

The Irish Rural Development Paradigm — an Exploratory Analysis

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Abstract: This paper examines the recent rural development programmes. It considers the way they use the idea of "community", what is meant by rural development and who benefits from it, and what are the implications for systems of governance.

I INTRODUCTION

The lack of theoretical precision in rural sociology has been an issue of debate over the last 20 years by people working in the area. As a result, theoretical paradigms and conceptual tools have advanced enormously (see for example Copp, 1972; Buttel and Newby, 1980; Marsden *et al.*, 1990; Buller and Wright, 1990; Dickens, 1992). New emphasis has been given to the meaning of rural, the sociology of space, spatial exclusion and social class in the rural context. This developing theoretical sophistication might seem particularly timely given the renewed emphasis on rural development policy. Yet theory does not seem to have informed policy or practice to the extent possible. While the current area-based approach to rural development is clearly more advantageous than previous sectoral measures, there are some basic issues which have not been addressed. If the paradigm of area based rural development is to have a fair trial these questions must be rigorously discussed. This paper identifies some of these. It considers the new rhetoric of

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community, who benefits from rural development, what is meant by rural development and what are the implications for systems of governance. To set the scene the paper begins with a brief historical overview of the policy use of community development, a discussion of what is meant by rural and rural development, and a brief historical overview of rural development policy in the Republic of Ireland. Reference is made to Canada, as Canada provides an example outside of the EU which is experiencing similar rural development policy formations.

Community Development

Community development became fashionable in the 1950s as a means of stimulating local initiative. The term "community development" was first used in the context of British colonial administration in Africa (Wright, 1990). Community development was to be at the forefront of each colony's development policy and was designed to encourage self-help and stable, self-reliant communities (Wright, 1990, p. 45). Community development officers were appointed to work at village level with a holistic approach to development. The United States took up community development as its main foreign policy in the 1950s and with US and UN assistance, national community development programmes were launched in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The three broad objectives of community development programmes were to improve the living conditions of the whole community, to have development initiatives emerge from the locality, and to secure the widest possible local participation in the development process (Varley, 1988). From the start community development had a political dimension (Wright, 1990, p. 46), concentrating on areas of potential political tension. The dependence of the programmes on political support and external finance for continuation underlined the political nature of community development. It is clear, in retrospect, that while there was a discourse of facilitating villagers to generate their own ideas about projects and how they should be undertaken, this could only occur within the parameters of the programme, represented by the community development worker.

The programmes encountered a number of well documented problems (see for example, Holdcroft, 1982) of sufficient magnitude to lead to the virtual abandonment of this approach to development. It proved difficult to secure adequate participation of locals and frequently it was the local notables who dominated the process of development (Curtin and Varley, 1991). Pre-existing structures of inequality were not significantly altered. In many instances existing powerholders became more powerful, partly as a result of the failure to consider systems of governance and the question of power (Wright, 1990). Another difficulty was the external formulation of projects despite the central

objective of development initiatives emerging from the locality. By 1965 most community development programmes were abandoned and were replaced by comprehensive planning and capital intensive industrialisation as a means of stimulating economic growth (Varley, 1988).

A number of the EC rural development programmes developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s bear a remarkable similarity to the community development programmes of the 1950s and early 1960s. The EC's guiding principles assert that rural development policy must be integrated, that is, cover all aspects of rural life and not just specific sectoral concerns. In addition, there must be close co-operation or partnership between local or regional authorities, the Member State and the Commission in rural development initiatives. There is an emphasis on local participation and the development of community self-reliance. In Northern Ireland, development officers have been employed to assist with this task. This has led to a territorial basis to rural development, which allows for a more holistic representation of different interests than previous sectoral measures. Locality, region and particularly community are frequently used terms in discussions about territorially based rural development.

II "RURAL" AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The meaning of rural has constituted a long and arduous debate and it would take at least one book to recount it in detail. Reference is made to it here simply to illustrate the subsequent problems posed for the formulation of rural development policy. Until the mid 1960s rural and urban society were seen as occupying two ends of a continuum. This idea has since been largely dismissed (i.e., Pahl, 1966; Copp, 1972). "Rural" has been clarified as a geographical expression rather than a sociological category. Greater attention has since been paid to expressions of social class, occupation and gender in rural areas and to the links between spatial configurations and social systems. Socio-economic processes in rural areas are accountable for decline, change or underdevelopment. It is the negative spatial impact of socio-economic processes which rural development policies address.

Rural development has been subject to a number of definitions and interpretations and there is no agreement on what development as a process, as a goal or as a perceived achievement actually is (Buller and Wright, 1990, p.2). A widely used definition is that of Jasma *et al.* (1981) who define rural development as "an overall improvement in the economic and social well-being of rural residents and in the institutional and physical environment in which they live" (quoted in Keane, 1992). Another widely accepted definition in the Irish context is Matthews (1986) definition of rural development as an

overall improvement in the economic and social well-being of rural residents. One of the most comprehensive definitions of rural development is that offered by Buller and Wright (1990) who describe it as an ongoing and essentially interventionist process of qualitative, quantitative and/or distributional change leading to some degree of betterment for groups of people (p. 3). Rural development involves goals for the betterment of *some* people and consequently can become a conflictual process.

An underlying aim through time and a variety of rural development measures in the Irish context¹ has been the maintenance of the country's rural population, not just in terms of aggregate numbers in rural areas but also in terms of maintaining the existing spatial distribution (Commins, 1992a). As the history is documented, it is clear that rural development has shifted from being an adjunct of agricultural policy to being an area of policy concern in its own right.

History of Irish Rural Development Policy

There are a number of detailed accounts of the history of rural development policy in Ireland (NESC, forthcoming; Commins, 1992; Shortall, 1992). While the first government of the independent Irish State argued the merits of free trade and did not introduce protectionist policies, the second government came to power on a ticket advocating self-sufficiency and a protectionist policy for Irish industry. Between the 1930s and the late 1950s, high tariff and non-tariff protection was the principle method used to foster and develop Irish industry. New industries developed and older ones expanded, but the industrial sector stagnated, became increasingly inefficient and undercapitalised behind this tariff and non-tariff protection (Ruane, 1981; Cuddy, 1991). During the late 1950s, the employment situation was deteriorating and emigration rates were high. The 1960s witnessed an increased concern with regional development.

