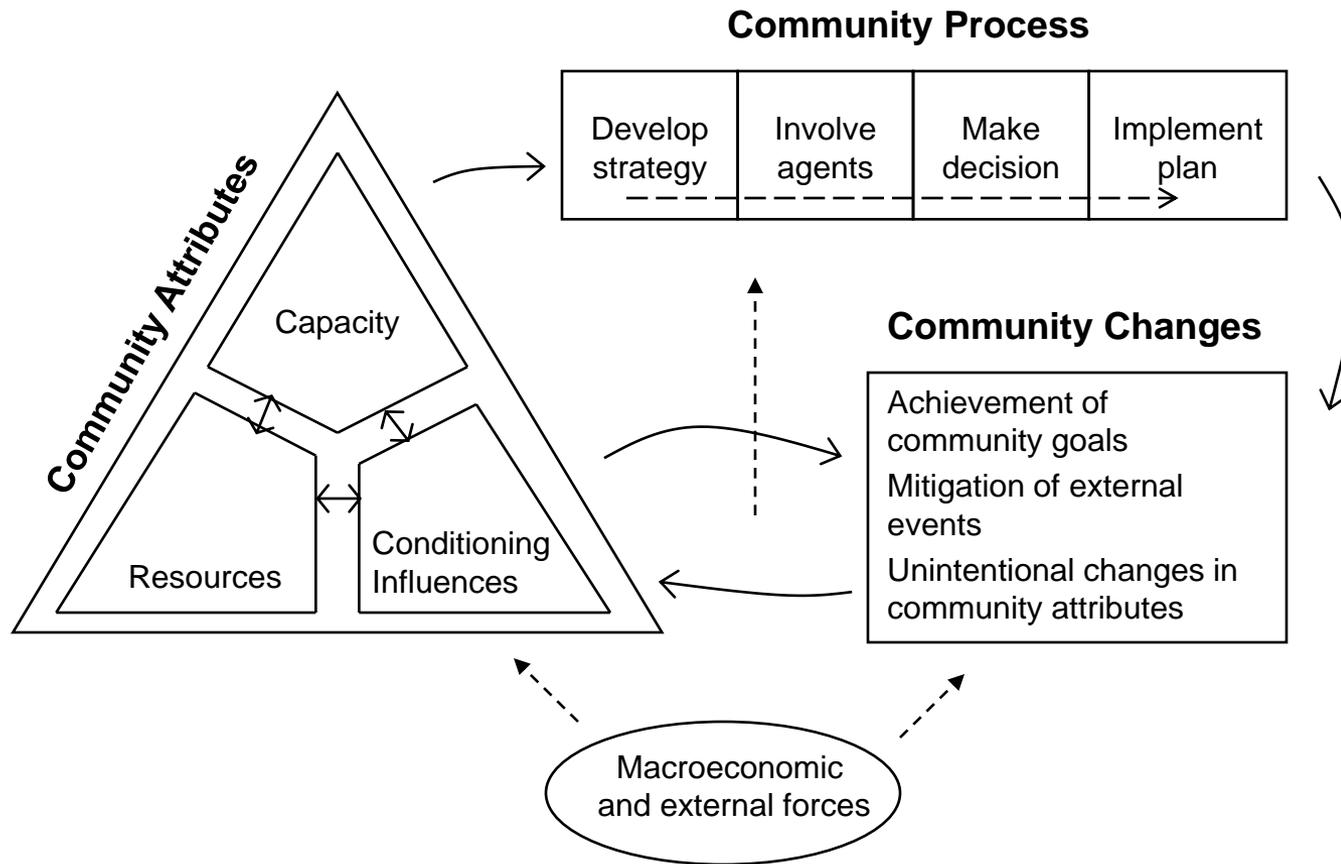


# A community model

What is a community? How does it function?



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This model is a general view of the large-scale processes and characteristics that influence community development. With it, we seek to understand what a community is and how it functions, so that we can also understand what ultimately makes a community vital.

In any community, outcomes are a function of community characteristics, the actions that may or may not be taken by the community, and larger macroeconomic forces that are generally outside the community's control.

A *vital* community is a little bit more: one that can achieve *desired* outcomes, respond *positively* to change, and remain *a place that thrives*.

