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Government and Community Development in Ireland: The Contested Subjects of Professionalism and Expertise

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Abstract

This paper historicises the recent and ongoing professionalisation of community development in the Republic of Ireland. The term professionalisation refers both to the designation and accreditation of a distinctive community work occupation *and* a wider set of processes that effect more strategic approaches to the planning, delivery and evaluation of community organisations. The paper reviews some tensions associated with professionalisation; tensions that closely relate to community work's reputation as a 'bottom-up' or 'participatory' strategy. It also interrogates community development's place as a strategy of government in contemporary Ireland. In so doing it re-considers the assumed separateness and distinctiveness of the state and community sectors, arguing that the state has been centrally implicated in calling the community sector into being. In their turn community development organisations have shaped and mediated policy delivery on the ground. It is these processes of hybridisation, co-operation, antagonism and struggle that have given professionalisation its momentum.

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Rosie R. Meade

Introduction; Community Development as Government

> The tradition of community work in the Republic of Ireland and in the North of Ireland is vocational and professional, paid and unpaid. A distinct discipline and ethos has evolved, committed to working professionally and collectively with communities for change, inclusion and equality. The discipline is strong in its dedication to networking, solidarity and engagement with all of the stakeholders including central government and local authorities (Ad hoc Group 2008:12-13)[1]

This statement constructs community development as a unique and committed form of practice that is inherently oriented towards democratic and participatory outcomes. The statement also emerges out of and reveals something important about the contemporary social sphere in the Republic of Ireland[2], where community development is claimed both as a form of welfare intervention and of grass-roots activism by a diverse range of statutory, community-based and service provision organisations. In a context where the practice of community development articulates plural and often disputed meanings and expectations, the Ad Hoc Group's document 'Towards Standards for Quality Community Work' (2008:18) is one attempt to specify community work's[3] distinctive 'knowledge, skills, qualities, values and practice principles' in order to protect its integrity irrespective of the setting within which it is deployed. Significantly, the document seeks to reconcile its view of community development as a progressive praxis with the concern that it be 'professionally robust and effective', that there should be 'standards for professional community work' and its expectation that the identification of those standards is a first step towards 'developing a framework for the endorsement of community work education and training' (Ad Hoc Group 2009:29).

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[1] The Ad Hoc Group came together in 2005 and involved representatives of organisations with a commitment to community development in both the Republic and the North of Ireland. Participating organisations included; Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Ulster People's College, Community Workers Co-operative, Community Action Network, POBAL, Combat Poverty Agency and University of Ulster Jordanstown (Ad Hoc Group 2008: 6-7)

[2] I am using 'Ireland' as shorthand for the Republic of Ireland throughout the paper. Where the North of Ireland is also referenced, the term 'Island of Ireland' is used.

[3] Here the terms community development and community work are used interchangeably, as is the common practice in the Republic of Ireland.

This paper historicises the recent and ongoing professionalisation of community development in the Republic of Ireland, a tendency that emerged during 1970s but became pronounced over the last two decades. In practice professionalisation is associated with a number of co-existing and related trends including: the displacement of activists or volunteers by paid staff; university level accreditation of an expanding community work profession, what Bondi (2005:509) calls 'academicisation'; the creation of a policy active community sector; participation by local and national community sector organisations in formal partnerships with the state; targeted state funding for community initiatives; the deployment of community development programmes as social inclusion strategies; and an ever growing emphasis on managerialism and accountability within the sector (Ad Hoc Group 2008; Bane 2009; Bondi 2005; Daly 2008; Forde 2009; Fyfe 2005; Meade 2005; Motherway 2006; Whelan 1989). The term professionalisation calls to mind the designation and accreditation of a distinctive community work occupation, and the Ad Hoc Group (2008) document is a tentative move towards the creation of a system of self-regulation for community workers. This paper acknowledges, however, that professionalisation also encompasses a wider set of processes that (re)shape community groups into more formalised organisations and effect more strategic approaches to the planning, delivery and evaluation of social inclusion technologies[4]. Borrowing from Escobar (2005:45), this broader concept of professionalisation relates to the ways by which community development, and related practices, have been imbued with the politics of expert knowledge, how they are situated within a distinct and highly specialised 'social sphere', and how they appeal to consciously 'rational' forms of intervention.

This paper reviews some debates associated with the professionalisation of community development; debates that centre on its reputation as a 'bottom-up' or 'participatory' strategy. But this analysis goes beyond an inventory of professionalisation's pros and cons by interrogating community development's place as a technique of government in contemporary Ireland. Irrespective of the wide-ranging and often divergent expectations of its likely achievements, community development is typically defined as a participatory process that can *empower* socially excluded individuals and communities (Department of Social Community and Family Affairs 2000; Lee 2006; Motherway 2006). In Ireland, as elsewhere, discourses of

[4] The word technologies is chosen deliberately in this context and it is used in a Foucauldian (1991) sense, to situate the goal of 'social inclusion' against an appreciation of the myriad 'technologies of government'. Rose (1999:52) explains that those 'technologies are imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired events'.

empowerment are imbricated within broader policy developments, whereby the state is no longer expected to satisfy all its population's needs but instead is recast as 'the facilitating state, the enabling state or the state as animator' (Rose 1999:174). The Government White Paper 'A Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity' explicitly declared the State's role to be that 'of enabler' (Department of Social Community and Family Affairs 2000:132) in the interests of 'a more participatory democracy where active citizenship is fostered' (2000:14). Significantly, such exhortations of 'active citizenship' also chimed with efforts by successive governments to institute the economic and social policy reforms that would service a 'competitive, liberalised market economy' (Kirby 2002:162); in other words, neo-liberalism Irish style. Nonetheless, while I acknowledge the importance of a political-economic analysis to a fuller appreciation of the factors that have shaped the growth of the Irish community sector and the social conditions to which it must respond, this paper focuses on the status of community development itself; how it came to be deployed as a technique of government and the contests and dilemmas this has engendered.

