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Setting the Scene

Ashling Jackson and Colm O'Doherty

As free citizens in a political democracy, we have a responsibility to be interested and involved in the affairs of the human community, be it at the local or the global level. (Wellstone 2002)

We are two academics who at various points in our careers have been directly involved in community development work. Our long-standing interest in community development has been inspired by our social experiences in different communities in England, Wales and Ireland. Both of us are delighted to bring together in this book the ideas, interests and frameworks which are currently shaping community development programmes and projects in Ireland.

While it is tempting to look back in a nostalgic fashion and declare our experiences to have been uniformly positive, some elements of these communities were not affirmative, and as a result some of our experiences were neither comfortable nor fruitful. So right from the outset, it is important to acknowledge that the power of the idea of community is such that it can make us look backwards in a nostalgic way, or forward in an idealised manner. The notion of community is itself contentious: it can be understood as soap opera theme, as a political aspiration or, as in recent times, as a social policy instrument for the implementation of an active citizenship agenda. Definitions of community are legion and often contested. It is sufficient to state here that what people feel about a community determines, to a large degree, whether or not it is a community. Communities can be defined by location and physical proximity, but also and importantly, they are units of belonging where intangibles such as feelings, attitudes and perceptions connect members in a network of relationships. Community should not, however, be regarded as providing us with some kind of blueprint for utopia. To regard it in this way is to fail to recognise that all utopias, from Plato's *Republic* to More's *Utopia* and beyond, have one thing in common: they are predictable social settings from which change is absent. Contemporary Irish society is not a utopia, and the changing and diverse nature of community in Ireland is readily visible.

'Community development can be defined as a process in which people join together to improve conditions and create change at the community level' (Checkoway 2011:5). This definition succinctly captures the essence of community development work. Different definitions of community development will be used

by the various contributors to this book, each of whom will draw attention to the key elements of community development work.

Community development may be evident in local initiatives or in the work of formal agencies with diverse racial, ethnic, religious, or other groups, and in rural and urban communities in industrial and developing areas.

Community development has some core concepts on which there is relative agreement, such as 'starting with people', the idea that the process should originate in the experience of people; 'strengthening community', that community is a unit of solution; 'joining together', that individuals acting collectively can accomplish more than one person acting alone; and 'creating change', that change is both desirable and possible (Checkoway 1997; DeFilippis and Saegert 2008)' (cited in Checkoway 2011:ii6)

Communities and people within communities can mobilise and be mobilised in a variety of ways. For example, they can provide community-based services, advocate on issues that affect them, raise awareness and critical consciousness, and lobby the government for social change. There is no single strategy to create change; there are many (Checkoway 1995; Zukin *et al.* 2006).

For community development workers, community development is a *way of working with* communities, so that the community can become empowered, be competently proactive and, if necessary, reactive to the issues that affect it. Sound community development practice will see community development workers facilitate, manage, advocate and mediate for change in communities, most especially marginalised communities. They will do this by assisting the community to identify (if it is not already evident) a common need, something that is important to the community; to facilitate the community to identify ways to address this need; to empower and build capacity so that the community as a whole or, at the very least, individuals within the community can act to address the identified needs, all the time ensuring that the community takes ownership of the solution or process to effectively address its needs.

Given that social change has been so rapid in Ireland since the 1960s, and that the social context of communities has changed so dramatically over the last few decades, the theory of community development work, and policies affecting the operation of community development organisations and community development practice, have also changed rapidly. Therefore, when choosing an orientation for this book, we decided to adopt a theory, policy and practice approach. Community development practice is more and more shaped by social and economic policy, as well as by our own ideology as community development workers. In compiling the chapters that make up this textbook, we also employed a key principle of community development work, that of collaboration, by working closely with experts in the field. Contributions from key practitioners and academics in the community development area provide examples of best practice in various aspects

of community development, while taking cognisance of the altered landscape of working in community development settings in Ireland. Current restrictions on funding, compared to what was available a decade ago, is an example of this altered community development landscape. The chapters in this book reflect current theoretical conceptualisations in the area of community development, the latest policy implications for the community development sector and, importantly, models of best practice for working in various community development settings.

Community development practice is framed by the social context in which it occurs. Ireland is in itself an interesting case study, in that until recently 'two social processes have partly overlapped in Ireland in the last two decades: one is a general modernisation, with its greater individualism and secularism; and the other is a tremendous surge in economic growth, with its spiralling materialism, consumerism and increased choice' (O'Connell 2001:7). Combined, this meant that Ireland experienced very rapid economic, social and cultural change in recent decades (O'Connor 2006; Fahey and Layte 2007).