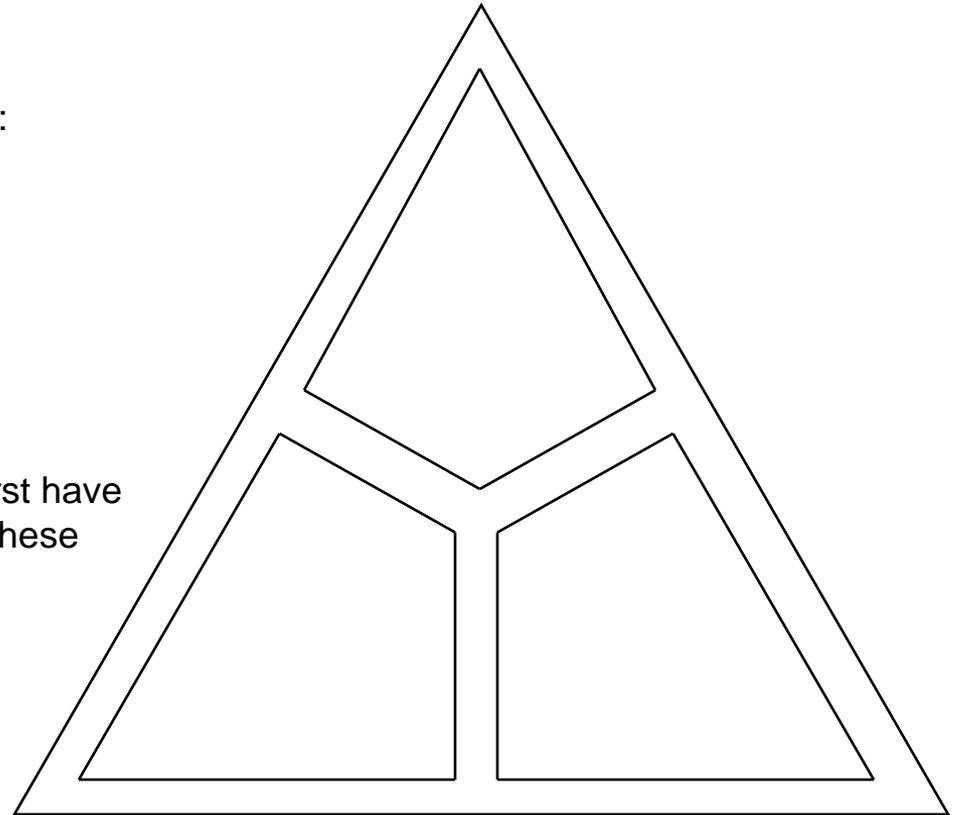
# I. What is a community?

1. *A group of people living in the same locality and under the same government.*
2. *A group of people having common interests.*
3. *Sharing, participation, and fellowship.*

A community, then, has several components:

the people,  
the place,  
the structure (governance), and  
the inter-personal connections.

To understand how communities work, we first have to be able to identify the attributes of these components and how they interact.



# What is a community? Resources

Every community has unique **resources**: particular assets that can be used.

It is convenient to think of resources as falling into four categories: human, economic, natural, and social resources.

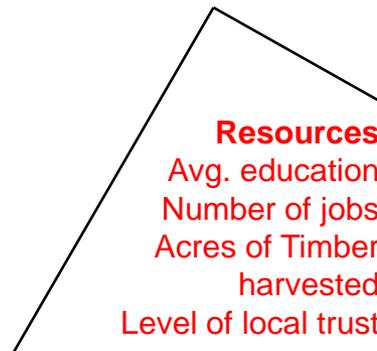
For example:

Human: the skills and abilities in the people; *average education level*.

Economic: the local economy and infrastructure; *number of jobs, available credit*.

Natural: forests, farmlands, clean water.

Social: levels of trust and cohesiveness.



# What is a community? Conditioning influences

Every community also has **conditioning influences**: factors and conditions that affect the ability of the community and the people in it to fully utilize their resources and opportunities.

Although these conditions represent challenges that a community may have to overcome, they also represent opportunities for change.

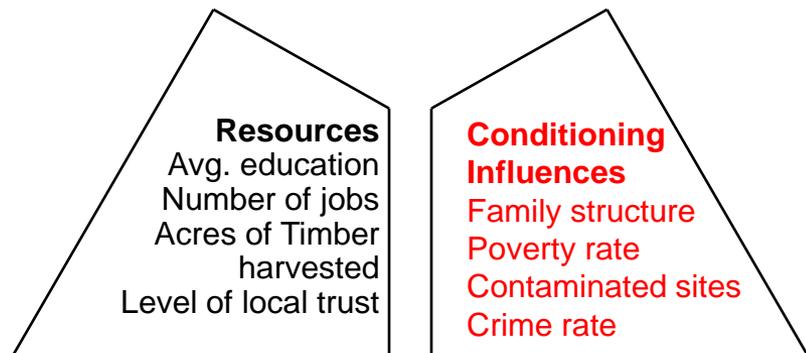
Conditioning influences include things such as:

Health and family structure of the population; *large shares of single-parent families in the community affect opportunities to lower overall poverty rates.*

Average wages; *if wages are low, people will find it difficult to stay out of poverty.*

Health of natural systems; *toxic hazards affect the health and safety of residents.*

Social conditions such as crime and mobility; *high levels of either makes it difficult for a cohesive community to develop.*



