enrich the community development field by presenting a restorative framework that refines existing meso-level approaches and facilitates opportunities for micro-level applications.

Keywords: restorative community development; stakeholder engagement; comparative analysis; disinvested communities; meso-level approach

1. Introduction

Disinvestment refers to the systematic withdrawal of resources from certain communities, perpetuating inequalities and hindering their development. The persistent existence of disinvested communities reflects a deficiency in operational practices within community development that prevent communities from achieving sustainable development outcomes. Restorative approaches acknowledge that a focus on sustainable development outcomes within current and future development practices may be insufficient. Instead, sustainable development practices must also encompass interventions that address historical damage to both ecosystems and communities. Disinvestment, a practice which has perpetrated both socially and environmentally unsustainable development outcomes, has historically affected communities of color and low-income communities disproportionately, perpetuating racial and class disparities in wealth, education, housing, and healthcare. Research by Rothstein [1] and Hyra [2] highlights how race discrimination was systematically perpetuated through practices like redlining, discriminatory lending, and urban renewal policies, which have contributed to the creation and perpetuation of disinvested communities across the US, including in the nation's capital, Washington, DC. The city is administratively organized into eight wards, with Ward 8 being Washington, DC's most disinvested community.

Disinvested communities face limited economic opportunities, high unemployment rates, and restricted access to capital, hindering their economic growth and social mobility. The resulting cycle of poverty exacerbates inequalities and constrains residents' ability to thrive [3]. Disinvestment in education leads to dilapidated school infrastructure, inadequate resources, and limited educational opportunities, perpetuating a cycle of educational disadvantage. Studies have documented how students in disinvested communities face persistent opportunity gaps and reduced prospects for academic success [4]. Similarly, disinvested communities often experience limited access to healthcare services, resulting in higher rates of chronic diseases, lower life expectancy, and poorer health outcomes. Inadequate resource allocation and infrastructure have a significant impact on health disparities within these communities [5,6].

Structural racism, entrenched within institutions and policies, perpetuates disinvestment in predominantly black, brown, and low-income communities. Restorative practices require addressing structural racism through policy reforms, equitable resource allocation, and community-led initiatives. In restorative work, it is necessary to tackle structural racism to address the root causes of disinvestment [7,8]. Restorative approaches in community development involve acknowledging historical injustices, empowering communities, and fostering participatory decision-making. Examples include community land trusts, cooperatives, and equitable urban planning [9]. Scholars like Maguire and Cartwright [10] provide insights into the implementation and effectiveness of such restorative practices.

Our study aims to discern the adaptability of the more broadly applicable meso-level framework called the Five Pillars of Economic Development in capturing nuanced micro-level frameworks, such as the one devised by a grassroots organization in one of Washington, DC's jurisdictions, namely Ward 8. The persistence of disinvested communities, like Ward 8, underscores the lack of generalizable restorative practices in community development that also take case-level findings into account. Our study therefore seeks to address two research gaps. First, we seek to contribute a decidedly social systems approach to the field of restorative development practices, which has focused largely on the restoration of environmental context systems. Secondly, we seek to explore the possibility of integrating meso- and micro-level frameworks of development to fill a gap in the existing research which leaves development practitioners with either adopting standard macro-level approaches that operate from a one-size-fits-all perspective that excludes effective community input or micro-level case study approaches which have limited transferability to other communities. Addressing historical disparities and promoting equitable and sustainable outcomes necessitates integrating restorative approaches that function at a range of levels and encompass community empowerment, resource redistribution, and policy reforms. By adopting restorative practices in community development, policymakers and practitioners can strive for transformative change and create more inclusive and just communities. However, this is not a simple task, especially since disinvested communities often lack the resources to develop their own micro-level framework for identifying and adopting restorative practices [6].

1.1. Community Development Frameworks

As conceptual models, community development frameworks provide a structured approach to planning, implementing, and evaluating community development initiatives. They, therefore, seek to guide community development practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to identify community needs, design interventions, and evaluate outcomes. Community development frameworks are important tools for promoting community well-being, social change, and social and environmental sustainability. By providing a structured approach, these frameworks can guide community development practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to achieve a positive impact. However, each framework has its strengths and limitations, and the choice of framework will depend on the specific needs and context of the studied community.

Community development frameworks typically involve a set of key components, which include a needs assessment (a systematic process of identifying community needs, assets, and resources); goal-setting (developing clear and achievable goals and objectives based on the needs assessment); planning and implementation (designing and implementing interventions to achieve the goals and objectives, which may involve a range of strategies such as community organizing, advocacy, and service provision); and monitoring and evaluation (tracking and assessing the progress and impact of the interventions, using indicators and data) [11].

