Currents of History: Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission, Rural Community Development, and Sustainability

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Lasting Legacy

The legacy of Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission (CLC) of 1908-1909 offers an opportunity to discuss and analyze an understudied activity of the Progressive Era that is a cornerstone for both rural community development and the sustainability movement in the United States.

Roosevelt's CLC emerged in a turbulent time as America was being transformed from a rural, agrarian society into an urban, industrial society. Even though farming was fairly prosperous during this so-called "Golden Age of Agriculture" that drew to a close about 1914, there was widespread dissatisfaction with country life. Rural residents flocked to the nation's cities seeking better opportunities. This was an alarming trend to those who saw rural America, especially agriculture, as the economic, social, and moral foundation of the Republic.

Roosevelt recognized that rural areas, defined as farm communities, were falling behind the rest of the country. At the same time, there was a growing conservation movement dedicated to changing the ways of a nation that had been squandering its natural resources. Roosevelt is known in history as a conservation activist. As President, he set up a number of conservation-oriented commissions and meetings besides the CLC: Public Lands; Inland Waterways; National Conservation; Joint Conservation Congress; Conference of Governors; and the North American Conservation Conference.

The Progressive Era's ideas flowed partly from the agrarian Populism of the last part of the nineteenth century. Both movements challenged industrialization and corporate domination of both politics and the economy. Progressives, led by Roosevelt, were split from the big-business orientation of the mainstream Republican Party. He and his followers not only reacted to corporate abuses, they offered and implemented positive plans to rebuild faith in a government that they believed had lost its moral compass. The reformers wanted to redress corporate iniquities by restoring government to its proper role of regulating companies, conserving natural resources, and building a national political economy that offered opportunities for everyone, rural or urban.

As Bowers (1974) points out, the Country Life Movement was more than a protest against powerful interests. *The Report of the Country Life Commission* (United States and Bailey, 1909) suggests ways for farmers to gain power by banding together to get their fair share of market value. It also laid the groundwork for community development and education within the context of wise use of natural resources and other areas of community improvement, a precursor to today's sustainability efforts. The Country Life Movement's goals showed deep

faith in the power of education to transform people and their communities into places that were strong, not only in their own right, but as part of the broader national fabric.

In her autobiography, journalist Ida Tarbell (1939, p. 26), who had challenged the ascending oil conglomerates, clearly laid out the underpinnings of the progressive philosophy that sympathized with the underdog and challenged powerful economic institutions:

> In walking through the world there is a choice for a man to make. He can choose the fair and open path, the path which sound ethics, sound democracy, and the common law prescribe, or choose the secret way by which he can get the better of his fellow man. It was that choice made by powerful men that suddenly confronted the Oil Region. The sly, secret, greedy way won in the end, and bitterness and unhappiness and incalculable ethical deterioration for the country at large came out of that struggle and others like it which were going on all over the country – an old struggle with old defeats but never without men willing to make stiff fights for their rights, even if it cost them all they ever hoped to possess.

The CLC had an ethical compass guided by republican principles of democracy rooted in rural America and the Social Gospel of progressive American Protestantism. It manifested concerns expressed in government and academic circles about farm communities that faced challenges from larger forces that dominated food marketing, including railroads and food processors. The Social Gospel linked Christian religious teachings with action in the here and now to redress social inequalities. Leaders of the Country Life Movement linked their activities to religion, not only seeking to strengthen rural churches, but in viewing their own efforts as part of God's work on Earth.

Roosevelt appointed the Country Life Commission in August, 1908, as his term was about to end. Later administrations tried to overlook the report after it was issued in March, 1909, a sign of deep splits within the Republican Party and with Democrats as the nation became more urbanized and industrialized. Although the CLC did not survive intact, its political opponents failed to quash the movement. This happened partly because Roosevelt was such a dynamic political force. In addition, the commission's members represented a broad swath of agricultural and rural educators and journalists with considerable influence. Their expertise, energy, and passion carried the commission's ideas through World War I, developing into a broader movement that led to the creation of the American Country Life Association (ACLA) after the war to advocate for farm life and farm communities. The movement also helped generate the American Farm Bureau Federation in 1919 as a highly successful association of farmers that has been a strong advocate for farming as a business. While the ACLA halted operations in 1976, the Farm Bureau remains as a significant player in the agricultural economy.