# What is a community? Community Capacity

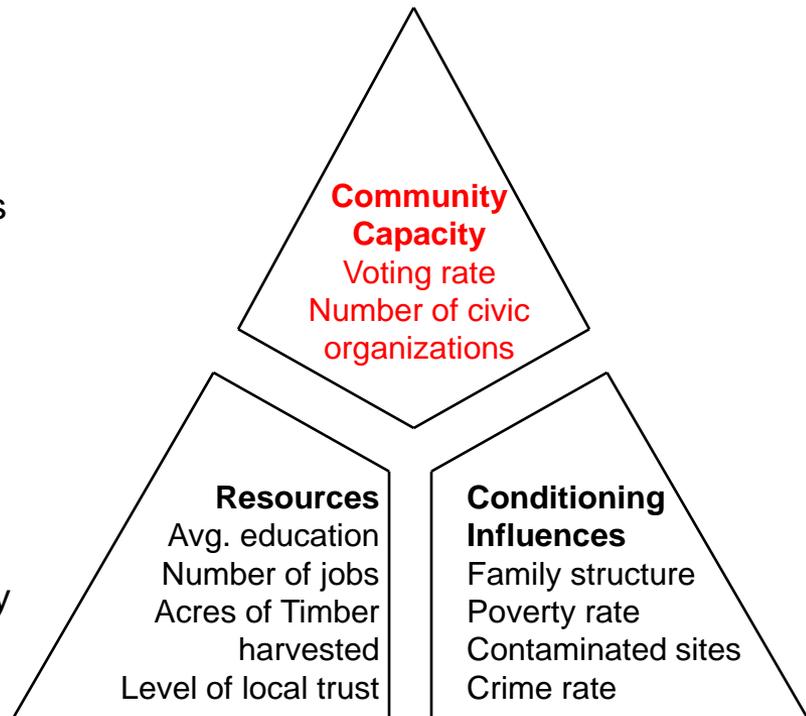
The characteristics of the people and the place are encompassed in the resources and conditioning influences of a community.

But there's more than just those individual and place characteristics that define a community.

The ability of a community to work together to identify needs, problems, and take actions to enact change can be thought of as **community capacity**.

Some communities have high levels of capacity, while others may not be able to work together in an effective way.

Although difficult to define and measure, capacity can be built, enhanced, or eroded.



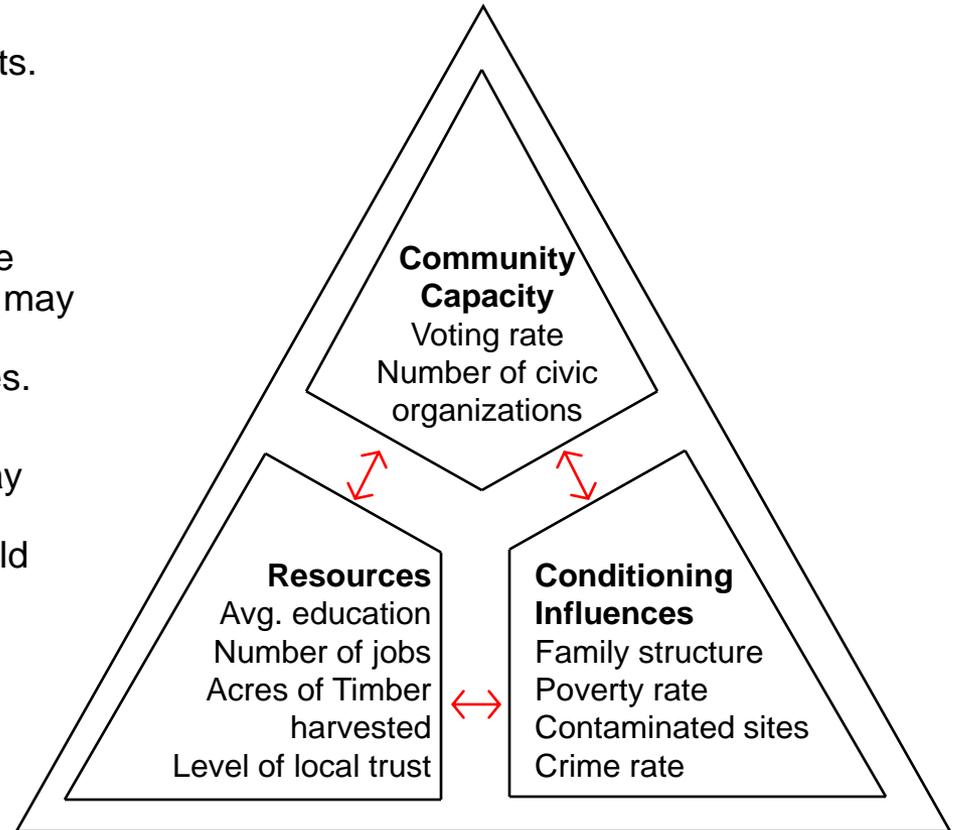
# What is a community?

