Community Development and Adult Education: Prospects for Change?

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Abstract

This article will look at the origins of community development and its role in addressing social issues such as poverty, unemployment and the unequal position of women. It will assess the part adult education plays in community development. Finally, it will consider if the current main trends in community development in Ireland succeeds in bringing about social change which is liberating rather than domesticating.

Introduction: Context

Ireland has changed enormously over the past four decades. The Programme for Economic Development introduced in 1958 by the then Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, endeavoured to bring Ireland into line with the current western thinking on economic development and the government established the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) (Lee, 1989: 344).

Ireland's situation was particularly interesting in that the modernisation of society ran well ahead of the industrialisation. British rule ensured that a modern state apparatus was in place together with an advanced financial system. In addition, the Catholic Church played a critical role in developing a modern educational system which attempted to ensure, among other issues, national literacy (Whelan, 1994: 4,5).

This industrialisation process seemed to transform the fortunes of the Irish people. Initially, it stemmed emigration, it provided well paid and plentiful jobs, it raised the standard of living by the normalisation of higher quality housework and relatively easy access to household appliances such as washing machines and vacuum cleaners. However, one of the unintended consequences was the increasing polarisation of the population, a deepening divide between urban and rural and between rich and poor.

By the mid 70s, the picture had altered and it became obvious that industrialisation marginalised a range of groups: unskilled workers, rendering them unemployable; small farmers on increasingly unviable farms; and people in low paid jobs, by reason of the high rate of taxation on the employee sector to pay for modernisation (O Cinneide and Walsh, 1990:326).

Kirby (1988) considers that the failure to find a model of economic development which moves towards a more equal society is the major cause of poverty (Kirby,1988:12). He links unemployment and poverty, and finds that poverty is rooted in powerlessness, in the experience of being insignificant in the overall order of things (Kirby, 1988: 12).

The failure of any serious action on unemployment, one of the outcomes of the inappropriate development and the subsequent recession of the 1980s, meant that people who were unemployed became more and more marginalised. People who were unemployed almost immediately became poor:

> "...most people experienced a substantial fall in income during unemployment. Where benefit levels were close to reported earnings, this was frequently because these earnings were well below average, rather than because benefits were substantially above average" (Callan and Nolan, 1994:114).

Kirby (1988) critiques the government's role in employment. Ironically, Ireland is promoted as the most profitable industrial location in Europe. While TNCs availed of the generous inducements to settle, however short term, in Ireland, their high performance did not always translate into jobs (Kirby,1988:18).

Callan and Nolan (1994) conclude that the current policy on employment will not tackle the problem adequately. They maintain that people who are long term unemployed face a particularly bleak future, not only missing out in terms of education and health, but also being perceived as poorly motivated by employers (Callan and Nolan, 1994:115).

One of the ways of changing the direction that economic and social policy has dictated is the most recent trends in community development, fundamentally, a basic, human scale process which tries to address the problem of exclusion and marginalisation.

However, the origins of community development were more ambiguous and demonstrate a more questionable ethos.

Community Development - The Origins

Mezirow (1963) looks at the origins of community development and traces the directions it took from the beginning. He examines the experience of community development in various so-called developing countries, especially Pakistan from 1952-1961.

> "Community development has been ardently championed on every continent as the most practical means of translating the ideological promise of Western democracy into specific attitudes and behaviour change in the closed society of traditional village life" (Mezirow,1963:7).

This history is particularly interesting because of its unselfconscious ideological stance. The passage of time has allowed the examination of the assumptions which underpinned the process from its inception in 1948.

Rural peasants in the developing world were perceived as backward looking, conservative and village centred. Community development was seen as the route to transform these people, adapting them to life in a modern, industrialising, urban-based state. Community development was seen as the hope for the developing countries of Africa and Asia.

Mezirow (1963) saw community development as an ideology which evoked dedication and commitment from indigenous peoples. The term entered

the parlance in 1948 when the Cambridge Conference on African Administration designed it. It was a movement intended to foster a better standard of living for the whole community and the participation of the people in the whole community. It was concerned with people as agents of their own 'betterment'. As such, it was a substitution for the notion of 'mass education' (Mezirow, 1963:9).

