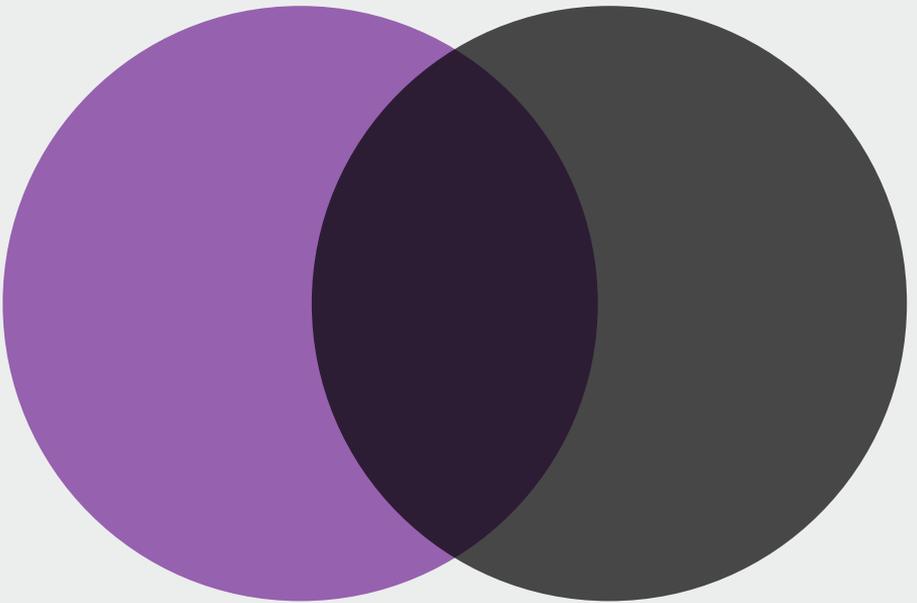


# Working for Change:

*The Irish Journal of Community Work*



Issue 3 – December 2012

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## *The Irish Journal of Community Work*

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## Contributors

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**Sinead Gormally** is currently a lecturer at the University of Hull in community and youth work studies. Prior to this she worked as a development officer on The Social Justice Approach to Community Development Programme with The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland. She was awarded her PhD in sociology from the University of Strathclyde which focused on the relationship between youth gangs and their local communities in Glasgow. Sinead has a background of youth work and has worked with young people both in Glasgow and Australia. Sinead has also lectured at the University of Strathclyde on the Community Education and Community Arts courses. Her research interests include youth work, community development, social justice and rights based work.

**Brian Harvey** is an independent social researcher working in the fields of poverty, social exclusion, equality, community development, human rights, the world of non-governmental organizations and European integration. He lives in Dublin and works for voluntary and community organizations, government agencies, intergovernmental bodies and trusts and foundations in both parts of Ireland, Britain and continental Europe.

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**Edel McGinley** coordinates the Justice for the Undocumented Campaign and Communications within MRCI. She is a board member of the Platform for the International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM). Edel previously coordinated two Equality for Women initiatives, including developing the Domestic Workers Action Group, and work with migrant women in rural Ireland. Before joining MRCI, Edel has worked in various social care and youth work positions. She has BA in Applied Social Studies, an MA in Globalisation, and Diplomas in Youth and Community Work and Digital Media Technology.

**Aoife Smith** is a community worker in the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland with a particular focus on gender, care and migration. Through coordinating grassroots organising with migrant women working in private homes, the Domestic Workers Action Group facilitates women to pool their resources into taking collective actions towards establishing decent work for domestic workers. Aoife has a BA in Journalism and a MA in Development Studies from Kimmage Development Studies Centre.

## Editorial

Community work on the island of Ireland faces a difficult period that could potentially undermine the substantial progress made in developing an infrastructure to address social exclusion and inequality over the past three decades. In the Republic, the context in which community work operates continues to deteriorate, with organisations struggling to internally offset significant budget cuts without affecting the response to the growing demand for supports and services.

Despite consistent government commitments to protect the most vulnerable, poverty and social exclusion in the South have continued to grow and there are now over a quarter of a million people (6.2% of the population<sup>1</sup>) living in consistent poverty. Perhaps even more significant are the trends in relation to poverty and social exclusion; in contrast to the progress made in recent years, all the indicators show that poverty and social exclusion are increasing annually.

Another consistent government commitment, to protect front-line services, has also been challenged. A 2012 report<sup>2</sup>, which analyses the changes in employment and services in the voluntary and community sector in Ireland, estimates that at a time when overall Government spending fell by 2.82% funding for C&V sector reduced by approximately 35%, clearly illustrating the disproportionate share of the cuts imposed on the community and voluntary sector since 2008. This has brought about a contraction in community work activity, which in turn has impacted on weaker sections of society who are dependent on these supports. Matters have been further compounded by reductions to public services, on which those living in poverty and social exclusion depend.

The ongoing project to restructure the community sector continues. Building on the endorsement and cohesion processes, the recommendations in the final report of the Steering Group for the Alignment of Local Government and Local Development are likely to bring about significant changes in the responsibility for and delivery of local development and community development actions at local level. Based on indications in the Interim Report of the Steering Group, it is likely that local authorities will have a strengthened role in the

planning, decision-making, oversight and delivery of local development programmes, and by implication the community development activity of local development companies, the actions of community development projects recently absorbed within local development company structures and the many community development initiatives associated with or supported by local development.

The report of the Central Expenditure Evaluation Unit of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is even more alarming. This report, which is likely to feed into forthcoming rounds of government cuts, looks at what it calls the not-for-profit sector, focusing on the fact that most organisations receive funding from a variety of sources through relationships with a range of government departments and agencies. It sees this multi-source funding as problematic and argues that the existing funding regime results in duplication by organisations both at local and national level, although the evidence is thin. The report recommends a reduction of the number of transactions between the state and the sector by the designation of a single state body as the core funder. It also recommends the merging of organisations and/or the introduction of a competitive process to ensure a better focus. In short, it amounts to a further reorganisation of the community sector.

It is likely that Community Development will remain in the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government and will be increasingly absorbed into a 'local' version of community development, as opposed to focusing on poverty, social exclusion and inequality. The challenge to community workers is to find creative ways of ensuring community work in this challenging environment.

In the North, similar withdrawal and reductions in funding is giving rise to a dramatically changing community sector landscape, with the unfortunate demise of many grassroots and indeed, even some larger resource base organisations. Others have managed to survive, through a pooling of resources, but in such a climate, where survival is the key priority, there is little space for the voice of dissent or challenge. In spite of this, a recent event in London, with Stormont ministers and all the home-grown NI talent, announced 2012 to be the Year of Northern Ireland. Regardless of the increasing impact of the recession on the lives of working-class people, with rising unemployment and

an accompanying rise in the cost of living, media attention instead focuses on celebrations such as the Titanic Centenary, the Queens Jubilee Garden Party or Olympic Torch carrying throughout the region (and indeed, of historical importance, across the border)!. This is despite reports from a Belfast City Council meeting that ‘working class communities across the city had “missed out on the dividend” arising from the project’ and at a cost of over £92 million (the vast majority public money) (Kelly, 2012)<sup>3</sup>, it has ‘failed to generate a mere 25 apprenticeships, fell short of creating a pitiful 15 jobs for the city’s long-term unemployed, and...includes not a single unit of desperately-needed social housing (Belfast Telegraph, 3rd May 2012)<sup>4</sup>.

Once more the gap between rhetoric and reality gapes wider and the panoramas created around these celebrations bear little resemblance to the day-to-day hardships of those in or on the verge of poverty. The Northern Ireland Programme for Government announced earlier this year states that its primary focus will be on growing the economy and tackling disadvantage. The latter is no doubt to be accomplished through the £80 million Social Investment Fund, which aims to deliver social change in NI, through reducing poverty, unemployment and physical dereliction in areas of need. Whilst it cannot be disputed that were this strategy to be successful, it would indeed deliver social change, however, the limited view and understanding of social change is all too apparent in the priorities identified above. Indeed the main thrust of the PfG appears to be on encouraging investment and increasing tourism. If we are to rely on the strategy pursued for the Titanic Project, which adheres to neo-capitalist trickledown theory, the future does not augur well for those struggling to make ends meet and indeed for those working in the voluntary and community sectors, who are at the coalface.

This edition of the journal focuses on migrants, and associated issues such as interculturalism, integration and racism. In the South, over 17% of the population described themselves as being born outside of Ireland in the last (2011) Census and that proportion is as high as 25% in some areas. Anecdotally, it is well known that many migrants experience poverty and social exclusion. The Habitual Residency Condition denies many migrants access to social protection at times when they may need it. The Migrants Centre of Ireland, the National Women’s Council and

Pavee Point have highlighted this unfair condition, especially in relation to migrant women and nomadic cultures. In the North too, there is no doubt that there are many migrants living in or on the verge of poverty. However, they are very much a hidden minority within NI society, often facing double discrimination, firstly, in terms of their ethnicity and secondly, in terms of their religious (real or perceived) affiliation. In a society still struggling to move beyond conflict, the majority of community development work focuses on dealing with this legacy and trying to bring about positive and lasting peace. Migrant voices are rarely heard in these arenas, both through exclusion and opting out, for a variety of reasons. The lack of migrant perspectives on this issue however, has the added impact of further marginalizing and isolating the concerns of migrants from what is generally considered in the North to be the 'mainstream' community development work.

Whilst there have seen some hopeful signs of migrant community workers engaging in professional community development education and networking with local community organisations, both in the North and the South, perhaps the real litmus test will be when the NI Executive Strategy on Cohesion, Sharing and Integration focuses less on its 'two tribes' thesis and more on promoting dialogue across the ever-growing ethnically, religiously and culturally diverse population. However, given the relatively low priority listing of this strategy in the Programme for Government and the lack of consideration given to ethnic minority voices, it would appear that this strategy may take some time to show any results.

Times of adversity force community workers to return to fundamental frameworks and basic principles. Many of the contributions to this edition of *Working for Change* demonstrate the vitality of action that operates out of a solid set of conceptual understandings and collective processes. Aoife Smith's article provides us with a very well grounded example of using community work methods and principles in the ongoing struggle for social and economic justice for migrants. The approach to this work emphasises the need to build relationships of trust. She documents the use of the techniques of Augusto Boal to initiate a process of transformation with migrant workers. While acknowledging the engagement capability of theatre in working with the most oppressed people, the article is also insightful in reflecting

Boal's belief that purposeful change is only accomplished by crossing the frontier between fiction and reality.

The dilemma facing undocumented workers who find themselves outside the normal recognition and protection of the state is the focus of Edel McGinley's account of the development of a campaign for regularisation. It is estimated that there are 30,000 undocumented migrants living in Ireland. Through her work with the Justice for the Undocumented Campaign Group, she sets down the reasons why social justice is a key underpinning value in community work – highlighting the need for community work to be inclusive of today's injustices towards migrants and minorities and the particular oppressions that they experience. This article looks at the step-by-step processes of developing a campaign that is driven out of community work principles. The necessity of analysis and politicisation as a key element to understanding the global and local forces that determine the situation of the undocumented - and the possibilities for social change - is clearly demonstrated in the article.

Sinead Smith's case study of the work undertaken by *Cultur* in County Meath charts the challenges in developing relationships that go beyond individual work/service provision. Her article outlines the implementation of community work approaches to work with migrants in a typical mixed urban-rural setting. As a case study illustrating the practical use of the 'Towards Standards for Quality Community Work' publication it is particularly useful in demonstrating what is possible when community work methods and principles are applied. The formation of a migrant's forum and the development of a county-wide intercultural network - developing the organisational capability to address the considerable barriers facing migrants at both local and national level - are good examples.

In his article, Michael Mahadeo examines the current success of political parties with tendencies to the 'far right' of the political spectrum and analyses the 'crises' and fears which seem to be engulfing Europe, in relation to integration and culture. He contends that these political trends are a reflection of the negative effects of the globalisation process and that community activism, as a politics of collective agency, is well placed to promote intercultural solidarity.

Claire Dorrity and Féilim Ó hAdhmaill's account of the identities and tensions in a changing neighbourhood illustrates the need for community work and the potential role of community structures such as Family Resource Centres. Focusing on Carrigtwohill, a rural area in East Cork, the research explored the experiences and perceptions of both long-term residents and those newly settled in the area, including those from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds. The study exposed the very different perspectives of different communities in the area.

The role of community structures in overcoming barriers that migrants face is also a theme of Siobhán O'Connor and Des McCafferty's article on the impact of housing policy on migrant communities in Limerick. They argue that social housing policy has resulted in the residential segregation of immigrant groups, excluding migrants from areas where there is an established community infrastructure. The resulting ghettoization has impeded community interaction and integration.

Rory Hearne's article also examines links between community development and social housing. It charts the progress of a community development initiative in the Dolphin House flat complex in Dublin that involved a Human Rights Based Approach to addressing substandard housing conditions. The article explores connections between the Human Rights Based Approach and community development practice.

Brian Harvey's analysis of voluntary boards of management of community development projects provides food for thought for all involved with community work. His careful account of the history and development of voluntary boards of management from the first EU Anti-poverty Programme (the National Pilot Schemes Against Poverty as they were known) up to the disbanding of the boards of management of the Community Development Programme projects raises some important questions about the resetting of the relationship between the state and the community sector that is still underway and which has removed a considerable layer of social capital, in terms of management capability and control of resources, from local communities.

Fortunately, some funding initiatives remain rooted in a clear understanding of community development processes. Sinead Gormally's discussion of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland's new programme, A Social Justice Approach to Community Development, shows how social analysis and processes of collective reflection can be embedded in the process of funding community organisations. Through employing mentors to work with a range of community groups, as well as providing small grants, the programme aims to facilitate communities to understand and reflect on social injustices and community relations, while providing support to find solutions to remedy identified injustices.

Both Brian Harvey's and Sinead Gormally's articles demonstrate the importance not just of the availability of funding for community development, but of the terms on which this funding is given, with both indicating that a clear understanding of the purpose and process of community development is critical to effective action. Brian Harvey argues that the decision to abolish the voluntary boards of management in community development projects, significantly reducing the capacity of the community sector, may ironically be seen as a tribute to the sector's prior effectiveness. Naomi Klein in her classic analysis of economic and political power in society, *The Shock Doctrine*<sup>5</sup>, illustrates how states use crises to deliver on agendas they would normally find difficult to pursue. It is tempting to apply that lens to developments within the community sector since 2008, with many believing that the economic crisis is providing a useful smokescreen for reform the state wishes to pursue anyway in the name of necessity.

In the context described above, it is perhaps more important than ever that *Working for Change: the Irish Journal of Community Work*, provides a space in which to explore, debate and articulate best practice in community development across the island. The production of this edition is with thanks to the voluntary effort of the Community Workers' Co-operative, which continues to support the Journal despite having its core funding withdrawn and losing all staff. It is also with thanks to University College Cork, the P&C Hickinbotham Charitable Trust and other contributors who prefer to remain anonymous. Finally, it is with thanks to the contributors and readers without whom there would be no Journal.

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1. CSO (2011), EU SILC 2010
  2. Brian Harvey (2012). Downsizing the Community Sector: changes in employment and services in the voluntary and community sector in Ireland 2008 - 2012
  3. Kelly, B. (2012) 'Neoliberal Belfast: Disaster Ahead?' Irish Marxist Review, Vol 1 (No 2), 44-59
  4. 'Working-class communities missed out on Titanic Quarter dividend', Belfast Telegraph, 3 May 2012
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## A social justice approach to community development

*Sinead Gormally*

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### Background

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) has been in existence since 1979 and over the past 30 years has worked with communities within Northern Ireland by using grant-making and fund development to drive social change (CFNI, 2012). Their work has promoted community development whilst supporting a context for peace and aiming to reduce poverty amongst the most disadvantaged communities. In recent years they have been engaged in facilitating communities to become increasingly aware of human rights protection and have worked to strengthen advocacy capacity amongst local groups. Their new programme, A Social Justice Approach to Community Development, aims to continue this work whilst combining theoretical and practical support to communities for the development of community-driven advocacy plans. The objective includes the facilitation of connections and networks within and between groups, policy-makers and politicians.

This article discusses the adopted theoretical position on social justice. It then explores the practical tools created to run this ambitious, yet timely, action research project to further develop community development methodologies that will support local communities and marginalised groups to work towards solutions to contentious issues.

### Social justice

This article does not seek to replicate the wealth of academic debates surrounding the term social justice. Rather, there is a focus on the way the concept is used by this project and how this translates practically as a model for community development. As a basis this project recognises that justice is closely interlinked with human rights. Human rights within the Northern Irish context are in themselves highly debated and over past years have often followed the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist fault-line. This project accepts the position set out within *Towards Standards for Quality Community Work* (Community Workers' Cooperative, 2008) that social justice is a core value for community work and is centred on promoting human rights for everyone in society.

Achieving social justice is about identifying and attempting to address structural disadvantage, discrimination and inequality. Fraser (2009) summarises two main approaches to social justice. The first focuses on redistribution of resources and goods, whilst the second focuses on politics of recognition. Fraser argues that far from dislocating the two strands of justice there is a need to address both. Similarly, Lister (2008) advocates the need to integrate redistribution and recognition, claiming that this integrative approach allows policy demands that result in a genuine voice for all and social security that pays sufficiently to ensure a dignified existence.

The struggle for recognition happens throughout society and can be manifested at a number of levels. There can be a lack of political/policy recognition with different access to things such as income, employment, education and healthcare. There is also the need for recognition of voice and identity, not only ensuring that various identities are acknowledged, but revaluing undervalued, devalued or ignored identities. Recognition must not be granted in a tokenistic sense but must actively provide space for voice, for involvement and for genuine inclusion. Lack of recognition is often intertwined and heightened in cases of material deprivation. Taylor (1997) suggests that recognition shapes the identity and expectations of individuals and groups and its absence can have serious, negative impacts.

The conception of social justice used within this community development context seeks to address and focus upon the collective broader rights for groups and communities whilst still recognising that the rights of the individual should not be negated nor ignored by the collective. If our understanding of social justice, based on the work of Fraser (2009), is that there is a need for collectives to gain justice of recognition as well as justice of economic distribution, question for this project is how to practically engage groups in this two-layered notion of social justice.

### *Practically*

Practically, this project aims to create a framework that can facilitate communities and collectives to understand, identify and reflect upon the importance of recognition and redistribution, whilst simultaneously providing the support required to find solutions and pathways to better relations in order to begin to redress identified injustices.

Ginwright et al. (2002) have employed a social justice approach to youth development. This approach potentially ensures there is critical consciousness of the social context. However, I argue this should be married with social action, or what Freire (1996) terms 'praxis'.

Part of social justice, as a form of community development, is to encourage groups to reflect on their situations, analyse the options and then act on their reflections. If social justice is about social and economic inequalities, as well as a belief in human rights and providing the capabilities, opportunities and resources to take action to address the inequalities, then there is a need for consciousness and the ability to act.

Practically, this project aims to ensure genuine praxis on a number of levels. Initially the groups will be supported to reflect and act on the identified injustices. Mentors are employed to work with the groups and will be required to reflect on their own role and practice to ensure they are not perpetuating existing norms. On a third level the Development Officer for CFNI will liaise with the groups and the mentors to capture the praxis process, to document and disseminate the problems and processes with this model, both in policy and academic fields. In essence there is a three-tiered process of praxis in practice, ensuring a continual theory-practice feedback loop where each continually modifies the other. Although Ginwright et al.'s (2002) work is with young people and youth development, this model can be drawn upon and used with community groups in a community development context. They advocate that the way to foster praxis with young people is to address three key levels of awareness:

1. Self-awareness - where issues relating to identity, race, class, gender and sexuality are identified. Although it may be more straightforward to work with individuals, our challenge is to get a community group to work collectively to discuss and identify these issues.
2. Social awareness - where there is a focus on the misuse of power. This stage provides a framework to analyse community relations. However for this project, it is suggested that social awareness is multi-faceted and should be divided to create clearer analyses:
  - 2a. Firstly, internal social awareness - both within the community and with others from differing communities, which within the context of Northern Ireland is of critical importance.
  - 2b. Secondly, strategic awareness, as key strategic relationships impact on the day-to-day lives of young people and community groups. These can be both horizontal within communities and vertically within society and include relations with the police, politicians, former paramilitaries, educational and health services, to name but a few.
3. Global awareness - where empathy for other oppressed people throughout the world is fostered. In the Northern Irish context this adds a further complexity. The view of 'oppressed people' or those experiencing injustices is often divided between communities. There is often no clear-cut, universally accepted, global oppression, emphasising the need for further negotiation and understanding.