While contemporary conceptions of neo-liberalism or active citizenship are suggestive a more peripheral role for *the Government*, we should, as Wendy Larner (2000:6) warns, be careful of concluding that there is by implication 'less governance'. Foucault's (1991) concept of governmentality calls attention to the multiple ways by which power serves not to repress conduct but to vitalise it or call it into being. Accordingly, to govern is to 'conduct conduct' (Rose and Miller 2008:14) and the will to govern is predicated on the diagnosis of problems - such as community disempowerment or exclusion - that must be managed, solved or resolved. Community development thus becomes a technique through which the more strategic purposes of a diverse range of actors, within the state system and civil society, may be realised. This conceptualisation of government also emphasises that the public enactment of power does not occur in crudely hierarchical ways, with the state as sole determining arbiter, but that individuals, families and communities absorb, assume, resist, claim and interface with power and that they too are implicated in the character, form and techniques of government within any given society. It is as Kim McKee observes (2009:468) an 'older and more comprehensive meaning of government' as ranging across a 'continuum' where problems to be managed might relate to the most private or intimate aspects of life and the most public or high profile of issues.

It is in this sense that community development with its aspirations to create empowered, active or participative citizens can be understood as a technique of government. As such it addresses

and seeks to recruit subjects as 'self-responsible' but also 'as subject to certain emotional bonds of affinity' (Rose 1996/2008:91) that are expressed as an active allegiance to place, issue or identity based forms of collectivity. It also re-orients the terrain of governmental action and intervention away from the single and unified sphere of the nation – or what Rose (1996/2008:90) calls 'government from the social point of view' - towards a more diversified, pluralised and particularised sphere of co-existing but discrete communities. In Ireland, however, where discourses of community, parish and locality have a long-standing popular currency (O'Carroll:2002) and where non-state actors have been key welfare providers in a subordinated social sphere, there is a definite historical continuity in contemporary celebrations of active citizenship.

The contested terrain of state/community sector relationships in the Island of Ireland has generated considerable academic interest (Forde 2009; McVeigh 2002; Meade 2005; Murphy 2002; Robson, 2000). Terry Robson (2000:224), applying a Gramscian analysis, explores how even apparently 'radical' community organisations, may contribute to an extension of the 'hegemonic values of the state' as they become submerged in the bureaucracy of contemporary practice. In analysing community development's place as a technique of government this paper adopts a more Foucauldian approach and re-considers the assumed separateness or distinctiveness of the state and community sectors. It highlights how the state has been centrally implicated in calling the community sector into being and how, in their turn, community organisations have shaped and mediated policy delivery on the ground. Professionalisation has gained momentum from the varying experiences of hybridisation, co-operation, antagonism and power struggle that occur at the interface of these supposedly discrete sectors, and some related issues are discussed in later sections. Ultimately, this is not the story of the seamless rise to recognition of a community work profession; instead this story is punctuated by reversals and antimonies that relate to contests over expertise, evidence and the relative significance of the social sphere and its relationship to the economic.

A Pre-History of Professionalised Community Development

The antecedents of what is now called community development can be traced to the 19th Century co-operative and land-agitation movements and to the emergence of the rural self-help movement, Muintir Na Tire, in the 1930s. Although they diverged in their higher purposes and

use of tactics, each of these movements sought to engage rural dwellers in collective action in order to protect and sustain their livelihoods. They reflected what Curtin and Varley (2002:21) call 'radical communitarian populism', in so far as they challenged political and state elites, embodied a 'participative organizational culture' and focused on 'concrete projects'. In its efforts to reverse rural decline in the face of modernisation, emigration and industrialisation, Muintir promoted the Catholic social teaching of subsidiarity, according to which the state should desist from intervention in areas of life and welfare that could be provided for by families and communities (Devereux 1993; Curtin and Varley 2002). Community development was invoked by its founder, Father John Hayes, as a unifying social force that could mobilise rural parishes in the name of survival through mutual aid. More practically he exhorted communities to organise local guilds that would provide for their educational, cultural and infrastructural needs. Similar activities are undertaken by today's community development projects; although in the 1930s the now irrepressible discourses of empowerment and social inclusion had yet to make their presence felt.

Talk of self-help or subsidiarity was not just the preserve of Muintir and its parish guilds. It reflected more general tendencies in Irish social policy in the post-independence period where welfare schemes evolved slowly and state intervention around issues such as unemployment, housing or poverty reduction tended to be ad hoc or precipitated by crisis (Considine and Dukelow 2009; Dukelow 2002; Ferriter 2009). The post-colonial Free State retained many features that had been implanted under British rule, including a centralised approach to economic planning, a privileged role for the Department of Finance and a conservative fiscal outlook. In this context, the 'social' as a sphere of government (Miller and Rose 1992/2008) was constituted by the actions and interventions of voluntary bodies, the churches, cultural movements and community organisations, most notably in the health and education fields. 2009's shameful Ryan Report (2009), which catalogued neglect and abuse within church run child 'care' institutions, is just one illustration of the state's readiness to out-source to the religious orders its disciplinary and regulatory functions.

In the period after 1922 we observe the making of an Irish social sphere by multiple architects of government, but it is worth emphasising that this sphere was effectively subordinated to the economic. Clarke (2007:984) usefully explains that the subordination of the social sphere can take a variety of forms; that it generates 'contradictory' and 'uneven' outcomes and practices. From the outset, the processes and pace of Irish social policy formation demonstrated that the

'needs of the economy' would always be treated as pre-eminent, with welfare approached either as an afterthought or *'subjugated'* (Clarke 2007:975) in the interests of competitiveness or austerity. The subordination of the social sphere also means '*domesticating the social'* (Clarke 2007:976), whereby welfare issues are treated as private concerns, best resolved in and by the family. Confirmation of the special place of 'the family'[5] was locked into the 1937 Constitution and the notorious Mother and Child[6] debacle of 1951 demonstrated the discursive power of familism as a bulwark against collectivised forms of health care. Even as more consciously interventionist state welfare schemes began to emerge during the 1960s – e.g. the universalisation of access to post-primary education - such moves were rationalised with reference to their future benefits for labour market participation and inward investment (O'Sullivan 2005). In this sense state policy also '*functionaliz[ed] the social*' (Clarke 2007:976); its worth and effectiveness were predicated on its potential contribution to economic growth, rather than on any other inherent benefits.

