CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	The changing landscape of local and community development in Ireland: policy and practice
Authors	Forde, Catherine;O'Byrne, Déirdre;O'Connor, Ray;Ó hAdhmaill, Féilim;Power, Carol
Publication date	2016-04-01
Original Citation	Forde, C., O'Byrne, D., O'Connor, R., Ó hAdhmaill, F. and Power, C (eds.) (2016) 'The changing landscape of local and community development in Ireland: policy and practice', University College Cork, 21 October, 2015. Cork: Institute for Social Sciences in the 21st Century (ISS21), University College Cork
Type of publication	Conference item
Rights	© 2016, the Institute for Social Sciences in the 21st Century (ISS21), University College Cork
Download date	2026-10-30 21:14:13
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/2732









The Changing Landscape of Local and Community Development in Ireland: Policy and Practice

Conference Proceedings | 21st October 2015, University College Cork

Edited by: ISS21 Local and Community Development Working Group

ISS21
Institute for Social Science in the 21st Century
Institiúid na hEolaíochta Sóisialta san 21ú hAois

The Changing Landscape of Local and Community Development in Ireland: Policy and Practice

Conference Proceedings

21st October 2015, University College Cork

Edited by: ISS21 Local and Community Development Working Group

The members of the Working Group are:

Dr Catherine Forde
School of Applied Social Studies, UCC

Déirdre O' Byrne
Adult Continuing Education, UCC

Ray O'Connor
Department of Geography, UCC

Dr Féilim Ó hAdhmaill
School of Applied Social Studies, UCC

Dr Carol Power
Department of Food Business & Development
and Centre for Co-operative Studies, UCC

Published by the Institute for Social Sciences in the 21st Century (ISS21), University College Cork

ISS21, UCC (2016)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publishers.

ISBN 978-1-906642-83-9

Table of Contents

Foreword by Marian Harkin, MEP v

Introduction 1

Civil Society, Active Citizenship and Democracy in Ireland

Fred Powell 3

Local and Community Development in Ireland - An Overview

Brian Harvey 7

Community Development in Ireland under Austerity and Local Government Change: Policy and Practice

Catherine Forde, Déirdre O' Byrne and Féilim Ó hAdhmaill 15

Acknowledging the "vital role of the community and voluntary sector" (Programme for Government 2011): A View from the Coalface

Anna Lee *37*

New Structures for Local Government in Ireland: Evaluating the Impact on Community Participation in the Local Planning Process

Jonathan Hall, Ray O'Connor, Carol Power and William Brady 45

Local Government Reform in Ireland: Implications for Rural Development and Community Engagement

Mark Rylands, Ray O'Connor and Carol Power 57

Contributors

William Brady is a planning academic, researcher and practitioner in UCC's Centre for Planning Education and Research. Having completed a comprehensive two-year study of the nature of planning and decision-making in city centre regeneration projects as part of his MPhil project in 2001, William has maintained his interest in advancing research in the field of urban governance and decision-making through the planning process. More recently, this interest has broadened and he has been involved in a number of research activities around metropolitan and sub-regional government, local government and planning reforms in Ireland and the UK, urban settlement systems and functional urban regions.

Dr Catherine Forde is a lecturer in the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork. She has a background in community development. Her main research and publication interests are community development; State-civil society relations; children and young people's participation; and research, teaching and learning in social work education. She is co-author of the books Youth and Community Work in Ireland: Critical Perspectives (Blackhall Publishing, 2009) and Social Work and Community Development: A Critical Practice Perspective (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). She is a member of the Civil Society Research Cluster of ISS21.

Jonathan Hall is a lecturer the Centre for Planning Education and Research at University College Cork. He has worked as a planner in the public, private and voluntary sectors. After many years of work in the public sector in the United Kingdom he gained first-hand experience of the impact of volatile local governance structures. He is particularly interested in the effect that changes to governance structures have on the delivery of planning and regeneration services at a local level.

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 works for voluntary and community organizations, government agencies, intergovernmental bodies, trusts and foundations in both parts of Ireland, Britain and continental Europe. Brian is the author of a major report which examined the effects of austerity on the community and voluntary sector in Ireland, focusing particularly on the impact on employment, during the period 2008-2012.

Anna Lee has considerable experience of the local/community development sector with a particular focus on the development of anti-poverty/social inclusion strategies. She has been centrally involved in the design and implementation of integrated actions at local and regional level and was CEO of South Dublin County (formerly Tallaght/Dodder Valley) from 1991 until July 2014. Anna has contributed to policy development at national, regional and county level. She currently chairs Volunteer Ireland and the South Dublin County Local Community Development Committee. She is a Board member of the Community Foundation for Ireland, Focus Ireland and Tallaght Hospital.

Déirdre O' Byrne, BA, MSocSc, has worked and taught in the voluntary and community sector for over 20 years. The main foci of her research, teaching and learning have been: modelling the State-third sector institutional relationship, resourcing the third sector and social enterprise development through community development practice. She is a Programme Co-ordinator and Lecturer at Adult and Continuing Education, University College Cork and an active researcher within the ISS21 Civil Society Cluster at UCC.

Ray O'Connor is a lecturer in the Department of Geography, University College Cork. His research interests are focused on local, community and rural development and the voluntary and community sector. He is a member of the SYMBIOS Project, a European-wide network of academics and practitioners established to investigate social exclusion in rural areas. He is an associate member of UCC's Centre for Co-operative Studies. Ray is co-ordinator of the MA in European Development Studies and Academic Director of the Diploma in Genealogy.

Dr Féilim Ó hAdhmaill is a lecturer in the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, where he teaches social policy across a number of degree programmes. He has a background in community activism and has worked and taught in the community and voluntary sector in the North over many years. His academic research and publications have focused primarily on social policy relating to social exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation and he has also researched and published on such issues in relation to the voluntary and community sector. Currently he is a volunteer Board member of Gael Taca and a local Gaelscoil in Cork. He is also the Programme Director for the Masters in Voluntary and Community Sector Management at UCC and a member of the ISS21 Civil Society Research Cluster.

Professor Fred Powell served as Head of the School of Applied Social Studies at University College Cork from 1989 to 2014. He was Dean of Social Science at UCC from 2008 to 2014. He has been an Instructor on the Extension Programme of the University of California, San Diego, and has lectured in the UK, Italy, Portugal, China and France. He is Chair of the Board of the M.Plan and Chair of the PRTLI4-funded ISS21 at UCC. He also served as Chair of the MBS in Asian Business, a joint venture between UCC, NTU Singapore and the Farmleigh Fellowship from 2010 to 2013. He is UCC's representative on the Irish University Association's Committee on Community Engagement.

Dr Carol Power is a Lecturer in the Department of Food Business & Development, and a Researcher with the Centre for Co-operative Studies, University College Cork. Carol contributes to a number of academic programmes, in particular, the online Master's in Co-operative and Social Enterprise, the Postgraduate Diploma in Co-operative Organisation, Food Marketing and Rural Development, and professional education programmes for credit union staff and volunteers. Her interests focus on collaborative responses to social need and economic development. Carol is convenor of the ISS21 Civil Society Research Cluster.

Mark Rylands is a community activist and researcher based in South Tipperary. While working in the Community and Voluntary sector, he is also chairman of Knockmealdown Active, a multi-community initiative that promotes sustainable tourism and activities in his local area. He has strong research interests in local and community development, agriculture, landscape and heritage. He has a BA in Geography and Archaeology and an MSc in Community and Voluntary Sector Management from University College Cork.

Foreword

Marian Harkin, MEP[1]

When I was asked to write the foreword to the conference proceedings, at one level I was delighted because it gives me an opportunity once again to express my anger and disbelief at what has happened to the once vibrant community and voluntary sector in Ireland. However, as I write this and reflect on the demise of this powerful tool of citizen engagement I am hugely disappointed and greatly saddened, as barring a complete reversal of government policy, I hold out little hope for its revitalisation in the immediate future.

Yeats' words come to mind: "all is changed, changed utterly, a terrible beauty is born". We have lost the community led 'bottom-up' approach which empowered citizens through capacity building, advocacy and meaningful participation accompanied by real decision making at local level. We have replaced it with a 'top-down' service delivery approach to development, increasing privatisation of the sector, and reinforcement of the centralised approach to decision making. In short we have torn the heart out of the community and voluntary sector.

The question is: who cares? Or perhaps a more basic question is: who knows? Anna Lee, in her insightful contribution, says that the approach of State funders to date has been to allow organisations/projects to die by neglect, making it so difficult for organisations to continue that they decide to close. Between 2008 - 2014 there has been a gradual starving of the sector, with an average resource cut of 40%, including cuts in support staff of 31% and, crucially, a stripping away of any meaningful citizen engagement or empowerment in the process. During this time most ordinary Irish people were concentrating on surviving the effects of austerity day by day and they haven't really realised that valuable structures of civic engagement and active citizenship were being dismantled in front of their very eyes.

Brian Harvey, in his contribution, traces the history of community development in Ireland from 1891 when it flourished briefly. Then, as now, the heavy hand of the political establishment smothered the movement. In an insightful and informed piece, he traces the progress of the community and voluntary sector recognising the on-going tension between representative and participative democracy and how this has contributed to the undermining of the sector. "How many first preference votes did you get in the last election?" has often been used by politicians as the raison d'etre to question the basic right of civil society to exist at all. Rather chillingly, at the end of his contribution he accepts the demise of the sector but states that "when change does come, it is very important to remember the record and potential to renew community development".

In a piece entitled *Community Development in Ireland under Austerity and Local Government Change: Policy and Practice*, Catherine Forde, Déirdre O'Byrne and Féilim Ó hAdhmaill assess the risk that competitive tendering, allied to greater government control, will lead to the commercialisation and privatisation of many community and voluntary sector activities in Ireland. They conducted extensive research at various different levels within the sector and their results paint a chilling picture of a sector hemmed in on all sides and struggling to adapt to the new regime of alignment.

"Alignment has reduced local autonomy, under the new arrangements, funding decisions will be more open to political interference and based on the priorities of the relevant local authority executive as opposed to the communities and target groups it is meant to address".

"No it's not a fear factor, it was enforcement, there was not an option. If you did not comply you did not have a budget and your valued staff lost their jobs".

These are two typical quotes from those within the community development sector which describe their experience of the recent alignment process. I know their comments are representative of the sector because over the last three years, in particular, I have worked with LEADER groups nationwide.

[1] *Marian Harkin is an Independent MEP representing the 15 counties of the Midlands-North-West constituency in the European Parliament.*

They have been subjected to huge pressure from various different sources. This pressure has been unrelenting and in my opinion a scandal to observe. It was like as if the establishment worked in a pincer movement to crush any dissent. At EU level MEPs voted for Community Led Local Development (CLLD) as the basis for the LEADER programme. In Ireland, we have ticked all the boxes but manipulated and twisted the concept so that it is effectively meaningless.

Mark Rylands, Ray O'Connor and Carol Power in their powerful contribution *Local Government Reform in Ireland: Implications for Rural Development and Community Engagement* further articulate concerns about realignment when they assess the impact of this reform in the case of the merging of the North and South Tipperary local authorities. They state that the implications for rural development are that it will now be delivered by the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) which is a top-down administrative structure, which, potentially, is subject to a substantial level of influence by unelected local authority officials. They paint a gloomy but realistic picture of the current situation when they say "the loss of organically evolved, community-based administrative structures to more centralised governance structures may, in the future, come to be recognised as the cannibalisation of local development by local government."

Jonathan Hall, Ray O'Connor, Carol Power and William Brady look at the issue of localism and how it fits in a highly centralised system of governance. They also examine the Local Reform Agenda and the abuses in the planning system. In a well-researched and insightful piece they suggest that there is good reason to consider that the dysfunction in the planning system was not specifically attributable to the local nature of the activity but the chronic lack of oversight and an overarching laissez-faire attitude to spatially undifferentiated growth potential. Yes, there were very significant abuses in the planning system and reform was needed but they pose the question, have we "taken out" the right people? They quote the 2011 Programme for Government which states that "Government is too centralised and unaccountable. We believe that there must be a real shift in power from the State to the citizen", however, in an ironic twist they draw the conclusion that, despite a rhetoric that promises to deliver power to the local, the practicalities of reform in fact seem to reinforce the centralised nature of the Irish Government by reining in the local.

Anna Lee, with her valuable years of experience in the sector, considers what the community and voluntary sector might want to reflect on and prioritise in the current complex situation of community and voluntary funding and policy. She speaks of a significant breakdown in trust between the community and voluntary sector and the State. "An undermined community and voluntary sector is not in the interests of Irish society and there needs to be a reengagement with the political system about what the community and voluntary sector contributes". I agree wholeheartedly but we need to see real willingness from the political side to re-engage in a meaningful way. I have seen little evidence of this to date.

In conclusion, I believe this document should serve as a red warning light for all who believe in and support community and voluntary action. In many ways, it is an extremely depressing document because it deals with the reality of the current situation in a well-researched and straightforward way. There is little or no drama here and nobody can be accused of exaggeration. The plain facts of the rise and demise of the community and voluntary sector are laid out starkly in the following pages. A quote from a respondent to the online survey sums up the feeling within the sector.

"*I believe that we are moving toward privatization and that we are witnessing the demise of the community development sector. This government have shown that they don't want anyone questioning their policies and an autonomous community sector is a threat. I think the focus will become increasingly on activation and if we continue to fight against it and fight for community development we will lose our funding. If we compromise and go along with their plan we are no better than them and are undermining everything we believe and destroying community development in the process. Either way they've got us."*

Earlier, I asked who cares. Well many people do but we live in an insecure State that is unable and unwilling to engage in a meaningful way with its own citizens. All politicians, but particularly those from community backgrounds, have a responsibility to the citizens and communities they serve to work with them and not just for them.

Introduction

On 21st October 2015, a conference entitled *The Changing Landscape of Local and Community Development in Ireland: Policy and Practice* was held at University College Cork (UCC). The conference was organised by the Civil Society Research Cluster of the UCC-based Institute for Social Sciences in the 21st Century (ISS21). It stemmed from a research initiative undertaken by members of the cluster – the Local and Community Development Working Group – to investigate the impact of two main strands of policy development affecting the community and voluntary sector at the time: firstly, the range of austerity measures introduced by Government since the economic crisis of 2008, which led to severe cuts in funding to the sector; and secondly, an on-going process of policy change since the late 1990s, linked to Government attempts to align the sector with central and local government priorities and agenda. The latter culminated in the passing of the *Local Government Reform Act 2014*, which attempted to bring the community and voluntary sector under greater local and central government control, and the introduction of competitive tendering for service contracts established by the State, in place of grants for community sector organisations.

The aims of the project were to establish what was actually happening in the local and community development sector and, in particular, to ascertain how policy changes were affecting content, quality and process in community work and local development. The conference provided a forum for dissemination of some of the findings from this research and also to hear from external speakers with expert knowledge of the sector. Drawing a large attendance from the local and community development sector, the conference also provided a discussion platform for those involved in local and community development work and, hopefully, facilitated opportunities for networking and continuing debate on key issues affecting the sector. This publication documents the proceedings of the conference. The foreword was kindly provided by Marian Harkin, MEP, who also addressed the conference.

In the first paper, Professor Fred Powell, Chair of ISS21, discusses the role of 'active citizenship' and civil society in advancing democracy and pluralism. He explores some of the challenges posed by the promotion of an austerity agenda in Europe and in Ireland in recent years.

Brian Harvey's paper provides a summary of the evolution of community development in Ireland, particularly since the 1960s. He goes on to document and analyse the strategic turn in policy in 2002, which precipitated major changes in the relationship between government and the community and voluntary sector. He discusses some of the effects of funding cutbacks that have been introduced under the austerity programme since 2008.

Catherine Forde, Déirdre O' Byrne and Féilim Ó hAdhmaill (ISS21) discuss the impact on community development of austerity policies, funding cuts and, in particular, increasing local and central government control over the priorities, practices and agenda of community sector workers and organisations. Based on original primary research, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, and containing the views of over 135 workers in the community sector, the paper highlights a range of impacts on community development work and on co-operation, innovation, advocacy and independence in the community sector.

Community and voluntary sector activist, Anna Lee, considers whether there is a 'vital role' for the community and voluntary sector in Ireland, particularly in addressing poverty and social exclusion through community level action. She proposes a number of priorities for the future development of the sector that might be considered by those who work in, volunteer in, or get support and service from the sector.

Jonathan Hall, Ray O'Connor, Carol Power and William Brady (ISS21) consider the implementation of some of the changes instigated by the report *Putting People First* and legislated for in the *Local Government Reform Act 2014*. Their paper focuses specifically on changes to the local government structures within which local planning operates and considers the implications for community involvement in local plan-making.

In the final paper, Mark Rylands, Ray O'Connor and Carol Power (ISS21) discuss the impact of changes in local government structures on local and rural development. Using original primary research based on interviews and focus groups with some of those working within the new structures in County Tipperary, they detail how local government reform has affected community work and inter-agency relationships in the county.

It is intended that this report will inform debate and discussion within the community and voluntary sector and amongst policy makers at local and central government level. In particular it is hoped that such debate will lead to a better understanding of both (a) the impacts of recent policy changes and funding cuts on the community and voluntary sector and (b) the importance of that sector in promoting community and rural development in Ireland. It is hoped that this in turn may lead to a new found recognition of the importance of the community and voluntary sector's independence and the need for government to support that independence. In particular, there is a need to recognise the important role of the sector in innovation, advocacy, building social capital and promoting grassroots participation and social inclusion. All of these are important elements in building and sustaining real democracy and, as such, need to be supported.

This research project and conference were made possible by the co-operation and support of a number of individuals and institutions. We would particularly like to take this opportunity to thank the many community development workers, local authority officers, public representatives and other individuals who engaged with us in the research. Thanks are also due to a number of colleagues in the ISS21 Civil Society Research Cluster who offered support at various stages of the research initiative, especially Noreen Byrne, Dr Olive McCarthy, Dr Theresa Reidy, Professor Fred Powell and Professor Michael Ward. We also thank Marian Harkin, MEP, who addressed the conference and provided the Foreword for this publication; guest speakers, Brian Harvey, Anna Lee and Mary Fogarty; colleagues within UCC who chaired sessions, including Rosie Meade and Dr Piaras Mac Einrí, or supported the conference in other ways, especially Professor Anita Maguire, Vice-President for Research and Innovation, UCC, and Professor Patrick O'Donovan, Head of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, UCC. We also wish to convey our appreciation to Dr Linda Connolly, Director of ISS21, and Dr Caitriona Ni Laoire, Deputy Director of ISS21, who participated in the conference and, moreover, have been supportive of the research cluster's activities on an on-going basis. Finally, the financial support received from UCC's Strategic Research Fund was critical in enabling us to carry out and disseminate the results from our research.

Local and Community Development Working Group (Editors)

March 2016

Civil Society, Active Citizenship and Democracy in Ireland

Fred Powell

> *Active citizenship refers to the active role of people, communities and voluntary organisations in decision-making, which directly affects them. This extends the concept of formal citizenship and democratic society from one of basic civil, political and social and economic rights to one of direct democratic participation and responsibility (Irish White Paper, Supporting Voluntary Activity, 2000: 7).*

The renaissance of civil society is associated with demands for greater participation in the Welfare State through the involvement of a burgeoning third sector as a partner (Powell, 2013). In this new reality, the third sector is perceived as (i) an alternative to State bureaucracy and professional elitism and (ii) a public space between government and market, where the spirit of altruism can flourish. Civil society in its reinvigorated form is presented as a democratic community-based alternative to the dependent status imposed by the social citizenship of the Welfare State. In postmodern conditions, active citizenship is promoted as a more humane alternative to the Fordist philosophy of the Welfare State 'one size fits all'. It is part of a wider attack on the modernist conception of citizenship that has in part been induced by the consumerist philosophy of neoliberalism but is also the product of a deeper social fragmentation connected to the rise of identity politics. Social politics, embodied in the institution of the Welfare State, has consequently suffered in terms of public esteem. The growing disenchantment with this form of democracy and demands for greater public participation refocus attention away from the social to the active citizen. The core emphasis in active citizenship is on participation in the decision-making and service delivery processes of the State, leading to the empowerment of the citizen.

Civil society has come to epitomise this purported democratization of welfare. It is the prism through which we can examine the impact of active citizenship in this conference. We analyse the meaning of active citizenship and the changing nature of governance in the context of modernization. An emerging political emphasis on civil society is considered in terms of these policy developments, which have produced the 'enabling State' favoured by modernizers. Three core questions arise from this discussion of modernization:

(i) Is active citizenship part of a new democratic postmodern welfare reality or is it a myth that assists modernizers in reforming the Welfare State?

(ii) Is the modernization of voluntary community development simply reproducing the professional elitism of the Welfare State?

(iii) Does the voluntary and community sector reflect the gender inequalities that permeate the Welfare State?

Ruth Lister (1997: 14), in *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*, has described citizenship as a 'slippery concept'. It has defied simple definition since the days of the ancient Greeks and Romans. At its most obvious, citizenship constitutes membership of a bounded community, usually a nation state. The advent of the European Union has, however, undermined this modernist conception of citizenship. Our passports tells us that we are now both nationals of a member state (e.g. Ireland) and Europeans. As a European constitution is still in a process of gestation, we are not quite sure what rights and obligations will finally be settled upon European citizens. In the meantime we tend to look to the nation state to define the parameters of citizenship.