Farming was the primary industry in rural Ireland during this time. Agricultural occupations accounted for 50 per cent of the total labour force when the State was founded, while today they account for about 16 per cent (Breen *et al.*, 1990).

In the late 1950s, the move towards free trade was associated with the idea of economic rejuvenation (FitzGerald, 1981). Ireland joined The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trades (GATT) in 1967, and became a member of the EC in 1973. The 1960s heralded a change in industrial policies as Ireland prepared for free trade and EC entry. The Irish State phased out protection, encouraged existing and new industries to develop export-based markets, and actively pursued foreign investment.

1. Unless otherwise stated, Irish refers to the Republic of Ireland.

The main traditional centres of manufacturing during the period of protection were the two largest Irish cities, Dublin and Cork. When Ireland decided to embark on free trade, there was also a decision to try and correct this uneven spatial distribution of growth. The current debate in general rural development is somewhat resonant of the debate which took place during the 1960s: on the one side "centralists" argued in favour of carefully selecting a number of regional growth centres and fostering industrial development and focusing investment in these centres (Buchanan, 1968). On the other side "dispersionists" recommended a much wider geographical dispersal of new industry and argued that a factory in small towns and villages was more likely to halt rural decay. The recommendation to develop a number of major poles was *not* the policy pursued, rather a strategy of wide geographical dispersal of new industry was undertaken. At this time, agricultural employment had fallen and emigration from rural areas was high. There are many similarities between the situation in the Irish rural economy in the 1960s and today. Commodity surpluses in other agricultural exporting countries meant limited opportunities for exporting Irish produce. While a strategy of price support was undertaken, the Government warned that support for farm prices was limited and agricultural productivity and competitiveness had to be improved (Commins, 1992a). In the 1960s, diversification and agri-tourism were promoted as important instruments of rural development. It was hoped developing industry in rural areas would provide an alternative source of employment and a supplemental income for farmers with small or poor acreage. It is interesting to note that appropriate institutional apparatus to facilitate regional and local development was an issue of concern (Commins, 1992a). The 1960s saw the development of County Development Teams, Regional Development Organisations and regional boards for health and tourism.

The Industrial Development Authority (IDA) was the most important national body from the point of regional policy since they directly affected the location choices of firms. The early 1970s saw the beginning of the IDA's clearly stated policy of dispersing new industry outside the traditional centres. The IDA used an attractive package of incentives to develop Irish industries and particularly to attract foreign investment. This policy achieved its objective in that new manufacturing industries, with IDA support, were established throughout the country. Manufacturing employment was created, mostly by foreign-owned multi-national companies, in areas which previously had no such tradition. The pattern of rural depopulation was reversed during the 1970s. Employment in agriculture, forestry and fishing continued to decline (from 273,000 in 1971 to 168,000 in 1986) but rural population recovery was widespread, as evident in Table 1.

Table 1: *Population Change by Type of Location*

<i>Type (population centres)</i>	<i>1966-1971</i>	<i>1971-1981</i>	<i>1981-1986</i>
10,000 and over	+6.4	+16.1	+2.4
5,000-10,000	+8.1	+40.4	+5.3
3,000-5,000	+16.0	+38.1	+4.3
1,500-3,500	+10.7	+26.3	+2.5
1,000-1,500	+7.9	+24.4	+0.2
500-1,000	+7.6	+22.6	+4.7
Under 500	+5.8	+29.7	+6.1
Country districts	-2.2	+7.4	+2.6
Total State	+3.3	+15.6	+2.8

Note: Groupings are based on average populations for the relevant intercensal periods.

Source: Commins, 1992a.

Some manufacturing companies had good reason to locate in remote areas, but many were "urged, cajoled or bribed" by IDA policy (DKM consultants, 1992). For example, the location in remote areas of light manufacturing plants whose raw materials and business services come through the East Coast, meant operational cost penalties for the firms involved. The policy of industrial dispersal pursued was not so much about *creating* jobs in rural areas as *moving* jobs to rural areas.

Over the 14 year period, 1975-1989, national industrial employment fell by 4 per cent, but there was marked regional variation. The West and North-West had large gains. Employment fell in only two regions; South-West (Cork city) and the Eastern region with Dublin being most affected within that region. The decline of industry in Cork and Dublin cannot be entirely attributed to IDA policy. EC membership, the end of tariff and non-tariff protection exacted a heavy toll on traditional industries, most of which were located in Dublin and Cork. It is clear though that much foreign investment was steered away from these regions.

The foreign investment which followed Ireland's generous "open door" policy and the benefits of CAP following EC entry, meant the 1970s were a very buoyant period for the Irish economy. The buoyancy was such that there was rapid public sector expansion. Rural Ireland benefited significantly from public expenditure during this period, particularly from expenditure on education and health (Cuddy, 1991). Rural residents had an unprecedentedly high level of access to health and education services and the services sector put direct employment into rural areas. It is interesting to note that rural regions have benefited much more from public sector than from private sector

employment. The public sector share of employment in rural areas is close to the national average, whereas it is considerably less in the case of the private sector services (Brady, Shipman and Martin, 1987).

The end of the 1970s and start of the 1980s saw the beginning of a very difficult period for the Irish economy. In some areas the world recession only precipitated problems that were already latent (Cuddy 1991, p.33-34). The generous and facilitating "open-door" policy to foreign companies led to foreign subsidiaries becoming a substitute for, rather than a complement to, indigenous industrialisation. Many of the foreign industries attracted to rural Ireland had little growth potential. They were simple, self-contained processes with little scope for development. Each new firm needed as much inducement as the original ones. By the end of the 1970s, Ireland was heavily dependent on foreign industry and was among one of the world's most dominated economies in terms of relative shares of foreign direct investment (Smyth and Boylan, 1991). The export-oriented foreign industries brought economic buoyancy in the 1970s, but they brought crises in the 1980s when foreign investment declined. Unemployment reached an all time high. The blows to rural areas were severe. While manufacturing employment declined during this period 1980-1987, services employment increased. This growth in commerce, insurance and finance sectors benefited the East and urban areas more than rural areas. A re-orientation of industrial policy de-emphasised the regional dimension, and the problems of high national and urban unemployment took precedence. At a national level, regional policy has remained in decline since the 1980s.

