

2000-01-01

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Recommended Citation

Forde, Catherine (2000) "Networking: Promotion of "Horizontal" Partnership in the Local Development Programme," *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 8.

doi:10.21427/D7HH9F

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijass/vol2/iss2/8>

Networking: Promotion of 'Horizontal' Partnership in the Local Development Programme

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Abstract

Social partnership, or 'the search for consensus on economic and social objectives between sectoral interests' (Walsh et al., 1998) has gained increasing importance in Irish public policy in recent years. The Programme of Integrated Development in Disadvantaged Areas 1995-1999 (P.I.D.D.A.), under the Local Development Programme, is one of several initiatives to stem from the Irish commitment to social partnership. The Programme represents a locally-based response to unemployment and disadvantage. Two of its principal objectives are as follows:

- To improve the capacity of local communities 'to participate fully in local development and to counter social exclusion' (Ireland, 1995, p. 60).
- To 'improve co-ordination and evaluation at local level of mainstream programmes and policies to ensure their effective delivery to the long-term unemployed and the socially excluded' (A.D.M., 1995, p. 9).

Both objectives are problematic, and recent research suggests that the P.I.D.D.A. has experienced some difficulties in achieving them.

Introduction

Using a case study from the Curragh in Co. Kildare, this paper argues that the promotion of cross-sectoral networking at local level, involving statutory and voluntary agencies and the community, can be effective in promoting inclusion of disadvantaged or marginalised communities and in improving co-ordination and co-operation between public and other service providing agencies in delivery of programmes. Networking, with its emphasis on inclusion and democracy, provides a means of reaching and involving the most marginalised communities. In addition, networking emphasises horizontal communication *between* groups and agencies, thus facilitating liaison and co-operation in the delivery of services.

Programme of Integrated Development in Disadvantaged Areas (P.I.D.D.A.) 1995-1999

The Programme of Integrated Development in Disadvantaged Areas (1995-1999) is the successor of the Area Based Response to Long-term Unemployment (1991-1993). The Area Based Response to Long-term Unemployment (A.B.R.) was a pilot programme under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress. It aimed to tackle long-term unemployment in an integrated manner in certain areas where this problem was particularly bad. Partnerships were established in twelve areas

around the country, and comprised representatives from the statutory, social partner and community sectors. The objectives of the partnerships were to improve employment opportunities and provision, improve training provision, and encourage the establishment of small businesses (Walsh et al., 1998, p. 33). Another feature of their work was the encouragement of local participation through capacity-building (Ibid, p. 33).

The P.I.D.D.A. (1995-1999) represents an expansion of the A.B.R., both in size and in objectives. There are now 38 partnership companies in designated areas of disadvantage, and 33 local development organisations (i.e. community groups) in non-designated areas. Thus, the programme covers the entire country. Like those under the A.B.R., the partnerships and local development organisations consist of representatives of the statutory, social partner and community sectors. It is their responsibility to implement local action plans which were drawn up prior to the commencement of the work. A crucial characteristic of the action plans is that they are *integrated* in nature. In other words, the work which is laid out in these plans is to be carried out in a co-ordinated and collaborative manner, involving co-operation between partner organisations.

The principal objectives of the P.I.D.D.A. are as follows:

'to counter disadvantage through support for communities which make a collective effort to maximise the development potential of their areas' (Ireland, 1995, p. 59)....'to accelerate local economic development and thereby increase employment, and to tackle exclusion and marginalisation resulting from long-term unemployment,

poor educational attainment, poverty and demographic dependency' (A.D.M., 1995, p. 7).

The partnerships and local development organisations have been responsible for conceiving, planning, co-ordinating and/or delivering a range of projects and activities aimed at meeting these objectives. Significant areas of work include prevention (e.g. preventative education), early school leaving, childcare, enterprise, and actions in favour of the unemployed, people with disabilities, and Travellers (E.S.F. Evaluation Unit, 1999, p.p. 247-251). The primary groups at which these actions have been targeted are:

- The long-term unemployed
- Early school leavers
- Women/lone parents
- People with disabilities
- Travellers (Ibid, p. 137).