This book looks at community development in Ireland *now*, in the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger and at a time when Ireland is in the throes of a well-established recession. Chapters 2 to 6 explore the evolution of community development and the current social context in which practitioners work. In Chapter 2, we see how a culture of competitive individualism, very much a characteristic of Celtic Tiger Ireland, undermines collective and individual well-being. Community development can be an effective response to this. However, community development has been evolving in a particular way in Ireland. Chapter 3 explores the nature and type of community development in Ireland, drawing particular attention to how community development has moved away from the politicised action that informed its birth in Ireland in the 1980s. Theories and understandings of well-being are introduced in Chapter 4 to enable the reader to understand the impact of social context and circumstances on well-being. The link between well-being and government policies is established here. Importantly, this chapter shows how community development processes can strengthen the capacity of people to be involved in social transformation activities that redistribute power and enhance well-being. While community development practice is framed by the social context in which it occurs, it is also framed by the environmental context in which community development workers carry out their work. Chapter 5 examines cultural diversity in Ireland and draws attention to the increasingly important value of culturally competent practice when working in community development settings. While the majority of chapters in this book deal with community development in the South of Ireland, Chapter 6 focuses on the impact of community development in a conflict setting, exploring specifically the evolution of community development in Northern Ireland, as well as the nature of community development practice there.

Chapters 7 to 10 review examples of various aspects of community development work in new and emerging settings. Chapter 7 describes how an intensive family

support project was set up and implemented in two areas suffering from sustained poverty and disadvantage using core community development principles. Collaboration between professionals, and between professionals and the community, is promoted here. Collaborative working is further explored in Chapter 8, which identifies best practice in collaborative working in Ireland and examines the impact the international collaborative model of co-location is having on community development practice in Ireland. Chapter 9 focuses on one of the major additions to the community development sector in Ireland over the past two decades – family resource centres. This chapter analyses the contribution local community members make to the successful running of these centres on behalf of their local community, as well as to community development practice in Ireland. Chapter 10 discusses family resource centres, community development and restorative justice as possibly congruent activities. The chapter draws some conclusions as to the compatibility of community development and restorative justice in principle and practice, and makes recommendations as to how practice might be developed in this area.

Community development and community education are inextricably linked. In Chapters 11 and 12 various dimensions of community education are explored. Chapter 11 introduces the reader to a number of critical theories relevant to adult and community education. The importance of being a knowledgeable and critical practitioner, equipped with the necessary knowledge that informs practice, but also possessing a developed sense of criticality, is highlighted. Community education, particularly if a peer education model is employed, can be a very powerful force for social change. In Chapter 12, five Traveller women share their experiences of becoming Traveller community health workers and peer educators, and what this means for them and their local Traveller community. Here we can see how peer education can be an effective way of promoting self-help and mutual aid in community settings.

Community development practice should be rigorously conducted and ideally be evidence-based rather than evidence-informed. Chapter 13 explores how community-based youth and family interventions can introduce and utilise an evidence-based approach to community development workers' work, by engaging in a system of tracking the perceived social support levels among adolescents attending their project. In this practical way, community development work can move from being evidence-informed to being evidence-based. In Chapter 14, evaluation, an essential element of sound community development practice in assessing the effectiveness of the community development endeavour, is promoted as a way to empower communities. Empowerment evaluations specifically can be an effective way to ensure ownership by the community at all stages of a project. In the recessionary times in which we live, empowerment evaluations may well become a cost-effective approach to evaluation in community development practice.

Community development can be a powerful social force in any society. It may well be a panacea for that sense of normlessness, the feeling of having no control

and of events being very unpredictable, that is experienced when one is living in a rapidly changing society and which is exacerbated by living in a marginalised community in a rapidly changing society. Our concluding chapter, Chapter 15, reflects on community development as a key characteristic of civil society, and the importance of it as a mechanism to improve the social situation of those living in marginalised communities in Ireland.

This book aims to provide thought-provoking insights into the complexity and richness of community development practice in Ireland, a practice that is framed by theory and by current social and economic policy. It is not an exhaustive account of the myriad of community development work that occurs, or the variety of community settings in which that work occurs. We do hope, though, that this book will give a flavour of the current state of play of community development practice in Ireland. Importantly, we hope the best practice guidelines provided in various chapters will assist the reader to achieve best practice standards in their current or, indeed, future community development work.