Entry into the EC

Since Ireland joined the EC in 1973, regional and rural policy is profoundly influenced by thinking in Brussels. The CAP replaced national price supports and was more extensive and more generous. It had a direct positive effect on all rural areas through raising product prices to farmers, raising their incomes and the amount of money in rural areas. The agricultural support mechanism helped those dependent on agriculture, but it was in proportion to output and this led to inequity as larger farmers and farmers located in the better regions benefited most. CAP has also led to other well known problems apart from skewed distribution of benefits such as over production, high cost of produce and negative environmental impacts. There was an unwarranted optimism in Ireland about the efficacy of the CAP to deal with the problems of agriculture which was not realised (Commins, 1992).

It was also hoped that Ireland would benefit from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This fund was specifically intended to assist with infrastructural development in regional areas. However, price guarantee

expenditure dominated the grants and subsidies Ireland received, and between 1979-1984, the ratio of structures to price guarantee expenditure was 15:85 (Cuddy, 1987). Furthermore, all of the Republic was designated as an area eligible for aid and the fund was not used to improve specific regions but rather it helped to finance the public capital programme (Commins, 1992). Ireland may have had a "regional" status within the EC, but this did not necessarily mean it trickled down to the regions within Ireland. Differing national policies on regions varied and this meant that despite EC attempts at amelioration, disparities continued.

It is necessary to document the history of Ireland in the EC in order to understand the current emergence of area-based programmes. The Irish philosophy, probably not unlike that of other member states, has been to maximise funds from the EC. The result has been a reaction to policy initiatives and viewpoints originating from Brussels. The current area-based programmes hold tremendous potential and have even to date shown a resource waiting to be tapped. However, the Irish response has remained a reaction to an EC initiative rather than a national development of the rationale.

In the late 1980s, area-based programmes and "bottom-up development" came into vogue in Brussels. The failure of CAP and the advent of the Single European Market (SEM) required a new strategy to develop lagging regions in order to secure economic and social cohesion (*The Future of Rural Society*, 1988). Community Support Frameworks (CSFs)² have been agreed between the Community and National Governments. The Commission stipulated programmes integrated across sectors, and that the preparation and implementation of plans and programmes should involve much greater regional and local participation (Cuddy, 1991). One of the main points was that rural areas could no longer depend on external investment to the same extent as in the past and the emphasis would have to be on the development of indigenous resources. This made a lot of sense in the Republic of Ireland where industrial employment had been based on imported enterprise and where branch-plant factories had been severely hit in the recession (Commins, 1992).

2. The Community Support Framework (CSF) set out the basis for the disbursement of EC Structural Funds in the Community over the period 1989 to 1993. The overall objective of the structural fund and other Community assistance under the CSF was to promote economic development, to contribute to the raising of per capita incomes towards the Community average in lagging areas and to promote greater economic and social cohesion throughout the Community.

III CURRENT RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

Ireland

There has been an increase in structures and measures which embrace the principle of locally based development and although they were not developed specifically in a rural paradigm, they still affect rural areas. Examples are the PESP companies, the twelve area based partnership companies established under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress, the EC funded Global Grant for Local Development, which will fund local socio-economic initiatives through partnership structures and outlined in area action plans, and the 36 recently formed County Enterprise Boards (CEBs). The objectives of the CEBs, which have primarily an economic brief, are to help develop a local initiatives approach and generate community support for integrated efforts to promote economic development (The National Development Plan 1994-1999, Chapter 7). Partly these developments are a response to the growing international acceptance of the importance of area-based interventions to complement mainstream or structural policies addressing long-term unemployment, economic marginalisation and social exclusion (The National Development Plan, p.71).

Those local and community orientated initiatives which are particularly rural have by and large developed because of EC directives. At present, there is a plethora of largely unco-ordinated rural development policies and initiatives funded primarily by the EC. These are largely project rather than process driven (ESRI, 1993). While some of the main rural development initiatives will now be briefly described, it must be borne in mind that there are many other initiatives and policies which also relate to rural development.³

The Integrated Rural Development Programme: This programme is described in some detail since it was initially a state initiative and it has been through a pilot phase and evaluation. The Department of Agriculture and Food operated a two year pilot Integrated Rural Development Programme (1988-1990) in 12 selected areas in order to assess the viability of this type of approach. The objective was to improve the employment situation, earning potential, quality of life and sense of community identity amongst people in rural areas (O'Malley, 1992). The Department of Agriculture and Food appointed a planning team for each area consisting of Department of Agriculture and Food officials and senior civil servants. A rural co-ordinator was appointed for each area, and he/she mobilised a core group. The programme had an external evaluator, who evaluated its progress in a summary report

3. Policies dealing exclusively with agriculture are not discussed here.

(O'Malley, 1992). The overall conclusion was that this type of programme could make a distinctly useful contribution to economic and social development. Projects were locally based, although they were focused by systematic central guidance. The project was not specifically geared to developing new industries, but some small enterprises did develop. The continual training and close contact between the groups in the different areas contributed to the success of the venture and the stated objective of "shared learning". It was found that one of the most important factors in producing quick results in terms of jobs and income was the previous existing level of community activity and strength of community spirit. Where such activity was strong, then regardless of whether areas were rich or poor, the core groups proceeded more rapidly and produced tangible results (p. 74). In other words, *community spirit was a crucial factor* and feedback from the groups recommended that in such ventures, the areas should be self-selected. At the end of the venture, the following number of jobs had been created:

- 99 full time jobs;
- 249 seasonal jobs (full time at least half-year);
- 187 part-time jobs.

The areas estimated the further potential for the creation of:

- 505 full-time year round jobs
- 188 full-time half-year jobs
- 687 part-time jobs.

The pilot IRD programme demonstrated that there is a considerable voluntary effort which can be mobilised to promote economic and social development in local areas.