The Community Development Corporation (CDC) model emerged as a dominant framework, which focused on building community-based organizations to address the root causes of poverty and inequality [12]. However, many other frameworks exist, which differ in their approach, focus, level of engagement with the community, and normative aims. Some common types include the following:

- Asset-based community development (ABCD): This framework emphasizes the importance of identifying and leveraging community assets and resources to promote community well-being rather than focusing solely on needs and deficits [13].
- Participatory community development: This framework prioritizes active community participation and engagement in all stages of the development process, to ensure that interventions are relevant, effective, and sustainable [14].
- Sustainable community development: This framework seeks to balance economic, social, and environmental sustainability by promoting strategies that meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [15].
- Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA): SLA is a framework that aims to understand the interdependent relationships between the environment, economic activities, and social relationships in a community. The framework emphasizes the importance of sustainable development and improving the livelihoods of community members [16].
- Community Capitals Framework (CCF): CCF is a comprehensive framework that identifies seven different forms of capital that exist within a community, including human, social, cultural, political, natural, financial, and built capital. The framework aims to understand the interactions between these different forms of capital and how they contribute to community development [17].

1.2. Sustainability through Restorative Community Development

Restorative economics emerged in the late 1990s as a subfield of sustainable development that seeks to transform the traditional economic model by prioritizing the restoration and regeneration of natural and social systems. Drawing inspiration from ecological principles, restorative economics aims to create a more resilient and equitable society. This approach challenges the conventional linear economic model, which often depletes resources and exacerbates social inequalities [18]. By contrast, restorative economics promotes regenerative practices that sustain and improve the well-being of ecosystems and human communities.

The emphasis on a restorative economy is not merely theoretical; numerous real-world applications, such as sustainable agriculture, circular economy initiatives, and social impact investing, provide evidence of restorative economics' feasibility and potential benefits [19]. The field, therefore, offers a promising path toward a more sustainable and resilient future in community development.

1.3. Meso-Level vs. Micro-Level Approach

The Five Pillars Model [20,21] and the W8CED [22] framework are multidisciplinary development frameworks aiming to empower and mobilize individuals, groups, and organizations to take collective action towards positive social change. At their core, both community development approaches seek to improve the quality of life of individuals and communities by addressing issues related to poverty, inequality, social exclusion, and

marginalization. Both frameworks are especially consistent with restorative economics applications since they both acknowledge the need to address the negative repercussions of past development practices rather than focusing solely on development practices that are present-day- or future-oriented.

Ward 8 has been exposed to numerous micro-level and macro-level community development strategies. While the micro-level approaches focus on individual empowerment and localized initiatives, macro-level approaches emphasize systemic change and policy interventions. Micro-level frameworks tend to prioritize direct community engagement with individuals and small groups. Such approaches often rely on grassroots initiatives, participatory processes, and capacity-building efforts at the local level [23]. Micro-level interventions can also increase social cohesion, self-efficacy, and community resilience by empowering individuals to address their needs and fostering a sense of ownership and agency [24].

In contrast, macro-level frameworks seek to address systemic issues and structural inequalities that hinder community progress. These approaches emphasize policy changes, resource allocation, and collaboration with government bodies and other influential stakeholders to drive large-scale impact [25]. Macro-level interventions can transform communities by addressing broader social determinants of well-being, such as housing affordability, educational opportunities, and healthcare access [26]. By promoting policy changes and systemic reforms, macro-level strategies can create an enabling environment that supports sustainable community development.

Though micro- and macro-level approaches to community development have distinct merits, it is also necessary to acknowledge their limitations. Despite their effectiveness in promoting individual empowerment and local change, micro-level interventions often struggle to scale up and achieve sustainable outcomes at a broader level [24]. On the other hand, macro-level strategies, while addressing systemic issues, may overlook local communities' diverse needs and aspirations due to their top–down nature [25]. These limitations highlight the importance of integrating micro- and macro-perspectives into a meso-level approach to foster holistic community development toward restorative economics.

Meso-level approaches seek to position themselves between micro- and macro-level frameworks. Therefore, they must offer the flexibility to capture the community specifics of micro-level frameworks while offering the systems-level transferability of a macro-level framework [26]. The Five Pillars framework is stationed at the meso-level of analysis and was developed to accommodate both local specificity and transferability. The question, however, is whether the framework lives up to its aspirations and can sufficiently accommodate both macro-level and micro-level scales to address the multilayered dimensions of transformative change.

2. Methods

This study adopted a qualitative approach to conduct a comparative analysis between the meso-level Five Pillars and the micro-level Ward 8 community development frameworks. Our data collection centered on an in-depth review of both frameworks, their structure, indicators, and overall implications. The comparative analysis process included selecting a frame of reference, a comparison rationale, similarities and differences, and a final argument. The chosen analysis structure facilitates a systematic examination of both frameworks, allowing for a nuanced understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. The rationale for comparison is driven by the need to assess the adaptability of the meso-level framework in accommodating the micro-level framework developed by a grassroots organization, namely the Ward 8 Community Economic Development Plan (W8CED).

