

# Stimulating Local Development Through Educational Interventions.

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## Introduction

Community Development through education is the goal of an innovative programme of extra-mural studies offered throughout the West of Ireland by University College Galway, a campus of *circa* 5,000 students, situated on the west coast of the country (O Cinnéide, 1987). When it was first established as Queen's College, Galway, in the middle of the 19th century, the subjects of its professorships included Agriculture, Civil Engineering and Celtic among others, indicating that those who planned a university institution for Galway had in mind that it should contribute to the economic and cultural development of its predominantly rural hinterland, no less than to the scholarship of its students (O hEocha, 1984). The University, therefore, has a long history of involvement in the development of its region and its community development programme is but one facet of its current contribution. The purpose of this article is (a) to briefly review the fundamental principles of community development; (b) to outline an educational intervention found to be effective in stimulating local community development in Ireland; (c) to illustrate the potential of this approach by reference to one local community and (d) to identify the preconditions for the success of this approach to local development.

## Community Development

Community development is a term which has come into international usage and is used loosely, ambiguously and even wrongly to denote a range of strategies and activities having different underlying philosophies (Commins, 1985). However, the essential elements in the classical community development model are not in dispute. They are: (a) the community is the unit of action; (b) emphasis is placed on the mobilization of indigenous human and natural resources; (c) internal resources are supplemented by external supports; (d) all segments of the community are given an opportunity to participate and in effect to obtain increased control over decisions and resources; (e) the approach is holistic or comprehensive going beyond segmented efforts and the limited

interests of particular groups within the community; and (f) the process of decision making is rational (e.g. based on identification of needs) and democratic (Cary, 1970). Accordingly, community development represents a bottom-up approach to development which involves: (a) local groups in organising, planning, co-operating and implementing projects for the benefit of their community; (b) emphasis on indigenous human and natural resources and (c) interaction with outside bodies (e.g. government agencies) from which necessary advice and support is sought.

The accomplishment of specific tasks such as the building of a community centre, the preparation of a local resource survey or the creation of employment opportunities locally, through the establishment of a community business, represents the most tangible results of community development. However, the ultimate goal is much less apparent and may be easily overlooked. In its ideological sense, community development places strong emphasis on the approach or method of undertaking local development. What is stressed is the intrinsic merit of getting a local community to identify its own needs, the desirability of involving all segments of the local community in a collaborative effort, the importance of representative democratic structures to encourage citizen participation in community affairs, the nurturing of local leadership and the development of the community's capacity to function effectively on a self-help basis in its own interests over a period of time (Commins, 1982).

In other words, community development is basically a training process. Participants are expected to acquire a range of multi-situational skills. The acquisition of these skills is a gain in itself and a gain with a potential to multiply so that most observers attach greater significance to the attainment of the educational goal than to the accomplishment of specific tasks which are best regarded as a means to the ultimate end. As such community development represents an approach to local and regional development that emphasises investments in human resources as opposed to the more traditional approach of

assisting lagging regions through the provision of buildings, locational grants and enhanced infrastructural facilities.

## Adult Education and Local Development in Ireland

University College Galway provides courses on community development as part of its general extra-mural programme in adult education. The courses are aimed at community groups which lack the know-how to undertake development but which express an interest in developing that capacity with the help of the University. In this sense the programme is a reactive one with the result that courses are generally provided at centres in which local interest in them is previously expressed. The courses are usually staffed by full-time teaching personnel attached to various academic departments. Courses are held in appropriate centres (e.g. a local school) which are convenient to the community groups. They last for the duration of one academic year (approximately 25 weeks) during which class is held once weekly for a period of two to three hours. The need for follow-up support for the community initiatives is increasingly recognized. Attendance at the courses varies considerably, but generally approximates 20. There are no special requirements for admission to the course. Rather, at sometime prior to the commencement date a public meeting is held to which the local community is invited and at which details of the proposed course are given.

The overall aim of the course is to develop participants' interest in and awareness of their own community with a view to encouraging them to participate actively in local affairs. Specific objectives may vary slightly from centre to centre but generally include: (a) promotion of a spirit of self-help and self-confidence amongst local communities and dispelling of apathy and dependency; (b) encouraging widespread participation in community activities; (c) establishment of an appropriate vehicle for community development in the form of a local community organization; (d) increasing awareness of indigenous human and natural resources for development; (e) identifying development constraints and appropriate remedial measures; (f) familiarizing participants with various external supports and incentives that may be available; (e.g. introducing the class to the rudiments of sound business management practices) and (h) assisting with the development of specific projects

so as to instil confidence in their ability to achieve something worthwhile as a group.

