

Community Empowerment:
Critical Perspectives from Scotland

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The Glasgow Papers

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Editorial Introduction

Akwugo Emejulu and Mae Shaw

Community development in Scotland has a rich and diverse history. It has emerged from an ambivalent provenance: benevolent paternalism, social welfare (and control), and social and political action 'from below' in pursuit of social justice. It has been drawn upon to justify policies from left, right and centre of the political spectrum. It has been deployed in the state and voluntary sector and, more recently, has become embroiled in market competition. It is therefore a highly contested concept, with predictably unpredictable consequences.

What community development means at any particular time is defined by all those interests which have sought to name, frame and regulate it. It is the tensions and contradictions generated in the current context by the interface between these different interests – professional, political, ideological, social, economic – that this collection is concerned to explore. By bringing together a range of authors who locate their work both inside and outside the community development tradition, we wish to highlight different perspectives that examine how collective decision-making and action can be used either to strengthen or undermine social justice claims for marginalised groups. In doing so, we wish to present this volume as a contribution to critical debate about the role and effectiveness of community development in contested contexts.

These are unprecedented times. We are living through one the most significant transformations of the welfare state since the Second World War. All of our assumptions about the role and purpose of the state—in terms of cradle to grave care, the enforcement of order and the

distribution of (in)equality—will need to be reassessed in light of what is to come. The UK Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government have committed themselves to swingeing cuts in publicly funded welfare in a bid to appease the financial markets and tackle the deficit. Nothing so far suggests that the Scottish government's approach will differ significantly. It is bitterly ironic, of course, that ordinary people (and people living in poverty in particular) will bear the brunt of these cuts since the financial markets which now demand an end to so-called 'reckless spending' on social welfare precipitated this current recession. As we are forced to acclimatise ourselves to 'austerity' Britain, it is all the more important to step back and gain some critical distance.

For those committed to working at the grassroots and supporting social justice we need to explore how we position our theory and practice for progressive social change. The theme that unites this edited volume is a concern about the meaning, politics, possibilities and practices of empowerment. As our contributors demonstrate, community empowerment is neither an unproblematic idea nor necessarily an unmitigated social good. The challenge for those working in these micro-level settings—especially as the state begins to withdraw support—is retheorising what we want community empowerment to be and what practices we should undertake to achieve this vision.

An important role for community development in the coming period will be the creation of democratic spaces which foster real empowerment by bringing different types of people together to debate what the 'good society' is, what it might look like and how it might be achieved. It should not be assumed, however, that dialogue will automatically lead to consensus or, indeed, foster solidarity. The politics of living together in the current context requires an honest recognition of competing interests of individuals and groups. Building a sense of collective identity and common purpose to struggle for a community that fights for equality and social justice for everyone is a painstaking process. It cannot simply be 'delivered' – in any sense of the word.

Our contributors, in different ways, are concerned with the processes by which communities are being reconstituted by policy makers and local people and the effects this has on notions of solidarity, equality and justice. In the articles written by Gerry Mooney, Zakaria el Salahi and Matthew Priest, we see how people living in poverty, Muslim groups and young people respectively are constructed as 'problem communities' and targeted for intrusive social policy interventions. These authors powerfully demonstrate how an 'empowerment agenda' is often used as a tool to discipline and 'responsibilise' these groups so that they conform to

dubious policy priorities whether they be in the name of the Big Society, preventing violent extremism or anti-social behaviour. In contrast, Ian Cooke, Anne O'Donnell and Peter Kelly show us how community empowerment might be reshaped to work in the interests of particular groups. Through the asset-acquiring Development Trusts, the reclaiming and retelling of the history of 'mad people', or challenging the public perception of 'poor people' in order to build popular solidarity, community empowerment can be mobilised effectively to support the self-determination of certain groups.

In the second half of this collection, the authors are primarily concerned with how the idea of community empowerment operates in practice when practitioners and activists attempt to advocate for specific issues. Chik Collins, Sarah Glynn and Eurig Scandrett explore contestation and conflict in community spaces. Collins and Glynn investigate policy failures in housing and regeneration in Glasgow and Dundee respectively. They focus particularly on the obstacles local people encounter when they attempt to challenge and transform the dominant policy discourses and practices in their local areas. Scandrett considers the conflicts that arise between the competing interests and priorities of activists and workers in the context of environmental justice campaigns.

As grassroots-based practitioners, Lynn McCabe, Stuart Fairweather and Keith Paterson provide us with insights generated through their attempts to promote community empowerment while simultaneously negotiating a policy context that appears to demoralise and frustrate meaningful citizen participation.

According to the contributors to this volume, community development and empowerment still occupies a contradictory but strategic space: it can be used to deliver people up to policy or create spaces where policy can become a focus for critical engagement with politics.

In the coming period, community development practitioners and activists will inevitably be drawn upon to 'deliver' the new welfare order, and to help mend the so-called 'broken society'. In fact, it could be argued that the self-help ethic associated with community development has already performed an important ideological function, in some cases reinforcing the attack on the so-called 'welfare dependency culture'. In order to transform private troubles back into public issues, those interested in community development will need to consider what collective identity and real community empowerment might mean in these uncertain times.



Anti-welfarism and the making of the ‘problem’ community

Gerry Mooney

Introduction: Rediscovering community – again!

What is it about ‘community’ that enables it to be mobilised repeatedly as a policy-making narrative across different generations? Like a bad penny, ‘it’ keeps coming back! Certainly it is a resilient notion; the flexibility and plasticity of the notion of community is apparent to all of us who are interested in community development and in the many different ways in which communities today are being affected by long-term economic and social change. The term community can be ‘stretched’ in a multitude of different ways to refer to very different sets and networks of social relations. It can refer to a local area or a network of interconnections which may or may not be geographically close. And, of course, it can be used as a political and policy making tool – as well as a tool of opposition, of resistance and of struggle.

Across Scotland and the other parts of the devolved UK today ‘community’, as a policy making device, is mobilised in many different and contradictory ways: Community Cohesion, Community Safety and Crime Prevention, Sustainable Communities and so on. In addition, community appears in a diverse range of other policy-making sites and is implicit within other narratives which are, like community, themselves also the source of ambiguity; for instance ‘social capital’.

Community is of course a highly contested concept – and sometimes fought over. Its contested nature is illustrated, for example, in the controversial policy for housing stock transfer pursued by the UK New Labour Government and the Scottish Government between 1999 and

2007. Presented in policy as a form of 'community ownership' the reality was seen by its opponents as little more than the wholesale privatisation of council housing, and was strenuously resisted by tenants' groups in some cases.

What emerges from these brief examples is that community is seen as a solution to perceived social problems. However, importantly, it can also be seen as a source of such problems.

The return of the 'problem' community

The idea of the 'problem' community has a history as long as community itself. While community is generally invoked as something that is a social good, something positive and desired, this co-exists alongside other ways of thinking that locate social problems as a result of community failure, community breakdown or simply a 'lack' of community. In the context of the contemporary UK, for instance, declining community 'cohesion' is seen by the Westminster government as a particular issue on the back of rising immigration and a growing anti-Muslim racism. Questions of race have often played a central role in narratives of community problems in the UK since 1945. However, there are long entanglements between ideas of community in policy and elite concerns with poor and disadvantaged social groups, and it is to this that we turn now.

While the nature, extent and intensity of such discourses and representations vary considerably over time and place, we do not have to look far to find claims that 'the poor' (here used as a generic category) represent a 'danger' not only to themselves, but also to 'wider society'. In the UK over the past century and a half, for example, at specific times when poverty and inequality have increased, this has generally been accompanied by attempts to construct 'the problem' as one of poor people themselves: their behaviours, lifestyles, cultures and inadequacies. In other words, notions of 'the poor' immediately serve to construct and delineate a particular group in the population as 'them', not 'us'!

Seeing the poor and disadvantaged as 'at risk' or as a 'vulnerable' section of society requiring state support or 'social security' stands in sharp contrast to those representations of the poor as an 'underclass' or an 'undeserving' group that require management and control. Further, constructions of 'the disadvantaged' as a 'problem population' do not occur in a vacuum, but mirror the wider social relations of inequality. The very inequalities that so pervade the world today also underlie many of the dominant representations of those groups most affected by inequality, as in some way the product of their own behaviour or some other lacking in the way that they organise their personal or family lives. Through this,

poverty and inequality come to be seen not as a product of state failure, of an inadequate welfare state nor of 'unfairness' or injustice, but as a consequence of a 'lacking' or of 'negative', 'dysfunctional' and 'backward' attitudes.

In this way people and place come to be identified in particularly pejorative ways and particular kinds of people come to be associated with particular kinds of places. These localities often become symbolic in the sense that they come to represent in the public consciousness all that is problematic about social life. Impoverished and disadvantaged areas come to be understood as the harbingers of social problems. This is reflected, in turn, across a range of urban social policies and regeneration programmes that both speak of 'poor people and poor places' but also of what they *should be like*.

There have, historically, been repeated attempts to associate particular groups of people with particular places, ways of 'reading' people from where they live. There are many diverse and changing ways in which such constructions have emerged both over time and across different countries – from the fears of politicians and the rich with the slum-dwellers and crime-ridden 'rookeries' of nineteenth century London, Glasgow, Manchester and other cities through to the activities of market research organisations in the UK today that designate particular places as 'credit-risks'.

In the contemporary UK context, 'the council estate' or 'scheme' plays such a role. It seems almost ironic now that council housing once played a key welfare role – meeting the housing needs of a sizeable section of the UK population. Since the 1960s there has been a steady shift towards understanding council housing – now rebadged social housing – as welfare housing for the poor. The difference is that, in the context of welfare state expansion in the immediate post-1945 era, 'welfare' was not portrayed in the negative way that it is today in the context of neoliberalism.

'Problem' communities and the 'broken' society: Pejorative entanglements!

In 2006, a research programme concerned with exploring public attitudes to poverty and inequality was launched by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. One of the key findings was that UK poverty in general was a marginal issue for the news media, but that particular individuals or groups of people experiencing poverty were routinely either represented in a stigmatised way or as passive victims. The Glasgow East by-election in

July 2008 represented a unique case study of the role of the media in helping to generate consent for more punitive government policies in relation to welfare – as well as hardening public attitudes. During the by-election campaign, Glasgow East, and the citizens who live there, were generally and relentlessly portrayed in a negative light. The ‘problems’ of Glasgow East were frequently presented as either a consequence of welfare dependency or individual inadequacies in one form or another.

Media and political commentary work to influence and reinforce each other and this was also clearly evident in Glasgow East. It was a series of well-publicised visits to the constituency by two leading Conservative politicians which helped to shape much of the newspaper media reportage during the election. Iain Duncan Smith had already made well-publicised trips to Glasgow’s East End, launching in February 2008 the Centre for Social Justice report, *Breakthrough Glasgow*. Adopting a language that came to be the common sense of media reporting, Glasgow East was the example *par excellence* of the ‘broken society’. Picking-up on this, the media dubbed the Glasgow East by-election the ‘broken society’ election. Following Smith to Glasgow to launch the Conservative election campaign, leader David Cameron also invoked Smith’s broken society imagery, further reinforcing the portrayal of East Glasgow in very disparaging terms, albeit as a way of highlighting New Labour’s failures. Social welfare has now, arguably, become identified as *the* factor in generating the kinds of social problems that have become a staple of political, media and policy-making commentary.

As with earlier anti-welfare narratives such as Charles Murray’s (Herrnstein and Murray, 1994) identification of a welfare-created and a welfare-dependent ‘underclass’, part of the potency and pervasiveness of the Broken Society idea is that it is a very flexible notion, able to be deployed as an explanation for a range of social problems and popular social ills. In the hands of the Conservative Party, however, a clear connection is made between the broken society and ‘broken families’. Teenage pregnancies and increasing numbers of one-parent households – caught, of course, in a ‘dependency culture’ – feature prominently in this account. In this way, the institution of the family and approaches to families become a key site for political and policy argument and a target for policy formation.

Throughout the history of ‘problem community’ narratives in the UK, from the inter-war period and slum housing through the recurring concerns with ‘inner city slums’ and ‘problem estates’, ideas of problem communities are entangled with explicit anti-welfare ideologies that draw upon a century-and-more-old distinction between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor. In the increasingly pervasive language of the early

'noughties' this distinction is now inflected with notions of aspirational deficit, dysfunctional and deviant behaviour or an absence of social capital (of the 'right' kind!), drawing on a seemingly endless range of individualising explanations.

Notions of problem communities today are tied-up with narratives of welfare failure: the view that the state is now failing to protect us from a growing range of social harms and risks in increasingly precarious times. Anna Minton (2009) has talked of Britain as an increasingly 'distrustful and fearful society' which she sees as the result of growing social and geographical inequalities and reinforced by a media which has a vested commercial interest in promoting fear and insecurity. She points to the twin processes of deepening social and economic segregation and the homogenisation of communities which create the 'worlds apart' which exist in many areas of urban, suburban and rural Britain.

Community and social welfare in the years to come

The demands made on the concept of community are diverse and many. Community has become the modality through which social welfare provision and crime control strategies are to be conceived, designed and delivered. David Cameron has spoken of community as a bulwark against the 'big state', as way of enabling individual 'responsibilisation'. Community here is regarded as an alternative to state intervention. Alongside this there is a retreat to another narrative which has also enjoyed a long and close relationship with community – '*the family*'. New Labour, and Gordon Brown in particular, have in recent years made repeated references to the government's desire to support 'hard working families' as opposed, it is supposed, to those 50,000 'chaotic and dysfunctional' families which have been identified as a scourge of modern British society.

Notions of community and family will continue to form a key part of the battleground around not only social welfare but will also feature prominently in wider political visions. A key task for community workers and activists who seek to challenge negative representations, as well as those who are committed to supporting impoverished communities, is to resist all attempts to 'other' the most disadvantaged in society in the name of community!

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Preventing violent extremism through community work? Essentialism and manipulation

Zakariah el Salahi

Introduction

This article focuses on the UK government's Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) agenda, and explores how its policies affect community work. By highlighting the essentialist notions of community and static conceptions of Islamic identity that PVE promotes, it is argued that the UK government is generating a racist community work practice that urgently needs to be challenged. PVE is first outlined with examples from policy documents. The ways in which PVE incorporates community work into the wider counter terrorism strategy are then explored. Final sections explain how incorporation into counter terrorism affects community work; how 'community' is constructed, which aspects of community work practice are emphasised, and how this re-shapes community work overall.

Community work has both emancipatory and oppressive dimensions, having historically played pacifying and liberatory roles in society (Gilchrist et al. 2003; Mayo 1975; Tett 2006). These reactionary/progressive tendencies within community work are manifestations of the dialectic within 'community', the contradiction between 'community as policy' and 'community as politics' (Shaw 2008). This dialectic is clearly evident within the UK government's 'Preventing Violent Extremism' (PVE) agenda, a highly controversial part of the British state's counter terrorism strategy that explicitly focuses on 'the Muslim community' in Britain.

The PVE agenda incorporates significant aspects of community work into its discourse, frequently referring to 'capacity building', 'community

engagement' and 'community cohesion' within its policy documents. While the incorporation of community work into state policy is nothing new, PVE's potent blend of counter terrorism and community development has major implications for the field as a whole. PVE deserves the attention of all community work practitioners, not only those traditionally concerned with racism or 'Muslim issues'. It is crucial to understand what PVE is – where it comes from, what its priorities are, and its impact on community work theory and practice.