The British sociologist T. H. Marshall is viewed as the most authoritative source on the meaning and definition of citizenship. Marshall (1973) formulated citizenship as a 'three legged stool'. It consisted of political, civil and social rights. Historically, civil rights emerged first guaranteeing religious toleration, freedom of speech, a free press and due process in the courts. Political rights bestowed the right to vote initially on the middle classes, which was then extended to all adult males and finally women. Social rights were essentially the product of enfranchisement, conferring rights to shelter, basic income, education and health upon the citizenry. Marshall's conception of citizenship is essentially a social democratic one, based upon the nation state. It assumes a developed society with a Welfare State. Neoliberals have contested this collectivist vision on both economic and social grounds. The welfare state has also been critiqued by feminists, anti-racists and community activists on the grounds that it is paternalistic and culture bound.

Some of these critiques, while highly critical of the welfare state, can also be viewed as attempts to change it for the better. The neoliberals clearly wish to downsize the welfare state, ideally abolish it. On the other hand, supporters of 'Third Way' politics seek to modernize the welfare state along market lines, purportedly in order to make it more efficient and responsive to citizens' consumer needs. They call it co-production (Demos Think Tank). In reality, it is re-scaling the state in a downward direction – as social democrats embrace market economics. Proponents of identity politics seek to democratize it, by reshaping the meaning and structure of welfare provision into a more inclusive form. Currently, women, members of ethnic minorities (e.g. Travellers, Roma), asylum seekers and refugees, pensioners, people with disabilities; all experience relationships with the welfare state that diverge from the norm. Many campaign for equal rights and for greater participation within the welfare state, which they view as elitist in its bureaucratic structures and professional culture.

Active citizenship has emerged in this transformed social landscape. It was initially promoted by neoliberals 'as an exhortation to discharge the responsibilities of neighbourliness, voluntary action and charity' in the context of the rundown of public sector services and benefit cutbacks – a project called 'Big Society, Small Government' (Powell, 2013). However, soon more democratic variants of active citizenship emerged in the form of community groups challenging paternalistic top-down relationships that disempower. These more democratic forms of active citizenship arguably indicate the emergence of new social movements amongst marginalized groups. In this transformed context community is being reconfigured from its predominantly spatial orientation into communities of interest or alternative communities with common social and cultural rights agendas. Simultaneously, the ecological citizen has emerged as the fourth leg in Marshall's concept of citizenship. Green politics builds on the civic republican tradition of citizenship, which dates back to Periclean democracy in Ancient Athens, emphasizing the importance of participation. It has arguably globalised our concept of community while simultaneously promoting a sense of local responsibility. Lister (1997: 23-24) concludes:

> The renaissance of civic republicanism represents a reaction against the individualism of the liberal citizenship paradigm that has dominated contemporary political life. This, it is argued, represents an impoverished version of citizenship in which individual citizens are reduced to atomized passive bearers of rights whose freedom consists of being able to pursue their individual interests. The reclaiming of active, collective politics as of the essence of citizenship is central to contemporary civic republicanism.

Active citizenship and civic republicanism find their most pure expression in the arena of civil society. As the Irish White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity* (2000: 4) puts it:

> An active Community and Voluntary sector contributes to a democratic, pluralist society, provides opportunities for the development of decentralized and participative structures and fosters a climate in which the quality of life can be enhanced for all.

However, this aspiration needs to be considered in the context of the changing nature of governance in Ireland, which is being fundamentally modernized (meaning marketised). Austerity is part of this process of deconstructing the welfare state in the era of globalisation. The threat to democracy is fundamental. We need to debate the future. Will it be democratic or will democracy be swallowed up by oligarchy? Civil society is the narrative of agency over structure that speaks truth to power.

References

Government of Ireland (2000). *White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

Lister, R. (1997). *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Marshall, T.H. (1973). *Class, Citizenship and Social Development*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Parker, S. and Heaphy, J. (2006). *The Journey to the Interface*. London: Demos.

Powell, F. (2013) *The Politics of Civil Society: Big Society and Small Government.* Policy Press.

Local and Community Development in Ireland – An Overview

Brian Harvey

Introduction

This paper begins by providing a brief summary of the evolution of community development in Ireland, particularly since the 1960s. It goes on to document the strategic turn in policy in 2002, which precipitated the demise of the sector and the effects of the austerity programme from 2008. It examines the factors that motivated this policy shift.

The evolution of community development in Ireland

Community development in Ireland began on 5th August 1891 with the formation of the Congested Districts Board (CDB) by the British government to work in the west of Ireland. It compiled base line reports on poverty in communities all along the west coast of Ireland. Financial instruments included funding of parish committees to engage in community development, provision of credit so that co-operatives could be established, and small grant schemes. Other initiatives included the establishment of small-scale, local, community based nursing stations. The board had organisers in local communities to promote these initiatives.

The activities of the CDB were very disruptive to the established political order. In the post-Parnellite period, the attitude of Irish nationalist MPs was that the CDB should focus on the land issue rather than involve itself in local development issues. They were concerned that the CDB was by-passing the party's traditional routes into communities, i.e. elected representatives. The shopkeepers who supported the Irish nationalist party did not like the CDB because it promoted the establishment of community co-operatives. In the end, the nationalist party managed to excise the community development role of the CDB and oblige it to focus on land re-apportionment.

It was not until the 1960s that the practice of community development was resumed in Ireland. The new voluntary sector - groups like Cherish and Simon - engaged with the political administrative system, as exemplified by the Simon slogan of 'caring *and* campaigning'. Community development was the method of choice of the first European programme against poverty, introduced in Ireland in 1975. Community development was institutionalised, in the best sense of the word, in the Combat Poverty Agency established by the government in 1986.

Irish community development drew inspiration from the Community Development Foundation in Britain. Despite having established the welfare state, with huge investment in housing, education and welfare after the war, there was still poverty in Britain. The Wilson government at that time began to invest in work with communities to deal with issues of poverty at a local level, bearing in mind that the solutions to poverty were always going to be national and that there were, and are, limits to what community development can do.

Here, the community development programme was established by Dr Michael Woods, the Minister for Social Welfare in 1988. It was constructed from the old projects of the *Poverty 2* programme (1984-9). This expanded into 180 projects, to which were added 107 family resource centres undertaking comparable work.

The community development model in Ireland was locally-based action, targeted at both geographically and issue-based disadvantage. It provided mechanisms whereby issues of disadvantage could be raised both locally and nationally. A huge amount of work was carried out in building the research and evidence base. There was investment in improving the capacity of local communities, in physical facilities, in building, setting up and running resource centres and the provision of financial support through small grant schemes. There was investment in the building of leadership through committees, ensuring those

committees were well trained to do their jobs, with the use of technical support agencies to build up their capacity to be effective agents for their communities. Community workers combined practical services, advocacy and networking. Networking was important for access to information, to people and power structures further up the line. These networks were the beginnings of what we now call the concept of social capital and building trust with institutions.

Community development in Ireland had a distinct focus on particular issues, such as the health service and the cross-cutting issue of gender, which had hitherto been invisible within community development and indeed poverty. The programme became recognised as a European flagship. What was done in Ireland from the 1980s to 1990s was advertised, rightly, as the leading, cutting edge of community development and anti-poverty work throughout the European Union.

Local development in Ireland

Local development had a somewhat different origin. It was based on the notion of entire communities being disadvantaged, evident in the *Poverty 2* report from two rural areas where it was stated that poverty was synonymous with under-development (Barry, 1988). It was a rejection of the notion of targeting, because everyone within these communities was poor. It was a denial – if we were looking at it in Marxist terms - of the notion of class, a denial of the underlying structure of inequality within poorer districts.

Local development began as an initiative under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP). It was a labour market initiative of 12 partnership companies designed to work effectively at local level in the field of unemployment. It evolved into the Operational Programme for Local, Urban and Rural Development (OPLURD), the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP), the Local Community Development Programme (LCDP) and the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP). They became evermore focused on services, on co-ordination, on numbers, on performance, on hard measures, like 'how many unemployed people did we help this week'. It was a different orientation from community development, although many partnerships retained and indeed still use the methods and approaches of community development.

Between these two streams, by the early years of this century Ireland had much improved indicators of poverty which had fallen from 33% at the beginning of the first poverty programme in 1975 to the order of a third of that level by the beginning of this century. That was a result of many factors, but this kind of work was one of the key contributors to that positive outcome.

Civil society and the Irish State

Community development was just one part of the evolving role of civil society, but Ireland has always had difficulty with defining the role of its civil society. It is a contested space. Civil society played an important part in building the State. If we were here a hundred years ago, the country would be alive with community development groups sparked off by the Congested Districts Board, the women's movement, the housing movement, the Irish language movement and the cultural revival - civil society at work. Some parts of that were co-opted into the new State like the language movement, but others were definitely not, like women, as one could see with the protests that women made over the role defined for women in the 1937 constitution. The Irish State's model of development did not see civil society as having an important role in contributing to decisions.

Ireland was not part of the two European democratic revolutions of the latter part of the last century, 1968 and 1989. Obviously, we were not part of the 1989 revolution because we were not in eastern Europe. We were part of western Europe in 1968 when the great democratic revolutions took place, but they did not happen here in Ireland, unless you include a short protest at University College Dublin. The authorities were so terrified that, so urban legend has it, the proposed meeting square in the university's new campus at Belfield was redesigned and filled in with a lake, lest bolshy students find a place to congregate and protest!

There were early signs that the civil society relationship was going to be difficult. The original Combat Poverty Agency, established in the 1970s, promoted community empowerment. It was abolished by Charles Haughey in 1982, because he did not like what they did. In 1976, the Tánaiste, Brendan Corish, promised a white paper to define the relationship between the State and the voluntary and community sector and civil society, but it took 24 years to agree, a record, and was not eventually published until 2000 as *Supporting voluntary activity.* It had four important points. It affirmed the independence and critical role of the voluntary and community sector. It set down that there must be voluntary activity units in every government department to facilitate access to government so that if, say, a group was concerned about a transport issue they could go to the Department of Transport and expect a meeting with officials there. There was to be a programme of multi-annual funding and finally, a much improved set of funding supports for the voluntary and community sector (research and training). This coincided with the national anti-poverty strategy. So, at last, it seemed that the issues of Irish society, civil society and the State were being resolved.

The strategic turn

Then came the strategic turn of 2002, one of the most unheralded in our modern history. Within days of the election of the 2002 government (Fianna Fail with the Progressive Democrats) and the appointment of Ministers of State, a proposed new policy unit that would bring issues from the community development sector to government was cancelled. It had taken two years to design and agree, but was gone in days.

The funding promised in the White Paper (2000) was delayed for two years and then cut by 53%. Research funding was cancelled and funding for training cancelled later. Funding for anti-poverty networks was cancelled and community development was cut the following year by 17%. This was at the height of the boom, so it was not as if there was a shortage of money. There were no voluntary activity units and there was little multi-annual funding. Two years later, voluntary and community agencies were given warnings that their work was 'too political'. They were discouraged from having social policy posts and most of the nine support agencies were closed down.

This was not austerity, for it was six years before that. None of these developments had been heralded in the manifestos of either of the two parties elected or, indeed, re-elected to government.

Austerity

In 2008, the austerity programme began, one which had and continues to have profound effects on voluntary and community activities, civil society and the voluntary and community sector. Compared to the previous austerity period which began in 1987, there were differences. The cuts in 1987 focused on health and housing, while welfare and education were relatively unaffected. Approximately 3,000 beds were taken out of the health system, roughly the number that it is short of now. Funding for housing fell -90%, from which it never recovered. Over the 2008-2015 period, the government chose to cut welfare and housing, or what was left of it, leaving health and education relatively alone - except for Traveller education, which was reduced -85%. All social welfare rates, except the pension, were moved below the poverty line, where they remain. Supplementary schemes were seriously affected, particularly exceptional needs payments. There was a general income loss in the country of -11% but, in the lowest income group it was -13% and for the unemployed it was -22% (Keane *et al*, 2015). Poverty rates began to rise from their low point in 2008. These are the people, the constituency, served by community development and they suffered the greatest under the austerity programme.

Dissolution of the institutions

In the midst of all this occurred the dissolution of the institutions. One of the first decisions of the Fianna Fail/Green Party Government of the 30th Dail in 2007 was to abolish the Combat Poverty Agency, even before the economic and social crisis began. It was the body that had supervised anti-poverty and

particularly community development policy and research, so its abolition led to 20 years of expertise being destroyed overnight. With the arrival of austerity, a hit list of 41 State bodies selected for closure was decided in July 2008. Most of these were social policy agencies such as the National Economic & Social Forum, Comhar (for the environment), the National Council for Ageing and Older People, the Active Citizenship Committee, the Crisis Pregnancy Agency, the Women's Health Committee, the National Committee on Racism & Integration, the Humanities Research Council, the Crime Council, the Educational Disadvantage Council, the Early Childhood Development Committee, the Children's Acts Committee, the Homeless Agency, with cuts in the Equality Authority and the Irish Human Rights Commission of up to 53%, all to save €6m. The government appeared to take the view that it was better for it to take social policy decisions in the absence of advice, rather than with advice. Institutions were dissolved that were a vital part of Irish social policy.

The dissolution of the institutions was the least reported part of austerity. It was not covered very much in the media who, indeed, celebrated what they called the 'bonfire of the quangos'. If we look at a country like India, which fought a similar struggle for independence from the same colonial master, we read of Indian pride in the creation of its institutions. Yet here, this wave of destruction was celebrated by politicians, commentators and civil servants. Instead we get large new State agencies, including the biggest and greatest of them all, NAMA, but there were others, like the Irish Water and the Fiscal Advisory Council. So this cannot have been about money.

As for community development, the first wave of closures began in December 2009 when 14 of the 180 community development projects were closed by a Christmas Eve fax message from the department. In the following year, most of the rest were transferred to local partnerships.

From 2008 to 2014, government spending fell by -7.1%, the benchmark figure against which all other programmes may be measured. During this time, voluntary social housing fell -50%, local community development -43%, youth organisations -44%, sports grants -60%, drugs prevention -37%, the Family Support Agency -32%, rural disadvantage -100%, urban disadvantage (RAPID) -80%, voluntary and community organisations national funding -41%, probation services (mainly delivered by voluntary and community groups) -35% and funding of migrant organisations -65%. Why is it that national spending fell -7.1% in this period but voluntary and community spending is down between 35% and 45%? We have never heard an explanation.

This process of reducing the voluntary and community sector was as gradual as it was severe. It lacked the drama of, for example, Clerys department store, which was gone in an afternoon. But it was just as real. Many reduced their services. Some staff were made redundant while others went part-time. Front line services *were* reduced, contrary to government misinformation that they were not affected. Staff were made redundant. Interns often took their place. Temporary contract staff were not renewed, salaries were frozen or reduced. Charges were made for services, while staff and volunteers were redeployed to fundraising to take more money out of ever more financially-depleted communities. Total employment in the voluntary and community sector in Ireland will have fallen from 53,000 at the benchmark year of austerity, 2008, to 36,000 by end 2015, down about -31%. There is no example from anywhere else in Europe of such a decline in voluntary sector staffing since 1948 when the People's Democracies took over most of their respective voluntary sectors.

The community development projects were transferred into the Local Community Development Programme and then into the local authorities on 1st July 2014. In 2015, this programme was put up for sale in 31 commercially-tendered lots. Six partnerships were deemed 'uncompetitive' and were abolished. This privatisation was justified on the basis of the secret legal advice of the Attorney General, which we will never see (*glasnost* is only for the Russians) and on the basis of EU public procurement legislation, which, strangely, does not apply in any other member state. They are all out of step except for us.

The closure of the community development programme marked a significant loss of social capital - the concept that local disadvantaged communities build up their own leadership, their capacity, knowledge, their education and so on. A feature of many of the community development projects was that they sent their board members and staff for further education, some to UCD for example, so our government was faced with the ultimate nightmare of an educated working class, mainly women, able to argue their case.

So they had to go. Privatisation marked the ultimate end of the road for community development in Ireland, so it is fair to conclude that a process that began on 5th August 1891 ended on 30th June 2014.

Redrawing the contours

The redrawing of the lines between the State and the voluntary and community sector was not a uniquely Irish development. It happened in Northern Ireland in the 1980s when political vetting was introduced to decide which community projects should be funded or not: indeed, the historian of that period, Sam McCready, called it a time when 'the State strikes back' (McCready, 2001). It happened in Britain in the 1980s where Margaret Thatcher's government grew tired of Oxfam complaining of its support for repressive regimes on the *Today* programme on BBC and sent in the Charity Commissioners to take away their charitable status. It happened under Vladimir Meciar of Slovakia in the 1990s, when he cut back the voluntary community sector. So it is not unusual for this to happen, but what happened in Ireland is extreme. Ireland went from being a European flagship in community development, making substantial progress against poverty, to obliteration in only ten short years. That is an astonishing story. So why did it happen? There are three possible ways of looking at it, which we will explore under the headings of dissent, representative vs. participative democracy and the market project. There are often quite intimate connections between these three.

Dissent

A 2014 report by the Advocacy Initiative, *Are we paying for that?* (Harvey, 2014), posed a number of questions: Did the State fund voluntary and community organisations to engage in advocacy? Did it support advocacy? Was it neutral? Or did it discourage or even suppress advocacy? The answer to those questions was that the State did all of those things, but there were many, many examples of where the State withdrew money from groups that spoke out of turn; not because of what they *did*, but because of what they *said*. In fact, practice is inconsistent between and within departments. There were examples of supportive practice. For example, the Free Legal Advice Centres have been very outspoken ever since they were set up in 1969, but this has not been to the detriment of their funding from the Department of Justice. There were examples of neutrality where the State did not seem to mind what voluntary organisations said. There were, though, many examples of suppression of dissent. The research found the emergence of the 'services-only paradigm', that it was the role of voluntary organisations to provide services, but not to argue. The National Economic and Social Council's *The Developmental Welfare State* referred to these organisations' important role in delivering services, but one will search that document in vain to find reference to their role in campaigning and advocacy. In other words, voluntary and community organisations should be seen but not heard.

The research found many examples of State authoritarianism, micro-management and even downright censorship, with some organisations having to send every single letter and word of every single leaflet to the relevant government department for approval before they could publish it. There was quite extreme, personalised behaviour by the State officials in their treatment of voluntary organisations.

Along with the services-only paradigm, there was conditionality, which was widespread in the grants of the Health Service Executive, which is the biggest single funder of the voluntary and community sector in Ireland. There is a standard template that most organisations are expected to sign which says that you must not use the grant to 'change the law or government policies or try to *persuade* people to adopt a view on law or public policy'. *Persuasion* seems to be the offensive word. That would rule out Barnardos trying to persuade the authorities to try to improve child welfare guidelines, for example. The research found that this conditionality had a chilling effect. It said to voluntary groups, 'be careful what you say'. It reflects the fact that we live in an insecure, weak State that is scared by the prospect of civil society trying to 'persuade' people.

This sense of fear can be found in quite different places. In 1973, the Department of Justice argued that Chilean refugees should not come to Ireland because they fled a country whose Marxist government

under Allende was overthrown; they might bring in 'bad ideas'. The recent Supreme Court *Stokes* judgement ruled that Travellers did not have a right to a second level education, the prospect that they should being too terrifying. This gives an idea of the sense of insecurity of the Irish State and its organs.

Instead, the State gave us implausible explanations for its actions, such as the termination of community development. We were told that there were too many voluntary organisations and community development groups, with multiplicity, duplication and excessive administration. What was needed was 'cohesion', 'alignment'. The word 'cohesion' puzzled people greatly when it first came out: what does it actually mean? Only one European language appeared to offer an explanation, German, where there is a word for cohesion, namely *Gleichschaltung*. It means 'everyone marching a step together', 'getting into line' and has a subliminal message: 'no dissent'. This was evident at the end of 2015 when the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government announced that voluntary homeless services now had to be 'reviewed' because there was too much duplication - or dissent?

Representative and participatory democracy

In Ireland, representative democracy is embodied in Dail Eireann and Seanad Eireann – and is founded on the principle that elected representatives should take decisions. There is also, though, a long tradition dating back to the Enlightenment, which is that civil society organisations should have the opportunity to contribute to decision making. When community groups began to protest about what was being done to them after 2002, the minister responsible challenged their right to speak. 'How many first preferences did *you* get in the last general election?' he would ask, challenging their legitimacy. This was willfully misleading, because it is not a question of representative democracy *or* participatory democracy, but of *both*. Voluntary and community groups have always acknowledged the primacy of representative democracy, so this line of questioning in effect challenges the right of civil society to exist at all.

Is this challenge to legitimacy really about something else as well? Community development projects were summoned to a north Dublin hotel in 2004 and chastised for an incident in which, it was alleged by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, but never substantiated, that a local election candidate had, somewhere, sometime, used a photocopier in a community development project office (it is possible he paid the standard charge to do so). This chastisement reflected a fear that local people might use community development as a route into politics, though most political analysts would consider apathy to be a greater challenge to democracy. Such candidates might, perish the thought, challenge existing sitting councillors, deputies or senators. Yet, the world over, community action is a nursery for politics. For instance, US President, Barack Obama lists, on his CV, his first occupation as a 'community activist'.

Another explanation for the strategic turn lies in social partnership – what Mike Allen (1998) in his book *The Bitter Word* called 'the long march through the institutions' when the community and voluntary pillar eventually became consulted, alongside the farmers and trade unions, thereby creating a much more even playing field, or consultation field. It may be no coincidence that the strategic turn was led by the two ministers who, when on the opposition benches, were most opposed to social partnership, which they considered undermined representative democracy.