The four stages can combine when a group creates an action plan to address a redressable injustice (Sen, 2009). It is envisaged that even if an action plan is minimal in substantive content, participation in the overall process, and particularly in the reflective discussion, will shift the consciousness of the group/community members to question 'common sense' norms and to generate alternative views of societal/community possibilities.

To achieve this there is the need for support and critical questioning of the social context in which groups operate. There is also the need to provide resources and support to facilitate action. There is a danger that community groups become socially aware and critically reflective on the structural and/or power imbalances faced but are left with little support to take action to make changes. Thus a twofold approach to practical engagement with groups is beneficial. The first element is providing a self-reflective mentor, who can enhance and support critical questioning and consciousness-raising. The second is the provision of a small grant, providing groups with resources to begin addressing the injustices identified.

### Involvement

Twenty community groups throughout Northern Ireland have been identified to be involved in the programme.<sup>1</sup> The table below highlights the mix of groups involved:

<b>Communities of interest</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>
An over-50s group	4 Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist	4 Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist
LGBT group	2 Catholic, Nationalist, Republican	3 Catholic, Nationalist, Republican
2 Ethnic minority groups		
2 Youth groups		
Women's group		

The aim is to use the above approach to get community groups to:

Collectively identify the forms and sources of injustice affecting a group, both as a result of the institutions to which they are subject and the behaviour of those around them;

'Justify' the need for redress – there has to be a reasoned argument (with appropriate evidence) that compares the position of the group with other groups in similar circumstances;

Set out the practicalities of redress – what needs to happen and what is the appropriate contribution of institutions and the group itself;

Make sure that redressing these forms of injustice does not leave others isolated or create new types of injustices for some members of the group or other groups.

Methodologically this process is based on an action research framework where groups reflect on their own practices and question their position in addressing injustices. This work is fed back to CFNI and the mentor and groups can share their learning experiences with other groups involved in the process. The collated information will be disseminated within academic and policy fields, ensuring grass-roots learning can have a broader impact.

Practically the mentors will work alongside community groups to explore:

how the group works within their local area and within their local committees and evaluate if more effective ways of working can be developed;

relationships with other groups and areas to evaluate if better ways of communicating needs and sharing resources could occur;

the group's relationship with councils, statutory and voluntary agencies and politicians to create a strong and participative means of working;

support groups to develop advocacy skills and plans;

skills and awareness of social justice principles.

The mentor is expected to adopt the role of a 'critical friend' where they facilitate discussions and adopt a challenge function. This will encourage groups to assess the differences between real and perceived injustices and to be self-critical, to examine their own role in perpetuating injustices as well as to reflect on how they can act upon these identified injustices. Groups are encouraged through the framework below to examine justice/injustices at the various levels of society, the internal community as well as the institutional/decision-making levels.

### *Self-awareness or internal reflection*

Self-awareness involves the group internally reflecting on how they work. This ensures that there is self-knowledge and reflection on working practices. Without knowledge of internal workings it is difficult to attempt to address injustices. Furthermore some injustices may not be solved due to the internal practices of the group. An example of this may be the practice of gatekeeping by a collective. Certain individuals may be perceived to be or in reality be in control of the workings of the group. This can prevent others from engaging with the group, voicing their concerns or feeling secure enough to challenge the internal power structures.

Facilitating critical discussion within the group may give space, time and opportunity (something which is often not afforded due to the practical demands of the job) to

discuss how to self-improve their workings whilst also reflecting on those voices who are not included within their community organisation. It provides an important space to assess if they as a group are in fact perpetuating injustices internally by excluding others or by being closed in their workings whilst claiming to be representative of a geographical community or a community of interest. In the specific Northern Ireland context there may also be issues of whether the group is seen to be politically/paramilitary aligned and how this impacts on the potential for broader community participation.

### *Social-awareness or external reflection*

Once the group has critically reflected on their own composition, workings and actions, they can begin to question how they engage with others. This stage should analyse both real and perceived perceptions within broader society. This involves how the group themselves perceive, work and engage with others, but also how they feel they are perceived by people outside the community group. This starts a process of reflection, whilst also allowing the mentor to pose critical questions about where perceptions come from. This is particularly important in Northern Ireland as it will begin to unpick the historical, normalised stereotypes and perceptions of others. The question of perception is not only important to encourage effective community development but also to consider the levels of recognition apparent. This is demonstrated clearly in the next section.

### *Strategic-awareness or strategic reflection*

This stage allows the analysis of power structures within society. It is impossible to address social and economic injustices or justice of recognition without identifying who holds the power within the community. Often community

groups find it relatively easy to assess strategic injustices without identifying their own role. The perception that particular areas, religions etc. get more than others is an easy charge. However, if the internal workings have not been assessed there is a danger that localised power dynamics are disregarded and, rather than being addressed, are protected. This is not to suggest that there are not high levels of injustice within society, as on the whole there are. It is the aim of this programme to begin to address some of these injustices, but a parallel aim is to build effective community development for the groups involved. This means reflecting internally as well as externally and strategically in order to achieve voices for all (Lister, 2008) and strategic change.

### *Global awareness*

This programme is not specifically designed at this stage to focus on global issues. However, in developing this framework there could be an additional stage for mentors to focus their attentions on global awareness in groups and it could be used as a means to also reflect back on local issues, such as racism, sectarianism, immigration, poverty and discrimination.

### *Learning to date*

In 2011 there was a small-scale pilot project that has allowed the framework to develop and be implemented. The pilot involved seven geographical community groups engaging with a mentor over a short period of time to explore the concept and potential application of this social justice approach. Many mentors faced initial problems explaining the project to groups and encouraging them to participate when there was no money available and the process seemed complex and somewhat unclear. However, after groups were involved they articulated that they had

never been asked about these types of issues before – they had never been asked to look at local concerns through a social justice lens – and that they found the conversations in themselves cathartic and enlightening.

The pilot project demonstrated that once groups engaged they found positives in analysing and reflecting on their work, their practices and the practices of others in a new light. The groups were afforded time, albeit limited, to discuss internal and external perceptions of their areas, their local needs, local injustices, barriers to local rights, voice and the resources, strategies and supports necessary to begin to realise those rights at a local level.

The issues identified in the pilot process resonate with initial discussions within the larger programme. Issues of perception arose with many feeling they were viewed in a negative light by outsiders: ‘We are seen as sectarian and scary, that nobody works and we are scroungers’. Others thought outsiders see their areas as controlled by former paramilitaries and so feel intimidated to enter. Many of the pilot groups wanted to work on the perceptions others had of their area by engaging with the media and by confidence and capacity-building training. By engaging in the dual process of internal training and building relations with external institutions they felt they could respond to the negative sentiments often associated with these areas.

Other issues such as unemployment, lack of public transport, paramilitary control, drug and alcohol abuse, and poor relations with the police, were also identified. Though some solutions were discussed, these were not acted upon in the pilot project. The expanded programme will seek to discuss these issues and facilitate redressable solutions for participants.

CFNI has gained considerable learning from the pilot project and the early stages of the broader programme. Firstly, the role of the mentor is critical. The mentor has to have the capacity, ability and nuanced knowledge to challenge when necessary yet support when required. They must be capable of reflecting on their own prejudices and ensure they do not perpetuate current behaviour or stereotypes. The role of being a 'critical friend' is paramount for the success of the project. This requires a confident yet empathetic approach of both informed challenge and support. Mentors have to be capable of building rapport, questioning, being critically reflective, supportive, challenging and facilitating sessions. Thus the training of mentors, ensuring they understand the project brief and can theoretically and practically engage with the programme, is crucial for this model to work.

Secondly, the model can provide groups the opportunity to explore issues that may not have arisen using other frameworks. Importantly, it should also begin to work towards building the capacity to address identified issues using a social justice approach. The exploration of issues and the level of reflection and action will vary for each group. For some the ability to view issues from differing perspectives may be a significant starting point. For others the willingness to engage with all parties, even if not directly to begin with, may be a move towards sustainable action and change.

Thirdly, CFNI must remain realistic throughout this process. Many of the identified issues cannot be remedied overnight and it is acknowledged that economic, social and political issues raised through this model have a very real impact upon the lives of local people. Thus, though the space is provided for reflection and a process of capacity-building can be started, this is a lengthy process and reflection, acknowledgement and understanding are key steps

towards sustainable and substantial change. Equally, from its many years of engagement in support for community-based groups, the Community Foundation is acutely aware that community processes are seldom linear in nature and that the pace of social change is irregular.

## Conclusion

This programme attempts to develop a way of working that allows a social justice model to be used in community development practice. The aim is that this model will enable groups to assess and identify the needs of their local areas, how they might tackle injustices and how they might become more inclusive and accountable. Alongside looking at 'local' relationships, the programme will support groups to look at their relationships with 'others' – be these neighbouring communities, the other community, new communities within Northern Ireland or agencies and service providers. Finally, it will support groups to build or capitalise on relationships with politicians and other decision-makers (Healy and O'Prey, 2011). The marriage of consciousness and action allows for the process of development and sustainable change to begin. It also allows space for reflection on current beneficial practices and provides opportunities for shared learning between different groups and communities.

In a practical sense this model relies heavily on groups being willing to participate in the exploratory process and to be open to communication, reflection and action. It also places a lot of emphasis on relationship-building and trust developing between the mentor and the group. The mentor has to have the ability to support but also at times to question and criticise.

The practical implementation of this model will be collated and will provide future learning about how best to use social justice as an approach to community development. For the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland this will bring together its commitment to supporting community action and promoting social justice in a society that has been previously focussed to a much greater extent on the uni-dimensional constitutional issue.

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1. The twenty enlisted groups were selected with two main aims in mind: 1) to select the geographical areas most suited to (and most likely to benefit from) the programme; and 2) to provide a wide mix of areas from across Northern Ireland for comparative research. Initially statistical analysis were conducted to discover those Super Output Areas (and estates via NIHE data) with the highest levels of a) multiple deprivation; b) economic inactivity; c) educational under-attainment (no qualifications); d) long-term illness (unable to work); e) child poverty; f) poverty among older people; and g) lone parents. Then there was a deliberate mix of a) urban and rural communities; b) single identity PUL/single identity CNR/mixed communities; and c) a balance of communities from across Northern Ireland. Finally, desk-based research (including phone interviews) was conducted in order to ensure a mix of communities with strong/weak infrastructure was included, as well as to determine the levels of community participation (number/range of community groups) and other funding (including statutory support) that has been provided to the local communities.

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# 02.

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## Justice for the undocumented: a community work approach to working with undocumented migrants

– Edel McGinley

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### Introduction

Community work seeks to address the exclusion of groups experiencing oppression. In this context this article outlines the situation of irregular migration globally and in Ireland. It examines the position of undocumented migrants from a structural, political and social perspective, highlighting their vulnerable position in society. From a community work perspective this represents a critical analysis of the challenges and benefits of engaging with undocumented migrants. Through an exploration of the barriers to participation, it documents the strategies employed to enable the participation of undocumented migrants in a process of change.

Community work is about the empowerment of individuals and communities and addressing an unequal distribution of power in society. Many community workers choose to work with groups who experience exclusion and discrimination and are vulnerable to human rights abuses. As community

work 'involves an analysis of social and economic situations and collective action for change based on that analysis' (Community Workers' Cooperative, 2008), developing and deepening our understanding of the global and local forces which reinforce structural oppression is vital. Consequently community work with undocumented migrants requires an analysis of systems that impact on and drive irregular migration. This in turn helps shape practical and pragmatic responses at a local level.

The lack of legal channels out of an irregular legal status is a fundamental barrier in realising the basic rights of undocumented migrants. An irregular situation significantly impacts on people's dignity and well-being and their ability to exercise basic human rights (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) 2010). Ireland, like all other countries, is challenged to respond in an effective and humane manner. The Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) is committed to a community work approach to push for justice through collectivising experiences and building power with undocumented migrants. To realise this MRCI created the conditions for the emergence of the Justice for the Undocumented Campaign Group (JFUG). This group is campaigning for the introduction of an Earned Regularisation Scheme for undocumented migrants in Ireland. This would give undocumented migrants and their families living in Ireland a window of opportunity to come forward and earn their way to permanent residency status (MRCI, 2011).

Using a community work approach to working with undocumented migrants is relatively new in Ireland and some have argued that it is indeed impossible to work collectively with undocumented migrants. A community work approach which is informed by core values – of participation, empowerment and social justice (Community Workers' Cooperative, 2008; MRCI, 2009) – has a valuable

contribution to make to working with undocumented migrants. This article critiques the dominate discourse that has developed in respect of undocumented migrants and documents the community work approach used by the MRCI to engage and mobilise undocumented migrants in a process of change.

### *What is irregular migration?*

Irregular migration is a complex global phenomenon experienced locally and driven by forces of globalisation, structural poverty and inequality. Patterns of irregular migration are underpinned by complex decision-making processes, individual aspirations, and household strategies. Arguably, economic opportunity is one of the key drivers of irregular migration globally. However, irregular migration is reinforced by networks of migration and driven by global market forces, family reunion, employer demand and complex policies and laws which control entry to a state. It is often the lack of legal migration channels coupled with the demand for labour which create the conditions for irregular migration (CLANDESTINO Project, 2009).

Irregular migration generally refers to migration taking place outside a legal framework, i.e. people who enter a country or who remain in a country without legal permission from the State (MRCI, 2010). People who find themselves in this position are referred to as undocumented or irregular migrants. While irregular migration remains complex it is relatively easy to drift into an irregular status throughout the period of migration. Many migrants who are undocumented initially enter a country legally but become undocumented for complex and diverse reasons.

### *Developing a critical analysis of irregular migration*

Because critical thinking underpins community work it is important to have an analysis of the social, structural and political dynamics that shape people's lives. Collective work with groups requires the transfer of skills and knowledge to critically engage with the dominant discourse in respect of undocumented migrants, both globally and nationally. On a global scale undocumented migrants are seen on the one hand as desirable due to their flexibility, while on the other they are seen disposable, due to their vulnerability and exploitability (LeVoy and Verbruggen, 2005). However, balanced discussion on irregular migration is difficult where there is a lack of reliable data. The EU CLANDESTINO project estimated that there are between 1.6 and 3.8 million undocumented migrants in the EU (CLANDESTINO Project, 2009). Other EU research has estimated a figure of between 7 and 8 million. The discrepancies between these figures are significant and show a lack of reliable information on irregular migration. In reality, larger figures are often used to support arguments for greater border security and migration control within the EU. Policy responses to irregular migration are often formed not by sound evidence but by hearsay and rumour, and become highly politicised. A paradox emerges in that the policy goals that aim to reduce irregular migration actually contribute to its growth. Often, in spite of the political objectives of managing migration and preventing irregular migration, policy development and legislation continue to contribute to the emergence of irregular migration (CLANDESTINO Project, 2009). As a result undocumented migrants remain invisible to policy makers outside the 'fight against irregular migration' (PICUM, 2011). These responses are contradictory and engender a discourse of fear and mistrust which invariably leads to flawed policy development. For this reason community workers and migrant organisations must demand that governments

critically engage with this issue. A simplistic 'illegal' / legal analysis will not suffice, so unpacking both the data and terminology used when describing and responding to irregular migration is extremely important for community workers who engage with this issue.

### *The Irish context*

Irregular migration is a relatively new phenomenon in Ireland, and is directly related to the rise in inward migration experienced since the mid-1990s (MRCI, 2011). The immigration and employment permit system could not keep up with demand for labour. An *ad hoc* and restrictive employment permit and immigration regime evolved and assisted in creating the conditions for irregular migration. Consequently as the economy grew, so too did the undocumented population. Based on figures from the Department of Justice, MRCI estimate that there are 30,000 undocumented migrants in Ireland, including children.

At the heart of the Irish immigration system is the requirement that people from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) need permission to enter and remain in the country. There is a variety of different permissions and visas administered by the Government which specify the conditions and duration of the permission to remain in the State. The vast majority of non-EEA nationals enter Ireland with such legal permissions, but for a variety of reasons become undocumented. Such situations include workers who became undocumented as a direct result of exploitation; prospective students who paid school fees for nonexistent or fraudulent schools; people invited to work in Ireland on the understanding that permits were secured for them; children born in Ireland to already-undocumented parents; visa over-stayers such as those on tourist visas; those who have become undocumented as a result of administrative failures and mistakes; and asylum seekers who have had their claim refused.

### *A rationale for community work with undocumented migrants*

Community work is ultimately concerned with the rights of all people and 'recognises the changing and often hidden nature of structural inequalities' (Community Workers' Cooperative, 2008: 10). Being an undocumented migrant reinforces these inequalities and impacts on the participation of this group in society. The constant fear of discovery by the authorities means that many people experience psychological distress and frequently crimes such as domestic violence and racist incidents go unreported. Undocumented migrants, including children, are often isolated from their communities and cut off from visiting their families. Faced with few options, many are forced to stay in exploitative situations (MRCI, 2011). For most, going home is not an option, as they and their families have lived and worked in Ireland for many years: they have put down roots in their local communities and Ireland has become their home (MRCI, 2010). According to Freire, critical community work is centred in the 'lived lives of people' (Freire, 1970), so our practice must be rooted in the precariousness of undocumented people's lives. This expands our understanding as practitioners and allows us to work with oppressed groups to overcome barriers to their participation and to engage in a process of consciousness-raising which strives to bring about collective change. This begins the process of empowerment.

### *Engaging and building participation*

Community work recognises that people have the right to participate in decisions and structures that affect their lives (MRCI, 2009). The idea of becoming politically active and of campaigning for rights is often not associated with undocumented migrants in the Irish context. MRCI has been working with and for undocumented migrants for

over a decade and while it is not impossible to engage this group in a process of change it is however not without its challenges. Creating the conditions for active and critical participation requires an understanding of the systemic barriers which impede participation so as to inform strategies for engagement. Contact with undocumented migrants can be problematic as many fear detection and are often invisible to services within society. It must be stressed that the initial contact with an undocumented person is very important in addressing individual fears of detection and to build trust relationships. Consequently it has been necessary to employ a service provision element in the early stages of engaging with undocumented migrants to address individual needs and concerns. MRCI's Resource Centre therefore provides an extremely important point of first contact. This contact is initiated often through word of mouth and is significant as it would not be possible to engage this group without connections within diverse migrant communities. This first contact from a community work perspective begins to connect the individual with the structural and political elements their situation.

### *Moving from the individual to the collective*

In order to move forward with concrete proposals for change there is a need to create the conditions for people to come together and to engage in a new discussion about their situation. MRCI employs a power-sharing approach to working with migrants and in May 2010 we brought together a small group of undocumented migrants to discuss the change needed to address their individual and collective situation. From these meetings the core group of the Justice for the Undocumented Group (JFUG) was formed. The work with the group is concerned with both addressing and building power. This process requires a number of strategies. Currently one-to-one meetings are held to assess an individual's situation and to also alleviate the fear of

participating in or coming to a meeting. Small campaign introduction meetings (6 to 10 people) are held on an on-going basis. The creation of this space has been critical to move from the individual to the collective by simply allowing people to meet each other, share information, support and solidarity, and to begin to critically engage with the issue of being undocumented. Developing an effective system of engagement has taken time, and given the time many leaders have emerged within this process.

### *Empowerment as a process*

Empowerment, a core value of community work, involves an active engagement with power through a process of consciousness-raising. Margaret Ledwith (2005) argues that personal empowerment through a process of consciousness-raising is the beginning stage of collective action for transformative change. This is achieved through the development of skills, analysis and knowledge and requires active engagement in leadership development. Leaders in the campaign have spoken of how the act of coming to a meeting has been a very powerful experience and enabled them to engage with irregular migration as a political issue, and not an individualised problem. Connecting to values and deepening an understanding of power and oppression has been critical for the members of the JFUG. To enable this critical analysis MRCI provides opportunities for members to link with other action groups, campaigns and organisations working in the area of social justice. Members have participated in courses and workshops to develop skills in the areas of anti-racism, equality, campaigning, media and facilitation work. The core group has grown and is emerging into a strong leader group. Some members are involved in becoming educators and agitators through assisting with the facilitation of campaign meetings. Though this power-sharing approach members of the JFUG have taken on leadership roles in

representing the campaign. The campaign also requires us to engage with very large groups of people as it is an issue that affects thousands. To respond to this, MRCI runs workshops and meetings to engage a wider group of people, to pass on information and to link and build ownership of the campaign.