The UN developed a definition encompassing economic and cultural dimensions.

> "This complex set of processes is...made up of two essential elements: the participation of the people themselves in efforts to improve their level of living with with as much reliance as possible on their own initiative; and the provision of technical and other services in ways which encourage initiative, self-help and mutual help and make these more effective. [It is] essentially both an educational and organisational process"

Mezirow (1963) says that community development was an attempt to bridge the gap between the ruling elite and the rural population. The basic premise of this concept of community development is that it fully supports the governments of developing countries in their move towards urbanisation and western style democracy. Thus, community development was a tool of the process of westernisation. Social change meant in essence, a change from a predominantly agricultural, uneducated, undeveloped state to a western democracy and life style.

Perspectives of Community Development

The United Nations definition of community development provided the basic philosophy which underpinned several schemes.

Further definitions link community development with education. The Murphy Report (1973) identified community development with one type of adult education:

> "Planned self-help in all matters relating to the material and human development of a particular section of the community is the essence of community development. The adult as a member of a community and through his (sic) involvement in its affairs can himself (sic) be a learner and at the same time be a source of encouragement to learn, to other members of his(sic) community."

Dempsey (1987) identifies some key factors which form a necessary part of the community development process:

- the unit of action is the community;
- leadership and initiative should come from the community itself;
- the principle of participation must be adhered to;
- community decisions must reflect the wishes of the community;
- a comprehensive approach should be attempted (Dempsey, 1987: 16,17).

Dempsey does not see social action as a part of community development. Social action programmes, she maintains, are often organised by radical groups in the community and they do not deal with the community as a whole.

> "The underlying assumption is that social problems of the disadvantaged, for example, inner city poor, itinerants (sic.), drop out alcoholics, are due to social injustice, inequities, oppression. The basic objectives while still based on change, as in community development, imply change in the power structure, the changing of institutions of power" (Dempsey, 1987: 20,21).

This perspective encapsulates a non-radical approach to development. It does not see the "disadvantaged" as a significant part of the community and it holds that the power structures are adequate and in no way responsible for the incidences of disadvantage. It also holds that the institutions of power can encompass enough change, without serious transformation.

Community Development and Social Change

Arensberg and Niehoff, (1971) study the concept of social change. After the 1945, social change centred around creating more stability and "a greater equality of sharing" and reducing "productivity differences." They speak in terms of industrialisation bringing about "great marvels of production" but unindustrialised countries, and unindustrialised pockets in developed countries, have not been "assimilated into the productive patterns" of industrialisation (Arensberg and Niehoff, 1971: 1).

This perspective of social change is primarily centred on enlisting people as the agents of their own modernisation. Industrialisation is viewed as the model of progress and civilisation and the voluntary co-operation of the people is an extremely efficient tool for bringing it about.

Freire (1972) sees this type of community development as domesticating. It creates passive citizens, people who are not questioning of the institutions of power. He maintains that modernisation benefits only the "metropolitan" society (Freire, 1972: 130) and by inference, creates a marginal sector. Non-radical community development is a repressive process, perpetuated by the ruling class.

Another perspective of social change was postulated by Saul Alinsky in Reveille for Radicals (1969). He poses the question "What is a Radical?" and answers that radicals are those who are completely identified with mankind (sic) that they share the pain, suffering and injustices of other human beings (Alinsky, 1969:15,16). Radicals believe in participative democracy and in what he calls "real equality of opportunity" (Alinsky, 1969: 17).

This discussion is interesting in that Arensberg and Niehoff and Alinsky wrote virtually contemporaneous accounts of the same theme. Yet they are polar opposites in that the first, Arensberg and Niehoff's account sees social

change as facilitating an objective concept: industrialisation, synonymous with progress, modernisation and development, while the second sees it in terms of people, first and foremost, as the arbiters of their own needs, many of which are not met by the model of development inherent in industrialisation. These opposing views encapsulate the tension that, to some extent, underpin the most recent discussion: social change which serves to domesticate and social change as a radical force for liberation.