A recent European Social Fund evaluation of the work of the partnerships and community groups has indicated that they have been generally successful, in terms of expenditure of funds, generation of activity, and work with the principal target groups:

'...the Area-Based Partnership Companies and the ADM-funded Community Groups have engaged in substantial activity with and in favour of the target groups identified in the Operational Programme. Following an initial and inevitably slow rate of overall expenditure resulting from the detailed setting up exercise, the rate of spend and activity has substantially increased. We can also conclude that at least some organisations are engaged in innovative

practice, providing real added value at a local level, actions with the potential to provide valuable lessons to the mainstream....' (Ibid, p. 220).

In the introduction it was mentioned that two specific objectives of the P.I.D.D.A. concern improvement of the capacity of local communities to take a full part in local development, and improvement of the co-ordination of mainstream service provision. Like the A.B.R., the P.I.D.D.A. has emphasised the need to encourage the development of community participation in local development through capacity building. In fact, community participation has received greater attention under the P.I.D.D.A. than previously. The second specific objective concerns the need to improve the operation of mainstream service provision at the local level, for the benefit of the most excluded groups. This objective focuses on the performance of existing service providers, such as state agencies.

These two objectives are inter-related, in that facilitation of community participation is meaningless if it is not matched with the provision of programmes and services which are responsive to community needs. To use a general example, developmental work with early school leavers is irrelevant if there are few training, placement or job opportunities for them once the developmental work has been done.

If by the term 'community participation' we mean, in simple terms, the provision of mechanisms whereby voluntary and community groups can be represented at decision-making level, then partnerships and local development organisations are keen to emphasise their achievements. This is noted in the E.S.F. evaluation report:

'In general, the Partnerships claim to have provided local structures and supports to previously deprived marginalised groups and also to have provided a forum for all interested parties – community, voluntary, statutory and social partner – to work together towards tackling fundamental problems in disadvantaged areas' (E.S.F. Programme Evaluation Unit, 1999, p. 138).

While the efforts of partnerships in promoting community participation are not in doubt, two reservations may be expressed. First, as the E.S.F. Programme Evaluation Unit notes, measurement of the outcomes of community development activity is fraught with difficulty, due both to the nature of that activity and to the failure of the Local Development Programme to develop adequate indicators for measurement of qualitative activity. If qualitative indicators were available, they would make it possible to measure the nature and extent of activity such as community development. The absence of such indicators makes it very difficult to establish exactly *what* is being achieved, and to what extent particular activities are taking place.

Second, there are still concerns about the level of success which partnerships and local development organisations have experienced in accessing the most marginalised groups. In their study of the role of partnerships in promoting social inclusion, Walsh et al. note that the community and voluntary interests interviewed are worried about the exclusion of minority groups such as Travellers and women from representation in partnerships (1998, p. 109). They go on to state:

'While having seats at the decision-making table, the quality of community participation is variable, especially

in regard to its ability to represent local interests' (Ibid, p. 110).

Frazer makes a similar point:

'There can be a real problem about involving the most socially excluded in partnerships. The active participants in partnerships from disadvantaged areas are not always the most disadvantaged nor are they always actively representing their interests' (in Community Workers Co-operative, 1996, p. 48). Inclusion of marginalised groups in a meaningful manner is a constant challenge to the partnerships and local development organisations, and one which is not easily met.

The second specific objective concerns the co-ordination of mainstream services, so that they may be delivered as effectively as possible to socially excluded groups. This objective has also proved problematic for the partnerships and local development organisations. Here, the difficulty lies in achieving co-operation between the various agencies involved in the partnership process. These agencies include the statutory partners, which are responsible for the provision of crucial services to particular target groups. An example is FAS, which provides training and job placement services for the unemployed.

Partnerships may choose between three approaches or ways of working. These are the delivery approach, the agency approach, and the brokerage approach. The delivery approach involves a partnership in direct provision of services to target groups. Partnerships which adopt an agency approach are involved in

developing and implementing actions, but their role is secondary to that of existing service providers. The brokerage role absolves the partnerships from a role in delivery, and involves the partnerships in supporting community-based agencies in the delivery of services. Of the three approaches, brokerage is the most desirable because it ensures that community-based organisations are to the forefront in meeting community needs and in service delivery, and that partnerships provide the necessary supports for this to happen. In community development terms, it is the best use of the resources – both financial and human – which the partnerships possess.