At the end of the pilot programme, there was a limbo period while the future of the programme was debated. In the middle of 1991, it was decided to extend the programme for a further 2 years. There are now 25 rural development co-ordinators. However, it is difficult to state that the programme has been extended, when it has essentially assumed a different form. The extensive planning of the pilot programme is no longer carried out by planning teams. The rigorous training and work-shop/seminars are gone. While the extended programme is now funded under the EC Operational Programme for Rural Development (OPRD), this fund will only finance small and community enterprises, rural infrastructures or farm diversification. In other words, it will fund *sectoral* measures, but not an area-based approach to rural development. This narrows considerably the parameters of the original Integrated Rural Development Programme which was much broader in scope.

The Operational Programme for Rural Development (OPRD): The OPRD was designed to complement other measures relating to rural development developed under the 1989-1993 CSF (i.e., LEADER), and to encourage initiatives in rural development not covered in these measures or in other parts of the CSF. The principle objectives are to maintain and strengthen the rural economy, and to improve the quality of life and foster a sense of community identity among people living in rural areas (OPRD summary, Dept. of Agriculture, Food and Forestry). The OPRD consists of five sub-programmes, one of which is the Small and Community Enterprise Scheme, or the IRD programme in a new and altered guise. This sub-programme has a stated commitment to facilitating community efforts and encouraging a spirit of self-help (OPRD summary, p. 7). In the western designated counties, this sub-programme was administered by the County Development Teams and by SFADCo in its operational area. In the Eastern counties, it was operated through the County Development Officers attached to local authorities. The administering of the sub-programme is now in a state of transition following the establishment of the County Enterprise Boards and it is not yet clear how it will be administered if it is continued under a second OPRD.

The Leader Programme is an EC initiative, the first round of which was in operation until the end of 1993. Of the 200 leader groups in the community, 16 are in the Republic of Ireland. They were chosen on the basis of their business plans. The Leader initiative is a model for rural development. It is designed to establish a network of local rural development action groups, enjoying a substantial degree of flexibility in implementing projects financed by global grants. The State and EC will provide 50 per cent of finance for business plans and the community must provide the other 50 per cent. Proposals must embrace an overall plan for the area.

INTERREG Programme: This EC programme is specifically targeted at helping border areas of the community to prepare for the Single European Market. Rural regeneration and community development are stated aims of this programme. It is a joint South/ Northern initiative and includes counties Donegal, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth and all of the North excluding Belfast City.

3rd EC Poverty Programme: There is one Irish rural project under this programme. It is co-financed by the EC and national exchequer, is concentrated in a particular region of Ireland and has the stated objective of reducing poverty. It has a set of objectives and an operational strategy which are part of an EC-wide programme. It has a formal company structure and employs a

number of staff. Its projects are not part of any broader set of rural development strategies but none the less provides an inflow of funds and expertise to the areas in which they are located.

Canada

Compared to Ireland, Canadian rural development policy has an equally chequered past and a surprising number of similarities. Canada has a wider base of resource industries, including agriculture, forestry, mining and fishery. The occurrence of increased production in these industries until the 1980s has been described as growth without development (Freshwater, Ehrensaft, and Apedaile, 1992). They no longer provide sustainable incomes and, like Ireland, Canada is undergoing rural depopulation, an ageing rural population and increasing evidence of rural deprivation (Reimer *et al.*, 1992). The development of foreign based investment in non-metropolitan areas has had the same unsuccessful history in Canada, with loss making companies going out of business, or relocating (Clement, 1977). In response, the Canadian State has recently emphasised an area based approach to rural development. Its main initiative is The Community Futures Programme (CFP), which is a federal initiative and requires partnership with provincial government and local groups. The CFP is part of a broader programme — the Canadian Jobs Strategy, which is a response to broader labour market problems. One of the factors which increased support for CFP as the non-metropolitan dimension of the jobs strategy, was the fact that the Conservatives won a large majority of the non-metro ridings across the country in 1984 and the MP's representing non-metro constituencies formed a large proportion of the Conservative MP's in Parliament (Ehrensaft and Freshwater, 1992). CFP aims to catalyse locally directed rural development (Ehrensaft and Debailleul, 1991). While the CFP appears to be similar to LEADER, there are a number of important differences.⁴ Firstly, the funding for the CFP came from a specific department, Employment and Immigration Canada, and therefore is not inter-departmental, whilst LEADER was funded by the three main structural funds. In addition, LEADER grant aids projects and is confined to priority regions. Despite these differences, there are similarities between the CFP and LEADER: both are centrally organised programmes which aim to foster locally based development, both select groups which meet their requirements and both have instigated the creation of new local structures for their implementation. The CFP, operated by Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC) selects rural areas and fosters local committees with which it liaises. These committees have representatives from the local private sector, politicians, local civil servants and

4. I am grateful to John Bryden for clarifying this for me.

social cultural groups. Guidelines stress the necessity of facilitating development in the most beneficial way for local people, while augmenting their participation in these development strategies. Through its business development centre, The Community Futures Programme aims to foster local and community economic enterprises.

In addition to the Community future's programme, there are a whole range of other community or area-based programmes. The recently defeated Conservative Government appointed a *Small Communities and Rural Areas Secretariat* in early 1993. Their brief included a review of existing and proposed programmes to determine their impact on rural areas and to develop new re-structured or re-focused federal activities to address rural areas (Pearson, 1993). One of the primary conclusions of the secretariat's review of current policy was that many existing community development programmes overlapped and worked against each other rather than in a synthesised way.

Current Rural Development Policies: Ireland and Canada

In concluding this historical summary of rural development policy, there are a number of points worth noting. First, the Irish State has considerable power to shape rural development policy. The Regional dispersal of industry happened in the 1970s because of the state's commitment to this policy. While this policy was not successful in the long term, it remains illustrative of the state's ability to implement policy which has a profound effect on rural areas. The same is true in the Canadian system where the political commitment to the Community Future's Programme has resulted in its extensive application.