This tension can be seen in some of the trends in Ireland since the 1960s.

Trends in Ireland

O Cinneide and Walsh (1990) identify four main trends in community development trends in Ireland since the 1960s. A common element would incorporate notions of self-determination and self-expression by ordinary people who belong to the one community.

Stemming from a report by O Cinneide in 1972, "The extent of poverty in Ireland."Awareness was raised about the real picture in relation to poverty. The government of the day appointed the National Committee on Pilot Schemes to Combat Poverty (NCPSCP) in 1973, and they adapted a radical programme of community action aimed at combating poverty. The approach was underscored by a belief that the powerlessness of poor communities would have to be addressed if poverty was to by tackled. The underlying philosophy of the Combat Poverty Agency strategy and the strategies of those who developed within that philosophy is radical social change (O Cinneide and Walsh, 1990:327-330).

Definition

Community Development is a term that has been applied widely to all kinds of activity which takes place in the community. Examples include a Tidy Towns project or a group water scheme. Commins (1985) and O'Cinneide and Walsh (1990) use a broad generic concept, which subsumes a number of models. A common element would incorporate notions of self-determination and self-expression by ordinary people who belong to the one community.

More recently, Kelleher and Whelan (1992) have worked out a definition that goes beyond the concept of individuals working in a group to meet their own needs. In their definition, they attempt to encompass a complex process and concept, whereby people are encouraged to take control of their lives and to develop their human potential. Through this process, people would collectively identify the needs of their community and work collectively to meet those needs. Crucially, the process

> "stresses the need to develop community awareness, engender group cohesiveness and promote self-reliance and collective action. This logically leads communities to seek changes at policy and institutional levels, often highlighting the need for the redistribution of society's resources" (Kelleher and Whelan,1992:1).

This definition attempts to draw several strands of a cycle together: reflection, action, analysis, research, reflection, action. While community development can be used as a form of social control, containing the population and preventing social unrest, the cycle, described above, ensures that community development remains self-aware. This self-awareness endeavours to prevent complacency, complicity and stagnation.

However, O Cinneide and Walsh are doubtful about the effectiveness of community development programmes as strategies for bringing about social change.

> "History provides little solace: Ireland has experienced great political changes in its recent history but none of it has been or could be attributed to community [development] methods. Why, then, should people who are powerless and deprived see community [development] as an alternative means of political change?"
> (O Cinneide and Walsh, 1990:333)

This criticism is central to those who are advocates on behalf of community development as an instrument of social change. Community development, as formulated by the UN, works at the level of maintaining the existing power structures. Radical trends in community development are committed to working towards change in the community. This change challenges the power structures and works towards the redistribution of resources.

Community development approaches always include the concept of participation, that is, participation in decisions and benefits at local level. There is another, further step: participation as a model of democracy.

The emergence of the radical trend in community development has highlighted the deficiencies in traditional models of democracy. Clientelism, endemic in the current representational model of democracy in Ireland, ensures that power is maintained in the hands of the politicians, who may have divided loyalties.

Collins (1993) asserts that the representational democracy has proved to be disempowering to marginalised groups and, in the current form, politicians can reasonably safely ignore these groups (Collins, 1993: 90).

This is supported by the findings of Hardiman and Whelan (1994) in their study, *Values and Social Change in Ireland*. They find that unemployed people are relatively uninvolved in the political process, "that they were not politically mobilised around a distinctive set of values that makes their experience of unemployment their dominant concern" (Hardiman and Whelan, 1994: 120). Significantly, unemployed people were no more uninvolved than other people from the same or similar class and background. Of the group, non-skilled manual workers, almost one in two felt politically impotent: they felt they could do nothing to oppose an unjust law (Hardiman and Whelan, 1994:130).