Course syllabi may also vary in order to meet specific objectives and because individual tutors may stress (or individual communities may have a particular interest in) some aspects of local development to the exclusion of other topics. However, each course contains two major distinct elements. The first one consists mainly of lectures and seminars on predetermined topics of special importance to local development. During the course of these sessions the fundamental principles of community co-operation and self-help are examined with particular reference to the Irish context. Approaches to regional development and the principal instruments of regional policy employed in Ireland and elsewhere are analyzed. Various models of community organizations such as community councils, community co-operatives and development associations are outlined and their appropriateness to the local scene is evaluated. Where classes express a desire to initiate community enterprises a number of teaching sessions may be devoted to topics such as product identification, feasibility studies, costing and financing projects, plant requirements, accounting procedures, taxation, marketing and industrial relations. No individual tutor is competent to lecture on the wide variety of topics covered. Consequently, every effort is made to recruit guest lecturers with special expertise and practical experience in the chosen areas.

The second major element of each course consists of class centred projects which are usually identified by the students in consultation with the course tutor. The element is essentially task orientated and is based on the maxim that to do is to learn and *vice versa*. A comprehensive survey of the local area is a commonly selected project. The object is to actively enlist the participants in recording the community's aspirations, in analysing local problems, in searching for solutions and in implementing and monitoring projects. In due course, the participants are expected to undertake more ambitious projects and to exert a catalytic influence on the general development of their localities.

## Local Development: The Inishowen Example

**I**ntroduction. Inishowen is the most northerly peninsula in Ireland (Fig.1). The peripheral geographic location is compounded by an international boundary which distances Inishowen

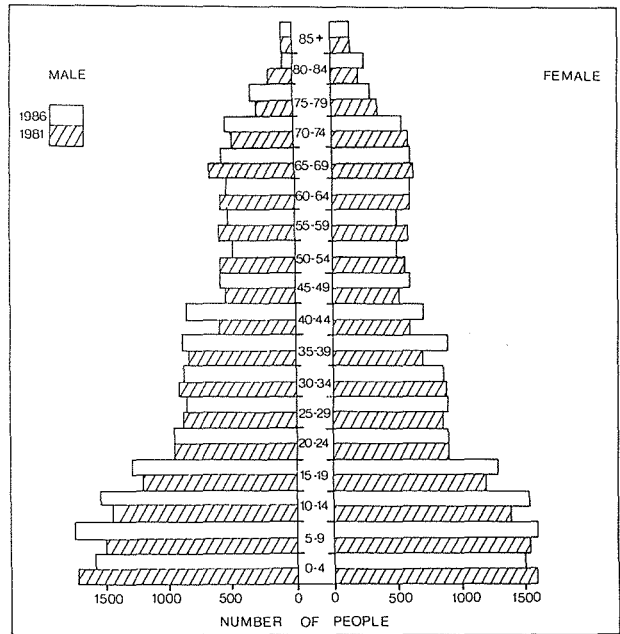
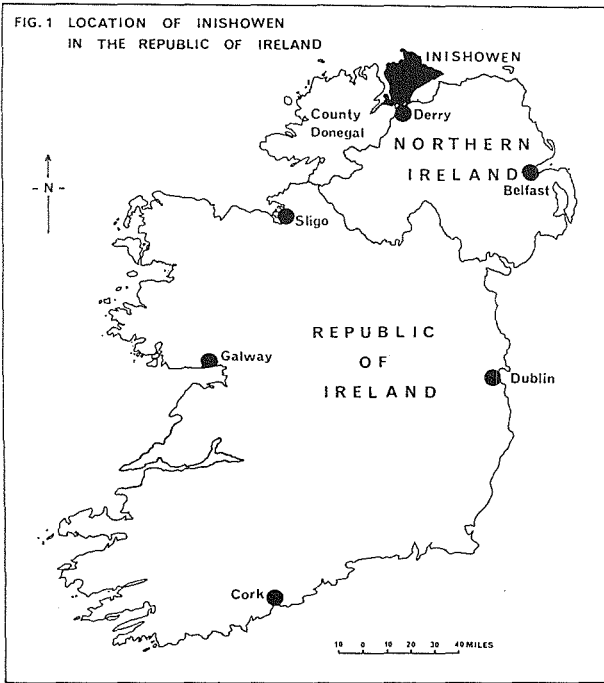


Fig. 3. Population Structure in Inishowen.