Against this historical backdrop more professionalised forms of community development emerged during the 1970s and 1980s. The pluralised and expanding social sphere provided a home for the discourses and techniques of community empowerment and inclusion. In its turn, community development contributed to the extension and re-shaping of governmental strategies by reaching into marginalised communities through adult education classes, job clubs, local employment schemes and a range of other cultural and social initiatives. But given the subordinated status of the social sphere itself, those very factors that contributed to the incorporation of community development within state policy, would make it vulnerable to retrenchment if and when economic priorities changed.

In the Republic of Ireland community development was formally constituted as a technique of anti-poverty policy with the implementation of the first EEC Anti-Poverty programme, officially launched in 1975. Its form was influenced by the 'rediscovery' of Irish poverty in

[5] Articles 41.1.2°: 'The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State.'

[6] The 'Mother and Child scheme' was a proposal by Minister for Health, Dr Noel Browne to introduce non-means tested free health care for all mothers and children up to the ages of 16, regardless of family circumstances. It generated opposition from the Catholic hierarchy and the medical profession.

1971[7], the US War on Poverty and the British Home Office Community Development Projects of the 1960s (National Committee on Pilot Schemes 1981). The EEC programme was overseen by a 'National Committee' and involved twenty-four separate schemes, including thirteen pilot community action projects. Significantly, it also involved the training and employment of seventeen 'field staff' to 'develop, plan and supervise the various local projects and to enable them to develop an appreciation and knowledge of their role and responsibilities in this work' (National Committee 1981, 102)[8]. As the training programme sought to shape the subjectivities of the community workers, the projects themselves sought to responsibilise and shape the self-images of local people. Projected outcomes included: 'to enable people to work together'; 'to help people become conscious of the structures, services, attitudes that constitute the fabric and dynamic of the institutions in society which control, order and regulate their lives' and; 'to kindle a mood of self-confidence, assertiveness a sense of identity and of self-value among disadvantaged groups' (National Committee 1981:191). Previous forms of community action had also demonstrated, if not consciously articulated, a 'will to empower' (Cruickshank 1999), but with this programme a distinctive role was carved out for trained community workers as central animators of these processes of individual and collective change.

Nonetheless this programme did not herald the mainstreaming of professional community work or community development approaches. In practice, employment opportunities were often tied to time-limited pilots, such as the second European Anti-poverty programme, or to small-scale initiatives that received residual state funding. From 1977 the regional Health Boards, as they were then known, began to employ small numbers of community workers to process grants and support voluntary social service organisations. This effectively meant the continued domestication of aspects of the social, insofar as essential preventive and respite care were still provided by family, voluntary and community groups. However, it also ensured that the social sphere was infused with a new 'rational' spirit as it became the subject of oversight by state employed community workers. Despite the paltry levels of funding and the absence of a coherent state policy for resourcing community work, Irish government discourses emphasised the positive contribution community organisations could make to poverty reduction in the

[7] This is a reference to a paper presented by Seamus O'Cinnéide at the Kilkenny conference, in which he estimated that a quarter of the population lived in poverty (National Committee 1981)

[8] This programme had a chequered history and the Final Report makes for fascinating reading as a review of some of the issues that emerged. Interestingly, Final Report comments that this training, because it was inadequately conceived, had a 'negative and divisive effect on the programme as a whole' (1981:103)

recessionary years of the 1980s. With the establishment of the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) by statute in 1986 this link between community development and social inclusion was made explicit and the agency was charged with;

> 'the collection and dissemination of information on poverty and community development and acting as a centre for counselling and training in relation to, and for assisting, encouraging and the giving of information on, community development as a means of overcoming poverty' [Government of Ireland 1986:Section 4(2)(c)][9];

Likewise, it would be inaccurate to assume that the form and purpose of community mobilisation was determined solely by the policies of central government. Between the 1960s and 1980s there were alternative approaches to local empowerment that were comparatively, if not absolutely, independent of state programming. These included community councils, parish hall building initiatives, cultural and economic co-operatives and social service committees. There were also numerous activist groups – e.g. Coiste Cearta Síbialta na Gaeilge, National Tenants Organisation, Dublin Housing Action Committee and Concerned Parents Against Drugs - that deployed protest tactics in pursuit of overtly contentious social agendas and directly challenged dominant economic and development discourses. However as Hindess (in Rose 1996/2008:92) observes, even when they are deeply rooted in real-life places, community organisations typically wrestle with the 'Janus-faced logic' of activism. Activists rationalise their public interventions with reference to the needs or wants of communities that 'already exist' but the members of those communities are implicitly defined as insufficiently aware of their necessary 'allegiance' (Rose 1996/2008:92) to those collectivities. Notably, some groups - although by no means all - that initially exhibited a kind of outlaw status became more institutionalised over time, as their later incarnations began engaging with state funding and partnership structures.