In addition, women are less likely to be interested or involved in mainstream politics than their European counterparts. This is attributed to their lower levels of participation in the paid labour force, to a considerable degree (Hardiman and Whelan, 1994:133).

This indicates that the political system, as it is currently instituted, fails to include significant groups in the process. Overall, a large proportion of unskilled workers, unemployed people and women, especially those engaged in work within the home, are disenfranchised by the system of representational democracy.

Participative Democracy

David Held (1987) examines a model of democracy which may change the power dynamics. Participative democracy is a model which addresses the issue of the distribution of power. He postulates it as a process which answers the needs of contemporary society. He says:

> "Individuals should be free and equal in the determination of the conditions of their own lives; that is, they should enjoy equal rights (and accordingly, equal obligations) in the specification of the framework which generates and limits the opportunities available to them, so long as they do not deploy this framework to negate the rights of others (Held,1987: 290).

He considers the question of participation and agrees with the argument that freedom from politics is and essential freedom. However, this is not incompatible with participative democracy. Rather it opens up the possibility of freedom of choice: citizens can choose to participate if they wish to (Held,1987: 292).

The question of equality is raised with regards to redistribution, especially the redistribution of productive property. Held maintains that consumption property is a matter of personal choice, but at least a minimum must be available for people to exercise their rights.

A right to the minimum is fundamentally different from a moral and legal right to ownership.

> "A choice in favour of the standard rights of ownership is a choice against political equality" (Held, 1987: 293,294).

If political equality is a moral right, then the way in which productive resources are distributed has to be examined closely.

> "Recognition of the necessity to minimise inequality in the ownership and control of the means of production in fundamental to the possibility of an open, unbiased political agenda. Without clear restriction on private ownership a necessary condition of democracy cannot be met (Held, 1987:294).

This model of democracy, which has equality at its centre, is a commitment to reducing the privileges of the privileged so that great pockets of people are not relegated to a permanent subordinate position, be they women, unemployed people, people on low incomes, travellers or people with disabilities.

The new wave of community development incorporates this radical view of democracy and politics:

> "This logically leads communities to seek changes at policy and institutional levels, often highlighting the need for the redistribution of society's resources" (Kelleher and Whelan,1992:1).

An essential element which transforms community development into a radical movement for social change is adult education. This will be examined in detail in the next section.

Education

> "In educational matters, there is an official transcript but there is also a separate transcript of practice. Quiet capitulation, moral acquiescence prevails, but I ask, where in the world have patriarchy or authoritarianism as personality traits, disappeared by a quiet evolution rather than by being named, acknowledged and then, by democratic decision, abandoned?" (Higgins, 1992: Radio lecture).

Very significant inequalities persist in the educational system in spite of the apparent equal opportunities provision.

Kathleen Lynch (1989), in *The Hidden Curriculum,* definitively demonstrates that the formal educational system, as it is currently organised, plays a crucial role in reproduction. The educational system is mainly concerned with the provision of equal opportunity. Lynch points out that provision and consumption are not co-terminous, and shows that provision of equal opportunity does not ensure that everyone can avail of the provision (Lynch, 1989: 126,127). In addition, the consumption of education is increasingly important as a route to the labour market (Lynch, 1989:124,127). Credentialised education is a vital determinant of status and power (Lynch, 1989:120,121).

Drudy and Lynch (1993) show that while expenditure on education has increased substantially since the 1960s, it has not managed to eliminate educational inequality. Working class people have improved their educational situation in absolute terms, overall, they have not gained any real advantage in relative terms (Drudy and Lynch, 1993: 146).

Elsewhere, Lynch proposes that those who benefit most from the educational system in terms of profession, status and power, are middle class men (Lynch, 1991:4).

Thus, the two major marginal groups, women and working class people, are not served adequately by the formal educational system. Attempts to redress the deficits have not succeeded yet.

Adult Education.

Lynch holds that the unequal outcomes can be addressed in some way by adult education.

Firstly, adult education can offer credentials to unemployed people to offset social class inequalities. Adult education can enable them to enter the labour market by transferring work skills (Lynch,1991:5).