The resources, conditions, and capacity of a community are not static or isolated attributes, however.

Changes in any one of the components may affect any number of other components.

For example:

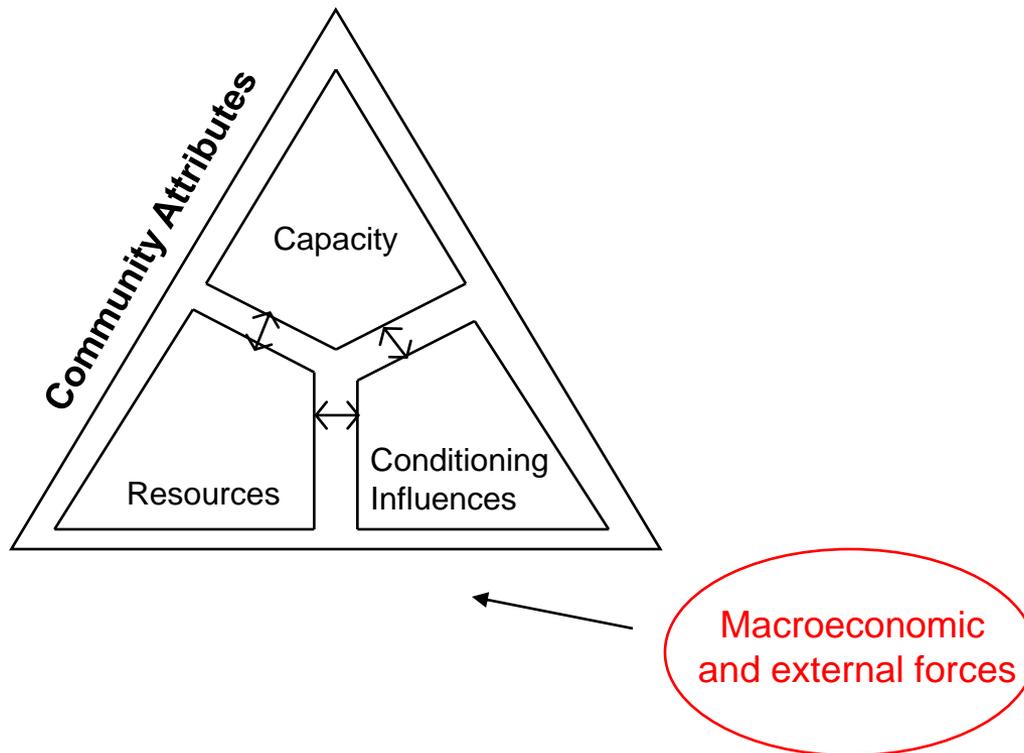
- An increase in human resources in the form of higher educational attainment may lead to changes in conditioning influences, such as lower poverty rates.
- An increase in available child care may free up time for families to participate more in their community, and thus build community capacity.



# What is a community?

Communities don't exist in isolation. All are subject to outside influences - **macroeconomic and other external forces** - that affect components of the community. These macroeconomic and external forces generally are outside of the community's control or ability to influence.