PVE in focus

The Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) agenda forms one part of the UK Government's wider counter terrorism strategy, 'CONTEST', which relates to the Terrorism Act (TA) 2006. Active since 2003, CONTEST involves four main strands of counter terrorism work; the Pursue, Prevent, Protect, and Prepare 'workstreams' (Home Office 2009). PVE stems from the Prevent workstream, the main concern of which is 'stopping people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism' (Home Office 2009: 55). The TA extended earlier legislation to make 'encouraging' or 'glorifying' terrorism a criminal offence, which transformed the Prevent stream of CONTEST from advice into a statutory duty of local authorities.

The PVE delivery strategy paper states that '[t]he most severe terrorist threat currently comes from individuals and groups who distort Islam to attempt to justify murder and their attacks on our shared values' (Home Office 2008: 3). The paper outlines six key priorities for 'preventative' work, each of which focuses on preventing 'Muslims' in Britain becoming violent extremists. Priority four of the PVE strategy explicitly focuses on working with Muslim community leaders, Muslim youth and Muslim women, stating that '[c]ohesive, empowered and resilient communities are best equipped to confront violent extremists and support the most vulnerable individuals' (Home Office 2008: 7). The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has been the primary driver of PVE since 2007, when it began providing funding to local authorities through the 'Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund' (PVEPF). This is targeted funding for multi-agency local projects, administered by local authorities, and awarded predominantly to third sector organisations that explicitly combat both extremist conduct and ideologies within Muslim communities.

The DCLG also started the 'Community Leadership Fund' (CLF) in April 2008, which is offered directly to third sector community organisations. The aim of this fund is 'to support work that will build the capacity of individuals, organisations and communities to take the lead on tackling

violent extremist influences' (DCLG 2008: 3). The CLF prioritises five areas of voluntary and charitable work:

- Capacity of organisations and communities
- Supporting Muslim young people
- Supporting Muslim women
- Capacity of Muslim faith leaders
- Local forums against extremism and Islamophobia

Thus the PVE agenda is a national government strategy that has a distinct partnership and governance approach to counter terrorism. It involves multiple agencies, across the statutory, charitable and voluntary sectors, in reporting and enforcing the criminal offences identified under the Terrorism Act 2006. While the actors most impacted upon by the PVE agenda are clearly Muslim people, PVE also has an impact on the processes and purposes of all of the agencies within its scope. The emergence of specific PVE funding for third sector community organisations is also highly relevant to the community work field in general.

Community work and PVE

Throughout the PVE delivery strategy, the key aim of the overall agenda is spelled out in terms of building the resilience of the Muslim community, building the capacity of individual Muslims to challenge extremism, and engaging the Muslim community in partnership work:

Strong, organised and empowered communities are better equipped to effectively reject the ideology of violent extremism, to isolate apologists for terrorism and to provide support to vulnerable institutions and individuals. We want communities to take the initiative in these areas but we can work with communities to enable them to do so. (Home Office 2008a: 31)

The £6million of DCLG funds that went into the PVEPF between 2007-08 was specifically for community work in its community engagement form. At the time of writing, this is set to continue, with part of the £45million for 2008/9-2010/11 going towards the Community Leadership Fund (alongside increased police numbers and training) (Home Office 2009).

Capacity building, community participation and engagement are already common features of British state policy, and have been scrutinised in detail by various commentators (eg Hodgson 2004; Craig, 2007; Cornwall, 2008). Learning from wider debates, it is essential to highlight the following three areas of the PVE agenda:

- a) the concepts of 'community' and 'capacity building' that are constructed in PVE policy discourse
- b) the form of participation and engagement that PVE multi-agency working promotes
- c) the type of civil society that PVE engages with.

Constructions of community and PVE

Each PVE policy document begins with a statement that only a minority of people support Islamic terrorism. Yet consistent references to a supposedly homogenous 'Muslim community' - particularly within the delivery strategy documents (Home Office 2008; 2008a) - construct static notions of Islamic identity, and essentialist notions of the millions of people in Britain who define themselves as Muslim. While the Al Qa'ida network is identified as the current threat to national security, 'The Muslim community' is posed as the potential threat.

The racism that underpins this concept of community is obvious. Many community work practitioners did away with essentialist, prescriptive notions of community a long time ago, recognising the socially constructed and political nature of 'community' (Martin 1993; Brent 2004; Shaw 2008). In utilising a racist hybrid of community of place and community of interest, the PVE agenda not only constructs the community of engagement, but also constructs the nature of engagement. As Craig (2007) highlights, when community is used unproblematically, it is easier to construct 'the community' as unskilled, unthinking and without capacities. 'Young Muslim Voices' (YMV), a London-based youth project, also points out that:

'[u]sing the umbrella term 'the Muslim community' does not adequately represent the diversity of ethnicities and experiences of the many Muslim communities and can lead to decision makers assuming that there are 'spokespeople' for the whole community that can speak for everyone' (YMV 2009: 18).

PVE indeed thus criminalises all Muslims through a deficit discourse that exclusively positions Muslim children, women and men as potential terrorists, and picks out 'community leaders' to speak for the 'whole community'. This is evident in theory and practice, when PVE initiatives such as the Community Leadership Fund identify 'Muslim young people' as those 'at risk of radicalisation' (DCLG 2008: 5), and when PVE public briefings are exclusively targeted at 'Faith and Belief community representatives', as is the case in Scotland (SPVEU 2009).

Participation and engagement in the PVE agenda

The forms of participation and engagement evident in PVE multi-agency partnerships relate specifically to the deficit discourse of PVE's capacity building approach. Constructed as 'vulnerable' and incapable of independent 'resilience' to extremism, Muslims are not to be engaged on their own terms, but on those of the state. At best, PVE partnerships follow the trend of contemporary community engagement approaches in the public service sector; in Cowden & Singh's (2007) terms, Muslim community organisations are 'consultant partners', rather than active leaders of partnerships. At worst, PVE partnerships act as intelligence gathering units, where community engagement is about 'obtaining surveillance' and 'turns [community leaders] into an arm of the security services' (Lavelette 2009). This is echoed by An-Nisa Society, a London-based Muslim women's organisation; '[PVE] is not only stigmatising all British Muslims, it is placing the entire Muslim community under surveillance in every area of their lives and further alienating the very community the government needs to have on board as an ally' (An-Nisa Society 2009: 11).

Civil society and PVE

Hodgson's (2004) concept of 'manufactured civil society' is particularly apt in the PVE context. Describing the current trend in which civil groups 'are formed and funded, at least initially, through some type of state initiative' (2004: 145), Hodgson argues that such 'manufactured' civil society fails to provide the much needed public counterbalance to the state in a democracy that a more 'organic development' of voluntary organisation offers. The form of civil society that the PVE agenda constructs is fundamentally 'manufactured'; the PVE Pathfinder Fund and the Community Leadership Fund both mould community projects in the British state's image, primarily into extended surveillance units. Clear dividing lines have also been constructed between legitimate and illegitimate civil society organisations, with legitimacy based on compliance with state priorities. As Kundnani (2008) points out, the shift in government favour from The Muslim Council of Britain to The Sufi Muslim Council in 2006 'was clearly political in that the MCB had gradually become more critical of government policy after 9/11 and was therefore no longer deemed to be a reliable ally in the 'war on terror' (2008: 55).

Bannister et al.'s (2006) discussion of 'civility' and 'incivility' is also relevant here. In a context where 'the Muslim community' is constructed as anti-social, PVE community engagement is clearly about building consensus around CONTEST rather than empowering communities. Muslims are constructed as un-civil people who need civilising. Ambiguous notions of

'British values' and essentialist notions of what it means to be British run throughout PVE policy documents; PVE community work is about helping Muslims embrace this British identity rather than the 'extremist' forms of identity offered within the Muslim community.

Community work re-shaped

It is clear that PVE shapes community work along national security priorities. An essentialist notion of community, combined with the deficit discourse surrounding this community, has significant implications for community participation and engagement. The contemporary trend of interpreting community empowerment as community consultation is evident throughout the multi-agency partnerships prescribed by PVE policy – in practice, local partners that oppose the PVE strategy have either been ignored or rejected in favour of more compliant partners. PVE funding has significant impact on third sector community work, prescribing not only the means of engagement, but the community of engagement. The discriminatory nature of PVE funding is increasingly being recognised not as positive, but divisive. Hence, an increasing number of organisations are publicly rejecting PVE funding. They clearly see 'community as policy' (Shaw 2008) to be as much of a threat to national security as terrorist violence. The challenge to community work that these organisations offer is that of developing a version of 'community as politics' that rejects the racism that the counter terrorism context ferments.

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Anti-social behaviour: Imagining social justice

Matthew Priest

Introduction

In this paper, I will explore the role of community work in mediating the relationship between the state's anti-social behaviour policy, and the lived experiences of young people. I will then describe how civil society's current position as a partner of the state both constrains and liberates community workers. I will explore how the behaviour of young people can be framed and tackled alternatively through discourses of 'zero-tolerance', or through discourses grounded in community work. Shaw and Martin's model of 'imaginative capacity' (2005: 88) will then be used to show how community work can assist communities to challenge the 'zero-tolerance' discourse. Finally, I will suggest how this model can be extended to include the 'moral imagination', with particular reference to the values of diversity, solidarity and dialogue.

Community work: The politics of justice

Community work should defend the public realm of society – the democratic realm in which we, as active citizens, are able to argue about how we behave towards one another, how we behave towards the state, and how the state behaves towards us. In practical terms, it should involve working with people, collectively, to support them:

- i. to explore issues that are of importance to them;
- ii. to express those issues; and
- iii. to act in ways that address those issues.

Furthermore, community workers should not only work *with* communities, but should actually *create* them through joint action. In short, community work should generate solidarity, knowledge, energy and action, in the pursuit of social justice.

Justice, as defined by one group within society, may result in the formation of structures that lead to *injustices* being inflicted on other groups. In the case of anti-social behaviour, for example, the concept of justice may be used to justify the restriction and criminalisation of young people in response to behaviour that is deemed to be unacceptable. An alternative view of justice – one which recognises the young person's need for support to assist them to change their life circumstances – might result in a very different outcome for the individual. The notion of justice, therefore, is not fixed and clearly defined, but fluid and problematic. In our ever changing world, the *aspiration* for justice should be non-negotiable, but its *interpretation* must always be contested.

Community work has a role to play in this constant reinterpretation of justice, nurturing the seeds of change, no matter how small, vulnerable and angry they may be. Involving communities in real decision making should be considered not just a technique, but an 'inherently political process' (Cornwall, 2008: 281). There is a need, here, to address the very notion of citizenship: the ability of individuals to act within a system of representative democracy should not start and end at the polling booth. Rather, community work should extend democracy by creating a link between the Government and 'the people'.

Shaw describes the importance of grasping the opportunities that present themselves in between the 'constraints of structure' and the 'possibilities of human agency' (Shaw, 2008: 32). Although citizens may be 'constrained' as a result of the ways that we are defined by the state through policy (eg young people being regarded as trouble-makers), there are always 'possibilities' to act as members of civil society, in order to work towards a more just social order. However, recent political developments are changing the relationship between civil society and the state. I will now explore these relationships by considering what civil society is, how it is changing, and how this may create both constraints and opportunities for community work.

Civil society: Problems and possibilities

Civil society is that sphere of society in which people can organise themselves into groups freely. This might be for social, cultural or political purposes – the crucial point is that it is undertaken voluntarily without

coercion or interference. Civil society may have different values and expectations to those of the state, and it has historically been independent of state control. Since New Labour was elected to power in 1997, however, the former Government advocated civil society as a *partner* of the state, and this had great implications for the role and nature of civil society. Such a partnership is viewed as a means of combating the social problems that are named and framed by the state, and large-scale partnerships have emerged across the country, bringing together representatives of the voluntary sector, private sector and a range of local and national government agencies. In Edinburgh, for example, 12 Neighbourhood Partnerships have been established, each with a core membership of local Councillors and representatives from the police, health, voluntary sector and residents. Hodgson describes such arrangements as 'manufactured civil society' (2004: 145), manufactured because members have not come together through the efforts of communities themselves, but as a result of Government strategies.

Whilst there may be considerable benefits to be gained from closer communication and co-ordination between component services, and from bringing decision making closer to the community, we must also consider what might be *lost* from the public sphere. Partner agencies are often accountable to the state, and tied to criteria and targets set by government. In effect, these agencies lose their independence and may be forced to considerably alter their approach and aims. Such a context can make it difficult for community workers to assist local people to come together to challenge existing structures.

Although I do share these concerns to some extent, I would argue that multi-agency programmes also have the potential to give community workers a stronger voice and a seat at the table. Bourdieu's (1992) notion of 'symbolic capital' is useful in understanding the opportunities that are opening up to community workers here. Bourdieu categorises four kinds of capital that can be used to gain power or influence: economic, cultural, social and symbolic, and reasons that the first three are worthless if other people do not consider them to be *legitimate*. Only when they are acknowledged and accepted can they be converted into *symbolic* capital. Social capital, for example, is capital generated through personal connections and relationships. In the case of young people, social capital gained through informal socialising or structured group work will give the young people greater power and influence only if it is viewed as legitimate by decision makers. By working in partnership with the state, young people have the potential to generate symbolic capital, in other words to gain legitimacy, and to put this to constructive use.

The role of community work, and its relationship with the state, will now be discussed with particular reference to current anti-social behaviour policy. This is an area of policy that has developed in recent years in ways that 'blur the boundaries between criminal and civil issues' (Bannister et al., 2006: 925). Implicit in this change in approach is a shift in the state's understanding of the concept of justice, and so there are significant implications for community work. Anti-social behaviour can be understood and framed around discourses of 'zero tolerance' or of community engagement, and these two perspectives will now be discussed in turn.

The discourse of law and order: 'Zero-tolerance'

Many people experience a poor quality of life as a result of structural realities such as poverty, low pay, poor housing and lack of housing. A society that makes large numbers of its citizens feel that they are looked down on will inevitably incur the cost of people's anti-social reaction. However, the anti-social behaviour that results from the anger, despair and frustration caused by such circumstances, is all too easily attributed to *individual deficiencies*. Indeed, in the current policy context, it could be argued that the concept of civility has been narrowly focused on the person, rather than on state structures and the resulting realities listed above. Gilling and Barton (1997: 66) state that:

the star of welfarism fell in synchronicity with the rise of New Right ideology, which stressed individual responsibility, fitting a 'law and order' discourse seeking to punish those making criminal choices.

The ideology of which they speak may have had its roots in Thatcherism, but it has been carried forward and developed by New Labour and looks set to dominate the political landscape for the foreseeable future. The Anti-Social Behaviour (Scotland) Act 2004, for example, requires local councils to publish plans to deal with anti-social behaviour, with the option of using anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) as a key tool in this endeavour. Hughes describes this as the 'criminalisation of social policy' (cited in Bannister et al., 2006: 925), with policy being directed to rebellious *behaviour* rather than the root causes of the *conditions* that might be expected to result in rebellion. In summary, the issue of community safety has been framed around criminality, rather than social justice.

