

Challenges of community development today

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Origins, evolution, role

- Community development began in Ireland on 6th August 1891 under Congested Districts Board
 - Baseline reports, funded parish committees, credit, cooperatives, organizers, small grants, nursing
 - Disruptive: seen to undermine Irish nationalist party, abolished 1923
- Practice resumed 1960s
 - Indigenous activism from Dublin Housing Rights Movement 1960s+, 'new' 'caring and campaigning' voluntary sector
 - Method of choice in 1st European programme against poverty 1975-80
- Institutionalized in Combat Poverty Agency 1986
 - Community development a key method but agency emphasized importance of changes in *national* social policy.
- Community Development Programme 1988
 - Constructed from *Poverty 2* programme (180 projects)
 - Later, Family Resource Centre programme (107 FRCs)

Some features of Irish CD model

- Locally-based action in *targeted* communities of spatial, issue-based disadvantage (e.g. disability) and cross-cutting issue e.g. gender
- Mechanisms for raising issues locally, nationally
 - Building research, evidence base
- Investment in capacity of local community
 - *Physical* facilities e.g. resource centres
 - *Financial* support, small grants schemes
 - Building of *leadership* e.g. committees (social capital)
 - Use of *technical support* agencies (13)
- Combination of practical services and advocacy
 - Focus on distinct issues e.g. health services
- To which a stream of local development was attached...

Local development

- Based on notion of *entire* geographical areas being excluded, association of poverty=under development, rejection of targeting, underlying structure of inequality (two rural projects in *Poverty 2*; see 1987 Barry)
- PESP (1989-94), labour market initiative, then
 - OPLURD (1994-9)
 - LDSIP (2000-6)
 - LCDP (2007-2013)
 - SICAP (2014-2020)
- Focussed on services, coordination, numbers, performance, but more and more 'hard' rather than 'soft' measurement,
- Between them, Ireland had much improved social indicators, reduced poverty early 21st century, flagship of Europe.

Ireland and civil society

- Commitment to define relationship 1976 (Corish), but took 24 years to agree. Why?
 - Ireland not part Eur. democratic revolutions 1968 (1989)
 - 1949 a landmark year in Irish social policy – no welfare state or NHS made V&C sector less needed, so it is smaller, less influential than NI, GB, Europe
- Relationship defined 2000 *Supporting voluntary activity*
 - Affirmed independence V&C sector
 - Voluntary activity units in every department
 - Stability of funding (multi-annual)+ funding package
 - But no support for a national umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector (cf. England, 1919; NI, 1938)
 - Followed by *Active citizenship* programme (social capital)
 - So the relationship resolved at last. Or was it?