### *Taking action*

Community work has an approach to action that is embedded in the collective and informed by critical analysis. Taking action requires identifying the system of power that needs to be challenged. This process requires locating those who hold and broker power and getting organised to make demands for change. This work includes identifying allies, and being strategic and political to assist the struggle to support the rights of undocumented migrants. The process involves approaching the most obvious power-brokers in society – i.e. those in the political sphere. Developing political awareness is critical to achieving change, and engaging the JFUG members in a politicisation process has been challenging given that people do not want to make their situation visible. To facilitate political action, participative and proactive campaign sessions were developed to explore irregular migration, systems of power and influence, media messaging and communication. Individual representations made to TDs and local politicians have resulted in the passing of motions of support from Dublin City Council and South Dublin County Council. Direct action in the form of a candle-lit march in December 2011 provided a visible and tangible opportunity for people to get involved in a process for change. These types of actions have built confidence and have seen the group grow exponentially.

## *Reflective learning and conclusions*

Doing this work has required innovative responses and solutions. Community work practice has to be deliberate in its actions and intentions and therefore engaging undocumented migrants in a process of collective action for change needs planning. For MRCI working with the JFUG has been an intentional and conscious process which has addressed issues of individual safety and questions in relation to confidentiality and anonymity. The precariousness of people's lives and their fear create the need for flexibility and creativity in this work. Small consistent meetings have worked well to enable membership growth. Developing comprehensive communications tools has been extremely important and follow-up cannot be underestimated. It must also be noted that the reality of this work means that some people will be more engaged and 'fired up' about the issues than others. It has therefore been important to create opportunities to be involved in work at different levels, from meetings to workshops to events and actions. Part of this work has required direct action to ensure visibility and as an engagement tool. Most important in this work has been engaging in a political process.

A key learning point was the time it took to engage people and grow the group. The issue at the beginning of the process of engagement was the lack of participation; the challenge now is working with large groups to mobilise for change. This work needs to be revised constantly and adjustments made to the practices employed. The next step is to build a network with existing members to reach out and mobilise undocumented migrants across the county. This type of planned action enables participation and gives a sense hope to those affected by the issue. The active creation of spaces, events and actions for involvement enables people to be free from fear and to

be active in solutions which will affect their lives. Finally, as a community work practitioner and migrant rights organisation, it is important that our work is underpinned by core values and a power analysis which enables us to be catalysts for change.

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# 03.

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## Creative approaches in community work: Developing a collective analysis for change: using forum theatre with migrant domestic workers

– Aoife Smith

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### Introduction

This article starts from the understanding that community work has a key role to play in supporting communities to actively examine, and try to address, the key cause of their exclusion instead of passively receiving services set up to alleviate its worst symptoms (Crickley, 2010). The article illustrates a creative methodology used in 2011 by the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) in their work with migrant domestic workers. This article explores the use of creative approaches to community work grounded in building critical analysis for collective action with marginalised and oppressed groups.

Over the last decade MRCI has adopted a community work approach to organising and empowering migrant domestic workers for change. It is an approach that is grounded in the lived experiences of domestic workers, that recognises their right to participate in decision-making structures

impacting on their lives, and that supports domestic workers' participation in achieving positive outcomes while fostering leadership development. The approach uses a model underpinned by a set of principles influenced by Brazilian educationalist Freire (1970), founded on participation, empowerment, collective action, anti-discrimination and social justice.

The article illustrates a body of work titled 'Acting Out for Hope and Change', a drama project that used participative 'Theatre of the Oppressed' and 'Forum Theatre', politicised drama approaches developed by Augusto Boal, where plays are developed around experiences of people silenced by poverty and oppression. It analyses this approach in terms of benefits for community development, as defined by the Community Workers Coop (2009).

### *Who are domestic workers and how are they marginalised?*

The ILO estimates that over 100 million people work in domestic services (ILO, 2008, p. 13). Over ninety percent of these are women and girls. Domestic work has existed for centuries, but recently the demand for workers has increased sharply. Increased numbers of women in the labour force, aging societies, and problems balancing family life and work underpin the trend. Despite playing a vital role in the well-being and economic structure of society, many domestic workers suffer physical, psychological, sexual and emotional abuse on a daily basis as a result of their occupation.

The sector has some of the highest reports of modern-day slavery and the worst forms of child labour. Anderson (2000) writes that society views domestic work as 'emotionally priceless but economically worthless'. Traditionally unpaid work done by women, nowadays

it needs to be paid for. However, often workers are undervalued, under-protected and underpaid. Three main concerns prevail in maintaining this vulnerability, according to the ILO: the workers' invisibility in private homes; deficits in law and enforcement; and poor organisation of domestic workers by trade unions.

### *Why are migrant domestic workers at risk?*

A lack of decent work opportunities pushes many women into domestic work. Increased rural poverty stemming from neoliberal agendas enforced in developing countries forces many women to migrate; often domestic work is the only option available. Shocking reports of domestic servitude where women are enslaved by employers are not uncommon, and have resulted in the recent adoption of an ILO Convention for the sector (ILO no. 189).

Migrant domestic workers experience a heightened risk of exploitation because of: coercion and deception, where jobs advertised are often false, employers withholding workers' passports is not uncommon, and workers' movements are often monitored; bonded labour situations, where ruthless individuals or recruitment agencies extort money for travel and visas, leaving the workers indebted to them; and restrictive visa regimes that tie workers to employers, often forcing them to stay in exploitative situations. According to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) (2010), migrant domestic workers are vulnerable to the 'worst abuses endured by any category of workers'.

### *Migrant domestic workers in Ireland*

With the onset of rapid economic growth in the late 1990s and the dawn of the Celtic Tiger the Irish population changed dramatically. Ireland went from being a sending

country to becoming a receiving country of inward migration. In 2003 the number of migrant workers entering Ireland from outside the EU and EEA states peaked, with the majority of migrant workers filling low-skilled work sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, catering and construction.

Like most other western democracies, Ireland's increase in migration rates has brought a disturbing increase in human rights abuses documented by migrant workers in relation to their working conditions and their experiences of racism in the workplace. 'Private Homes: A Public Concern' (MRCI, 2003, research into the lived experiences of twenty migrant women employed as carers, childminders and housekeepers in Ireland, was a moment of realisation for many in Ireland of the reality of exploitation taking place behind closed doors in Ireland. It highlighted disturbing exploitation in the sector, ranging from wage exploitation to racial discrimination and situations of forced labour. Although employment law does extend to domestic workers in Ireland, workers' rights can go unrealised in the absence of adequate mechanisms to monitor and enforce employment rights and working conditions within the sector.

### *Getting organised - Domestic Workers Action Group*

It became evident from the findings of the MRCI report that the private home sector demanded urgent attention to address the issues raised in the study. Wage exploitation, long working hours, no holiday or sick pay and feelings of harassment at the hands of employers were common findings. The report recommended facilitating migrant women 'to organise and participate in developments that concern them' (2003: 46). In response to this the Domestic Workers Support Group (DWSG) was established and resourced by the MRCI in 2004, aiming to empower migrant women working in private homes to pool their resources to

campaign for improved working and living conditions in the under-regulated domestic work sector. It aimed to involve migrant domestic workers in decision-making structures through their participation using community work principles.

The group began meeting regularly on Sundays, a convenient time for most to participate. Initially meetings took a 'soft' approach, primarily a 'Support Group', a safe social space where women could come to get information on their rights and on immigration issues. Over time the group developed, through sustained participation of members and a model of supporting leadership development, into an 'Action Group', with the name change in 2008 to reflect the move in priorities towards a more politicized campaign group. The Domestic Workers Action Group (DWAG) established a core group structure for decision making, agreed a strategic plan of action and focused on targeted campaigns to improve living and working conditions for domestic workers. Other strategic priorities of the group include outreach, awareness raising and social activities. While MRCI provides support and assistance to individuals with their personal situations, DWAG facilitates participation in a collective space for change, encouraging the move from focusing on the individual to collective issues for domestic workers.

Before discussing the drama project it is important to note that since 2004 DWAG has engaged in a number of creative processes to engage the participation of domestic workers and to create conditions to support the development of critical analysis. Projects have included quilt-making, photography and film. It is a methodology that has worked well with the group. Previous projects have been documented in Tools for Social Change (MRCI, 2009). Being aware of certain skills within the group it was decided to explore the use of theatre to engage both new and old members, who had different levels of participation

in the group. Of the ten participants, three were new members, all cases of extreme exploitation, who were living in direct provision centers whilst waiting for criminal cases to be investigated under human trafficking legislation, three were founding members all in good employment situations with irregular participation at meetings, and four were active members fully engaged in DWAG campaigns.

### *Forum Theatre - a theatre of transformation*

Theatre of the Oppressed, a process developed by Brazilian Augusto Boal in the 1960s, believes the theatre is inherently political. Forum Theatre, or Theatre of the Oppressed, facilitates individuals to identify oppressive systems, structures and individuals and – through role play, drama, games and improvisation – to understand how to use this knowledge to create change. Boal believes that in using theatre people learn to act. They can learn to act out different responses to oppression through dramatization, which empowers them to do the same in situations presented in reality.

### *Developing critical analysis*

As a methodology, Theatre of the Oppressed seeks to develop critical consciousness or critical analysis, which requires an understanding of the root causes of discrimination and the ability to link this to wider political contexts. For example, if experiences in the workplace are mirrored in wider society, negative workplace experiences will impact on the degree to which one can participate and enjoy an acceptable level of equality. In acting out situations a domestic worker can name the barriers that facilitated her oppression and understand how these can be changed. Through being involved in the collective space like this, she empowers herself with new knowledge based on her experiences, which, combined with the

group's collective analysis and actions, can be a powerful, transformative tool. Freire (1970) argues critical analysis or consciousness-raising like this does not end with the task. It is an ongoing process: it develops into further reflection, action and evaluation. It is often asked, when does theatre of the oppressed end? According to Boal:

In truth the Theatre of the Oppressed has no end, because everything which happens in it must extend into life...  
The Theatre of the Oppressed is located precisely on the frontier between fiction and reality – and this border must be crossed. If the show starts in fiction its objective is to become integrated into reality, into life (Boal, 1992: 246).

He asserts,

Theatre is a form of knowledge. It should be seen as a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than waiting for it (1992: 31).

### *The empowerment process - voice*

Often domestic workers are silenced and their stories are excluded. In forum theatre the silenced are given voice. Story telling is a critical step in the process of empowerment, as individuals begin the process of shifting from the focus on their experience to the group focus. Voice is 'an expression of self esteem' (Ledwith, 2009 p.65). This is emotional, experiential learning that seeks to turn hopelessness, anger and apathy into dignified, determined hopefulness – Freire (1970) identifies emotion, the personal, as the very motivation for action. This being the case, the process needs to be facilitated in a way that carefully encourages the participation of individuals while supporting an analysis of oppression, in doing so, participants will begin to question everyday realities and alter their ways of knowing the world and change their ways of 'being in' the world.

### *Case Study: Acting Out for Hope and Change - developing critical analysis through drama*

In March 2011, DWAG began a creative project working with drama facilitators. In order to encourage participation, develop group cohesion and build critical analysis, the group used drama as a tool to explore issues. Ten women participated in the ten-week drama workshops. A key element within this strategy was the development of a play, which explored the lived experiences of the workers, applying methodologies of Boal's Theatre Of The Oppressed, namely Forum Theatre.

#### *The process*

Through facilitated workshops on Sundays the women used games, drama, improvisations and interviews to explore issues. Games and ice-breakers were an intrinsic part of each workshop to build trust and establish relationships between participants.

A first step was the planning and development stage which enabled the group to develop a critical analysis and name the issues clearly. Through a process of story-sharing in smaller groups, the women shared their personal experiences to identify some of the common key problems they experienced, facilitating the move from individual to collective issues. In workshops, the women re-enacted scenes illustrating the multiple forms of discrimination they experienced as women, migrants and domestic workers. Emotions were raw, tears and laughter were common. Discussion and dialogue emerged on how to depict and respond to situations. They acted the scenes while working with the writer to develop a script for the play which they felt reflected their stories. The issue of identity came out strongly. As well as being domestic workers, women have many identities as workers, mothers, sisters etc.

The identity theme, true to Boal's framework, prompts the audience to look closer at how society perceives those performing care work. Perhaps the most poignant message was the theme of unity, and the women's recognition of the importance of solidarity, of belonging to a group where they find friendship, support and courage which they believe empowers them to fight back and respond to injustices.

'Acting Out for Hope and Change', was performed in the Project Arts Theatre in Dublin, as part of a series of activities to raise awareness of exploitation in the sector. The play format is followed with a questions and answers session, engaging audiences in solution-based dialogue on what needs to happen to improve the working and living conditions for women working in private homes. Subsequently, the play was performed before a number of audiences.

### *Positive outcomes and learning*

#### *Solidarity*

Through regular meetings, and creating the opportunities for the women to participate, the sense of solidarity within the group strengthened. Often this was reflected in meetings outside the drama setting. The women became more open and supportive to one another in terms of assisting with finding jobs and social supports.

#### *Leadership and analysis*

Strong leaders emerged throughout the process. All of the women developed a stronger analysis of oppression of domestic workers and displayed the ability to draw connections between their individual stories and policy and campaigns, such as the need for strengthened laws on monitoring and enforcement of domestic workers' rights. Many of the women have taken up leadership roles, displaying an understanding of community work principles

in engaging with media, academia and policymakers, where they can engage in solution-based discussions with stakeholders.

The majority of the women have progressed beyond focusing on issues for domestic workers to playing integral roles in MRCI's work, engaging in media and policy engagements, and to political lobbying on issues of forced labour and wider societal issues of equality and equal access to services.

### *Skills development*

The play's success brought many media opportunities. As a result DWAG has key spokespeople who are interested in engaging with the media, and who have the capacity to do so, making issues visible for all migrant domestic workers. The acting skills learned through the drama process have been applied to public engagements. Thus women have learned and developed skills in public speaking, media messaging, policy engagement, political lobbying and outreach.

### *Personal development and growth*

Participants' own evaluation of the process recognises the skills development on both a personal level and a collective level. One woman said, *'I think people learned something from the play about the value of domestic work. I think we all [the drama group] learned something. I understand things I did not get before. Perhaps I learned that we should not be defined by the work we do.'*

Another women said, *'Being part of the drama has given me confidence. Before I would never have had the confidence to say anything, but now I know I have done it, I feel stronger and I am not afraid of saying what I think. It has brought us together as a group.'*

## *The ripple effect*

Since taking part in the drama a number of the women have engaged in political lobbying, visiting their politicians to discuss issues they have experienced but framing it in the context of asking for policy change. In some participants the transformation from passive to active has been remarkable. There is also the wider impact on the group, where the actors have taken up more roles and responsibilities within DWAG in terms of outreach and getting new members involved, bringing new members to meetings and actively advocating for DWAG and MRCI and encouraging others to get involved.

## *What worked*

- The play was used as part of a broader campaign to call for Government support of an ILO Convention for domestic workers at global level.
- It was a successful tool for raising awareness of exploitation in the sector. It was not just a one off – the play has been staged several times.
- The process supported the move from individual to collective.
- The skills learned have been developed into creating new drama pieces, and skills have been shared and transferred to peers in the wider group.
- The process strengthened the group identity.
- The process built and developed relationships within the group and developed solidarity.
- The process facilitated the development of critical analysis through deeper discussion of the structural barriers faced by workers and how these could be addressed. It facilitated an analysis of power and oppression.
- The group became more politicised and developed political messages.

- The process supported leaders to emerge.
- In addition to group cohesion, the women reported personal development and growth.
- Staging the play facilitated stronger relationships with stakeholders and policymakers.

### Challenges

Participation in the process was a challenge. Many of the women were in vulnerable personal situations, living in precarious accommodation. Some of the women were still in trauma and secondary trauma situations, having fled their exploitative situations to find themselves without the protection of the State. This impacted on their ability to commit to Sunday workshops. It also impacted on the women's health, causing stress-related illnesses.

Financial issues for the women were also a barrier to participation. Some were not able to negotiate a Sunday off with their employers or were required to work extra babysitting duties to secure additional income resulting in them not being able to attend. Meeting the basic needs of transport and food was a challenge for the women. MRCI compensated participants for costs involved.

Time pressure was a challenge. Sunday was the day most women had off, but some women who had expressed a desire to engage with the project could not get the time off work. One-to-one support and relationship-building with women in traumatic situations throughout the project required additional hours on the part of the community worker, which were not catered for in the project outline but which are a vital element of their ability to participate.

The cost required for undertaking a drama project requires resources to pay for drama facilitators and the writing of the script. Additional costs included venue and production costs.

In a climate where funding is an ever-pressing concern, funding such a programme is a challenge.

### Conclusion

Analysis of the drama project reveals positive outcomes for the group. In terms of an approach to community work, the project illustrates an understanding of how engaging in creative, participative projects can support the move from individual to collective analysis. Frustrated with the lack of justice they received at a personal level from the State, leaving them in vulnerable 'limbo' type situations where they were without stable immigration status and not permitted to work, the women actively engaged in the fight for justice through participation in DWAG and MRCI campaigns, illustrating a commitment to collective action for change.

The play highlighted the experiences of workers and also named the structural change necessary for this group of workers to be free from exploitation. It facilitated participation, supported critical analysis and created spaces for leaders to emerge. It created several opportunities for leaders to engage with the media, policymakers and other stakeholders to make issues for domestic workers visible.

On a policy level, DWAG leaders were active agents in the successful campaign that resulted in the adoption of the ILO Convention, which was supported by the Irish Government in June 2011.

At a group level, the process has united the group identity both internally and externally, has created the conditions to build relationships of trust and has fostered a desire in the participants for further participation at a deeper level of engagement.

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# 04.

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## Benchmarking community work with migrants using Towards Standards for Quality Community Work: An All-Ireland Statement of Values, Principles and Work Standards

– Sinéad Smith

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### Introduction

'If you always do what you always did, you will always get what you always got'. This saying, oft cited by community workers, is a reminder that community work is about changing the prevailing circumstances affecting particular communities.

In this article I explore and reflect on the experience of a local community work organisation working with migrants in Co. Meath in a mixed urban and rural context. The main focus of the article is on how the community work principle of collective action is implemented in day-to-day practice. The article takes a local setting at a particular point in its development as a case study.

The article uses the quality standards document *Towards Standards for Quality Community Work: An All-Ireland Statement of Values, Principles and Work Standards* (Community Workers' Cooperative, 2008) as

a benchmarking tool.<sup>1</sup> This document is used to evaluate and critique collective action in our work under a number of ‘practice principle’ headings. The article illustrates the issues/challenges that arise in our work, alongside some of the lessons learned and changes we have made as a direct result of engagement. Finally, I make a number of concluding observations for future community work practice on collective action in light of our experience.

### *Terminology*

In writing this article I have used the term ‘migrants’ as a collective term to include asylum seekers, refugees and migrants or immigrants in general. The overall strategic plan of Cultúr includes all of these categories, with a particular focus on work with migrants who are experiencing inequality and social exclusion, which is a central concern of community work (Cultúr, 2010).

### *A brief history of Cultúr*

It may be useful at this juncture to briefly introduce the origins or history of Cultúr as an organisation working with migrants in Co. Meath. Cultúr was founded in 2004 as a voluntary action group by a number of Irish and non-Irish individuals who felt it was important to support and promote the development of an intercultural society. One of the key challenges identified at an early stage by the organisation was the language barrier that existed among local communities, service providers and migrants. The demand for English classes grew from participants attending events organised by Cultúr. Coupled with this was the identification of the need for the provision of information on rights and entitlements to migrants with little or no English.

In the course of the intervening years, Cultúr expanded its work and accessed ad hoc resources from local

and national funders but was not in receipt of any core funding for staff or running costs. In late 2008, funding was accessed for a project manager and for the day-to-day running of the organisation through the Office of the Minister for Integration under the auspices of Meath County Council. At that stage the work of the organisation was not underpinned by any particular analysis, model or approach. This funding provided an opportunity to review the current approach, moving on from solely providing individual service-type supports that were reactive rather than proactive. It facilitated the work to move from having little or no community work process or objectives to adopt community work principles and practices in the organisation across all its work. I will come back later in the article to explain this, in terms of the work of the organisation, when I discuss the principle of collective action in greater detail.