In response to an article in *The Scotsman* (2008), about homelessness in the capital, one reader made the following comment on-line:

Hide the world's reality from your eyes and the world is such a wonderful place

The challenge that we face, alongside communities, is to find ways of disputing the validity of images that demonise them, and opening society's eyes to 'the world's reality'. By considering problems from a different perspective, it can be possible to re-politicise them in ways that re-forge the link between societal structures and people's lived experience. Rather than attempting to enforce civility, society should strive to create the conditions in which civility becomes a natural expression of pride for each citizen. Current anti-social behaviour policy can be contested, but to do so may require community workers to exploit opportunities that present themselves in *other* areas of policy.

The community work discourse: Imagining justice

The 2009 Scottish Community Empowerment Action Plan (The Scottish Government, 2009) states that:

communities who feel a sense of control over what happens at a local level know exactly what empowerment is. Fundamentally, it is about people taking collective action to make change happen on their own terms

Such opportunities provide real possibilities for community workers to work with young people to enable them to challenge the 'zero-tolerance' approach. Shaw and Martin (2005: 88) propose a model that could be of value to community workers who find themselves negotiating the terrain that exists between anti-social behaviour policy and communities themselves. They describe three different forms of imaginative capacity: sociological, narrative and reflexive. These will now be discussed in turn, in the context of tackling anti-social behaviour through community work.

Drawing on the work of C Wright Mills (1970), the *sociological* imagination allows people to interpret the relationship between their lived experiences and the wider structural contexts of their lives. The first task of community work is to generate an awareness of 'un-freedom', and an understanding that our actions and expectations are always bound, to some extent, by societal structures. Not all are truly free to access a fair share of the nation's wealth, and to live in respectable conditions that are likely to engender respectable behaviour. The structures that bind people must be recognised before they can be undone. For example, workers could stimulate discussion with young people around:

- how they think other people perceive them and why
- why they have to hang around in stairwells in order to keep warm
- why they get involved in vandalism and/or fighting

The second type of imagination, the *narrative* imagination, is the ability to see one's own struggles reflected in the struggles that have gone on throughout history. Using examples of past social movements can be a powerful way of stimulating new movements, whether they be at local, national or international level. With young people, workers could use examples of other projects or campaigns that have involved young people and have led to changes in:

- national policy
- the provision of local services and amenities
- the ways that the police interact with young people

This leads us on to the *reflexive* imagination, which is the capacity to see ourselves as part of both the problem and the solution. It may be unsettling to consider our own actions, expectations and values as contributing to unjust structures, but this kind of self-awareness can also stimulate action or positive changes in behaviour. Young people, for example, can be enabled to gain an understanding of the ways that their own behaviour may influence how local authorities respond to their needs. By exercising the reflexive imagination, energy, frustration and anger can be channelled in productive ways that influence decision makers.

One could add the concept of the '*moral* imagination' to this model. By this I mean the ability to consider where we stand in relation to values that relate to social justice and democracy. In the context of community work and anti-social behaviour policy, I consider three core values to be of particular relevance:

- i. Diversity
- ii. Solidarity
- iii. Dialogue

Firstly, community work has a role to play in creating a climate that celebrates diversity, including diversity of behaviour. In the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act, Chapter II, which relates to Scotland in particular, defines ASB as behaviour that 'caused or was likely to cause alarm or distress ... to one or more persons not of the same household as [the perpetrator]' (Office of Public Sector Information website).

It could be argued, however, that in some situations, 'alarm' is as much about the *attitude and state of mind* of the alarmed person, as it is about the actual *behaviour* of the alleged perpetrator. The underlying issue is one of psychology: if, in our daily lives, we are rarely exposed to 'otherness', then we will inevitably consider it to be both intimidating and

anti-social on the odd occasion when we do encounter it. The street is the place where one can 'go beyond one's own defined boundaries of self' (Sennett, cited in Bannister et al., 2006: 932). Viewed from this perspective, interactions with unfamiliar 'types' of people and behaviours can enrich our lives, allowing us and society to develop in a healthy way. Through community work, diversity can be put to educational use, and recognised as a necessary ingredient for social and cultural learning.

Secondly, one of community work's key objectives is to build *solidarity* across groups that may be diverse and in conflict. By focusing on similarity rather than sameness, communities of interest can be created that are able to unite around issues of mutual importance. For example, this may involve bringing young people together from different territorial gangs or rival schools in order to address the issues in which they share an interest. It may also involve inter-generational work that allows young and old to work together in the same geographical community.

Thirdly, community work can enable *dialogue*, and ensure that the public sphere of civil society remains free and open. Can we expect young people to act respectably in neighbourhoods that are 'un-respectable'? Young people can work together to keep such questions alive and to keep the public sphere open. In the current policy context, there is potential for 'manufactured civil society' to stifle the voice at the grass-roots, but there is also potential for the voice of young people to gain legitimacy. Partnerships that include local authority youth justice departments and the police, for example, may provide young people with real opportunities to make themselves heard. For these reasons, there is a need for community workers to generate dialogue and to actively encourage argument and debate, whether this be through formal committees or radical action.

Conclusion

Community work, ultimately, is concerned with the constant reinterpretation of the notion of justice. In the context of anti-social behaviour policy, there is a need for young people to challenge the way that justice has come to be construed within the 'zero-tolerance' discourse. By asking the question 'why?', community workers can assist young people to frame issues in new ways; to become political actors. Community work may be about educating young people so that they can explore and articulate their issues. What is exciting, however, is the fact that it is also about enabling young people themselves to take on the role of educators, and to educate their neighbourhoods, their local government and the state.

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Trust in the community? Development Trusts in Scotland

Ian Cooke

Introduction: The background

Over the last 25 years, an increasing number of communities throughout the UK have established development trusts as a framework for community-led regeneration or as a means to address key community issues. On the face of it this seems to have been a largely organic development, and much of this activity has taken place with limited support from 'professional community development'. But what exactly are development trusts, what historical, economic and political influences have shaped the development trust movement and what potential do they have to offer within a community development context?

Development trusts come in a number of shapes and legal forms, but essentially they can be distinguished from other types of community organisations. Firstly, they are community-led and community-owned; this is enshrined within their constitutional arrangements. In the main, Scottish Development Trusts represent defined geographical communities and are seeking to either regenerate these areas or address a number of local concerns. Development Trusts are, therefore, multi-issue in nature. In seeking to address these multiple issues and concerns, they work in partnership with public, private and other third sector organisations – from informal working relationships to joint ventures. Finally, development trusts are committed to reducing their dependency on grant income through the creation of independent income streams from trading and social enterprise activities. Importantly, this explicit enterprising approach is oriented towards the acquisition and ownership of assets in order to deliver a long-term and stable income stream for the organisation. In this

way, the community ownership of assets can provide a foundation from which to launch community-led social enterprises and deliver sustainable transformation for a local area. The community ownership of assets also has the potential to increase the sustainability, independence and status of the organisation because community groups with assets are players – rather than tokenistic or peripheral participants – in the decision-making process with public, private and voluntary sector partnerships.

The Development Trusts Association (DTA), the UK-wide body for these organisations, currently boasts a membership of 466 (this includes the 143 Scottish members); this gives some indication of the scale of the national movement. Within England, development trusts are more prevalent in urban, rather than rural, communities. This position is reversed north of the border for a variety of reasons. Scottish Development Trusts are more common in island and rural communities. The current membership level of the DTA significantly underestimates the extent of development trust activity in the United Kingdom as there are many community organisations who do not call themselves ‘Development Trusts’ but exhibit all the key characteristics which define the mission and scope of these types of organisations. For instance, West Kilbride Community Initiative conforms to the four principles of development trusts discussed above, but their name reflects the circumstances in which they were established.

What is particularly striking within the development trust movement is the variety of communities and organisations participating, the array of issues addressed and the diversity of activities and services undertaken to tackle these issues. In terms of size and scale, Development Trusts range from those covering small rural settlements of between 40 and 50 people to the large, well established development trusts such as Coin Street Community Builders in central London. Formed over 20 years ago as a community response to the lack of affordable rented housing for local people in the centre of London, Coin Street now has extensive commercial and property interests on the South Bank such as the Oxo Tower and Gabriel’s Wharf. The income generated from these properties has enabled the Development Trust to establish 4 housing co-operatives and other state of the art community facilities for local people. The 2009 annual membership survey of the DTA calculates that the combined turnover of member Development Trusts across the UK is £275 million (of which £136 million is earned income) and that the asset base of members is currently worth around £565 million. In addition to land and buildings in community ownership, the assets of development trusts in Scotland include woodlands, harbours, housing, renewable energies (wind turbines, hydro schemes and bio-mass initiatives), castles, swimming

pools and other sports facilities, shops, post-offices, hotels and former Ministry of Defence bases.

The changing context of Development Trusts

The growth of Development Trusts within Scotland has taken place within (and arguably as a response to) a difficult and challenging context for many communities. Development Trusts often operate around the area of market failure and many have acquired, and successfully run, a range of commercial businesses, in many cases maintaining vital local services and safeguarding local employment. For many urban communities, and particularly the poorest urban communities, the last 25 years have been characterised by a succession of regeneration partnerships and initiatives by governments of different political complexions. While the experience of these partnerships, including their limited impact, has been well documented, the top-down nature of these arrangements has frequently required communities to engage on the terms of the paymaster, with issues, problems and the required solutions invariably being defined in advance by politicians and civil servants. Out-with housing funding, major public sector investment has usually taken the form of grant funding, and as a consequence, vital local services are being delivered by fragile community-managed voluntary organisations that are almost 100% grant-dependent. The longer-term sustainability of this community infrastructure will be tested to the limit given the looming public sector budget cuts.

It is interesting to note that over the same period, the issues facing rural communities has been virtually ignored within contemporary community work literature in Scotland, yet the experience of many island and remote rural communities has been not that dissimilar to poor urban areas – effectively abandoned by the market (apart from the second home/holiday home market which has contributed further to the de-stabilisation of fragile rural communities) and systematically failed by central and local government. Arguably, the major exception to this public sector failure is the approach of Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE), who have for some years encouraged and supported community-based social enterprises as a key element within their economic development strategy.

Given these different, yet in some ways related, contexts which many communities have experienced over the last 25 years, it is perhaps unsurprising that a new approach – the Development Trust approach – has emerged: a framework which enables communities to define and prioritise issues for themselves, engage in genuine partnership by working on their own terms, release the creativity of local people, reclaim the idea of ‘enterprise’ from being the sole preserve of the private sector and increase the community ownership of land, buildings and other productive assets.

Because of the different elements within the approach it is difficult to place Development Trusts neatly on the political spectrum. Indeed the fact that Development Trusts talk of enterprise and assets in the same breath as co-operation and mutuality perhaps presents a challenge to the nature of the political spectrum itself. Despite this, the Development Trust movement seems fairly comfortable with itself, where it has come from and where it is going. In terms of the community ownership of assets it can point to a rich historical tradition emanating from the struggles of various groups from as far back as the 17th century (the Levellers, the Ranters and the Diggers perhaps being the most well known). Over the centuries, the community ownership of land and assets has run 'like a golden thread through our social history' remaining a consistent issue within progressive political thought, and subsequent struggles and movements (Wyler, 2009). The concept of community-based social enterprise can arguably be traced back even further - to the 12th century medieval guilds that owned and regulated their craft. Since then, the concept of social enterprise has informed the development of successive progressive movements (including the Chartists, the Rochester Pioneers, Robert Owen's villages of co-operation, the trade union communities of the 1840s, and the early Co-operative movement), often being interwoven with ideas of community ownership.

While the impetus for many of these social movements was the eradication of poverty and exploitation and a desire for transformative social change, Development Trusts within the current context make no such claims, preferring to draw on their rich historical legacy to provide practical and creative solutions to both traditional community issues and new, emerging issues, such as climate change, with an approach that is both proactive and often opportunistic in nature. As has been described above, the Development Trust approach is not rocket science and indeed part of the attraction for communities may lie in both the simplicity and the flexibility of the framework on offer.

The current economic crisis has arguably posed more fundamental questions about the nature of the society we live in than any other event in recent years, summarised in the following editorial from *The Independent* (29th March 2010), 'The present situation has shown us that the purely profit-motivated business model hasn't worked. It never worked for the poor and excluded, but now it can't even survive on its own terms. It has over-borrowed, over-promised and finally the bubble has burst'. If ever there was an opportunity to re-focus on the concepts of co-operation, mutuality and social enterprise and the re-emerging economic ideas of thinkers such as Ernst Schumacher (1999), then this is it. Faced therefore with the consequences of further potential economic crises, an increasingly

ageing population, and the twin threats of climate change and peak oil, it is fairly safe to conclude that communities will increasingly require to be stronger, cohesive, creative, more autonomous and more resilient.

Conclusion

While the development trust approach seems to have much to offer within the above context, it should be stressed that it is not a panacea for all of society's ills. It does, however, offer a new framework for community development which draws on the strengths of effective and progressive grassroots-based practice. Importantly, the Development Trust approach also addresses many of the problems within contemporary community engagement work such as imposing change through top-down decision-making, tokenistic and marginal community participation and imposed partnerships and agendas.

The Development Trust approach is not, of course, without its challenges. There is a fragility about some of what has been achieved to date and, like much other community activity, it runs the risk in some instances of community activist burn-out. In addition there can, at times, be a tension between the Development Trust being both democratic and enterprising. However there is no doubt that increasing numbers of local people are drawing inspiration and motivation from both the Development Trust approach and each other, and using this to achieve all kinds of success in their communities – often in very adverse circumstances. As more and more communities vote with their feet, professional community development would do well to, at the very least, ascertain why.

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Poverty in Scotland: Three challenges for community development

Peter Kelly

Introduction

There are currently over 900,000 people living in low-income households in Scotland. In hard cash, being from a low-income household means living on less than £115 per week for a single person with no children or £279 for a couple with two children (both figures are 'after housing costs').¹ The consequences of large numbers of people living on low incomes are well known: the impact on health, with higher incidences of long term illness and disability, and most importantly early death; the impact on children's educational outcomes, where poorer children do worse than those from better off households; the impact on employment, with poorer people more likely to experience periods of unemployment throughout their working lives; and the impact on community life, where communities experiencing higher levels of low income are more likely to be impacted by crime, drug misuse, poor housing, violence.

Whilst those living on low incomes feel the greatest impact of poverty, there is a cost to our society as a whole. A recent study for the Scottish Government suggested that the cost of additional spending on public services due to the level of child poverty in Scotland was in the region of £1.5 to £1.75 billion per year (Hirsch 2008). The work of Wilkinson and Pickett (2008) has highlighted the link between the levels of inequality in a society and poorer outcomes across all income groups. Poverty diminishes the lives not only of those who directly experience it, but of us all.

So there is little doubt that poverty in Scotland remains a significant challenge. It is not a challenge that is only the preserve of those active at

the 'grassroots', nor of those working at the national level as lobbyists, policy makers, or politicians. It is a challenge that cuts across all these areas and that requires solutions in different places, led by different people at different times. The challenge of poverty is, therefore, a challenge for all those engaged in the theory and practice of community development.