Strategic turn 2002

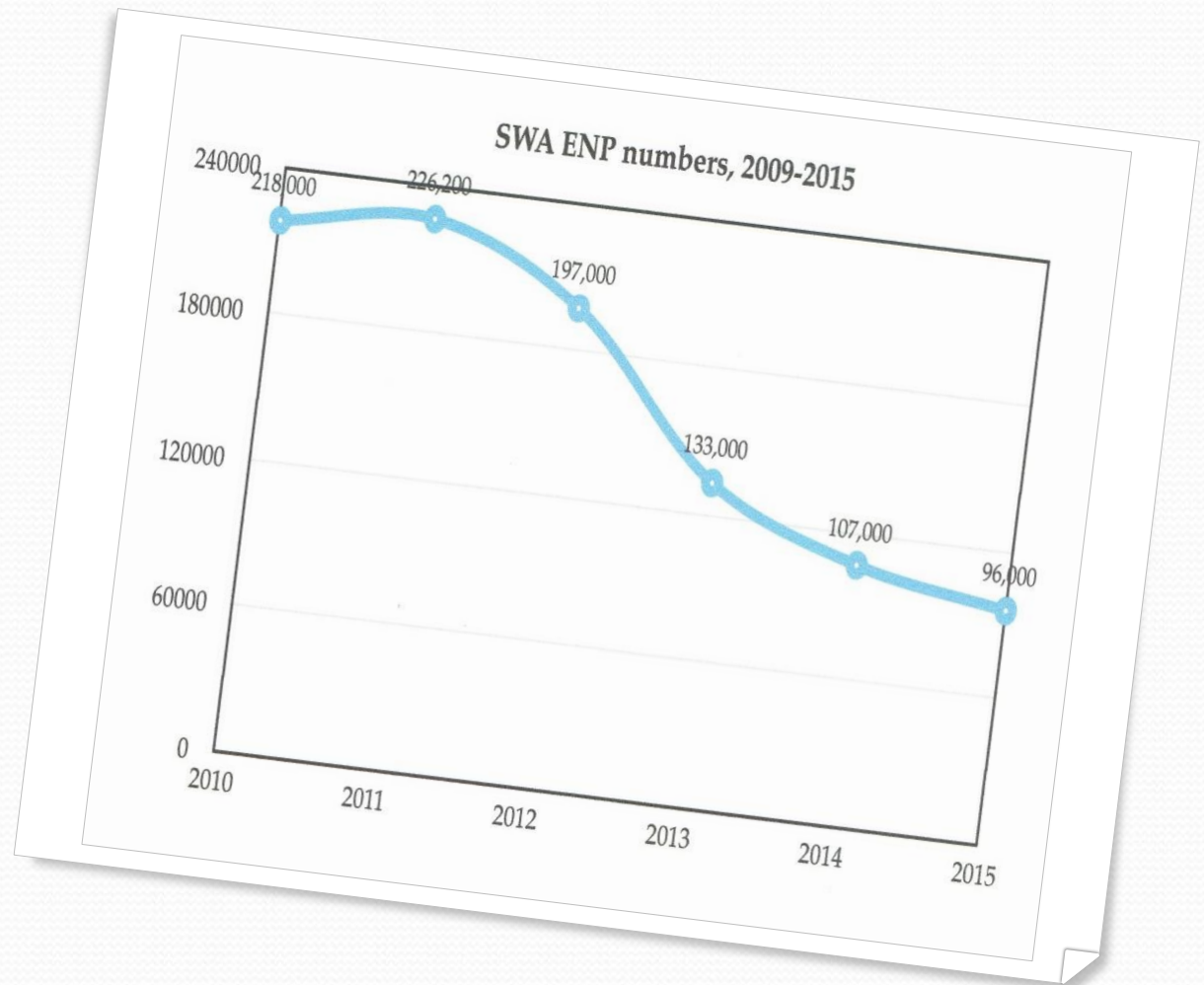
- Within days of election of 2002 government
- 29th Dail convened 6th June
 - Ministers of state appointed 18th June
- Planned policy unit cancelled in time for first interviews by 26th June
- As for the white paper *Supporting voluntary activity*:
 - € delayed two years, overall package cut -53%
 - Research funding cancelled then, training funding later
 - Combat Poverty lost its funding schemes
 - Anti-poverty networks funding cancelled
 - 2003 cut of 17% in community development funding
 - No voluntary activity units, little multi-annual funding
 - 2004 warnings about 'political' work, discouragement of policy posts in CDPs, support agencies closed
 - Cohesion process (*Gleichshaltung*)

Austerity, 2008

- Those groups & communities most helped by community development were most affected
- Income loss general -11%, but
 - lowest income groups -13%,
 - unemployed, -22% (ESRI)
 - Some groups gravely affected e.g. Travellers: education, -86%; accommodation, -85%
- % in poverty up 2009-2015 from 14.1% to 16.9%
- Inequality up from 29.3 to 30.8 (gini coefficient)

Government spending overall fell 7%, now back to 0.2% above pre-crisis level.

But Exceptional Needs Payments numbers down from 218,000 to 96,000. Many other indices of immizerization e.g. homeless, food centres.



Comparisons 2008-2016

Title	2008	2016	%
Voluntary housing	192m	143.9m	-25%
Youth organizations	90.5m	51.9m	-43%
Arts Council	81.6m	60.12	-26%
Community development (SICAP	84.7m	0 42.4m)	-100%
National supports V&C	18.6m	12.4m	-33%
Sports Council & grants	115.3m	47.2m	-59%
FRCs and counselling	36m	19.3m	-46%
Probation services	16.7m	10.7m	-36%
OPMI migrants	6.7m	4.5m	-33%
Cosc violence against women	3.1m	2.4m	-23%
Women's organizations	0.6m	0.4m	-32%
Environmental NGOs	8.2m*	5.5m*	-32%
Medical charities research	1m	0.8m	-20%
DoH&C lottery	3.9m	3.3m	-15%