The Five Pillars framework (see Figure 1) is a community-based approach that uses five broad domains of indicators and argues that these categories form a systemic basis for sustainable economic development success. They are health, education, social and cultural amenities, environment quality and recreation, and IT and transportation access. In addition, the model engages local stakeholders in the planning, implementation, and

coordination process around a qualitative storytelling workshop that engages community members in envisioning the future with respect to the five domains [20,21].
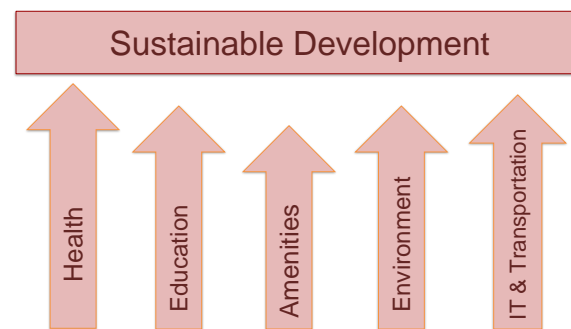

Figure 1. The Five Pillars approach to development. Source: [20,21].

The W8CED framework is a community-led approach that is hyperlocal and engages residents in six key areas of community need. They are economic justice; education, workforce development, and employment; environmental justice; family support; health, wellness, and safety; and housing justice. The approach also used a local survey to query community members about the six identified community needs to broaden participation.

The analysis extends to a gap assessment, where the limitations of each framework are elucidated based on qualitative findings. This critical evaluation identifies potential gaps and challenges that may hinder the seamless integration of the meso-level framework with micro-level applications. The resulting insights contribute to the overall field of study and the refinement of the meso-level framework, ensuring that it remains adaptable to unique micro-level characteristics while maintaining transferability across diverse community contexts.

Regarding ethical considerations, we secured permission to utilize both frameworks and maintained strict confidentiality throughout the analysis to protect the reputational risk of participants. We intend to communicate our findings through academic channels and community forums to foster broader conversations about the effectiveness of restorative development practices and improve their transferability across different locations and scales. Our study also acknowledges limitations in scope and resources.

3. Results

While both the meso-level Five Pillars and the micro-level W8CED frameworks aim to promote community development, they differ in terms of scale, the level of stakeholder involvement, planning and coordination, and selected areas of need and indicators to assess both status and progress in the selected areas. The Five Pillars framework involves a broader range of stakeholders and utilizes publicly available quantitative data to define its key development focus areas. This broader range of stakeholders results in an expansive base of local voices and perspectives. Additionally, firmly rooting key focus areas form the pillars around which quantitative data are collected. The framework thus incorporates metrics that allow for comparability across time and jurisdictions. Both the expansive stakeholder base and the mooring in regional metrics promote connections to systemic policy issues that are often missing in parochial micro-level approaches and yet are critical to sustainability outcomes.

Both models reflect the historical tenets of the economic development debate and related attempts to measure it. The roots of community development frameworks can be traced back to the early 20th century when social reformers and community organizers began to develop strategies to address the social and economic challenges facing marginalized communities. In the United States, the community development movement emerged as a response to the Great Depression and the New Deal, which aimed to stimulate economic recovery and social welfare through public investment in housing, education, and health

care [27]. In the post-war period, community development frameworks gained momentum as a strategy for promoting social equity and citizen participation.

Despite the potential benefits of community development frameworks, there are several challenges and limitations that can hinder their effectiveness. Macro-level community development frameworks can result in generalizations that fail to take specific community details into account. As a result, they may fail to create ownership of the development process, leading to a lack of buy-in, motivation, and sustainability [28]. Micro-level community development frameworks may overlook the power dynamics and structural inequalities that underpin community issues, which can perpetuate marginalization and exclusion [29,30]. Many communities also lack the resources, capacity, and expertise needed to effectively implement and sustain community development initiatives [31]. In addition, hyperlocal community development efforts are most valuable when amplified and given a platform to be heard and acted upon. Thus, there is a need for a balance between both levels of abstraction. The meso-level approach seeks to strike this challenging balance but is not without its own limitations.

3.1. The Meso-Level Approach: The Five Pillars Framework

The Five Pillars Model of economic development places a strong emphasis on community involvement as the foundational element for sustainable development progress. The framework encompasses five key pillars: education, health, environmental quality and recreation, social and cultural amenities, and information and transportation access. The reason for focusing consistently on these five pillars is to create transferability across communities and thus improve actionable information about successful development frameworks. By identifying indicators within each of the five broad categories and incorporating a community-based storytelling process, the framework allows for local specificity that brings the voices of local community members to the fore. The summary of the vision created by two neighborhoods in Wards 7 and 8 of Washington, DC, illustrates the local community vision, while the five categories offer consistency.