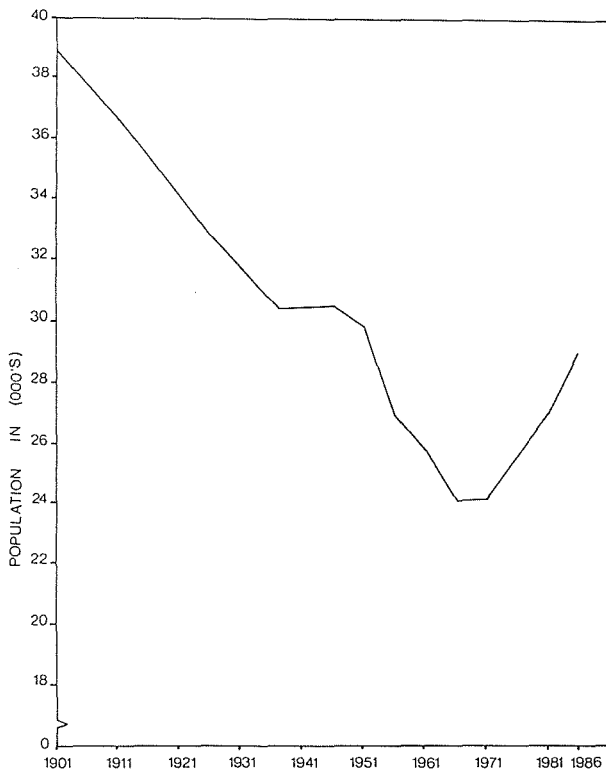


Fig. 2. Population Trends in Inishowen.

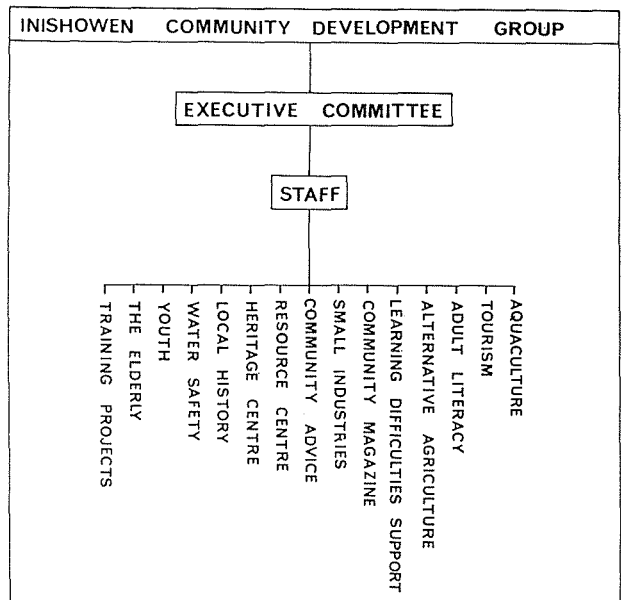


Fig. 4. Structure of Local Voluntary Organization in Inishowen.

from its nearest major urban centre of Derry. The area consists largely of marginal land with a high preponderance of poorly drained soils. The climate is windier and wetter here than elsewhere in Ireland. In general, difficult physical conditions militate against successful exploitation of the natural resources of the area, especially with regard to farming and fishing. At the same time the rugged terrain of Inishowen, its attractive seashore and the unspoilt landscape represent natural resources upon which tourism may be developed.

**Demography.** The total population of Inishowen is 28,914 representing 36 people per sq.Km. Low population density is directly attributable to inadequate employment opportunities locally resulting in a prolonged history of net out-migration except for a brief period during the 1970s when a strong reverse migration flow occurred (Fig. 2). The salient features of the age/sex composition of the population and the changes in the intercensal period 1981-1986 are apparent from Fig. 3. The large numbers in the younger age-groups are especially noteworthy. The truncated bars corresponding with the 20-39 age group reflect the impact of out-migration on the population structure. Of particular concern is the very high proportion of the population (5.7%) represented by elderly (65+ years) people living alone, very often in isolated rural locations. Another concern relates to the exodus of young people which has become manifest again during the past five years or so.