### *Collective action principle in practice – opportunities and challenges*

For the purposes of this article I use the explanation of the term ‘collective action’ as outlined in the *Towards Standards* document to illustrate what I mean when I use that term: ‘Community work is based on working with and supporting groups of people. It enables them to develop knowledge, skills and confidence so that they can develop an analysis, identify priority needs and issues and address these through collective action.’ (Community Workers’ Cooperative, 2008: 22)

I briefly go into more detail on a number of examples of collective action in our work using the practice principles cited under the value of collective action in the *Towards Standards* document, highlighting the opportunities/challenges which arose for the organisation in our own practice of collective action, benchmarking our progress in this regard.

## 1. Building an Analysis

### *Practice principle: Analysis of the reality on the ground Development of a new strategic plan*

In 2010 we undertook the process of developing a new strategic plan which provided a framework and clearly demonstrated our understanding and definition of community work and its intrinsic values, including collective action, resulting in the plan having a clear community work analysis. The three areas of work in the plan, namely information, community work and policy work, became interlinked areas of work, fostering group processes across all the goals and objectives of the plan itself, e.g. capacity building, raising consciousness and building analysis, empowering migrants and collective action. We facilitated the participation of migrants in all aspects of the plan's development to ensure that our analysis was informed by what was actually happening on the ground. This was undertaken through focus groups, surveys, informal meetings and through migrants who participated on our board. This ensured that the plan had integrity not only in its intent but also in its delivery.

### *Practice principle: Analysis of the reality on the ground Community Profile*

Cultúr carried out a community profile on the experience of migrants from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) in order to be in a position to respond to their needs (Smith, 2010). We were acutely aware that our knowledge of the needs of this target group was limited due to the fact that the organisation's level of contact and work with migrants from outside the EEA was a small proportion of our overall work with migrants. Indeed, approximately twenty per cent of our drop-in centre work and the bulk of our work at that time was with migrants from the EU accession countries. No documentation of best practice, policy or experience of working with this group existed in the county, so we

began the process of carrying out the profile. The profile was conducted by staff and volunteers, many of whom were migrants themselves, and the research method was a qualitative one with individual migrants interviewed along with focus groups undertaken with migrant-led groups, local service providers and policy makers.

### *Opportunities and challenges*

This profile contributed to the setting up of the MIME (Migrants Integrating in Meath Equally) project, an 18-month project specifically working with migrants from outside the EEA. The baseline analysis from the research informed the rationale for the project, providing an evidence base for a specific project to be delivered using a community work approach. Many migrants who participated in the community profile are now a central part of the project in terms of participating within the project's action groups, steering group and other activities that have collective action as an integral part of the project.

The main challenge in carrying out this profile has been time and resources to carry out baseline action research when we had no funds and little staff time. Indeed, this report took over a year to complete. However, in seeking to work with new target groups we believe having a clear basis for this work is vital if appropriate community work responses are to be developed.

## *2. Collective Outcomes*

### *Practice principle: Work towards collective outcomes for the community as a whole rather than the advancement of individuals*

Through our information provision work we sought to gather and collate evidence from individual migrants to assess trends and be able to respond to issues on the ground impacting on migrants. The purpose of this was to inform

the development of community work responses to support migrants specifically to address the issues they faced, progressing on from our work that previously took place at an individual level onto a group process, e.g. action groups, working groups, campaigns on issues etc.

### *Opportunities and challenges*

Some of the challenges we have encountered engaging migrants who attended our drop-in centre in our broader work are what might be called ‘bread and butter’ issues. These include a lack of language skills, which reduced the participation of some communities in group activities, particularly when seeking to work with groups composed of different nationalities.

The more complex issues included the engagement of individuals in group processes, where such an experience may be alien because of perceived cultural understandings about community work or social justice work along with cultural differences in terms of group participation. Being clear about our own lack of knowledge on these issues and our openness to learning was important in supporting intercultural dialogue, not only among Irish community workers and migrants but also among migrants of different ethnic backgrounds. An ongoing challenge for the organisation is to be able to respond proactively and appropriately using community work practices to the issues on the ground.

The opportunity for Cultúr to access the use of a case management system,<sup>2</sup> to highlight trends and patterns in our work, assisted us in prioritising issues on the ground, which in turn we developed community work responses to. It also facilitated us in framing our role in terms of what issues presenting were community work concerns for us as a community work organisation. Secondly, it determined what areas of work relating to issues presenting

were more appropriately the remit of other agencies, in particular statutory agencies. Finally, this culminated in the organisation developing referral agreements or protocols with those agencies responsible and/or mainstreaming work through them. We documented clearly in our strategic plan that our drop-in centre work was not an end in itself in terms of resolving individual issues; it had to contribute to our overall community work and collective action on these issues for migrants as a community.

### *3. Creating spaces for collective action*

*Practice principle: Working towards collective outcomes from the community as a whole rather than the advancement of individuals*

Cultúr has sought to create the conditions for collective action to develop through providing a range of 'spaces' for a group analysis to develop which moves away from individual issues that migrants experience. These fora are being utilised to facilitate the participation of migrants in discussions on their needs, which could potentially employ community work responses to address these concerns. The purpose of this group process is to empower migrants, raise their consciousness of their shared experiences and analysis of same, thus facilitating the development of collective action to achieve social change. One of the spaces, the Meath Migrants Forum is discussed briefly below.

#### *Meath Migrants Forum*

Using a successful model developed by the Migrants Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI), Cultúr set out in early 2010 to foster the initiation of a Migrants Forum in County Meath. This was a deliberate attempt to shift the individual focus of earlier work such as the information provision service of the drop-in centre to a group process, creating the conditions for migrants themselves to identify the issues of common

concern and allowing the development of strategies with which to pursue these issues collectively. The initial meetings with the working group of migrants focused on what the Forum could look like, what its focus could be, the challenges that such a Forum for collective action could present, how we could foster a shared understanding of the role of the forum and finally how such structures could identify and address the broad range of issues experienced by different migrants.

### *Opportunities and challenges*

Early challenges included:

- That the broad nature of the Forum as an open space for all migrants could dilute or prevent the Forum having a clear focus. This in turn could impact on fostering and building solidarity and creating the conditions for collective action to develop.
- Moving from individual needs to group needs within the group. Many migrants who attended initial meetings had concerns about their own individual situation, so it was vital that the forum acted as a space to raise consciousness about shared experiences among those who attended and to focus on the root causes of the inequalities and social exclusion that migrants were experiencing.
- Practical challenges relating to the location and timing of meetings, given the geographical spread of the county, in terms of communicating the existence of the Forum and enabling migrants to attend evening meetings in different locations.
- Language issues, with people feeling that some migrant communities might not engage at all: this was a particular concern with migrants from some of the former accession countries of the EU.

Indeed, these challenges were not just perceptions but were realities in some instances and we undertook a number of actions to address them. In seeking opportunities to make the group work, we began with the working group itself, fostering solidarity by ensuring the make-up of the group was diverse not just in terms of different migrant communities but also in terms of gender, age and life experiences.

Some of the learning and opportunities arising from the group to date have been:

- Collective action is important to the organisation itself. In terms of Cultúr, our strategic plan and work plans place a central importance on the Migrants Forum along with other action groups as being a space to inform our work and the actions we take as an organisation.
- We need to be clear about what the Forum is and is not, again for those seeking individual outcomes.
- A working group of migrants leading and fostering the development of the Forum is key, and the support of a community worker for this group is vital.
- The Forum cannot be all things to all people and this is why working group members asserted the need for thematic approaches to the work, so that those participating are clear about the focus of meetings and the Forum's relevance to their lives.
- Different groups of migrants have a broad range of needs experiences and identities, e.g. migrants from outside the EEA, asylum seekers, migrant women etc., and there is a need to work directly with these groups to address those specific needs outside the forum.
- Momentum of the group is also important so that follow-up action takes place, ideally with working groups being formed and support for these working groups through various stages of collective development.

#### 4. Building Alliances

*Practice principle: Collaborate and build alliances with other groups, organisations and agencies in order to advance key community objectives*

##### *Meath Intercultural Network*

In 2009, Cultúr founded the Meath Intercultural Network (MIN). This interagency network was initiated on foot of a key recommendation of *Engaging Difference: the Opportunity of Diversity in a Changing Co. Meath*, a research report funded by the Meath County Development Board which was published in 2008 (Bruce, 2008). The report identified a gap in terms of the lack of co-ordination of policy relating to migrants living in Co. Meath which was leading to ineffective and ad hoc responses to the issues migrants were facing at that time. The network was set up to address the democratic deficit that exists, with migrants currently not represented in either representative or participative democratic structures. It was envisaged that the network could operate as a policy forum with a direct link to the SIM committee of Meath County Council, thus feeding into social inclusion policy in the county. Secondly the network was set up to act as a forum to build alliances, raise awareness and foster partnership working on migrant issues, with migrants and agencies working together on these issues.

In setting up the MIN, we envisaged that those participating would be key stakeholders from a range of community, voluntary and statutory agencies, ethnic-led groups and individual migrants themselves. An executive committee made up of group members including migrants was formed to ensure greater ownership of the group. The executive committee assisted in shifting the forum away from Cultúr, as the founder of the group, to ensure that the members were centrally involved in developing a network that was organised and owned by its members. It has a central role in implementing the decisions on the work and direction of the forum.

### *Opportunities and challenges*

The MIN has been a victim of the economic recession in terms of the time and commitment that some agencies have been able to provide to participate in fora like this. In terms of collective action, migrants and the agencies involved shared a common purpose in seeking to develop an integration strategy for the county. However, an evaluation in mid-2011 highlighted that for some members of the group the task of completing a strategy was the most important thing for them as members. Other group members recognised the value of the process of being involved in the network itself, i.e. building relationships with other organisations working with migrants, accessing opportunities to support migrant issues within their own organisations and other agencies on the MIN. Overall, nearly all members cited some benefit to participation in the network, e.g. increasing their capacity to work with migrants through enhancing their analysis of migrant issues. This occurred through becoming informed about models of best practice in working with and supporting migrants to exercise their rights both locally and nationally.

In the case of some members of the MIN, the participation has been huge and has resulted in increased commitment to migrant issues along with a more developed analysis, collaboration and solidarity. In terms of supporting collective action, the group members worked together with migrants to support work with asylum seekers in Mosney, with a number of agencies working together. Another working group supported and managed the European Week Against Racism. Others, in striving to become more informed on migrant issues, attended training on migrant issues. All of this contributed to building the overall capacity of the network to work collectively toward shared goals supporting migrants.

## Conclusions

Community work demands the development of relationships with communities beyond individual work/service provision. It is transformative, proactively seeking to support communities to engage with group processes that seek to change the situation that people find themselves in. Through this process, migrants experiencing inequality are empowered to effect social change through collective action. It involves working with people over a prolonged period of time in a planned way by building relationships, particularly with vulnerable migrants experiencing, racism, inequality and social exclusion.

Collective action requires community workers to create spaces that analyse the situations migrants find themselves in and share their experiences about these situations, raise their consciousness about the root causes of these situations and ultimately create the conditions to foster change. This involves using a range of strategies to create that change e.g. developing new policies, seeking legislative change and the realisation of rights. It also includes planning for action regarding how collective action can be utilised to achieve such change, e.g. campaigns. As an organisation, we believe this means that the community work principle of collective action must be incorporated across all areas of work and activities, e.g. community work practice, action groups, working groups, policy work, gender issues, campaigns, if the ultimate aim of that work is transformative, seeking social change. If it is not, then the results will be limited to small individual improvements (tinkering around the edges but not changing the status quo) that don't address the root causes of the inequality that the work sought to change.

This article focuses on the practice of the community work principle of collective action using practice principles as set out in *Towards Standards for Quality Community Work: An All-Ireland Statement of Values, Principles and Work Standards* (Community Workers' Cooperative, 2008) as they are implemented in a local setting. I outline a number of key examples in our work that relate to the principle of collective action and the challenges and opportunities they present to our organisation. It is important to note that we have begun a journey in our work with migrants and in many respects we are still at the pre-development stage of that journey - building capacity, raising consciousness, seeking to empower migrants to participate - all the time working towards collective action, in order for migrants themselves to realise and exercise their rights.

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1. This document was produced by the Towards Standards Ad Hoc Group in 2008, which involved a number of organisations and educational institutions.
2. MRCI provided Cultúr with access to their CMS programme design which has greatly enhanced our work in this area.

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## Applying a human rights based approach to social housing disadvantage: a community development analysis

– Dr Rory Hearne

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### Introduction

The financial and property crash of 2008 resulted in the collapse of most of the Public Private Partnership regeneration plans for communities living in designated disadvantaged local authority estates across Dublin (and the model of private funding in Limerick, Cork and other urban areas). As a result, thousands of social housing tenants were left living in appalling substandard conditions. The range of issues affecting the areas that had been designated for regeneration included severe structural problems of dampness, mould, sewage overflow, overcrowding, accessibility, inadequate play and community facilities, and anti-social behaviour, particularly the impact of illegal drugs (Dolphin House Community Development Association, 2009; Fahey, 1999; Hearne, 2009; Hourigan, 2011). These issues have been exacerbated by the inadequate responses of the Gardaí and poor estate management by local authorities (Hourigan, 2011). In

addition, these areas continued to be affected by very high levels of social deprivation such as high unemployment, early school leaving, low participation in third-level education and high stress and mental health issues (Bissett, 2008; Sheridan Woods, 2009; Norris and Redmond, 2005). This reflects the high level of socio-economic inequality that endured in these areas through the economic boom years of the Celtic Tiger. The communities, however, highlight that despite the significant challenges there remain very strong local family and neighbourhood connections, pride and commitment to the areas. The communities, therefore, should be sustained and supported (Dolphin House Community Development Association, 2009).

The lack of any prospect of regeneration in the near future combined with frustration at the failure of traditional methods of engagement and campaigning led tenants<sup>1</sup> in the Dolphin House local authority estate in Dublin's inner city to adopt an innovative approach to try to progress housing and social issues. Dolphin House is Dublin's second largest remaining public housing (managed and owned by Dublin City Council (DCC)) flat complex, with 436 units. The estate is comprised of six U-shaped 'blocks' that are three and four storeys in height. It is located within the village of Rialto, near to the Coombe Hospital and bordered to the north by the South Circular road and by the Grand Canal to the south. The estate, which was built in the 1950s, remains fully tenanted and has a strong, proud community, despite the challenges of substandard living conditions and high levels of poverty and disadvantage among its population. In 2009, the tenants, along with Community Action Network and locally based community development organisations, set up the Rialto Rights In Action Group (RRIAG)<sup>2</sup> to implement a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA). This paper provides an overview and analysis of the process and outcomes involved in the implementation of the HRBA in addressing substandard housing conditions in Dolphin House.

## *Introduction to the HRBA*

Rights are growing in significance as a means of raising economic, social and cultural standards across the world. NGOs, communities and other rights agencies are increasingly adopting the HRBA as a method of realising the rights of marginalised, disadvantaged, and excluded groups through participation and empowerment. The Participation and Practice of Rights Project, for example, has implemented the HRBA in housing and other areas in Belfast, Northern Ireland, while Amnesty Ireland has developed the approach in relation to health (Amnesty Ireland, 2009; Participation and Practice of Rights, 2007).

The HRBA is based upon the concept of pressuring states (duty-bearers) to fulfil their obligations to citizens (rights-holders) articulated in various UN and international human rights covenants and treaties (Kenna, 2011). The Danish Institute of Human Rights provides a useful definition of the principles underlying the HRBA (Kirkemann Boesen and Martin, 2007):

- 'Human rights go beyond the notion of physical needs and include a more holistic perspective of human beings in terms of their civil, political, social, economic, and cultural roles.
- Rights always trigger obligations and responsibilities, whereas needs do not.
- Rights always cannot be addressed without raising the question of who has obligations in relation to these rights. This automatically raises questions about the actions and accountability of duty bearers.
- People are often expected to be grateful when their needs are met; this is not the case when people's rights are met. This reminds us not to campaign for "the needy", but rather to support marginalized people as equal human beings in their efforts to claim their rights and address the poverty, suffering and injustice in their lives.

For UNESCO (2006) the effective implementation of human rights programmes must incorporate:

- A human rights analysis based on State obligations.
- Human rights goals and standard-setting with clear timelines.
- Plans and programmes of action that are the responsibility of all levels of government and the bureaucracy.
- The effective monitoring of compliance and enforcement involving both government authorities and the beneficiaries themselves.

This highlights then, that the HRBA, in line with community development practice, is concerned with the process, as well as the outcome, of human rights implementation. It aims to go beyond legal mechanisms of achieving human rights to empower the rights-holders to be directly involved in realising their rights; to bring about a longer-term transformative change in the nature of power relationships between rights-holder and duty-bearer; and to ensure the practical implementation of State obligations.

### *Housing rights instruments*

The principal UN and European human rights instruments relevant to the HRBA in relation to addressing substandard housing conditions in the broader community context include the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966) (ICESCR), which Ireland ratified in 1989. Article 11 states:

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will

take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent.

The State's domestic obligations under the ICESCR Covenant are set out in Article 2:

Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to take steps, individually and through international assistance and co-operation, especially economic and technical, to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the present Covenant by all appropriate means, including particularly the adoption of legislative measures.

The UN Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UNCESCR) General Comment 4 spells out the elements of housing rights which States must address to comply with the ICESCR, including amongst other aspects the right to participate in public decision-making (paragraph 9). References to the right to housing are also contained in many other UN Conventions, such as the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Compliance is monitored by the UNCESCR. While resolutions adopted by various UN decision-making organs are not legally binding, they articulate internationally accepted standards (Kenna, 2011).

Another relevant instrument is the European Social Charter (adopted in 1961 and revised in 1996), a Council of Europe treaty, which Ireland has ratified except for Article 31 on the right to housing.<sup>3</sup> Article 30 states that:

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, the Parties undertake:

- a) to take measures within the framework of an overall and co-ordinated approach to promote the effective access of persons who live or risk living in a situation of social exclusion or poverty, as well as their families, to, in particular, employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance;
- b) to review these measures with a view to their adaptation if necessary.

The European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) monitors States' compliance with the Charter through regular reports from States and the Collective Complaints system.

Essentially then the HRBA turns government and, therefore, public authorities/service providers into duty-bearers; they are obligated to demonstrate how they are working towards realising people's rights. It is about power and its distribution; aiming to empower and enable those most affected by human rights issues to demand from the State adequate standards of living (Participation and the Practice of Rights Project, 2007). It aims to achieve immediate and lasting change in the power relationship between people experiencing inequality and decision-makers (Community Action Network, 2010). It is about challenging and changing policies, processes, and relationships in order to ensure effective delivery of services which respect human rights standards and values. Indicators are set by the rights-holders in order to monitor and highlight the difference between what should be happening under human rights law or domestic legislation and policy and what is actually happening in practice. However, the HRBA has a number of potential drawbacks. These include the vagueness of international human rights standards, as they are based on international public law and therefore are often described as a 'moral compass' rather than a concrete template on which to base enforceable laws and

policies. The absence of legal enforceability is one of the greatest challenges that the HRBA faces (Hearne & Kenna, 2011). It has also been found that the flexibility of terms such as “progressive realization”, and “maximum of their available resources” can be used by States to provide an escape clause from their responsibilities (Kenna, 2011).

### *Implementation of the HRBA in Dolphin House*

Drawing on the methodology outlined in the international HRBA literature (Kirkemann Boesen & Martin, 2007; UNESCO, 2006) and particularly the experience of the Participation and Practice of Rights Project (2007), the following process was developed by the RRIAG:

#### *June 2009-May 2010*

1. Selection of the human rights issues to pursue and linking the issues to international human rights instruments.
2. Gathering evidence of the violation of rights.
3. Setting indicators for the progressive realisation of rights including identifying and mapping duty-bearers and setting up monitoring mechanisms for the indicators.

#### *May 2010*

4. Planning and organising public hearings.

#### *June 2010-present*

5. Pursuing formal engagement regarding the issues with the duty-bearers using the human rights framework as the basis of engagement.