When the partnerships were asked by the E.S.F. Programme Evaluation Unit to describe the barriers they have encountered in attempting to redirect funding and activity towards disadvantaged groups, they mentioned the negative attitudes of statutory agencies towards change, and the inflexibility of these agencies (1999, p. 136). The evaluation stresses the frustration of partnerships in trying to encourage co-ordination and collaboration between the public bodies, and between these bodies and the partnerships (Ibid, p. 137). One of the results of inadequate co-operation and collaboration is that partnerships and local development organisations find themselves rooted in a delivery role, and unable to move away from this role. Assessing the delivery role of the partnerships, the Evaluation Unit made the following comment:

'...it is, however...possible to interpret a degree of circularity at best and duplication at worst which is not leading, in general, to any great change in the services provided or the manner of their provision by the statutory agencies' (Ibid, p. 135).

If partnerships and local development organisations are unable to progress significantly from a delivery role to a brokerage role, then their potential as agents of social inclusion is diminished.

Networking: Some Characteristics

The concept of networking has achieved regular usage in community development work in recent years. Like many other concepts associated with community development, it is difficult to find a definition of networking which has received widespread use and acceptance. It is even more difficult to establish precise characteristics of networking. Gilchrist (1995) suggests a definition:

'Networking is the process by which relationships and contacts between people or organisations are established, nurtured and utilised for mutual benefit. These personal connections often give rise to many community campaigns and self-help initiatives, which may also evolve into more structured organisations....' (p. 2).

While this description is somewhat innocuous in nature, it provides a working understanding of 'networking'. This definition also points to some of the characteristics of networking, when used in a community development context. For the purposes of this paper, identification of these characteristics is essential.

Firstly, networking is a *process* rather than a type of organisational structure. Thus, networking may be distinguished from networks, which are types of organisational structure,

consisting of people or organisations bound together through specific relationships or because of common aims. Secondly, networking is *informal* in nature and approach. In other words, networking activity is characterised by informality. It is only when networking adopts formal structures that it becomes formalised. Thirdly, networking undertaken in a community development context aspires to *inclusion*, in that all of those with an interest in becoming involved may participate. Fourthly, networking is *democratic* in nature. This means that all groups and organisations involved in the networking are treated equally and have equal involvement in the process.

Finally, and of central importance here, networking is concerned with the promotion of *horizontal communication*, or the promotion of links between groups and agencies. Horizontal communication refers to the development of communication between different organisations, with a view to establishing collaboration and co-operation between these organisations, thus furthering the community development activity which the networking process serves.

Why is the promotion of horizontal communication in the context of community development significant? In the first instance, the encouragement of horizontal communication provides opportunities for liaison and co-operation between groups and agencies which may otherwise operate in distinct spheres, carrying out their work in mutual exclusivity. Furthermore, horizontal communication provides an effective alternative to the bureaucratic model, which emphasises vertical communication according to a hierarchical management structure.

'There is a conflict between the bureaucratic mode of organisation and inter-agency networking. Bureaucracy encourages vertical communication up and down the various management levels and strict controls on the transmission of information. Networking encourages horizontal communication across organisational boundaries' (Trevillion, 1992, p. 52).

Having examined the principal characteristics of networking, it is now possible to highlight its potential as a means of overcoming the problems which this paper has identified. Taking these problems one at a time, we can note that, first, the process of networking offers possibilities of participation and inclusion which can be useful in accessing and animating marginalised groups and communities. Secondly, networking can be instrumental in encouraging and facilitating inter-agency communication and co-operation.

A Case Study of Networking from The Curragh, Kildare

This section describes a networking activity which involves Action South Kildare, the local development organisation/community group for the South Kildare area. The networking has been taking place since November 1997, and is ongoing. The participants have included a number of public bodies and voluntary organisations, of which the most prominent are Action South Kildare, the Curragh Post-Primary School, the Eastern Health Board (Social Work) Department, Kildare Youth Service, and the Personnel Support Services of the Irish Army (the Curragh).

The area on which the networking focuses is the Defence Forces Training Centre, generally known as the Curragh Camp. The target group is the population of the Curragh Camp (1,336 people according to the 1996 Census). The original goal of the inter-agency group was to establish a joint community and agency initiative which would tackle the social needs of young people living in the Camp. In 1997, the group embarked on a process which sought to realise this goal. Here, an attempt is made to encapsulate this process, and to explain how the use of community development principles and methodology have led to the establishment of a broader goal, which encompasses the social needs of the entire community within the Curragh Camp.