This article will highlight three interconnected challenges that currently exist for those who wish to contribute to the fight against poverty. The first challenge is to recognise where progress has been made in addressing poverty over the last decade or so. The second relates to convincing the wider public about the need to tackle poverty and the feasibility of such a project. The final challenge is that of 'working together'. This is an issue that has been at the heart of the work of the Poverty Alliance for nearly 20 years, but there is now a greater urgency to make working together a reality. Whether we can meet these three interconnected challenges will determine whether we are able to make a bigger impact on poverty in Scotland in the future.

1. Credit where it's due?

For some people working at the grassroots, whether as paid employees or activists, it can sometimes appear that the problems of poverty have shown little improvement over the last 10 years. There is good reason for this. The places most often associated with higher levels of deprivation and poverty today remain very similar to those one would have thought of 10, 20 or even 30 years ago. It is clear that the patterns of deprivation have remained consistent for too many communities in Scotland and throughout the UK.

Indeed the work of Danny Dorling (2007) suggests that spatial inequality, the physical separation between where the rich and poor live, has become even more pronounced over the last 40 years. In this context of the continuity of spatial patterns of poverty and inequality, it is little wonder that the notion that 'nothing changes' persists.

However, in the midst of this continuity there has also been change. If we look at headline figures for child and pensioner poverty, we start to see where some change has taken place. In Scotland the rates of child poverty declined from around 32% in 1996/97 to around 24% in 2008/09. The fall in pensioner poverty has been even more dramatic, with the proportion of pensioners living in relative poverty falling by more than half during this period, from 31% to 16%. It is important to note that progress in reducing child poverty or pensioner poverty has not been continuous over this period. The decline in child poverty largely took place in the early part of the last decade, with recent years showing very little change. Indeed, the

target of reducing child poverty by half by 2010/11 is now likely to be missed by some way. A similar story is evident for pensioners where there has been little progress since 2004/05, and where the trend is starting to move upwards again².

Central to the Government's anti-poverty strategy, north and south of the border, has been efforts to increase employment levels. In the three years to 2007/08 the risks of low income amongst working age adults were 65% for unemployed families, 55% for economically inactive families, 24% for part working families (both in part-time or one in full time work) and 4% for all working families³. This shows that work can be a route out of poverty, but also both parents need to be working and one of them needs to work full time. The flipside of these figures, of course, is that for many families merely having someone in work is not sufficient to lift them out of poverty. The Poverty Website also reports that 39% of working age adults on low income were in a household where someone was working in the period 1995/96 to 1996/97. Ten years later this had risen to 45%.

One of the policies that has made it possible for work to provide a route out of poverty for some families has been tax credits. MacInnes et al (2009) suggest that tax credits lift an extra 700,000 children out of poverty each year than the old Family Credit system that existed before 1999. Were this the end of the story then we would have to mark the tax credit system down as a genuine success. However, the authors also note that more children now need tax credits than in 1999, and that the 'fairly strong improvement brought about by tax credits has been undermined by a rising need for them' (p.9).

In assessing where progress has been made (or not) over the last decade we have focused only on 'income poverty'. Had we considered areas related to poverty and social exclusion such as neighbourhood regeneration, health inequalities, racial and gender discrimination, fuel poverty or housing, we would have found similarly mixed results: some progress, but it has often been partial, incomplete and now possibly in reverse.

The accumulated evidence of the last 13 years of anti-poverty programmes does provide us with strong evidence of the need and effectiveness of policies that are designed to reduce poverty. It provides evidence that where resources are made available, and in sufficient quantity, then a real impact can be made on poverty – levels of poverty *did* fall in the first part of the last decade, and this fall happened by design, not accident. Our first challenge then is to convince ourselves, and those with whom we work, that the kind of change we want is possible.

2. Getting the public on board

A curious thing appears to have happened to the 'poverty debate' over the last five years or so. Where once it seemed that the mainstream political parties either didn't use the word 'poverty' or searched for alternative language (from the useful 'social inclusion' to the wholly negative 'underclass'), today we have entered a period where they are more than happy to use the 'p' word. This is a very welcome development and we can now, at the very least, have a genuine debate with all the main parties about how we address the reality of poverty for individuals, families and communities.

All three main parties make differing levels of commitment, and have somewhat different approaches and understandings of the problem of poverty. Whilst the Conservatives have much to say about the 'Big Society' and the role of community and voluntary sector in mending the 'broken society', some of what they say appears to echo more traditional arguments around 'welfare dependency' and finding the causes of poverty in family breakdown, drug dependency and alcohol misuse (Lister and Bennett 2010). For Labour, the emphasis on paid employment and 'no option for a life on benefits' remains similar to what have been ever-present themes for more than a decade. The Liberal Democrats make fewer direct references to poverty, but where they do, the agenda does not stray far from the current conventional wisdom.

Regardless of the particular policies the main point remains: the debate between political parties about how best to tackle poverty is real and one that should be welcomed. But whilst there may be a degree of unanimity amongst the political parties in the area (and it is important not to overstate the depth of this commitment), there still exists a significant proportion of the general public that remains to be convinced of the need for or efficacy of policies to tackle poverty.

The most recent British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) found that support for redistribution from the better off to help poorer people has fallen from 51% in 1994 to 38% in 2009 (Park et al 2010). Interestingly the fall in support for redistribution was largest amongst people that identified themselves as Labour supporters. Previous research has highlighted why people think that some people are poor. In 2008, 27% of respondents put poverty down to laziness or a lack of will power, 34% saw it as an inevitable part of life and a further 10% said it was the result of bad luck. These findings reflect views revealed by the Fabian Commission on Life Chances and Child Poverty. They found that there was scepticism both about the existence of poverty and about the possibility of tackling it (Bamfield 2005).

So, if we are to bring about the kind of policy change required, or to prioritise key parts of public spending that will support poorer people (for example, increasing benefit levels for lone parents as opposed to cutting tax for married couples) then we need public support. Again this may seem like a rather obvious statement, but the actions of many anti-poverty organisations often suggest that lobbying by a few policy experts or the campaigns of a handful of committed activists will be enough. For sustained change, policy change that endures, more effort needs to be devoted to convincing the public that poverty can and should be tackled.

Once again the current context of spending cuts to public services, which will undoubtedly impact on the poorest the most, the need to engage the public more effectively in the fight against poverty is crucial. This will require change for some organisations in the way that they talk about poverty, how they communicate this, and what practical activities they undertake. There is a need for anti-poverty organisations to link to wider concerns regarding inequality in society more generally. Articulating concerns about poverty within the broader context of inequality is more likely to tap into concerns that the majority of the public share (Bamfield and Horton 2009).

Of course, it is not enough to simply modify our arguments to convince the public of the need to tackle poverty. What we practically do to engage the public is of crucial importance. It is to this final challenge that we now turn.

3. Working together to combat poverty

Throughout this article it has been assumed that there is a natural constituency of 'anti-poverty organisations'. The reality is that there are relatively few organisations that are explicitly set up to address poverty and challenge its existence, but there are hundreds of organisations that work around poverty and social exclusion issues or that have concerns which link directly into the desire to create a more socially just society. The final challenge we face is bringing these groups together into a stronger coalition to make the case for concerted action to address poverty.

Here the prospects look encouraging. Over the last few years we have seen the development of a number of specific coalitions that have brought together a wide range of organisations. Perhaps the most obvious was the Make Poverty History coalition. Although focused around global poverty, this coalition inspired groups focused on 'domestic' poverty to seek similar approaches to mass mobilisation. The development of the End Child Poverty campaign⁴ has been one of the most notable successes. This has brought together more than 150 organisations and held the largest

demonstration against poverty in the UK in October 2008 when around 10,000 people marched through London.

Central to the success of these campaigns has been the ability to engage civil society, faith groups and trade unions. On a smaller scale, the development of the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform (SCoWR) and the Scottish Living Wage Campaign have been examples of attempts to bring together similar coalitions of civil society organisations.

It is an inauspicious time to seek to build this type of response to poverty, but increasingly it is recognised by many organisations that pursuing separate sectional agendas will not allow us to make the impact we require. If we are to meet the challenges outlined in this article, it is perhaps this last challenge we need to address first. By building broad coalitions around a clear agenda of tackling inequality and poverty it will be possible to create the public support required to deliver the policy change needed. In difficult times, such an optimistic goal may seem unrealistic, but without it we are unlikely to meet the challenge of poverty.

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Notes

¹ These figures relate to 2007/08, the most recent data available. The figures represent 60% of median household income. For further details see <http://www.poverty.org.uk/01/index.shtml>

² Figures from <http://www.poverty.org.uk/s39/index.shtml>, from Households Below Average Incomes, updated for August 2009.

³ Ibid

⁴ www.endchildpoverty.org.uk



Oor Mad History: Community history as a way of revitalising mental health collective advocacy

Anne O'Donnell

By listening to and learning from their stories from the past, and by understanding the views of those who have been in mental institutions in our own time, we create the greater possibility of making mental health treatment more humane, less imposing, less impersonal, and more responsive to what the people on the receiving end want or do not want (Reaume 2000: 253).

Those of us who use mental health services are usually seen as sufferers of mental illness, as victims of stigma and discrimination and as dangerous people needing to be controlled. Our madness and distress are understood as irrational and beyond understanding – some people are sane and some people are insane – and the former can never understand the latter. The medical model dominant in mental health services constructs certain individuals as sick and in need of treatment, and draws on the 'expert' knowledge of psychiatry for diagnosis and prognosis, and a reification of mental illness. Unlike other medical specialities, psychiatry has legal powers to detain a person diagnosed with a mental illness and considered to be a danger to his or herself or to others, and to treat them against their will. While it is a minority of service users who are under compulsion, the effects of this power can be felt throughout the mental health system, in what Rogers and Pilgrim call a 'gradient of coercion' (2003:71) where some people are under legal compulsion to accept treatment, where some are under threat of such compulsion and so agree to something they might otherwise not (*de facto* compulsion), to the majority who are conscious of the possibility of coercion.

We have long been objects of social policy, of professional discourses and of the history of psychiatry. We have been constructed as people who are passive, rather than people who can act, however limiting the structural issues may be. 'As objects, one's reality is defined by others, one's identity created by others, one's history named only in ways that defined one's relationship to those who are subject' (hooks, 1989: 42-3). For example, unlike most disabled people, those of us who experience mental distress are constructed in terms of our use of services rather than our experience of impairment and society's role in disabling us is therefore concealed. I consider this as evidence of how we are situated because of mental health legislation and the medical model.

The reality is that we have long been active in challenging these views and assumptions, and in generating ideas for better services and better working practices in the delivery of more effective services. In recent years, our demands to have our voices heard and our views included in mental health policy, service planning and management have been successful. Legislation such as the NHS and Community Care Act (1990) and the Mental Health (Treatment and Care) (Scotland) Act (2003) and policies such as the Patient Focus and Public Involvement Framework now mean that service user involvement is automatically part of every new development in mental health services.

The problems of success

However, success brings problems and we have found that the increased demands to participate in consultations, planning groups, evaluations etc. leaves mental health collective advocacy groups with less time and energy to focus on what we felt was important. We have also found that most user involvement initiatives operate so that important structural issues are effectively kept off the agenda (Hodge, 2006). Such demand has also meant groups miss out on the opportunity to learn from one another. The focus on local issues (at local authority or health board level) means that we cannot always keep up to date with issues at a Scottish or UK level.

Collective advocacy groups are products of the social context in which they arise. Mental health services are not generally places or spaces in which those of us who use them have had positive experiences of power, so many of us who become members of collective advocacy groups may not have had the opportunity to explore issues of power and to challenge our own beliefs and behaviours. Therefore, there is a danger that we will generally replicate the power imbalances present within most mental health services. For example, we may see ourselves as primarily people with mental health problems and not as people who are capable of working

together to effect change. Beresford and Wallcraft (1997) argue that psychiatry has had a powerful influence on how mental health service users understand their own experience of madness and distress, and on how they identify, individually and collectively. They contrast this with the experience of disabled people who developed the social model of disability based on their own experiences and understanding, independent of professionals and services.

So we need to explore ways of engaging with these kinds of issues. Some of us involved in Edinburgh Users Forum had been casually reminiscing about events and people from our past, and it was always noticeable how much more energy we had when remembering way back when compared to how we talked about current demands. Perhaps a focus on our history as mad people and as activists would help us in our current work? By re-connecting us to the reasons mental health service users had set up our groups, by learning from the past, and by working together, we could use the past to change our future...

Then in October 2007 came the visit of Canadian mental health 'consumer' and academic, David Reville, to Edinburgh. David teaches a course at Ryerson University called *Mad People's History*, originally designed and taught by Geoffrey Reaume, and this caught our attention and our imaginations. This course looks at 'madness' from the perspective of those who were, or are, labelled as 'mad' as opposed to the history of psychiatry or the history of mental illness. It is part of the 'the wider goal of advancing social justice struggles for the vast majority of mad people who could never dream of being in a position to take any university course, let alone one that speaks so clearly about their own collective history.' (Reaume, 2006: 174)

'Oor Mad History'

We successfully applied to NHS Lothian for funding for a two year project to take this work forward. *Oor Mad History* will involve service users from all the Lothian mental health advocacy groups, the Patients Council at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital, East Lothian Involvement Group, West Lothian Mental Health Advocacy Project, Service Users Midlothian and Edinburgh Users Group. It will be managed by CAPS - a user-led advocacy organisation which has played a major role in developing collective advocacy throughout the Lothians.

Language is significant - we chose each word in the project's name carefully. *Oor* emphasises the collective nature of the project and the Scottish context. *Mad* is a loaded term, one which challenges the medical

focus of much of the language in this whole area. No term in the history of madness is neutral — not mental illness, madness, or any other term. Madness, however, is more respectful of the huge diversity of views within this field over a much longer period than a term exclusively identified with biological determinism that has developed since the early twentieth century (Reaume 2006:182).

And *history*? For many marginalised groups, oral history is a key way of discovering and recovering their history. Thomson (2000) gives many examples of how such groups have been able to sustain themselves through hardship, through remembering their history and using the confidence it gives them to mobilize politically. Oral history usually, though not always, takes a more collective approach. The Oral History Society (2007) describes oral history as the 'recording of people's memories' which 'enables people who have been hidden from history to be heard'. Thomson (2000) argues that all history has a social and political purpose, whether stated or not. What we can do with oral history is to be explicit about our social and political purpose. Harding and Gabriel claim that '[a]n enduring and dominant theme in generating life-story interviews ... has been the enrichment and democratisation of history and the empowerment of 'disenfranchised' groups' (2004: 186).

We intend that both the content (our history as activists) and the process (ourselves as oral historians) will challenge the more usual construction of mental health service users as objects and argues that we are agents in our own lives and can actively participate in the planning, management and evaluation of mental health services. We also expect it will strengthen collective advocacy groups by shaping 'their sense of collective and communal attachment and the opportunities for further mobilisation' (ibid.: 200) which should enable us to resist the user involvement agenda and to focus on our priorities.

Oor Mad History will have two key tasks – to:

- gather and organise material which has been stored in organisations' premises and other material which may be donated by individuals;
- interview key people and transcribe the interviews.