3.1.1. Education

Education takes center stage as a top priority for the community, extending beyond the traditional K-12 schooling system. The vision embraces a comprehensive, high-quality education system that is accessible to residents of all ages, from preschool to post-retirement. In its vision, the community boasts a variety of educational institutions, from pre-K to 12th grade, including specialized schools such as Montessori and bilingual immersion schools. Furthermore, vocational training programs cater to the needs of the green economy, offering certifications in fields like HVAC, IT, and alternative energy.

3.1.2. Health and Well-Being

Community health and well-being are foundational to the community vision of the future. The community story, however, shifts from a focus on treatment to a strong emphasis on prevention. In their visions, community stakeholders saw a network of easily accessible community health clinics, urgent care facilities, and wellness centers the story envisions. These services encompass mental health support, substance abuse counseling, prenatal care, child wellness programs, and geriatric care. Promoting community gardens, which encourage the consumption of fresh produce, also plays an important role, especially in reducing the prevalence of diabetes, obesity, and other nutrition-related illnesses. These initiatives, in conjunction with accessible fitness facilities, are expected to have a significant positive impact on public health.

3.1.3. Environmental Quality and Recreation

Environmental health is given high priority in the community story, with extensive efforts to improve water, air, and soil quality. Initiatives include water conservation measures, the implementation of green roofs, and the use of Living Machine water filtration

plants. Efforts to replace coal-burning power plants with neighborhood-scale renewable energy sources are envisioned as a source for improved air quality. These sustainable technologies not only enhance environmental conditions but also create local employment opportunities. Additionally, establishing a network of parks and trails enhances the quality of life for residents while mitigating environmental risks.

3.1.4. Social and Cultural Amenities

The community's cultural richness is celebrated through two museums and food venues emphasizing culturally diverse cuisines. The museums actively serve as learning hubs, connecting history to modern innovation and promoting entrepreneurship and business workshops. They also serve as intentional bridges connecting the neighborhoods' proud past with contemporary green technology.

3.1.5. Information and Transportation Accessibility

The stories conceive that each neighborhood embraced information technology and imagined residents with access to essential resources. In a future where cell phones have evolved into versatile connectivity devices, they can offer access to libraries, energy and water data, and educational resources. Local training sessions cover various technology-related topics, fostering a tech-savvy community. A robust public transportation system enhances accessibility within the community and drives economic activity between neighborhoods and the tourism-heavy downtown area.

The community-driven vision presented here highlights the transformative journey of two neighborhoods in Wards 7 and 8. The framework combines a quantitative methodology of collecting and analyzing proactive indicators in five key domains with a qualitative, storytelling methodology structured around the same five categories. By prioritizing education, health, environmental quality, culture, and information access, these neighborhoods have been introduced to a potential pathway for cultivating a sustainable and thriving community that serves as a model beyond the nation's capital.

3.2. Power and Limitations of Five Pillars Model: Meso-Level Community Development

The Five Pillars approach respects local specificity (the story) while creating transferrable solutions across varied communities (the Five Pillars). The approach can, therefore, serve as a transferable blueprint for achieving sustainable development outcomes. To ensure it sufficiently reflects the priorities of local stakeholders, the local specificity, or story, changes with geography, time, and participants.

The Five Pillars Model approach encompasses a range of interventions and strategies that operate at the intermediary level, situated between macro- and micro-perspectives. It, therefore, recognizes the significance of collective action, social networks, and community-based organizations as catalysts for fostering positive change. Meso-level interventions empower communities by creating platforms for active participation, facilitating resource mobilization, and fostering social capital [32]. By capitalizing on local strengths, building partnerships, and leveraging existing community assets, meso-level approaches like the Five Pillars Model enable communities to collectively address their unique challenges, leading to sustainable and equitable development outcomes [33].

Furthermore, the Five Pillars Model promotes a bottom–up approach to community development, emphasizing local ownership, inclusivity, and participatory decision-making. The 'Five Pillars' provide a framework or outline; the 'stories' provide the narrative and confirm priorities. The approach thus aligns with the principles of asset-based community development (ABCD), which emphasizes identifying and utilizing community assets to drive transformative change [15]. By recognizing and mobilizing existing community resources and capacities, meso-level interventions empower individuals and organizations to take charge of their own development processes. This bottom–up orientation fosters community resilience, self-reliance, and sustainable outcomes that resonate with the needs and aspirations of the community members [21,34].