The Report of the Country Life Commission is not exactly well known and is rarely read now. Roosevelt's biographers hardly mention it. It comes up in rural studies classes as part of discussions of rural development policies. It is not generally recognized as part of the foundation for sustainable rural community development practice. In reality, the report is a gem partially hidden under layers of time and passing generations. Pull it out, read it, and you

will find old ideas that have enough glitter to shed some light on sustainable rural communities today.

The commissioners' approach to rural American farm communities helped create CLC's rural community development legacy. Admittedly, the CLC's process was top down and male dominated. Given the times, it probably would have been this way even without the short timeframe. With less than eight months to go in Roosevelt's Administration, commission members were pressed for time and used budding social science methods to gather information quickly and build support from rural farm communities. They held well-publicized hearings nationwide. They did a national survey. They listened to rural residents and, even though the report clearly shows their preconceptions, they also included citizens' ideas in the final report and recommendations. Their suggested remedies took an institutional approach to communities, advocating reform of rural churches and schools as places that could inform a better country life. Their remedies focused primarily on the needs of people, which could be met through joint action and education.

From the cynic's perspective, presidential commissions are typically shallow political or public-relations gestures. The President assembles a notable group of people. They investigate a problem, issue a report, and get a flash of publicity. The report may generate some enthusiasm, but is soon forgotten. While the CLC's report may be obscure, elements of the country life movement have evolved and are quite alive today, despite the demise of ACLA.

The CLC report has faced criticisms since it was issued. The *Country Gentleman,* in its March 11, 1909 edition, criticizes the report's exhortations to farmers to work together, while not pointing out "the tremendous evils of the national legislation, especially of the administration, denouncing these evils, and exhorting the agricultural interest as a whole to demand relief from them." The article went on to say the good the commission might have done was "incalculably small, utterly imperceptible."

Another critic closer to our time calls the report a "vaguely worded homily" (Sealander, 1997, p. 42). The report is indeed worded broadly. Whatever its shortcomings, however, the CLC enthusiastically offered a vision for rural America and a call for farm constituencies to work together through their schools and churches to strengthen farming communities. In the Progressive Era tradition that battled against corporate and industrial domination of the government and the workplace, it was a call for a better rural life based on an elite group's vision for rural America. Those poor conditions disturbed enough rural residents that thousands across the country became active participants in community-based activities to improve their own lives in their own ways in the face of tremendous pressures for change from an agrarian to an industrial society.

The Movement: Contradictions and Continuity

The CLC's top-down leadership synthesized a novel, if sometimes pejorative approach to real and perceived rural problems. Some of the leaders refer to rural problems as pathologies. Rural sociologist Carl C. Taylor (1940, p. 19), discussing the burgeoning field of rural community research, writes:

> Opportunities for the study of cultural factors which condition the geographic spacing and institutional organization of rural society are created by the new impulse to conserve the soil and accomplish better land utilization. The recognition that a portion of the roots of some of our most distressing agricultural problems are social, psychological, and cultural opens the gates and creates the need for types of research new to rural sociologists. The tardy but developing recognition that we have something approaching rural slums; that the need for adequate rural housing ranks equally with the need for adequate urban housing; that farm unemployment, at least farm under-employment or ineffective employment, is widespread; and that rural poverty has gradually crept up on approximately one-third of the farm families of the Nation furnishes the sociologist his first outstanding opportunity to study the pathological elements in our rural society.

Fiske (1919, p. 18), like Kenyon L. Butterfield (1919), sees the rising of a new rural age in religious terms, emerging in the midst of potential degeneracy:

> Hope for the country rests in the fact that the problem has been recognized as a national issue and that a country life movement of immense significance is actually bringing in a new rural civilization. "We must expect the steady deterioration of our rural population, unless effective preventive measures are devised," was Dr. Strong's warning two decades ago. To-day the challenge of the country not only quotes the peril of rural depletion and threatened degeneracy, but also appeals to consecrated young manhood and womanhood with a living faith in the permanency of a reconstructed rural life.

As progressives, members of the loosely knit Country Life Movement adhered to the dominant capitalist ideals of progress and growth, but their ideals sought to put a human face on community development. As Ellsworth (1960) notes, Roosevelt was the first president of the Industrial Age to have a sympathy for rural people and their problems. Ellsworth (1960, p. 156) – in a slight hyperbole that ignores Jefferson's farmer-citizen vision and Lincoln's desire for readily accessible education for farmers and the wider populace – notes the commission's true significance:

> *The Report* was the first recognition by a federal agency that the production of more excellent citizens on the farm was at least as important as the production of more and better hogs and cotton and that the current emphasis on more scientific production would not solve a host of farm problems. In the fifty years that have followed, the *Report* has been the central charter of farm people in their democratic quest for their just share of the material and spiritual things of life.