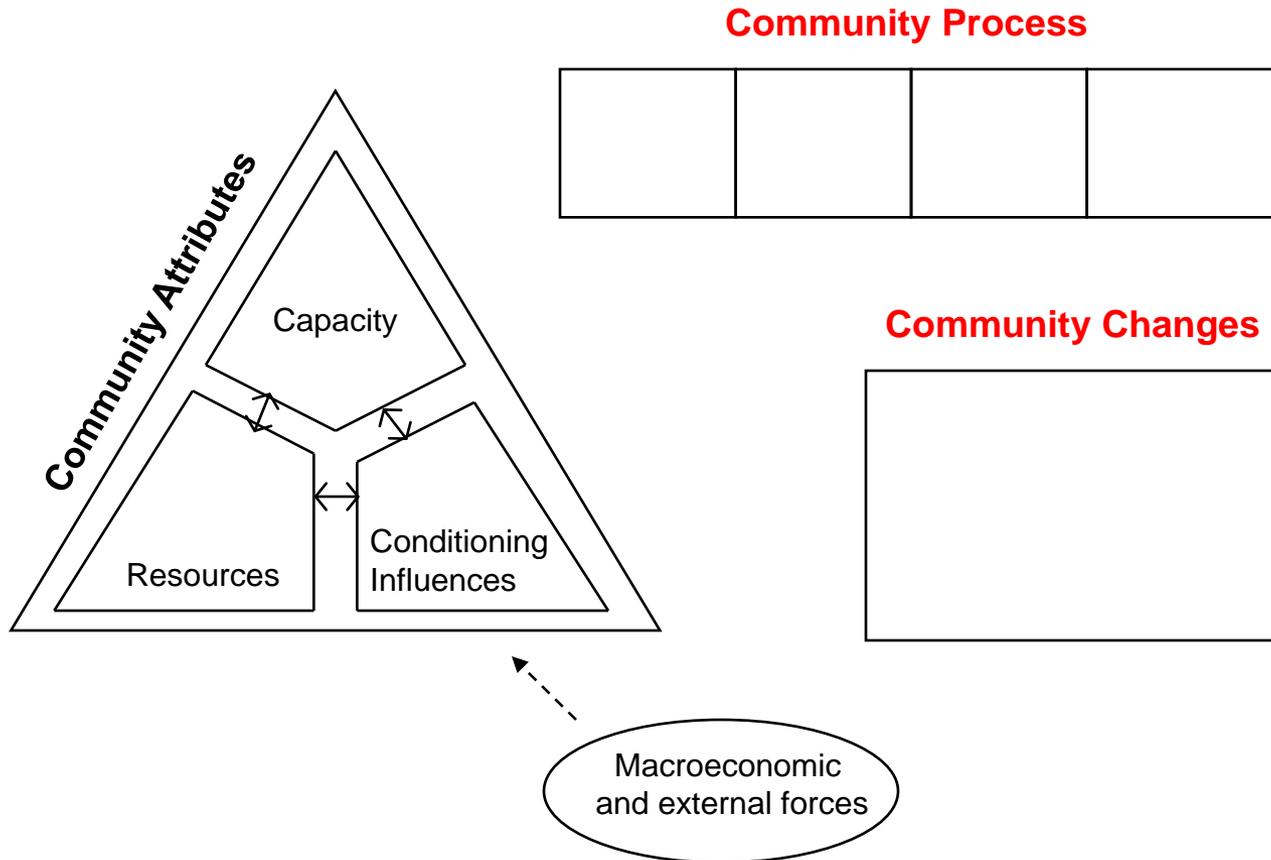
For example, the movement of low-skill jobs overseas is a global phenomena that may directly affect a certain community if a manufacturer moved facilities. Or changes in national policies, like changes in welfare or medical programs, may affect an area.



# II. How communities function

A community with a given set of attributes (resources, capacity, and conditioning influences) can take actions to achieve certain **changes**, or outcomes in the community.

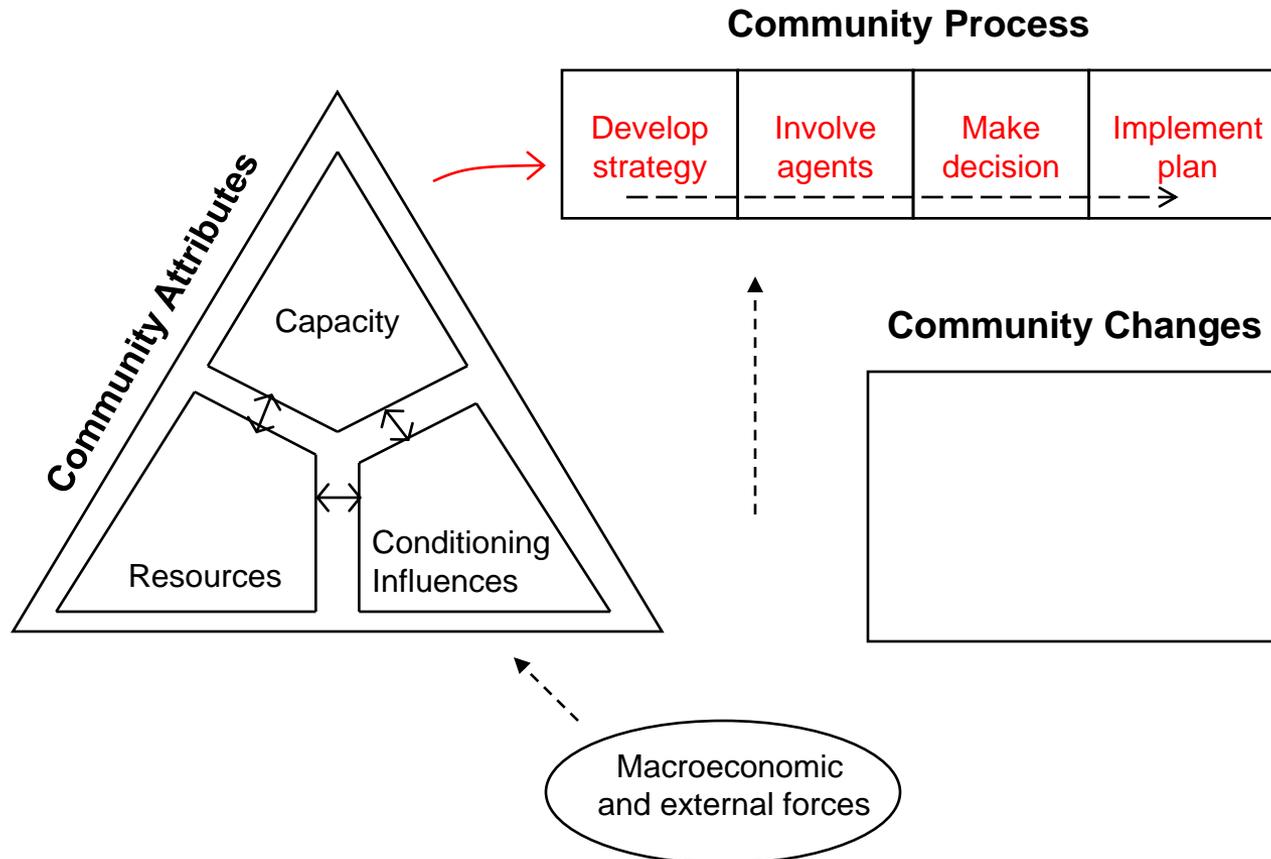
Actions taken by a community are ideally products of a **process** that follows a step-wise progression from development to implementation.