While the Five Pillars Model offers promising avenues for community development, they are not without their limitations. One notable challenge lies in the potential to perpetuate existing power imbalances within communities. Despite the emphasis on inclusivity, certain voices and marginalized groups may remain unheard or underrepresented, hampering the effectiveness and fairness of the intervention [31,35]. Moreover, the sustainability of meso-level initiatives relies heavily on the capacity of community organizations to navigate complex administrative procedures, secure funding, and sustain collaborative partnerships [36]. Insufficient resources, limited organizational capacities, and competing priorities can undermine the success of meso-level strategies, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support and capacity-building initiatives [37]. While these limitations of a meso-level approach like the Five Pillars Model must be acknowledged, the model is also potentially well situated to provide a forum for micro-level approaches.

3.3. The Micro-Level Approach: The Ward 8 Economic Development Plan

The Ward 8 Economic Development Plan (W8CED) initiative represents a community-centered approach to economic development in Ward 8. With a focus on trust and empowerment, W8CED aims to prioritize the voices and needs of Ward 8 residents, businesses, educators, and nonprofit organizations to shape a future of opportunity and growth. The origins of W8CED can be traced back to 2017 when the Ward 8 Senior Community Economic Development (CED) committee sought to address health disparities and other community concerns. By December 2018, a collaborative effort was launched with various organizations, leading to the establishment of 11 community-driven subcommittees in 2021. These subcommittees were condensed into six and tasked with mapping out priorities for socio-economic improvement and sustainable economic development. This resulted in six key priority areas:

3.3.1. Economic Justice

The primary focus of the economic justice subcommittee was bolstering local entrepreneurship and fostering economic growth. This area includes facilitating easier access to capital, offering specialized technical assistance and back-office support, and expanding opportunities for commercial real estate ownership and subsidized rental spaces. Equally important is ensuring equitable access to public resources for Ward 7 and Ward 8 residents, improving access to market opportunities, and addressing public safety and transportation issues that often hinder small-business owners in the area.

3.3.2. Education, Workforce Development, and Employment

This subcommittee focused on bridging the gaps across the educational spectrum, from pre-kindergarten to post-secondary education, and even into targeted workforce development programs. An important strategy to accomplish this is creating stronger bonds between various educational levels and engaging employers to shape curricula while offering a culturally grounded learning environment. Furthermore, support for workforce development programs is comprehensive, providing access to education, training, employment, and vital support services in a flexible manner tailored to individuals' needs.

3.3.3. Environmental Justice

This subcommittee seeks to foster green infrastructure and food-related businesses, thereby generating jobs, boosting incomes, and nurturing innovation. This endeavor enhances community pride and bolsters self-sufficiency, with a strong focus on incubator kitchens, urban farms, and sustainable water and energy projects. The educational thrust extends to sustainable agriculture, distributed water management, and cross-generational programs, solidifying a comprehensive vision for a prosperous and informed community.

3.3.4. Family Support

This subcommittee seeks to prioritize children, families, and the broader community by championing the five family success centers, enhancing mental health services for both the youth and seniors, and fostering a dynamic, positive youth development strategy, to unite residents and streamline information flow, cultivate meaningful intergenerational connections, and ensure that the voices of the youth and seniors resonate in all decision-making processes. Advocating for universal guaranteed income is a powerful pillar in their mission to support the most vulnerable families, making Ward 8 a place where all generations thrive together.

3.3.5. Health, Wellness, and Safety

One of the expressed aims of this subcommittee is to address intergenerational trauma by providing high-quality mental health and substance use care to all residents, strive for resident-led safety and health programs, and ensure the residents have a say in shaping services that prevent and address community violence, prioritizing youth civic engagement and offering safe and rewarding educational and employment opportunities for all young people. A further aim is to improve police presence and interactions by reducing unnecessary encounters and deploying better-trained officers to enhance safety while minimizing violence.

3.3.6. Housing Justice

This subcommittee seeks to ensure that all residents have access to affordable housing in their neighborhood. This includes offering financial and training support to help them become homeowners, with assistance like down payments, counseling, and credit repair. A housing improvement fund will be established to help multifamily buildings and current homeowners make necessary upgrades. The goal is to develop an inclusive and equitable housing strategy, working together with Ward 8 residents to implement project and policy changes across public, private, and social sectors, ensuring housing for all.

The engagement process of the W8CED initiative involved grassroots efforts to involve Ward 8 residents with the assistance of W8CED ambassadors. These resident ambassadors recruited neighbors and associates to participate in the W8CED process. Thousands of residents participated in community meetings and working groups centered around the six themes of the W8CED framework. In addition, over 1100 residents participated in a well-being survey, which provided essential indicators for W8CED's strategic focus. The W8CED developed an integrated service delivery and self-sufficiency model for economic development as an integral part of its efforts. The model involves coordinating community and business resources to provide housing, food, employment, education opportunities, and quality healthcare access. Additionally, the W8CED is committed to real-time, data-driven community development information through an online community and data warehouse.