The CLC's emphasis on people and communities picked up threads of agrarian Populist beliefs opposing the industrialization and urbanization threatening rural farm lifeways (Jefferson's notion of yeoman farmers as the basis of a democratic society). The report bolstered the myth – strengthened by then-recent Populist struggles to secure better conditions for farmers – that agriculture and rural life are one and the same and are naturally better than urban life. This

myth persists today, although agriculture is now a vast financial undertaking that relies heavily on machinery instead of the physical prowess of a great number of workers.

The transition to modern, market-oriented agriculture was already well underway when the CLC made its report. Youth were leaving farms for the city, and mechanization had already begun to reduce the need for labor. The CLC claimed to want efficient farms, but did not recognize that farm efficiency was related to mechanization, which not only reduced the number of farm laborers, but also reduced the number of farms. Since the work of the CLC, the agricultural sector remains important, but has lost much of its power relative to the population and the rest of the economy. Politically and economically agricultural interests remain a potent force, reinforced by the recent surge in interest in biofuels, which already has changed the face of agriculture and rural communities.

The Country Life Movement emerged as a way to help rural communities adapt to widespread change across the nation. Ironically, as Sealander (1997) points out, private foundations – funded by the families of wealthy corporate industrialists who were altering the face of the country and the countryside – gave financial support to progressive efforts to both modernize and preserve what was left of rural life at the turn of the twentieth century. In the short term, the CLC failed to preserve rural farming communities in the face of changing agricultural practices and the growth of urban areas. But its ideas and principals for helping rural people and their communities survive and adapt to change continue to shape rural community development policies and practice today.

Community Defined: The Emergence of Practice[1]

Community is hardly a precise term. The Country Life Movement initially focused on open-country farm communities, instead of including villages and towns. Roosevelt believed in the inherent goodness of farming, continuing the Jeffersonian agrarian tradition. Community in this definition focuses on shared agricultural interests within a particular open-country neighborhood that shared social institutions such as schools and churches.

For example, Country Life Commissioner Kenyon L. Butterfield (1919, p. 134) outlines the task of the country life movement as community organization:

> The organization of the local farming community is in some ways the biggest single development for the farmer in the New Day. It means the effort to persuade all the people and all the local associations and agencies of the community to pull together for the common good. By "community" is meant that local area, not always clearly defined, which has or may have its own school and church and organizations, a region large enough to organize well and small enough so that everybody may become acquainted.

Country Life Commissioner Liberty Hyde Bailey (1911, p. 56-57) highlights the need to overcome selfish individualism to improve communities through their institutions:

[1] Portions of this section are adapted from a presentation to the Community Development Society (Collins and Goetz, 2006).

> A new social order must be evolved in the open country, and every farmer of the new time must lend a strong hand to produce it. We have been training our youth merely to be better farmers; this of course, is the first thing to do, but the man is only half trained when this is done. What to do with the school, the church, the rural organizations, the combinations of trade, the highways, the architecture, the library, the beauty of the landscape, the country store, the rousing of a fine community helpfulness to take the place of the old selfish individualism, and a hundred other activities, is enough to fire the imagination and strengthen the arm of any young man or woman.

By the end of World War I, the movement's definition of rural community was changing to include rural settlements. As Fiske (1919, p. 3) points out:

> In general, the scope of the term "country life" … will be understood to include the life of the open country, the rural village and most country towns of 8,000 people or less, whose outlook is the sky and the soil rather than the brick walls and limited horizon of the city streets.

Over the years, the definition of community has become more complex and varied. For example, Warren's (1963) description of community expands on the country life tradition: community as space, as people, as shared institutions and values, and as interaction with internal (horizontal) and external (vertical) linkages. Christenson and Robinson (1980) list four main components to define community: people, area or territory, social interaction, and identification with the community. Mehrhoff (1999) suggests numerous facets of community, including groups of people, social interaction, shared values, shared territory, rediscovered community, key to personal identity, social order, social system, field of action, and an ecological system (defined as an adaptable social environment). Like, Mehrhoff, Wilkinson (1999) recognizes changing communities. He describes a dynamic community that can be turbulent and cohesive with self-seeking and community-oriented individuals in a setting of order and disarray all at the same time; communities are constantly changing fields of interacting forces.