#### *September/October 2010*

6. Follow up survey and first monitoring hearing.

#### *March/April 2011*

7. Second monitoring survey and monitoring hearing.

Commencing in June 2009, residents were engaged in human rights training by the Community Action Network and by community and regeneration workers. They learned how their lived experiences of substandard conditions linked to the right to adequate housing, health and the rights of the child. They gained an understanding of international human rights and the Irish Government's obligations and were supported to articulate their experience in human rights terms. They were surprised by how explicitly it is stated in human rights covenants that the Government has obligations that directly refer to the issues affecting them. The process was organised so that it was driven and carried out by residents; their voices, stories and experiences were dominant and they were the decision-makers. This faced the challenges and pressures to conform to 'business as usual', whereby local authority professionals would determine the agenda and pace of change, and community workers would 'represent' residents' views on behalf of residents. This challenge was overcome through, amongst other methods: residents being trained and educated in human rights and media work; a working group of residents and workers being set up at which residents could develop their own strategy and make all decisions; ensuring residents were present and actively participated in all meetings with the City Council (including chairing some meetings); and ensuring residents had independent technical expertise, and that they were the principal media spokespeople of the group.

The RRIAG then identified a range of issues and prioritised them according to a number of agreed criteria including: their impact on the maximum number of residents; the ability to link the issue with UN human rights standards; the possibility of achieving change in relation to the issue; the ability to identify clearly responsible 'duty-bearers' and links to Irish law and regulations; and residents' commitment to address the issue.

Three issues were identified as meeting the above criteria: a) housing (poor structural conditions); b) health (mental health/stress issues and support for those on methadone); and c) inadequate play and youth facilities. This paper explores the experience of the group in implementing the HRBA in relation to inadequate housing.

The RRIAG gathered evidence through a number of methods including:

- A door-to-door survey of 70 tenants in April 2010, which established a benchmark of the conditions (with the results of that survey outlined as 'Benchmark May 2010' in Table 1), and which was repeated in September 2010 ('Target result at 6 months' in Table 1) and March 2011.
- Scientific testing of the waste water, the spores from the mould and dampness.
- A short documentary of interviews with those directly affected, recorded by Dublin Community TV.
- Photographic evidence of the mould, damp and sewage overflows in affected flats.

The residents in Dolphin set eight indicators that linked the evidence gathered to the human rights standards and the responsibilities of the Irish State in domestic housing policy and law. Such responsibilities include those outlined in the Irish Government's own Housing Policy Framework (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2007), which states that housing policy should provide for 'sustainable communities' which are:

... places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well-planned, built and run, offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.

The indicators included, therefore: the proportion of residents reporting dampness, mould and sewage invasions/smells; health impacts; and satisfaction with responses, information and inclusion in decision-making from DCC. The Irish Human Rights Commission affirmed that the indicators:

... represent the lived experience of residents. This is a very innovative approach which is important both to empower residents to articulate their problems in terms of human rights standards and to provide a way of measuring to what extent the housing conditions in Dolphin House are improving or otherwise. Setting indicators also provides some form of “evidence” that there are ongoing problems in the realisation of the right to adequate housing (Dr Maurice Manning, Irish Human Rights Commission, speaking at the RRIAG hearing, May 2010).

Table 1 outlines the results for two of the indicators: proportion of residents reporting dampness, and proportion reporting sewage invasion/smells. The surveys of the indicators found that a significant majority of residents (see Table 1) had problems with sewage invasions, smells, dampness and mould and that the conditions have severe health implications for residents, particularly children. One resident explained:

It's everywhere ... It's all around the beds. The walls are soaking wet. The walls are literally black. I have to wash them down with bleach and its back a couple of weeks later. The vents are all open anyway. There is nothing I'm doing wrong. I don't dry clothes in the bedrooms. It's in the walls. It's black and furry and disgusting to look at.

Agar plates were placed in a number of the affected flats to test the spores in the air and analysis found that the fungal contamination is 'far greater' than that recorded in domestic dwellings and 'is a significant threat to the health of the occupants'. The City Council claimed that the problems of mould and dampness were caused by condensation, which under DCC policy is the tenants' responsibility to repair.

Tenants reported that they, and particularly their children, are 'constantly sick' with serious chest infections, pneumonia, bronchitis and e-coli infections. They experienced grey and black wastewater repeatedly backing up and overflowing into household fixtures such as sinks, showers, baths, washing machines and outside drains. This had been ongoing for a period of at least twenty years. The tenants described being affected by 'stomach bugs and bacterial infections' after such sewage overflows. One tenant said:

The bath – it [sewage] gurgles, it comes up a couple of inches. I have to put the plug in every night and I have a big heavy candle I put over it. If the kids are in the bath, well as soon as we hear that gurgle, I have to drag them out of the bath because it will come up in on top of them and you don't know what's coming up.

**Table 1 Indicators, human rights standards and Benchmarks for Dolphin House 2010**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Human rights standard</b>	<b>Benchmark May 2010</b>	<b>Target result at +6 mths (actual result)</b>
Proportion of residents reporting dampness	"Adequate housing must provide the inhabitants with adequate space and protect them from cold, damp, heat, rain, wind or other threats to health, structural hazards and disease vectors." (ICESCR General Comment 4, Paragraph 8 (d))	72%	30% (80%)
Proportion of residents reporting sewage invasion/ smells	"An adequate house must contain certain facilities essential for health, security, comfort and nutrition ... safe drinking water, energy for cooking, heating and lighting, sanitation and washing facilities, means of food storage, refuse disposal, site drainage and emergency services." (ICESCR General Comment 4, Paragraph 8 (b))	89%	20% (82%)

Source: Rialto Rights In Action Group (2011: 10).

The City Council denied that the waste water was dangerous to health but, significantly, analysis carried out by consultants (commissioned by the RRIAG) in September 2010 indicated that the waste water was highly polluted. The tenants criticised the City Council for delaying up to three or four days before responding to such blockages.

## Outcomes and analysis

The evidence from the implementation of the HRBA in Dolphin House demonstrates that it is an approach that is worth a closer analysis by community groups and workers to identify potential lessons, but it also faces many challenges in realising housing rights.

In terms of achieving substantive change in the conditions and the nature of the relationships at local government level little materialised in practice after the initial public hearing, held in May 2010, despite requests that senior DCC officials with responsibility for addressing the housing conditions should engage more regularly with residents to work out solutions in a participative and partnership approach. The author witnessed instances whereby tenants continued to experience very poor listening and communication, disrespect and condescension from some of DCC's employees.

There were also challenges to the community by the media coverage resulting from the hearing as some were embarrassed by it – with, in some instances, children being taunted at school over the conditions highlighted in the media. However, others within the community came forward stating that they wanted their problems included within the HRBA.

The public hearing and the monitoring hearings (October 2010 and April 2011) gave an important message that the group was going to persist and had considerable local community, public, media and political support. After the second monitoring hearing (April 2011), the election of a new Government and questioning of the new Minister for Housing about the issues on RTÉ's *Prime Time*, things shifted considerably. Dublin City Council committed to providing adequate housing standards in the short term

and agreed that the senior officials would meet regularly with the group. Subsequently, DCC progressed, from June 2011 to date, in consultation with the community, a number of initiatives including cleaning the waste-water pipes, undertaking a conditions survey of all the flats, relocating tenants into refurbished flats, and developing a regeneration masterplan for the estate based on refurbishment, some new build and a social and physical plan based on sustaining the community.

This demonstrates that the unique approach in this HRBA, which involved both publicly criticising and highlighting the breach of human rights by the State and simultaneously continuing to engage with it and putting forward solutions, has achieved results thus far. The HRBA provides a legitimate space where criticism can be made and pressure applied outside statutory / community structures. Furthermore, the HRBA requires a disciplined approach to gathering evidence as it demands rigorous, scientific and quantified evidence.

While the HRBA approach does not involve placing a legal obligation on the State to respond to these issues, the international law and rights-based discourse and framework did give residents the belief in the rights that they are entitled to, which created a power in itself that residents did not assert before. This is because it lent a moral and political legitimacy to their concerns and thus provided them with confidence and inspiration. Residents have self-advocated for their right to a home that includes not just an adequate dwelling fit for purpose but also the conditions of the surrounding neighbourhood such as adequate environmental conditions of playgrounds, green space, safety, and the condition and health of the community itself.

## Conclusion

The experience of the Dolphin HRBA lends support to the contention that human rights do not develop through some normative or critical progression of legal thinking, but only as a result of the action of social movements. The RRIAG is, in effect, a complex social movement, an innovative campaign, that is trying to use the international rights framework, underpinned by a community development approach, to achieve a re-balancing of power and resources between the State and its most marginalised citizens.

On reflection, while the Dolphin experience suggests it might be more difficult to apply the HRBA in a community lacking community development resources, it would be interesting to see if, with some training and support, other communities could successfully apply the framework strategically within their available resources. Furthermore, the linking of similarly affected communities together in common approaches and campaigning could achieve outcomes within a human rights framework.

There remains a necessity for the Irish State to address housing conditions and regeneration despite the economic recession. The reality is that the Government and local authorities still have significant budgets to spend (e.g. the Social Housing Investment Programme budget covering regeneration and other social housing investment was €691 million for 2012) and, therefore, it is a question of political and social priorities. As the UN independent expert on human rights and extreme poverty, Magdalena Sepúlveda, stated in a press statement after her recent mission to Ireland (Sepúlveda, 2011):

Specific measures must be taken to ensure that the recovery plan does not disproportionately impact the poorest sector of society, pushing them deeper into poverty and increasing their social exclusion... Human rights are not dispensable and cannot be disregarded in times of economic uncertainty. On the contrary, these are times in which people become more susceptible to potential infringements on their basic rights and have higher risks of falling into poverty. Therefore, they must be particularly protected and governments must be vigilant in their compliance with human rights obligations.

1. The tenants are also referred to in the paper as 'residents', reflecting their commitment to the community.
2. The Rialto Rights In Action Group is a collaboration of Rialto Residents, the Dolphin House Alliance, the Dolphin and Fatima Health Projects, Community Response and Community Action Network.
3. The Minister dealing with the ratification told the Dail in 2000 that, while Ireland is in a position to implement almost all of the provisions of the European Social Charter, some provisions were deferred: 'The position is that Ireland cannot accept the provisions of Article 31 at this time. However, I understand that the Department of the Environment and Local Government intends to follow future interpretations to be given to the provisions of Article 31 by the Council of Europe itself with a view to their possible acceptance by Ireland at a later date...The signature of the revised European Social Charter and of the Collective Complaints Protocol by Ireland is further evidence of this country's on-going commitment to achieving the highest standards in relation to social and economic rights' (Dáil Debates, 2000). Full details of Ireland's ratifications and reports are available at [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/socialcharter/CountryFactsheets/Ireland\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/socialcharter/CountryFactsheets/Ireland_en.asp)

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## VOICES

### Hilda Regaspi

My name is Hilda Regaspi, a Filipina national living in Ireland for more than 10 years now. I came to Ireland in late 2001 to work as a domestic worker for a family in Waterford. I was blessed to work for a family who counted me as one of their own and treated me very well. In 2002 a group of Filipino including myself initiated a Filipino/Irish group in Waterford. Firstly we started to meet up in the evenings in people's home. Then we discovered that a number of migrants, mostly Filipino women were experiencing exploitation, working long hours, getting no overtime pay, no days off, their employers not paying their taxes correctly or giving them a pay slip. These were the burning issues in the earliest stage of domestic workers living and working in private homes in Ireland. Encountering these issues and problems and finding a solution was not easy for us and these issues really made me think about myself, my values and what I could do to bring about change.

I always had a strong belief in justice and equality even if it's hard to realise for so many people in this society. I felt what the women I was meeting needed was access to their basic rights. I started to do some research and rang Filipino friends in Dublin. Fortunately at that point I came across the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) who concerned themselves with the rights of migrant workers and their families Ireland. Whilst I questioned what I could do when I was a migrant myself with little knowledge of the law in Ireland my values and beliefs were stronger than my doubts. I got heavily involved with the Domestic Workers Support Group (now known as the Domestic Workers Action Group DWAG). This is a collective of women working as a childminders, carers and cleaners in the private home. In the beginning this group of women were coming together to

discuss the issues, support each other and find solutions to all of these problems facing women employed in the private home. The vision of this group over time came to embrace the fight for recognition and value of domestic workers as workers with rights and entitlements and voices that needed to be heard.

In 2004 I moved to Dublin and got more involved with the work of the Migrant Rights Centre. The MRCI supported my leadership development and a learning process that saw me developing not only skills and analysis to work for justice and rights for migrant women employed in the private home but also an understanding and appreciation for community work and its approach to pushing for change. In 2009-2010 I participated in *Community work in a Changing Ireland*, accredited by the Department of Applied Social Studies NUIM in collaboration with the MRCI. I was awarded a certificate in community work. The course was for migrants who were active in communities and community work organisations supporting their road into community work learning in Ireland. It afforded me a greater opportunity to be active in advocating justice and rights for all. The learning and skills give me the capacity to empower other migrant workers especially Filipino to participate more actively, addressing major issues affecting them in their lives and helping to bring about positive change in the longer run.

Today one of the biggest issues facing the most vulnerable migrants in Irish society is that of becoming undocumented. It leads to many immigrants facing more exploitation and being abused in Irish society. Their basic rights are being denied such as right to access legal redress and many feel very powerless. Ireland is now a very diverse country and many migrants have put down roots and made their homes here. Now we see equality issues arising for the next generation of immigrants here such as barriers accessing

third level education. We all know that sending children to college is costly and parents are struggling because of the cost of living in Ireland. Many young immigrants face huge barriers in the form of higher fees and not being eligible for free fees and higher education grants despite having spent more time here in Ireland than the home country. We know education is important as our young people Irish born and migration; they are the next generation in our society.

I believe community work has an important role to play in supporting migrants and their families to participate fully in their communities and in Irish society. In its concern for positive social change I believe community work has an important role to play in collectively tackling the issues of inequality and discrimination that are experienced by many migrants here in Ireland. Community workers and migrant workers and community workers from immigrant backgrounds need to work together closely to address the burning issues facing migrant workers and to bring a better more equal Ireland.



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## Social housing, community development and the integration of immigrant communities: emerging challenges

– Dr Siobhán O'Connor and Professor Des McCafferty

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This article discusses issues of social integration and community development arising from the growth of immigrant communities in Irish cities in recent years. The article draws in particular on experience in Limerick, the country's third-largest urban centre, and the retail and business capital of the Mid-West Region.

Limerick has been described as a socio-economically polarised city, characterised by high levels of residential segregation along social class lines that have been a feature of the city's geography for some time (McCafferty, 2011a). The city's residential communities have boundaries that correspond variously with Roman Catholic parishes, social housing estates, RAPID areas<sup>1</sup> and, latterly, regeneration areas,<sup>2</sup> and these boundaries define neighbourhoods that can be classified into a number of distinctive social area types. Residential mobility across the boundaries between different types of social area has been restricted by aspects of the city's housing system, both public and private, though there is some evidence of increased mobility in recent years (McCafferty and O'Keeffe, 2009).

The surge in immigration in the last decade has resulted in the long-established social geography of the city being overlaid by a new pattern of cultural and ethnic differentiation, and a segregation of new immigrant groups which is even more pronounced than social class-based segregation (McCafferty, 2011b). The key elements of ethnic segregation are a concentration of immigrants in private residential accommodation in the city centre, and an under-representation of these groups in social housing. According to the most recently published (2006) census, over 10,000 persons, or 11 per cent of the population of the urban area, are non-Irish nationals, and 3,855 persons (4 per cent of the population) report their ethnic background as other than white.<sup>3</sup> The city centre contains less than 5 per cent of the Irish nationals resident in the urban area, but 30 per cent of the Polish nationals.<sup>4</sup> It contains 4 per cent of the white Irish population, but 26 per cent of the black population. Conversely, the areas containing the main local authority housing estates (including all the regeneration estates) contain almost 15 per cent of both Irish nationals and white Irish in the urban area, but just 5 per cent of Polish nationals and less than 1 per cent of the black population.<sup>5</sup>

This evidence of residential segregation, based on small area data from the 2006 census, has presented a number of challenges to Doras Luimní, a migrant support organisation in Limerick City which has been promoting and supporting the rights of migrants for 11 years. It is the experience of Doras Luimní that, after a decade of large-scale inward migration there is a dearth of migrant families settling in established social housing areas. The increased cultural and ethnic diversity of the population in the city as a whole is not found in social housing areas, which remain relatively homogenous. Although there is a significant number of non-Irish nationals on the City's housing list and in receipt of rent allowance supports, there are limited inlets for these groups into areas that are traditionally inhabited

by the native Limerick population, and that tend to grow from the inside. The result is that there has been a gradual ghettoization of immigrant communities in the city. This exclusion of immigrant groups from social housing areas is potentially problematical, because it is within these areas that there is an established community infrastructure such as community centres, community crèches, sports facilities and teams, and other community-based social outlets. These facilities are resourced by national and local government and consequently are either affordable or free of charge. They are, therefore, a vital support for families and individuals on lower incomes, as well as being the focal point around which community grows, and a mechanism to enhance integration.

The emerging tendencies towards the ghettoization of immigrant groups have been driven by a range of factors and processes. The concentration of immigrant groups in the city centre is a common feature of the social geographies of cities that have experienced significant immigration. To a considerable degree it may be voluntary on the part of the immigrants, and driven by benefits that arise from location close to co-nationals who share a language, religion, or other social and cultural traits. However, in Limerick, concentration in the city centre, and exclusion from social housing areas, have also been the unintended results of housing policies, in particular as these relate to persons from outside the European Economic Area (EEA).

It is difficult for many newcomers to gain access to social housing. To be considered for social housing by a local authority a person has to show 'Proof of [...] leave to remain in Ireland; where applicable, evidence of having a Stamp 4 Immigration Stamp Endorsement on a passport for a period of 5 years should be provided' (Limerick City Council, 2011a). It is the experience of Doras Luimní that the longest period of time that non-exceptional cases of Stamp 4

holders receive from the Department of Justice and Equality is 3 years, with an option to renew. Therefore the required stamp is not a possibility, and hence the individual or family is effectively excluded from social housing, even when there are units available. Similarly, based on the clients that Doras Luimní deals with, there are very few cases of non-EEA immigrants who have 'permission to remain in the State permanently' yet this is a condition of eligibility for the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), which is a social housing support introduced to cater for the accommodation needs of persons who are in receipt of long-term rent supplement (Limerick City Council, 2011b). Consequently, many migrant families are excluded from this scheme. In restricting the access of immigrant groups to social housing and related supports, these regulations are counterproductive and go against sections 36-42 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 which requires city and county councils to make provision for the prevention and reduction of homelessness. If people cannot get on the housing list, and are excluded from rental support, homelessness becomes a significant risk in the event that they encounter difficulties meeting housing payments.

As well as increased vulnerability to homelessness, many migrant groups in Limerick experience a diminished quality of life as an indirect result of the operation of housing policies. In particular, the effective exclusion of migrants from social housing means that they cannot access any of the associated benefits, such as the employment and training opportunities of RAPID,<sup>6</sup> the quality-designed modern homes, improved community facilities and integrated services offered by the Regeneration Agency,<sup>7</sup> or the long established community and family resource centres in social housing estates. If a person is not eligible for social housing they are also not eligible for rent supplement, even if they have a limited income. This pushes low-income migrants out of the more traditional

home model in Ireland, the house, into lower rental-cost apartment living. Many of the migrant individuals and families that Doras Luimní works with settle in city centre apartment blocks. Finnerty (2003, 2010) and O'Connell (2007, 2009) have identified the growth of private rental sector ghettos in Ireland as an issue that needs to be addressed by policy makers. They have also raised concerns about the challenges of managing the significantly increased number of apartment schemes. For migrants settling in these areas the difficulties faced are arguably much greater than for indigenous groups.

Many, perhaps most, of the city centre apartment schemes that contain large immigrant populations suffer from a community vacuum, both in terms of the absence of facilities and infrastructure, and in terms of the nature and type of social networks and inter-personal relationships. Such accommodation is transitory in nature with short-term lease options available. There is no community core, and limited scope for interaction between residents. There has been an acceptance across State agencies that there is a need for a co-ordinated, interagency approach, with strong community involvement to ensure positive living environments (O'Connell, 2007: 84). Yet this is absent in privately run apartment settings. Due to the anonymity of living in these schemes there is little focus around which residents can create a connection, so that individuals have to seek out others that they can link with through common culture, language or belief systems. This may cause people to search for 'community' outside their immediate neighbourhood, so that they have little or no connection to the people or space immediately around them. Alternatively, it encourages groups based on nationality, ethnicity or faith to take up residence in certain areas, so that localities, and in some instances specific buildings, become associated with a narrow set of values. These areas mirror, but are very distinct from, the social housing areas already established in the city.