The process in question is the first example of networking involving several agencies within the Curragh Camp. It is also the first time that agencies have come together to consider the broad developmental needs of the community living within the Camp. Prior to the establishment of this initiative, any networking that took place was on a smaller scale and only involved agencies which co-operated in the general course of their work. For example, social workers from the Eastern Health Board liaise with the social worker employed by the Personnel Support Services of the Army on the Curragh.

There were two main reasons for the establishment of an inter-agency initiative on the Curragh. Firstly, concern had been expressed for some time about instances of anti-social behaviour amongst young people living within the Camp. The Army has been particularly concerned about acts of vandalism against its property. In the past, attempts were made to address the problem. For example, in 1995 the Army was responsible for establishing a youth club aimed at disaffected young people.

The club did not last for a significant period. Other youth clubs had previously been established and had lasted for varying lengths of time. The involvement of Personnel Support Services in the current inter-agency initiative represents the latest attempt by the Army to respond to this issue.

Secondly, Army concerns about anti-social behaviour coincided with concerns expressed by an Eastern Health Board social worker about problems relating to adolescents living in the Curragh Camp. His work on the Curragh led the social worker to believe that there was a concentration of adolescent problems within the Camp.

According to figures from the 1996 Census, the District Electoral Division in which the Camp is located experiences a high rate of unemployment (12.2% - twice that of the rate for Kildare as a whole), dependency and early school leaving (36.2% - considerably higher than for Kildare as a whole). The Camp is physically and socially detached from other communities. Furthermore, prior to the initiative being described, the level of community or youth development activity there was very low.

In October 1997 the social worker from the Eastern Health Board contacted Action South Kildare in order to discuss the possibility of establishing a service which would focus on the needs of young people living in the Curragh who were at risk. The initiative of the social worker was informed by four main ideas:

- There was a perception that existing services were failing to reach young people at risk

- Services such as social work departments tend to carry out their functions in isolation from other service providers
- A joint approach to the problems identified may be more likely to achieve something, than if expectations rest with a single agency
- Any service which would result from a joint approach could be tailored specifically to the needs of its target group i.e. young people at risk in the Curragh Camp.

Following the initial contact with A.S.K. it was decided to invite several relevant agencies to explore the possibility of a joint initiative. These included the agencies already mentioned and others, such as the Irish Pre-school Playgroups Association, which did not maintain their involvement after the initial contact. The new grouping proceeded to hold a series of meetings. At this point, concern and interest focused on the needs and problems of *young people* within the Camp. Individual members of the group spent some time gathering statistics relating to local young people. These included information on dependency, early school leaving, employment and involvement in crime.

It was the intention of the group from the beginning to involve the Curragh community in the initiative. After three initial meetings, it turned its attention to ways in which this could be achieved. It was decided to engage in a form of action research. In this way, involvement by the community in identification of needs could be combined with mobilisation of local people.

The group decided to hold a public meeting or workshop in March 1998. The purpose of the workshop was to identify the needs of young people in the Curragh area, and to look at how the community, in co-operation with outside agencies, could

meet these needs. Prior to the meeting, a letter publicising it was sent to all of the homes within the Camp.

A total of 45 people attended the meeting. Those in attendance included members of the community, people from public bodies and voluntary organisations, and people from development agencies such as A.S.K. A number of young people also attended.

Perhaps one of the most important conclusions of the meeting was that the problems for young people were rooted in broader issues, such as family difficulties, and lack of adequate facilities for young people within the Camp. It was pointed out that any initiative would require the involvement of all groups within the community – young people, parents, teachers, community and church groups, and the Army. In particular, it was emphasised that the initiative would require a broad, community development focus, while also tackling some of the immediate problems faced by the youth of the area.

In addition, emphasis was placed on the importance of involving the various public bodies, and youth and community development agencies. It was suggested that these agencies should inform the community of their activities, and become more involved in providing support to the community. The meeting called for the establishment of a co-ordinating group, involving the community, the agencies and young people.

Through subsequent public meetings it became apparent that training of members of the community would be necessary before actions to meet its needs could be initiated. It was apparent that few people within the community possessed the

broad range of skills or the experience necessary to initiate youth or community development activity. The idea of community development and youth leadership training was mooted, and was generally favoured by those present.

Through consultation at these meetings the following actions were planned:

- A course in youth leadership for adults
- A course in community development practice.