There is a long-standing post-Enlightenment narrative that it is a good thing to have advocacy NGOs. They lead us to a good society and social well-being. Advocacy is a defining feature of the European model of development, or at least it used to be. It is in the interests of government to promote and, indeed, pay for NGOs to perform an effective advocacy role – what is called 'the rational model'. NGOs facilitate participation of citizens, social cohesion, improved and better policies, expertise and a long-term perspective beyond the five-year electoral cycle. They have a watchdog role, they enable the voice of minorities to be heard, they give the truth of what is happening on the ground, they raise new issues and can help government with the implementation of policies. They are good for public administration. The EU goes further, because in the White Paper on European Governance (2001) it spoke of voluntary organisations not only having a legitimate role to speak but a legitimate role to protest.

The problem is that this narrative is not accepted in Ireland, at least not fully. It is accepted in some parts, but not in all parts of our politics or our national administration. Former minister Michael McDowell said: 'There is hardly a major voluntary organisation in the country that didn't have its hand out for cash. This is because former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern brought dissent into the semi-state world', as if dissent or different views were a terrible and threatening thing.[2] In 2005 Senator Brian Hayes, now MEP, on the debate on the closure by the government of the Centre for Public Inquiry, an anti-corruption NGO, said 'I welcome that decision. It is a matter for the organs of this State to determine what should be matters of public inquiry. I do not believe that any privately sponsored body has the right to determine what is right or wrong'.[3] It was about to issue a report suggesting the possibility of impropriety on the part of Anglo Irish Bank, but it was closed before it could do so. Anglo was safe to continue on its merry way.

By contrast, anti-corruption NGOs were decisive in reducing the role of the mafia in Italy, yet apparently they are not allowable here by the political classes. The former Prime Minister of Slovakia, Iveta Radicova, said that a strong society should play 'the primary role' in a democracy, hardly the situation here where it is considered a malign focus of 'dissent'. What she said raises questions about Ireland's isolation from the rest of Europe, a theme developed by Prof. Joe Lee in his magisterial *Ireland 1912 - 1985,* who said that one of our problems was isolation from the European intellectual mainstream.

The market project

Finally, the market project is a term defined by Mary Murphy of the National University of Ireland in Maynooth (Kirby & Murphy, 2011). From 1945, in what the French call *les trente glorieuses annees,* there was a period of post-war reconstruction in welfare, housing and education. This was challenged successfully by the market model of the Chicago School of Milton Friedman, first applied in Chile and followed by Thatcher and Reagan in the 1980s, a period well explained by Naomi Klein in her book (2008) on disaster capitalism. Irish policies followed and moved decisively to the market project. Ireland's social welfare policies are even coordinated in an informal group of six liberal economies, such as the United States and Britain where that market model has been most advanced. A particular example of the market model is evident in housing. Until 1987, there was an acceptance that up to a third of all housing in the State should be provided by local authorities, but now it is almost nil and people must depend on the market that delivers the misery of homelessness to those who cannot afford housing. A further aspect of the market project is privatisation, from motorways to schools to utilities and now, finally, community development.

Conclusion: An extraordinary story

It is an extraordinary story. Community development went from invention in 1891 to reinvention in the 1960s to become the flagship of Europe by 2002, only to be destroyed in just over ten years. There is very little left. There are a few projects here and there. The national architecture has been taken out, local partnerships are still there and they continue to do good work but it is not what was started in 1891. Community development became a victim of the unresolved issues of civil society and the State and, in particular, an insecure State and one not part of the European intellectual mainstream. Naomi Klein said that austerity requires coercion, which is why 'dissent' had to be taken out. The poor, we know from the ESRI (Keane *et al*, 2015), suffered most and they lost some of their best protectors. To repeat the phrase in Northern Ireland, 'the state strikes back', deciding to reconfigure the boundaries.

Community development on its own is no substitute for national policies against poverty. Community development can only do so much, something that was known in the 1960s and still is accepted. That is why challenges to austerity and the market model that create poverty are so important. Such challenges have taken place in Greece, Ireland, as shown by the studies of Rory Hearne (2015) and in South America, as documented by Eduardo Silva (2009). They are evident in Scotland (the rise of the

[2] Cullen, Paul: *McDowell says a new party will soon emerge to fill political vacuum*. Irish Times, 27th February 2012.

[3] Seanad Eireann: Debates, 8th December 2005, 342.

Scottish Nationalist Party) and the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party in Britain. They present a counter-narrative as to what could happen and what could be done to reverse what has happened in the past ten years or more. For those concerned with community development, it is important to conserve the record of what was achieved from 1891 to 2014, because that provides a guide to how that knowledge could be used to build a more just society in the future. One hundred years ago, in a Europe impatient with change, a Zurich exile was once heard to say 'there are decades when nothing happens and there are weeks when decades happen' (Vladimir Lenin). So when change does come, it is important to remember the record and the potential to renew community development.

References

Allen, M. (1998). *The Bitter Word*. Dublin: Poolbeg Press.

Barry, B (1988): *Lofty ideals, tangible results*. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

European Commission (2001). *White Paper on European Governance*.

Government of Ireland (2000). *White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

Harvey, B. (2014): *Are we paying for that?* Dublin: The Advocacy Initiative.

Hearne, R (2015): *The water war, austerity and the risen people.* Department of Geography, National University of Maynooth.

Keane, C; Callan, T; Savage, M; Walsh, JR; Colgan, B (2015): *Distributional impact of tax, welfare and public pay policies - budget 2015 and budgets 2009-2015.* Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.

Kirby, P; & Murphy, M (2011): *Toward a second republic - Irish politics after the Celtic tiger*. London: Pluto Press, 2011.

Klein, N. (2008). *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism.* London: Penguin.

Lee, J.J. (1990). *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McCready, S.(2001): *Empowering people - community development and conflict, 1969-99*. Coleraine, University of Ulster.

Silva, Eduardo (2009): *Challenging neo-liberalism in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.

Community Development in Ireland under Austerity and Local Government Change: Policy and Practice

Catherine Forde, Déirdre O' Byrne and Féilim Ó hAdhmaill

Introduction

Over the last twenty years there has been a policy of gradually increasing central and local Government involvement in the operation, funding and work of community and voluntary sector organisations in Ireland. This was outlined initially in the White Paper *Better Local Government* (1996), and subsequently in the Green Paper on Local Government Reform *Stronger Local Democracy – Options for Change* (2008), the policy document *Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government (2012)* and the *Local Government Reform Act 2014.* These policies aim to achieve greater 'alignment' between local government and local development systems and agencies, particularly community and voluntary sector bodies. In recent years community and local development organisations in Ireland have been required to competitively tender for contracts to provide Government designed service packages at local and community level. In particular the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2015-2017 was the first State-funded local development programme to be subject to competitive tendering. Evidence from the UK suggests that competitive tendering has had a detrimental impact on the work and independence of the sector (MacMillan, 2010; Benson, 2014; Independence Panel, 2015; NCIA, 2015), and there is a risk that competitive tendering, allied to greater government control, will lead to the commercialisation and privatisation of many community and voluntary sector activities in Ireland.

In addition to alignment and competitive tendering, since 2008 an 'austerity agenda' has had a significant impact on the funding of Irish voluntary and community sector organisations engaged in community development and social inclusion activities (Considine and Dukelow, 2012; Harvey 2012). The adverse impact of austerity measures on the welfare system in Ireland since 2008 has been well documented (Kirby, 2010; Considine and Dukelow, 2012; Allen and O'Boyle, 2013). Cuts in funding have particularly affected the community and voluntary sector, which plays a very significant role in the provision of welfare services and promotion of social inclusion (Government of Ireland, 2000; Equality Authority 2009; Considine and Dukelow, 2012). The Wheel (2013) suggested that there had been annual cuts to the sector of between 8% and 10% between 2008 and 2013. Harvey (2012) indicated that the sector had experienced disproportionate cuts ranging from 4.5% (health services) to 54% (voluntary social housing) by 2013. The following sections explore the growth of alignment and competitive tendering in the Irish community and voluntary landscape.

Alignment

Alignment of the local government and local development systems has been a long-standing goal of successive Irish governments. The White Paper *Better Local Government: A Programme for Change* (1996) sought integration or alignment between the local government system and the local development system, which consisted of a range of social partnership arrangements including area-based partnership companies, EU-funded LEADER groups and city and county enterprise boards. One of the main reasons for integration was to enhance the policy-making role of local city and county councillors (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 1996). Furthermore, *Better Local Government* 'recognised local authorities as key players in the development of local areas and communities and the value of the partnership model of local development' (*Final Report of the Local Government/ Local Development Alignment Steering Group*, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012, p. 10). *Better Local Government* introduced a number of new structures to Irish local authorities, including Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and City and County Development Boards (CDBs). SPCs aimed to 'allow councillors a more meaningful role in policy review and development'

(Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1996, p. 19). CDBs were charged with drawing up and overseeing integrated strategies for economic, social and cultural development within each city/county and overseeing the implementation of these strategies over a ten-year period.

Neo-corporatism or social partnership was the prevailing national and local social policy of the 1990s. Social partnership principles informed the negotiation of a succession of national partnership agreements between the State, employers, trade unions and, latterly, community and voluntary sector bodies; they also informed the running of successive local development programmes, including the Area-Based Response to Long-term Unemployment (ABR) 1991-1993, Programme of Integrated Development in Disadvantaged Areas (PIDDA), 1995-1999, and the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP), 2000-2006. Under each of these programmes, area-based partnership companies and community partnerships implemented integrated local development plans in the areas of education, training, enterprise, employment and community development. Partnership companies, SPCs and CDBs were organised along neo-corporatist lines, with members from a range of sectors, including representatives of state and semi-state bodies, the social partners (employer bodies and trade unions), and members of the voluntary and community sector. The 1996 White Paper led to city and county councillors being invited on to the boards of partnership companies, with the specific purpose of facilitating alignment between local development and local government (Local Government Efficiency Review Group, 2010). Representation of partnership companies on the boards of CDBs was also aimed at fulfilling this goal (ibid).

In 2010 the Local Government Efficiency Review Group indicated that

> local development bodies should more closely align the delivery of their programmes and plans with those of the relevant local authorities to ensure maximum value for money and a more focused impact on local communities. It considered that local government, as a directly-elected tier of government, should be given greater responsibility for the provision of local and community-based services (*Report of the Local Government/Local Development Alignment Steering Group*, Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2012, p. 11).

The Local Government Efficiency Review Group sought the integration of local development bodies and the Community Development Programme (CDP). Under the Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) 2010-2015, the number of 'local delivery structures for social inclusion and rural development programmes' (including partnership companies) (Local Government Efficiency Review Group, 2010, p. 154) was reduced from 94 to 52 through consolidation. The local delivery structures were thereafter known as Local Development Companies or LDCs. In addition, the long-standing state-funded Community Development (CDP) Programme was discontinued. From 2010 most CDP projects[4], which were managed by local people, were either discontinued or subsumed into the 52 LDCs (Community Work Ireland, 2015). This had serious implications for the quality and depth of community engagement, ownership and initiative at local level.

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provided for the establishment of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in each local authority area. The LCDCs are made up of representatives from a range of interests, including local authorities, state agencies, business representatives and local civil society groups. According to the Community Workers' Co-operative the primary aim of the LCDCs is to

> Bring greater co-ordination on an area-basis to publicly-funded programmes and to oversee administration efficiencies across the local development landscape, while drawing on the capacity of local government (2014, p. 1).

The LCDCs have a number of functions, including the following:

- Development of the community elements of a six-year local economic and community development plan and implement the community elements of the plan
- to coordinate, manage and oversee the implementation of local and community development programmes that have been approved either by the relevant local authority or by agreement between the LCDC and a relevant public authority (Community Division of the Department of

[4] The number of CDPs had already been reduced from 186 to 165 in April 2010.

the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2014).

In 2014 the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government recommended the establishment of public participation networks (PPNs) in each local authority area. According to the Working Group one of the main roles of the PPNs is

> to facilitate opportunities for networking, communication and the sharing of information between environmental, community and voluntary groups and between these groups and the local authority (Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, 2014, p. 25).

Competitive Tendering

The LCDCs coordinate and oversee the implementation of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2015-2017, which is the successor to the LCDP. SICAP, which is currently delivered by 51 local development companies (LDCs), is funded by the State and the European Social Fund (ESF) with a special allocation under the Youth Unemployment Initiative. Public procurement was introduced by the Government as a reform measure in the Public Service Reform Plan (2011) and in the Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016.

The tendering process for SICAP was open to Local Development Companies, other not-for-profit community groups, commercial firms and national organisations. The stated aims of SICAP are to 'reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality through local, regional and national engagement and collaboration' (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2015, p. 5). It claims that this work will be underpinned by community development approaches and principles (ibid). SICAP operates in accordance with 'nationally set targets and performance indicators' (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2015, p.18).

In its report *In Whose Interests? Exploring the Impact of Competitive Tendering and Procurement on Social Inclusion and Community Development in Ireland (2015)*[5], Community Work Ireland (formerly Community Workers Co-op) underlines the manner in which funding has shifted from a grant-based approach to tendering.

> The nature of SICAP definitively shifts funding from grant-giving, the model that has been used for decades to support community development and social inclusion initiatives, to a model based on payment for contracted services determined centrally. This is one of the most significant changes to local development and community development interventions in recent history (p.9).

Reports from the UK suggest that the use of competitive tendering to fund community and voluntary sector activity has had a detrimental impact on the work and independence of the sector there (MacMillan, 2010; Independence Panel, 2015; NCIA, 2015). Competition for funding in England has led to services being provided by private sector organisations, often with no local connection or base, and with the displacement of voluntary and community sector organisations by for profit organisations. As local and central government funding for voluntary and community organisations—becomes increasingly restricted to funding for service packages on behalf of the State, the ability of the sector to engage in work which they and their client/community base wish to undertake has become more and more difficult. Decisions about what work needs to be carried out and how that is prioritised have increasingly moved from the sector to Government, thus undermining the independence of the sector. Dependence on the State for funding for service packages has also meant that the voluntary sector has been less able to act as an independent advocate on behalf of its client/community base or to use knowledge acquired in its work to lobby and campaign for policy change (Aiken, 2014; Benson, 2014; Milbourne and Cushman, 2015). Despite this, the existence of a wide range of independent trusts in England, as well as the continued existence of some progressive council funding policies, has meant that not all campaigning and independent community development work has suffered (Independence Panel, 2015, p.51; Independence Panel, 2013, p. 7). In Ireland the absence of such independent trust

[5] The report *In Whose Interests?* was published after the conference but before the publication of these proceedings.

funding makes community and voluntary sector organisations particularly dependent on local and central government. With the current trend towards funding solely for tightly managed and defined service provision packages the possibility of engaging in sector driven, innovative or advocacy work is potentially threatened.

The research used both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The research methods were as follows:

- An initial exploratory **focus group** with five stakeholders from the voluntary and community sector; the focus group was organised to inform the design of the subsequent survey.
- An online survey which was developed and circulated via Survey Monkey to government funded programmes including all Local Development Companies (51), former Community Development Projects (186)[6] and Family Resource Centres (101), plus selected others (10).
- Eight qualitative interviews with community workers, managers, chief officers of LCDCs and trade unions.

Focus Group

The focus group was conducted in December 2014 and included five stakeholders from within the community and voluntary sector. The focus group addressed three themes: the nature of community development; changes in community development work; and issues in community development work.

Online Survey

An online survey based on the themes developed in the focus group was carried out in March 2015 using Survey Monkey. The population for the online survey consisted of all organisations working within three national programmes: local development companies (LDCs); former projects of the Community Development Programme; and resource centres under the Family Resource Centre Programme[7]. These constitute the three main State-funded programmes which use community development approaches.

The survey was circulated to 348 organisations and individuals; 135 completed the survey, giving a response rate of 39%.

Interviews

Between October and December 2015 eight interviews were carried out with community workers (3), managers of local development organisations and family resource centres (2), chief officers of LCDCs (2) and trade unions (1). Interviewees were recruited via the online survey, which asked respondents to volunteer to be interviewed, and by requesting interviews from key actors. This paper does not include analysis of these interviews as they were on-going at the time of the conference. Instead the paper relies on analysis of the results of the focus group and the survey.

---

6 As these are former CDP projects, a number of these projects are now defunct and did not respond to the survey.

7 The Family Resource Centre Programme aims to combat disadvantage and work to improve the functioning of the family unit through working inclusively with individuals, families, communities and both statutory and non-statutory agencies leading to community participation and social inclusion. The programme comes under the remit of TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency.

Themes Emerging from the Focus Group

The focus group participants were dissatisfied with the bureaucratic requirements and target-based nature of the SICAP programme because of the implications for engagement in front-line community development work. The participants argued that the SICAP targets are quantitative in nature and are not an effective measure of the work or of people's needs. They indicated that community development workers are now spending more time desk-bound and inputting data on their work in order to achieve targets than actually working in communities. This is compounded by the reality that fewer development workers are now employed in local development organisations as a result of alignment. They consider competitive tendering a 'race to the bottom' because it is based on doing more work with less resources and staff.

A number of concerns about the possible effects of the new funding arrangements emerged from the focus group. Participants expressed concern that funding was likely to go to larger bodies that have the capacity to cover wider geographical areas, thereby possibly leading to the demise of smaller local community organisations, local knowledge and expertise and grassroots community development practice and processes. There was also a concern that competing with other local organisations may create animosity or lead to a diminution in the potential for local cooperation as groups are pitched against one another in competition for funding rather than working in association with one another.

Participants indicated that they are fearful for their jobs and livelihoods. They were concerned that if their organisations did not meet the requisite SICAP targets contracts would be taken up by private agencies and organisations. One participant expressed a fear that they were being monitored in their work and stated that they refrain from saying anything 'controversial' in case this affects their employment.

Survey Results

The main findings from the survey are presented in the following sections: organisational background; funding; impact of alignment on community development; campaigning work; competitive tendering and procurement; measurement, accountability and reporting; and the future of community development.

While 135 people responded to the questionnaire, not all of them answered all questions. As a result, the statistics presented below represent the numbers and percentages of those who provided an answer to each particular question.

Organisational Background

Nearly all of the respondents to the survey answered the questions about organisational background and almost half of these, 64 (48.1%), indicated that they worked for Local Development Companies (LDCs) (Table 1). Given that only 51 of the 348 organisations surveyed (15%) were LDCs, the response rate from this particular cohort was disproportionately higher than for the other organisations. This may be due to the timing of the survey which coincided with the completion of the Local Community Development Programme (LCDP) in March 31st 2015 and its replacement by the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). The survey also coincided with the national competitive tendering process for SICAP contracts. Given the uncertainty that organisations may have been experiencing, in terms of future funding security and thus employment of their workforce, both of these circumstances may explain this cohort's high response rate.

Table 1: Type of Organisation

What type of organisation do you work in? (Please tick as many boxes as apply)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Family Resource Centre	11.3%	15
Community Development Organisation	24.8%	33
Former Project of the Community Development Programme	14.3%	19
Local Development Company (LDC)	48.1%	64
Other	7.5%	10
If 'Other' please state		12
answered question		**133**
skipped question		**2**

Respondents' Work Roles

Seventy-eight (59%) of respondents described their roles within their organisation as managers or co-ordinators and thirty-one (23.3%) as project workers. These tend to be paid positions within the sector. Another thirteen (10%) picked 'Other' as a response. These included people who worked in a variety of paid positions, such as Tús leader, clerical/admin, development worker, external consultant, etc. Just seven (5%) of the respondents stated that they were volunteers. The latter may simply reflect the types of work carried out by volunteers compared to paid staff, access by volunteers to the organisation's email system, the time available on the job to fill out a questionnaire, or their perceived role/responsibility within the organisation.

Urban and Rural Breakdown of Organisations

The survey generated an even breakdown between respondents from rural and urban catchment areas (about a third each) with just over one third (45 or 34.4%) reporting that their catchment area combined both urban and rural areas (See Table 2).

Table 2: Catchment area of organisations

How would you describe the catchment area of your organisation? (Please tick appropriate box)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Rural	31.3%	41
Urban	34.4%	45
A combination of Rural and Urban	34.4%	45
answered question		**131**
skipped question		**4**

Areas of Work

When presented with a number of areas that best described the work of the respondent, an overwhelming 123 or 91.1% chose community development. Other high scoring areas of work are closely linked to community development. They include: social inclusion; training/education; and work with ethnic minorities (See Table 3).

Table 3: Areas of work of organisations

Which best describes the work of your organisation? (Please tick as many boxes as apply)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Community Development	91.1%	123
Local Enterprise	45.2%	61
Training/Education	62.2%	84
Social Inclusion	71.9%	97
Youth Work	37.8%	51
Child Care	28.1%	38
Work with Older People	43.0%	58
Environmental Work	22.2%	30
Work with Ethnic Minorities	43.7%	59
Work with People with Disabilities	33.3%	45
Other	15.6%	21
If 'Other' please state		30
answered question		**135**
skipped question		**0**

Funding

Sources of Funding

To a question relating to the main sources of funding for organisations, the replies predominantly indicated that a variety of state sponsored bodies and government departments were the main sources (See Table 4). Ninety-three respondents (71%) indicated that Pobal[8] was the main source of their funding. The second highest source of funding was government departments (60 or 46%), followed by the HSE (42%) and TUSLA (25%). A minority of respondents (16 or 12.1%) indicated that they obtained funds through independent fundraising.