# How communities function: process

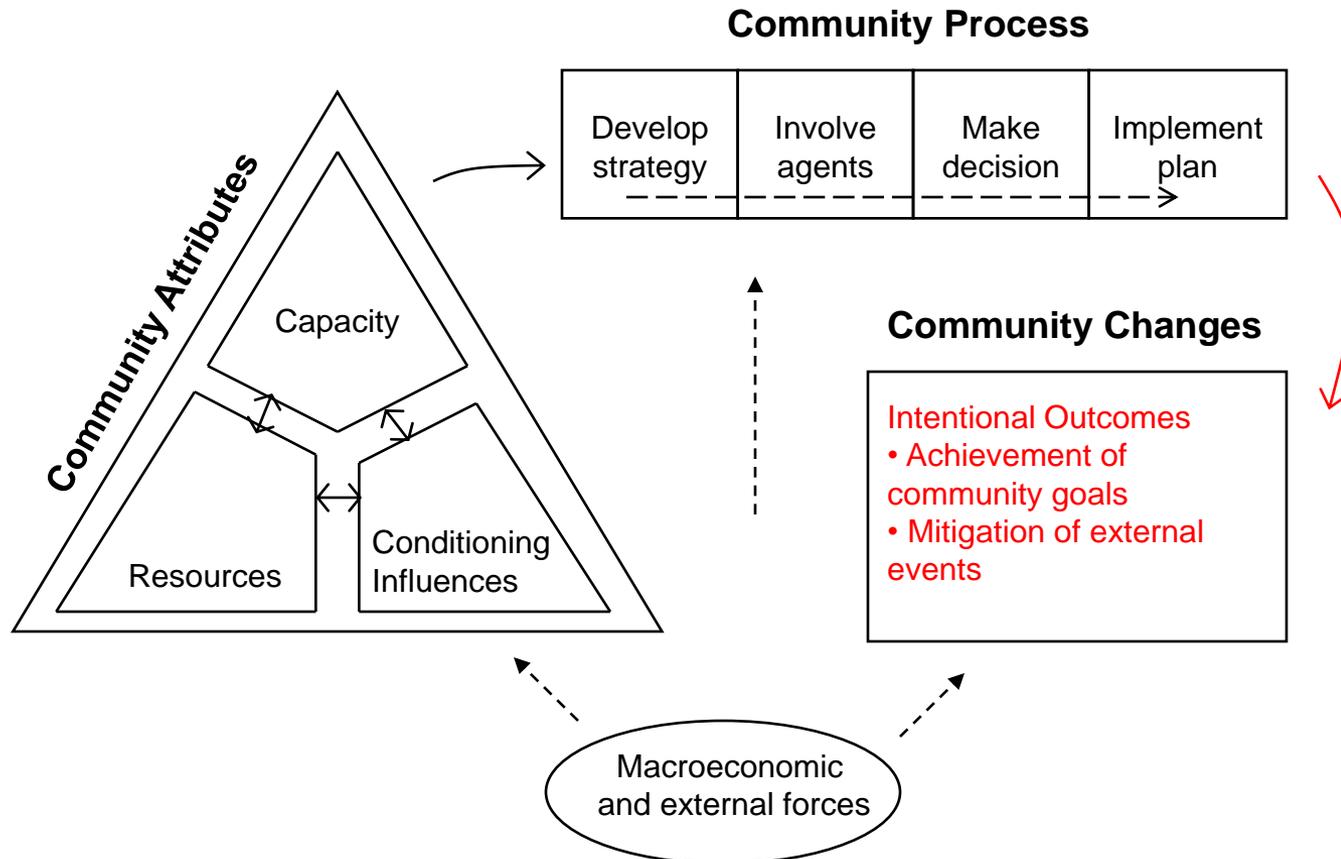
The final decision that is made and its implementation depend not only on the initial strategy developed, but also the agents involved.

Macroeconomic and external forces may also influence this process.