The danger is that these processes of population sorting according to ethnicity lead to the development of what we might term ‘cultural bubbles’ where the experience of the country of origin has been transposed to a Limerick space, where the medium of communication is the language of the country of origin, the shared experiences echo those of the country of origin, and there is little interaction with the host communities. Individuals are living in a city without knowledge of the language, or an understanding of how the host society, including its systems of public service provision, works. In the immediate term this impacts negatively on immigrants’ ability to access essential services in areas such as health, employment, and education. It also adversely affects the capacity of the host community and the new communities to integrate and evolve together organically. Doras Luimní believes this is leading to the development of parallel societies within the one space, and is creating the potential for conflict when multiple groups compete for limited resources.

There is evidence of efforts to prevent cultural and ethnic polarisation. Local authorities and Community Welfare Offices exercise a degree of flexibility and discretion when applying the housing eligibility regulations in relation to length of residence. Consequently, many more individuals and families have access to the social housing list and rent support than would otherwise be the case. For example, there are currently between 50 and 60 immigrants availing of the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) in Limerick City. However, outside informal practices such as this, the burden of addressing integration issues in a structured manner falls at times to community NGOs.

Doras Luimní attempts to address these issues through partnership, coalition and collaboration. The organisation co-chairs the Limerick City and County Integration Working Group (IWG), which operates under the Social

Inclusion Measures Committees of both Limerick City and County, and was established with the aim of bringing together statutory, community and voluntary bodies to address the integration needs of migrant and host communities in Limerick. These efforts require a lot of buy-in from the varied interest groups, but indications are that both the statutory and non-statutory agencies involved are committed to addressing the more immediate concerns. The Working Group's Integrating Limerick plan was produced following widespread and in-depth consultation with community groups and service providers to identify gaps and barriers as they were perceived at the time (Limerick Integration Working Group, 2010). Significantly though, housing, and more specifically the issue of integrated housing, is not identified as a theme. Despite this, it is the view of Doras Luimní that the issue of where migrants are housed is a key factor underpinning other issues addressed in the plan, such as access to information and to education.

At community level, Doras Luimní has two specific actions aimed at breaking down the barriers that may impede community interaction. Firstly, support is provided to mainstream service providers and migrant groups to build their capacity to develop, communicate, and respond to each other's needs. Doras Luimní's activity in this area includes, for example, its work as chair of the IWG to build relationships with and between communities, whilst contributing to the development of policy and practice relevant to community work and to the issues faced by communities. This work is based on the values and principles of community work set out by the Community Workers' Cooperative (Community Workers' Cooperative, 2008), including empowerment, participation, inclusion and collective action. Secondly, events are organised to celebrate the cultural and ethnic diversity of Limerick, and to promote inter-culturalism in the cultural and social scene

of Limerick. The purpose of these events is to create a friendly atmosphere where all communities can positively interact, and learn from, and contribute to, the experience of living in a diverse Limerick (Doras Luimní, 2011).

While these efforts have met with some success, a significant drawback is that, in the main, the many elements of Limerick's culturally diverse population rarely share the same space. The result is that, when they do interact, it tends to be either in a process of exoticisation of each other, or, more problematically, when conflicts arise during routine daily activities. Access to services (both public services such as post offices and social welfare offices, and private services such as shops and restaurants) is often the flashpoint for inter-racial conflict, and there is already evidence that racism is a problem in day-to-day interactions between some migrants and some members of the host community.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to these community-level actions, Doras Luimní also campaigns for structural change that will break down the barriers to integration, such as by abolishing, or at least amending, those clauses within public policy that automatically exclude. As well as the examples from the housing policy domain dealt with in this article, there are many other instances of exclusionary policies. One of the most significant in terms of segregating newcomers is the policy of direct provision of asylum seekers' basic needs for food and shelter while their claims for refugee status are being processed (Reception and Integration Agency, 2011). The effect of the direct provision policy is to house asylum seekers away from the general population, thereby restricting their integration. Another group that is explicitly excluded is those who are considered not habitually resident. These individuals are precluded from accessing State services and supports because they do not satisfy five distinct eligibility criteria (Department of

Social Protection, 2011).<sup>9</sup> Doras Luimní, in consultation with migrant groups, communities and individuals, and in collaboration with other NGOs, is actively calling for change in the conditions for habitual residence.

Using the tool of campaigning within the work of Doras Luimní has a multifaceted benefit. A key impact area is public awareness, because by promoting understanding and empathy on the part of the established and empowered populations, grassroots agitation against the status quo is more likely to occur. Lobbying at local and national, even occasionally international, levels to create an understanding of the diverse migrant populations' perspectives informs those in a position of power of the need to change legislation and policy. It is only through such changes that service providers can implement more equitable systems. As an organisation advocating change, in partnership and coalition with other NGOs, Doras Luimní is uniquely placed. The majority of migrant-specific organisations are based in Dublin, and most focus on a subset of the migrant sector. Doras Luimní, on the other hand, offers support to all migrants, as well as the indigenous population. Its presence in Limerick, outside the services hub of Dublin, means that many of the issues that are encountered are distinct from the experience of Dublin-based migrants. This work brings a Mid-Western perspective to what can often be predominantly an Eastern Region discourse, and thereby enhances the body of knowledge on which agitation for change is based.

It is crucially important for Doras Luimní that migrants and their issues are positioned in public discourse not merely as 'others'. The people Doras Luimní works with through its drop-in centre are parents, students, families, individuals with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, older, young, educated, and illiterate. They are people with aspirations, dreams, hopes, experiences, anxieties, loves, fears. They

happen to have migrated from somewhere to Ireland, and find themselves, either by accident, design or policy, living in the Mid-West of the country. Many of their issues and concerns are shared by the indigenous population, as well as by the varied other groups supported by the community and voluntary sector. There are, at times, extra burdens or extra barriers that impact directly on migrants, but there are also many instances where the migrant and indigenous populations are in solidarity with each other through common grievance or celebration. To talk about migrants as being a homogeneous group belies the experience of a broad range of diverse people. There are often hidden structural inequalities that can impact on multiple layers of exclusion for the generic 'migrant'. A black person who also happens to be a woman with a disability may have completely different experiences from an able-bodied white man with English language difficulties. One or the other's marital status, family status or immigration stamp may influence the level of access they have to mainstream society and community structures.

While it is not valid, therefore, to generalise about 'migrants', or to think in terms of a dichotomy between migrant and Irish, nevertheless some conclusions can be drawn about the needs of the more vulnerable and marginalised migrants, as represented by those who access the services of Doras Luimní. The competition for limited resources mentioned earlier has significant repercussions for community work, as practitioners attempt to foster a sense of solidarity between what can be perceived, at times, as opposing elements and hierarchies of deserving, that is, migrant communities versus more established geographic communities of disadvantage. Any ghettoization that develops as a result of town planning or housing policies and practices renders more difficult attempts to create vibrant, integrated and inclusive communities. It is important, therefore, that in framing such

policies a holistic approach to housing provision, which recognises the importance of the community dimension, be explicitly adopted. In addition, there is a need to support migrants to participate in decisions that affect their lives, including those in areas such as social housing policy. Some efforts have already begun in this regard, with the Limerick City Community Forum, which includes members from all communities, encouraging members to sit on the City Council's Strategic Policy Committees. This is an example of good practice in creating the conditions for migrants to participate actively and critically in local communities and decision making.

In conclusion, the surge in immigration in the first decade of this century, and the resulting increase in the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Irish population, together present significant challenges for housing policy and for community development. There is evidence that, in Limerick, many of the new migrants live separate from the host community, and while residential segregation may be voluntary in some instances, it is the experience of Doras Luimní that to some degree, and for some categories of migrant, it stems from housing and other public policies. The results of segregation for migrants are isolation, exclusion and a lack of connectedness to the mainstream society. For society at large, forcing migrants to remain outside of the mainstream, and to be established as the 'other' in public discourses undermines the positive contribution they, along with all others, can make to the development of Irish society and to the communities of which they should be an integral part. Responding to these issues calls for ground-level community development work with both indigenous and immigrant communities, and incorporation of the voice of immigrants and the expertise of their representative bodies, such as Doras Luimní, in public policy formation and implementation.

1. RAPID is the Irish Government's programme for Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development. One of RAPID's key objectives is to improve the integration and coordination of public services for people experiencing different forms of economic and social disadvantage.
2. The Limerick Regeneration Agencies were established by the Irish Government in June 2007 in response to the Fitzgerald report to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion on issues prevailing in Moyross and other disadvantaged areas of Limerick City.
3. The urban area is defined as the legally defined City and surrounding suburban Electoral Districts (EDs).
4. The city centre is defined as the ED's of Custom House, Shannon A and B, and Dock A, B, C, and D.
5. The areas referred to are the ED's of Ballynanty, Custom House, Galvone B, John's A and B, Killeely A and B, Prospect B and Rathbane, in all of which the percentage of households renting their accommodation from the local authority is at least 25 per cent.
6. These include opportunities provided by RAPID's Employment and Training theme, which is intended to help local agencies to work together in a cohesive manner to address the needs of disadvantaged urban communities.
7. See the Regeneration Agency's web site: <http://www.limerickregeneration.ie/>
8. See for example Doras Luimni's submission to the NGO Alliance Against Racism (NAAR) Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Eradication of Racial Discrimination.
9. The Habitual Residence Condition was introduced on 1 May 2004 as a qualifying requirement for social assistance payments and Child Benefit. It is presumed, until the contrary is shown, that an applicant is not habitually resident if they have been living in the State or the common travel area for less than two years. According to the Department of Social Protection, the onus is always on the applicant to provide sufficient evidence that they are habitually resident in the State. In determining whether a person is habitually resident, five factors set down by the European Court of Justice are to be considered: length and continuity of residence in Ireland; length and purpose of absence from Ireland; nature and pattern of the employment; applicant's main centre of interest; and future intentions of the applicant.

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# 07.

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## Diversity and Expansion: Charting the Needs of a Community in Change

– Dr Claire Dorrity and Dr Féilim Ó hAdhmaill

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### Introduction

The impact of social, economic and cultural change on community and the challenges this presents for community work has been the subject of much debate in the literature in recent years (NESC, 2006; Cattle, 2008; Putnam, 2007). In Ireland, many of the changes taking place have been influenced by modernisation, economic growth, new migration patterns and rural and urban expansion. As a result many communities face a number of challenges in responding to expansion and heterogeneity and more specifically the challenge of diversity. This in turn has had a direct impact on the role of community work and community development particularly in the areas of promoting community cohesion and social interaction.

This paper aims to explore some of the challenges presenting in Carrigtwohill, a small rural community in East Cork, which has witnessed profound industrial

developments, consolidated by market influences and a dramatic increase in its population level. Many of these changes have taken place over a relatively short period of time bringing a marked change in the area's demographic profile, particularly during the 'Celtic Tiger' years. The attraction of a large number of external agencies and pharmaceutical industries to the area has also boosted job creation in the period of economic growth and led to a massive expansion in housing development. Coupled with this, the local community has witnessed a pronounced increase in ethnic diversity becoming home to an increased number of migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers.

The research presented in this paper indicates that for many residents living in the Carrigtwohill area, these trends towards new migration patterns, greater mobility, more flexibility and diversity in living patterns and lifestyles has mainly been a positive experience in the community and has given rise to increased job creation, improved living standards and improved facilities in the immediate and neighbouring areas. However, for others, particularly those who have been long term residents in the area, the level of change has been somewhat unsettling. In particular there has been a feeling among long term residents that the changes that have taken place have signalled a shift away from close knit ties in the community and a loss of community kinship. In this instance the move from rural to urban, from homogeneous to diverse, from close knit to atomised anonymous communities (McDonagh, 1998) is marked by what Crow and Allen (1994) refer to as a sense of 'loss of close knit community bonds' and the erosion of perceived traditional community values (Crow and Allen, 1994, Crow, 2002). At the same time the increased level of diversity presents specific challenges, particularly in a community that has previously had a relatively homogenous population. Cantle (2008) argues that in such cases it can often be that while some may welcome the prospect of

living in a more culturally diverse society, for others it can signal the loss of traditional value systems. (Cantle, 2008)

The aim of the research study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of both long-term residents and those newly settled in the area, including those coming from different ethnic minority backgrounds. It also aimed to examine the role of community work in facilitating integration and how the Family Resource Centre could develop new ways in assisting the community in coming to terms with change. The study took place between 2008 and 2010 and employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods including a community-wide survey, community consultations, and a range of focus groups with local residents and community workers.

### *Background to the Research*

The study was conducted at the request of the local Family Resource Centre (FRC) who were particularly interested in what additional services they could provide to promote the integration of new-comers in the area, but were also concerned with meeting the needs of long term residents in coming to terms with change. Of particular interest was the perceived loss of 'community' among long-term residents, resulting from expansion and the transition from small close-knit rural community to a growing urban town. The FRC was particularly interested in how a research project might inform the development of potential strategies for community workers and those directly involved with the work of the FRC.

Two of the overarching concerns expressed by the FRC were as follows:

- a) Without positive, pro-active work from the FRC and others in the host community, newcomers would feel isolated and marginalised within the local community;
- b) Traditionally strong cohesive community bonds which previously existed in a small local area were now being eroded causing concern for the FRC that some members of the community may feel a sense of loss and isolation.

### Research Design

It was clear from the initial consultations that took place with the FRC that efforts were already underway at local level to ensure the inclusion of migrants in community activities. This took place through the provision of language classes, computer classes, and making links between the FRC and local churches in facilitating the integration of migrants. The FRC was particularly concerned with how migrants experienced living in the local community, how they interacted with others in the community and through what means integration took place between newcomers and long-term residents. It was also deemed important to consider the impact of change on long-term residents and what this signalled for some in the community in relation to issues of 'belonging' and 'sense of community'. Specific factors relating to 'loss' and isolation' and community values were viewed as significant. As a result a research plan was drawn up which included both qualitative research in the form of focus groups of local residents and quantitative research in the form of an expansive community wide questionnaire reflecting the views of the community, inclusive of both new and long term residents.

Preliminary research was conducted using a series of three focus groups of local residents organised with the support of the FRC. These three focus groups included:

- 1) Adult Irish residents associated with the FRC.
- 2) Teenage residents associated with the local youth club.
- 3) Ethnic minority residents associated with the local multicultural group.

Following from these initial focus groups it was clear that a number of issues were emerging relating to concerns over the loss of community cohesiveness and community bonds. Other issues emerging were directly related to the challenge and prospects for integration. Also emerging were both mutual and differing perceptions around issues of diversity and cultural difference. Additionally, issues were raised relating to changing community needs directly linked with infrastructural supports and the pronounced growth in population. Having acquired such data from these initial consultations it was decided that the issues emerging would inform the construction of a more detailed community-wide survey. The exact layout and contents of the questionnaire was carried out in conjunction with the FRC.

It was accepted at the onset of the research that the complexity of integration was difficult to measure (ICI, 2008) and that the level at which integration took place was strongly associated with wider community structures and the level of community participation. How individuals and groups access services, employment and education and the capacity to build up relationships with others (both migrant and indigenous population) within the wider community was therefore viewed as important. Barriers to integration based on age, ethnicity, national origin, and migrant status were thus explored along with the degree to which people felt at home in the community.

It was decided that the survey sample should be administered to approximately 20% of households in the area (500 households) incorporating new and long standing geographical regions of the locality. It was

anticipated that such a distribution would reflect both the perspectives of new settlements and long term residents in the area. The survey was conducted using volunteers from the local community and distributed to 500 households. A total of 363 questionnaires were completed.

After careful examination of the survey it was noted that there was limited representation from the migrant population and therefore it was decided to conduct further focus groups to ensure perspectives were inclusive of the whole community. Two focus groups were set up: one with African community residents and one with Polish community residents. Following from these a further series of focus groups were also organised with local residents (both new and long term residents) to discuss themes arising from the data analysis of the survey. A further series of meetings took place with the FRC to discuss the findings of the research and to explore in what ways the survey analysis might inform the future work of the FRC.

### *Issues Arising from the research*

Initially the findings from the survey suggested that whilst there had been profound changes taking place in the area the vast majority of residents had a positive experience of living within the community. Findings from the survey appeared to indicate that residents had adapted well to diversity and that issues relating to infrastructure and lack of amenities were more pressing issues for residents.

The survey also revealed less contentment among residents in relation to:

- a) The impact of expansion on a close knit community.
- b) The loss of cemented social relations.
- c) The loss of traditional rural living and values.

The feelings of loss of community spirit indicated by respondents related specifically to an erosion of a sense of belonging in the community. Such feelings of loss were expressed disproportionately by older people and those who had long term settlement ties with the community. However, this did not necessarily reflect a reluctance to accept change or increased diversity. For example, some elderly respondents expressed empathy with those who came to Ireland to seek refugee status and did not apportion blame to newcomers for scarce resources. Rather, the dramatic changes that had occurred over a short period of time had signalled a loss of familiarity and close-knit community. It was this overwhelming sentiment which was deemed as one area of importance to the role of the FRC in facilitating integration.

While the majority of respondents in the survey did not appear to display any hostility towards migrants in the area there were some overt expressions of hostility from a small minority. It was also noted that the survey respondents were not representative of all groups living in the area. For example there was very little representation from African communities despite a large increase in the number of Africans living in the area. Equally the strong presence of Polish people living in the area was not reflected in the overall sample.

For this reason it was decided that follow-up focus groups with migrants would prove beneficial if the study was to be representative of all groups living in the area. Additional focus groups were also set up with local residents (both new and long term) to discuss the findings of the survey. In contrast to the data presenting in the survey, the focus groups with local residents revealed a degree of overt hostility to migrants particularly those of African descent, and some of the comments suggested that not all residents were tolerant of diversity and differing cultural practices and

values. One group mainly made up of long term residents revealed that there was an overwhelming consensus that an assimilative approach was favoured as a means of integration rather than one of tolerance and recognition of different cultures and backgrounds. There was also a clear distinction made between Eastern European and African residents. For example, some residents did not see members of the Polish community as unwelcome but made negative comments relating to African residents. Moreover, while Polish residents were seen as contributing to the economy through employment and paying taxes, there was a sense that African residents were 'a drain on resources' and over-reliant on welfare assistance and benefits. There was also a sense that Africans were sometimes less approachable, whereas many Polish people integrated through work and were working in local shops and viewed as more likely to communicate.

The focus groups specific to Africans and Polish residents also yielded differing perspectives and experiences of integration. The focus group with members of the African community, in particular, revealed how residents of African descent faced specific barriers in relation to integration, that were not experienced by Eastern Europeans and other members of the community. Such barriers included access to employment, education, social networks, housing, and community ties. Those coming from Polish and Eastern European backgrounds appeared to feel more accepted by the host community while those coming from African backgrounds often did not. In the focus group with the Polish community very little difficulty was expressed with integrating, despite the difference in cultural backgrounds. Such perceptions seem to fit with other research carried out in this field which suggest differing responses of the host community towards different incoming ethnic groups and different barriers between groups (e.g. Garner, 2004; McGinnity et al, 2006). Overall the Polish participants had a

positive view of employment while Africans tended to face discrimination in applying for jobs.

However, where both groups highlighted positive experiences of integration was in the schooling system. This proved a valuable place for parents of migrant children to meet and develop relationships with other residents in the community. Many of the Africans commented on how sport had been a positive way to integrate and build new friendships, particularly where their children were attending local clubs such as the GAA. When asked if friendships had been made with the settled population Polish participants appeared to have more positive experiences than Africans. While the Polish participants indicated they had a mixture of Irish and Polish friends this was less true of the African community. Follow up meetings with the Family Resource Centre in 2011 suggested that feelings of hostility and discrimination have become more heightened and widespread in the community particularly since the onset of economic decline.