These figures represent a high level of financial dependence on State funding amongst community and voluntary sector organisations. This may also indicate a high degree of influence over their work priorities by State funders. It certainly raises questions about autonomy for such groups and ultimately about their ability to engage in community development work which is responsive to the needs of their communities or clients rather than the demands of their service contract with the State funder.

[8] Pobal acts as an intermediary for programmes funded by the Irish government and the EU. It is a not-for-profit company.

Table 4: Sources of funding

What are the main sources of your organisation's funding? (Please tick as many boxes as apply)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Pobal	70.5%	93
HSE	41.7%	55
TÚSLA	25.0%	33
Direct funding from a Government Department (specify below)	45.5%	60
Local Authority Funding	9.1%	12
Philanthropic Funding	9.8%	13
Independent Fundraising	12.1%	16
Social Enterprise	9.8%	13
Membership or Service Income	4.5%	6
European Funding	22.7%	30
Don't know	1.5%	2
Other	14.4%	19
If 'Other' please state		62
answered question		**132**
skipped question		**3**

Influence of funders on Work Priorities

Respondents were asked about the extent to which work priorities are influenced by funders. Given the high rate of financial dependence on State funding, this is a key question (Table 5).

If we combine those who indicated that work priorities are either totally (34 respondents) or to a great extent (69 respondents) influenced by funders' priorities, over three quarters or 103 (77.44%) of those surveyed felt that funders' priorities have a major influence on their work.

Table 5: Influence of funding on work priorities

To what extent are your work priorities influenced by funders' priorities? (Please tick appropriate box)						
Answer Options	**Totally**	**To a great extent**	**To some extent**	**Not at all**	**Don't know**	**Response Count**
	34	69	28	1	1	133
					answered question	**133**
					skipped question	**2**

There is an apparent tension between the percentage of 77.44% of respondents who state that their work is influenced by funders and that of the 91.1% who describe their work as 'community development'. If community development is understood in terms of a 'bottom-up approach' it is difficult to see how a community development approach can be maintained in a context where funders determine work priorities. This tension is also evident in responses to the next question.

Eighty four respondents (63.2%) indicated that funding criteria prevented their organisations from engaging in work that they wished to pursue, while just over one quarter (34 or 25.6%) considered that they do not (See Table 6).

Table 6: Funding criteria and the work of the organisation

Do funding criteria prevent your organisation from engaging in work that it wishes to pursue? (Please tick appropriate box)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Yes (Please elaborate below)	63.2%	84
No	25.6%	34
Don't know	11.3%	15
If Yes, please specify		79
answered question		**133**
skipped question		**2**

For those who responded 'yes' to this question, the survey offered an opportunity to elaborate and 79 of the 84 respondents made additional comments. The responses revealed quite a high level of discontent and disquiet in relation to the influence of funders on the work of respondents' organisations. This data strongly indicates that tensions exist between those who are charged with the implementation of community development and those who fund the sector. A selection of responses illustrates this view.

> *Funders often set target areas which are not necessarily relevant to this area. Budgetary constraints mean meaningful work cannot be tackled. Short funding periods and significant gaps between funding rounds mean that developmental and capacity building work is lost (26/3/15, 11:17a.m.).*
>
> *Tusla are pushing a family support agenda as opposed to a community development approach to our work. This promotes an individualistic approach and is intervention based as opposed to prevention work. We have grave concerns with regard to the future of Family Resource Centres as the rhetoric does not match with the practice.* (24/3/2015, 12:14 p.m.).
>
> *We are very reluctant to engage in any way in community development work of a participatory democracy nature even though the funders claim we can do this under the old LCDP and the New SICAP programme. We believe the programme only pays tokenism to this work and our hands are tied in getting involved in local or national political campaigns therefore our ability to empower people/community is severely limited and curtailed due to the prescriptive nature of the programmes. We also feel that because of the prescriptive nature of both the LCDP and the New SICAP we are not in a position to build local capacity as defined by the communities we serve therefore again instead of empowering we are disempowering* (13/3/2015, 4:31p.m.).

Impact of Alignment on Community Development

Respondents were asked for their views on the nature of community development and about the impacts of alignment on community development practice in their organisations. The responses are presented in the following sections.

Nature of Community Development

Respondents were presented with a definition of community development and asked to comment on whether they thought that the definition represents the current task and process of community development in Ireland. The definition provided stated:

> Community development has traditionally been seen as being composed of "both a task and a process. The task is the achievement of social change linked to equality and social justice, and the process is the application of the principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision making" (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2007).

A small majority (47.7% or 63 respondents out of 132 who answered this question) indicated that they thought that this definition does not represent the current task of community development in Ireland, while 45.5% (60 respondents) stated that they thought that it did. The following comments illustrate the variety of views expressed, many of which were critical of the mismatch between the task of community development as described in the definition and the expectations of the State.

> *It (definition) reflects the task but the sector is not being funded to deliver that task. It is being funded to deliver service delivery. I think the definition of the task is fine, what is missing is any commitment at political and civil service level* (11/3/2015, 3:45 p.m.).
>
> *The current government agenda is a top down, service delivery approach to development. It does not provide for an independent community sector which can work to empower people from disadvantaged communities and groups to raise issues and influence policy and public provision. Therefore in my opinion the current agenda is definitely not about equality and social justice* (21/3/2015, 8:16 p.m.).
>
> *Community work principles underpin our work, while SICAP has an individualised focus enforcing the economic unit principle. We will continue to work to ensure that we maintain our community work approach promoting social inclusion*
>
> (19/3/2015, 10:35 a.m.).

Respondents were asked if the definition represents the current process of community development in Ireland. A majority (67% or 88 respondents out of 131 who answered this question) indicated that it does not represent the process of community development, while 28% (37 respondents) stated that it does. Again, a variety of opinions are reflected in the following comments:

> *The process has been shifted to meet targets that are arrived at by central government and must be fulfilled in order to draw down budget allocations every quarter. Hardly a "bottom up" approach.* (26/3/2015, 10 a.m.)
>
> *There is no empowerment for the communities – all decisions/changes are now at government level – budget cuts, changes to programmes (SICAP). This has reduced participation at community level – you cannot empower if you do not consult but just cut budgets. Community groups are currently at their lowest ebb – fundraising is no longer the option it was – families, small businesses no longer have the resources to donate what they used to*
>
> (25/3/2015, 12:59 p.m.).
>
> *Participation, empowerment and collective decision-making are not at the core of current programmes* (26/3/2015, 1:10 p.m.).

Impact of Alignment

A majority (64% or 85 respondents) of respondents stated that the impact of alignment on community development practice in their organisation has been negative (see Table 7 below). Eleven per cent (11% or 14 respondents) indicated that the impact has been positive, while 11% (15 respondents) stated that there was no impact, and 14% (18 respondents) were not sure if alignment had an impact on community development practice in their organisations.

Table 7: Impact of alignment on community development practice

Has the impact of alignment on community development practice in your organisation been: (Please tick appropriate box)					
Answer Options	**Positive**	**Negative**	**No Impact**	**Not Sure**	**Response Count**
	14	85	15	18	132
Please comment					68
				answered question	**132**
				skipped question	**3**

Some comments illustrate the range of views.

> *Alignment is not the issue as greater collaboration with the Local Authority is positive however the alignment brought with it further budget cuts and job losses* (26/3/2015, 2.30 p.m.).
>
> *We did not align and negotiated an alternative model however this has caused us extreme difficulty and a significant reduction in both funding and access to decision making at local and national level. Also the emphasis since alignment has been on service delivery* (27/3/2015, 9.41 a.m.).
>
> *I have only been with this development company for 2 years. During the SICAP process community development principles went out the window. The management did not consult with staff or with the community. The numbers game that has accompanied alignment has meant that people are less inclined to work under community development principles which takes time and more likely to do whatever it takes to get the numbers they need. The process of alignment and the underhand way in which it was carried out has left community workers disillusioned and they now come to work do the bare minimum (without adhering to any principles) and go home or want to get out of the sector. The focus of the organisation has shifted to an individualized activation service rather than an organisation who works with the local community to support them to solve problems through collective action/decision making* (2/4/2015, 1.18 p.m.).
>
> *We do not do as much community development as we used to. It has all become about target numbers, get x amount of people into training, get x amount of people moved into self employment. It's a numbers game. I enjoy supporting people, but there is little time for community development. The areas where CDP's were taken away have very little supports and the individuals and groups have made it aware they greatly miss their CDP for a 'one stop shop' of support, meeting space, guidance, group support, funding brought into the area by the CDP, a comfortable and reliable venue for citizens information, MABS, training courses, reduced isolation, fundraising and so on* (25/3/2015 6:49, p.m.).

A majority (66% - 87 out of 132) of respondents stated that the work of their organisations had changed as a result of alignment, while 27% (35 respondents) indicated that it had not. The next question asked if alignment has contributed to or reduced local autonomy/independence in decision-making processes. Most (71% or 95 respondents) of respondents stated that alignment had reduced local autonomy, while 18% (24 respondents) indicated that there had been no change, and 10% (13 respondents) that they were not sure. Some comments provide insights into respondents' views on the issue of autonomy.

> *The alignment process has been very negative for community projects because it is no longer possible for the work to be guided and managed by the people whose lives are affected by the issues. There has been a huge reduction in the ability of the projects to manage their own work* (11/3/2015, 10.42 p.m.).
>
> *There will be reduced autonomy as funding decisions will be made by the LCDCs as opposed to be a local development company board composed of a mixture of community development reps, state agencies and elected councillors. Under the new arrangements funding decisions will be more open to political interference and based on the priorities of the relevant local authority executive as opposed to the communities and target groups it is meant to address (26/3/2015, 12.48 p.m.).*
>
> *The programme was designed at national level with no involvement of local stakeholders (2/4/2015, 1.18 p.m.).*

Respondents were asked if there is a 'fear factor' influencing how people within the community sector react to alignment. A majority (74% or 97 respondents out of 131 who answered this question) agreed that there is a 'fear factor' at play, while 12% (16 respondents) disagreed and 14% (18 respondents) did not know.

> *I think the fear is justified. The whole process has been underhand and it feels like a take-over. The whole process has in many ways gone against all the principles of community development…of course people are afraid of that. This is people's lives we're talking about* (2/4/2015, 1.18 p.m.).
>
> *The community themselves find it hard to keep up to date with changes. The LCDC and PPN's replacing the Community Forums went unknown to many community groups - until we told them they had to re-register. They were wondering why they no longer got information from the Community Forum. That was badly handled. We are being told to be 'grateful to still have a job' - that is not right. We are highly educated, experienced people that are being put under enormous stress. The tendering process for SICAP put untold stress on every one of us. County Council staff are becoming our 'big brother' watching our 'targets' and activities. We are being put under a lot of pressure. Good people are going to move on from the community sector and it will be a huge loss* (25/3/2105, 6.26 p.m.).
>
> *The concerns of the community sector are not based on a 'fear factor'. They are instead based on the real knowledge that alignment will lead to less informed decision making and a further loss of autonomy for the community sector. This will diminish the opportunity for the community sector to work effectively in striving for equality and social justice* (21/3/8.16 p.m.).
>
> *No it's not a fear factor - it was enforcement - there was not an option - if you did not comply you did not have a budget and your valued staff lost their jobs.* (25/12/2015, 12.59 p.m.)

Assimilation of the Community Development Programme

Respondents were asked for their opinions on the impact on community development of the assimilation of most of the Community Development Projects into LDCs under the Local Community Development Programme (LCDP). Ninety-six respondents or 72% (out of 134 who answered this question) viewed this development as negative, while 12 (9%) saw it as positive. Fifteen (11%) indicated that there has been no change and 10 (7%) did not know.

Campaigning Work

Respondents were asked if their organisations engage in any campaigning for social change on behalf of community members. A majority (63% or 82 respondents out of 130 who answered this question) indicated that their organisations do engage in campaigning work, while 32% (42 respondents) indicated that they do not do any campaigning activities, and 5% (6 respondents) did not know. It seems that some of the constraints on campaigning work in the UK are also evident in Ireland. Many respondents indicated that funders do not allow campaigning activities but some stated that their organisations still engage in campaigning work.

Ninety-six respondents answered a question about the factors that encourage or discourage campaigning work. The following responses represent the range of views.

> *To some degree we are engaged in formal mechanisms for creating social change but protesting or funding grass roots community development groups would be problematic* (2/4/2015, 3.09 p.m.).
>
> *Local Development companies do not lobby for change, despite having a community development remit. The closing of the CDP programme effectively stopped real community or curtailed real community development* (3/12/2015 10:33 a.m.).
>
> *Campaigns are often a prerequisite to policy change. If there is a discouragement to engage in policy work, it affects both confidence and ability…to engage in campaigns. It is clear that when the government speak about social inclusion and community development, they are speaking clearly in economic and employability terms and not in relation to cultural, social, political terms…* (26/3/2015, 11.40 p.m.).
>
> *Advocating for anything radical can make enemies of funders because they see it as a challenge. They at the end of the day hold the purse strings. Jobs in the sector very often depend on a good relationship with these people and if we question their policies or practices we show ourselves in a bad light from their point of view* (20/3/2015 1:57 p.m.).

It's not funded but we still do it as we know that it will have a positive result for the people we work with (8/4/2015, 11.11 a.m.).

The Impact of Competitive Tendering and Procurement

Respondents were provided with a list of issues relating to competitive tendering and asked which might cause concern to their organisation. In the first place they were asked for their views on a range of issues concerning competitive tendering (Table 8).

Table 8: Issues associated with competitive tendering

The Government has introduced competitive tendering for local community development work. In your opinion, do any of the following issues potentially associated with competitive tendering cause your organisation any concerns? (Please tick as many as apply)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
New actors tendering who may not come from the sector	78.4%	105
Potential job losses	79.9%	107
Communities competing against each other	85.1%	114
Time associated with engaging in tendering	72.4%	97
The impact on cooperation between community groups	70.9%	95
Other (Please Specify)	17.9%	24
If 'Other' please specify		44
answered question		134
skipped question		1

A majority (85% - 114 respondents) listed communities competing against one another as a concern and 71% worried about the impact this might have on cooperation between local groups.

> *Competitive tendering is not a suitable process for community development. One is about cooperation and openness and the other is about competition and secrecy*
>
> (30/3/2015 2:10 p.m.).

Potential job losses were mentioned as a concern by 80% (107 respondents) (since previously funded groups may now lose out on funding). One respondent commented as follows:

> *The SICAP tendering process was a nightmare. 45 of the 50 LDCs won SICAP after a competitive tendering process. 5 LDCs lost out and the staff in those organisations are now losing their jobs in most instances* (3/30/2015, 5:36 p.m.).

A majority of respondents (105 or 78%) mentioned new actors appearing on the scene to do the work previously carried out by them as a concern.

> *The idea that a for-profit company could come in and take over the work, with no links to the area is frightening. They are not working for the community, they are working for profit and power. How would they work with other community groups? Would they care about quality or just hitting their service level agreement?* (1/4/2015 8:42 p.m.).

Finally, 72% (97 respondents) were concerned about the time they would have to spend on engaging in the tendering process, time that might better be spent in working directly with people in the local community.

> *Delays in programme commencement, duplication in paper work, loss of motivation amongst workers, disengagement with beneficiaries, increased bureaucracy and conflict* (31/3/2015, 2:23 p.m.).

According to others,

> *It turns Community Development into a business, reflecting the trend to 'living in an economy and not a society* (31/3/2015, 2:20 p.m.).
>
> *The amount of time spent on this process takes people away from their role to deliver for people*

in the community, this further reduces the delivery of services which are already understaffed after 30% cuts (30/3/2015, 10:53 a.m.).

How can every bit of society be measured in value for money terms? Irish society is now judging every fabric of its being in economic terms and a society is made up of people - not targets (27/3/2015, 10:48 a.m.).

Respondents consistently talked about how increasing attempts to make them accountable to local authorities and the State were leading to the establishment of time-consuming bureaucratic practices and processes which were hindering their ability to do essential work on the ground. This is discussed more fully in the section on Measurement, Accountability and Reporting below.

Potential Impact of New Funding Arrangements on Relationships between Community Groups

In terms of the potential impact of the new funding arrangements on relationships between local community groups within the sector, 77 respondents felt that this had been negative, while only 3 thought that it had a positive impact.

Table 9: Impact of changes in procurement on relationships

What impact if any have changes in procurement had on your organisation's relationships with other voluntary sector bodies?					
Answer Options	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	No Impact	Don't know	Response Count
	3	77	25	28	133
answered question					133
skipped question					2

Impact on Community Development Work

A majority of respondents (69%) stated that they felt that the changes in procurement would have a negative impact on community development work carried out by their organisation. Only 10% indicated that it would have no impact and a small number - 2 - felt it would have a positive impact.

Table 10: Impact of changes in procurement on community development work

What impact if any will changes in procurement have on the community development work undertaken by your organisation? (Please tick appropriate box)					
Answer Options	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	No Impact	Don't know	Response Count
	2	93	14	25	134
answered question					134
skipped question					1

Measurement, Accountability and Reporting

One aspect of community development in recent years has been the attempt by local and central government to make community and voluntary sector organisations increasingly accountable for public money provided to them. Whilst few would deny the need to ensure that public funds are well spent, it has become clear that many community and voluntary organisations have felt that attempts to measure the impact of their work have been crude, short-term and ineffective. These have also added substantially to the workload of community workers and moved work away from frontline activities towards paperwork and bureaucratic practices. This was borne out in this survey.

Virtually all respondents stated that the effectiveness of the community development work of their organisation was measured in some way. A majority (72%) cited the use of both qualitative and quantitative measures (measuring numbers of people visiting the project, etc.) and just less than 20% cited quantitative measures only.

Several commented that outputs were measured differently by different funding agencies. For example, 'performance indicators' were used under the LEADER/Rural Development Programme (i.e. statistics on job creation etc.), while the IRIS system recorded indicators for the Local Community Development Programme (SICAP) and this in turn informed the release of funding based on achievement of targets. However, there were a lot of criticisms of evaluation measures.

> *Quantitative evaluation is easy and therefore seems to be the only evaluation that interests State funders particularly Pobal and TÚSLA. They do not seem to have any interest in the improved well-being and/or circumstances of service users. We operated an integrated service model as from our many years of doing this work we recognise that disadvantage is complex and that generally no single intervention can address the problem. Therefore we refer users to different services as needs are identified and capacity is developed. In terms of qualitative evaluation we ask questions like 'Do you feel safer as a result of the support of our organisation' and 'Do you believe that your children are safer' believe you me, TUSLA has no interest in this commentary but we continue to amend reporting templates and provide this information* (27/3/2015, 9:41 a.m.).
>
> *Each funding body has a different reporting mechanism. The results are measured both in quantitative and qualitative manner. The emphasis has changed to results in this way, there is no recognition for the value of participation* (26/3/2015, 4:38 p.m.).
>
> *The emphasis seems to be on the end result and CD process doesn't seem to be of much concern, except by those of us who understand its value* (20/3/2015, 11:01 a.m.).

The vast majority of respondents (71%) stated that formal evaluation of their organisation's work was required by the funders. Only 21% stated that evaluation was not required.

When asked to comment on the impact of reporting requirements from funders on community development work there was a mixture of responses (see Table 11 below). Just over a quarter (27.5%) felt that such reporting requirements were having a negative impact on community development work while 21% felt they were having no real impact and 20% felt they were having a positive impact.

Table 11: Impact of reporting requirements on community development work

What impact do reporting requirements from funders have on community development work? Please tick whichever box applies		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
A Positive Impact	19.8%	26
A Negative Impact	27.5%	36
No Real Impact	20.6%	27
Don't know	3.1%	4
Other (please specify)	0.0%	0
If 'Other' please explain	29.0%	38
answered question		131
skipped question		4

The comments seemed to show that workers felt that measuring their outputs and reporting back to funders is in principle a good idea but has drawbacks. This was reflected in a range of comments.

> *it's good to measure - but measuring also directs/slants your work in a certain direction* (8/4/2015, 12:30 p.m.).
>
> *every organisation has to improve transparency to outline they are an effective service but all this time filling out forms could be better spend working with service users* (2/4/2015, 3:09 p.m.).
>
> *Creates targets set by people with little knowledge of the areas and communities* (30/3/2015, 2:10 p.m.).
>
> *Everyone must be accountable for their work ….. However with the drive for results the principle of participation is somewhat lost. The creating of good community relationships happens through creating events where people can come together to build a better place for their families to enjoy their lives. There is no requests for such work now. It is all work placements and training which has a value but is not community development* (26/3/2015, 4:38 p.m.).
>
> *Frustration! Time-consuming when other jobs are more relevant. Come in and talk to our clients and you would know if we were value for money* (11/3/2015, 2:59 p.m.).

A small number of respondents felt that more accountable structures would be beneficial.

> *It will become more business focused and the need to show value for money. This is good in one way as budgets and restrictions re: spending is always needed. Staff will also feel more motivated and can see the outcome of their work. Overall it could increase productivity and make organisations link more as the funding will be monitored and reduced. So for example people will seek other options to help support part of the workload. For our service we now link in with a lot more HSE funded services like occupational teams and mental health services ….. Previously we might have done that role ourselves now we kind of outsource it or find alternative ways to help. This then helps us sustain our caseload and get the results we need* (3/4/2015, 9:06 a.m.).

The Future of Community Development?