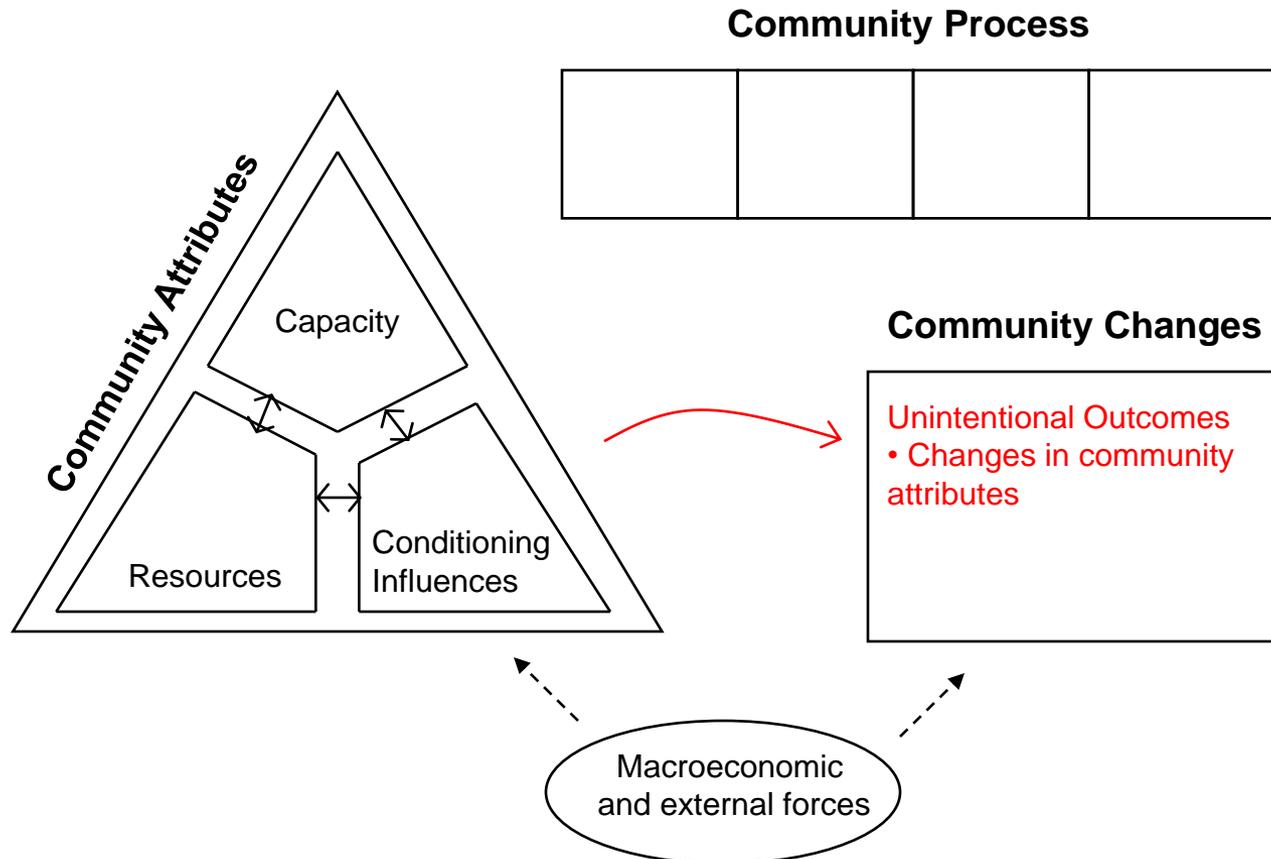
# How communities function: change

If a community engages in the community process, the community is likely to change – intentionally. In some cases, a change may be the achievement of goals set by the community – like an increase in homes purchased by residents. In other cases the change may be the intentional mitigation of negative events that are affecting the community, but are outside the community's influence – such as local jobs created to replace jobs lost from a sector that is declining due to global pressures.