However they define community, those who inherited the CLC's legacy in the first part of the twentieth century hoped to activate people in communities to improve the standard of rural life by developing citizens and institutional capacity. The basic CLC idea was to get people together to talk about problems and opportunities in their communities. Schools and churches had an important role in bringing people together and educating them to build stronger communities with deep-seated civic and religious values. Community residents also would develop new businesses such as cooperatives to increase farm income and the quality of farm life. Increased farm income depended on farmers working together to improve transportation and create markets that would pay good prices for their products.

Following this basic map, later rural community development activities surfaced throughout the twentieth century, especially after the 1950s. Professional community developers worked with individuals and groups to increase social equity, spurred partly by the recognition of the impacts of widespread change on communities (cf. Phifer, 1980) that lagged behind urban areas.

Warren (1963) outlines the emergence of community action and community development as process. Community action brings people together from across the community (horizontally) around a particular issue or project. Community development as process also strengthens horizontal relationships, but works in the long run, not on an *ad hoc*, project-by-project basis.

While community development as process includes planning, it moves beyond planning to deliberately build a framework for coordinated, democratic community actions to improve communities (Phifer, 1980). In a review of the community development literature, Christenson (1980) lays out three broad community development themes that reveal the profession's progressive roots: self-help, technical assistance, and dealing with conflict.

As it evolved, the Country Life Movement adopted many community and economic development strategies to carry out its work based on progressive principles of improved life. Butterfield (1919, p. 183) notes:

> The idea of local community organizations is not merely a theory. There are many instances running all through our agricultural history of entire communities developing all their work and life as units. In more recent years almost spontaneously there have sprung up community breeding plants, enterprises, cooperative agencies on a community basis, and very recently hundreds of community groups have been organized in many parts of the country.

According to Bowers (1974):

- Bankers in over a dozen states worked with their state libraries to bring information to farmers; some local banks established their own lending library in the bank;
- Sears, Roebuck and Company set up an Agricultural Foundation to give farmers information on marketing, farm economics, and production;
- When the U.S. Department of Agriculture created the Office of Rural Social Organization in 1913, oil magnate John D. Rockefeller's foundation agreed to work with the new division through his foundation.
- The Rockefeller Foundation also sought to build an agricultural county in Mississippi with an agricultural college as a social center to be a model of efficiency and social planning in rural affairs.

Bowers (1974) also points out the role of rural women's clubs, which focused on activities such as improving rural schools, the lives of farm women, and health and sanitation, all areas of concern for the CLC. In rural communities across the country, residents formed village improvement societies and other organizations to improve the quality of life, including beautification, building community centers, and better roads, schools, and churches. These efforts were not limited to single communities, as regional and statewide groups were formed, such as the Rhode Island League for Rural Progress, the New England Conference for Rural Life Progress, the Illinois Federation for Country Life Progress, and the Pennsylvania Rural Progress Association.

In addition, Cooperative Extension, based in each state's land-grant university, came to maturity after World War I, with funding from the federal government, states, and counties. Extension has long been an important purveyor of technical assistance for farmers and their families to improve farm productivity and rural households. Over the past several decades, it has become more engaged in broader aspects of community and economic development.

Butterfield (1919, p. 165) shows how quickly the CLC's report became associated with the idea of community organization and lays out a plan for community development:

> The main object of organizing the rural community is to try to secure the cooperation of all associated effort and individual influence on behalf of a generally accepted plan or program for improving the community at all points. By reason of such cooperative endeavor, should emerge at last a group of people with one mind as to the desirability of working together for one large purpose and in the finest spirit of cooperation. Remember again that organization is merely the cooperation of all the people. It is an assembling of all factors that make for better working and living together. It implies a group of people working as one. The ideal is the most complete possible cooperation of all individuals and all groups in a small natural area, making their best efforts in the common task of securing the greatest possible improvement in all things that make for the common good.