Dissolution of the institutions

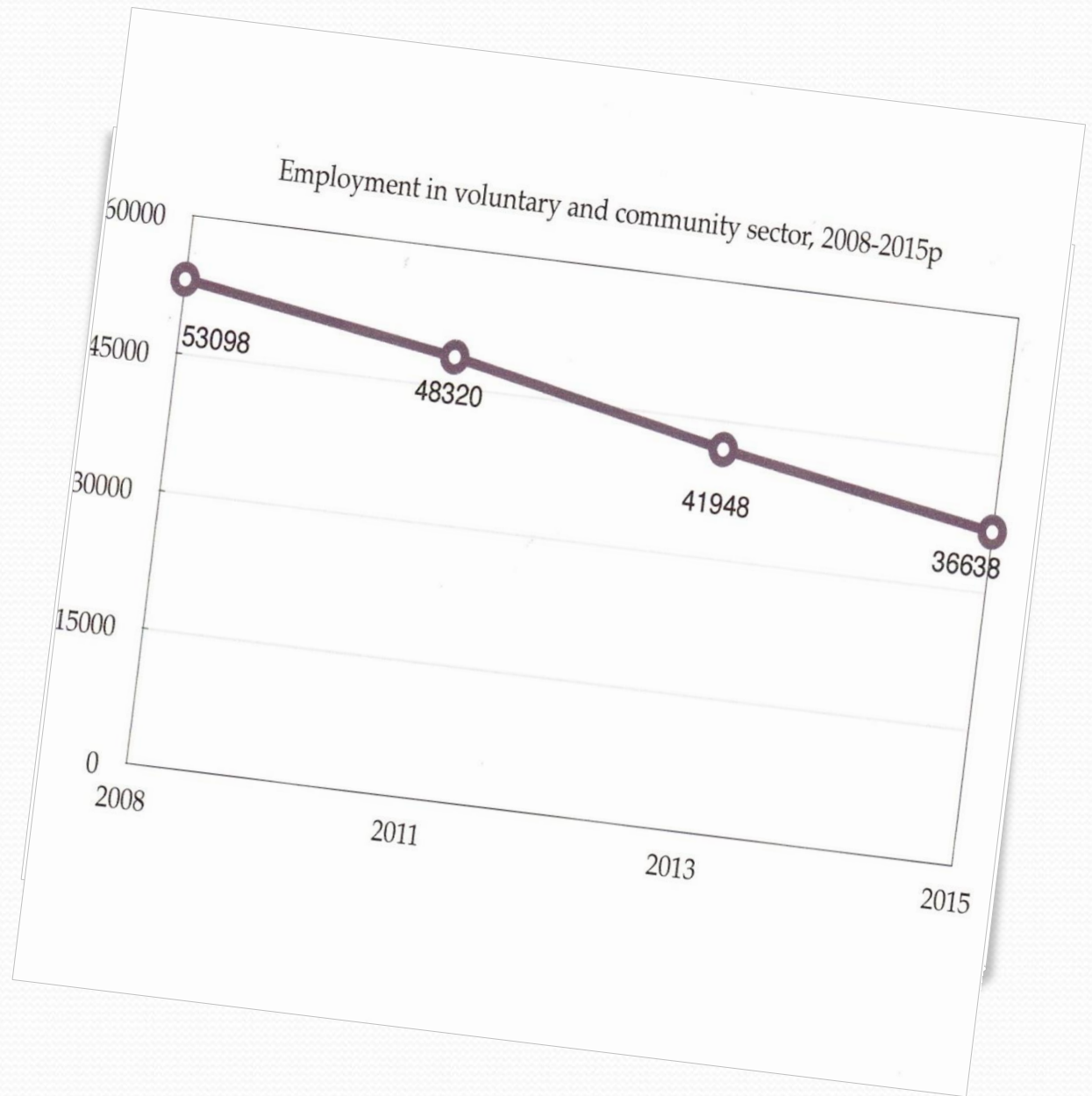
- First decision of FF-GP govt 30th Dail: abolish Combat Poverty Agency (14th June 2007), note *before* crisis. 20 years expertise destroyed overnight.
 - Our level of social documentation now very low cf. NI
- Hit list of 41 state bodies for closure July 2008. Most were social policy agencies:
 - NESF, *Comhar*, NC Aging & Older People, *Active Citizenship*, Crisis Pregnancy, women's health, NCCRI, humanities research, crime council, educational disadvantage, early childhood devp, children's Acts, Homeless Agency, participative town hall Forum on Europe. Cuts in Equality, IHRC. Saved €6.4m.
 - New state agencies: NAMA, NewERA, Uisce, NOAC
- Abrupt closure of 14 of 180 CDPs December 2009
- Most of rest then transferred to local partnerships, then local authorities.