[9] Since 1986 the Combat Poverty Agency had responsibility for promoting research and policy development to address issues of poverty in Ireland. It was also an advocate for community development as a social inclusion strategy. In summer 2008 Minister Mary Hanafin at the Department of Social and Family Affairs made provision for a review of its activities and it has since been amalgamated with the Office for Social Inclusion to form the Social Inclusion Division in the Department of Social and Family Affairs; thus losing its independent status

In 1990 the then Minister for Social Welfare, Michael Woods, launched the Community Development Fund (CDF) to provide grant assistance for the creation of community resource centres and the employment of project co-ordinators in fifteen areas of disadvantage. This initiative would later evolve into the Community Development Programme and by 2010 somewhere in the region of 180 projects were operating in locality based and issue specific communities across the country (Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs 2010:www.pobail.ie). The launch of the CDF therefore represents a key moment in both the expansion of the community development workforce and in bolstering community development's status as a technique of government. Announcing the Fund, Minister Woods explained that projects should emphasise; 'involving local communities in developing approaches to tackling the problems they face and [on] creating successful partnerships between the voluntary and statutory agencies in the area' (see Cullen 1994:2). By 1999 the research consultancy NEXUS was tasked with evaluating the expanding Community Development Programme (CDP) with reference to its key objectives. Among other factors it considered if and how projects had fostered 'the emergence of community leadership in disadvantaged communities and facilitated participation by such communities in … partnerships and other local development and social development initiatives' (NEXUS 2002:6). It also assessed the 'extent to which people have been enabled, by involvement in activities funded under the Programme, to progress further to mainstream job education and training opportunities' (NEXUS 2002:6). Official policy discourses therefore emphasised the CDP's role, in empowering, responsibilizing and activating citizens (see Clarke 2005) to assume subjectivities appropriate to the economic and social climate of the day. Individually, citizens would work their way out of poverty and into inclusion: collectively, they would become partners in government.

As Kieran Allen (2007 56) has observed, during the 1990s social partnership became a kind of hegemonic shorthand for the 'national good', while its critics were largely dismissed as naysayers or slaves to outdated 'ideology'. Charging former combatants, such as employers and unions, with collective responsibility for economic planning and individual responsibility for disciplining their respective sectors, partnership played a crucial role in normalising neo-liberalism in Ireland. The institutionalisation of partnership – from the late 1980s - coincided with an unprecedented assault on public spending by the Charles Haughey led government and the partnership agreements rationalised and set in motion a regime of low corporation taxes, unconditional

industrial peace, competiveness, flexibilisation of the work force and public sector 'reform' (Allen 2000; Allen 2007; Kirby 2002). Throughout that decade and into the 21st century the national trend was mirrored at the local, and in name of social inclusion, social cohesion, and local government renewal, a succession of policies provided for the creation of a complex infrastructure of area-based partnerships[10]. Indeed, one of the declared purposes of successive national agreements was to extend the practice of partnership across the economic and social spheres (Kirby 2002). Local partnerships deployed community workers on the ground and were managed by coalitions of business, trade union, statutory and local spokespeople. Here too the emphasis was on problem solving strategies that would deny or transcend *a priori* political and economic cleavages: the practice of giving recognition to different sectors reflected an effort to contain inequalities of power and resources, rather than to resolve them (Allen 2000; Allen 2007; Kirby 2002; Meade 2005; Murphy 2002).

In 1996 a Community and Voluntary Pillar was created to sit alongside the already existing Trade Union, Farming and Business pillars, for the 'Partnership 2000' discussions. This place had been staked out and claimed by a range of organisations that lobbied for the right of a distinct sector to represent constituencies, such as women, Travellers, migrants, young people and the socially excluded (Meade 2005). In so doing, these organisations asserted that partnership could embody alternative rationalities, associated with concepts of justice, democracy, recognition and social equality. Irrespective of the actual influence it was able to exert, the creation of this

[10] The second national partnership agreement 'The Programme for Economic & Social Progress' (1991) made provision for the creation of local partnerships in 12 designated areas. This programme was later extended to include 38 'Area Based Partnerships' and 33 additional 'Community Groups'. It subsequently became known as the *Local Development Social Inclusion Programme*. *European Structural Fund Programmes* (1994-1999) also contributed to the extension of partnership approaches in community development e.g. LEADER 1 and 2, New Opportunities for Women (NOW), INTEGRA and URBAN. *The Task Force Report on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems (Aug 1998)*, lead to the creation new partnerships allied to local government; i.e. County and City Development boards (after 2000). In 2001, the RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment & Development) programme was launched to focus on integrated development and social inclusion in 25 of the most disadvantaged areas of the state. Again it emphasised partnership and was connected into local government system.

Pillar represented a kind of victory for organisations that had sought official recognition for the sector and its particular expertise. It also suggests that social partnership and its techniques were not merely products of a top-down imposition of the neo-liberal agenda, but were also expressions 'of successful campaigns to decentralise decision-making' (Bondi 2005:500) and broaden participation in the policy field.

The net result has been a tangible increase in the visibility and size of the community sector, but with that sector largely dependent on state funding for its survival. The Hidden Landscape Survey (Donoghue et al 2006) found that the state is the most important source of income for all non-profits, including charities and community development groups, with 58.9% of total income emanating from this source. In this somewhat 'manufactured civil society' (Hodgson 2004; Meade 2005) workers are employed directly by local management committees, but financed by the state; projects assert a primary allegiance to local places but are typically integrated within more general programmes. To avail of the advocacy, resource and policy-making opportunities that engagement with the state promises, groups must clarify legal structures and managerial systems while demonstrating more strategic approaches to planning and delivery. Professionalisation thus takes on a self-generating momentum and professionals become regarded as indispensible if organisations are to negotiate and manage these complex roles and responsibilities.

Dilemmas of Expertise and the Limits of Professionalism

The Irish community development sector is characterised by significant deviations in terms of pay, working conditions and entry points, with employees displaying a variety of third-level, adult education and experiential credentials. Community work does not yet have a collectively agreed or state recognised qualification, although growing numbers of universities and colleges have been providing professional education and training programmes since the 1980s. As in Aotearoa New Zealand, the creation of such programmes coincided with a surge in participation in third level education, and there is a similar 'symbiotic relationship' (Larner and Craig 2005:411) between the expansion in size and scope of tertiary education and the professionalisation of community development. Furthermore, community work education typically occurs in tandem with the formation of youth workers and in recent years the emphasis of Irish youth work has swung away from universal provision based on a youth club model, towards special projects with demonstrably 'at risk' groups of young people. In line with the responsibilisation of youth work as an instrument of justice, health and education

policy, many youth workers asked that their skills and inputs be accorded the same professional regard as teachers and social workers (Bane 2009). In January 2006 *the North-South Education and Training Standards Committee for Youth Work* was established for 'the professional endorsement of courses and programmes of education and training' in third level institutions in the island of Ireland (Morgan and Kitching 2009:4). Given their overlap, it will be interesting to observe if and how the processes of professional identity formation associated with accredited youth work training will shape the professional subjectivities of future community workers.