The Value of Community Development

Colm O'Doherty

It is always worth itemising happiness, there is so much of the other thing in a life, you had better put down the markers for happiness while you can. (Barry 2008:148)

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Community development and well-being are natural bedfellows. Community development enhances individual and collective well-being by strengthening communities in ways consistent with the core principles of: collective action, empowerment, social justice, participation, equality and anti-discrimination. (CWC 2008:22/26)

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

The purpose of community development is to improve people's social and emotional well-being – their happiness – by promoting positive change through a process of social emancipation. We are regularly made aware by politicians, church leaders and other influential figures who comment on the decline of community that we need to do something to counteract this movement away from the 'warm circle' (Bauman 2001:11) of respect and belonging associated with collective life and the cultural resources which sustain it. Putting down markers for happiness and manifesting our shared humanity are two of the key organising principles for community development.

However, the key organising principle of our dominant economic system is that society works best when each person individually seeks to maximise their own utility or satisfaction in the marketplace. Under this economic order, vulnerability or insecurity, which is part of the modern psychological condition, is directly related to our personal failings. Coping with the insecurity of contemporary life requires us to constantly re-assess our individual circumstances and forces us:

. . . to seek biographical solutions to systemic contradictions; we are looking for individual salvation from shared troubles. That strategy is unlikely to bring the results we are after, since it leaves the roots of insecurity intact; moreover, it is precisely this falling back on our individual wits and resources that injects the world with the insecurity we wish to escape. (Bauman 2001:144)

This individualistic approach to well-being sits well with a dominant economic model which equates happiness with economic growth and consumerism. Our sense of self-worth is bound up with self-management and the acquisition of commodities. In this model, gross national product is seen as a true indicator of the level of human happiness. For many people their social standing and sense of identity is no longer reflected in the quality of interactions with others and the real knowledge of each other that they can experience in a community to which they belong. A person's social standing becomes an ongoing project, the project of the self; and the project of the self hinges on the successful forging of an identity which affords a person social recognition. Consumerism, and the traits and activities (for example shopping for brands/logos) associated with it, provides a ready-made identity platform for obtaining and retaining a social standing which in turn occupies a central position in the pursuit of a happy life.

Too often consumerism is regarded as though it reflects a fundamental human material self-interest and possessiveness. That, however, could hardly be further from the truth. Our almost neurotic need to shop and consume is instead a reflection of how deeply social we are. Living in unequal and individualistic societies, we use possessions to show ourselves in a good light, to make a positive impression, and to avoid appearing incompetent or inadequate in the eyes of others. Consumerism shows how powerfully we are affected by each other. Once we have enough of the basic necessities for comfort, possessions matter less and less in themselves, and are used more and more for what they say about their owners. Ideally, our impressions of each other would depend on face-to-face interactions in the course of community life, rather than on outward appearances in the absence of real knowledge of each other. The weakening of community life and the growth of consumerism are related (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009:225–6).

Counterbalancing the utilitarian or materialist perspective is a significant and growing literature on happiness, or subjective well-being (Layard 2005; Searle 2008; Bauman 2008; Jordan 2008; Layard and Dunn 2009; Wilkinson and Pickett 2009; Delaney 2009), which rejects the excessive individualism of the economic growth model.

By excessive individualism we mean the belief that the prime duty of the individual is to make the most of his or her own life, rather than to contribute to the good of others. Of course some degree of individualism is necessary for survival, and individual choice and self-determination are vital ingredients of a good life. But individuals will never lead satisfying lives except in a society where people care

for each other and promote each other's good as well as their own. The pursuit of personal success relative to others cannot create a happy society, since one person's success necessarily involves another's failure. Individual freedom and self-determination bring many blessings, but they can only exist if balanced by a proper sense of care and responsibility for others (Layard and Dunn 2009:6).

Layard and Dunn's *Good Childhood* report (2009), a landmark inquiry into children's experiences of childhood in the UK, identified excessive individualism as the source of a whole range of problems for children: problems relating to family breakdown, teenage antagonism, dishonest advertising, excessive competition in education and inequality all stemmed from excessive individualism. This culture of individualism, 'in which each person is supposed to realize themselves through the development of their special potentials' (Jordan 2008:8), is derived from the 'invisible hand' economic model of Adam Smith (1723–1790). Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, set out to explain the singular increase in economic growth occurring in Western Europe. *The Wealth of Nations* analysed the inter-relationship between three key elements – the *factors of production*, the *market* and the *state* – of mercantile society. Smith's influential examination of the emerging market capitalist system has become a manifesto for contemporary capitalism and shapes the cultural flows in which social value is defined. Bauman points out that:

The 'invisible hand' of the market operated by selfish individuals in search of their own wealth and pleasure seemed to be rather reluctant or impotent to save humans from the horrors of reciprocal cruelties. Most certainly, it managed neither to liberate most humans from the bondage of passions, nor to make completely happy those few whom it succeeded in freeing. (Bauman 2008:49)