Secondly, adult education is also about empowerment and resistance, especially among those who have been disempowered by the social, economic and educational systems. It is a subtle process, whereby people become aware of their oppression and they build the capacity to overcome the oppression (Lynch, 1991:7).

Central to the practice of adult education is the ideology of the initiators of it. Allman and Wallis are clear that adult educators must have a subjective desire to create a more just world, they must have vision and must have the skills and "strategies to enable a 'critical mass' of humanity to engage in the achievement of social justice" (Allman and Wallis.1995: 19/18). Adult education is quite distinctive in its approach in that it aims to do substantially more than simply impart information to participants.

All forms of education rest on theories of what it means to be human and on the nature and origin of knowledge. Adult education recognises the potential in humanity for growth and development and therefore the type of knowledge it engages with is based on that assumption.

There are three different types of knowledge or ways of getting to know the world (Bassett, Brady, Fleming and Inglis, 1989 :27).

Technical knowledge which includes science and medicine.

Practical knowledge includes the study of history, English literature and psychology.

Critical reflection centres on learning to reason and reflect about life and the society and culture in which we live. "Freedom is sought from the forces which limit the range of options or choices we can make" and which "limit the amount of control people have over their lives" (Bassett et al., 1989:28).

This is emancipatory learning, learning for perspective transformation "becoming aware through discussion and reflection of how one's attitudes and values are developed" (Bassett et al., 1989:30-31).

Critical intelligence is the most basic ingredient of radical adult education (Allman and Wallis, 1995: 18).

Adult Education is centrally concerned with change. Change is mediated through all levels of education, technical, practical and critical reflection. The adult education approach facilitates the emancipatory dimension of the process, making the imparting of skills and competences an opportunity for critical reflection as well as the acquisition of techniques or knowledge.

Emancipatory Learning

Adult education provides the opportunity to participants to appraise their attitudes and values. This appraisal questions the fundamental assumptions and expectations with which they live their lives.

> "This kind of learning is achieved by the learner becoming aware, through self-reflection, of the genesis of attitudes and ways of interpreting the world. It leads to a freeing of the present from the control of the past, a freeing of ideologically imprisoned consciousness" (Fleming, 1984: 31).

There are several terms used in the context of emancipatory learning: critical reflection, conscientization and consciousness raising. The distinctions that are made between them are as follows.

Critical reflection is an instrument of the development of a critical awareness of the ideologies which underpin attitudes and values.

> "Critical reflection centres on learning to reason and reflect about life and the society and culture in which we live. Freedom is sought from the forces which limit the range of options or choices we can make" and which "limit the amount of control people have over their lives." (Bassett et al., 1989:28).

Conscientisation is the critical awareness and impetus to act that comes from insight into one's own oppression.

> "The term 'conscientisation' refers to the learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality"(Freire, 1972: 15).

Consciousness raising centres around the same theme as conscientisation, with particular application to women and their oppression in a patriarchal society.

> "Consciousness raising is a way for women to analyse their condition, develop new theory and plan action, Conceptually, through this process, one comes to see that what was thought to be an individual problem is instead a social or political problem requiring a collective solution. Consciousness raising groups developed the slogan "the personal is political" (Ryan, 1992: 167).

Critical reflection is mainly a cognitive process. Conscientisation and consciousness raising are primarily experiential: emotional, psychological and cognitive processes.

All of the concepts comprise emancipatory learning, learning which facilitates the raising of awareness, the impetus to act and the capacity to reflect on the action. The whole process is developmental. It moves the learner on to another level of being, as the agent of her or his own life, lived in a society which s/he participated in shaping.

Mezirow identified perspective transformation in a study of a group of women who re-entered formal education. This is a phenomenon which is witness by adult educators and participants in adult education. It is an enormously significant experience. It changes everything in a fundamental way.