At the risk of reification, professionalisation can be seen to present two principal dilemmas for community work. The first concerns the particular form that professionalisation is taking; suggesting that such processes are not inherently problematic but that state interference and control is corrupting any progressive potential. In particular does the malign influence of partnership, with its protocols and bureaucratic modus operandi, suffocate more creative forms of professional practice (Bane 2009; Loughrey 2002; Shaw 2008)? The second dilemma is more troubling: is professionalism inherently inimical to community development's purpose because it exalts a narrow conception of expertise at the expense of more democratic forms of knowledge exchange? Community development's supporters insist that its stock in trade is the voluntary participation of citizens, as opposed to clients or service users, and the context specific wisdom generated through community membership is the primary resource of action. Consequently Ife (2002:277) holds that '[I]deas of skill sharing, empowerment and the 'community knows best' are simply not compatible with a professional model of practice'.

Since the 1990s community development's participatory claims have been repeated almost unreflexively in state policy documents. The White Paper, '*Supporting Voluntary Activity'* (2000) agreed that community organisations do contribute to a more participatory democracy by providing much needed spaces for the inclusion of voiceless or marginalized constituencies. But, critics argue, the cumulative impact of state patronage may override community development's more democratic potential (Daly 2008; Forde 2009; Gaynor 2009; Meade 2005). This paradox was highlighted by the (now defunct) policy advisory agency the National Economic and Social Forum [NESF] (2003:71) which warned, '[T]oo much control, social engineering or provision of external incentives could negate the very principle of an active civil society'. Such concerns are not peculiar to the Irish case and a range of international commentators have identified similar fault-lines along the borderlands between civil society

and the state (Fyfe 2005; Ife 2002; Markowitz and Tice 2002; Shaw 2008). While professionalisation is not solely reducible to either the influence of partnership or to the increasing availability of state resources, in Ireland these are inter-related and co-incidental processes. Research by Airey (2006) found that CDP personnel claimed a general willingness to become more policy active but their actual policy work tended to encompass a narrow range of activities, such as attendance at conferences, participation in network meetings and engagement with partnership structures. Expectations of the professional responsibilities of workers are being shaped in a context that presents 'partnership' as the default expression for community participation in the public and political spheres. Therefore, active citizenship and community empowerment often translate as engagement with local institutions and adaptation to their formalised routines. For community workers a growing share of their time and energy is dedicated towards managing those relationships (Airey 2006; Fyfe 2005; Lee 2006; Loughrey 2002; Motherway 2006; Murphy 2002); the upshot being, paradoxically, a less autonomous and more bureaucratised community sector

In a revealing and ultimately distorting semantic slippage The White Paper cited Ireland's partnership institutions and processes as evidence of participative democracy in action (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs 2000). More accurately they can be seen as comparatively privatised spheres where 'select' individuals and groups participate in discussions beyond the radar of broader public commentary (Meade 2005; O'Cinnéide 1998). Partnership reflects a distinctive model of state patronage, where civil society is no longer constituted as 'dependent' or 'separate', but is instead responsibilised as an 'equal' in the technical arts of government. By implication, some organisations are constituted as insiders or partners, and others, the non- or anti- participants as outsiders. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that inclusion in partnership was actively courted by community and voluntary sector organisations because it offered highly prized access to policy-making processes and affirmed their role as representatives of socially excluded groups. These kinds of strategic calculations led many organisations to relate to partnership as if it was 'the only game in town' (Murphy 2002), but it always was just one possible strategy among others. Alternatives might have emphasised conflict over consensus, localised as opposed to state funding, voluntarism over professionalism and all would have generated costs and benefits in terms of autonomy, influence, status and resources. Community sector organisations actively contributed to the normalisation and extension of partnership, but did so for many divergent reasons (Loughrey 2002; Meade 2005; Murphy 2002). Partnership in turn contributed to the normalisation and

extension of professionalised community development: community workers became its 'strategic brokers' (Larner and Craig 2005) and their skills and expertise became essential to its localised delivery across the nation.

Critiques of professionalised community development can go deeper, raising fundamental questions about the status of citizen as opposed to expert knowledge in its processes and institutions. In Ireland wide-scale acceptance of community development's professional status is still a work in progress, and within the community sector, key actors and organisations have not always been convinced that professionalism is desirable or justifiable. For example, in the 1980s the Community Workers Co-operative argued that;

> The process of professionalisation is about gaining status. It is a search for power, money and control over the practice of community work. It is a process whereby a small group decides on the rules of entry and works to have them accepted and so build up a membership. The profession resulting from this process would be: exclusive with restricted right of entry; self regulating and as such not answerable to the community (cited in Whelan 1989:154)

This analysis resembled that of Ivan Illich (1977:12) who denounced outright the pursuit of professional identity in the social sphere, claiming it 'withered' politics and infantilised voters: we abdicate our citizen power by entrusting 'technocrats' to define public needs and the appropriate means of securing them. Consequently, issues of poverty, inequality and other social contradictions become recast as technical problems, best resolved by the application of expert knowledge and advice. Illich (1977:20) argued that professions come to resemble an exclusive priesthood, the power of which is legitimated from on high, and that each time the state licences the claims of a professional interest group power is transferred from the public sphere into the 'hands of a self-accrediting elite'

By portraying professional expertise as an exclusive possession that is exercised with absolute impunity over and above the citizenry, anti-professional discourses may disregard the efforts workers make to democratise their relationships with communities. Instead of diminishing or actively suppressing community wisdom and retreating away from politics, workers may use their status productively to validate and support more creative forms of practice (Bondi 2005;