Second, regional policy at a national level has been in decline in Ireland since the early 1980s (NESC, forthcoming; ESRI, 1993). Juxtaposed alongside this is a plethora of rural development initiatives. It is tempting to account for this by locating the Irish case in Esman and Uphoff's (1984) category of those where the State has an incentive to support local organisations in order to strengthen their claims for foreign assistance, which in the Irish case is European Community assistance.

There is an accumulated body of wisdom which could inform current strategies. The Buchanan Report (1968) has stood the test of time and could usefully contribute to present debate on the most appropriate level to focus development. The impact of CAP has indicated the importance of retaining sight of the necessity of developing national strategies for national problems alongside EC strategies to deal with EC problems (NESC, 1992). Another lesson learned from CAP is the necessity of long-term development shaping the conduct of short-term policies (NESC, 1992). Many of the current rural development concerns are resonant of the debate about the designation of

areas for industrial policy (NESC, 1985). The issue of whether allocation of resources should be on the basis of need or potential is the crucial common element. There is a great deal of recognised, high quality work which has evaluated and developed thought on rural and regional policy. The reactive response to the EU's rural development initiative has left this large body of knowledge untouched and current initiatives are not benefiting from the accumulated wisdom of prior successes and failures.

IV THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

"The term community is one of the most elusive and vague in Sociology and it is now largely without specific meaning" (Abercrombie *et al.*, *Dictionary of Sociology*, 1988). The meaning of community has generated a vast and rich debate (Cohen, 1985; Bell and Newby, 1971; Frankenburg, 1966; Buller and Wright, 1990; in a specific Irish context see the special issue of *Social Studies*, 1985; Varley, 1988; Curtin and Varley, 1991).⁵ Very briefly, community has been used to describe a group of people with common interests, sometimes although not always living in the same geographical area and frequently feeling a sense of belonging to the community or "community spirit". The community development approach popular in the 1950s relied heavily on this understanding of community.

The most idealistic advocates of this approach identify it as a process of empowerment providing local actors with the means of identifying their issues of concern. Community members are presumed to adopt a holistic view of their needs, including both social and economic needs, and to take control of the process of addressing these. The resources, material and human, of the community are developed and a consensus and democratic process evolves.

Sceptics, on the other hand, identify problems with conflating interests with a community or geographic locality. The risks of ascribing agency to a community have also been identified, since it frequently amounts to a number of actors claiming to act in the name of the locality or community (Marsden *et al.*, 1993). The conflicts of interest within the community have been underlined. It is argued that the *raison d'être* for community development has been disingenuously presented as one of empowerment, and a more accurate description is the failure of centralised policy planning to stimulate development, the reduced costs of utilising voluntary community labour, and reduced government responsibility for the success of development initiatives, given increased community ownership of development projects. In addition,

5. This is by no means an exhaustive account of work available on community, rather it is illustrative of some of the work around the debate.

doubts have been expressed about the extent to which community empowerment or community development is possible without a reorganisation and decentralisation of systems of governance and power. An ironic feature of community development is its frequent operation alongside very centralised systems of government and the fact that it frequently depends on government for survival.

Regardless of the controversy and debate about the notion of community and the merits of a community approach to development, it is impossible to deny its continued rhetorical significance. It remains true that community, albeit an ambiguous concept, has positive connotations; people *want* to believe in community (Cohen, 1985). A belief in community has become central to rural development policy. The rationale can not be presumed to be as simplistic as the ideal types of the idealists or cynics outlined above. More likely it is premised on the idea that this kind of approach will reach more groups in a given area than previous top-down sectoral measures. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), and the Operational Programme for Rural Development through which it continues to exist, describes as its general objective; "to improve the employment opportunities, earning potential, quality of life and *sense of community identity among people in rural areas*" (O'Malley, 1992; ESRI, 1993). The leader programme aims to encourage and assist the rural community to develop their own areas in accordance with their own priorities. The Department of Agriculture specified that the business plans submitted by rural groups under the LEADER programme "should have a *real local presence, that it should be representative of the community...*" (Department of Agriculture, 1991; emphasis added). INTERREG aims "(i) to assist border areas to overcome problems associated with underdevelopment and peripherality, and to encourage rural regeneration and *community development*, and (ii) to encourage cross-border co-operation to maximise the area's growth potential" (emphasis added). The Canadian Community Future's Programme (CFP), with a slogan of "local solutions to local problems" describes its objective as helping hundreds of communities in decline to plan and restructure to meet the demands of a changing economy and labour market. The CFP's client is described as a community or set of communities that make up a labour market area (EIC, 1992).

The current territorial approach to rural development is premised on a vague belief that a community or communities exist in the designated areas. In order to examine the validity of this in a little more detail, it is worth returning to Tonnies (1887), the father of community theory, for a moment. Tonnies identified three types of *Gemeinschaft* (loosely translated as community); *Gemeinschaft* by blood, by place and by mind. The latter, in

conjunction with the others, represents the truly human and supreme form of community. The first, *Gemeinschaft* by blood, leads to community by kinship. *Gemeinschaft* by place signifies a common relation through a shared location and leads to a community by neighbourhood. *Gemeinschaft* by mind signifies a common relation from similarity of work and intellectual attitudes. It results in a community by friendship and it is not bound to any place.

Tonnies' seminal work is over a hundred years old, but it none the less provides a useful basis for considering what type of community might be found in designated areas for rural development. It can no longer be assumed that kin are likely to share a similar location. Educational and occupational mobility means that families are likely to be geographically dispersed and this is particularly true of rural areas where employment opportunities are more limited. Community by kinship is not so likely.

Community by place is far more likely since residents of the area do share a common location. The idea of community by place is however increasingly nebulous since the idea of space is constantly changing. For example, in local area development it is argued that a space of flows is superseding a space of places in that population and activities of an area are increasingly linked to and affected by activities and decisions that go beyond the area's boundaries (NESC forthcoming). In other words, sharing a common space is not necessarily sufficient grounds for presuming a community by place. On the other hand some people who do share a common space do form bonds and groups on the basis of concerns common to sharing that space, i.e., community councils, school committees, local field days, etc.