The youth leadership course began in November 1998 and ran for seven consecutive weeks. Trainers from Kildare Youth Service delivered the course, which was completed by eight people from the Camp. The new youth leaders will undergo further training in the future. The group intends to establish a youth club for 10-16 year olds, and is currently raising money for insurance. Kildare Youth Service has also arranged that one of its workers will devote part of her time on an ongoing basis to working with the youth leaders/youth club group. In addition, this worker is initiating a youth arts project in the Camp. Part of this project will entail training of volunteers in youth arts, so that the initiative will be self-sustaining. K.Y.S. is also seeking to facilitate participation by the new youth leaders in its activities, such as conferences and training.

Action South Kildare funded the community development course, which had over twenty participants. The training finished in March 1999 and the participants have formed a group which they have called FOCAS (Family Orientated Community Active Scheme). To date, the group has negotiated to take

control of the community hall in the Camp from the existing community council, which has been in decline for some time.

In the longer-term, the group has also expressed its hope that a multi-purpose centre can be built on the Camp. This would be the property of the community. The fact that the existing community hall is owned by the Army leads to restrictions on its use, and on how it may be developed. The group is being supported by the community worker from Action South Kildare, and plans to undergo further community development training. Ultimately, it is hoped that a representative from the Curragh community will sit on the Board of Action South Kildare.

The inter-agency group continues to meet and to support the new youth and community groups which have been established. In addition to financial resources, the ongoing expertise which this group provides to these new organisations is invaluable. It is unclear at this stage whether the inter-agency group will merge with the community development group or remain a separate entity.

Lessons from The Curragh Networking

Having looked briefly at this example from the Curragh, what can we conclude about the process of networking in the context of this discussion? Three principal advantages of networking may be identified, followed by two principal obstacles to maximising its potential.

First, Gilchrist points to the ways in which networking can achieve community development aims. She states:

'By broadening and enriching the range of connections that exist amongst people operating within and around a particular community or issue, networking enables people to help themselves and to tackle some of the problems they and others experience' (1995, p. 23).

Networking provides the means by which people from different organisations and the community can co-operate in considering problems and in working out ways of combating these problems. This is the nature of the networking initiative in the Curragh Camp. As we have seen, the initiative is still at an early stage, but capacity-building has taken place, and the 'action' phase has already begun. Thus, the initiative is contributing towards the achievement of one of the objectives of the Local Development Programme:

'To enhance the capacity of local communities, particularly in areas of economic marginalisation and depopulation to participate fully in local development and to counter social exclusion' (A.D.M., p. 7).

Given that the Curragh community had little knowledge or experience of development work prior to the establishment of the networking, the networking process has achieved much within a short space of time. Through the training and support which it receives, it is to be hoped that the community within the Camp will reach its optimal potential. If this is achieved, it can engage with confidence in meeting its own needs.

Eventually, it should be possible for members of the Curragh community to link with other communities and initiatives. In addition, it should be possible to integrate the community into

the local development process through participation in the structures of organisations such as A.S.K.

Secondly, networking facilitates the development of joint approaches between different agencies in the first instance, and between these agencies and the community in the second place. The benefits of inter-agency networking are described by one of the members of the Curragh inter-agency group:

'I think it has been helpful for me as a worker operating in the Curragh to have an opportunity to meet with (other people), just so as there is a point at which we make contact, and it isn't all crisis management. Because it does give us an opportunity to look beyond the immediate. Even if we decided that this particular initiative can take on a life of its own, I think I would still be inclined to think that maybe there's a role for a group, to meet, to explore issues of mutual concern'.

Another member gave specific reasons why he finds the meetings of the group beneficial:

'...the network makes me aware of other initiatives in other places, so I'm not isolated. I can pick people's brains and ask what we can do in a case like this. I find it, for my own benefit, very positive. One, for my own support. Two, for ideas'.

There is consensus amongst members of the group that the liaison between agencies which the group has generated has been beneficial. Such a group facilitates sharing of information and ideas, helps people to deal with problems and situations in a proactive manner, and facilitates a planned approach to tackling

these problems. It also makes them aware that they are not dealing with problems in isolation from other people and agencies.

A third advantage stems from the realisation that much is achieved through the work of individuals at 'ground' level. This is recognised by the E.S.F. Programme Evaluation Unit:

'...in our experience, the difference between getting things done can come down to individual and interpersonal disposition as opposed to ordained policy or system' (1999, p. 138).

One of the great strengths of networking is that it allows individuals to use their initiative and skills to promote a collective issue or cause. People with expertise in particular areas can use this expertise, without necessarily being constrained by the bureaucracy under which they may operate in their organisational settings. In this way, things may be achieved more quickly and efficiently.