Shaw 2008). The Ad Hoc Group has explored the possible development of 'a framework for the endorsement of community work education and training' (Ad Hoc Group 2008:29). Significantly, the 'Towards Standards' (2008:18) document seeks to offer 'an ethical basis for community work' that can facilitate 'a better understanding of the role and function of community work by all involved and all who come in contact with it'. Defining values such as participation, equality, social justice, collective action and empowerment (2008:22-26) as inherent to its practice, may constitute a pre-emptive ring-fencing of an autonomous and politically committed vision of community development in the face of state interference or funding retrenchment. It may constitute an effort to inscribe alternative or progressive rationalities onto the concept of professionalism itself, so that the community worker's professional identity is grounded in an active repudiation of the kinds of hierarchism that Illich satirises. Furthermore, professionals are themselves 'the targets of professional rationality; they are both the governor and the governed' (Fournier 1999:285). In the name of an avowedly participatory practice, 'Towards Standards' is one attempt to conduct the conduct of future community workers as it seeks to identify foundational values and key skills appropriate to their role.

Ultimately, it is difficult to imagine how community work as a process could ever be immune from expertise. Cruickshank (1999) explains that all assertions of the need for community empowerment, be they 'radical' or 'professional', are born of assessments, sometimes explicit but often unstated, of the needs and desirable outcomes for the groups and individuals involved. Similarly the practices of community work, those sites where the transfers of power that constitute empowerment actually occur, are themselves power relationships. To name people as disempowered or excluded and to seek to engage them in 'improving' activities is always an expression of power and expertise. Of course this, as Cruickshank (1999) observes, does not by necessity render community work wrongheaded or politically suspect, indeed one of the distinctive features of community empowerment strategies is their emphasis on popular or local wisdom. Nonetheless it suggests that professionalism cannot be accepted unquestioningly or monolithically in community work; it is inevitably the site of competing and contested knowledge claims and there is nothing self-evident about its expertise.

At this point, it might be worth asking if the term 'professional community worker' is anything more than a floating signifier, particularly since the practice of community development appears to have such an uneasy relationship with expertise. Community workers must negate

or disavow their expert status in order to engage as equals with community members, but they must assert some form of expertise in the context of policy, funding or partnership negotiations with the state. Given their dependence on public resources, community workers are themselves subjects of and subjected to external oversight. As Nikolas Rose (1996/2008:108-109) explains, with New Public Management's (NPM) incursions into the social sphere, conceptions of professional expertise have been revised in line with market models; professionals must prove their worth with reference to costs, benefits and outcomes, and must demonstrate their willingness to be subjected to audits and review. In Ireland NPM has been embraced by central government, where there is now talk of 'Transforming Public Services' with reforms underpinned by the following criteria:

> Achieve improved performance by organisations and individuals;
>
> Create flexibility in the deployment of people, assets and other resources;
>
> Identify the precise transformation agenda in each sector and engage and mobilise the necessary actors; and
>
> Achieve greater efficiency, effectiveness and economy (http://www.bettergov.ie/eng/Background_Info/)

In this neo-liberal context self-regulation and professional autonomy are decidedly precarious achievements. Significantly, instead of claiming exclusive forms of expertise for community work, the Ad Hoc document (2008:20) underlines its flexibility and openness, while stressing repeatedly its strong value orientation. It names a number of skills as 'core to the practice of community work' and they include, among others, 'research and observation…working with people, empowerment and activation…administration, including fundraising, financial and people management, strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation…leadership, collaborative and partnership working' (2008:20) Aside from being a useful register of the daily demands now made of paid community workers, it also illustrates the extent to which workers' professional roles are bound up with an ability to navigate managerialist responsibilities and procedures.

Unsurprisingly, politically engaged and reflexive community workers will encounter real dilemmas as they attempt to act purposefully within this contested and contradictory terrain. Because of its social inclusion focus community development occurs in those spaces most acutely affected by the withdrawal or absence of public services. It also seeks to empower and activate those citizens who are least likely to be invested in or engaged by existing democratic processes. One ethical challenge for professional community workers lies in having to name

and counter the consequences of neo-liberalism but to do so in the spirit of managerialism so that they 'make their political claims technical or turn their contests into collaboration' (Larner and Craig 2005:419).

Enablement and Discipline; Reviewing the CDP

For community work to achieve a *bona fide* professional status, its professional claims must be accepted and licensed with the active approval of the state. This raises questions regarding the kinds of practice that the state is prepared to validate and support. It also prompts us to ask whether or not the state has a unified vision of community work's purpose, and if so, what it is. As earlier sections showed, the community and state sectors are neither hermetically sealed nor estranged from each other. The community development sector has been constructed along the interface of the state and independent civil society; it is neither one thing nor the other, and it too is an active agent of governmentality in the Foucauldian sense. With the hegemonisation of partnership from the 1990s, the state represented its own responsibilities to the community sector in comparatively benign terms; most obviously with its claim to 'enable' the sector (Department of Social Community and Family Affairs 2000). Even then there was a certain partiality about this assertion. As funding increased and partnership opportunities were extended, the state sought to enable a particular kind of sector; one that would co-operate in government, abide by the economic consensus and fill gaps in the social sphere (Allen 2000; Allen 2007; Forde 2009; Kirby 2002; Meade 2005). If the state adopted the discourses of participatory democracy, it did so, as the following examples suggest, while demonising and side-lining dissenters and invoking its disciplinary powers to keep organisations in check.

Some members of the Community and Voluntary Pillar voted against the 2003-2005 Social Partnership agreement 'Sustaining Progress', on the grounds that it provided insufficient resources or commitments to the socially excluded and the unemployed. The central government response was to exclude those critics from related institutions as punishment for their breach of etiquette (Meade 2005). Cruder still is an example from 2007 when Pavee Point the Travellers rights and community development organisation was censured and subjected to review by then Minister for Justice Brian Lenihan. It had offered support to an 'illegal' Roma encampment on a Dublin Motorway.