### *The Role of Community Workers and the FRC*

Government responses to migration and increased diversity in Ireland have tended to be largely laissez-faire with limited meaningful planning with regard to the promotion of integration. While the 1999 Integration Strategy *Integration: A Two Way Process*, was welcomed by many NGOs working with migrants, its impact has been limited due to lack of comprehensive planning and vision at a macro level. This has been further compounded by the lack of provision of resources and planning at local level and the absence of any meaningful consultation and negotiation with local communities. This in effect has meant that the assumed responsibility for integration has often shifted from state to local community, placing increased pressure on community projects and community development without

the necessary accompanying structural supports and resources. The research indicates that Carrigtwohill is one community like many others facing such challenges.

Despite the growth of Carrigtwohill and accompanying increased ethnic diversity in the area it is clear that planning for integration and community cohesion has been largely absent. Some efforts have been made by the FRC to facilitate integration, for example, through the provision of integrated art classes for children and parents, computer classes and languages classes. However, these have tended to be delivered in an ad hoc way and have been hampered by lack of resources and the absence of any comprehensive strategic planning. The research points to some areas where the FRC could have the potential to address some of these issues. Increased opportunities for meaningful contact (and thus awareness-raising) between members of different ethnic groups and the host population is one element. The research has indicated that sport and schools are two areas where positive interaction has already taken place and could be built upon through a community wide approach that could include the input of local schools, local GAA and the FRC. Another element relates to anti-discrimination, human rights and diversity training. Such training would also need to be community wide, involving local schools, sports and local business. There is also a potential for the FRC to develop networks with local media through which awareness raising could be promoted.

The FRC also needs to develop its own strategy and build on its existing work through networking with other organisations and finding new ways of promoting social interaction, community cohesion and the anti-discrimination agenda. This could potentially be done through the delivery of educational and leisure activities and social needs provision. Such a strategy would need to include the needs of both the newcomers and the host population if the needs

of the whole community are to be addressed. It would also need to include a programme of training and development for the FRC's own community workers.

The research points not only to the challenges of integration but also highlights issues relating to 'belonging', 'identity', 'kinship' and the perceived 'loss of community'. Therefore in developing a strategy a multi-layered approach is required that takes into account not only the needs of newcomers but also explores how long term residents in the host community adapt to change. Such an approach requires not only the input of the FRC but would also need to include the involvement of the wider community, including the local Council. It also requires more innovative and creative ways of engaging the local community through building levels of trust and connectedness that have the potential to improve social relations between groups.

### *Concluding Remarks*

The research suggests that there are a number of challenges currently presenting for the local community in Carrigtwohill relating to expansion, social change, diversity and integration. It is evident that the FRC and others in the community have an important role to play in promoting mutual understanding, alleviating distrust, and educating about differing cultural values, rights and expectations. Putnam (2000) talked about the need to develop 'bridging' capital between diverse groups within the community in order to promote co-operation and reduce potential for conflict. In the process members of different ethnic groups may come to 'bond' as they find that difference is not so great after all. Thus opportunities need to be created in the community where different ethnic group members can come together with Irish nationals for mutual benefit. Clearly local community groups could have an important part to play in this but they need the support and resources to do this.

Integration, however, requires more than the involvement of just the community sector. The wider statutory sector has a major responsibility also, in terms of positive planning for social change and the adequate provision of services to meet new and evolving social needs. In the absence of the latter the danger is ever present that a situation of scarce and inadequate resources will encourage a climate of scape-goating of minority groups in society. In the current economic climate with cuts to vital services and to the funding of community development work, the work of organisations like the FRC is critical and needs to be valued rather than undermined by the state.

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# 08.

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## Globalisation, migration and interculturalism: the role of community activism

– *Michael Mahadeo*

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### Introduction

At present, across Europe, one of the more noticeable features of the political landscape is the success of political parties with tendencies to the ‘far right’ of the political spectrum. This article will analyse the ‘crises’ and fears which seem to be engulfing Europe, in relation to integration and culture, and the role community work and development can play in alleviating the sense of angst and alienation at the source of this trend. Informing the context of this discussion will be an overview of the process of neo-liberal globalisation within which we are embedded. The author will show these political trends to be a reflection of the negative effects of the globalisation process and that community activism, as a politics of collective agency, is well placed to promote intercultural solidarity.

## Globalisation and migration

In our present era, the world has become more interconnected and interrelated than ever before in human history. This process is one of much promise, and in many ways much pain too. There is, in a number of ways, a big gap between the rhetoric and aspirations of globalisation and its reality. The present ideological character of the global processes, and the impact it is having, has led to an increase in insecurity and racist, xenophobic sentiments, which are translating into political tendencies unseen in Europe since the end of World War II (Craig, 1998; Leys, 2008). It is within this cultural-political landscape that community activism of any sub-genre has to operate, with both dangers to the ethos of community activism as well as opportunities. The purpose of this article is to contribute to the debate on the way forward towards a better understanding of context and, hopefully, better practice.

Globalisation is a fairly recent term that has become a regular part of the mainstream discourse in a little over two decades. Authors differ on how to define it, as would many 'ordinary' people. However, as Wayne Ellwood puts it:

Globalization is a new word which describes an old process: the integration of the global economy that began in earnest with the launch of the European colonial era five centuries ago. But the process has accelerated over the past 30 years with the explosion of computer technology, the dismantling of barriers to the movement of goods and capital, and the expanding political and economic power of multinational corporations (Ellwood, 2006: 12).

Indeed, it is the economic and technological aspects of this process that are the most mentioned characteristics. "Globalisation" is associated with an increasingly dominant

process of economic change, with economic transactions taking place regardless of national jurisdictions' (Craig, 2003: 3). In an earlier article, Craig pointed out:

... it is apparent that the consequences of economic decisions are felt more quickly than ever by increasing numbers of those who do not take the decisions, and indeed who may be thousands of miles from where the decisions are taken (Craig, 1998: 5).

To further define this process and its features giving it more relevance, one can highlight distinctive aspects such as: stretched social relations, whereby human networks of all kinds connect all over the world; intensification of information flows, where 'the impacts of events are felt more strongly than before' and more interpenetration in the close interaction of seemingly distant cultures and social values at a local level than ever before, 'creating increased diversity'; and, finally, a global infrastructure of 'formal and informal institutional arrangements, that are required for globalized networks to operate' (Cochrane and Pain, 2000: 15-17). To paraphrase Babacan and Gopalkrishnan (2001), this is the global context in which community work is practised and must develop adequate responses: 'Understanding the global context of community work is the first step toward developing appropriate community work frameworks' (p3).

At this point, it would be useful to clarify what is meant by 'community activism'. There is no agreed use of the term. For this author, it is meant to include all community activity which is geared to initiating progressive and empowering social, economic, political and cultural change. Northern Ireland has seen a plethora of such initiatives over the decades, especially in the context of 'The Troubles' whereby civil society - increasingly through community work and development, whether supported by the statutory or voluntary

sector - fulfilled the need for development and socio-economic-political justice at local level. Also, particularly amongst the nationalist community, any engagement with state institutions was viewed by some as suspicious. Therefore, community activism fulfilled an especially important role for this section of society (Robson, 2000).

With the expansion of the EU, and the challenges of both peace and more open borders, community-orientated activity is having to reorient its thinking, policies and practice to accommodate a more fluid environment. One can say there is a general consensus that those working in the field of community activism have to think beyond the local and national in order to meet the challenges globalisation has thrown up (Craig, 1998, 2003; Babacan and Gopalkrishnan, 2001): '...the scope of the challenges ahead for community work is so great that international forms of organising and partnerships are needed' (Babacan and Gopalkrishnan, 2001: 3).

Specific to this paper are the challenges facing community activism at the moment, particularly migration and the attendant consequences in the localised settings within which community work/development takes place. The urgency of this issue has been tragically highlighted by the atrocity in Norway on the 22 July 2011, which was intended to be a 'message' against migration and its attendant mixing of cultures (Tittley and Lentin, 2011). Additionally, racism against the Roma Community in Belfast in the summer of 2009 made national headlines. At this time, Roma immigrants were subjected to a series of violent assaults that led to a significant number of them returning home (Sharrock, 2009). The issue of dealing with diversity is, therefore, a matter of urgency in many societies and one which is of relevance to the community sector.

One of the major features of globalisation, partly as a result of its uneven development, is the intensification of contact between people across the globe: 'As social relations stretch there is an increasing interpenetration of economic and social practices, bringing apparently distant cultures and societies face to face with each other at a local level, as well as on the global stage' (Cochrane and Pain, 2000: 16). This in itself is not intrinsically a problem, but in conjunction with the other, more negative impacts of the globalising process, it can germinate a number of issues which are both a challenge and an opportunity for community activism.

'The unevenness of the globalizing process creates other contradictions and conflicts... the issues of migration and the resultant growth of racism' (Craig, 2003: 7). For the sake of context, it must be noted that the principal driver of globalisation, especially in its economic form, has been and is capitalism with its core value of the profit motive. However, of more importance for us today is the character of that capitalist politico-economic model commonly known as neo-liberalism and identified in the popular imagination as 'Thatcherism' and 'Reaganism'. This strand of capitalist ideology, which is itself a version of liberalism, envisions and encourages policies promoting - amongst other things - less economic constraint on finance and investments across borders, subjecting the world to the logic of international capitalism's needs at the expense of national priorities of the public/local good. That is, of course, unless they conform to the needs of global market forces (Robinson, 1996; Craig, 2003; Leys, 2008). As Leys succinctly puts it: 'It is not just that governments can no longer "manage" their national economies; to survive in office they must increasingly manage national economies in such a way as to adapt them to the pressures of trans-national market forces' (2008: 65). He goes on to add: 'Governments can try to reduce these pressures through various kinds of protectionism...but they can't escape them' (2008: 66).

The result of this structural change in the locus of power regarding policy and decision making is one of 'poverty amidst plenty', reflecting 'the dramatic growth under globalisation of socioeconomic inequalities and of human misery, a consequence of the unbridled operation of transnational capital,' which is 'worldwide and generalised' (Robinson, 1996: 21).

The impact of these destabilising policies and processes fuels one of the more obvious and controversial features of globalisation, that of migration. Migration is not new in the evolution of humanity, particularly within historical periods of earlier global state/imperial expansion, such as colonisation and the 19th to early 20th century industrial revolutions in Europe and North America. Other waves followed in post-war Europe from former colonies attracted by the economic post-war boom. Having said which, although in the public discourse immigration seems to be towards the rich world, the reality is that most migration is to those places neighbouring the home regions of the migrants (Sutcliffe, 2003).

Nevertheless, this post-war migration/immigration into Europe is relatively new and has been accompanied from its inception by a racist reaction from sections of the public, massaged by conservative parts of the media and political class (Craig, 2003; Sutcliffe, 2003). Indeed, one of the ironies of globalisation is the rhetoric of free market in goods and services, but a reticence on more open borders. Sutcliffe (2003) puts it like this:

...while vast legions of intellectuals, politicians and bureaucrats argue for free trade and free capital movements, and international organisations like the IMF and WTO exist to bring about these goals, the number who argue for the free movement of human beings is extremely limited and no international organisation

promotes it... Some of the theoretical high priests of free trade and capital movements (including Milton Friedman and Gary Becker) have explicitly declined to apply their arguments to the international movement of labour (2003: 264).

Gary Craig (2003) points out that in the increasingly uncertain world of neo-liberal globalisation, immigrants are blamed if they find work, and if they do not. In the racist discourse, they are 'taking our jobs' or 'living off welfare' (p. 9).

It is within this context of globalisation and one of its corollaries, that of migration, that the issues of multiculturalism and interculturalism have arisen. They are informing the very character of our society and how we interact. Firstly, it is necessary briefly to discuss these terms and look at the preferred ones informing community activism at the moment.

Both in Britain in the 1980s and Ireland in the 1990s, the term multiculturalism came into mainstream discourse (Ging and Malcolm, 2004; Panayi, 2010). It was to denote the massive changes in these societies whereby a supposed mono-cultural social landscape was now multi-ethnic and thus multi-cultural, with different cultures existing side-by-side. In relation to the UK, Panayi (2010: 259) says:

Multiculturalism (or multiracialism or multi-ethnicity) had increasingly come to replace the concept of race relations. Implicit within this new terminology lay the idea that that migrants of the early post-war years had escaped from a life of endemic discrimination. In the new order, equality, at least of opportunity, had arrived between Blacks, Asians and Whites'.

He also pointed out that there was a celebratory air about multiculturalism as a policy whereby people could feel comfortable about their own backgrounds within an equality of diversity (Panayi, 2010).

However, there are criticisms of this policy for being too encouraging of parallel ethnic developments rather than facilitating the mixing seen as necessary for complex multicultural societies to progress with more mutual understanding. One can add there is urgency here, given the impacts of our current phase of globalisation. Panayi (2010: 262) writes that 'it creates and perpetuates difference'. He goes on to cite Varun Uberoi who argues that 'multiculturalism prevents social unity because each group pursues its own individual interests at the expense of the greater national good' (p. 262). In view of this, there has been a shift in the use of terminology, reflected in the new term 'interculturalism':

...interculturalism is perhaps best understood as a critique of, or alternative to, the limits of multiculturalism. Whereas multiculturalism as a concept envisages and produces dominance of one 'majority' culture over a host of smaller 'minority' cultures, interculturalism proposes a parity of cultures (Ging and Malcolm, 2004: 127).

Commenting on the supposed difference embodied in the change in language and policy, Philip Watt, cited by Ging and Malcolm, describes an intercultural approach 'as one in which policy promotes interaction, understanding and interaction between the dominant and minority ethnic communities. An intercultural approach will inevitably lead to a reflection on issues of how power is distributed in society' (2004: 127).

Edna Longley, also cited by Ging and Malcolm (2004), argues that interculturalism is a better term than multiculturalism because ‘...interculturalism places an emphasis on the dynamic which exists between groups, the ways in which they learn from each other through dialogue and reciprocity’ (p. 127).

It is important to bear in mind that, whether as multiculturalism or interculturalism, these policy responses are not without constant critiques to ‘fine tune’ their meaning with changing circumstances. However, for the purposes of this article, of more importance is the fact that they engender core values which are at the heart of community activism, whether in community development or community work.

Community activism embodies the values of being people-centred, making links between the local and the global; combating racism and empowering the marginalised; being about social justice; fostering more collective ways of acting; moving away from the culture of individualist standpoints to challenge hegemonic ideas even while working within the system (Babacan and Gopalkrishnan, 2001; Craig, 1998 and 2003).

The enhancing of intercultural initiatives therefore reflects all, or at various times a number of, these values. This is especially the case with regards to ethnic minority groups, with their composition being mainly migrants and their vulnerability to populist racist ideologies and stereotyping, particularly in these times of crises and recession. Of course, Northern Ireland has, like any deeply divided society, shown the limits of multiculturalism; communities can co-exist but yet not develop meaningful relations with, or understanding of, each other. Yet Northern Ireland society has changed significantly over the last decade. There have been changes in population, especially the

more obvious presence of ethnic minorities throughout society. Now a relatively peaceful society, there remains a still contested national question. In addition, there is the impact of a deep recession within the Republic which is struggling for its economic autonomy in the face of European pressure. These factors make globalisation very real for local people and community activism needs to respond to these challenges.

*Case Studies in community activism: the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP) and the Centre for Global Education (CGE)*

Two community-orientated projects particularly illustrate sustained, progressive community activism in action and are examples of 'best practice'. Firstly, the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme ([www.stepni.org](http://www.stepni.org)) has existed since 1997 as a non-profit organisation dedicated to the very core values elucidated above. In the process of seeking to empower the marginalised and vulnerable they offer training in a range of skills to enhance the economic and socio-cultural potential of small groups, but have links to wider projects as well.

In relation to the theme of this article, of particular importance is the Migrant Project, which has been going since 2001. It is funded by the Community Fund and other sources within the organisation and community sector with the following aims: community capacity development; individual support for accessing services, advice and information; language support programme; training opportunities and interpreting and translation services.

Many of these community initiatives have also bridged the gap with state authorities. For example, public services such as the judicial system and healthcare have drawn upon interpreting assistance from projects like those detailed

above. This was particularly important given the rapid diversification of Northern Ireland society in the years after the 1998 peace agreement when public services were ill-equipped to deal with a more multicultural society in the face of increased immigration to the region (McDermott, 2011).

The project is a direct result of the local impact of globalisation and the increase in numbers of migrant workers and their families. Correspondingly, there evolved the need for basic and practical skills and legal services, especially in the forms of language provision/translation and training of various kinds. This fits well with the core value of empowerment through education and training to give viability to people as individuals and communities.

Of relevance to interculturalism is the effort to acculturate migrant groups into local communities with the help of trusted and experienced community workers/groups which have experience of migrant people's needs and have a knowledge of lived experience with mixed communities (McAliskey, 2011). Such an approach is of vital importance in building the long term trust and understanding that enhances sustainable relationships building on a sense of commonality, so vital to combating the fragmenting effects of globalisation.

As part of this particular initiative, a project has started with children from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, learning to do things together while still using their various languages as a medium (McAliskey, 2011). This has particular significance in the context of intercultural values and an early acculturation into a community characterised by diversity. This is equally an example of bringing the global to the local in a very positive sense. It has the advantage of arresting the development of 'otherness' so prevalent in this society, caused by both historical and contemporary factors.

The second example of exemplary community activism is the Centre for Global Education in Belfast. It was formed in Belfast twenty five years ago, in 1986, to promote, through educational resources and projects, issues of global development. A specific goal was the intent to combat the racist and stereotyped imagery of the Global South, along with the provision of detailed information about global interconnections<sup>1</sup>.

An important project of the Centre for Global Education is the Black and Ethnic Minority Group project (BME). This initiative is for three years' duration, intended to foster understanding through development education teaching of local/global interconnections and the contribution of migrants to the wider society. An additional objective is the fostering of an understanding by participants from minorities of their role in the local-global-relationship matrix, to help with coalition-building between minority groups and majority communities (McCloskey, 2011). Indeed, the explicit aim of the project is to foster three core areas: social justice, interdependence and interculturalism. So far, they have trained 80 participants, who are now accredited to do community education.

Many of these participants have retained contact with the Centre and have successfully employed their new skills in the workplace, schools and community. In 2011, an evaluation of the course confirmed its positive impact on trainees and host organisations (McCloskey, 2011). Nonetheless, according to McCloskey (2011), there are insufficient such courses for ethnic minorities. Indeed, that provided by the Centre for Global Education was the first of its kind featuring a global dimension to be written specifically for ethnic minority communities.

There remain serious limitations. Northern Ireland society is still trying to come to terms with its own dislocations and

inequities. The results of initiatives like these will be felt in the long term and it may be too early to judge their overall effectiveness in 'humanising' Northern Ireland society. Suffice to say, they have had much support and success as part of Northern Ireland's emerging civil society. One has to bear in mind the continuing impact of macro power structures in terms of funding cuts, loss of jobs and the overall effects of recession.

Nevertheless, these organisations and their initiatives are positive examples of community activism enabling interculturalism not only between the majority communities but within minorities as well. For too long, mistaken assumptions have hidden the fact that understanding and co-operation needs to be fostered within and between minority communities, because globalisation encourages all to scramble for scarce resources, fostering negative competition rather than positive cooperation.

### Conclusion

In concluding, one can say with a degree of certainty that globalisation is going to remain competitively capitalist in character for the foreseeable future. It throws up both challenges and opportunities which community activists will respond to in a variety of ways depending on circumstances. The above examples attest to the fact that responses can be progressive in keeping with the core values of this genre of activism, that of empowering in a variety of ways those who are vulnerable in a rapidly changing world.

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## Who manages? Models of Voluntary Boards of Management

– *Brian Harvey*

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### Introduction

A key question in community work is: how are community development projects managed? This article focuses on the evolution of the management of community development projects in Ireland, principally through the instrument known as the Voluntary Board of Management<sup>1</sup> and recent changes affecting them. This article first sets the backdrop of the international context and what we know of boards of management in early community projects. Second, it chronicles the evolution of voluntary boards of management in Ireland, where we have some detailed information from the programmes against poverty, the Community Development Programme and other projects. Third, it looks at how boards have been affected by changes in Ireland over 2009-10. Finally, a conclusion is presented.