3.4. Power and Limitations of W8ED Plan: Micro-Level Community Development

The Ward 8 Economic Development framework addresses local issues, promotes social cohesion, and enhances the well-being of individuals and the community. W8CED framework focuses on the grassroots level, emphasizing community members' active involvement in identifying and addressing their unique needs and challenges [38]. True to this pattern, the W8CED Plan empowered residents of Ward 8 by providing them with the tools, knowledge, and resources to take control of their own development, although some experts from outside of the Ward 8 community were engaged in the process at the request of local community leadership. By fostering a sense of ownership and agency, micro-frameworks like the W8CED Plan enable communities like Ward 8 to shape their destinies [23].

The plan's approach allowed for the customization of development initiatives to meet the specific needs of the Ward 8 community. This customization level enhances the interventions' effectiveness and fosters a sense of community cohesion. The W8CED Plan

focuses on building social capital within the community. This involves strengthening relationships, trust, and social networks among community members, which can serve as a valuable resource for addressing local challenges. The plan prioritized longevity by involving community members in decision-making processes and encouraging the responsible management of resources. This can lead to long-lasting and self-sustaining development outcomes.

However, one of the primary limitations of micro-level frameworks like the W8CED Plan is the limited availability of financial and human resources. Smaller-scale initiatives often struggle to secure the funding and community capacity necessary to implement comprehensive development programs [39]. The plan primarily operates on a small scale, addressing the needs of an individual community. This limitation may result in challenges when tackling larger, systemic issues affecting multiple communities [40]. While micro-level frameworks aim for longevity, they may encounter challenges in ensuring that communities can maintain the gains achieved once external support is reduced. Long-term sustainability can be difficult to achieve without ongoing support [41]. This is especially true with respect to the sometimes-tedious work of measuring and evaluating the impact of initiatives on the community. In the case of the W8CED Plan, the initiative was launched with an initial contribution from a foundation. The group now plans to maintain its efforts by creating a community-based membership organization that will create the resources needed to sustain the work.

There also appear to be micro-level perspectives that run counter to meso-level and macro-level goals as well as to some of the self-identified aims of the micro-level plan. For example, the plan emphasizes the importance of economic growth without offering a critical perspective of the growth mindset that is evident in some of the environmental justice and health and wellness objectives of the W8CED Plan. Given its hyperlocal focus, it also does not aspire to any transferability of its findings beyond providing a potentially exemplary process. At the same time, hyperlocal efforts and findings may confirm areas for continued meso-level focus and prioritization or suggest new areas to explore. These approaches may also be critical initial steps to socialize historically disenfranchised communities which have not had opportunities to develop consensus around issues. By definition, micro-level approaches are opportunities specifically to hear individual voices, singular perspectives, and very discrete focused areas of concern. To move from these distinct areas of concern toward policy and structural change, shifting to a meso-level approach and aggregating voices and issues is necessary.

4. Discussion

The aim of our examination of the Five Pillars and W8CED frameworks is to identify a transformative approach to addressing the complex challenges disinvested communities across the United States face. We, therefore, propose a restorative community development framework that centers on creating inclusive and sustainable communities by embracing principles of equity, empathy, and holistic well-being. By acknowledging historical injustices, nurturing social cohesion, and prioritizing the regeneration of natural resources, a restorative development approach aims to heal the wounds of the past, strengthen the fabric of community life, and protect the environment for future generations. In doing so, restorative community development seeks to offer a meso-level path toward building resilient, compassionate, and thriving communities that are better equipped to tackle the multifaceted challenges of our interconnected world. To meet these objectives, we propose three additional categories that complement the Five Pillars approach and draw on the priorities of the W8CED framework. They are economic justice, housing, and community development; the built environment; and the digital collective. Table 1 delves deeper into the key domains and contents that underpin restorative community development.

Table 1. Eight Drivers of Restorative Community Development.