When asked to comment on the likely future of community development in the light of the new arrangements for funding and monitoring of the work of the community and voluntary sector under SICAP, the vast majority of respondents offered comments. Most expressed concern about a wide range of issues, including cuts to funding and job losses, increasing political control over the work and the impact of this and increased privatisation and new work processes on community development and relationships. The following comments illustrate these views.

> *Funding has been halved and job losses are now taking place all over the country as the local authorities are in the process of taking it over* (4/8/2015, 12:30 p.m.).
>
> *Power and control and the silencing of the real experience of those who work daily addressing poverty and powerlessness* (26/3/2015, 10:28 p.m.).
>
> *Fear that party politics may play a bigger role* (8/4/2015, 11:11 a.m.).
>
> *A fear that was happening was the privatisation of community work and that groups would increasingly operate like businesses rather than community organisations* (26/3/2015, 4:49 p.m.*).*
>
> *I believe that we are moving toward privatization and that we are witnessing the demise of the community development sector. This government have shown that they don't want anyone questioning their policies and an autonomous community sector is a threat. I think the focus will become increasingly on activation and if we continue to fight against it and fight for community development we will lose our funding. If we compromise and go along with their plan we are no better than them and are undermining everything we believe and destroying community development in the process. Either way they've got us (1/4/2015, 8:42 p.m.).*
>
> *That the sector will be privatised and potentially destroyed, any real voice to challenge inequality will be lost, we will be left with passive service provision, rather than community development* (26/3/2015, 4:45p.m.).
>
> *Community development has now become very limited and is not representative of the needs of the community, moreso for the Government to establish a national programme that is seeking to 'activate', 'monitor', and 'track', local community interventions as prescribed by a national programme under the guise of inclusion as government policy* (25/3/2015, 10:21 p.m.).

Conclusion

This research attempted to investigate the effects on the community and voluntary sector of Irish government policy developments relating to alignment, funding and accountability mechanisms. Such developments have aimed to align the government-funded work of community and voluntary sector organisations more closely with government policy priorities, making the sector more accountable for the funding it receives and improving efficiency and value for public money in the provision of services by the sector.

The research demonstrates that the heavy reliance by community sector organisations on government funding means that they are more susceptible to changing government attitudes towards the sector. In the past, governments were prepared to fund such organisations on the basis of the work they did in responding to local needs, in building capacity among local communities and in campaigning and advocating on behalf of such communities and thus informing policy change. Changes in government policy towards the sector in terms of alignment, funding, and accountability mechanisms suggest that the role of the sector is now viewed as one of delivering services directed by government and little else. As such the role of the sector appears to have changed as far as government is concerned. No longer, apparently, is there an expectation that the sector can or should act independently of government, or indeed in response to locally expressed need.

The research highlights some of the impacts of these government policy developments. In particular, it shows their effect on the ability and capacity of voluntary and community sector organisations to continue to engage in community development and social inclusion work with the communities they serve. It also shows the impact on the ability and capacity of the sector to utilise the information they gain from working in the community to advocate, campaign and promote development and innovation. Finally it highlights the implications for the independence of the sector to choose its own work priorities or to respond to the priority needs of it client/community base.

The research provides a snapshot of current perspectives in what is a dynamic process as new policy is being rolled out; these perspectives may change over time. Nevertheless, the emerging evidence seems to suggest that there have been major changes in:

- the type of work being undertaken by community and voluntary sector organisations
- the quality of relationships within the sector due to competitive tendering (and the demand that organisations compete with each other rather than cooperate as they did in the past)
- the relationships between organisations in the sector and local and central government agencies.

The research shows that a high degree of unease exists within the community and voluntary sector in relation to how new funding structures and programmes (e.g. SICAP) have impacted upon the practice of community development. Evidence has emerged of tightly worded service agreements decided upon by local government rather than local communities with limited flexibility and limited ability to respond to rapidly changing needs of community. Claims of top-down approaches that do not allow input from local communities are made, with funders' directives having to be adhered to, while informing the priority areas of work within a region or area. This impacts and brings strongly into focus, the decision making processes which affect local services for local people and their community organisations, particularly as they relate to their ability to prioritise work areas reflecting locally identified need. Such service agreements invariably ignore the role of campaigning and advocacy in the sector and in some cases actively exclude it as an option.

The research also demonstrates that while the increasing introduction of managerial and business practices may serve a need for increased accountability for public funding, these in turn have major

knock-on effects in terms of the amount of time left to work in local communities. Bureaucratic practices not only take up time, they also impact on relationships between community workers and people with whom they work in the community.

The high reliance by the community and voluntary sector bodies on public funding means that such bodies are more susceptible to changes in public policy towards community development than grass-roots informed community actions. One view is that the community and voluntary sector is now being more efficiently harnessed by the State to deliver that which has historically been State service provision. The result however, is that this weakens the ability and capacity in the sector to act independently of the State and promote innovation and change.

The increasing privatisation and marketization of community and voluntary sector service provision also highlights the allied issue of the rolling back of State responsibility for such service provision and citizenship rights to such services. Services provided by the community and voluntary sector may be more dependent on the existence of such a sector in an area rather than on a citizen's right to support. The research therefore highlights important issues concerning not just the role of the community and voluntary sector in society, but also the role of the State and the rights of citizens to obtain support from that State. It is hoped that this research will inform greater debate about these issues, not just in academia but in the voluntary and community sector and in government policy making circles.

References

Allen, K. and O'Boyle, B. (2013) *Austerity Ireland: the Failure of Irish Capitalism*: London: Pluto Press.

Aiken, M. (2014) *Ordinary Glory, Big Surprise not Big Society: The changing shape of voluntary services: how this affects volunteer based community groups*, Working Paper 2, NCIA Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services, NCIA at

http://www.independentaction.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Ordinary-Glory-final.pdf [Accessed 9 February 2016].

Benson, A. (2014) "The Devil that has come amongst us": The impact of commissioning and procurement practices, Working Paper 6, NCIA Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary

Services, NCIA at

http://www.independentaction.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Commissioning-and-procurement-final.pdf [Accessed 9 February 2016].

Community Work Ireland (2015) *In Whose Interests? Exploring the Impact of Competitive Tendering and Procurement on Social Inclusion and Community Development in Ireland*, Galway: Community Work Ireland.

Considine, M. and Dukelow, F. (2012) 'From financial crisis to welfare retrenchment: assessing the challenges to the Irish welfare state', *Social Policy Review 24, Analysis and Debate in Social Policy*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (1996) *Better Local Government: a Programme for Change*, Dublin: The Stationary Office.

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2011) *Public Service Reform 2011*, Dublin: DPER.

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2014) *Public Service and Reform Plan 2014-2016*, Dublin: DPER.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2012) *Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government*, Dublin: DECLG.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2012) *Final Report of the Local Government/Local Development Alignment Steering Group*, Dublin: DECLG.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2015) *SICAP Programme Requirements: Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme*, Dublin: DECLG.

Equality Authority (2009) *Annual Report 2008*, Dublin: Equality Authority.

ESRI (2015) *Annual Report 2014*, Dublin: ESRI at

http://www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/AR2014/AR2014.pdf.

Government of Ireland (2000) *White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector*, Dublin: Stationary Office.

Government of Ireland (2014) *The Local Government Reform Act 2014*.

Harvey, B. (2012) *Downsizing the Community Sector: Changes in employment and services in the voluntary and community sector in Ireland, 2008-2012*, ICTU Community sector committee, Dublin at http://www.ictu.ie/download/pdf/downsizingcommunitysector.pdf

[Accessed 20 February 2015].

Independence Panel, (2013), *Independence under Threat: The Voluntary Sector in 2013, Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector*, The Panel's second annual assessment. The Baring Foundation at http://www.independencepanel.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Independence-Under-Threat_The-Voluntary-Sector-in-2013_WebVersion12.pdf [Accessed 9 February 2016].

Independence Panel (2015) *An Independent Mission: The Voluntary Sector in 2015: The Panel's fourth and final annual assessment* at http://www.independencepanel.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Independence-Panel-Report_An-Independent-Mission-PR.pdf

[Accessed 20 February 2015].

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) (2015) *Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, (Report to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)*, June 2015, IHREC, Dublin. http://www.ihrec.ie/download/pdf/ihrec_report_executive_summary_ireland_and_the_international_covenant_on_economic_social_and_cultural_rights.pdf

Kirby, P. (2010) *Celtic Tiger in Collapse: Explaining the Weaknesses of the Irish Model*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lupton, R., Burchardt, T., Fitzgerald, A., Hills, J., McKnight, A., Obolenskaya, P., Stewart, K., Thomson, S., Tunstall, R. and Vizard, P. (2015) *The Coalition's Policy Record 2010 to 2015*, London: LSE at http://www.casedata.org.uk/coalition-overview [Accessed 9 February 2016].

McCarthy Report (2009) Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure at http://www.governance.ie/updates/commentaries/an_bord_snip_nua_-_how_might_it_affect_state_agencies/.

MacMillan, R. (2010) *The third sector delivering public services: an evidence review*, Third Sector Research Centre, Working Paper 20, TSRC, England at http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/working-papers/working-paper-20.pdf [Accessed 20 February 2015].

Milbourne, L., and Cushman, M.B. (2015) 'Complying, Transforming or Resisting in the

New Austerity? Realigning Social Welfare and Independent Action among English

Voluntary Organisations', *Journal of Social Policy*, 44 (3), pp. 463-485.

NCIA (2105) *Fight or Fright: Voluntary Services in 2015*, *NCIA Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services A Summary and Discussion of the Inquiry Findings*, England: National Coalition for Independent Action at http://www.independentaction.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/NCIA-Inquiry-summary-report-final.pdf [Accessed 20 February 2015].

The Wheel (2013) *Analysis of 2014 Budget*, Dublin: The Wheel at http://www.wheel.ie/sites/default/files/Wheel%20budget%202014%20PDF.pdf[Accessed 20 February 2015].

Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government (2014) *Working Group Report on Citizen Engagement with Local Government*, Dublin: Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Acknowledging the "vital role of the community and voluntary sector" (Programme for Government, 2011): A View from the Coalface

Anna Lee

Introduction: What my front line looks like

I worked in the not-for-private-profit sector in Ireland from 1975 until July 2014 in roles with a particular focus on social inclusion. I started in Cherish; moved to work with the ISPCC in Darndale in the early 1980s; and then to Tallaght in 1986 initially managing a 2nd EU poverty programme and moving to Tallaght Partnership (which subsequently became Dodder Valley) in 1991; and finally South Dublin County Partnership.

Working in the Partnership provided a particular opportunity. The work was area based; promoted integrated approaches to addressing poverty and social exclusion; required user participation; expected innovation and added value. A key focus was on mediating between the State and communities/ vulnerable groups. The Partnership's budget in 2013 was over €7m., 95% of which was Exchequer funding. There were 500 staff (400 on labour market programmes). The Department of Social Protection (DSP) was the single largest funder and there were a number of small but very important funding lines such as those from the National Office of Suicide Prevention and the Department of Justice integration budget.

I currently chair Volunteer Ireland, a small national organisation that is very different from the Partnership. It is committed to a three part funding structure of State funding, earned income and fundraising. I am a Board member of the Community Foundation where my contribution is as Chair of the grants committee allocating the Foundation's endowment resources and I am Chairperson of South Dublin County Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) a local government initiative which has a commissioning but no programme delivery role. I am also on the Board of Tallaght Hospital and of Focus Ireland.

In this paper I will consider whether there is a 'vital role' for the community and voluntary sector in Ireland, particularly in addressing poverty and social exclusion through community level action and I will offer a view about the current acknowledgement of the community and voluntary sector's role and contribution in this area. I am not placed to address the sector as a whole given its extent and diversity. I will make some proposals about priorities that those who work/volunteer in the community and voluntary sector and those who get support and service from the sector might want to think about and/or seek to ensure for the future. I have used the term 'community and voluntary sector' to identify and describe the sector and its organisations.

Does the community and voluntary sector play a vital role in Ireland?

In early 2010 it was estimated that there were 11,500 community and voluntary organisations in Ireland, 8,500 of which were registered companies. Information from The Wheel and the Irish Non-profits Database (in relation to non-profit companies) provides more detail about the sector:

- The total reported income of the non-profit companies in the database in 2009 was €5.7bn.
- Grants were reported as a source of income by 2,886 non-profit companies at a combined level of €2bn, with around 15% of companies reporting grant income of less than €10,000
- Ten nonprofits (only one of which is not a health service provider) with a combined turnover of just over €1bn account for €0.9bn of reported grant income, reflecting huge disparities within the community and voluntary sector

- Of the 3,857 non-profit companies that report employee numbers and/or payroll costs, the total number of employees in 2009 was 101,054
- Hospitals and healthcare providers are the largest employers, while 45% of non-profit companies employ 5 people or less.
- The accounts of about 3,500 non-profit companies report neither staff numbers nor payroll costs, indicating that they operate on an entirely voluntary basis (The Wheel, 2016).

Nearly one-third of acute hospitals in Ireland are voluntary hospitals. More than half the secondary schools in Ireland are voluntary schools. Services for people with disabilities are significantly provided by the community and voluntary sector. One in five social housing units, 27,000 units, is now provided by voluntary housing associations. The community and voluntary sector provides labour market programmes, home care services and community childcare services and includes organisations addressing social exclusion, supports for ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups.

Accepting that information about the sector is not comprehensive and is somewhat dated, it is clear that the community and voluntary sector does play a vital role in Irish society particularly in relation to matters such as health, education, housing and wellbeing.

Is the 'vital role' of the community and voluntary sector acknowledged?

It is my view that the community and voluntary sector has been facing significant challenges for some time. The requirement that an organisation in receipt of public funding needed to be set up as a company created a large number of expensive structures with associated responsibilities, and resulted in a number of legal entities that have struggled to meet these responsibilities. The Local/Community Development sector has been through three centrally led initiatives to 'tidy up' some of the outcomes of this requirement – cohesion, mergers and alignment. A number of matters arising from the alignment process and the subsequent Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) tendering process remain unresolved.

Unhelpfully this requirement to create independent legal entities has been paralleled by poor practice at national level in relation to stopping/finishing programmes and budget lines, despite questions periodically being raised by the same national funders about the effectiveness of the sector. The approach of State funders to date has been to allow organisations/projects to die by neglect – making it so difficult for organisations to continue that they decide to close. Recognition of and support for the community and voluntary sector has been inconsistent, with the sector being the junior partner in a very unequal relationship.

This scenario was pushed into crisis by the recession. There have been significant cuts in exchequer funding for the sector. There has been the amalgamation/closure of policy focused organisations and other organisations have been forced into closure. There is a focus on, and what can be experienced as an obsession with, targets and outputs but a limited focus on outcomes. The State sector has 'retreated' from the values and approaches of the community and voluntary sector such as engaging with potential users and an ability to hear constructive criticism. There has been a failure to support community and voluntary organisation approaches to developing and/or accessing alternative funding mechanisms e.g. social clauses in contracts, tendering, and consultation mechanisms.

So where are we now in relation to acknowledgement of the community and voluntary sector?

The Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) has lead responsibility for developing the relationship between the State and the community and voluntary sector. The implementation of the *White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector* published in 2000 is part of this responsibility. There was a proposal in 2012 that a policy would be prepared for the community and voluntary sector in the context of the alignment of local government and local development. *Our Communities: A framework policy for local and community development in Ireland* was published in

January 2016 but addressed the local and community development sectors of the wider community and voluntary sector only. Given that the White Paper is now 15 years old it is questionable whether there is a Government policy relating to the community and voluntary sector. Unsurprisingly, I think we are not clear about who does what and why. There is no discourse about what public services are appropriately delivered by the State and/or by others. To my knowledge there has been little or no discussion about the appropriateness or otherwise of the for-profit sector delivering public services. If they are appropriate deliverers of public services, does it apply to all public services or some public services?

There is currently a degree of public policy interest in citizen engagement/participation but little or no discussion about the parameters of this engagement; its relationship to elective politics; how the engagement/participation might be enabled; the possibility and acceptability of the replacement of paid work, or work that should be paid, with voluntary effort or labour market programmes. The commitment to develop Public Participation Networks (PPN) is a manifestation of this interest. It is worth noting that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) consultation process in relation to the action in the *Open Government Partnership Draft National Action Plan* (2014) to 'review national and international practice to develop revised principles/code for public engagement/ consultation with citizens, civil society and others by public bodies' as part of a wider action 'fostering citizen participation/more active citizenship' closed in October 2015. This consultation process focused on draft consultation principles/and guidance for public consultation processes and not the wider range of matters named above. In the context of 'ladders of participation' consultation comes midway - ahead of manipulation, therapy and informing but behind delegated power and citizen control. It would be interesting if DPER 'road tested' this consultation process against its own document. It is positive that the Charities Regulatory Authority is now operational. It is important as a confidence building accountability mechanism, albeit with a limited support function at this time.

It is my view that the State has disengaged from integrated/joint action with the community and voluntary sector, using a 'conflict of interest' defence to justify this disengagement. There has also been a reduction in integrated/joint action across statutory organisations. This has significant implications for the effective development and implementation of Local Economic and Community Plans by LCDCs.

There is also a list of challenges for the community and voluntary/not-for-private-profit sector in the context of current grant funding. These include doing more with less; a push into service delivery; the challenge to maintain advocacy work and learning while increasing outputs; the annualised nature of funding; micromanagement by funders; and funder poor practice and inconsistency including retrospective notification of rule changes, late decision making and/or payment and funder amnesia; and the transfer of all risk to the grant aided body. The move to new funding frameworks, including competitive tendering and commissioning, is creating significant concern. In 2014 a number of organisations in the community and voluntary sector were involved in two competitive tendering processes. In Jobpath, a new 'back to work' initiative, the tenders were awarded to two private sector bodies on a payment-by-results basis. The successful for-profit sector organisations will be funded to compete with public funded employment activation and placement services delivered by State and community and voluntary sector organisations. The objective of the SICAP is to provide locally relevant, innovative responses to poverty and social exclusion using community development approaches and, in its previous forms, to resource integrated responses to significant local issues. Tenders were sought from a single 'implementing body' on a geographical basis determined by the Local Authority. A result of this was that organisations (primarily community development projects) that were not placed to become the single implementing body were at risk of closure. There was significant pressure on such organisations to become part of a wider bid for a programme (SICAP) that had reduced resources. It is worth noting however, that an alternative funding mechanism was found for the Traveller projects originally funded through the Community Development Programme and those in the National Women's Network. The move from programme application by way of detailed plan over three years to competitive tendering process with nationally set targets for a programme that is to 'focus on social inclusion through empowering communities to work collaboratively with relevant stakeholders using a broad range of supports and interventions facilitated through the programme - and - will engage those most disadvantaged and excluded in our society and will afford local flexibility to respond to local needs' (Pobal, 2016) raised questions about the capacity of SICAP to address local needs and priorities. The

contract for the delivery of SICAP is between the 'Implementing Body' and the LCDC, which has a contract with the Local Authority, which has a contract with DECLG. The Implementing Body (generally a Local Development Company) is managed by a Board that has a membership that closely mirrors that of the LCDC who are also 'managing' the Programme at local level. The competitive tendering of SICAP has been a complex and costly exercise that has created the duplication of management responsibilities for the Programme. The full implications of the tendering process are not yet clear.

We know that complex needs require complex responses. The matters identified above give rise to real concern that the community and voluntary sector, and not just the parts of the sector that are focused on addressing poverty and social exclusion, is being 'taken out'. There is a significant breakdown of trust between the community and voluntary sector and the State and a limited, potentially diminishing, acknowledgement of the community and voluntary sector and its role and contribution.

What the community and voluntary sector should think about

An undermined community and voluntary sector is not in the interests of Irish society. The sector plays an important role in helping those who are commissioning services to identify, understand and fund services to meet the needs of potential service users and in enabling users to have a say in the services that are delivered. Key characteristics of the community and voluntary sector, noting that these are not solely 'owned' by the sector, include:

- Responsive services tailored to individual need through a person centred approach
- Innovation in service design, delivery and funding
- Flexibility in approach
- Rapid response to new and emerging needs
- Value for money focus
- Involvement of users/beneficiaries in service design and control
- Sensitivity to context
- Commitment of value driven personnel
- Empowerment (and associated wellbeing benefits) of people and communities involved.

International research (Salamon, Hems and Chinnock, 2000) has found that non-profit organizations perform a wide variety of service, innovation, advocacy, expressive, and community-building roles in diverse fields throughout the world. In Ireland the great majority of community and voluntary organizations are actively engaged in providing services, and are doing so with 'added value' such as flexibility, responsiveness, and innovativeness and in many instances with advocacy and community building.

Salamon, Hems and Chinnock's (2000) research also found that while non-profit organisations are effectively engaged in the provision of services, their involvement in other critical roles such as building social capital is less developed. This raises the question as to whether the current focus on targets and outputs in Irish public policy is undermining the capacity of the community and voluntary sector to enable, for example, the optimal development of citizen participation, which is, as noted earlier, a key aspect of current Government policy. If the community and voluntary sector is not facilitated to drive the realisation of this policy, who is or can? A discussion of equals is required; this should form the basis of the promised policy for the community and voluntary sector, about the role of the sector, its particular contribution to Irish society and the added value that it provides.