Buttterfield's (1919) prescription for community organization looks something like a visioning program that modern community developers might use:

1. Set up an independent community council which represents the entire community and all its interests as a planning body to secure teamwork.
   - Committees
     a) Production
     b) Marketing and other business interests.
     c) Conservation
     d) Community life

   - Activities [building horizontal and vertical linkages]
     a) A community study
     b) A community program
     c) The work of each agency in carrying out the program
     d) Community meetings and conferences relative to the program and its progress
     e) The need of new association
     f) Bringing the community into touch with other communities and with county, state and national activities [building vertical linkages].

2. Gain the facts before the community makes a plan using the community study/community inventory.
   - What are the needs of the community?
   - What are the best things that exist in the community?
   - What are its resources, natural and human?

- What are the possibilities of the community?
- Might use farm bureau or agricultural college specialists to help.

3. Develop a community policy.
   - People of the community decide the policy direction they want to follow.

4. Develop a community program.
   - It consists of the successive steps needed to make the policy work.
     - Is designed to arouse community will.

5. Hold regular community meetings.
   - To discuss common needs and purposes. The meeting is not general, but has a specific purpose.

A Template for Sustainable Rural Communities

Proponents of improved country life fought for changes in the way things were being done in the United States. They recognized a crisis of natural resource waste and lagging rural communities. They wanted citizen farmers to be empowered in their communities and in the marketplace. Their recognition of these and other issues underpin many of the ideas that feed our conceptions of community sustainability today. Given the fragmentation of the Country Life Movement because of its broad backing from farmers, businesses of different sizes, academics, journalists, foundations, government leaders, churches, and organizations, many country life advocates were drawn to the ideals of strong local economies, healthy environmental conditions, and social justice as they defined them at the time.

Butterfield (1919, p. 26) was a proponent of the agricultural side of the Country Life Movement, speaking of the "New Day." Yet, the values he proposes for the movement capture the progressive ideal and are relevant to sustainable rural community development:

> The spirit of the New Day then seems to call for (1) a far better chance for the common man; (2) the intelligent planning of human progress; (3) a reconciliation between organized effectiveness in human work and life that also leaves individuals and classes truly free; (4) an insistence upon service to fellow men as the great motive in life, believing that thus social justice can best prevail.

Butterfield (1919, p.63-64) argues against what we would now call market-based, trickle-down approaches to community development. Prosperous farmers who only took care of business would not improve rural community conditions:

> A good community life costs money. To supply good rural institutions costs money. But the converse is also true: That a prosperous farm business is not *all* of the farm problem; indeed, the desire for a satisfying life is often the fundamental cause of financial profit; a sound rural civilization must also have as secure foundation intelligence, morality, ideals of personal and community life.

> The "economic motive" … is very powerful with us all, but it is not the only motive. Love of home and children, patriotism, religious faith, all have their part in stirring men to the utmost endeavor.

Butterfield (1919, p.50) also offers a case for locally grown foods, what he calls "Regional Self-Support."

> It is a law of economics that the greatest efficiency in production comes when each region produces that which *it can best grow,* not necessarily that which it can grow better than some other region. … We have gone so far in producing for the distant market that we have not only neglected the nearby market which is often poorly supplied, but we have incurred an enormous expense for transporting and handling products which go back and forth. We need to establish certain zones or regions that up to a certain point can take care of themselves with reference to the growing of their food.

The Country Life Movement's definition of conservation, expressed in Bailey's (1911) discussions of land reclamation, is problematic. Forester and conservationist Gifford Pinchot defined conservation as wise use of natural resources and conservation through use, with scientifically managed forests and watersheds. Theodore Roosevelt and his intellectual leaders understood the negative impacts of environmental waste, but focused on human control of nature as an inherent human right. Bailey's language (1911, p. 58) clearly echoes Roosevelt's "bully" philosophy.

> We have scarcely begun even the physical conquest of the earth. It is not yet all explored. The earth is an island, and it is only two years ago that we got to one end of it. There are mountains to pierce, sea-shores to reclaim, vast stretches of submerged land to drain, millions of acres to irrigate, and many more millions to utilize by dry-farming, rivers to canalize, the whole open country to organize and subdue by means of local engineering work, and a thousand other great pieces of construction to accomplish, all calling for the finest spirit of conquest and all contributing to the training of men and women.

The Progressive Era's ideas about resource conservation obviously do not exactly match today's evolving ethic of sustainability, which puts environmental concerns at the front of human planning and decision making. Time and experience with disasters such as the Dust Bowl and widespread pollution of air, water, and soil tempered our understanding of ourselves as conquerors, with increased understanding of our role as creators of environmental degradation. Even so, the CLC's work is a pattern not only for sustainable agriculture (Peters and Morgan, 2004), but also for sustainable communities based on a healthy environment, economy and social relationships.