Community Development Domains	Content
Education	• Promote equal access to quality education and prioritize lifelong learning opportunities. • Support workforce development programs to enhance employment prospects and economic mobility.
Health and wellness	• Ensure access to affordable healthcare services for all community members. • Promote preventive healthcare measures and wellness initiatives. • Enhance community safety measures to create a secure environment.
Environmental sustainability	• Foster environmental stewardship and sustainable practices within the community. • Promote clean energy sources, waste reduction, and conservation efforts. • Enhance access to green spaces and recreational opportunities.
Economic justice	• Address economic disparities and promote equal opportunities for all community members. • Support entrepreneurship, job creation, and economic empowerment initiatives. • Foster a fair and inclusive economy that benefits all segments of society.
Housing and community development	• Ensure access to affordable, safe, and sustainable housing for all residents. • Implement fair housing policies and address homelessness. • Support community development initiatives to enhance livability and neighborhood cohesion.
Social and culturalamenities	• Foster a vibrant community by promoting social and cultural amenities. • Support the arts, cultural events, and recreational activities that enhance community engagement. • Preserve and celebrate the community's diverse heritage and traditions.
Information technology and transportation access	• Improve access to reliable and affordable information technology infrastructure. • Enhance transportation networks, including public transportation, to facilitate mobility and connectivity.
Digital collective	• Closes gaps where services are not effectively delivered to those who need them most, through a mechanism called integrated service delivery. • Increase opportunity for members to communicate, educate, coordinate, collaborate, and advocate.

4.1. Eight Drivers of Restorative Community Development: Meso-Level Community Development

Both the Five Pillars and the W8CED framework emphasize the need for a restorative perspective that demands more than a standard economic development model that seeks to attain economically defined objectives. Instead, both frameworks seek to enhance community health, education, environmental quality, and more. Yet, while the Five Pillars framework emphasizes a focus on the five broad categories and expects to adjust indicators in each category based on the specific needs and goals of the community, the W8CED framework reflects more specific locally focused goals. The fact that there is considerable overlap and complementarity between the two frameworks suggests that the Five Pillars framework may deliver on its transferability goal to a large extent. Both frameworks encompass education, health, environment, social and cultural amenities, information technology, and transportation. The W8CED framework also adds economic justice and housing. In addition, the expanded framework adds a digital collective (see Table 1). The alternative meso-level framework that our expanded categories create promises to foster a more transferable community development process that addresses social, economic, and environmental challenges.

While the Five Pillars approach centers its engagement around the narrative component of the framework, the expanded framework of the Eight Drivers of Restorative

Community Development (see Figure 2) arises from a recognition of the need for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to meso-level community development. Though the Five Pillars framework emphasizes broad categories, the expansion incorporates additional crucial dimensions. The inclusion of economic justice, housing, and a digital collective reflects a desire to address specific aspects unique to community development, fostering a more transferable process. This expanded framework aims to provide a structured and versatile approach that not only captures the diverse needs of communities but also guides positive change by fostering inclusivity and adaptability.

Figure 2. The Eight Drivers of Restorative Community Development.

In the context of hyperlocal experiences, the nuances of economic disparities and opportunities for marginalized communities become more apparent. Explicitly incorporating economic justice into the framework ensures that community development efforts are not only aware of these disparities but actively work towards equitable solutions. This inclusion reinforces the commitment to addressing the specific economic needs and aspirations of each community, fostering a more tailored and impactful approach to sustainable development.

The expanded framework for restorative community development also emphasizes the pivotal role of the digital collective in fostering the commitment to communication that is critical to inclusive and sustainable community development. Rooted in an inclusive approach, this driver centers on engaging diverse stakeholders, including residents, employers, local businesses, educational institutions, health and housing providers, nonprofits, and locally based entities. The digital collective, acting as an innovative platform, employs a user-friendly digital community infrastructure to identify and mobilize existing community resources effectively. Critical to the broader context of restorative community development, the digital collective facilitates ongoing advocacy, outreach, and engagement. By leveraging real-world resident input, shared experiences, and community values, the collective ensures that services are not only informed by but also reflective of the community's needs and vision. This approach stands in contrast to traditional top–down models, promoting a more participatory and community-driven ethos.

4.2. Power and Limitations: Implementation of the Eight Drivers of RCD

The Eight Drivers of Restorative Community Development framework acknowledges the complexity of achieving sustainable development outcomes. Sustainable development involves intricate interconnections between various factors, and the nuances of these interactions are often multifaceted and context-dependent. In response to the feedback from hyperlocal experiences, one crucial aspect that emerges is the explicit inclusion of

economic justice. Sustainable development, as a desired outcome, is inherently complex. It requires a delicate balance between economic prosperity, social equity, and environmental responsibility [42].

The feedback from W8CED's hyperlocal experiences highlights the necessity of addressing economic justice explicitly rather than relying on implicit considerations. Economic justice is a foundational element that underpins community well-being and resilience. By making it an explicit driver within the framework, the Eight Drivers of RCD approach recognizes the importance of fostering a fair and inclusive economy that benefits all segments of society. However, the emphasis on sustainability through the comprehensive nature of the framework may lead to complexity and challenges in implementation. Balancing diverse aspects such as economic justice, environmental sustainability, and cultural amenities may require significant coordination and resources.