The shortcomings of this economic model in promoting well-being were documented in 1974 by Richard Easterlin. He identified a counter-intuitive relationship between economic growth as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) and measurements of happiness in affluent countries. As income and economic growth rise, well-being remains stalled. The Easterlin paradox – as this insight was termed – suggests that societies in developed countries like Ireland are operating within an economic model that is not capable of improving the quality of life of their members. The growing literature on well-being has challenged the economic account of how value is created and distributed. According to the economist Richard Layard (2005), the critical dimensions affecting our well-being or happiness are health, income and the quality of our relationships. Material success and social failure in many rich countries flags up the need 'to shift attention from material standards and economic growth to ways of improving the psychological and social well-being of whole societies' (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009:4). Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) argue that economic growth and increases in average income make only a limited contribution to well-being in rich countries.

This is because as these countries have grown richer their societies have become more unequal: Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) show how the quality of social relations deteriorate in less equal societies.

Trust is a valuable collective good because it lubricates our day-to-day social and economic exchanges, facilitates co-operative relations and generates social capital. Social capital, as defined by Putnam (2000), refers to social rules, networks of reciprocity (I will do something for you on the basis that in return you do something for me) and trustworthiness. Putnam sees social capital as being akin to neighbourliness. He identifies personal as well as collective benefits, for example through networking, and that the concept of social capital has links with the notion of community (Packham 2008:32).

There is ample evidence that social capital constitutes a major resource for communities and that it promotes health and well-being, reduces levels of crime, sustains social cohesion and advances solidarity (O'Doherty 2007). Trust is diminished by the divisiveness of inequality. Here in Ireland, Delaney (2009) examined the health and well-being of the Irish population during the boom years of the Celtic Tiger. Using statistical data from administrative and survey sources he considered whether this period of growth had improved well-being and welfare in Ireland. He found that:

If one looks at psychological distress measures, Ireland fits neatly with the pattern of relationship between economic growth and well-being described by Richard Easterlin in his seminal papers on the topic. The substantial period of economic growth throughout the late 20th century may have had a strong welfare component to the extent that it funded advancements of elder life expectancy. However, there is no evidence for large increases in psychological well-being from the data available. (Delaney 2009:12)

Stalled happiness or well-being is associated with an individualistic version of social value based on the traditional assumption that economic growth is the way forward for the creation of a better society. If we understand culture in its broadest sense as a whole way of life, we can see how the individualistic culture associated with the economic model places little or no value on the interpersonal sources of social value that are associated with local and increasingly globalised networks of formal and informal support. Money and what it can buy is, in conventional economics, the fixed measure of value that makes it possible to establish the relative price of all commodities. Like all social systems, money capitalism is cultural in the sense that its economic activities are made meaningful to participants through cultural processes – in this case, processes that overstate the value of commodities and devalue the interpersonal goods produced through positive social interactions. These interpersonal goods are experienced through relationships, groups, associations and communities. They constitute an interpersonal economy which creates social value by developing cultures of

mutuality, respect and belonging. Community development sets about improving well-being by generating and implementing changes which impact on people's collective life and cultural resources. Before setting out the features of community development that improve well-being it is important to acknowledge what we know and understand about the idea of 'community'.

COMMUNITY

'Community' has become a somewhat elastic term, but its ubiquitous usage is testimony to its enduring importance in our lives. It is an evocative idea conjuring up positive images and feelings of identity, belonging and understanding shared by all its members. Belonging offers members security and exclusivity. The feelings of belonging associated with community membership can kindle divisiveness and become a triggering factor in racial, ethnic, class, gender, religious and ideological tribalism and xenophobia. These negative social outcomes can be influenced by a type of social capital that supports and produces inward-looking social networks.

Referred to as 'bonding' social capital, it reinforces solidarity and ties between homogenous groups. As such it can be utilised at one end of the spectrum by nefarious organisations such as the Mafia or the Ku Klux Klan and at the other end by golf clubs that foster exclusivity. In between these two extremes it can underpin golden circles of exploitative individuals or sustain the strong ties between families and within ethnic groups and immigrant communities. 'Bridging' social capital, on the other hand, enables participation and involvement in outward-looking networks such as the civil rights movement in the USA (O'Doherty 2007:25).