Community by mind or friendship is very likely to exist in these designated areas, but as Tonnies himself pointed out this kind of community is not conditional on a particular territory or area. People are very likely to form bonds on the basis of common interests, preferences and ideas through which to pursue a goal. This is hardly a sufficient basis for a development plan which is intended to benefit a designated area. It is clear that in any given area there are likely to be many interests, not necessarily complementary and the individuals in an area are likely to identify in varying degrees with the designated area. In addition, groups are likely to have varying degrees of need and targeting might be a more effective way of ensuring that this group within the area benefit from development programmes. The possible inaccuracies of conflating interests onto a community on the basis of area are clear. This is particularly true in the case of the various rural development projects, since they have constructed the boundaries of the particular areas through their guidelines about size of area, and necessary characteristics i.e., border region, extent of unemployment etc. Buller and Wright (1990) identify three notions of community combined in rural development policies: a

locational notion; a spatial/administrative area within which development programmes are placed, a cultural notion; a recognisable body of people among whom a sense of community identity can be fostered and a functional definition; an assumed socio-economic unity within which development policies can be integrated and sustained (p. 12). Whatever problems there may be with using these notions for the basis of development policy, they are magnified if a number of programmes have overlapping administrative areas in which development programmes are placed and attempts are made to foster community development.

Preliminary evaluations of the rural development programmes developed under the CSF indicate the desirability of a greater degree of rationalisation (ESRI, 1993; NESC, forthcoming). At present the variety of EU programmes of grant assistance with criteria of their own allows for considerable overlap and duplication. The rationalisation argument is usually advanced on grounds of economic efficiency, although it has also been argued that the plethora of programmes is antithetical to the idea of *integrated* rural development (Varley, 1991; Commins, 1991; Shortall, 1992). What has not been considered are the *social* implications of this fragmented approach to rural development. Community is not a static entity, and it does seem possible to encourage and develop its existence. This is the current task of various animators and rural development workers. However communities are not created by installing the appropriate structures alone. Structures do not in themselves create meaning for people (Cohen, 1985). Communities exist symbolically, not structurally, and the existence of community should not be confused with geographic or sociographic fact (Cohen, 1985, p. 98). The promotion of community identity is currently fostered in particular, chosen areas. New groups and committees have been formed towards this end, and while previously existing community groups such as community councils, Muintir na Tire and other groups may be represented on the new committees, it remains a structure superimposed on those already in existence. There is a new structure then, and a variety of sources of funding. In Mayo for example, there are two leader projects and one community development programme.⁶ If it is accepted that identity and boundaries are necessary to the development

6. In 1990, the Government launched a community development programme. This is under the auspices of the Department of Social Welfare and is unusual in being one of the first of this kind of programme to receive mainstream funding. The programme is pitched at disadvantaged areas and The Combat Poverty Agency provides technical support and evaluates the projects and programmes. The main objective is to develop a network of community development resource centres in areas of need throughout the country. While current rural development initiatives have, as discussed, a particular community development aspect, the CDP's operate quite separately to rural development programmes. Indeed CDP projects are primarily located in areas with high concentrations of disadvantage, most frequently urban centres.

of community groups, it is unclear what are the likely consequences of the current plan and structure of development. The end result may be as planned, that is, new groups identify with the designated area and assume control and autonomy and successfully direct local development. However, if funding in some way defines identity and boundaries, it is also possible that community schizophrenia may develop. Some areas for example will have the option of pursuing LEADER or INTERREG funding. Do people in the areas identify themselves as living in a disadvantaged rural area or in a border region? The type of projects pursued under INTERREG do not seem to be substantially different from the general (ESRI, 1993) but it is unclear whether or not the framework in which funding is attained colours social identity. Of course this begs the question of why funding, which is frequently used in similar ways, is made available to *some* communities through a complexity of programmes? The effects on groups who were unsuccessful applicants for funding (for example, unsuccessful LEADER applicants) are not clear. Are the communities not worthy of interventionist strategies and assistance for development? Whether or not unsuccessful bids for community assistance have social implications for those communities requires further investigation.

V COMMUNITY AS THE BASIS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND REDISTRIBUTION

Central to the rationale for area-based rural development is the idea that it will reach parts of the community other more sectoral top-down schemes do not. There is abundant evidence which shows this aspiration to be riddled with difficulties (Varley, 1988; Curtin and Varley, 1991). Frequently, more powerful actors have directed development initiatives and better-off groups have benefited a great deal more than the less well-off groups in the area. This is obscured when the community as an entity is seen as benefiting from community development interventions.

The very selection process means that those areas participating in development programmes have gained on competing areas. LEADER for example, required rural development groups to submit business plans covering a geographical area including 5,000-100,000 inhabitants. Groups had to demonstrate their ability to raise 50 per cent of the funding for their proposals. Given that LEADER is an initiative for designated Objective 1 and Objective 5b regions, that is, considered to be "lagging" in an EU sense, and given that all of Ireland is considered an Objective 1 region, then all areas are in theory lagging. Yet although 34 groups from the Republic submitted business plans, 17 were unsuccessful. This illustrates the selective decisions that are made about participants on the basis of how well they meet the given

criteria. In addition, there are difficulties with the 50 per cent funding stipulation. This is of great assistance and an important injection for development, *if* an area has access to the other 50 per cent (Phelan, 1993). Those areas that are likely to have access to such capital are likely to be the wealthier and more organised areas. The same problems and difficulties arise with the Canadian Futures Programme which provides 50 per cent federal funding and has limited geographical dispersal. Funding is not the only, or perhaps even the greatest difficulty. Some (very fragile) rural communities face other obstacles such as a lack of internal cohesion, organisation and will.