The transcribed interviews and the organised archive will form a resource from which a number of products can be developed, e.g. DVD, website, book, etc.. The material will determine what formats the products of the project will take, taking into consideration issues to do with accessibility of such products e.g. literacy, sensory impairment, and so on. However, it

is important that we do not decide too soon on what format such products might take.

A Community History Worker has been appointed who will have the responsibility to co-ordinate the activity of *Oor Mad History* and support the activists. We will recruit, train and support people currently active in service user groups to carry out interviews and other aspects of *Oor Mad History*, based on their interests. We hope that this new project will draw a wider range of mental health service users into the work of the project and to wider user involvement.

Our aim is that the project will benefit:

- people who use or who have used mental health services in Lothian: by becoming involved with the project and being part of a wider group learning more about our history, they will develop skills in interviewing and/or archiving
- collective advocacy groups: by remembering our own history, we will reconnect with the reasons our groups came into being, celebrate our successes and learn from our mistakes and failures.
- workers: both in the voluntary and statutory sector, workers will gain a broader appreciation of how mental health service users have made and continue to make a difference to services
- trainers and educators: this resource will provide valuable material for people who do training in mental health awareness, user involvement etc. as well as those responsible for professional and academic education
- researchers: the resource will provide unique materials for those researching the history and current situation of mental health services, psychiatry, etc.
- the public: through the products developed from the archive and the interviews, the public will get a broader perspective on mental health service users and this will counter stigma.

However, we must be cautious about expecting too much from an oral history project. Harding and Gabriel (2004:186) found that 'the changes produced are small and local' and that attempts to represent 'marginal experience', inevitably define further positions of marginalisation for those who do not get to say their bit' (Harding and Gabriel: 2004: 197).

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This article was first published in Concept Volume 18 Number 3, 2008. Since then we have completed recording and transcribing over 60 interviews from activists and allies. We are now working on the book and CD which will be launched at our exhibition in October 2010 during Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival. You can keep up to date with us on our blog: <http://oormadhistory.blogspot.com/>



What's the problem with communities these days? Learning networks, root causes and solutions

Chik Collins

Language and learning: From 'vibrant' to 'mixed' communities

The urban policy talk has shifted over the past few years - from 'creating vibrant communities' to 'creating mixed communities'. How come? There seems to have been a little learning going on. One uses the phrase 'a little learning' advisedly; despite the abundant talk of learning around 'community regeneration' and 'renewal', if real policy learning routinely came in *significant* measures then the decades-long history of this field would not be so deeply marked by failure.

First, let's be clear about the failure. An authoritative synthesis of the best available evidence was unable to indicate any clear, positive overall impact resulting from the 'significant public investment' in regeneration across the UK between 1980 and 2004. The specific programmes covered by the review were estimated to have taken up over £11bn of public money in England alone (Thomson et al, 2006). There is no reason to think that this situation has improved since 2004. In key respects – especially trends in poverty and inequality – things are known to have deteriorated (MacInnes et al, 2009).

Second, let's come to the talk of learning. There is no shortage of it. It is at the heart of the activity of the Scottish Centre for Regeneration (SCR). The SCR, previously part of Communities Scotland, but now, since the abolition of the latter by the Scottish National Party administration elected to Holyrood in 2007, part of the Scottish Government, is responsible for

no less than three (and perhaps by the time this is published even more) Learning Networks. There is one for Community Regeneration and Tackling Poverty, another on Town Centres and Local High Streets and also a Mixed and Sustainable Communities Learning Network (MSCLN). Folk can sign up on-line for membership of these networks – which promise to connect you ‘to evidence, expertise and excellence’.

Leaving aside what counts as ‘expertise and excellence’ in a field so hallmarked by failure, there can be no objection to the idea of learning or of a learning network. And, looking at the recent development there does indeed seem to have been some learning. Folk no longer – or at least rather less often – talk about creating ‘vibrant communities’. Connecting that term to the concrete reality of the poorest areas was more than the language could credibly bear. Add in the increasingly clear evidence of policy failure and it was clear that the language had to change. That much was learned.

A little learning about ‘mixed communities’

What emerged was talk about ‘mixed communities’. There is some further learning behind this. It is on show in the Government’s 2007 housing paper – *Firm Foundations* (Scottish Government, 2007). Over 30 years social rented housing has gone from the majority tenure for the nation (over 50%) to a minority tenure (25%) which caters for a population distinguished by its poverty and vulnerability. At different times and in varying degrees it has been a stated policy aim to try to achieve more of a socioeconomic ‘mix’ of households within social rented areas. But, with a growing and welcome recognition of the importance of a better future for the tenure, this policy aim has come centre stage. Something more has been learned.

However the aim has come to the fore with a very specific slant. It is not so much that we should aspire to create a socio-economic mix *within* the tenure; rather the aim is to achieve it through *tenure mix* – breaking down the concentration of poverty and vulnerability by introducing other tenures, especially owner occupation, into areas of social rented housing. But here we come up against *resistance* to learning; for there is little evidence that mixing *tenure* leads to the kind of *community* mix and associated benefits which are being assumed, and at least as much to suggest that it can create other problems (see Glynn, 2008, esp. pp.174-176).

One could sign up for the MSCLN and seek to share such learning. But such a ‘critical’ contribution might not be welcome. Perhaps indicatively,

joining the MSCLN has certain 'conditions' attached. One is that members must 'be committed to being positive and constructive', which reads like advance warning, when one knows the linguistic terrain, that challenges to basic policy thinking will be categorised as 'negative' and 'destructive' – and responded to accordingly.

Learning with communities about 'mixed communities'

But there remain in Scotland some 'networks' where a less 'blinkered' learning is allowed – indeed encouraged. One such network has been nurtured in recent years by a range of independent tenants' organisations, community and trades councils around the west of Scotland. Since 2004 it has held community conferences in Govan, Partick, Port Glasgow, Clydebank, the Vale of Leven, Renfrewshire, Govanhill and, in 2010, in Kilmarnock. The local trades councils involved also secured an STUC day conference in September 2008 – on 'Communities, Regeneration and Democracy'.

At the Kilmarnock conference there was some discussion about mixed communities. It turned out that Kilmarnock, like many other places in Scotland, used to have a number of them. Just up the road from the conference venue there had been such a place. In the later 50s, 60s and 70s it had a real mix of socio-economic groups, and significant numbers from groups that one would rarely now find in social rented housing. However, this was not a mixed *tenure* community. The social mix was encompassed within a *single tenure* – council housing. In fact, it was this single tenure which made a meaningful social mix – as opposed to a 'physical proximity' or 'juxtaposition' – possible. Good quality housing at affordable rents meant that households from different socio-economic groups, including those which could have chosen a different form of tenure, lived together as a community.

This is not to romanticize the place – it had its problems even then. But it was, inescapably, a very much more mixed community than it is now. Now it is one of those places that the Scottish Government and COSLA (2009, p.1) have in mind when, in their recent Joint Statement on Equal Communities in a Fairer Scotland, they talk of areas where:

a variety of complex, interrelated factors such as economic decline, unemployment, low levels of educational attainment, and poor health have combined to create concentrated multiple deprivation and significant challenges for the people living there.

Of course not all of the places which are being described in this statement were previously 'mixed communities' – some were established in ways that

worked to prevent that from the outset. But many, especially outside the major cities, were.

Root causes?

The Joint Statement referred to above declares as its first principle the desire to go beyond alleviating symptoms, and to address the root causes of problems affecting areas of 'concentrated multiple deprivation' (Scottish Government and COSLA, 2009, p.3). So, what caused those communities which were once mixed, and which today exhibit 'concentrated multiple deprivation' to change so dramatically?

Unfortunately one will struggle to find answers in the policy documents, because root causes are just not identified. But at the Kilmarnock community conference underlying causes *were* identified. The key underlying causes, it was learned, were *government policies* – especially after 1979. Nor were their effects accidental or unintended. The policies were *designed* to undermine the capacity of council housing to sustain mixed communities. And that was one aspect of a broader policy agenda which aimed to attack the institutions and culture of the working class as it had developed after the Second World War (Foster, 2003; Phillips, 2008). This required an engineered recession to force deindustrialisation and create mass unemployment, legislation to further hamstring the trade union movement, attacks on council housing, and broader attacks on welfare and benefits, the public sector and local democracy. Harvie (2002, p.213) called it 'sado-monetarism'.

The combined effects of these policies *caused* dramatic change in the nature of many previously 'mixed communities' around Scotland, and radically intensified the problems of others which were already less mixed. And as this process unfolded, community development found itself being directed away from the kind of work with communities which encouraged critical reflection on causes, and instead was directed towards securing 'participation' and 'engagement' to gear communities into the 'new realities' – housing stock transfer, property development, flexible labour markets and 'employability'(Craig, 1989; Collins and Lister, 1996).

Subsequent governments, participants in the community conferences have also learned, not only maintained key policies which created these problems, they actively intensified them – continuing, for instance, to attack council housing, to undermine trade unions, to deepen poverty for some groups, to heighten inequality, and to stigmatise and punish benefit claimants. Indeed, these very policies were commonly key elements of the 'regeneration' and 'renewal' programmes which were meant to make things better (Collins, 2008).

More generally, governments continued to place highly unrealistic faith in the inclination and capacity of 'enterprise' and the private sector to contribute to positive change. The recent Kilmarnock community conference heard from a local authority representative that there had until quite recently been ambitious plans for such market-driven regeneration in the town. That same representative then laid out very clearly for the conference just how cruelly the financial crisis had exposed the weakness of these plans – even to those people who had most enthusiastically promoted them. With private developments halted, shop vacancies rising, planning applications down dramatically, unemployment rising, and the local economy declining (not least due to closure of the Diageo plant), the local council was left struggling to prevent further *degeneration* – even before currently projected, and savage, budget cuts kick in.

Against this backcloth, it is little wonder that the Scottish Government and COSLA (2009, p.1) now find themselves declaring that: 'Despite the best efforts of these community regeneration programmes, stark inequalities between geographical communities persist'.

Learning from failure?

There is an important difference, however, in the way different kinds of 'learning network' respond to this realisation of failure. The Scottish Government and COSLA (2009, p.1) respond with an almost immediate contradiction, saying that in fact 'there is evidence of success on the ground achieved by committed partners ... and it is clear that work has been done that everyone can be proud of'. In fact, it transpires that their proposed path to a more equal and fairer Scotland is strikingly similar to the one which led to it becoming more unequal and very unfair (pp.2-4). There is to be a 'partnership', with joint working, focusing on 'employability' and some 'community empowerment'. The partners are going to invest in 'what works' – even as the cuts are made!

It is a response which tells us more about the psychological sensitivities of the 'policy and practice community', and the limits to 'approved learning' within it, than it does about what needs to be done to serve the broader needs of the local communities concerned. The response of those participating in the community conferences has been rather more focussed on the latter. This is in no small part because in their network *learning about causes is actually encouraged*. It is also because they have a rather more profound interest in actually grappling with causes than many in the 'policy and practice community' seem to exhibit.

Having grappled with causes, the participants respond to the failure of the 'best efforts' of the regenerators by saying that there needs to be much

less poverty and inequality. The income of the poorest – including the increasing numbers of working poor – must be increased significantly. The tax system needs to shift from a regressive to a progressive one. Pensions and benefits, some of which purposefully immiserate large numbers of people in the poorest communities, must be increased, and there must be positive encouragement and support for trade unions to counter the growing problem of low pay and its impact on families with children. Privatisation of public services, which has been actively promoted as ‘regeneration’ (Collins, 2006), needs to be stopped and reversed.

Moreover, if we are to have ‘mixed communities’, we will need to reassess the idea that a ‘mixed tenure’ approach will produce them, and rediscover that genuinely mixed working class communities, in the future as in the past, are most likely to require the large scale collective provision of good quality, affordable, well maintained rented homes that many more people would actually *choose* to live in.

Conclusion: Learning for a change

There is evidence of learning in the most recent policy development in Scotland; but it is not enough to begin to grasp causes and craft solutions. Nor is the learning that is needed likely to emerge from a government-led and managed ‘learning network’. It could emerge from an independent network of working class communities and trade union councils (see also Collins, 2009). In fact it has already – albeit on a still small scale – begun to do so. The message from this network is that broader participation and support from all those who are committed to learning about and addressing the root causes of the problems of poor, working class communities will be very welcome.

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The Tenants' Movement: Incorporation and independence

Sarah Glynn

At the beginning of this century, the participation of local authority and housing association tenants in the management of their homes was enshrined in law in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. But what might appear at first sight to be a long overdue recognition of tenant power, has proved in practice to be a highly effective managerial tool in the hands of the local and national state and social landlords. As the late chairman of the Scottish Tenants' Organisation pointed out, the legislation was framed in terms of a duty on the landlord rather than rights for the tenants,¹ and landlords have been able to use the system to their advantage. Almost a century on from the mass rent strikes of 1915, when organised Scottish tenants played a major part in the movement that forced the British government to introduce rent control and - eventually - subsidised public housing, anything that could be described as a tenants' movement has shrunk to a few handfuls of campaigners. There are many tenants' organisations, but even a quick glance suggests that all is not what it seems. Half the tenants' organisations registered with my local council, Dundee, give a council employee as their main contact, and half the rest list a council employee as a source for further information.

The weakening of tenant power has to be understood in the context of a massive decrease in renting as a result of thirty years of privatisation. Not only are tenants now a relatively small group, but this includes a disproportionate number of people whose lives are overwhelmed by the problems of multiple deprivation, leaving them little opportunity to organise. And, on top of this, authorities can readily exploit divisions between tenants and owner occupiers. However, renting remains an

important - and often the only - option for many people, and a stronger and better public rented sector could contribute to a more equal society (Glynn, 2009). As history has shown us, improvements for current and future tenants will not be achieved without a fight, but the type of organisational structures described here make the necessary concerted action even harder to achieve.²

An organisational evolution of this kind is not unique to the tenants' movement. It is symptomatic of the growing use of new forms of local governance to incorporate potential sources of resistance and limit debate. New 'partnership' structures function as part of a management strategy, geared towards the implementation and strengthening of policies consistent with hegemonic neoliberal economic practice. This article looks at this process at work, drawing on my own experience in Dundee. For the last five years, I have been involved as an activist and researcher with council tenants campaigning against the demolition of their homes, and I am currently acting as secretary of the residents' association formed by the remaining tenants in two multi-storey blocks in Derby Street. The use of this example is not meant to suggest that the situation in Dundee is either worse or better than elsewhere. I am sure that tenants and activists in other places will recognise familiar patterns in this account. Housing association tenants may also find themselves incorporated into the system of management through becoming members of the housing association board, where they are legally bound to keep discussion confidential and to prioritise the interests of the association. Tenants of private landlords are not even covered by the law on tenant participation – despite the recent emphasis on increasing private renting.

In Dundee, the body that the city council consults in order to fulfil its duties under the 2001 Act with respect to the participation of its tenants, is the Dundee Federation of Tenants' Associations, and this has become the conduit for the implementation of all council policy affecting its tenants. The Federation is also quoted in the local press as the voice of the city's council tenants, although only a very small proportion of tenants have any interaction with it. It exemplifies the new form of organisation promoted by partnership governance, and it receives generous funding from the council – although, since this comes from the housing revenue account, it is in effect paid for by Dundee's council tenants.