> If their [Pavee Point's] involvement was simply to provide humanitarian assistance to these individuals, then I do understand their position. But if their position was that these individuals should be permitted to stay here and that we should set aside the

> whole immigration law of the State, and have a back-door entry policy, then that would be wrong. (Lenihan in Lally and Healy 2007:np)

The Minister was explicit in his assessment of the purpose of projects such as Pavee Point: stick to service provision. However, in its own public statements on this controversy, Pavee Point had never demanded that the government 'set aside' its immigration policy. Instead it consistently stressed that the Roma experienced profound levels of discrimination in Romania, that their living conditions on the M50 were intolerable and asked that the Minster for Justice 'take a humane approach to the families camping in appalling conditions' (Pavee Point June 20th, 2007). The organisation had done precisely what might have been expected of it by a state that was funding it in good faith.

For a Foucauldian analysis it is hugely significant that the minister used the threat of 'review' to put manners on Pavee Point. To 'review' does not necessarily imply 'to close down' or to 'cease funding'. Instead it suggests that the organisation will be reassessed; that it will be evaluated according to its capacity to perform, or that its terms of reference might be re-written. The term perfectly encapsulates how state power serves to simultaneously discipline and enable: how the state seeks not to stop the community sector, but to bring it into line so that it governs and is governed more effectively. In recent years this term 'review' has been invoked a number of times to re-negotiate the purpose of the CDP. Unsurprisingly, these moves have generated anxiety and uncertainty across the community sector and some of the related issues are considered in the final paragraphs of this section.

As noted earlier, the establishment of the CDP was perhaps the most obvious marker that the state accepted community development's potential to empower and activate the socially excluded. In 2003 the Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs instituted a review of the CDP - the Community Development Support Programme as it was then named - that was designed to integrate projects more closely within local government and partnership structures (Meade 2005). This was deemed necessary even though NEXUS (2000), the research agency charged with evaluating the programme, had already commented favourably on the ability of projects to meet core objectives. As the review progressed local projects were placed on interim funding, with no guarantee of long term survival, and were forced to submit revised work plans to the Department. The upshot of this review was that local projects were required to submit their annual work-plans for endorsement by the City/County Development Boards, yet another partnership structure located within the local government system. In other

words, it generated new bureaucratic procedures for community groups, extended state surveillance and deepened the influence of institutionalised partnerships within the sector (Meade 2005).

By 2009 Ireland was deep in recession and with that came the inevitable prescriptions of spending retrenchment, public sector cutbacks and social welfare reform. National level partnership negotiations faltered as it became increasingly difficult to reconcile conflicts both within the Trade Union sector itself and between employer and union spokespeople. Even though Ireland's economic collapse was precipitated by hyperactive markets, unregulated financial speculation and irresponsible models of property development – what Kieran Allen (2009) calls 'casino capitalism' - central government sought to responsibilise the citizenry to take 'its share' of the pain. Announcing the 2009 budget, Minister for Finance, Brian Lenihan revitalised the tired old logic of consensus to proclaim the crisis a technical rather than a political matter and to suggest that hardship was an opportunity rather than a threat;

> This Budget serves no vested interest. Rather, it provides an opportunity for us all to pull together & play our part according to our means so that we can secure the gains which have been the achievement of the men & women of this country. It is, a Cheann Comhairle, no less than a call to patriotic action.' (Brian Lenihan October 14th:2008)

Nonetheless the sugary language of togetherness was accompanied by a concerted effort to isolate the public sector as an obstacle to recovery. Its work conditions, pay rates, and spending priorities were subjected to frenzied assessment by media and government commentators; the implication being that public sector workers were shirking their responsibility to adapt to the new economic order and therefore in urgent need of review. In order to rationalise and prescribe the future course of retrenchment a *Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes* was established and chaired by economist Colm McCarthy. Its report, which became popularly known as the McCarthy Report (2009), recommended €5.3 billion in savings and staff reductions of 17,300. The veneer of economic expertise was drawn upon to legitimise what was, in effect, a reaction to crisis and there is much that can be said about the neo-liberal rationalities that shaped both the establishment of the committee and its findings. In relation to community development there were a number of specific proposals: abolition of the government department that is home to the CDP, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; €10 million reduction in grants for equipment, training and volunteer support; and a €44 million reduction in direct supports for Community Development and Local Development Programmes (McCarthy 2009:37-38). The report also

expressed concerns regarding the breadth of the sector and the prevalence of small organisations, and it advised closer integration between local projects and local government and partnership structures. Not all of the report's recommendations have been or will be implemented, but the document is a reminder to all community and public sector personnel of their vulnerability as workers and of the continuing subordination of the social sphere to the needs of the economy, however coarsely they are defined.

In September 2009 John Curran, Minister of State at the Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, announced that there would be fundamental reforms to the CDP with a new version being ready for 'roll-out in early 2010' (http://www.pobail.ie/en/PressReleases/2009/September/htmltext,9975,en.html). The new programme would require the integration of existing community development projects and local partnership structures (Local Development Social Inclusion Programme - LDSIP). Prior to this all such local community projects were managed by voluntary management committees, but under the new arrangement those committees would be rendered redundant and projects would effectively become the eyes and arms of local partnerships, charged with delivering 'frontline services to those who need them the most'. Again, it was a revealing statement; reflecting a reconstituted role for community development as service provider rather than voice of local people. The participation of volunteers was also reconstituted as the principle of local management of projects was deposed in the interests of greater centralisation and state oversight.