**Local Economy.** The economy of Inishowen was traditionally dominated by small farmers. Although this sector has contracted severely since the 1960s it still remains a significant element in the local economy. Most farming families eke only a marginal standard of living from the land. Consequently, many are dependent on welfare assistance and other forms of financial transfers. The main industries are in the clothing and knitwear sectors giving largely female, unskilled or semi-skilled and poorly paid employment. There is a heavy overdependence on one major textile plant. Fishing is well established at one port in Inishowen but the realization of its full potential is being greatly impeded by the Common Fisheries Policy of the EC. The undoubted potential for tourism in the area has scarcely been tapped. Factors which militate against tourism development include its remoteness from points of entry to the country and its proximity to Northern Ireland with its adverse publicity associated with civil unrest. Over

20% of the population are officially registered as unemployed but the real level of unemployment is much higher because (a) many people, especially women, do not qualify for welfare assistance, and therefore are not on the unemployment register, (b) many farmers are underemployed and (c) out-migration reduces the level of unemployment locally.

#### **Local Development in Inishowen.**

Inishowen Community Development Group (ICDG) spearheads the process of local development in Inishowen. This voluntary local body was established in 1984 following the completion of an extra-mural community development course in the area by University College Galway. ICDG consists of a central co-ordinating and planning committee together with numerous special-interest subcommittees (Fig. 4). Providing an opportunity for widespread community participation in the development process is a major objective of ICDG. It is hoped that through participation, skills and know-how will be acquired at the individual and community level and that eventually the apathy and sense of powerlessness prevailing at the local level will be replaced by a "can do" mentality. As the attainment of this long-term goal is regarded as being of paramount importance, great care is taken to involve local people in all stages of the development process so that "learning by doing" is a fundamental tenet of ICDG's overall development strategy.

The expansion of the original small group (circa 20), which attended the community development course, into what ICDG now is, represents a major achievement. A total of over 200 individuals are now actively pursuing a wide range of social and economic objectives through ICDG's various subcommittees. Each specific interest subcommittee has one or two representatives on the central co-ordinating committee known as ICDG which has an executive committee and three full-time staff (Fig. 4). The whole organisation is incorporated as a company limited by guarantee. Meetings of ICDG and of its executive committee are scheduled regularly on a monthly basis. Meetings of subcommittees are generally held prior to these meetings. The executive staff are, as far as possible, placed at the disposal of the subcommittees provided their projects are endorsed by the central co-ordinating committee. In this way the specific interest subcommittees generate ideas which are approved by the central committee and then progressed by the staff working in conjunction with the various

subcommittee members. The successful establishment of the local voluntary organisation represents a very important vehicle for the future development of Inishowen.

To enhance communication with the Inishowen community at large and to increase their support for, and active participation in, the activities of ICDG, an elaborate magazine is produced on a quarterly basis by a special subcommittee. The magazine carries a wide range of articles many of which are germane to the immediate goals of ICDG. Commercial viability is being achieved through sales approximating 1,000 copies per issue and through sponsorship from local business interests. The magazine represents a vital instrument in the hands of ICDG to promote its objectives. The quality of production has improved very considerably since its inception four years ago and it now rates among the very best publications of this kind in the country.

The exploitation of the maricultural and tourism potential of Inishowen are major objectives of ICDG and serve to illustrate the nature and range of their local development activities. Through a special subcommittee, ICDG has worked relentlessly on maricultural development. Progress to date includes: (a) a survey of various sites around the peninsula in order to identify ones potentially suitable for maricultural activities; (b) the identification of the Trá Bréaga Bay as one such site; (c) the completion of oyster growing field trials which established the suitability of the Bay for oyster farming; (d) the establishment of a pilot commercial oyster farm in Trá Bréaga Bay and, more recently, the establishment of a pilot clam farm in the same area; and (e) the preparation of an ambitious business plan aimed at translating these pilot farms into a viable community enterprise that would create the necessary funds to enable ICDG to continue to function as an effective local development body.

The establishment of privately owned farms represents another goal of ICDG's mariculture subcommittee. Considerable local interest has been generated through the establishment of the community farm and already several young men (some of whom are returned migrants) have undertaken an ICDG organised enterprise development course which was especially tailored to fish farming. As part of their studies they prepared private business development plans which they now propose to implement. A successful transition from training centre to fish farming is contingent on the issue of necessary

licences and raising of sufficient capital but already 10 private shellfish farms are at an embryonic stage of development.