When, six years ago, the city council agreed to undertake an initial consultative vote on the possibility of transferring its housing stock to a housing association, it was the Federation that organised the consultation. Stock transfer votes have become notorious examples of the abuse of democracy. Tenants have a legal right to vote on the change of landlord,

but in recent years they have been told that investment in their homes is contingent on their voting 'yes' to transfer, and huge sums of public money have been spent promoting transfer campaigns. Despite this, there have been growing numbers of 'no' votes as a result of concerted grass-roots campaigns that hope, ultimately, to change the system so as to allow direct investment in council housing. In agreeing to organise Dundee's consultation, the Federation ruled itself out of taking a critical or campaigning role that might challenge the rules of the game. And, in setting out the limited options available within those rules, its newsletter suggested that transfer was the only option. It was left to independent activists to put the case against transfer and win a two-to-one vote against taking the process any further.

Through avoiding taking up a critical position, the Federation effectively supports the status quo. This was demonstrated again a couple of years ago when a group of us formed Dundee Independent Housing Action Group in response to the then council administration's dismal record on housing, which had been headlining the local paper. We arranged a public meeting and sent an invitation to the Federation, but they refused to attend on the grounds that the meeting was 'political'.

The Federation has not, however, refrained from campaigning over the Derby Street multis, and its chairperson recently wrote to every political party and tenants' organisation to emphasise that they do not support the retention of these buildings. This view was reached without any attempt to consult Derby Street tenants, who have been campaigning publicly for five years against demolition. The stance taken by the Federation is the natural conclusion for an organisation that relies on council officials to set out and interpret its options. Tenants are expected to make decisions in a world where, rather than campaign for more investment in much-needed public housing, you must rob Peter to pay Paul; and the Federation was convinced (though this need not actually be the case³) that money spent on the Derby Street multis would put up rents for their members, who are lucky enough to already have secure council tenancies.

Derby Street Residents' Association's first - and probably last - attendance at a Federation meeting was certainly instructive. We saw from the minutes of the previous meeting, at which no Derby Street tenants had been present, that there had been a unanimous vote against retaining the buildings, and sought to make a brief comment on this under 'matters arising'. We were refused. The main business of the meeting was a discussion on the setting of the next year's rents. There were two speakers, one from the council and one from the national Tenants Information Service, and they explained how all the different but vital calls on the

budget necessitated a 4% rent rise. To call this consultation is a cruel joke. Even the Federation objected that, unlike in previous years, they were presented with only one option. But in those previous years they had been ready to give their stamp of approval to options put to them by the council that involved similar rent rises. After the meeting everyone was treated to a buffet and taxis home. Those who attended could clearly count on having a good night out, and the council could rest secure in the knowledge that they had complied with the 2001 Housing Act: but it is difficult to see this as real tenant participation.

If tenants encounter a tenants' organisation, it is likely to be in this vein. When we registered the Derby Street Residents Association,⁴ the council officer we spoke to expressed surprise that no-one from the council was involved, and suggested that our major expense would be tea and biscuits. Toothless tenants' organisations serve a similar function to a company union. They restrict debate within limits that present no challenge to existing authorities, encourage cynicism towards the political process, and make it difficult to attract people to alternative more radical organisations. They drive a wedge between tenants who believe that it is only possible to work within the existing, increasingly restrictive, system and those who believe in challenging it; and by encouraging reliance on officially-dispensed subsidy they effectively discourage dissenting voices.

In addition to working in partnership with approved organisations, authorities can go out of their way to prevent others from participating or having a voice. Derby Street tenants had to appeal to the Information Commissioner before they were able to see the report on which the decision to demolish their homes was based. And our Independent Housing Action Group was told that it could not put up a stall in the city square without liability insurance. We went ahead with the stall anyway, after first informing the local press, and the council clearly decided not to court worse publicity in front of the camera, but we later learnt, through sources in the council, that the insurance rule was brought in specifically to try and cut across our protest. By being prepared to contest the rules we were able to make more space for critical voices to be heard.

One stall cannot make much impact, let alone challenge hegemonic political and economic structures. But it is important that tenant organisations are not bound by the limits imposed by those structures, both in what they strive to achieve and the manner in which they take the fight forward. Like trade unions, tenants' organisations need to be independent - free to set their own agenda outwith the limited choices presented by those who control the current system, and free to challenge current policies.

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Notes

¹ Submission to the Scottish housing Minister written by John Carracher, September 2009. Carracher and the STO had been instrumental in campaigning for tenant participation, however they were highly critical of the form the legislation was given and of how that allowed it to undermine their original vision.

² A comparison might be drawn with trade unionism, which has been impacted by organisational regulation as well as by the decline of large-scale industry; but in the case of tenant organisation the new regime has been installed primarily through a process of co-option rather than confrontation.

³ Demolition not only results in a loss of social housing; it is an extremely costly process, and also has long-term impacts on the council's total rental income.

⁴ Although it is not necessary to register a tenants' organisation we hoped it would make the council take us more seriously and also give us access to money to pay for essential costs such as photocopying.



Community development for environmental justice

Eurig Scandrett

My message to young people who are into this work is that they should do it as long as they can do it sincerely. If they lose interest they should quit. People who they claim to work for can do without them, they do not need their help or they do not insist on getting help from community workers. People can survive with what they have. People who are not assisted by community workers also survive and people who know how to fight for their rights will do so without any assistance. So my message to the new generation is if they want to do community work they have to be honest and sincere, they should not take advantage or exploit. There is a lot of power in truth. And truth will also be your hindrance because it will cause a lot of problems for you and get you into trouble (Rabiya Bee, founder of the Bhopal Gas Affected Women Workers' Campaign, Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study, 2009:68).

Introduction

Greengairs is a former mining town of 1500 people in North Lanarkshire with high levels of unemployment. The deep mines in this area closed well before Margaret Thatcher's onslaught on the National Union of Mineworkers, but the coal seams have continued to be extracted by open cast. As open cast mines have been exhausted, the resulting holes in the ground have been transformed into landfill sites and 'rehabilitated' by receiving municipal and commercial waste, primarily from Glasgow. Greengairs is therefore a 'sacrificial zone' (Coleman, 2003), completely surrounded by opencast coal mines and landfill sites,

including one of the largest landfills in Europe, which dominates the skyline of the village and is the source of smells, pests and constant heavy vehicle traffic.

In 1996, an article appeared in ENDS report, a technical journal of environmental management, which identified that soil contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) was being dumped in the Greengairs landfill site after having been transported across Britain from Hertfordshire. PCBs are known carcinogens and the handling of contaminated materials by waste facilities is governed by licensing by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. Greengairs was one of the few landfill sites whose licence had not been upgraded to take into account stricter regulations on the handling of PCBs, a fact which the operator was exploiting by receiving the contaminated soil.

Staff in Friends of the Earth Scotland, having identified the exploitation, notified Greengairs community. The town was mobilised and blockaded the entrance to the site with local men, women and children, supported by a handful of environmentalists. Following days of standoff, the company's Chief Executive met with the community, conceded to a few demands, acceded to recommendations made by an independent consultancy, and changed the management of the site, bringing in a regime with greater openness and accountability to the community. A local environment group was formed which spearheaded a number of other local environmental campaigns – maintaining vigilance over the landfill and other local operations, constructing environmental improvements and fighting new unwanted developments. Activists politicised by these events went on to study courses on environmental justice, lobbied ministers on waste policy and linked up to share their learned expertise with others throughout Scotland in similar struggles (Coleman 2003, Dunion 2003). Greengairs became the iconic community in Scotland which mobilised against environmental injustice.

Community development for environmental justice: Global and local

The environmental justice movement is, essentially, an alliance of community action campaigns against environmental racism. However, as Martinez-Alier (2003) has pointed out, environmental justice struggles (or in his term, 'environmentalism of the poor') long predate this. Wherever disempowered people have mobilised to oppose the devaluing of their environment by the economic logic of the powerful this can be understood as environmental justice. For example, the movement has roots in the USA, where it emerged from campaigns against environmental racism. In

1982 there was an outbreak of militancy amongst African-American residents of Warren County, North Carolina, in opposition to PCB dumping in their communities. This led to research being commissioned by the United Church of Christ which identified correlations between toxic sites and African-American, Latino/a and Native American communities (Commission for Racial Justice, United Church of Christ 1987). The sociologist and activist Bob Bullard (1990) found that there were around four thousand community campaigns tackling local environmental pollution, primarily in racialised communities. Drawing on the discourses, methods and in some cases the veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, these communities mobilised into the environmental justice movement in 1992 with the First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit.

Responding to the environmental injustices experienced by communities in Scotland has, in turn, led to approaches to community development which give interesting insights into the role of community workers and other professionals and outsiders who adopt a political commitment alongside communities impoverished and disenfranchised by the logic of capital accumulation. Friends of the Earth has regularly responded to communities facing acute crises, reacting to the imposition of a pollution incident or a proposed installation or development. Supporting communities in their time of crisis helped them to mobilise, to learn campaigning skills, deal with planning rules, interpret pollution monitoring data or use environmental protection legislation. The communities would win or lose their battles and then, at best, learn from their experience to build capacity for the next crisis, sometimes guided by a community worker. At worse they would learn to live with their failure and the further loss in their quality of life, and be ill prepared for the next onslaught.

Meanwhile Friends of the Earth started working with community workers in areas where there were no acute crisis, but chronic problems of economic, social and environmental decline – or unsustainability (Scandrett 2006). The work of community development seeks to identify, with the community, the causes of their disadvantage and to organise collectively to address these issues. Through scraping away at a community's discontents and revealing their structural causes, community development must be instrumental in 'creating' crises, or more precisely, uncovering the crises which are hidden beneath the surface. One effective starting point for this is the environment in which the community lives. Just as Martin Luther King's practice of non-violence was designed not to avoid violence but rather to expose the violence that is implicit in racism, so community development for environmental justice should expose oppressive contradictions in the environment.

The process of reacting to acute crises and proactively exposing causes of chronic injustice leads to a cycle of progressively more critical exposure of the structural injustices which undermine our communities. At Friends of the Earth we have been able to provide some opportunities for education and networking between communities whose experience of struggling against environmental injustice was borne of fighting new developments, demanding accountability from polluting operations, or seeking to improve housing and infrastructure in post-industrial decline (Scandrett, 2007). The Scottish Environmental Justice Network served, for a short period, as a mechanism for 'joining hands' to build solidarity between communities' struggles, and 'joining the dots' to understand the structural causes of injustice (Alf G. Nilsen, personal communication).

Whilst Friends of the Earth Scotland's Community Action Team was exploring mechanisms for environmental justice, colleagues in England decided to invest in a community worker in an area which research had revealed had the highest correlation between polluting industries and socio-economic deprivation – Teesside. For several years the worker organised amongst local people concerned about environmental degradation from economic decline, emissions and contamination. A local action group, 'Impact', started monitoring pollution and increased demands on the Environment Agency to regulate the large Wilton industrial area. In 2003 an international controversy hit Teesside when Hartlepool dock arranged to receive a convoy of old and moribund 'ghost ships' from the USA for breaking up and disposal. Friends of the Earth campaigned against the project and successfully, albeit temporarily, blocked the operation. Impact activists later expressed frustration that Friends of the Earth campaigned over the heads of the local activists, using them at best, as personal interest stories for the media (Gilligan and Zagrovic 2004).

Models of practice for community development for environmental justice

At a later review of local environmental justice involving staff from Scotland and England, some models of potential intervention between communities and environmental campaigners committed to environmental justice were raised and I have developed these for this discussion. These are not models in the sense of off-the-shelf formulae, but rather heuristic points in a complex of different relations between communities, campaigning organisations and community workers.

The first model may be loosely regarded as the 'Greengairs' model, in which leadership and mobilisation emerges from within a community.

There may be minimal contact from outsiders in the form of technical advice (Friends of the Earth provided information from scientific publications) but the agenda is entirely driven locally and campaigners and community workers are drawn on only for specific needs. One of the Friends of the Earth activists had previously worked with an NGO in Indonesia which adopted this approach: to resource and support communities only where they are self organising and requesting support. The Greengairs model resonates with anarchist and Gandhian approaches to community development and is a valuable corrective against manipulation by external activists or funds. However it also risks appealing to naive claims that the community is unproblematic and always knows best, or that the role of the worker is to work purely to the community's agenda. Communities are, of course, complex and dynamic, capable of contradictory and reactionary agendas which community workers need to challenge.

Second is the 'Teesside' model. Here, Friends of the Earth invested the resources of a community worker in one particularly significant area of environmental injustice. The community worker was able slowly to develop an agenda which identified issues of environmental concern, which included pollution but also issues in which Friends of the Earth had no interest, such as local play areas. As with any form of community work, conflicts are inevitable between the interests of the community and those of the employing organisation. The campaigning objectives of Friends of the Earth, in which limited resources need to be deployed efficiently by skilled, professional campaigners to achieve winnable targets, often contradict the slow pace and inclusive methods of community work, where process is equally if not more important than outcome.

Third, and in contrast, is the 'ghost ships' model, where a national campaign was emphasised over local issues. Here, the local community became part of the arsenal for the national organisation, which employs its technical expertise and campaigning experience to effect change through the efficient execution of campaign objectives. This may sit uncomfortably with community workers whose efforts are focused on processes of empowerment, but it seems to me that there are times when a compromise is needed for the forensic delivery of a victory against those powerful groups who do not let such niceties get in the way of defending vested interests.

A fourth, 'Scotland' model, sought to overcome the problem of limited resources by a combination of methods combining short term intervention in communities in crisis, with support for community workers in areas of chronic unsustainability. This approach developed into the Agents for

Environmental Justice project, in which Friends of the Earth sought to build up the capacity of key activists in communities facing environmental injustice, to better fight their own campaigns (Wilkinson and Scandrett 2003). Sometimes local community workers provided support to the activists and campaigns, although at times they were prevented from doing so by their relationship to the local authority. Often no community workers were employed in the areas affected. The activists participated in an intensive, university-validated, education programme which used Freirean popular education methods to develop skills and knowledge of environmental justice from the perspective of specific struggles, in order to analyse, understand and tackle these issues in the context of their wider political and economic causes. Friends of the Earth saw its role as facilitating critical access to the knowledge and experience of professional environmental campaigners and academics, as well as seeking to catalyse the emergence of a movement made up of community campaigns against environmental injustice.

A fifth approach which also used popular education is the 'convergence' model. In 2009, members of the direct action group Plane Stupid sought to address the contradictions between themselves as middle class, anarchist-inspired, anti-airport activists, and the working class communities most directly affected by flight paths and runway developments. A convergence event used popular education to bring direct action environmentalists together with fuel poverty campaigners in Clydebank, under the flight path of Glasgow Airport. Despite ideological and tactical differences between these groups, through such convergence events, mutual support for campaigns are being developed. This model treats community activists and movement campaigners as equal partners in dialogue to interpret and create social change.

These models are based on diverse contexts in which community development is occurring on issues of environmental injustice and interacting with wider social movements. In some cases the environmental justice movement is made up of community campaigns; in other cases, professional campaigners lead or facilitate community mobilisation, enter into partnership with existing community campaigns or else make use of local groups for targeted campaigns of wider benefit. The involvement of community workers and other forms of outsider intervention has been varied, complex and ambiguous.