# How communities function: change

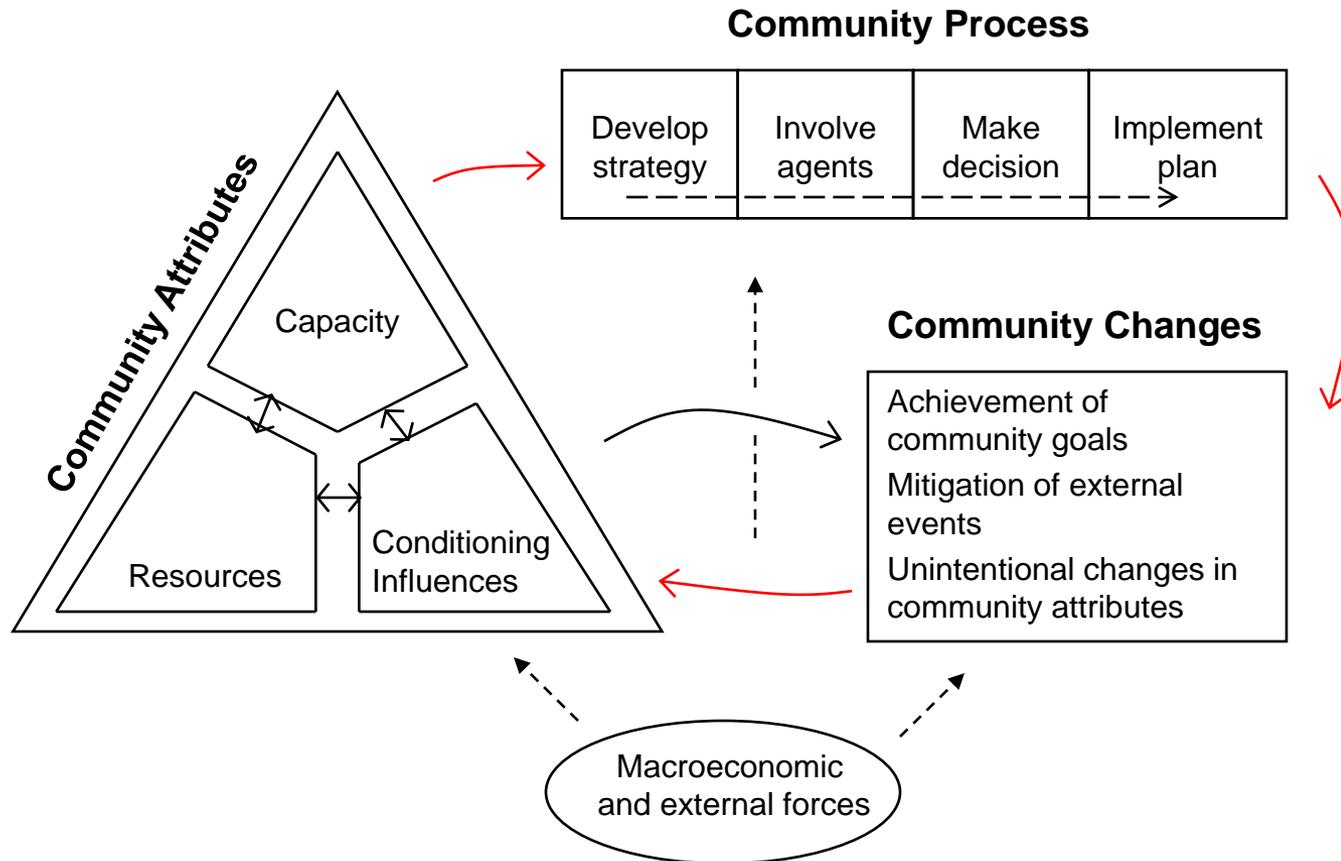
Not all communities follow an intentional decision-making process before acting, or take intentional actions at all. Change still happens, though, due to the influence of macroeconomic and external forces on attributes of the community that interact and affect each other. The difference is that without the community process, the changes – outcomes– may be both unanticipated and undesirable.



# How communities function: change

Once change has occurred, the outcomes can be identified.

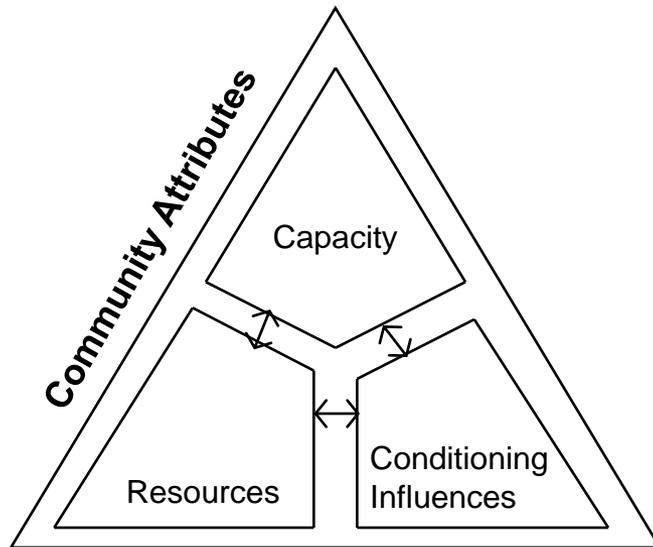
Outcomes are changes in the community itself – modifications of a community's resources, influences, or capacity, in either positive or negative, intended or unintended ways.



# Tracking changes...and vitality

Indicators are data used to characterize the community - an attempt to quantify what we know about a place.

By tracking the changes in indicators, a community can gauge the success of a particular action, or assess when a particular desired level of vitality is reached.



# A community model

This model is intended to be a general tool for residents and community groups – a description of how communities work to think about, talk about, and use to facilitate understanding of their specific community.

Better understanding of the community will enable residents to better identify problems, better predict what will enact change, and lead to better outcomes – and more vitality.