It is clear that area-based development benefits *some* people (Buller and Wright, 1990). If programmes are not targeted, it is not necessarily the case that those in the most economic or social need will be the beneficiaries. Indeed some regulations work against the less well off. For example, individuals who wish to provide bed and breakfast accommodation under a rural development programme must comply with Bord Failte regulations which specify three available bedrooms and a separate dining area.⁷ This immediately limits the take-up of this kind of initiative to those members of the area with larger houses. Given the amount of tourism related initiatives that have been developed under the development programmes, a profile of the people who have availed of it would be useful. A Teagasc organised farm tourism tour (Teagasc, 1992) provides an isolated example of the range of people who can benefit from the development of rural tourism. The six destinations included two country mansions, one of which provided afternoon tea, the other where the German owner of a recently developed large deer farm lived, a castle providing accommodation, the owners of which lived in England for a substantial portion of the year and also rural self-catering facilities consisting of a number of purpose built holiday homes, built and owned by a Dublin based developer. It is difficult to see how this kind of rural tourism benefits many people living in the local area or how those on the tour, with limited resources, could emulate the kinds of developments observed. It is unlikely that this tour would have had the same itinerary if tourism development initiatives were targeted according to some criteria of need.

The current rural development initiatives aim to involve people in the designated areas in development programmes intended to improve the economic and social quality of the area. However, the personal interests of all individuals in the area can not be simultaneously advanced. In order for some groups to benefit, another must lose if not well being, then a degree of political or economic dominance. Development thereby becomes a political

7. Interestingly, the regulations in the North of Ireland are much more lax, and only require one additional available bedroom.

and possibly conflictual process (Buller and Wright, 1990, p. 4). For example, farmers within a given area are likely to find farmers organisations a more effective channel for advancing their interests than a territorially based rural development organisation. If it is more effective for their interests to use the former channel, it is likely they will do so, even if it means conflict with the latter. Similarly housing, tourism, forestry or environmental issues within any geographical area are all sectoral activities with their own policy framework and appropriate Government Department. Individuals or groups with concerns in relation to any of these are likely to use the channels most likely to yield results. Sectoral channels and territorially based programmes of development represent different philosophies of social organisation. The co-existence of both cause confusion and undermines the latter since it does not have the weight of history of the former.

To summarise, the way in which area-based models of development embody a notion of community is problematic. It diverts attention and critical analysis from the process which chooses those areas which will be included in the development programme. There are different groups with different needs and resources within any given area, and without targeting on the basis of some clear criteria of social deprivation, area-based development is as likely to produce winners and losers as sectoral measures. The persistence of sectoral channels alongside area-based programmes is an anomaly requiring further debate and analysis.

VI PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIP

The EU's rural development programme is committed to an integrated approach to development, to the principle of subsidiarity and to the partnership model (EC Commission, 5/1991). Subsidiarity refers to the starting point for development projects resting with the people concerned at local level, each institutions' rôle in decision-making and management is respected and valued and effectiveness is maximised by shared responsibility. The Community advocates partnerships between itself, national, central and regional authorities in order to define policy principles and ensure their effective implementation. The underlying aim is to ensure that centrally planned rural development strategies are flexible enough to be regionally specific and sensitive and allow for the active involvement of local people. The same rationale underpins the Canadian Community Futures Programme (CFP) which also promotes a partnership approach between Federal Government, Provincial Government and local groups.

There are many favourable aspects to this kind of approach. Conformity of need and response has not been presumed, and there is scope for groups in

the given areas to shape the development plan. It also represents a break away from previous debilitating strategies of relying only on price supports and subsidies as a strategy for maintaining rural dwellers, in particular farming groups.

Increased participation is a desirable goal and one which quickly wins favour. Notwithstanding this there is a great deal of literature and evidence from previous participatory development approaches which suggests that this ideal is exceedingly difficult to attain (Kitching, 1982; Curtin and Varley, 1992; Varley, 1988; Varley, 1991). The tendency is to infer participation in a general sense because of a collection of community representatives (O'Carroll, 1985). An additional feature of recent rural development committees is the specification of who should be represented and in what proportion. The varied, diverse and conflicting views and needs of the people of the area cannot be fully represented and articulated by a small number of representatives. This is not a new problem, and the present process is more likely to benefit from an examination of the difficulties of this process and consideration of means of advancing forward from previous problematic experience rather than pushing blindly ahead and trading on the positive connotations of the idea of participation.

While there is increased participation in local committees and on local boards, it remains the case that the system of governance has not changed. There has been little or no devolution of power from central Government. The rural development process is in many ways quite removed from the central national power structure. The appropriate rural development committees have been formed in order to channel EU funds, but the process does not seem to have assumed central importance at a national level. The recently formed County Enterprise Boards are an interesting development in this respect, and although their brief of preparing County development action plans seems promising, it is not clear that they represent any significant change in the system of governance. It is not clear either how boards operating at a county level will integrate groups which are operating over different territorial areas. Canadians are also questioning the suitability of a centralised form of government alongside a commitment to community development, partnership and participation (Bryant, 1992). The pursuit of this kind of development strategy demands an evaluation and discussion of systems of governance.

The extent to which some local actors are participating in the development plan has increased enormously. To describe this new arrangement as a partnership however, is quite problematic. Like community, partnership is a positive word and connotes a sense of equality. Webster's English Dictionary defines partnership as "a legal relation existing between two or more persons

contractually associated as joint principals in a business". It is impossible, though, to consider local community groups as joint principals. With LEADER and the Canadian CFP, the whole development programme is a political construct, and while local areas have some room to develop a particular type of response within the framework of the development blueprint, this response *must* be within the confines of the blueprint. In addition, the areas were chosen to be involved in the projects, again signifying a certain imbalance of power. The partnership principle and indeed the guidelines for LEADER and the Community Futures Programme prescribes local responsibility and local accountability for the success of development initiatives. But it is not empowering to suggest local areas assume responsibility for the success or failure of projects if many aspects are outside their control. The areas are responding to a centrally defined blueprint of development. A decision was made to "bring community" and development to those who are perceived to be in need of it (O'Carroll, 1985). This kind of approach can be and often has been very useful. It is essential though to recognise it for what it is, since it will determine appropriate evaluation strategies. Since the rural development strategy is centrally defined and determined, it is appropriate to place greater emphasis on Government's agendas and frameworks for development and less on any one area's response to these strategies. The EU and the State and in the Canadian context the Federal Government, must assume the greater responsibility levied by the initiating rôle. It is at this level that a clear vision for the future of rural society must be articulated. Discussing the future of rural society, Cuddy (1991) anticipates that everything will depend on the type of objectives that policy-makers choose to pursue (p. 43). It is unrealistic to expect that locally-based effort will solve some of the basic and long-standing problems of rural areas (Commins, 1985).