The environment is a contested space in which injustices are practised and struggles for justice performed. Community workers are in a unique position of being socially and geographically located in particular communities, and somewhat immersed in narratives of the local

environment, whilst at the same time linked with networks, movements, knowledge sources and experts which are potentially useful in exposing contradictions in that environment. Community work is located in the changing relationship between community, state and social movements engaged in challenging the dehumanising tendencies of the market and its economic logic in the conditions of production – the social and physical environment. With the advantages of occupying such a strategic position, it may have much to offer in the struggle for environmental justice.

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Capacity building for activism: Learning from the past for the future

Lynn McCabe

Introduction

Working in the same area for twenty years might not be an appealing prospect for many community workers, particularly in the current climate, but sticking around for that length of time has its advantages. In particular, it has given me the opportunity to witness change – not only in the area and in the people I have worked with but in the community itself. Over time, I have also observed how national and local policy initiatives have impacted on community development and the ways in which we are expected to work with communities.

In many ways, the physical environment of North Edinburgh (formerly Greater Pilton) has changed dramatically for the better during the last two decades, with new community facilities in most neighbourhoods and many new housing developments replacing some of the area's worst housing stock. Two of the best examples are in West Granton and Muirhouse, where local tenants had a major input – not only in the design and layout of the houses but also in the development of the surrounding areas. There is, however, a downside to the regeneration process which has been taking place in North Edinburgh. According to local activists, there has been a decrease in the numbers of houses available for rent which has made it difficult for many people who were decanted to return to their neighbourhood. They also point to the increase in the private sector's involvement in housing in the area. Many people feel that the strategy to increase home ownership in North Edinburgh has led to an increase in private rented accommodation which has left many former council tenants paying higher rents and having less security of tenure.

This situation is exacerbated by 'absent' landlords who fail to carry out their duties and by a high turnover of residents, making it difficult to re-establish the sense of community and belonging once found in many of these neighbourhoods.

Another positive development which is worth noting is the wide range of voluntary organisations which have been established in the area over the last 20 years. The services they provide address many of the needs that statutory organisations were either unable or unwilling to meet. Most of these projects can be traced back to grassroots campaigns initiated by local people. Unfortunately, however, the global economic crisis and the consequent cuts in public sector funding means that many of the services and jobs provided by these organisations might not exist in the next few years.

As we can see from the above, North Edinburgh has a history of community activism which has been responsible for many improvements in ordinary people's lives. The area also has a long history of issue-based campaigns which have generated a collective political response from the community. The list of campaigns is too lengthy to document here, but it is worth highlighting some of the issues which local groups have taken up over the years: rent increases, dampness, poor repairs, unemployment, ill-health, the loss of health services, pollution, school closures, the poll tax, racism, water privatisation, 'super snoopers', poverty, lack of affordable childcare, fuel poverty and poor public transport.

The problem

It was on my return to work after a period of study that I sensed a change in the nature of community activism in North Edinburgh. Re-reading articles in back copies of the community newspaper and discussions with local people about current issues made me aware that many people felt completely powerless to challenge and organise a collective response to the savage cuts to projects which they had fought for, developed and, in some cases, managed.

I was also aware that many of the activists who had fought for the right to have a place at the governance table were now extremely disillusioned with official structures established to promote community participation. I also knew from personal experience, and from conversations with people, that it had been a long, painful process to get the authorities to accept that the community had a legitimate right to be consulted on important issues and to be represented in local decision-making structures. Many activists who had been involved at that time were now of the opinion that a seat at the table was no longer necessarily in the

community's interest. This was illustrated at a public meeting at the end of 2009 when community representatives were put in a position where they felt duty-bound as 'partners' to approve cuts to local projects.

I also was aware from my research that the local authority's strategy to increase involvement in local affairs was actually having the *opposite* effect, as many activists were choosing to walk away from a process over which they felt they had little influence. Some activists have decided to remain within the system, feeling that projects are best defended from the inside, but this situation creates an uncomfortable distance between 'the engaged' and 'the estranged'.

The crisis in community participation in North Edinburgh has been exacerbated by the fact that very few new activists are coming up through the system. There are many reasons for this, but it seems obvious to me that a significant factor has been an excessive emphasis on promoting participation in official structures at the expense of the kind of active issue-based work which traditionally generated new activists who were motivated by anger or solidarity. The irony of the situation is that a decrease in community activism and a decline in the community's capacity to assert itself is happening at the same time as participation, engagement and empowerment are, once again, key priorities for local and national government.

The role of community development

Since my introduction to community politics in North Edinburgh in the mid-1980s, I have been consistently impressed by the capacity of local people to rise again and again to the challenge of fighting injustice within their community. In fact, it was this fighting spirit and the idea that ordinary people could make a difference that inspired me to qualify as a community worker in the first place. And it was a growing uneasiness at what I saw to be the loss of this vital capacity and fighting spirit that made me return to what I consider to be the basics of community development – in order to work out what had led to this situation and what would be an appropriate response.

From my own experience, the basics involve a number of things:

- identifying an issue or problem which causes concern to members of the community
- researching and analysing the issue or problem
- consulting local people about their understanding of the problem
- bringing together people who are interested in developing a collective response

- providing the group with the necessary support to address the problem.

In addition, the process should be educational and should provide a range of learning opportunities relevant to the group's needs and objectives.

The proposal

The proposal for a social history project emerged from my initial discussions with local activists who were angry that many of the achievements won by the community over the years were under threat and exasperated because the community didn't seem to be able to fight back. They recounted the many campaigns which had taken place in North Edinburgh and the different, and often creative, tactics employed by campaigning groups. People also talked about why they had joined campaigns and how their involvement had led to other things. It became very clear to me that this was extremely valuable information, from a social history perspective. More importantly, it also struck me that such a project would provide a space for local activists to reflect on their history of community activism – and what had become of it. My hope was that collectively-gained insights might re-motivate people and encourage them to develop alternative methods of articulating and addressing issues. In addition, it could also help to rebuild the community's capacity to re-engage with decision-makers on their own terms and to exercise more power and influence over what matters to *them*.

Although social history may not be an explicit priority of my employer, the Children and Families Department of the City of Edinburgh Council, I nevertheless see it as a valid and legitimate aspect of Community Learning and Development work which is entirely consistent with the stated outcomes of The *Scottish Empowerment Plan* produced by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA):

Fundamentally, community empowerment is about people taking collective action to make change happen on their own terms.

The project

The original aim of the Project was to document the history of community activism in North Edinburgh from 1980 to the present time, to examine the ways in which it had changed during that period, and the factors which had contributed to these developments. Although the proposal gained widespread support from local activists, it was felt that the timescale should be extended – back to when the area was first developed in the 1930s. It was also suggested that the project should document the wider

history of the area as this would highlight how those problems and issues experienced by local residents had contributed to the area's tradition of community activism. Although this additional aim significantly increased the group's work, it has proved to be an extremely important aspect of their research in terms of how this 'hidden' history illustrates the relationship between the wider social, political and economic context and the provision of housing for the working class.

The first phase of the project, which began in March 2009, involved a small group of activists in various kinds of research: reviewing videos of local campaigns, analysing back copies of the community newspaper, collecting articles from national and local newspapers from the 1930s, and identifying material from other sources such as personal records, archives from local projects and national organisations. From this research, the group have produced a valuable archive containing articles, photographs, publications and videos.

The group have also produced two 'timelines'. The first charts key national policies and events and has helped the group appreciate how decisions at Westminster and further afield relate directly to local issues. Such work also helps to make the crucial link between local and global dimensions of politics and power. The second timeline summarises key issues during each decade and many of the initiatives developed by the local authority in response to the problems of and in the area.

As I have already said, my view is that community development is an educational process which should involve a range of relevant learning opportunities for those involved. In terms of the social history group who are responsible for developing this work, this has meant negotiating a curriculum which meets the needs and the interests of group members. This has helped to maintain people's interest in the project and, at the same time, has ensured that participants are equipped to tackle each new phase of the project. During the last year, the programme has included practical sessions which have developed the group's research skills: visits, speakers on different topics, learning how to use computers to scan material and access information via the web, attending conferences, meeting and exchanging information with activists from other areas. There have also been sessions which provide the opportunity for people to discuss, debate and reflect on local and national politics and their impact on the local community.

The group is currently compiling a short publication which will highlight key aspects of the archive. Members of the group have been involved in all aspects of this project, drawing on the knowledge and insights they have

gained from the research process. The next phase of the project will involve producing an archive of interviews with local activists who will be given the opportunity to tell their own personal stories to illustrate the area's history and their experience of community activism. The material will eventually be edited as a DVD and will focus on wider issues of citizenship. Once the publication and DVD have been completed, the plan is to use these materials to generate discussion within the wider community and to involve more people in the process of critically reflecting on the changing nature of citizenship and why it matters. This represents a significant opportunity for local people to make sense of what's happening in *and to* their community and to develop their own ideas about what to do about it.

Those involved in the process have found the experience extremely useful and rewarding. They have developed their own analysis of the changing nature of community activism and have been able to reflect on their own experience *as activists* (as distinct from 'learners') and the impact this kind of learning has had on their own lives, the lives of their families and the wider community. Most of the group are retired and have indicated how much they value being able to contribute to something they feel passionate about. This is worth bearing in mind when we consider the current lack of priority given to providing educational opportunities for older people. It also highlights the potential of this group of citizens in helping younger people develop the knowledge and skills which are necessary to take part in democracy.

The project does not make any great claims concerning the current state of community engagement in North Edinburgh, but it does create some much-needed critical distance for local activists and shows how we can learn from the past for the present. North Edinburgh Social History Project is a modest project involving a small group of retired people who are supported by a part-time community worker with access to a very limited budget. What it demonstrates, however, is that there are alternatives to the current model of capacity building and that even within the narrowest of policy agendas there is still space to try and make a difference.

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Partnership in action: A personal reflection

Stuart Fairweather

Introduction

What can be learnt from engagement and supporting engagement in partnership? In this article, I draw on my own experience as a community worker to explore the limitations of and possibilities for critically supporting 'participatory democracy' in a city that includes many of Scotland's hardest hit communities. Further, given the state's 'manufactured' interventions, I will consider how, as workers in alliance with our fellow citizens, we can promote positive learning and change.

Context

Since Scottish devolution in 2000, we have seen a move from a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition to a minority SNP Government. Councils, too, have been reshaped by voting reform. Notwithstanding these changes, the governance of geographic communities has remained high on the political agenda. Community work has been a consistent part of this agenda, given its proximity to the local. In policy, 'social inclusion' has now been eclipsed by 'community planning' and 'regeneration' is to be 'mainstreamed'. The names of the programmes and the furniture of civil society have changed but rhetoric has remained remarkably consistent.

Politicians of all persuasions in Westminster, Holyrood and local government have used the language of social justice whilst supporting the inequality created by the market. In the places where that inequality bites deepest, participation has been sugar-coated with the promise of 'closing the gap'. In the absence of independent local political structures,

community workers have been asked to find participants to manage the contradictions of policy on the ground. It would be fair, in these circumstances, to ask why people bother. Part of the answer might be that, given the changes in our society over the past forty years, any offer of involvement appears positive. In addition, a process that suggests the defence and attainment of resources may seem too good to pass-up. Where does this leave participants and community workers who are committed to critical learning?

Dundee and regeneration

From 'New Life for Urban Scotland', through 'Social Inclusion Partnerships' to local 'Community Planning', Dundee has had a history of individuals and groups engaging with the system. There have been many 'battles' with the 'suits' and there has been a lot of learning in the process. With the Government's ongoing desire to mainstream regeneration, people were faced with a stark choice: either wind up the existing Regeneration Forums or re-configure them in relation to Community Planning.

Historically five Forums, each with a financial allocation and a local elected membership of 15 citizens, made decisions about community regeneration. Unsurprisingly, retention of the Forums was strongly argued for by their members. Equally unsurprisingly, the Scottish Government and Dundee Partnership (the City Council and other key public sector bodies) highlighted the Forums as positive examples of empowerment in Community Planning. However, for the Forum members, the important thing was to defend and develop local projects alongside getting a say. In what is becoming a tradition in Dundee, a review group was established.

During the second half of 2009, the Review Group met. Its members were drawn from the Forums and Dundee Partnership. Consideration of various options took place but the turning point was agreement on a budget of £750,000. In return, Dundee Partnership pushed for a strong relationship between the Forums and the relatively new, officer-led, local Community Planning Partnerships. This was accepted on the understanding that the Forums would in no way be seen as a sub-group. Detailed discussion also produced additional Fora which would address geographic anomalies.

The current situation is that six of Dundee's eight electoral wards – those with areas of 'multiple deprivation' – now have a Regeneration Forum with an allocation of £125,000. This is targeted towards local projects that relate to Dundee Partnership's Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Government and followed events at which new people were elected to the Forums alongside experienced participants. Community workers played a big part in supporting this strategy, with the well-advertised events

attempting to ensure strong connections between the Forums and the wider community. Now the real work starts for the Forum members and the community workers.

The forums, democracy and learning

Now that the 'new' Forums have been established, one of the tasks for the workers supporting them is 'training'. The individuals that have signed up to participate in the Forums obviously need to know the rules of the game, how to access funding and so on, but there is also the potential for discussion about how and on what basis the Forums relate to various actors in the city, in particular:

- the state, in the shape of Dundee Partnership
- the communities from which they emerge
- other community and voluntary organisations across the city.

To date there has been very limited discussion amongst workers about this. Indeed creating opportunities for community workers to talk about anything other than targets and cuts is difficult. Yet consideration of the context in which the Forum operates could provide a starting point.

Another concern for community work relates to how participants are 'framed' in policy. Partnership, for example, has cast people in the role of volunteers or stakeholders and sometimes as partners. This creates the danger of distancing people from the communities they are part of. Conversely, the simplistic use of clichéd terms like 'activist' suggests the possibility of an agenda being imposed by others. Aside from the terminology, there is a temptation to see Forum members in abstract from their broader 'public' lives where they connect with others (or don't): at the bus stop, in the back garden, at the post office or in the pub. In addition, and given the distance of many citizens, including community workers, from formal politics there is a need to consider the complexities of popular, participatory and representative democracy.

Some would suggest that the Forums are merely about money and services and have little to do with active community democracy. This understandable assertion may be right, in part. The Forums have reduced over time and the ability to shape the deployment of local activity has been mixed. At best, some things have been changed to become more responsive. At worst a 'take it or leave it' approach has been adopted by inflexible service providers. Simultaneously, schools have been funded by Private Finance Initiatives, major projects have closed and houses have been demolished. The Forums have provided an opportunity for skills to be learnt in managing small funds at a time when major budgets have

been used to benefit the interests of the private sector and 'the market'. Nevertheless, involvement in the Forums has allowed people to question this assault on 'the public'. Supporting the 'new' Forums to continue in this way requires workers to recognise the wider context. In particular it means broadening the base of Forums, so that people can come together.