Another sector of the local economy which has considerable potential for development is tourism. The coast line of Inishowen is dotted with sandy beaches and small harbours suitable for boating and sailing. Spectacular scenery, good fishing rivers and lakes, and a rich heritage of antiquities represent other largely unexploited resources upon which a tourism industry may be developed. In pursuit of this objective ICDG, through its tourism subcommittee, had embarked on a comprehensive programme to promote Inishowen as a tourist destination especially for special interest holidays such as archaeological and historical outings. Achievements to date include: (a) the publication of large-scale black-and-white and colour maps of Inishowen showing major tourism attractions and amenities; (b) the publication of a booklet entitled *Inishowen: A Journey through its Past* which is a popular introduction to some of the most interesting antiquities in the area; (c) the preparation and distribution of a superb 20 page colour brochure of the peninsula with English, Irish, French and German introductions; (d) the organisation of sporting and cultural weekend events; (e) exploratory work on the feasibility of establishing a local heritage centre and a maritime museum; and (f) the establishment of tourism information points throughout the peninsula.

The pioneering work in shellfish farming and the promotional work in tourism are only part of a wide-ranging programme of local economic development which was instigated in Inishowen through an adult education course in community development. Significant initiatives are also underway in promoting small industry and in identifying alternative agricultural enterprises such as mushroom production. New economic opportunities are being created through the mobilization of hitherto unexploited indigenous resources. Most importantly, there is some evidence that apathy and hopelessness are being replaced by quietly confident attitudes which come with success.

## Preconditions for Success

A number of measures are necessary to ensure the success of this approach to local development. Above all the widespread apathy and sense of powerlessness that exists at local level must be tackled. Ordinary people must be persuaded that there is much they can and indeed must do. As Keams (1974) observed about the

Gaeltacht (Irish speaking) areas of Ireland, no efforts to resuscitate these communities, regardless of how well motivated or financially supported, can be successful unless they are paralleled by a revival of the human spirit. There are no formulae to instantly transform dispirited communities into vibrant cells. A clear need for a programme of social animation exists. There is growing evidence that this can be accomplished through the type of adult education courses currently being provided on a reactive basis by some tertiary educational institutions such as University College Galway. The provision of these courses on a widespread basis is beyond the capacity of most regional universities. One solution, which is already being applied in the west of Ireland, is that universities offer such courses in conjunction with regional development agencies. A more satisfactory long-term solution is for universities to produce development agents with the necessary skills to act as community animateurs. The recent establishment in University College Galway of courses at masters degree level in community and rural development is intended to meet this specialized labour requirement.

Empowering local communities represents a very sophisticated approach to local development that requires a long-term strategy on the part of the communities themselves and the agencies which support their initiatives (Keane and O Cinnéide, 1986). It is vital that all parties should appreciate the emphasis on the attainment of this process goal and that task objectives (e.g. establishment of fish farm or promotion of tourism) should be pursued in a way that facilitates the acquisition of know-how and confidence. Meaningful participation of the local community in the development process is essential to the underlying fundamental principle of learning by doing. Supporting external agencies must also see the promotion of local employment initiatives as a learning process for them and the experience gained should enrich their policies (Hawker *et al.*, 1989).

The establishment of a separate channel of funding for local development is another imperative for the success of local economic initiatives. The activities of ICDG to date have been largely funded by a grant of IR£310,000 through the Second European Anti Poverty Programme to Combat Poverty. This fund, of which 55% is provided from the European Social Fund and 45% from national exchequer, is payable over the four years 1986-89.

Considerable flexibility associated with the funding has enabled ICDG to maximise its impact on local development. They have succeeded in harnessing and orchestrating considerable voluntary local effort to the betterment of the community as a whole. They have also succeeded in coordinating the activities of various state agencies and voluntary bodies. It is unlikely that ICDG or any other local community would meet with significant success without a flexible funding arrangement over which there is local control.

Finally, the success of local development initiatives is critically dependent on vesting sufficient powers in the appropriate regional and local authorities. It is unreal to expect local communities to accept increased responsibility for their own development needs without giving them the necessary authority to discharge this role. Highly centralized systems of government, such as that which prevails in Ireland, creates a sense of powerlessness at local level and leads to dependency on the state (O Cinnéide and Keane, 1987). The essential response is to give local and regional authorities the necessary powers to advance local development in a manner which is consistent with national and EC goals.

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