Can it be assumed that the fate of the CDP was and will be determined solely by financial and economic considerations? As the earlier review from 2003 had suggested, central government already nursed concerns regarding the comparative autonomy of local projects (Meade 2005). In 2008, even before the creation of the McCarthy committee, a newly established *Centre for Effective Services* (CES) was tasked with assessing what constitutes good practice in community development and with marshalling that evidence towards a redesign of the CDP and LDSIP. In its own words, the CES is an 'independent, not-for-profit organisation funded jointly by philanthropy and government…part of a new generation of intermediary organisations across the world working to apply learning from the emerging science of implementation to real world policy and practice' (http://www.effectiveservices.org/). In 2009 it produced a summary 'evidence review' (CES 2009:3) of 'what has emerged as constituting effective (or ineffective) practice in community development' (CES 2009:5) by drawing on

international literature, although none of those sources was referenced directly in the summary report that was made available for public consumption at that time. Those sources were deemed useful despite their failure to include data generated by 'rigorous application of accepted scientific methodologies' or the unlikelihood that any results had been checked 'against a "counterfactual" (CES, 2009:5). Arguably, with the creation of the CES we see a new designation of expertise in community development, one that is being used to discipline and reorient the sector towards national policy goals. Its report is replete with scientific jargon and management-speak. It suggests that it is possible to answer the question 'what works' in community development by bracketing off troubling questions about purpose and politics, and by evading a consideration of how evaluations of success and failure will always be contested. It is a reminder that the guise of 'expertise' can be used to undermine the autonomy of community workers and community development projects, if it pretends that it is possible to posit universal and objective standards, irrespective of the specific circumstances and desires of the communities with which they work

Conclusion

This paper has drawn on Foucauldian conceptions of governmentality to analyse the context and tensions associated with the professionalisation of community development in Ireland. In the aftermath of Independence the Irish social sphere was constituted by changing combinations of actors, schemes, strategies and purposes but its subordinate status has remained constant, irrespective of the peaks and troughs of national economic performance (Dukelow and Considine 2009; Kirby 2002). Since the 1970s the Irish state has actively promoted community development as a technique of government, moves that were influenced by lobbying from local organisations, experiences of anti-poverty programmes elsewhere and the EEC's social agenda. Even when state rhetoric overshadowed its practical commitments, we have witnessed, particularly during the 1990s, a growing investment in community work and an expansion in the range and scope of organisations claiming to adopt its participatory approaches. This does not mean that the character of community development is uniquely determined by the actions and rationalities of the state. Indeed the momentum also swings the other way, with (local) people asserting community identities in order to activate themselves, each other and the state for the purposes of naming and creating solutions to problems. Therefore it appears that the Irish community development sector is located at the interface of state and civil society, that it is a product of the partnerships, oppositions, negotiations,

dependencies and power struggles that characterise relationships between those spheres. Community development is no more an unfiltered voice of the people, than it is an abject victim of state power. More usefully it can be seen as the site and source of a range of what Foucault (1991) might recognise as governmental technologies, that variously seek to empower, responsibilise, include, discipline, reform or mobilise citizens. While state and community organisations often diverge significantly in their political purposes or strategic visions, there has been, since the 1970s, a growing consensus in the social sphere that community development is a productive technique by which to conduct the conduct of socially excluded constituencies. Even when particular programmes or projects have been regarded ambivalently by the Government and their specific practices subjected to review, community development itself has retained its overall status within the social sphere.

It is this that gives momentum to and rationalises the professionalisaton of community development. We must acknowledge also the influence of partnership, in both its ideological and institutional forms, in shaping current expectations of the skills, knowledge and roles of professional community workers. Nationally, partnership greased the wheels of neo-liberalism and offered a hollowed out model of representative democracy in place of more participatory variants. Locally, it bureaucratised community development practice. Nonetheless, the reputation and legitimacy of community development is predicated upon its responsiveness to issues of inequality, democratic deficit or the state's failure to engage citizens. The dilemma for community workers is that, in the context of neo-liberalism and punitive cuts in public expenditure, they must adapt to the processes and practices of managerialism as they seek to counter their effects: they are situated somewhere between the between the rock of resistance and the hard place of co-option.

The hegemonisation of partnership obscured fundamental contradictions in Irish society. It implied that structurally created polarities and hierarchies could be ignored in the interests of consensus; that political concerns could be treated as technical hitches; that competing sectors were equals in the processes of policy making. As it facilitated and evangelised partnership processes, the state reconstituted its own role to that of enabler; supporting active citizenship, allowing communities to do what they do best. But interactions with the state held a parallel disciplinary aspect. Community development organisations were reminded - sometimes subtly, at other times more crudely – of the appropriate rules of engagement: that there were insiders and outsiders in the policy field; that participation was a privilege not a right; that

government departments control the purse strings; and that the effectiveness of projects and programmes was always up for review. The breakdown of national partnership in the face of economic recession and the recent reorientation of the CDP towards a service provision agenda have gone some way towards defusing these myths of collegiality and consensus.

As plans for the re-constitution of the CDPs were publicised, some projects and national organisations engaged in resistance and protest; lobbying politicians and media, organising marches, and seeking out new spaces for solidarity and creativity (www.claimingourfuture.ie/; www.indymedia.ie). In so doing, they attempted to assert the integrity of their participatory vision and to affirm the contribution local projects have made to the Irish social sphere. In these challenging times, an alternative or parallel response from the sector might be to work collectively towards securing community work's professional recognition. In this way its distinctive expertise and values would be validated by the state and embedded in society through accredited education and training. Arguably, without an agreed conception of standards and purposes, community work is ultimately a prisoner of fortune.

I am concerned, nonetheless, that further professionalisation is a risky strategy, not least because the neo-liberal dogmas of managerialism and market relevance actively undermine professional authority and independence. Professionalism also requires a kind of autonomous expertise that community development does not have. Instead, the responsibility to empower citizens or democratise communication, means workers cannot lay claim to an *a priori* professsional status. The participatory values and discourses to which community work appeals legitimise and invite constant renegotiations, and even outright rejection, of the worker's power. Even when their roles demand that they navigate and manage relationships with the state, workers must demonstrate responsiveness to community expectations. These countervailing responsibilities create scope for resistance, negotiation or flexibility in the face of state disciplinary power. If professionalism means submitting to accreditation processes that have been licensed by government departments or their proxies, it would ultimately expose community development to new and more profound forms of state discipline. I fear that, given the disquiet and uncertainty that has been provoked by recent review processes and revised state strategies, this would constitute a potentially counter-productive gamble.

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