Austerity impact V&C sector

- Gradual, not like a big factory closing overnight
- Organizations and projects closed
- Others reduced services and went part-time
 - Frontline services *were* reduced, contrary to government misinformation
- Staff made redundant
- Temporary, contract staff not renewed
- Salaries frozen or reduced
- Charges made for services
- Staff, volunteers redeployed fundraising, at cost of services
- Extensive use of interns, unpaid labour
- Trying to fundraise in financially depleted communities

**By end 2015,
voluntary and
community
sector lost 31%
workforce in a
country where
it was
supposedly
valued**

No other country
in Europe, so far as
we know, has
experienced such
an extraordinary
decline since 1948



Privatization

- December 2009: First round of closures of CDPs
 - Most of rest transferred into LCDP 2010
 - LCDP transferred to local authorities 1st July 2014
- 2015 put on sale in 31 commercially tendered lots
 - Six partnerships deemed 'uncompetitive': out:
 - Justified by Attorney General's secret legal advice
 - EU public procurement legislation (although not applied by any of other 27 EU governments)
 - All FOIs now refused as these are considered commercial (Dolan)
- Closure of CDP programme marked loss of:
 - Social capital. esp management c'ttees which enabled deprived communities to develop skilled voices.
 - Local accountability
 - Method

Community Development in Ireland

6th August 1891 – 1st July 2014

- Redrawing of lines of state – voluntary/community action is not usual e.g. NI 1980s, GB 1980s, Slovakia 1990s Meciar
 - State *does* redraw boundaries (e.g. *State strikes back*, NI)
- But what has happened in Ireland is *extreme*
 - From a European flagship, making substantial social progress, to virtual obliteration in just over ten years (2002-14)
- Explaining what has happened: why?
 - Role of state – voluntary and community sector still unresolved
 - State has a real problem with dissent

Dissent?

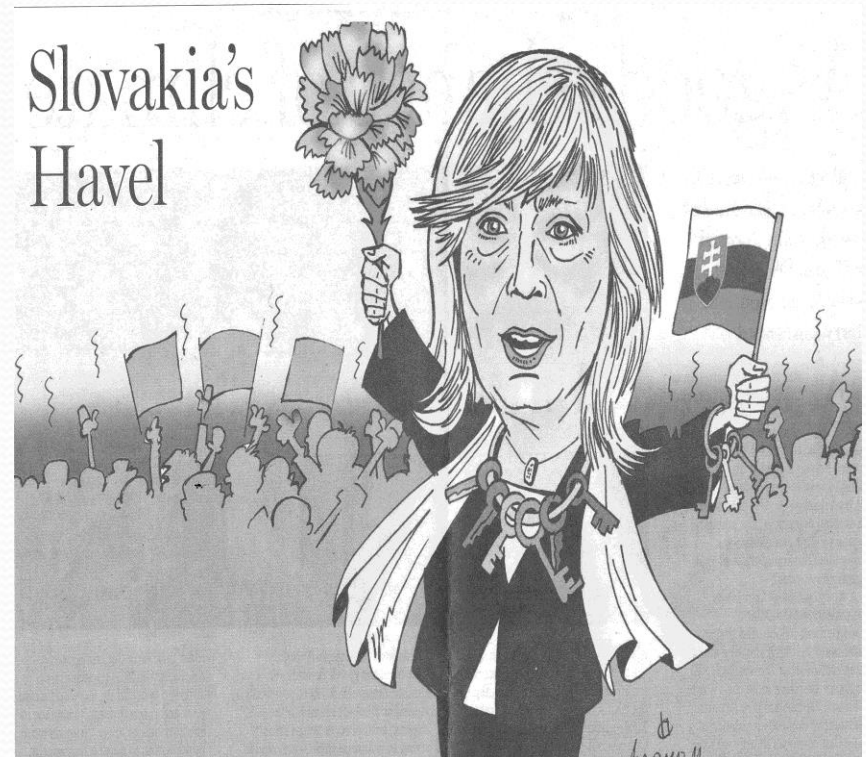
- ***You must not use the grant to change law or government policies, or persuade people to adopt a view on law or public policy (standard HSE SLA s2.8)***
- *There was hardly a major voluntary organization in the country that didn't have its hand out for cash. This was because former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern brought dissent into the semi-State world by subsidizing interest groups to beat their own drums from public money.*
 - Michael McDowell, referring to the INOU and NWCI, as reported in Irish Times, 27th February 2012.