In particular, there may be difficulties in implementation concerning data collection, conflict management, and achieving inclusivity. Implementing the Eight Drivers of Restorative Community Development requires robust data collection mechanisms to track community indicators across multiple domains, including education, health, environment, economic justice, and housing. Gathering such diverse data sets can be resource-intensive and may encounter significant challenges related to data availability, reliability, and comparability across different communities [43]. Moreover, maintaining up-to-date data requires ongoing effort and resources from a local data intermediary [44].

This challenge provides an opportunity to incorporate Community Indicators Projects (CIPs), which can play a valuable role in mitigating difficulties and enhancing the effectiveness of frameworks like the Eight Drivers of Restorative Community Development. CIPs, like the Boston Indicators, involve collaborative efforts to develop and monitor indicators of community well-being, providing valuable data for decision-making and evaluation [45,46]. CIPs can promote transparency, accountability, and community ownership of development initiatives by involving stakeholders in the data collection process [47]. Additionally, they can help identify areas of consensus and conflict within the community, facilitating constructive dialogue and conflict resolution [21]. Practically, the use of CIPs can contribute to the successful implementation of this framework by providing the necessary infrastructure for data-driven decision-making and stakeholder engagement.

Moreover, the single most promising result of the analysis and creation of the Eight Drivers of RCD is the transferable and wide-reaching impact of developing a digital collective. Recognizing the prevalent digital divide, the digital collective addresses issues of internet access and digital literacy, contributing to the overarching goal of inclusivity. The framework provides avenues for community organization, learning, and collaboration, fostering a sense of empowerment among residents. Importantly, it advocates for digital and internet justice, aiming to bridge gaps and ensure that the benefits of the digital era are accessible to all. Informed by the principles of restorative economics, this conceptual framework positions the digital collective as a transformative tool, not limited to specific geographic contexts. The idea of bridging the gap between data and technology and community is not new. Models like the Urban Commons explore what modern digital data and technology can do for communities in Boston that seek both prosperous growth and sustainability [48–50]. The digital collective adopts this idea and integrates technological developments with community and economic development on a broader scale, emphasizing the importance of leveraging digital infrastructures and communities of practice.

The Eight Drivers of Restorative Community Development, while emphasizing a participatory and community-driven ethos, might still face challenges in balancing top–down and bottom–up approaches. One such challenge is ensuring meaningful community involvement in decision-making processes. Communities have unique characteristics, and a standardized approach may not capture the specific needs of each community effectively [51]. Despite efforts to be adaptable, the framework might still be generalized in its application. Still, this approach aligns with the goal of creating resilient, compassionate,

and thriving communities that can effectively address multifaceted challenges in our interconnected world.

5. Conclusions

Community development frameworks are important tools for promoting community well-being and social change. Both micro- and meso-level community development have value to the restorative work of reinvesting in disinvested spaces. Micro-level community development frameworks empower communities, foster social capital, and address localized challenges. Implementing strategies for improvement and learning from successful case studies, micro-level community development frameworks can continue to play a vital role in the broader community development field. They may have unique utility in areas and among populations where there has not been recent engagement as they acknowledge the diversity of communities and can develop local priorities around sustainability and foster social cohesion. However, meso-level approaches hold significant promise in local community development by harnessing the strengths of lessons learned from case-level examples, collective action, participatory processes, and, importantly, larger models of generalization at an intermediate level of abstraction.

By providing a structured approach to identifying community needs, designing interventions, and evaluating outcomes, these meso-level frameworks can guide community development practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to achieve positive impact while supporting communities as they take charge of their own development processes and foster sustainable outcomes. Moreover, while meso-level interventions include the potential for power imbalances and the need for sustained organizational support, they also provide a potential framework for advancing micro-level efforts to influence policy and thus provide an opportunity to elevate the most marginalized of voices and perspectives. Meso-level community development approaches create a systematic space between top–down, macro-level paths and grassroots micro-level approaches. They neatly bridge this range of engagement by linking broad determinants of well-being such as housing, education, and transportation access (macro-level) with aligned indicators such as the Five Pillars (health, education, amenities, environment, transportation) and likewise linking these indicators to hyperlocal engagement via individual stories around issues of concern (micro-level). Meso-level approaches provide viable engagement strategies, including venues to propel micro-level community development research toward systemic change.

The Eight Drivers of Restorative Community Development present an inclusive framework but also pose challenges related to complexity, resource requirements, and the balance between adaptability and standardization. The success of its implementation would depend on careful consideration of these factors and a commitment to community engagement and equity. Our study seeks to serve as a stepping stone for further exploration and understanding of meso-level community development strategies, aiming to inform policymakers, residents, practitioners, and researchers in creating comprehensive and inclusive approaches that drive positive change within communities.

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