In addition to these two sources of identity formation and social cohesion, Field (2003:66) draws attention to a third type of social capital, 'linking social capital', which is derived from relationships with agencies and organisations up and down the social and economic scale. 'Linking' social capital connects people to contacts, from outside their own social milieu, that supply resources capable of enhancing the well-being of their communities. It is manifested through alliances between communities and individuals or groups with formal power, especially power over resources that can be used to encourage social and economic development. Hence the social value of communities or networks is bound up with the characteristic type of capital mobilised by their members. An exclusive sense of identity which rejects other groups or the whole culture may be upheld by bonding social capital which is based on inward-looking ties. Bonding social capital serves to reinforce homogeneity, while bridging social capital encourages and facilitates contact across diverse social networks and communities. Community development produces or harnesses social capital for collective benefit.

To sum up, then, community can be understood as a body of people with an ongoing relationship stemming from shared interests or something in common. The relationship may be based around a locality, a shared identity or experience of discrimination.

HOW COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IMPROVES WELL-BEING

The three features of community development that enable people to be active and to take action that increases well-being are:

- Self-determination: it assigns a positive value to people acting for themselves as opposed to having things done for or to them.
- Collaborative action: it has a collective rather than an individual focus.
- Getting a better deal for people, especially those who are collectively missing out in some way. Engagement and commitments are guided by moral and political principles rather than technical or ideological concerns.

Self-determination

Community development workers operate as facilitators with people in relation to what *those people* decide to become involved with, helping them to realise *their* collective goals (Twelvetrees 2008:3).

Community development works best when it is the people themselves, rather than a professional worker, who choose the means and ends to improve their own communities. So whatever occurs is on their terms and, more often than not, on their home territory rather than in a clinical or office setting. People are enabled to develop community responses and projects improving collective well-being in the natural setting of their social and physical environment. Community ownership of family support and outreach youth work services is encouraged when such community development programmes are situated in the neighbourhood rather than being located in an official building miles away.

Collaborative Action

Formal and informal relationships, comprising the currency of community development, make it easier for people to communicate and co-operate with each other and thereby generate purposeful collective action. The collective focus of community development is instrumental in empowering citizens to shape and determine positive social change in their communities. As Bauman puts it: 'We all need to gain control over the conditions under which we struggle with the challenges of life – but for most of us such control can be gained only *collectively*' (2001:149).

Moral and Political Principles

The third feature of community development follows from the other two. Community development is concerned with people's lives in a community and the

distribution of resources and power within the community itself and between the community and the wider society. Community development, through participative processes and structures, seeks to challenge inequitable power relationships and empower marginalised and excluded groups within the community and mainstream society.

To put it more simply, community development ensures that people as members of a geographical or other form of community (interest, faith, ethnicity, gender, class, virtual) get a better deal through their own collective efforts.

ESTABLISHING THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community development processes produce social value which supports healthy societies by building community capacity for children, youth and adults. Community capacity is the interaction between human capital (community members' levels of skill, knowledge and health status), social and institutional capital (leadership, motivation and networks) and economic capital (local services, infrastructure, resources) available to be used in collective ways to improve the well-being of any particular community.

As I discussed earlier, the logic of the economic model does not allow for a sympathetic evaluation of the arguments in favour of collective life and the cultural resources that sustain it. Because the economic model fails to explain behaviour that occurs outside the formal or monetary economy, it can measure the growth of national product but it cannot measure the growth of happiness or well-being.

When the social value of community development programmes is viewed solely through the lens of objective criteria, we are unlikely to see how and to what degree the programme has increased the happiness or subjective well-being of participants. Case studies that provide us with a rich description of the context in which the programme was located and in which the participants lived are a respectable method of social research. To increase our understanding of the value of community development, for the communities themselves and wider society, ongoing medium-term fine-grained qualitative research into social networks and community activities and their contribution to social capital is required.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have examined the transformational manner in which community development increases happiness and well-being. It does this by producing, through its programmes, the collective goods of intimacy (the close feelings generated by partners, family members and friends), respect, the culture of civility and belonging (the sense of loyalty, commitment and trust between members of the same group, community or society). The social value of community development can be contrasted with the individualistic version of value derived from the economic model.

Individualism – a very uniform, reductionist and ultimately banal version of the value of life – has failed to subvert a multitude of other collective ways of experiencing social value and sustaining it through relationships, groups, associations and communities (Jordan 2008:230).

Under the aegis of the economic model the dominant ideas and policies of speculators, builders, bankers – who believe they know best – have infiltrated our thoughts as *common sense* when they make no sense at all. The proposition that banks, developers and financial services could be trusted to advance our general well-being is now exposed as a fantasy. The value of community development is that it creates alternative sources of social value and develops collective cultures which offer genuine opportunities for citizens to *put down markers for happiness*.