Contrasting Ireland (left), Europe

‘A strong civil society should play the primary role in a democracy’. Iveta Radicova (below)

- *I welcome that decision. It is a matter for the organs for this state to determine what should be matters for public inquiry. I do not believe that any privately-sponsored body has the right to determine what is right or wrong.*

- Sen. Brian Hayes, now MEP, on decision to withdraw funding from the anti-corruption advocacy NGO, the Centre for Public Inquiry. Seanad Eireann, *Debates*, 8th December 2005, col 342. It was about to issue a report suggesting impropriety on the part of Anglo-Irish Bank but was closed before it could do so.



Conclusions on past

- An extraordinary story
 - From 1891 to re-invention in 1960s, the flagship of Europe by 2002; to destruction in just over ten years
 - Little left: a few projects; method still practised (partnerships, LEADER); national architecture taken out
- Community development a victim of:
 - Unresolved issues of civil society, insecure state, still in evidence with closure of 93 CIS, MABS committees
 - Dissent, less permissible during austerity. Naomi Klein says austerity *requires* coercion.
 - Market project and move to privatize e.g. SICAP
 - Austerity more the occasion than the cause
 - Poor suffered most, lost protectors and advocates

Future: where now?

- Restoration of community development as valued, method approach will depend on us and political change
 - But no substitute for state tackling 'big issues'
- At present, important to
 - Conserve the record
 - Build a narrative (or counter-narrative)
 - Ensure ideas, values, approach, method, practice, knowledge are applied when change does come
- Despite this difficult environment, there remain opportunities to influence our political system at local, national level (next)...

Local consultative structures

- Reorganization of local government from 1997
 - Social Policy Committees
 - Local Community Development Committees
 - Joint Policing Committees
 - Consultative structures for Travellers
 - Public Participation Networks (PPNs)
 - Structural fund, RAPID implementation teams
- Some characteristics
 - Improved *access into* local authorities (councillors, officials) for voluntary and community organizations even if:
 - Rules of engagement determined by local government
 - No change in balance of power

Why bother?

- *Once you change who decides the policy, you change the policy itself*

● –Slovenian NGO Association

What voluntary and community organizations bring (*Funding dissent*)

- Ground truth and new issues
- Long-term perspective beyond electoral cycle
- Watchdog role: surveillance, accountability
- Communication between government - people
 - Assistance in implementing positive policies
- More participative, inclusive society
- Minority, gender viewpoints that would be overlooked
- Better policies
 - Decisions are better if V&C perspective is heard See *Politics of expertise – how NGOs shaped modern Britain*
 - Bad decisions, unintended consequences avoided
- Expertise, skills and knowledge
 - Information, options, solutions to problems

Why should V&C organizations participate?


- Formally, to ensure that decisions, services, resources are socially inclusive
- To make changes in *behaviour*:
 - Who is consulted about what (BCON)
 - Allocation of resources and budgets (cycle lanes)
 - Development of services (ramps)
 - Procedures and protocols (e.g. smog ban, evictions)
- There are abundant examples of successful community engagement with local authorities (see *Working for change*)

Messages

- This is a difficult time, but not a reason not to try
 - Too important to give up
- There are new structures, places there
 - Even if they are problematical
- We know that voluntary and community groups *can* influence decisions, allocations for the better both in Ireland and elsewhere
- We know that this is tough, challenging work
- We know where the problems are
- *Not* doing so means bad decisions in our absence

Challenge of community development

- Challenge is here, ourselves, within us
- To remember, to learn how community development did work and can work
- To address, overcome our own despair
- Remind ourselves what V&C organizations bring and be assertive of honourable role of civil society in European social construction since Enlightenment
- Remember European example of how more successful societies are created
- Re-skill ourselves for 'asymmetric engagement' (Larragy)



“It can take centuries for change to happen. But sometimes, centuries of change can happen in weeks.”

■ VI Ulyanov, 1870-1924

■ - *Thank you for your attention!*