In a prophetic speech, Roosevelt (1910, p. 919) links conservation with the farm community, a necessary condition for sustainability:

> There are no two public questions of more vital importance to the future of this country than the problem of Conservation and the problem of the betterment of

> country life. Moreover, these two problems are really interdependent; for neither of them can be successfully solved save on condition that there is at least a measureable success in the effort to solve the other.
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> In any great country the prime physical asset—the physical asset more valuable than any other—is the fertility of the soil. All our industrial and commercial welfare, all our material development of every kind, depends in the last resort upon our preserving and increasing the fertility of the soil. This, of course, means the conservation of the soil as the great natural resource; and equally, of course, it furthermore implies the development of country life, for there cannot be a permanent improvement of the soil if the life of those who live on it, and make their living out of it, is suffered to starve and languish, to become stunted and weazened and inferior to the type of life lived elsewhere. We are now trying to preserve, not for exploitation by individuals, but for the permanent benefit of the whole people, the waters and the forests, and we are doing this primarily as a means of adding to the fertility of the soil; although in each case there is a great secondary use both of the water and of the forests for commercial and industrial purposes. In the same way it is essential for the farmers themselves to try to broaden the life of the man who lives in the open country; to make it more attractive; to give it every adjunct and aid to development which has been given to the life of the man of the cities.

Rural sociologist Dwight Sanderson (1932, p. 226) continues this understanding in his discussion of the village community and the land, based on what he calls the "extensive literature" on the subject. In 1948, forester Aldo Leopold, in *A Sand County Almanac* (1968, p. 203-204), echoed Roosevelt, articulating his view of community as part of the environment within the context of a more mature conservation movement:

> All ethics … rest on a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in the community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate (perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for).
>
> The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.

Leopold's land ethic is envirocentric. In this sense, it is quite different from Roosevelt's proclamation of wise use of natural resources, which puts human needs first. Leopold reverses the relationship between humans and the environment. Like Wilkinson (1999), Leopold understands the incredibly complex interrelationships in the social community, but extends the definition of community to include the natural world, demanding that humans respect the land as an ethical consideration.

Conclusion

If nothing else, the Country Life Commission and its associated Country Life Movement reflected the larger Progressive Era agenda of improving the political economy at the national and local levels. Rural community development has inherited large parts of this agenda in

terms of fostering democratic participation and building processes that make communities better places to live.

At the same time, the conservation movement – followed by the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s – developed out of a gradually growing consciousness of the damage humans were doing to the Earth. In the last part of the twentieth century, leaders of the environmental movement began to realize that demand for global resources was outstripping the Earth's capacity to supply human needs. This recognition lead to the emergence of a sustainability movement that seeks to build a more just society that respects the environment.

Leopold's land ethic is deeply rooted in the tradition of conservation. But it offers a different approach. It bridges rural community development and the environment by explicitly linking the social and biological worlds. This connection is essential for sustainable rural community development. It offers rural community developers the opportunity to recognize the primacy of the environment as they work to build social interactions for long-term improvements in the quality of life. Just as community developers are ethically barred from harming any disadvantaged group, Leopold's land ethic offers similar protections to the environment.

By incorporating the land ethic, rural community developers – now including both place-based social and environmental scientists – have new tools to build sustainable communities. They distill knowledge from the environmental and social sciences, provide educational opportunities, and facilitate building community networks that focus on sustainability. Based on community development principles, the process is participatory, letting citizens collaborate and use their local knowledge to adapt science-based knowledge to improve their lives. The process enhances the capacity of individuals and groups to build communications, trust, and leadership with a common goal of sustainable communities (Collins, 2007).

Roosevelt's CLC, in its efforts to energize the Country Life Movement, depended largely on education. Despite its shortcomings, and there were many in the short run, the CLC – in the context of the progressive tradition that also fostered the Conservation Movement – opened the way for promoting sustainable rural community development. A century later, the two movements are merging as rural communities struggle to face the challenges posed by globalization. Both movements rely heavily on education, and the growing recognition of their common interests is a tribute to the foresight of Roosevelt, CLC's members, and those who have worked to keep their legacy alive.

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