The community and voluntary sector is under huge financial pressure and there is an urgent need for the sector to explore the diversification of its funding base/s. Developing effective responses to this need is not easy. The work of the sector is about providing services and supports to those who cannot afford to buy them and the approach of the State has been to resource service provision rather than service users. There are two aspects, from a potentially very wide and diverse list, of the current funding

context that the community and voluntary sector might want to think about. The first aspect relates to funder requirements for target setting, and I believe that we need targets. It is increasingly the case that targets/outputs are being set by public budget holders with little or no account being taken of local contexts or the challenges facing particular target groups. I fully agree with the comment from UK researchers that 'targets do more than require a level of performance: they structure discourse and define the categories of what is meaningful and what is marginal' (Milbourne and Cushman, 2012, p.7) and can therefore restrict flexibility and organisational learning. The second aspect, and I believe that it is not useful that funding is assigned to organisations on a 'because you got it once you have it for ever basis', is that it is clear that funding mechanisms for community and voluntary organisations are moving rapidly from the making of grants or entering into service level agreements towards competitive tendering and other commissioning mechanisms with no expressed preference to fund not-for-private-profit organisations. This will lead to the privatisation of key public services and the loss of the added value currently provided by community and voluntary organisations.

If my analysis of these two aspects of current funding policy is accurate then the community and voluntary sector needs to consider how these might be managed and any negative impacts minimised. I believe that there needs to be a re-engagement with the political system about what the community and voluntary sector contributes and can further contribute to society, particularly to those at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and what the State is prepared to pay for. Support for advocacy work, evaluation and learning and related service adaptation, the identification and transfer of Irish evidence based models, the engagement of service users in service design and delivery will make progress towards the achievement of complex outcomes more likely. So target setting needs to be informed and still able to be evidenced by a wider range of objectives and related outputs. Agreeing how this might be done and paid for is the responsibility of both the community and voluntary sector and potential funders. It is worth noting that this better resourced developmental work, such as the Atlantic Philanthropies Children and Youth Programme, has in recent times been funded through philanthropic sources matched by exchequer funding, in a context where the learning would then be mainstreamed. It is not clear if this mainstreaming objective has been met.

There is evidence from the UK that moves to competitive tendering have led to community and voluntary organisations being squeezed out and their contribution to communities not being explicitly acknowledged or supported. In a submission to the DPER and the Office for Public Procurement (Cooper, 2014), The Wheel has argued for the protection of the current not-for-private-profit, community led approach to services. They note that European Public Procurement Directives permit Member States a high degree of latitude in how procurement is transposed into domestic law. How this is done in Ireland, they suggest, could have very positive or very negative consequences for community and voluntary organisations in their work in communities and with vulnerable groups. So again the task is to engage with Government and the political system so that, in this new context, Ireland takes full advantage of the provisions of the Procurement Directives, transposing them so that they are supportive of for-public-benefit approaches such as using social clauses, to sustain and develop the contribution of the community and voluntary sector (Cooper, 2014). I believe the community and voluntary sector should think about how it can put into place an informed, cohesive and persuasive strategy to address the current and pending resource challenges.

Writing about how changing UK Government policies have eroded third sector trust Milbourne and Cushman (2012) have identified the tension between autonomy and accountability as a key feature in the relationship between community and voluntary organisations and public funders. Community and voluntary organisations need sufficient autonomy to ensure their relevance to their target groups and communities and to enable learning. Accountability is needed to maintain trust that public resources are being used properly and effectively and for activities that contribute to the public good. Milbourne and Cushman note that the challenge is to manage the trade-off between accountability and autonomy. My experience from my front line, and I accept that it might be different from the experience from the public funders' front line, is that the community and voluntary sector is not managing the trade-off well. Accountability requirements are undermining and reducing the autonomy of community and voluntary organisations. They, like third sector organisations in the UK, are learning that '...the intensification of non-negotiated monitoring regimes has stifled flexibility and organisational learning' (Milbourne and Cushman, 2012, p. 7). So the community and voluntary sector needs to build its collective confidence in

its ability to be fully accountable and that may mean being prepared to challenge one another within the sector. The sector then needs to find approaches to collectively manage funder requirements and expectations so that these are realistic and allow some space for learning, development and adaptation. The sector also needs to be open to learning from other areas, for example the development sector.

Finally I believe that we need to think about how to build/rebuild trust and confidence within the community and voluntary sector and between sector and public funders and politicians, service users and the wider public. We need to accept that the sector as a whole has been damaged by revelations of over inflated pay packages in the sector. We need to note the level of mistrust that exists in many instances, between large community and voluntary organisations such as Local Development Companies and small organisations working in the same geographical area, and think about how smaller organisations might be best supported in the move to tendering. In their review of outsourcing referenced by Milbourne and Cushman (2012), Weeks and Feeny (2008) propose that trust is a key 'relationship enabler' and identify three types of trust: personal, competence–based and motivational. Personal trust is based on a belief in the personal integrity of project partners; competence-based trust on a belief in the other's professionalism; and motivational trust on joint opportunities for reward from success and joint exposure to penalties from failure, assuming joint effort/commitment and a two-way relationship. Milbourne and Cushman (2012) provide evidence that in contracted services in the UK trust has been replaced by client/contractor relationships where public funders do not share or mitigate risks, even in contexts where the community and voluntary organisations are providing services in fields where the State has failed. In Ireland this might include services such as provision for early school leavers and early childhood care and education services. So what might we want to think about? We need to find ways to replace and/or complement our increasing reliance on contractual approaches with ways of working that are built on shared knowledge and approaches, with the potential to build trust and effective inter-organisational work. This requires leadership, investment and openness to not "being in control". I fully share the view of Milbourne and Cushman that 'the consequences of reviving trust are significant for improving and developing services and thus for any renewed emphasis on wider social participation' (p. 35).

Conclusion

Given my view from my front line I have tried to identify what the community and voluntary sector might want to think about and/or prioritise in the complex context of community and voluntary sector funding and policy. I would have liked to be able to be more prescriptive – if we do this then, that will happen and we will be sorted – but I do not think that is possible and probably not useful. I strongly believe however that we should know the importance of:

- Being quite prescriptive in relation to Procurement Directives and the contribution of the community and voluntary sector;
- The sector proposing and agreeing how it might organise itself/be represented. I am not personally persuaded that the PPNs can achieve what Ireland needs in terms of citizen participation and engagement but, with supports, they may provide a focus and a base for this work;
- The inclusion of service users and wider community participation in the planning and delivery of actions to address needs and matters of concern to them.
- The central importance of trust if we are to maintain and build high quality integrated service delivery that our society requires.

I believe that it is important that the community and voluntary sector is clear, for those active in the sector and for others, about why and how we do what we do, and about the central importance of enabling and valuing learning, noting that some of our best learning comes from things that do not go well, and that is fine too.

References

Cooper, I. (2014) *Submission to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Office for Public Procurement: Sustaining the benefits of the not-for-private-profit, community-led approach to services*, Dublin: The Wheel.

Donnelly-Cox, G., Reid, C., Begley, C., Finn, J., and Harmon, D. (2012) 'Nonprofit – State relations in Ireland: Contexts, Issues and Alternatives', *Nonprofit Policy Forum,* 3(1), Article 3.

Government of Ireland (2000) *White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector*, Dublin: Stationary Office.

Milbourne, L. and Cushman, M. (2012) 'From the third sector to the big society: how changing UK Government policies have eroded third sector trust', *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organisations,* DOI: 10.1007/s11266-012-9302-0.

Open Government Partnership Ireland (2014) *Draft National Action Plan Ireland 2014-2016,* Dublin: Open Government Partnership Ireland and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Pobal (2016) *SICAP: Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme* at

https://www.pobal.ie/Beneficiaries/SICAP/Pages/Social%20Inclusion%20and%20Community%20Activation%20Programme.aspx [Accessed 18 February 2016].

Salamon, Lester M., Hems, Leslie C and Chinnock, K. (2000) *The Nonprofit Sector: For What and Whom?* Working papers of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector project*,* no. 37, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies.

The Wheel (2016) *Facts and Statistics about the Irish Community and Voluntary Sector* at www.wheel.ie/policy/facts-and-statisitics [Accessed 18 February 2016].

Weeks, M.R. and Feeny D. (2008) 'Outsourcing: From Cost Management to Innovation and Business Value', *California Management Review*, 50, pp.127-146.

New Structures for Local Government in Ireland: Evaluating the Impact on Community Participation in the Local Planning Process

Jonathan Hall, Ray O'Connor, Carol Power and William Brady

Introduction

The 2011 Programme for Government stated that: "Government is too centralised and unaccountable. We believe that there must also be a real shift in power from the State to the citizen" (Department of the Taoiseach, 2011). This implied a shift from a highly centralised government structure to one where local areas would have increased access to and influence over decision-making. What followed was an intense period of reorganisation and change guided by the 2012 report *Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government* (DECLG, 2012) and legislated for by the *Local Government Reform Act (2014)*.

The 2014 *Act* instigated a radical transformation of the territorial and institutional frameworks within which local governance, planning and development occurs. In terms of governance structures, the most visible of these changes has been the abolition of the 80 Town and Borough Councils and the creation of a new uniform sub-county system of local government comprised of municipal districts. These new territorial units are designed to provide a comprehensive and complete sub-tier of local governance, effectively acting as sub-committees of existing County and City Councils. These reforms were driven by a rationale of alignment and efficiency, and presented as an initiative to achieve effective local government within a leaner institutional framework that provides for local communities to be better represented in decision-making.

This paper will consider the implementation of some of the changes instigated by the report *Putting People First* and legislated for in the *Local Government Reform Act 2014*. It focuses specifically on changes to local government structures within which local planning operates and examines the changes to local plan making regimes.

Localism and its challenges

The aspiration to increase local access to decision-making is embedded in the political philosophy of Localism. Localism is often equated with enhancing democracy but it is not consistently defined. The dictionary definition (Oxford Dictionaries) of localism is "a preference for the local". It has three critical characteristics:

- Firstly, solutions are devised, implemented and managed by people and organisations that are close to those that the intervention is intended to help.
- Secondly, for it to be effective the resources and authority to do this must be devolved from a higher level of government – essentially the principle of subsidiarity; resources and authority are devolved to the lowest effective level of governance).
- Thirdly, local communities can adapt quickly. They have flexibility that enables them to respond efficiently and effectively to changing circumstances.

While there is support for the efficacy of bottom-up approaches there is also the need for inter-spatial alignment and consistency in government interventions. Hence, localism presents significant challenges for government, particularly in the context of this fundamental tension between top-down and bottom-up interventions. In Ireland, where a highly centralised system of government has evolved, this tension

is heightened by the paradox that the politics underpinning the centralised system is often criticised for being too local. Localism in Ireland is often seen as synonymous with clientelism and cronyism (Kitchin *et al*., 2010), and not only counterproductive but often tinged with corruption.

Although devolving power from the national to the local is, in theory, a policy objective of the government, it appears also to be viewed with a degree of suspicion and distrust. This represents an interesting starting point for this paper. It explains why the practicalities of reform seem to reinforce the centralised nature of Irish government by reining in the local, despite a rhetoric that promises to devolve power to the local.

The Local Reform Agenda

A number of reports (OECD, 2008; DECLG Local Development Alignment Steering Group, 2012) and advisory groups provided advice to the government, which ultimately fed into the landmark report *Putting People First*. This report espoused a commitment to effective local democracy through engagement with citizens, strengthened accountability and operational efficiency. In this context, it outlined the future responsibilities and organisational arrangements for local government (DECLG, 2012). The key proposals in this document formed the basis for the *Local Government Reform Act (2014).*

The motivation for reform was not due solely to the perceived need to deliver better local government to citizens. It is our contention that the reforms are also underpinned by three factors:

- The fallout from the planning tribunals
- The post-banking crisis austerity programme, and
- The perception that the "local" in Ireland was too unruly.

To what extent the first two events provided the impetus for reform is unclear. The fallout from the planning tribunals had already led to additional Planning and Development legislation designed to enforce the vertical alignment of Development Plans and Local Area Plans (LAPs); the issuing of unequivocal guidelines on the need to conform to regional and national plans and policies; and additional monitoring of stronger alignment in the shape of the new Planning Regulator's Office.

The post-banking crisis austerity programme demanded measures to achieve operational efficiencies in the context of straitened national finances. In many respects the reform agenda may be characterised as traditional neo-liberal priorities. This is manifested in rhetoric on delivering efficiencies, cost effectiveness, conformity and streamlining. The overall goal is to create a smaller, less costly State, managing public services predominantly on market principles (Kitchin *et al.*, 2011). However, the financial motivation for the reform agenda was not solely inspired by the banking crisis of 2008. While Ireland was later than others in taking up the New Public Management (DEHLG, 1996) agenda, the Strategic Management Initiative launched in 1994 began to identify the need for improving the efficiency and coherence of government.

> For local government, the *Better Local Government* report (DEHLG, 1996) presented a reform programme for local authorities aimed at enhancing local democracy and widening participation, serving the customer better, developing efficiency in local government, and providing proper resources to allow local government fulfil the role assigned to it (Boyle, 2014).

In 2008 the OECD published a landmark report on the Irish public service (OECD, 2008), and identified good practice whilst expressing concern over the limited degree of control by central government over local government. The OECD report identified the need for better integration and coordination of public services, and placed a strong emphasis on performance and value for money. What the banking crisis did was to give impetus to the implementation of the recommendations in these reports, culminating in the publication of *Putting People First* (DECLG, 2012).

Ireland is not alone in pursuing a Local Government Reform agenda. European community-based economic development and planning over the last 40 years has been defined by the principle of subsidiarity with an emphasis on devolving powers to the lowest level of competent governance. The trend has been for devolution of powers across the governance hierarchy with the State devolving to regions (and more recently cities) and then the regions and cities devolving power to local communities (DECLG 2013, 2015). These developments have been supported not only by principles of subsidiarity encouraged by the European Union but also by a strong recognition that some interventions are better implemented from the "bottom up".

The consistent thread through the Irish reform agenda is to seek integration, increase levels of conformity and most clearly to align the "local" – in both territorial and hierarchical terms – to remedy the perceived 'unruly' nature of the local in Ireland. The fundamental tension between top-down and bottom-up planning that is inherent in localism has also been experienced in other countries. In England, the Coalition Government in the *Localism Act (2011)* introduced reforms which were rich in the rhetoric of localism, and did indeed include some significant devolution of powers to local communities in the form of neighbourhood planning. Centrally funded and strongly supported from the centre, these initiatives so far have been geographically patchy in their implementation and the usual tensions between the community and the centre have emerged (Bradley, 2015). Even if concerns of geographic spatial alignment are downplayed, the potentially unruly nature of the local can cause concern to the centre. Such concerns moved Eric Pickles, then Minister for the Environment and a strong advocate of localism, to rechristen the form of Neighbourhood Planning that he had introduced under the *Localism Act* to "guided localism" – a tautological euphemism that sums up the fundamental difficulties that the central State has with community action (House of Commons: Communities and Local Government Committee, 2012).

Hooghe and Marks (2010) describe two basic types of governance:

- type one, multi-level (federal and territorially nested) and
- type two, multi-agency (complex, dynamic and sectoral).

They do not see these two types of governance as mutually exclusive. Ireland, through both historical accident and the more recent influence of EU interventions, seems to have more type two local governance structures. Historical legacy probably also reflects the strong local character of Irish society but to some extent this has been reinforced by the influence of the EU. It could be argued that Ireland has not had the well-established multi-level governance structures required to control the potentially more nested governance arrangements for the making of LAPs. Strong local interest and organic, bottom-up initiatives could be argued to provide effective and innovative local interventions in planning and development. The alternative view is that these can be seen to be 'unruly' insofar as it is difficult to place them in the wider spatial and governance structures. This contradiction is a source of frustration for central government whose default reaction to criticism is to seek out coarser, more closely supervised solutions while still championing the importance of the local.

This issue was specifically considered in the IPA Local Government Research Series Report No.4, January 2013, entitled *The changing structure of Irish sub-national governance*. The report stated that:

> Strategies for national development must still take cognisance of the important role played by sub-national organisations in the delivery of their objectives, however, and the 'bottom up' work performed by local and community development organisations will be critical in this regard (Mac Carthaigh, 2013, S 4.5, p. 32).

The Minister's introduction to *Putting People First* (DECLG, 2012) emphasised a number of key objectives: to improve accountability, increase efficiency and provide better value for money. Specifically he

emphasised the following: stronger performance monitoring and indicators, better national oversight, the vigorous pursuit of efficiency, further constraints on politicians' ability to influence planning decisions and a new emphasis on economic and community development.

What actions did the reforms involve?

Three groups of actions are particularly relevant to this paper. They are:

- Firstly, the reorganisation and "slimming down" of the local government institutional base by the abolition of Town and Borough Councils and the merger of a number of city and county councils
- Secondly, the remit of local councils was extended to include more explicit responsibilities for economic and community development, and
- Finally, a requirement for city and county councils to establish municipal subdivisions, both political and operational, and formal participation partnerships.

At an organisational level local government was restructured by the abolition of a whole tier of sub-county authorities – the 75 Town Councils and five Borough Councils. City and County Councils were merged in all but Cork and Galway where a review of the merits of such an amalgamation is in progress. The context for this rationalisation of governance structures was a background of austerity and savings. There was possibly a secondary subtext that planning powers vested in the local Councils had been misused. There was little assessment of the added value (distinctiveness) of Town Councils (or indeed separate city and county councils) to balance the conviction that the previous arrangements were duplications of governance or that amalgamations would definitely lead to savings.

To compensate for the loss of the local layer of democracy in the form of the Town and Borough Councils and the growth of some councils through amalgamation, sub-county level *municipal districts* have been created. So, in County Cork for instance, where we have a city council, county council and, prior to the reforms, twelve town councils, we now have a proposal for a single authority with possibly eight municipal districts. Municipal Districts are geographically defined parts of County (or City and County) Council areas overseen by sub-committees with some devolution of powers from the county authority. The municipal district councillors meet as sub-committees of the county council to represent their respective areas, and also have the traditional county-wide duties and representation.

Municipal districts are being complemented by the establishment of new Public Participation Networks (PPNs). PPNs are intended to bring the organised voluntary and community sector into closer dialogue with municipal district representatives and, ultimately, to the overarching local authority. These new structures, which are currently being established, and interestingly have already required additional central funding (€2.48m allocated, see DECLG Press Release 11.06.2015), are closely defined and structured, offering more in the way of consultation than any real "shift in power from the State to the citizen" that the Programme for Government promised (Department of the Taoiseach, 2011).

Another major re-organisation was the incorporation of community and economic functions within the local government remit. In organisational terms this involves the incorporation of historic county boards and the establishment of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) with a remit to prepare the community element of Local Economic and Community Plans. It could well be assumed that the main purpose of these new responsibilities for local government is to improve the efficiency, value for money and alignment of the plethora of local economic and community development initiatives supported by government and the EU in recent years (DECLG Local Development Alignment Steering Group, 2012).

How will the reforms affect Local Area Planning?

Critique of Local Area Plans prior to reform

The *Planning and Development Act 2000* introduced a full hierarchy of plans, from the national to regional and local Development Plans. It also included a discretionary sub local tier of Local Area Plans (LAPs). The intention was that there should be consistency between all of the planning tiers.

LAPs were intended to implement the over-arching Development Plans and Regional Guidance at a local level. As has been found in other jurisdictions (e.g. the experience of Neighbourhood Plans in England), this sets up an inevitable tension. While LAPs are intended to reflect local community objectives, needs and values, they are able to do this only insofar as they do not contradict the specifications and values set by national plans. So, spatial planning, which in the localist tradition should recognise the development objectives and priorities of local communities, is expected to follow the rubrics established in the Development Plan and Regional Guidance.

While the wording of the *Planning and Development Act 2000* implies the need for consistency across the hierarchy of plans, the wording is deliberately ambiguous; phrases such as "have regard to", "be consistent with" and "take account of" were used to describe the alignment of plans across the hierarchy. While such loose wording can deliver political consensus it falls apart under legal challenge. Critically the requirement for Development Plans to be consistent with Regional Guidance was particularly weakly worded. This issue was compounded by a change in the legislation relating to the content of LAPs in an amendment to the *Planning and Development Act* in 2002, which specifically introduced the ability for LAPs to zone land. The DECLG did not appear to have either the capacity or the statutory backing to intervene (DECLG, 2013). In explaining the circumstances Grist (2012 p. 7) more specifically adds: "This may simply have been loose wording or it may have been a further manifestation of reluctance on the part of the Department and the Minister to grasp the nettle of local supervision." As Grist implies this could just have been an unfortunate error. However, the fact that it was an error that took ten years to correct is less defensible. Poor wording in the legislation, weak oversight by the DECLG and the fact that County Councils did not always ensure consistency between their Development Plans and Local Area Plans all have led commentators (Kitchin *et al*., 2010; Grist, 2013) to identify poor Local Area Planning as one of the prime causes of the over-zoning that characterised the pre-recession development cycle.

While the over-zoning identified by Kitchin *et al.* (2010) and An Taisce (2012) was not universal, it was significant and, tellingly, was not identified or challenged effectively by either the DEHLG or (perhaps not surprisingly) the County Councils. Kitchin *et al.* (2010, p. 3 Executive Summary) summarised their report with a range of recommendations, one of which was to carry out a review of the planning system, focusing particularly on "charges of localism, cronyism and clientelism where appropriate." The endemic localism of Irish planning, which had long been seen as a weakness in the system, was now clearly being seen as a fundamental defect.

Not long after the introduction of LAPS, the Moriarty and Mahon Tribunals (Mahon, 2012) had begun to uncover major weaknesses in the planning system, drawing attention to specific issues of weak oversight and a lack of rigour in the alignment of the planning hierarchy. However, it was the banking collapse and subsequent recession that highlighted the failings in the planning system most dramatically. The sudden retrenchment of the development industry exposed very significant amounts of over-zoned land for housing development. One manifestation was the number of "ghost" estates across the country. Kitchin *et al*. (2010) in *A Haunted Landscape* described the problem and laid much of the blame on a dysfunctional planning system.