## Irish and international context

Community development projects in their modern form in Ireland date to the 1970s when they were recorded during the national pilot schemes against poverty (1975-81) and the European *Poverty 2* programme (1985-9). They were systematized in the course of the Community Development Programme (CDP) (1990-2010) which at its peak included 180 projects. Typically, each Community Development Project (CDP)<sup>2</sup> employed two core staff and at the end of the period an average core budget was €103,000. Family resource centres were originally established by the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) in the late 1970s. The first pilot programme comprised ten centres (1994-7), after which it formed into a programme of 107 Family Resource Centres, which continue to the present under the Family Support Agency. Although their orientation was different, they were and are of similar size and ethos, playing a comparable role in the communities in which they are based. In effect, they formed two parallel streams of development, but between them marked a considerable point of maturity in community development in Ireland.

The question as to how such projects should be managed and by whom is an important issue. A core value of community development is that community projects should be managed by and be accountable to the people in the area in which they operate (or the target group they address). This axiom is based on a series of moral, political and practical precepts: namely that local management and accountability is essential for ownership, buy-in, democracy, empowerment, inclusion and enabling communities to have greater control over the decisions affecting them. There are convincing public administration arguments to support authority being given to community development projects. Modern government and public administration is a complicated task, one improved by

participation at multiple levels, what in Europe is called multi-level governance (Grant, 1989). Services influenced by local users will be better designed and delivered than those not so informed. Local residents have important on-the-ground knowledge and skills: bringing them into the process of government and public administration is essential for the defining of problems, analysis and the devising and implementation of solutions, for example in such areas as housing, estate management, the physical environment, crime and public safety, play and recreation and sanitary services. Local representation and community groups have the capacity to identify and respond to social issues and problems more promptly than local or national government, enabling more timely and effective interventions (Coxall, 2001). Conversely, the exclusion of such communities from decision-making means that important views, information and analyses will be overlooked, leading to poorer decisions, unintended or negative consequences and failures in implementation (the belated state response to the problem of drugs being a classic example of the costs of not doing so). Community projects, rooted in and accountable to their communities, anchored in voluntary boards of management, play an important part in this process. Issues of power, control, accountability and public administration therefore throw the issue of management boards into sharp relief.

Despite their importance, boards of management featured remarkably little in the early literature of community development. A notable exception was the first of the three European programmes against poverty (1975-81, subsequent ones being 1985-9 and 1989-94). The Commission formed an impression that most community groups had quite informal organization (indeed it memorably described them as woolly, idealistic and narcissistic). Driven by militants,<sup>3</sup> they took the organizational shape of informal associations (Commission of the European Communities,

1981). By the time of the Poverty 3 programme, more formal partnership-based models had emerged, but the degree to which they engaged the communities in which they worked was less clear.

### *Irish experience*

In Ireland, the contemporaneous national pilot schemes to combat poverty (1975-81), gave considerable attention to boards of management. The National Committee on Pilot Schemes to Combat Poverty (1989) prescribed that all boards of management must have significant local representation; local-only boards of management must be broadened by wider representation; and there should normally be staff representation. This created quite a battleground between the committee and the projects, the national committee forcefully insisting management changes, projects often complaining bitterly about its impositions. By the time of Poverty 3, complex boards of partnership management were in evidence, combining local representatives, statutory agencies, voluntary organizations and social partners.

Our level of knowledge in the early 1990s enabled us to typologize the management of community development projects. Typically, they held an AGM which elected a committee of eight to ten people, generally coming from the community served by the centre; adjacent voluntary and statutory organizations working in the area; staff; and additional people drawn in from statutory bodies (often their funders) and other experts, especially in legal or financial matters (this writer, 1990; Kelleher & Whelan, 1992; Hayes, 1990; Cullen, 1994). To comply with legal requirements, they formed themselves into limited companies under the Companies Acts, appointed directors, acquired charitable tax exemption and made annual returns to the Companies Office. When the Community Development

Programme began in 1990, the Combat Poverty Agency, which managed the programme for a number of years, required that project management committees comprise a 'significant number' of people who lived in the project area or were part of the target group affected by the project, a unique directive in a state's history, recommending gender and age balance and discouraging the participation of statutory bodies. The introduction in the 1990s of social partnership was a fresh challenge, for it brought with it the imperative for community projects to work more closely with the state. McDonagh (1995) and Dorman (2006) illustrated the challenges to community groups as they found themselves drawn in to models of social partnership, with their attendant benefit (access of their voice to a wider world of decision-makers) but also risk (suffocation of that voice in a complex consensus).

By the new century, boards of management of community projects crossed a spectrum:

- A 'pure' model in which the board comprises only local residents or volunteers, who may be chosen from local residents through electoral colleges of varying size and nature. This may be a 'flat', egalitarian model and was most in evidence in urban working class communities;
- At the other extreme, a board comprising more professional people, voluntary organizations or state agencies, with more circumscribed local involvement, sometimes quite hierarchical;
- In between, boards of management which include a mixture of local residents, who are probably a majority, but which also include voluntary organizations, professional people, experts and state agencies. This is widely called a partnership model and may be the most common.

This, though, is a linear, historical model. Prendiville (1995) made probably the most detailed study of the

organizational trajectory of community development projects and their boards of management. She explained community development projects as dynamic bodies which go through a number of stages of evolution, with the model reflecting each stage. She established an ideal trajectory for community development projects, for many start with very flat, egalitarian, informal structures (formation). In their second stage, staff are employed and funding programmes contracted (normalization). In the third stage, the organization is re-orientated around planned targets, objectives, outputs and impacts (performance), the organization taking on more sophisticated organizational form at each stage. Each project must therefore be assessed against its trajectory and evolution at a given point in time.

### *Disbanding voluntary boards of management*

At the end of 2009, the Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs directed the disbandment of the Community Development Programme, its absorption into the new Local and Community Development Programme and, most significantly for this discussion, the disbandment of all 180 CDP voluntary boards of management.

The issue of the boards of management was an important aspect of this decision. The government explained the disbandment of the boards on the basis that local people should be relieved of the unwanted and onerous governance responsibilities associated with CDPs, such as employment, the management of premises, company law and so on. CDPs were required to present a plan for their integration into the local partnerships and disband their boards. They were offered advisory groups in their place. Individual CDPs, or groups of CDPs, could propose an alternative existence outside the partnership framework

based on three criteria (integrated delivery; efficiencies; and a reduction in the burden on company directors) - but the onus was on them to present a compelling case.

In the face of strong opposition, the government proceeded quickly with the closure of the programme. The government position was that there would be a strong role for the advisory group, and according to the former Minister for the Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs: 'they wouldn't have all the responsibilities of corporate governance. I think that is frightening people out of volunteering now'. This was disputed by many in the sector, typical comments being that this was a burden they gladly embraced and 'community development only works if the community has a direct involvement in management and organization'. Some took the view that 'if we don't have structures, there is no place or way whereby we can draw people in. Once the structures go, we'll never get the people back'. Overall, people felt that the focus, content, values and approach of community development would be lost in the partnerships. They were angry with what they perceived to be departmental attitudes that were dismissive of local communities managing projects ('amateurs running companies') (Meagher, 2009, 2010).

Although the Community Development Programme comprised 180 projects at the end of 2009, the department withdrew funding from 20 at the start of 2010 after a perfunctory evaluation, reducing the baseline figure to 160. Some of the twenty attempted to survive as unfunded projects. Other CDPs spun off boards to maintain their buildings and facilities, thus avoiding the transfer of community assets into the partnerships, taking the view that these were 'community facilities and not ours to give away'. Of the remaining 160, some 64 attempted to develop alternative models or approaches.<sup>4</sup> Two groupings were based on communities of interest: 19 Traveller CDPs and 14

women's CDPs. Three sets of projects proposed regional groups: seven Limerick CDPs, four Waterford CDPs and three Bray CDPs.<sup>5</sup> Five Kerry and Cork CDPs moved into the Health Service Executive, which was prepared to fund them. A necessary core element of the alternative proposals was that the governance function be carried out by one body, fulfilling the government intention that projects be liberated to provide a frontline service. The department made plain that its prime concern was a reduction in the number of boards discharging the formal functions required under the Companies Act. Meantime, the remaining hundred or so CDPs were annexed by the partnerships. They sought both representation on the partnership boards and the promised advisory groups, but with no positive outcomes by time of writing.

### *Voluntary management - end of an era?*

It was undoubtedly the case that many community development projects found governance functions to be burdensome (Bon, 2007). As well as complying with company law, they had to take responsibility for staff recruitment and management, health and safety and other legal requirements (e.g. insurance), important legal and moral responsibilities. At the same time, none argued that these governance functions be taken away. Moreover, Bon's research indicates that, far from being ignorant and uneducated, there was a high level of skills on these boards of management. Two thirds had university degrees and almost all had the Leaving Certificate. With the abolition of these voluntary boards of management, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that a consequence of the government decision was a considerable reduction in the social capital of the most deprived communities. What was also lost in this discussion was that the Companies Act structure was one of the government's making, not that of community projects. As far back as 1994, the Combat

Poverty Agency had argued for a simplified legal form for voluntary and community organizations, a proposal on which the government made no progress whatever in the sixteen years that followed (Cousins, 1994).

The reasons why the government abolished the Community Development Programme over 2010-11, even though it had been rightly touted in Europe as a flagship, good practice model of local development, go beyond the scope of this article, so reflection will be limited to boards of management. Breitenbach (1997) in her analysis of the Poverty 3 programme, noted how the state only began to interest itself in boards of management when community projects acquired significant finance, with the prospect of some authority as a local actor and player. In Ireland, the period from 2002 marked the redrawing by the state of the contours of its relationship with voluntary and community sector, the government significantly reducing its role, authority, funding, institutions and right to dissent from the state (O Broin & Kirby, 2009). The abolition of the voluntary boards of management fits entirely consistently within this process. Whilst such reconfigurations are by no means unknown, that which took place - and still continues - in Ireland was remarkable for its severity and duration and knew no parallel in any other part of the European Union in the new century. In particular, the abolition of the voluntary boards of management in community development projects suggests that the moral and practical authority they acquired had reached such an intolerable level that it must now be taken away, to return the standing of these projects to their earlier, traditional, normal impotence. Their suppression may be an unintended tribute to their success, performance and effectiveness.

1. Although the term 'voluntary boards of management' is the precise term to identify the subject matter of this article, this is not standard vernacular in most community development projects themselves. Instead, the terms most frequently used would be shorter, such as 'management committee', 'committee', 'steering group', or 'board'. These terms will be used inter-changeably, except where the context specifies a particular meaning.
2. The context will inform the reader whether the acronym 'CDP' refers to either the programme or a project therein.
3. The English report uses the term 'militant', but that may come from the French militant, which in English translates better in this context as 'activist'.
4. There were two anomalies. The first was the surviving Dublin City CDPs. Because the partnership there had been disbanded, the remaining CDPs there had no partnership into which to integrate, so they continued to operate independently. Twelve CDPs were special projects funded through the programme for convenience and they returned to departmental funding.
5. Some of the figures for projects supplied here vary from one account to another and went through numerous evolutions. Some of these proposals were still in progress at time of writing. The information given here was the most accurate available at the time.

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# Review 01

## Towards a Second Republic: Irish Politics after the Celtic Tiger (2011)

By Peadar Kirby and Mary P Murphy; published by Pluto Press

– *Reviewed by Barbara McCabe.*

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A huge amount of news hours and column inches are given over to the Irish, European/Euro and global economic crises. But for all this coverage, the ‘story’ remains confusing and amorphous.

This book addresses the challenge of explaining and proposing an understanding of the evolution of Ireland and the Irish economy from EEC membership, to Celtic Tiger, to the post-Celtic Tiger wilderness years.

The book is divided into distinct sections and clear chapters allow the reader to follow the premise of the book. This along with clear and ‘reader-friendly’ language makes accessible what might otherwise be a multifaceted and dense subject.

The first section of the book focuses on the political, thereby grounding the portrayal of economic collapse firmly within the context of the Irish state and Irish political culture.

The second section focuses on the Celtic Tiger itself, origins and policies that allowed for the emergence of the economic boom that has come to be known as the ‘Celtic Tiger’, reminiscent of the Asian Tiger economies.

The third section gives an international perspective – comparisons with other small nations as well as lessons from Latin America. For example, Finland is examined

due to its experience of similar economic crisis; New Zealand because of its similar size and Spain due to its parallel banking collapse. Of particular interest is the direct comparison with the banking collapse in Iceland offering a useful benchmark on which to observe the two government's differing approaches to addressing these problems. Despite the wide variety of other examples explored the writers conclude that a common lesson to be drawn from all of them is the quality of governance structures and practices. "...who is in power and how they use that power makes all the difference" (p183)

The final section looks to the future... lessons that can be drawn from the previously uncovered examples and parallels. Included in this section are proposals and suggestions regarding the future shape of a reformed constitution, based on coherent values which link back to the fundamentals of equality, good governance, participation and republicanism. Having previously highlighted the Celtic Tiger's winners and losers, it also explores differing concepts of political economy options, in other words, the relationship between state, market and society. The writers propose "Economic and social policy in a second republic needs to be developed within an understanding of development that gives high priority to social well-being, cohesion and equality..." (p202)

In turning their attention to the role of civil society, the writers offer a vision for those of us active in the voluntary and community sectors, identifying 'demand from below' as essential for any of these proposed reforms to gain any traction. This is a call for action and enhanced participation, and a more active citizenship which should reflect the responsibilities of 21st Century citizenship.

The limited inclusion of Northern Ireland in the debate is interesting but underdeveloped... elements of the northern political and economic life indicating closer cross-border ties whilst others indicate significant obstructions to enhanced unity.

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# Review 02

## Involving citizens and communities in securing societal progress for the well-being of all: Methodological guide

Council of Europe

– Reviewed by Hugh Frazer

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There is a growing international debate as to what constitutes well-being and social progress. Increasingly using gross domestic product (GDP) as a measure of progress is being called into question. Problems of pollution, environmental destruction, increased inequalities between social groups have led to a growing recognition that growth alone is unable to secure material well-being for all or a sustainable future. The challenge is thus to involve all citizens and local communities in defining what societal progress should mean in future and how it can be brought about. Here in Ireland we have seen an increasing engagement of community organisations and civil society organisations (e.g. Community Platform, Community Workers Cooperative, Social Justice Ireland, TASC) in this debate and the emergence of initiatives such as *Claiming our Future* (<http://www.claimingourfuture.ie/>) and *Occupy Dame Street* (<http://www.occupydamestreet.org/>).

A useful contribution to this debate is being made by the Council of Europe. For instance, the recent 2011 Forum for the Future of Democracy ([http://www.coe.int/t/dgap/forum-democracy/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dgap/forum-democracy/default_en.asp)) examined the link between democracy and social cohesion and, for instance, focussed on issues such as the need to empower all members of society in order to promote broader and more inclusive democratic engagement. Now the Council's Directorate of Social Cohesion has produced an informative and

stimulating contribution to the debate, *Involving citizens and communities in securing societal progress for the well-being of all*. This methodological guide is “addressed to all those who see the involvement of and reflection with communities and citizens as key ways of offering a vision of the future, taking account of shared responsibility and our obligations to future generations.” It draws on citizens initiatives that have emerged across the world to take a fresh look at the objectives and indicators of societal progress. The guide begins with an overview of the range of initiatives around the world. Then it goes on to analyse the concept of progress in the 21st century and what constitutes societal progress. Next it examines the concept of well-being and how indicators of progress can be drawn up together with citizens and communities. Overall the guide provides a very useful source of information and ideas that are highly relevant to community workers seeking to empower local people to have a voice in working for social change. In particular Part 5 of the guide which deals with methods for conducting societal progress processes with citizens and communities will be of interest to practitioners.

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# Review 03

## The Community Development Reader: History, Themes and Issues (2011)

eds. Craig, G., Mayo, M., Popple, K., Shaw, M. & Taylor, M. :  
The Policy Press, Bristol.

– *Reviewed by Avila Kilmurray*

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The twenty eight contributions that comprise the contents of this book offer a virtual cornucopia of community development practice and reflection over some six decades. Arranged in three sections – (a) In and Against the State: 1950s to the late 1970s; (b) In and Against the Market: mid-to late 1970s to early 1990s; and (c) Between the State and the Market: the mid 1990s to the 2000s – the selected writings provide an insightful chronology of changing thought patterns and priorities. This is a book that will be a treasure trove for any student of community development, social justice and indeed of politics, while also providing an aide memoire for more established practitioners. To those of a more cynical frame of mind the term ‘running in flat circles’ just might come to mind; yes, in 1975 Marjorie Mayo did pose the question – ‘Community development – a radical alternative?’

The editors of this publication have identified a number of the tensions and struggles that took place over the years as to how community development was framed, analyzed and presented. It is readily acknowledged that community development has always had an ‘ambiguous’ side to its nature, given its wide range of applications and sponsors. In this context the importance of a clear value base is recognised given that community development strategies are not neutral interventions but occur in ideologically contested arenas. Mae Shaw’s concise concluding section

- ‘Community Development and the Politics of Community’
- serves to emphasize the contradictions running through the concept of community.

The growth of community work into a profession is noted and the implications drawn out for consideration. Passing reference is made to the potential impact of current UK Government policies and thinking around the ‘Big Society’ notion with its attendant ‘community organisers’, and while the editorial team argue that their starting point is to represent ongoing debates rather than to seek to capture the ‘true meaning’ of community development, they also suggest that one goal of the book is to reassert the identity of the occupation of community development workers in a UK context. This is perhaps not surprising given the fact that the majority of the editorial group have had direct experience in the academic sphere of community development with its attendant focus on education and training.

This is essentially a UK book despite some broader references, connections and contributions. Northern Ireland sneaks in through one contribution from 1994, and there is even less note of happenings south of the Border. Notwithstanding this, the fact that the majority of articles address generic issues and quandaries makes this publication still relevant to the community development practitioner in Ireland – both North and South. I deliberately refer to practitioner rather than local activist as while the collection contains nuggets of activist insights, it is left up to the reader to mine them effectively. A somewhat more robust Afterword might have been useful in this regard.

By all means put this book on your ‘to read’ list, but it is more likely that it is something that you will dip in and out of over time.

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# Review 04

## The Short Guide to Community Development

Alison Gilchrist and Marilyn Taylor: The Policy Press 2011

– *Reviewed by Aiden Lloyd*

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Calling this little book a ‘short guide’ may be doing it some injustice as it is quite comprehensive in its coverage, focused in the selection of key elements and significant in the depth of coverage it affords each section. The authors have a long experience in community development as practitioners, strategists, researchers and educators. The guide is intended for UK practitioners but, because our definitions and models of practice are so close, equally valid to the Irish context. In that sense it is odd that the book regularly references US practice while ignoring the very significant contributions to community development on John Bull’s other island!

The 8 chapters cover definitions, the changing context, theoretical models, values and ethics, the application of community development in a range of service areas, challenges for practice and current and future trends. The book is most useful in laying out the different ideological approaches to community development work – ranging from the radical action model of Alinsky and the transformative agenda of Freire, through pluralist reformist approaches that see the state as a neutral force in a sea of competing interests, and on to the communitarian self-help models so beloved of conservatives. While the authors are fair in their description of the various models they are upfront in listing frailties, such as the blindness of asset-based approaches to the political dimensions of the presenting problems.

A section on the development of more radical anti-poverty community development projects in the 1960s and early seventies is interesting because of the strong parallels to the Irish experience a decade or so later. These interventions encountered resistance from local politicians and eventually succumbed to the contradictions between the limited aspirations of the state, as funder, and the expectations raised through the community development process within the targeted populations.

The book does not content itself with either frontline activism or theories of practice but also opens up the broader set of sociological understandings that explain social relations and interpret societal phenomena such as power, social class, inequality and social capital. Sections on theories of power, the state and on social movements are both informative and accessible and link very clearly to the issues and contexts faced by practitioners.

The chapters on challenges for the sector and current/future trends are particularly relevant to these uncertain times because they outline and discuss some of the issues current in Ireland – seeking alternative funding sources capable of overcoming the directive nature of the state, coping with the dilemma whereby most community workers are managed by people with no understanding or background in community development, and the importance of laying down professional training standards, with all that this entails in terms of safeguarding traditional volunteer routes into community work. There are also engaging sections that attempt to locate community development within current global issues and threats such as migration, the marketisation of welfare, climate change and the current crisis in capitalism.

This is an excellent book for practitioners, trainers, strategists and anyone with a fundamental belief in collective action for social change. It is very readable, written in an accessible manner and usefully formatted, with concise conclusions and summaries and a recommended list for further reading on the material referenced in the text - a must for the bookshelf, desk or satchel!