Making connections

Establishing structures and cultures that support people and groups to engage in challenging citywide policy is no easy task. It requires an interest in the benefits of involvement beyond the local. This also means coming up against a view of the city's future that is uncritical of the market. To date, much of the citywide engagement with Dundee Partnership has been defensive, ensuring the Forums' work and approach are respected. At times, some influence over specific aspects of policy has emerged through shaping the direction of major projects. But the constant changing of policy has eroded these occasional gains. Pressure has come from the city's desire to meet the aims of its strategic agreements with the Scottish Government, whilst preoccupation with target setting blocks off alternative objectives.

So is this where 'democracy from below' stops? The prospects do not look great. But some suggestions have been made. For example, bringing the Forums together with Community Councils and other neighbourhood groups (including from the two affluent wards) has been mooted. This would provide a more powerful vehicle for consultation with Dundee Partnership. Alternative strategies have yet to be discussed but community workers are well placed to support thinking on this.

Such networking is to be encouraged, particularly if it fosters thinking about Dundee's place in world. A recent community event set out to celebrate the achievements of an area of the city, although getting beyond the local proved difficult. Community workers felt comfortable encouraging individuals to discuss their needs within their community, but consideration of the community's needs within the city or beyond proved harder. If community workers are to support learning that looks beyond the local, we ourselves need to collectively discuss and understand the pressures on Scotland's communities. A culture that distrusts critical thinking and exploration of structural inequality makes this difficult. Creating the spaces to think and share ideas is not always easy, but it is not impossible. The conversations of those involved in the Forums and other local groups provide one starting point. Here questions are raised about the role and responsibility of the Council, about its duty to provide services to people and other policy choices. This is not far from the language of rights and a discussion of the power to make choices. Forum members

can also be encouraged to talk about their experiences of working across communities, sharing resources and knowledge. These practical connections, whilst fragile, point in the direction of solidarity and 'partnership' with those who have similar interests. Here community workers with a responsibility for developing positive social relations can assist in the opening up of questions and ideas.

Conclusion

There have been some signs of optimism, as I have described, but there has not yet been any real and transparent debate about learning and development. On the contrary, the imposition of crude measurement and fatuous 'continuous improvement' targets numbs the mind and weakens the soul. It is not what people came into community work for and it is hardly surprising that some want to get out as quickly as they can. Nevertheless, my view is that there is still the possibility, in the face of cuts, to listen to people without pandering or patronising and to discuss the contradictions of engaging in 'partnership' with the state. This means reminding everyone, including ourselves, that participatory democracy requires ongoing learning and critical understanding.



Community engagement: For whom?

Keith Paterson

Introduction

Community participation, empowerment and engagement are recurring themes in social policy, both north and south of the border and reinforced in current government interest in the so-called 'big society'. This article proposes a number of frameworks to assist workers to locate their own practice and to promote debate on the issues it raises.

Engagement and empowerment: The policy context

In Scotland, one of the most important policies promoting community engagement is Community Planning and Regeneration. Although Community Planning in many areas predated the Local Government in Scotland (2003) Act, it was this piece of legislation which established Community Planning as a statutory requirement of local authorities. The act set out two major objectives of community planning:

- Making sure people and communities are genuinely engaged in the decisions made on public services which affect them; allied to
- A commitment from organisations to work together, not apart, in providing better public services. (Scottish Executive, 2004)

Closely allied to this focus on community engagement is a renewed interest in community empowerment. In late 2007, the Scottish Government carried out a consultation on methods of 'empowering' communities (SCDC, 2007). The seriousness with which the Scottish Government and its predecessor, the Scottish Executive, regards these

policy developments can be measured not only by the extensive guidance issued but also by the volume of and profile given to supporting standards and resources.

Amongst these we can list:

- Scottish Executive Guidance for community learning and development: Working and learning together to build stronger communities (WALT) (Scottish Executive, 2004);
- The National Standards for Community Engagement mentioned above (Communities Scotland, 2006);
- Quality standards for Community Learning and development - How good is our community learning and development? (HGIOLD) (HMIE, 2006);
- Learning in Regeneration skills pack (Communities Scotland, 2006a);
- Building Community Capacity – Resources for Community Learning and Development Practice (SCDC, 2007);
- The Community Empowerment Action Plan (Scottish Government/ COSLA, 2009).

The sheer volume of standards, guidance and resources produced directly or indirectly by the Scottish Government is clear evidence of the centrality of community engagement as a key part of Community Planning. In addition, capacity building to ensure that communities participate effectively in Community Planning is listed as one of the three top priorities for professional Community Learning and Development.

However, consensus on the desirability of community engagement does not guarantee that it will fulfil its promise.

Power and empowerment: The theoretical and historical context

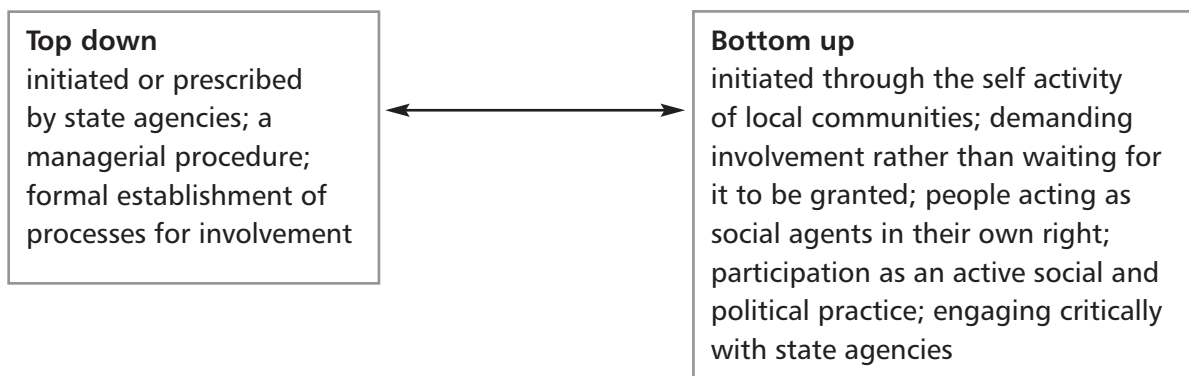
Against such a plethora of social policy initiatives, guidelines standards and resources, it is necessary to exercise a degree of caution and create some critical distance. A number of commentaries on community learning and development practice have raised the question of what we mean by engagement and empowerment. Furthermore how new is this interest in engagement, partnership and empowerment and whose interests does it serve? As Jeffries (2000) puts it: 'When does partnership-speak mask an intention to secure compliance?'. Similarly, in a critical review of funding conditions for community projects, Shaw (2006a) highlights the way in which the 'language of partnership, empowerment and participation

pervade policy' under successive governments. A new coat of paint, it seems is once again being given to the jaded ideas of partnership in planning and community empowerment. In a briefing for practitioners, Shaw (2005) turns her focus on Community Planning, asking whether it represents 'joined up thinking or stitched up thinking', contrasting Community Planning as a 'democratic process' with what too often turns out to be a 'managerial procedure'. She asks whether 'the managerialism which appears to be driving it, might actually undermine its democratic potential'. The Community Planning documentation, she considers 'often reads more like a business plan than a serious attempt to engage with people on what really matters to them'.

Another important distinction relates to approaches to community engagement. Shaw (2006b) distinguishes between types of involvement which are initiated as 'top down' and others which are more established as 'bottom up'. Top down processes are those instigated or prescribed by state agencies as a managerial procedure and with formally established processes for involvement. In contrast, bottom up processes are those initiated through the activity of local communities demanding involvement rather than waiting for it to be granted from above. Bottom up approaches involve people acting as social agents in their own right participating in an active social and political practice and engaging critically with state agencies.

I would suggest that it is possible to think of a continuum in relation to how engagement is initiated and by whom. This is represented in figure 1. For example, a mid-way point between top down managerial processes and bottom up initiatives would be those structures involving elements of both: perhaps where a local authority initiative was responded to by a community group but where community representatives thereafter took the lead.

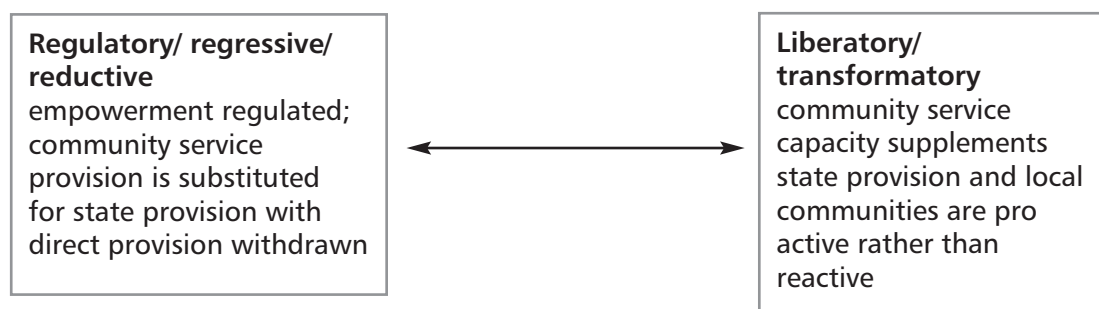
Fig 1 Top Down/Bottom up continuum



It is important to note that the term 'empowerment' is also a contested one. In a wide ranging review of contemporary campaigns for community participation and empowerment, Mayo and Craig (1995) note the 'different and often contradictory ways in which the terms 'community participation' and 'empowerment' are used and ask whether these are the 'human face of structural adjustment programmes or tools for democratic transformation'. At a more theoretical level, Dod Forrest, a local community learning worker, has explored the concept of empowerment in the context of the work of the Italian Marxist, Gramsci (Forrest, 1999). He suggests that some forms of empowerment are 'regulatory' and contain, sometimes restrict, and occasionally manipulate activism. These take the form of partial devolution or licence rather than full scale autonomy. By contrast, other forms of empowerment can foster 'liberation' which challenges established power relations and aims to redistribute power/resources. This suggests a distinction between approaches to empowerment and participation in relation to service provision which are either *progressive* - supplementing state provision and transforming social provision; building capacity rather than substituting for it - or *regressive* - substituting community provision for state provision as a cost cutting measure with the state retreating from service provision in vulnerable communities.

It may be useful, therefore, to consider a continuum between those kinds of empowerment and participation which are *regulatory/regressive* and those which are *liberatory/transformatory*, as represented in Figure 2. This helps to locate practice and to strike a more appropriate balance where necessary.

Fig 2 Empowerment by regulation or through liberation

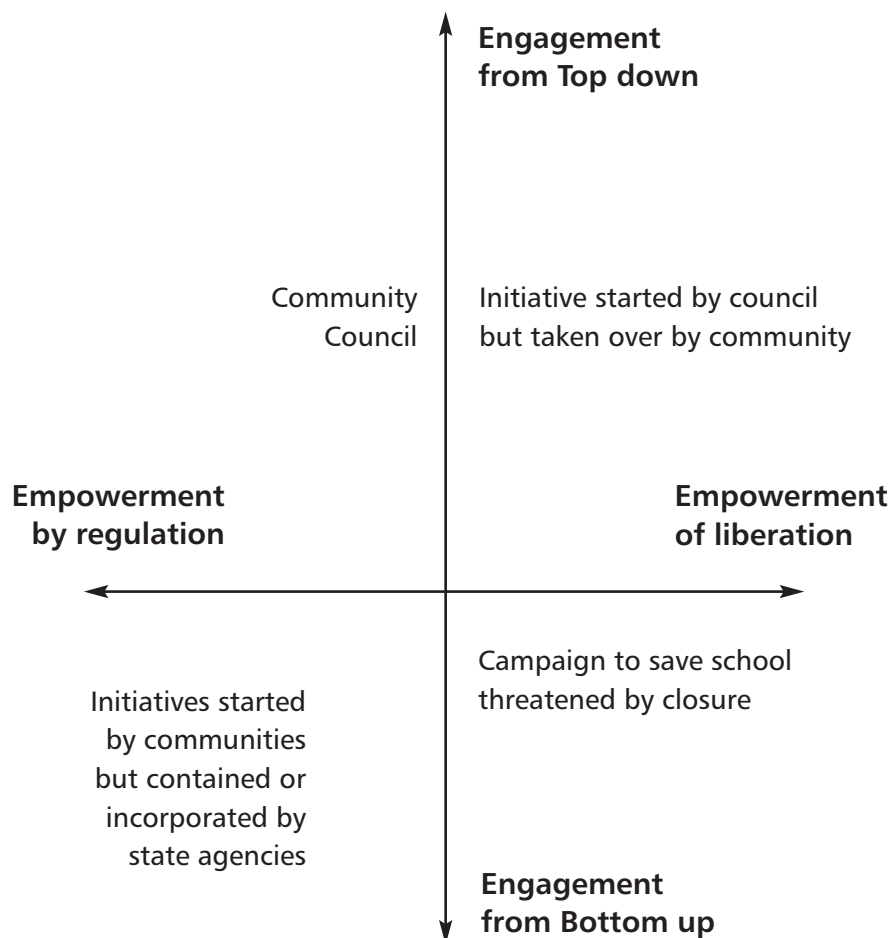


At one end of this continuum empowerment is so regulated, for example, that any community service provision becomes a *substitute* for state provision, which is promptly withdrawn. At the other extreme, the agenda is set by the community, outcomes are about emancipation and defined by the community rather than by policy dictates. In this model, community service capacity *supplements* state provision, and local communities are proactive rather than reactive. A mid-way point might be a situation where empowerment was initiated on a controlled basis but gave scope for community control and thus had liberatory tendencies.

Combining figures 1 and 2 suggests a paradigm 'map' (following Burrell and Morgan, 1979 and Jeffries, 2000) on which one could begin to classify empowerment initiatives in terms of the extent to which the source of the initiative is *top down or bottom up* and the extent to which it is regulatory or liberatory in relation to empowerment. This map is represented in figure 3.

Fig 3 – Engagement and empowerment – toward a paradigm map

To illustrate this model, it is possible to think of initiatives which could potentially occupy mid points in each of the quadrants as follows:



Conclusion: The challenge for community work

The aim of this article has been to trace the recent history of several central themes in community learning and development work which have a much longer history in theory and practice. There is an equally long history of debate within community work about our role in relation to community action, particularly where this challenges the policy and practice of our employers. I have attempted to devise a classification system which would allow workers to locate particular initiatives, explore what role they are playing and decide whether it is legitimate; in other words to analyse whether they are top down/regulators, bottom up/liberators – or somewhere in between!

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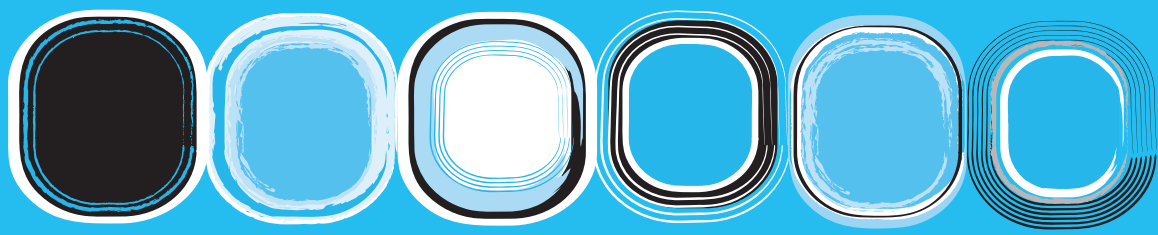
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