> Essentially a number of local authorities ignored good planning guidelines … Instead, permission and zoning have been driven by the demands of local people, developers and speculators; the abandonment of basic planning principles by elected representatives; and ambitious, localised growth plans framed within a zero-sum game of potentially being left behind with respect to development (p.3).

Note the inclusion of the words "local people" in Kitchin's long list of culprits. While the finger was pointed at a number of people and agencies, much of the criticism focused on Ireland's notorious clientelist culture. *A Haunted Landscape* also suggests that this was not solely a local issue but that the government of the day failed in its regulatory duties and actively promoted some of the development:

> Further, central government actively encouraged its excesses through tax incentive schemes and failed to adequately oversee, regulate and direct local planning (Kitchin *et al*., 2010 p 4).

In a broader critique of the failings of the planning system An Taisce (2012), in their report *The State of the Nation*, placed much of the blame on the reckless production of LAPs:

> Many councils deliberately used LAPs as the preferred mechanism to deliver dubious re-zonings in the full knowledge that there was no possibility of anyone intervening to stop them… (An Taisce, 2012, p.18).

The causes of the over-zoning have been given relatively little attention. Some commentators suggest that it was done because it could be done. We would suggest that two other factors were in fact more significant. Firstly, rezoning land increases its value so land owners have a strong interest in seeking rezoning. The development pursuant on the rezoning is not essential to realising some of the increase in the value of the land. Rezoning land provided landowners with collateral against which to borrow. Detailed evidence of the actual extent of this is scarce but its reality is reflected in the commendably honest statements from some Kerry County Councillors when they were faced with one of the government's remedies; a requirement to de-zone land. Faced with the fact that enough land had been zoned for development to cater for the building needs of six times the current population of County Kerry, it was stated that de-zoning would harm their constituents who had benefitted from the increase in the asset value of their land. A press report in the *Irish Times* on 11th May 2010 quoted one Councillor as saying:

> De-zoning would bankrupt people who had taken out loans for business expansion and for educating their children on 'the valid expectation' that had been created by zoning the lands in the first place.

The second reason for over-zoning can be traced to the nature of the growth narrative to be found in national and, to some extent, regional planning policies in Ireland. For a range of practical, historical and governance reasons, population growth is often viewed as a panacea for social and economic decline, particularly in rural areas. From this perspective, zoning decisions that would create opportunities for settlement growth, regardless of the location, were rarely questioned. At the same Kerry County Council meeting on de-zoning, another councillor was reported as saying that "the more land zoned for development, the better. It created competition and brought house prices down".

The "Strategic Spatial Roles" identified for the country in the *National Spatial Strategy* (NSS) (DELG, 2002) were described as "revitalising, strengthening, reinforcing, consolidating" the territory. Nowhere in the narrative are serious attempts made to prioritise and constrain. The *NSS* outlines how all areas of the country will have the opportunity to develop to their potential. The message is upbeat and the inference can readily be made that growth of some sort in all areas could be supported. These were broad but positive terms which set the scene for growth in all areas. While the authors of the *NSS* clearly intended that growth should be locally appropriate, the narrative was easily adapted to be supportive of any growth. The universal growth message of the *NSS* is reflected in the Regional Planning Guidance of the period. The *South West RPG* (2004), for instance, after confirming the primary importance of the regional gateways and hubs, included among a summary of priorities the need:

> To secure the development of other towns and rural areas to their maximum potential, to support the Gateway and Hubs, and to ensure a sustainable future for the rural areas of the Region (South West Regional Authority, 2004).

Criticism of the planning system in this period is well founded and LAPs were clearly part of the problem. However, there is good reason to consider that the dysfunction was not specifically attributable to the local nature of the activity but to the chronic lack of oversight and an overarching laissez-faire attitude to spatially undifferentiated growth potential.

Kitchin *et al.* (2012) state that

> local politicians wield power in ways which have actively subordinated the Irish planning system. As a result, Irish planning has never achieved the same status as has planning in much of Europe, and has always been weakened and compromised by localism, cronyism and corrupt political practices (p. 1305).

Local politicians' general disregard for the national and regional planning context, and their lack of commitment to proper planning procedures, often undermined the work of professional planners. The new oversight mechanisms, the Planning Regulator and the extended duties of the Regional Assemblies, offer some scope for achieving better planning but there is no sound evidence yet available that the commitment to planning is any stronger now than it was at the height of the property boom.

However, one of the problems with this critique is that all local politicians as a collective are regarded as adopting the same attitudes and practices in relation to planning. It is worth disaggregating this group and considering who was preparing and approving the 350 LAPs up until 2013. Commentaries on over-zoning suggest that LAPs were being prepared by some local out-of-control forces promoting development in their own local areas. Therefore these 'local people' who inputted into the making of these local plans needed to be reined in. But can we say with any certainty that these contentions are accurate?

LAPs were prepared by local authority planners and adopted by local councillors – city councillors, county councillors, and town and borough councillors. In general, county councils span the largest areas in spatial terms. This has the effect of spatially diffusing power and creating distance between the collective decision-makers and local citizens. In County Cork, for example, a councillor from Baltimore in the west of the county could vote on the adoption of a LAP for Ballycotton in the east, and vice versa. In this context, relational proximity factors, such as voting along party lines, are more likely than local interests to influence decision-making.

It could be that City councils by contrast are relatively compact in spatial terms, although socially they may be characterised by wide diversity. However, it was town and borough councils, before their abolition, that constituted the smallest territorial governance structures – the most geographically compact contexts – in which LAPs were adopted. LAPs were voted on by local town councillors with close proximity to their respective electorates.

There has been little if any detailed research comparing the LAPs prepared by Town and Borough Councils with those prepared by City and County Councils. However, based on certain assumptions, it could be inferred that these town and borough councils are likely to have been responsible for only a very small minority of the large-scale problem of over-zoning.

Firstly, assuming that the Town and Borough Councils (not all of which had planning powers) would each have produced only a single LAP, then fewer than 80 (23%) of the 350 LAPs produced up to 2013 were prepared within a truly local context, that is voted on by councillors representing those areas. Secondly, given the generally constrained boundaries of most Town and Borough Councils, the opportunities for excessive zoning were significantly limited.

Based on these assumptions, the largest proportion of over-zoned land must have resulted from LAPs created in County and City areas by County and City Councillors who were advised by local authority planners and officers. Again, when one considers the generally tight spatial boundaries of the City Councils at this time, a logical conclusion would be that the majority of the over-zoning must have occurred in County Council areas where the geographical concentration of power was more diffused and decisions were subject to county-wide scrutiny. This is in direct conflict with much of the rhetoric that surrounded the exposure of poor zoning practice, which invariably was associated with uncontrolled local action.

To prove this hypothesis would require a detailed comparison of LAPs produced by the different types of council. However, if our stated assumptions are sound, then it is likely that the recent Local Government reforms will have done little to address the problems in planning terms. Town Councils, many of which used LAPs wisely and effectively, were abolished. On the other hand, County Councils, which based on the geography of their area of influence would seem to have had more scope to over-zone land, have had their powers enhanced and strengthened. While the new municipal districts provide a structure for the devolution of powers to make or amend LAPs, these are "subject to a requirement of consistency with the county development plan and a (strong) right of 'call in' for the full council" (DECLG, 2013).

We are now in a situation that if another economic boom were to occur the Local Government Reforms could exacerbate, not ameliorate, the problems created in the last period of growth and development. The majority of LAPs were produced by local government planners and approved by politicians who had also prepared the City and County Development Plans. Although some LAPs would have been approved by Borough and Town Councils that had devolved planning powers there is little evidence to suggest that the gross over-zoning that was uncovered was by any measure entirely centred on renegade Town Councils. The "low level" corruption of the planning system that drove the over-zoning became enmeshed with the "higher level" corruption that was the subject of the Mahon Tribunal.

In responding to the findings of the Mahon Tribunal the government moved to correct the legislation and regulation of Local Area Plan preparation and adoption. Regulations were introduced to narrow the range of locations where LAPs (DECLG, 2013) could and should be produced and, most importantly, much tighter prescription of house building need was embedded in new legislation and practice. All Development Plans are now required to include a Core Strategy that fixed the amount and spatial distribution of population increases, as prescribed by Regional Strategies. The new legislation and guidance has introduced new oversight and prescription into the form and content of LAPs.

The Minister's introduction to the first extensive guidance on the preparation of LAPs in 2013 also suggests another set of issues that were of concern to government; namely recognition that they did not have the capacity (or perhaps the inclination) to oversee the planning system in as much detail as is required and, in particular, to integrate zoning with provision of appropriate public infrastructure. In this context, they would have to rely on tighter legislation and a reduction in the range of plan making.

Former Minister Hogan's introduction to the new guidance includes the following paragraph:

> The Act and subsequent amendments in 2002 led to a rapid increase in the number of local area plans and in the levels of land zoned for development within such plans. This made co-ordination of development with the provision of necessary public infrastructure and implementation of strategic planning policies … more difficult (DECLG, 2013).

The measures strengthen the top down authority of regional plans, make growth expectations in County and City Development Plans specific both in terms of location and amount, and limit the proliferation of LAPs. The planning system is also now to be overseen at a regional level and by a new State agency, the Planning Regulator. The legislation to establish a planning regulator has only recently been published and the regulator's office is yet to be established. While the localist tradition might have set the context for over-zoning, it was exacerbated by very weak scrutiny, political opportunism and silent professionals. It is not clear whether less equivocal superior policy and stronger alignment will provide a sustainable fix for the weak reflection of national and regional policy at local level.

One other important issue is raised in the new guidance. The production of LAPs is set firmly within the context of the new local government structures described in *Putting People First*. These again are best summarized in the Minister's introduction:

> ...the local area plan process is particularly adaptable to planning at local level for either urban areas or wider urban and rural areas ... and provide for proper consultation with the public (DECLG, 2013).

Putting People First demonstrates a strong desire to locate local interventions clearly within the new local government structures and to achieve strong horizontal alignment with other services and functions.

Conclusion

The recently published *National Planning Policy Statement* (DECLG, 2015) has as its first principle that:

> Planning must be plan-led and evidence based so that at the appropriate level, from the National Spatial Strategy, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, City and County Development Plans and Local Area Plans, the Government, local authorities and local communities, work together to set out a cohesive vision for the future of our country.

This is in effect a restatement of two fundamental principles of planning practice, namely that it should be coherent across its spatial levels and that it is a joint enterprise with local authorities and local communities working together.

It appears that there is a degree of consensus that the planning system at all levels needs to be "more sustainable, coherent, evidence-based and objective" (O'Connor, 2011). Recent legislation establishing a Planning Regulator and giving more explicit powers to Regional Assemblies to oversee plan-making is clearly designed to deliver stronger alignment of planning policy and decision making. The key question that remains is whether there will be sufficient capacity and support to address the more difficult challenge of ensuring that this stronger alignment is proportionate to its benefits. Alignment should not be allowed to stifle the ability to create local plans that are community inspired and generated by local action.

The contrast between the wording in the introductions to the draft and final guidance on Local Area Plans is instructional. The description of the plans' purpose in the draft document was "setting more detailed and community-responsive policy contexts for individual planning decisions". In the final document this had been reduced to just "setting more localised policy contexts for individual planning decisions" (DECLG, 2013).

No longer was open responsiveness to the local community one of the drivers for the production of Local Area Plans but rather the narrower requirement for the alignment of localised policy.

This is clear evidence of a continued shift to the centre in local government planning. There is much rhetoric for the local but this is tempered by an undercurrent of distrust for the local. There appears to be an unresolved tension between aligning local provision and promoting distinctive places.

References

An Taisce (2012). "State of the Nation: A Review of Ireland's Planning System 2000 – 2011", Dublin.

Boyle, R. (2014). Public Sector Reform in Ireland: Views and Experiences from Local Government Senior Executives, Local Government Research Series No 7, p.7, May 2014. Institute for Public Administration, Dublin.

Bradley, Q. (2015). The political identities of neighbourhood planning in England, Space and Polity, DOI: 10.1080/13562576.2015.1046279.

Callanan, M. (2005). Institutionalizing participation and Governance? New Participative Structures in Local Government in Ireland. Public Administration Vol. 83, No. 4, 2005 (p909–929).

Council of Europe (2008). Clear: An auditing tool for citizen participation at a local level. Version 2007, The European committee on local and regional democracy, Committee of experts on democratic participation and public ethics at local and regional level. Secretariat Memorandum prepared by the Directorate General of Democracy and Political Affairs, Directorate of Democratic Institutions.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2015). National Planning Policy Statement, Dublin.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2014). Guidelines for Public Participation Networks Annex 6 Section 2.1 Local Government Reform/Citizen engagement. Circular Letter CVSP2/2014, Dublin.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2014). Outline of LEADER 2014-2020 Sub-Regional Fund Allocation DECLG website, accessed July 2015.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2014). Working Group Report on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, Dublin.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government June (2013). Local Area Local Area Plans, Dublin.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government June (2013). A Manual for Local Area Plans, Dublin.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2013). Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government and Minister for Housing and Planning, Publication of the first set of statutory guidelines on the preparation of local authority local area plans. Dublin.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2013). Action Programme for Effective Local Government transition framework for sub-county/municipal reorganisation, Appendix 1. Dublin.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2012). Putting People First Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Dublin.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2012) Final Report of the Local Government/Local Development Alignment Steering Group, Dublin.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government June (2012). Local Area Plans, Draft of Guidelines for Planning Authorities, Dublin.

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (1996). Better Local Government: A programme for change, Summary, Dublin.

Department for the Environment and Local Government (2002). National Spatial Strategy for Ireland 2002 – 2020, People, Places and Potential, Dublin.

Department of the Taoiseach (2011). Programme for Government 2011-2016, Dublin.

European Commission (2014). Community-Led Local Development, Cohesion Policy 2014 – 2020, Brussels.

Grist, B. (2012). "The Irish National Spatial Strategy". Paper presented at a conference on *Planning for States and Nation/States: a Transatlantic Exploration.* Accessed from http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/Berna_Grist_paper.pdf, July 2015.

Hooghe, L. and Marks, G. (2010). "Types of multi-level governance", p.17-22 in Enderlein, H., Wälti, S. and Zürn, M. (eds.) Handbook on Multilevel Governance. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

House of Commons: Communities and Local Government Committee (2012). Localism: Report, Together with Formal Minutes, Oral and Written, Volume 1 Parliament: House of Commons, Great Britain

Irish Statue Book (2000). Planning and Development Act, Dublin.

Irish Statue Book (2002). Planning and Development (Amendment) Act, Dublin.

Irish Statue Book (2010). Planning and Development (Amendment) Act, Dublin.

Irish Statute Book (2014). Local Government Reform Act 2014.

Irish Times (2010). "De-zoning report splits Council". Accessed from Irish Times website 7.7.2015.

Kitchin, R., Gleeson, J., Keaveney, K. and O'Callaghan, C. (2010). A Haunted Landscape: Housing and Ghost Estates in Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. NIRSA Working Paper Series, No. 59.

Kitchin R., O'Callaghan, C., Gleeson, J., Keaveney, K., and Boyle, M. (2012). "Placing neoliberalism: the rise and fall of Ireland's Celtic Tiger." Environment and Planning A, 44(6) p.1302 – 1326.

Lowndes V, Pratchett l & Stoker G (2001). Trends in Public Participation: Part 1 Local Government Perspectives, Public Administration, 79(1): p205-222.

Lowndes V, Pratchett l & Stoker G (2001). Trends in Public Participation: Part 2- Citizens' Perspectives, Public Administration, 79 (1): p205-222.

Lowndes & Sullivan (2004). Like a Horse and Carriage or a Fish on a Bicycle: How Well do Local Partnerships and Public Participation go together? Local Government Studies, 30:1, 51-73, DOI:

Mac Carthaigh, M. (2013). *The changing structure of Irish sub-national governance*. IPA Local Government Research Series, Report No.4, January 2013. IPA, Dublin.

Mahon, A.P. (2012). The Tribunal of Inquiry into Certain Planning Matters & Payments, Final Report, Dublin.

O'Connor, J. (2011). Closing Address, Irish Planning Institute Annual Conference: Innovation in Practice – Reshaping Irish Planning, Galway, 6th May, accessed through the Irish Planning Institute website July 2015.

OECD Public Management (2008). Reviews, Ireland: Towards an integrated public service.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Department for Transport UK (2003). Evaluation of local strategic partnerships: Report of a survey of all English LSPs UK Report of Social Inclusion Forum, London.

Rydin, Y. and Pennington, M. (2000). "Public Participation and Local Environmental Planning: The collective action problem and the potential of social capital", *Local Environment*, 5:2, 153-169.

South West Regional Authority (2004), South West Regional Planning Guidelines, County Cork.

Tizard, J. (2011) “We still need to collaborate” quoted in *The Guardian* 2011, accessed July 2015, Centre for Public Service Partnerships University of Birmingham.

Local Government Reform in Ireland: Implications for Rural Development and Community Engagement

Mark Rylands, Ray O'Connor and Carol Power

Introduction and Methodological Approaches

The *Local Government Reform Act 2014* may be regarded as a continuation of an ongoing process, dating back to before the foundation of the State (Hussey, 1993). However, it could be argued that the 2014 *Act* constitutes perhaps the most significant single local government reform initiative in the history of the State. Phil Hogan, in his role as Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (2011-2014) in the Fine Gael – Labour coalition government (2011-2016), was the chief architect and main driver of these reforms. The Minister cited a number of reasons why local government needed to be reformed, which included an attempt to redress what has been widely described as an imbalance of power between the centrally-appointed executive and locally-elected councillors (Oireachtas Library and Research Service, 2012). Other reasons for introducing reforms included cost-saving, streamlining and efficiency, particularly in the context of the national austerity programme, and the facilitation of greater public participation and civic engagement. With these objectives in mind, the *Act* provided not only for the restructuring of local government but also for a reconfiguration of local development structures, and the 'alignment' of both.

In March 2011, the *Programme for Government* called for *inter alia* "fundamental re-organisation of local governance structures to allow for devolution of much greater decision-making to local people" (p.26). In October 2012, the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) report, *Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government* articulated the vision that "local government will be the main vehicle of governance and public service at local level - leading economic, social and community development, delivering efficient and good value services, and representing citizens and local communities effectively and accountably" (p.iii). In October 2013, the *Local Government Bill 2013* gave legislative effect to proposals outlined in *Putting People First*. The *Local Government Reform Act* was enacted in January 2014, to take effect from 1 June 2014. The resultant restructuring of local government has particularly far-reaching implications for rural areas because of the so-called 'alignment' of local government and local development.

Using a case study of County Tipperary, this research focused on two key questions:

1) What were the anticipated impacts of the local government reforms on the ability of local communities and individuals to engage in the decision making process that shapes their local areas and
2) In what ways did local development practitioners, community activists and elected public representatives envisage these reforms would impact rural development structures and processes?

A qualitative approach was adopted for this study. This involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eleven local politicians and seven community activists. These interviews varied in length from 30 minutes to over two hours. The interviews were complemented by participant observation: over a three month period, the primary researcher attended twelve meetings involving community groups. Three focus group meetings were also held with community groups. A number of discussions were also held with staff members from a number of Local Development Company (LDCs). The research also draws on reports from local media in County Tipperary.

County Tipperary was selected as the case study area for this research for a number of reasons. Firstly, the researchers had an in-depth knowledge of rural issues in this county because of recent research undertaken as part of 'Symbios', a European-wide project investigating some of the processes driving rural decline (http://www.proxectosymbios.eu). Secondly, while Tipperary shares with the other 25

counties the experience of town and borough council abolition, it also shares with Limerick and Galway the experience of merging two local authorities. Furthermore, as part of the local government reform process the two local development companies in Tipperary – South Tipperary Development Company and North Tipperary LEADER Partnership - lost their Local Action Group (LAG) status. This meant that the local voluntary boards and the local evaluation committees that previously vetted and assessed proposed development projects no longer fulfilled this role. This function will now reside with the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs). This appears to represent a fundamental change to existing administrative structures and, in the case of Tipperary, a significant distancing of decision-making in local development from community to county level.

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 – A brief Context

The *Taskforce on Active Citizenship* (2007, p.25) highlighted "a democratic deficit at local level, due to a perceived absence of meaningful opportunities for civic participation in decision-making about local issues. This related to two connected concerns: the ability of communities to influence decisions taken by statutory bodies and the availability of suitable mechanisms to channel civic energy in tackling local needs". Seven years later, these concerns were once again highlighted by a working group set up by Minister Hogan to report on *Citizen Engagement with Local Government* (2014, p.8). With the stated objective of addressing this democratic deficit, Minister Hogan decided to introduce a number of innovations at local level, which we now outline briefly.

Municipal Districts

Municipal districts were created within each local authority. These smaller administrative units within the much larger local authority areas allow for locally elected representatives to make certain strategic decisions for their own local area and its inhabitants.

Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs)

Another innovation at local level, and a central plank of the *Local Government Reform Act*, was the establishment of Local Community Development Committee (LCDCs) in each administrative area "for the purposes of developing, coordinating and implementing a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development" (DECLG, 2014, p.9). One of the LCDC's key functions is to develop, prepare and implement the community elements of the Local Economic and Community Plan. An officer of the local authority will be appointed to work with the Chairperson "to provide guidance and strategic direction" and a range of administrative functions on behalf of the LCDC (DECLG, 2014, p.27). In July 2014, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government issued guidelines for the establishment and operation of LCDCs (DECLG, 2014). It was envisaged that LCDCs would have relatively few members, initially proposed at as few as 15 (FRC, 2013 p. 6). At present LCDCs normally have no more than 19 members. The balance of power between statutory and non-statutory members always favours the non-statutory members. The composition will typically be a maximum of nine from the public sector (local councillors, local authority officials and representatives of State agencies, such as HSE, Education and Training Board, Teagasc, third level institutions etc.) and a minimum of 10 from "private sector interests", including community, voluntary and local development interests, among others (DECLG, 2014). In acknowledgment of their important role in the recent past, Local Development Companies (LDCs) have been allocated seats, subject to a maximum of three where there are three or more LDCs operating in an administrative area. Social, economic and community interests are represented on the LCDC by individuals nominated from the Public Participation Networks (PPNs).

Public Participation Networks (PPNs)

Public Participation Networks (PPNs) were a last minute inclusion in the local government reform programme. Their purpose is "to enable the public to take an active formal role in the policy making and oversight activities of the Local Authority's areas of responsibility" (Working Group Report on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, 2014, p.24). Membership of the PPN is open to groups representing community and voluntary interests, social inclusion interests and environmental interests. PPNs will operate at the level of the municipal district and at county level. PPNs are allowed to nominate representatives to the LCDC on a so-called 'college' basis, with three colleges representing community and voluntary interests, social inclusion interests and environmental interests (DECLG, 2014).

Public Representation

The most immediate impact of the *Local Government Reform Act* was rationalisation in the form of a reduction in both the number of local authorities and the number of public representatives. This resulted from the disbandment of all town and borough councils, the merging of city and county councils in Limerick and Waterford, and the merging of North Tipperary and South Tipperary county councils. As a result, the number of local authorities decreased from 114 to 31. With effect from the May 2014 local elections, the total number of councillors was reduced from 1,627 to 949 (http://www.environ.ie). This represents a 41.6% reduction and brought the ratio of public representatives to citizens to approximately 1:4,500, one of the highest ratios of citizens to elected representatives in Europe. France, for example, has one public representative for every 127 citizens while the United Kingdom has a ratio of one public representative to 2,729 citizens (Quinn, 2015).

Assessing the Impact of the Reforms: The Case of Tipperary

The Merging of South and North Tipperary Local Authorities

In 1838 County Tipperary was sub-divided for administrative purposes into Tipperary South Riding and Tipperary North Riding. While not the largest county in Ireland, this decision was dictated by both the shape and the geography of the county. The county extends from the boundary with Waterford in the south, near Carrick-on-Suir, to Portumna on the Galway county border – a distance of 140 kilometres. Following attempts to reform local government in the *Local Government Act 2001* these divisions were renamed South Tipperary and North Tipperary. As a result of the *Local Government Reform Act 2014* these administrative areas were abolished and both local authorities were merged into the single local authority of Tipperary County Council. Furthermore, six town councils (Tipperary, Nenagh, Thurles, Templemore, Cashel and Carrick-on-Suir) and one borough council (Clonmel) were abolished. As a result of the reforms, the number of local public representatives in County Tipperary has been reduced from 113 to 40. This equates to a decrease of 64.6% and represents a far greater percentage loss of public representation than the national average of 41.6%. At municipal district level, the county is divided into five districts (Clonmel/Cahir, Carrick-on-Suir, Cashel/Tipperary, Thurles/Templemore and Nenagh).

While the merging of South and North Tipperary local authorities may have appeared a good idea in theory – potentially generating greater efficiencies and resulting in more effective administrative structures – it poses a number of practical problems for which few if any mitigating mechanisms have been put in place. Key among these problems are: the potential for uneven distribution of power; the concentration of services in fewer locations and the consequent lengthening of the physical distance between local government offices and citizens; under-developed intra-county transport networks; lack of a shared county-wide vision; and the geographically distinct governance and development networks that underpinned the social capital of each of the two former county council areas.

This merger is quite a strange hybrid. There are two 'centres' of operations for one local authority – one being in Nenagh in the north of the county, the other in Clonmel, located in the extreme south on the border of County Waterford. More effective or innovative reforms might have seen one new, single centre of operations, perhaps in Thurles. While challenging, it would have meant a fresh start for the staff of both authorities, enabling the development of a new organisational culture. In informal discussions, staff from the former southern local authority highlighted how "we have to adapt to their [Northern counterparts'] way of doing things". While the process of merging is still evolving, some fears have been expressed by community groups and community activists regarding the 'power struggle' and the power distribution between the two former local authorities.

There appears to be a drift of power from the south to the north with many of the more prestigious directorships of services being based in Nenagh. At a local level for example, and on a very local issue, one community activist expressed his frustration while attempting to resolve a problem with rubbish being dumped in a particular area in the southern end of the county. When attempting to contact the Environmental Officer, he was informed on a number of occasions that the officer was dealing with other issues in the Northern part of the county. The community activist's frustration was evident when he stated: "I'm fed up ringing them…they don't care about us down here". That activist also stated that before the merger of the two local authorities he had always found it easy to make contact with the Environmental officer but that this was no longer the case.

While Tipperary is not the largest county in Ireland, its location led to the evolution of a transport network that was designed not to integrate the county but to allow traffic to pass through *en route* to other counties. This resulted in a transport system that makes the merger of both local authorities quite difficult as the transport network that connects North and South Tipperary and the quality of roads that connect towns and villages across Tipperary leaves a lot to be desired. The extent of the difficulties for travelling within the county can be seen from comments made by two different interviewees. The first stated: "I can get to the Red Cow interchange in Dublin quicker than I can get to Nenagh"; and a second observed: "I can get from Carrick-on-Suir to Monaghan Town quicker than I can get from Carrick-on-Suir to Portumna". Another Local Councillor called the merger "a f*****g disaster" when he was explaining how a lot of his time was spent driving from one meeting to another. Councillor Marie Murphy was more forthcoming with her comments and she didn't mind being quoted when she stated that "it would have been easier to merge Donegal and Wexford" (pers comm).

The loss of a tier of local democracy was highlighted by Councillor Tom Wood, as reported in *The Tipperary Star* (17 April 2015): "Many people will admit that there is a serious gap or loss at local level and a very serious loss of services too. The loss of Cashel Town Council has had an enormous negative impact on the town and its hinterland. I always supported the fact that local government needed to be reformed, but the total abolition of town councils - an entire tier of local democracy was totally wrong and insane. The Town Council was at the heart of the community at every level and that loss is really being felt now. A hell of a lot has been lost now and at a huge price". Similar misgivings were expressed by a local Independent TD for the area, Deputy Mattie McGrath, who voiced his opposition to the amalgamation of South and North Tipperary County Councils and the abolition of all of the town councils (*The Nationalist*, 8 March 2015).

The recently implemented merger is still a work in progress and it is unclear at this stage how successful it will be. It has been criticised by a number of local politicians, including Cllr Séamie Morris of Sinn Féin, who rejected "the upbeat conclusions" of a report on the merger by the Institute of Public Administration (IPA). He argued that the report failed to reflect the reality on the ground, or to account for the loss of services experienced by the public (*Tipp Tatler*, 21 September 2015). A long history of the two parts of the county operating independently of each other has resulted in the lack of a shared vision for Tipperary as a single administrative entity. As another councillor observed: "The county is too big… we know little about them and they know little about us… we haven't the time to learn about them."

Although couched in a discourse of citizen-centric governance, the logic underpinning the merger of the two local authorities appears to have been driven by a desire to achieve economic savings rather than develop a better and more efficient structure for the delivery of local government. However, this is a strategy that may have been adopted in vain as "…international evidence . . . tends to refute the

notion that a smaller number of larger local authorities yields improvements, savings and efficiencies" (Quinlivan, 2015). Moreover, apart from the practical problems outlined above, these changes also involve an enormous diminution of local history, heritage, tradition and culture – where mayoral offices dating back centuries were abolished. Nenagh and Clonmel towns for example, had a mayor for centuries, and with the stroke of a pen, these roles were consigned to the history books.

Interviews with local councillors revealed that, from a political perspective, the Municipal Districts are perceived as being highly significant; this is where future votes will be garnered, although this sentiment was not stated explicitly. It is at this level that part-time elected representatives interact with full-time paid employees of the local authority. This is where tensions emerge and there is potential for paid officials to dictate policy to elected representatives. One small segment of the reforms does allow for elected councillors to make a county manager/CEO more accountable. However, for councillors who invoke this procedure, there may be adverse repercussions, both on a personal level and in terms of their political agenda. While elected representatives have power, unelected council officials have 'real power', especially in terms of progressing specific issues. Referring to his experience of a particular infrastructural project one councillor, who for obvious reasons asked not to be identified, expressed this sentiment with "...Jesus, . . . you nearly have to bow down to the [County] engineer at times".

Resolving the democratic deficit?

While, in essence, the format of the LCDC is established, its actual working mechanism remains uncertain. It is clearly stated and enshrined in the *Local Government Reform Act 2014* that the LCDC will be independent of the local authority in the discharge of its functions. However, little thought has been given to mechanisms to ensure that LCDCs will remain independent of the local authorities on which they rely for their funding and administrative support. If an LCDC is facilitated to the extent of having its meetings organised, its minutes taken and its agenda set by local authority executives, it will be challenging for an ordinary member of the LCDC to upset that *status quo*. A primary concern of the *Local Government Reform Act 2014* is to promote civic engagement where an ordinary citizen could highlight an issue to local government through the PPN. It is in this additional space that the electorate might influence the local authority. However, a part-time, unpaid, public representative would find it much more difficult to set the LCDC agenda than a full-time Director of Services of a Local Authority. It is that tension that needs to be resolved if the people are to be given a meaningful voice in their local area. It is clear, as was stated in report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government (2014, p.8) that "civic engagement can only be sustained if people believe that they can influence decision-making and that their views are taken into account".

The LCDCs have a very important role to play in the new system put in place in January 2014 and yet this research has uncovered a huge degree of uncertainty and confusion with regard to the role of LCDCs. When asked: "Does the LCDC have any real power?" one councillor responded "I don't think they have yet anyway". Another councillor when asked: "How do the councillors get a position on the LCDC?" replied "I think it's to do with the party quota and groupings". The lack of information and understanding regarding these committees and their role and function in the new system of local government is epitomised by the councillor who replied: "Do the council staff not have a vote as well?" and "to tell you the truth I don't know enough about them". It must not be underestimated how much potential power is being vested in the LCDCs. Whoever controls the LCDC has the potential to direct how Social Inclusion and Rural Development funding is dispensed throughout the county.

Implications for Rural Development

The newly formed LCDCs will be the focal point for change in the structures and processes of rural development and social inclusion in Ireland. Let us first review briefly the structures for rural development that have operated over the past twenty five years.

Since 1989, rural development in Ireland has been inextricably linked with the LEADER initiative, which was first implemented as part of a programme to promote economic and social cohesion across the European Union. Rural development through economic diversification, the creation of enterprise and the promotion of social inclusion were key objectives of the LEADER programme. The introduction of LEADER signalled a move away from the fragmented approach to rural development in Ireland where different government departments operated in isolation from each other. This fragmented approach had resulted in a lack of co-ordination at national level and much duplication at local level. LEADER emphasised the important role to be played by local communities as partners in the development process and was based on a bottom-up, area-based approach to development. To access LEADER funding, local interests had to organise into Local Action Groups (LAGs), who became responsible for disbursing a budget allocated to the area. Membership of LAGs includes representatives from the community and voluntary sector, the farming sector, other local socio-economic interests and statutory organisations. They had a voluntary board and voluntary evaluation committees. In Ireland, during the first phase of LEADER (1989-1993), sixteen LEADER groups, or LAGS, were established. The spatial areas covered by these LAGs reflected the realities of rural need in the early 1990s and were largely formed without reference to any pre-existing (local government) administrative or spatial structures. The *ad hoc* manner in which the LEADER areas emerged represented a genuine bottom-up, spatial manifestation of deprivation and need in rural Ireland after the economic recession of the 1980s. These administrative structures developed locally and organically – shaped as much by local demands and needs as by the regulations imposed by the EU to ensure proper governance and accountability.

This established structure for rural development is set to change as a result of the *Local Government Reform Act* and Government's stated preference that LCDCs would assume the role of LAG. Consequently, the number of LAGs had decreased from 36 in 2013 to 28 by January 2016. The LCDC, albeit with the stated intention of bringing government closer to the people, is a top-down administrative structure, which, potentially, is subject to a substantial level of influence by unelected local authority officials. While the local development companies may remain in existence, their role is substantially undermined. No longer acting as LAGs, their role will be confined to administration of the rural development programme on behalf of the LCDCs.

The role and autonomy of local development companies and local partnerships will be eroded further by fundamental changes to the operation of other government initiatives, in particular, the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP), which replaced the Local Community Development Programme (LCDP) in 2015. Prior to the local government reforms, the voluntary boards of local development companies were responsible for deciding where, within certain parameters, LCDP resources were spent. This responsibility has now been transferred to the LCDC. Furthermore, whereas local development companies up to recently were generally awarded contracts by the government to undertake social inclusion projects in their areas of operation, under the new SICAP programme, local development companies are invited to tender for these contracts, forcing them into competition with private sector interests and even with each other. In cases where local development companies have not been successful in winning the SICAP tender for their local areas, this has resulted in some job losses within those organisations. The tendering process itself is a time-consuming exercise which stretches and strains the already under-resourced staff of local development companies. On the surface, a competitive tendering process might appear to guarantee better value for money. However, while competitors from outside the local area might be able to deliver the programme at a more competitive price, they lack the local knowledge and social networks upon which community development relies for a successful outcome.

During the most recently completed LEADER programme (2007-2013), there were two LAGs operating in County Tipperary, one in the north – North Tipperary LEADER Partnership (NTLP), and one in the South – South Tipperary Development Company (STDC). These LAGS successfully disbursed almost

€24 million of the €322 million LEADER budget for 2007-2013, representing 7 per cent of the national allocation. Nationally, the LEADER budget for 2014-2020 has been cut to €250 million. For County Tipperary, the share of the LEADER budget (4 per cent) and the actual amount of funding (€10 million) was considerably reduced. Part of this reduction can be attributed directly to the alignment process: after much heated debate, the LAG status for County Tipperary was conferred on the county's single LCDC that emerged from the merging of North and South Tipperary local authorities. This had the immediate effect of losing €3 million of LEADER funding for the county as each sub-regional area was guaranteed a minimum of €3 million to ensure viability of the programme. Furthermore, the role of the former LAGs (NTLP and STDC) has now been reduced to administering the programme on behalf of the LCDC. Since its inception, LEADER has had a significant impact on individuals, groups and communities. Given the much reduced budget of the forthcoming programme, and the diminution of self-determined, endogenous development, it cannot be hoped that the 2014-2020 programme will make as positive an impact on the development of rural areas in the future.

Conclusion

From the outset, the practicalities around the implementation of the *Local Government Reform Act 2014*, and its implications for local governance and rural development, have been clouded in confusion. It appears that this confusion has been fostered and encouraged. This research was conducted very early in the reform process and the implications are only beginning to unfold. However, there are clear indications that significant changes in the *modus operandi* of local representation and rural development have occurred.

In the context of Tipperary, as a direct result of the 2014 *Act*, citizens have lost large numbers of their public representatives. Instead of 'facilitating greater public participation and civic engagement', this weakens a citizen's ability to engage in the political process. In a parallel process County Tipperary, which had two 3-seater constituencies, one in the north and one in the south, now has one (almost[9]) unified 5-seater constituency. This loss of one parliamentary seat further distances people from their public representatives and weakens the county as a whole by having fewer Dáil representatives. County Tipperary as a whole, is left with five municipal districts; two 'head-offices' for the local authority; two 'local' development companies; two tourist areas promoted differently by Fáilte Ireland; two HSE areas where health service provision can differ dependent upon where in the county you and your family live, and a county so large that the most southern third of the county could find itself with no Dáil representation after the upcoming (Feb 26th 2016) general election.

It is too early in the reform process to state with any certainty how much the municipal districts will compensate for the amalgamation of local authorities and the abolition of town and borough councils, or to what extent LCDCs and PPNs will facilitate meaningful citizen engagement. What is certain is that the spatial dimension of the restructuring process presents significant practical problems for local representatives, and for the citizens they represent in terms of accessing both representation and services.

In the process of 'alignment' of local government and local development, decision-making powers have shifted from bottom-up, local groups to committees of local government. Despite the rhetoric to the contrary, it appears that the reform process has initiated the erosion of a bottom-up model of local development and has started to replace it with a more centralised decision-making model that is much more closely aligned to the county council structure. While this structure is idealised as a forum for citizen engagement, it is subject to greater influence by local authorities, including unelected officials. Moreover, this *de facto* centralisation of power compromises the self-determination of local communities. The loss of organically evolved, community-based administrative structures to more centralised governance structures may, in the future, come to be recognised as the cannibalisation of local development by local government.

[9] The fact that some County Tipperary voters in the northern portion of the county will now be voting in the Offaly constituency gives a small insight into just how unified the county actually is.

While we acknowledge that the reforms are in their early stages, it is difficult to argue with the *Irish Times* editorial (3 March 2015) where it was stated that "The small financial savings that may have been secured by this local government reform is more than offset by the social losses that have resulted. Small communities are less well represented and local democracy is weakened rather than strengthened by the change … Ireland is already a highly centralised state, and the further elimination of local representation reinforces that position… now some within the coalition [notably the Minister of Public Expenditure and Reform – Brendan Howlin] recognise that [aspects of this reform] was a mistake."

References

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2012). *Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government.* Stationery Office, Dublin.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2014). *Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Local Community Development Committees*. Stationery Office, Dublin. http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/LocalGovernment/Administration/FileDownLoad,38547,en.pdf

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. "Hogan welcomes the most radical reform of local government in over 100 years." 31 May 2014. (http://www.environ.ie/en/LocalGovernment/LocalGovernmentReform/News/MainBody,38159,en.htm).

Department of the Taoiseach (2011). *Programme for Government (2011-2016)*. http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Work_Of_The_Department/Programme_for_Government/Programme_for_Government_2011-2016.pdf.

FRC, 2013. Front-Runner Local Community Development Committees – Operating Guidelines and Terms of Reference September 2013

http://www.proxectosymbios.eu/descargas/newsletter/newsletter_symbios_15_2015_en.pdf.

Hussey, G. (1993). *Ireland Today: Anatomy of a Changing State,* Townhouse; Dublin

Local Government Reform Act 2014. http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2014/act/1/enacted/en/html .

Local Government Act 2001.

http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2001/act/37/enacted/en/html.

Local Government Bill 2013, Houses of the Oireachtas, Dublin.

Oireachtas Library and Research Service (2012). Spotlight, no.8, special issue on Local Government Reform.

Quinlivan, A. "Local Government 2025: How will local democracy fare?" Paper presented at the IMPACT Conference, Dublin, 28 April 2015.

Quinn, (2015) "How do we Compare?"– Political Studies Association Ireland Annual Conference, Cork 16-18 October.

Symbios Project http://www.proxectosymbios.eu /descargas/newsletter/newsletter_symbios_15 2015_en.pdf.

Taskforce on Active Citizenship, Dublin, March 2007.

The Irish Times, "A welcome rethink on town councils", 3 March 2015. (http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/a-welcome-rethink-on-town-councils-1.2123277).

The Nationalist, "Abolition of councils a mistake - battle now on to restore them". 8 March 2015. http://www.nationalist.ie/news/local-news/abolition-of-councils-a-mistake-battle-now-on-to-restore-them-1-6613293.

The Tipperary Star, "Re-instate Town Councils, says Wood", 17 April 2015. http://www.tipperarystar.ie/news/local-news/re-instate-town-councils-says-wood-1-6693451.

Tipp Tattler, "Morris Rejects Optimistic Tipperary Council Merger Report", 21 September 2015. http://tipptatler.ie/2015/09/morris-rejects-optimistic-tipperary-council-merger-report/.

Tipperary County Council (2015). Draft County Tipperary Local Economic and Community Plan, 2015-

2020. October 2015.

Working Group Report on Citizen Engagement with Local Government. Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, February 2014. http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Community/CommunityVoluntarySupports/FileDownLoad,36779,en.pdf.

A TRADITION OF INDEPENDENT THINKING





Strategic Research Fund

Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation (OVPRI)

ISS21 (Institute for Social Sciences in the 21st century) is an interdisciplinary research institute for the social sciences that seeks to build, sustain and enhance research on social, economic and cultural issues that will shape Ireland during the 21st century. The Institute brings together social scientists from a broad range of disciplines within University College Cork to pursue research at Irish and international levels in interdisciplinary areas such as citizenship, childhood, innovation and creativity, family, gender, health, migration, social justice and sustainability. ISS21 is affiliated to the Irish Social Science Platform (ISSP), an all-island programme of theoretical, applied and comparative research and graduate training focused upon the core themes of Knowledge, Innovation, Society and Space, coherently linking together significant and well-established centres of social science expertise across a partnership of third-level institutions.

The Local and Community Development Working Group is a sub-group of the ISS21 Civil Society Research Cluster. The mission of this research cluster is the promotion of inter-disciplinary research and knowledge exchange with civil society organisations that seek innovative and sustainable approaches to social justice and inclusion.

This research initiative was funded by the UCC Strategic Research Fund.