VII THE RÔLE OF THE STATE

The growth in EU instigated rural development initiatives has, through regulations, required the increased involvement of the State as a co-funder of the various initiatives. While the EU is the primary funder, the State contribution is still substantial (see ESRI, 1993). This State funding represents a commitment to rural development and it also represents a national commitment to the type of response engineered at an EU level since it commits funding that could have been used in a different way. Meeting specified levels of financing closes other options. A recognition of this for example is clear in The Agriculture and Food Policy Review (1990) which described national expenditure on agriculture as consisting mainly of meeting

the national funding requirements for schemes, and an increase beyond this was not expected in the face of the national debt. This is probably equally true for rural development and therefore maximum State development and advancement of initiatives might be expected.

Yet, apart from financial commitment there has been little structural change of the kind necessary to build the rural development programmes into a state response. Despite the integrated ethos to the rural development initiatives, they continue to be channelled through different government departments; i.e., LEADER through the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, INTERREG through the Department of Finance, The Operational Programme for Rural Development through the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry with sub programmes handled by differing authorities. While adopting in principle the integrated approach, there is little evidence of it at a national level. Even at a sectoral level, policies pertaining to rural development are not well co-ordinated; new forestry programmes have been hindered by policies working contrary to these programmes (Hannan and Commins, 1993) and the same is true of farm diversification initiatives (O'Connor, 1992). In addition, particular groups in rural areas yield different levels of power along sectoral lines. Farmers, one group within rural areas who have a long history of being well organised and well represented in the national policy arena, have maintained this key position alongside the continued non-representation of other rural groups at a similar level. Again this is antithetical to a movement away from dealing only with sectoral interests in rural areas.

Another problem encountered by the state in accessing some funds for rural development is the absence of regional authorities to act as the third partners (NESC, forthcoming). In the case of LEADER, committees were formed specifically for this project. These committees (all of which are legal entities) have formal contracts with The Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. There has been no attempt to incorporate these committees into a wider national response to rural development, or given the national commitment to LEADER, no consideration of the possible merits of extending it at a national level. Discussing aid and development, Hoggart and Buller (1987) maintain that development must bring about durable gains and if on the withdrawal of aid people are incapable of sustaining the improvements that have happened then what occurred was not development but a short term improvement in living conditions (p. 26). The same rationale can be applied to governance structures. If on the withdrawal of funding there is no significant change in how these are organised, then what happened was not a genuine re-thinking and re-ordering on the basis of local and regional authority, but a short-term measure. If LEADER funding ceased, some committees may

survive as viable initiatives. It is difficult however to speculate about the State's response in such a case. In other words, there is little evidence of what exactly is the national response to rural development other than matching funding. In some respects the "Developing The West Together" initiative⁸ is a living response to this ambiguity; the Bishops circumvented the National Government and sought (and received) funds from the Technical assistance provision of the Community Support Framework for their study.

The lack of any national regional development agenda, and the confinement of assisted rural development initiatives to those areas receiving funding, begs for clarification of national commitment to rural development. It is also an appropriate time to revise discussions on local and regional authorities. Whether or not an intermediary level is necessary, if yes, the appropriate level at which it should be pitched and the authority, power and resources it should be vested with are all questions of long-term relevance to rural development.

VIII CONCLUSION

One of the central tenets of current rural development practice is that the local community group must feel a sense of ownership of the development plan and projects. They must feel it is they who are the key directors and to whom the benefits of success will accrue. Yet one of the key problems in the Irish context seems to be the absence of this sense of ownership at a national level. The Irish Government does not seem to have identified itself as a key director in the current rural development strategies. This partly accounts for a number of the anomalous features of the current strategies; first, the extensive rural development activity which exists alongside the lacuna of a national commitment to regional development, second, the limited extent to which accumulated national wisdom has informed current practice and third alongside a commitment to integrated non-sectoral rural development, particular rural sectoral groups occupy key rôles in central policy fora at a national level. To some extent, rural development is currently in vogue. Past experience at a national level has demonstrated how commitment to regional development can wane when other problems become a higher policy priority. There is no reason to believe this may not also happen at an EU level, particularly with rising unemployment increasingly identified as a serious concern. It is essential, not only for the coherence but also for the possible continuity of rural development, that there is a commitment to it at the national level.

8. Developing the West Together is a study of the needs of the western region commissioned, with EC funding, by Catholic Bishops. It is hoped that the study will form the basis of an action plan for the region.

An interesting feature of rural development in an international context is the similarity of approach pursued in Europe, Canada and to some extent the US (Sher, 1993). Why this simultaneous adoption of a local, community driven approach to rural development? While a number of more cynical reasons could be, and have been, advanced (failure of previous centralised, top-down strategies, state pulling back from its commitments and leaving responsibility to local groups) there are also presumably more positive reasons why this approach is being pursued. These relate to the benefits of key local actor involvement, flexibility of plans, a multi-level (state/regional/local) and integrated approach. For this to succeed though, there must be an acknowledgement that this kind of strategy is not new and is not without difficulties. A recognition of this and consequent rigorous discussion and analysis may advance the current approach with reference to what is already known about this kind of practice. Ideology and the type of strategy pursued *does* make a difference. In the same way that mobilisation of new social movements requires potential, which frequently needs to be activated, and appropriate macrostructural factors (Gerhards and Rucht, 1992), the same is true of current rural development strategies. Activating the potential is a process, and this process takes time. The process requires education and training for this new kind of approach (Keane, 1992). The macrostructural factors must include not only the ideology, but also the development of structures which will facilitate this approach.

Finally, there must be an acknowledgement that rural problems cannot be solved through rural development strategies alone. In the same way that a Department of Women's Affairs in existence alongside continued discriminatory strategies is an inappropriate way of dealing with gender inequalities, rural development strategies alongside general policy strategies which pay no attention to the rural dimension amounts to an inadequate response. Indeed, if a general policy commitment to the rural dimension existed, the need for specific rural policy would be very limited.

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