Turning to the obstacles to networking, one of the main problems which arises from inter-agency networking at local level is that of attempting to ensure that the lessons which are learned filter through to the decision-making levels of the individual organisations involved. This can be difficult to achieve if those involved in the networking are lower grade staff, and not at managerial or decision-making level. Furthermore, some of the people who participate in networking do so as individuals, rather than as representatives of organisations. Thus, they may not be obliged to report to their organisations on the progress of the networking. This is a common problem

within the Local Development Programme, and one which is identified by Sabel (1996):

'...it is unclear what lessons, if any, the central offices of the national welfare and development agencies, on the one hand, and the social partner associations, on the other, are drawing from the new forms of collaboration between their local representatives and the successful partnerships....But if successes are not generalised through some combination of national reform and local adaptation, it will be impossible to test whether...the innovations can make a large enough improvement to the well-being of communities to justify the substantial engagement of volunteers on which their progress until now has depended' (p. 11).

Learning needs to take place at organisational as well as individual level. It is difficult to see how such learning may take place if powerful organisations take little heed of micro-processes such as networking. This is acknowledged by Thomas (1995), who points out that funders and bureaucrats often ignore social processes and relationships, which are crucial to the advancement of the development process.

The second problem relates to the previous one. Initiatives such as the Local Development Programme need to engage in qualitative research and evaluation into the processes which make up community development activity. This research would require the development of qualitative indicators which would describe, gauge and monitor particular activities and processes. Networking is one of these processes. The importance of such

indicators is recognised by Skelcher et al. (1996, p. 51) in their consideration of community networks in urban regeneration.

Insufficient attention is given to exploring and elucidating the contribution of micro-processes such as networking at local level to achieving the objectives of initiatives such as the PIDDA. The development of qualitative ways of measuring such activity would have one very significant benefit. It would help to highlight the crucial importance of social processes such as networking in achieving programme objectives. This, in its turn, should help to convince programme managers, policy-makers and decision-makers of the need to facilitate these processes, and of the potential to learn from their achievements.

Conclusion

In essence, the networking described here has consisted of a series of stages or phases. These stages are part of a process which has been consciously followed by those who established the networking initiative. It has already been stated that one of the characteristics of networking is its emphasis on *process*. This means that the stages through which the networking proceeds are considered to be just as important, if not more so, than any desired outcomes of the networking activity.

The stages through which the Curragh networking has proceeded are easily and clearly delineated. First, the problems to be tackled were assessed, and information concerning the nature and extent of these problems was gathered. Second, contact was made with agencies which could usefully contribute to the networking process. Third, the inter-agency group was formed

and contact was made with the community through the mechanism of local publicity and the subsequent consultation through workshops. Fourth, agreements were reached as to goals, tasks and procedures. Fifth, the new youth and community development groups were formed as a result of the consultation process and the training which followed. A number of stages have yet to be completed. The FOCAS group has identified several objectives, and most of these have yet to be achieved. For example, the group will have to approach the Army if it wishes to acquire the community hall, or if it intends to build a new multi-purpose community centre on Army land. Another stage concerns the decision which must be made about the nature of the relationship between the inter-agency group and the community groups.

In terms of the process described in this paper, we can say that it has been undertaken in accordance with a number of important principles of community development. In particular, the process has been 'bottom up' in nature. This means that it has concentrated on helping the community to articulate its own needs and to work coherently towards tackling those needs. In doing so, it has avoided the imposition of solutions from outside the community. Furthermore, the process has been non-directive in approach. Thus, the inter-agency group has acted as a catalyst for, or facilitator of the process, rather than directing it. This non-directive element has become more pronounced as the initiative progresses and the new community groups have become established.

The Curragh networking accords with the emphasis placed by community development on achieving both participation and learning. This is clearly expressed by Twelvetrees (1991):

'Community work is predicated on the central idea, that product goals are brought about by a process which ensures that the participants in the action have as much control as possible over all of its aspects and that they acquire an enduring capacity to act themselves as a result' (p. 11).

Whatever the outcomes of the Curragh networking, it is certain that the process has already been instrumental in giving the community the confidence to identify and assess its own development needs, and some of the skills essential to finding ways of meeting these needs. These are important advantages which the community will retain, regardless of its tangible achievements.

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