In Connolly (1989), a report on a Women's Studies series of classes in daytime adult education, participants described themselves as deeply moved by the experience. She found that the roles and lifestyles of the women who participated in the classes suddenly became problematic: they started to question the most basic of their behaviour as women. The questions yielded answers that were sometimes unpalatable. It compelled them to look at themselves as enablers of the process of their own oppression, at their intimate relationships and at their relationship with society (Connolly, 1989: 20).

Hart (1990) describes the process of consciousness raising as pivoting around an analysis of oppression, where the oppressed share and identify the experience of oppression. It is a process where social membership is reclaimed and that process passes through the actual experience of power on an individual basis involving a theoretical grasp of power as it operated as a social reality and as a way of taking action that is ultimately emancipatory (Hart, 1990: 70,71).

Kathleen Weiler (1991) compares women's consciousness raising groups and Freire's concept of conscientisation. Women's consciousness raising groups began to form in the United States in the late 1960s, almost spontaneously, parallel to the civil rights and new left movements. The objective of the consciousness raising groups was to apply the demands for justice and equality to themselves as women. Consciousness raising focused on collective political change. She continues:

> "Consciousness raising shared the assumptions of earlier revolutionary trends that understanding and theoretical analysis were the first steps to revolutionary change, and that neither was adequate alone; theory and practice were intertwined as praxis" (Weiler, 1991:458).

Lovett (1988) raises the question of whether adult educators are major actors in the process of social change or if they are merely "decked out in resplendent new garments" (Lovett, 1988: 145). He assesses that in his experience, adult educators have failed to initiate or sustain a radical movement

for social change. He does not attribute this failure to lack of direction on the part of adult educators. Rather, it comes from the struggle to resolve the basic contradiction in the objectives of adult education and community action.

Firstly, there is the need to involve people in the design and implementation of their own educational needs. The second factor is the premise that adult and community education has a role to play in social change. The conflict arises when people want to partake in the formal education provision which had at least some influence in excluding them in the first instance. In addition, he also finds that:

> "A concern with personal growth and development was apparently in conflict with an emphasis on collective growth and development" (Lovett, 1988: 148).

This has not been the experience of all adult educators.

Hamilton (1992), in a study of Freire's work in Latin America and Horton's work in the Highlander Center in Tennessee, finds that:

> "Generally, radical approaches to adult education and community development serve a useful function in countries with entrenched institutional structures" (Hamilton, 1992:24).

Hamilton (1992) focuses on countries with "entrenched institutional structures" and estimates that community development, underpinned with adult education, are successful in challenging the causes of exclusion.

Conclusion

These two findings are supported by the experience in adult education. Lovett's position, ie, that personal development supersedes collective development, is the outcome of personal development focused programmes which are not underpinned by emancipatory learning. The participants' needs are met on an individual basis without being placed in the social and political context. Additionally, the adult educators are not facilitating the process of emancipatory learning.

Women who are oppressed in a uniquely personal, political and social way identify their need for a particular, narrowly-focused personal development programme to overcome the personal powerlessness endemic to their experience in this patriarchal, capitalist society. However, some do not make the transition from personal empowerment to collective action.

When the emancipatory learning process is foremost, the outcomes are different. The role of adult educators in this context, is to facilitate the process. The adult educators have to subscribe to the full meaning of adult education. Their role is ultimately to bring about emancipatory

social change. When the adult educators fully understand this through their own emancipatory learning, then they can implement it.

Community development without the essential element of emancipatory learning domesticates the activists and subverts the possibility of radical social change. Emancipatory learning is mediated through the agency of adult educators who have undergone an emancipatory learning process,themselves.

Similarly, adult education without the conduit of community development remains located in the personal. Emancipatory learning provides the impetus to action but not the collectivity. Political and social action is implicitly a collective activity. Adult education acts through it, informing it in the process. Adult education and community development are interdependent: each has a vital role to play in the implementation of the other's principles. Community development not informed by adult education remains domesticating and hierarchical. Adult education without community development stays personal, isolated and socially less powerful. Together, they combine to create an emancipatory model of collective action. This model will ultimately underpin an equal and just society.

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