

Community development and policy

Some thoughts

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Some context

- Negative directions in key CD concerns (inequality, migration, xenophobia, democracy and the environment)
- Reduction in resourcing, and dilution of meaning of CD
- Policy is often 'community friendly' but does not understand CD

What is policy in CD?

Two ideas:

- CD as a means of realising policy outcomes in other spheres (e.g. health, crime prevention, regeneration), essentially 'top down'
- The policy of CD itself: to build solidarity with all those who are working to create a sustainable, inclusive and peaceful world free from poverty, conflict and inequality, essentially 'bottom up'

From Scotland

- Long experience in CD and arguably most strongly established in Europe
- Recognition across equalities work, health, housing, and others
- 3 national networks – CDAS has 100+ members
- Widely recognised tools and methods: LEAP, Building Stronger Communities, SCARF etc
- Community Empowerment Act (discussed later)

On the other hand ...

- A big 'democratic deficit'
- Interplay between 'engagement' and 'capacity building' with the language of CD largely absent
- Insufficient attention to training and professional standards (although improving)
- Emerging law for 'empowerment', but is it CD?

Empowerment, Scotland style

- Eases the path from communities that want to take ownership or control over 'assets' such as village halls, forests, community centres etc.
- Eases the path for communities to trigger partnership action on community needs or issues

Therefore helping implement policy to:

- Reduce dependence of the state for funding and support
- Encourage more participation in designing and delivering solutions to community problems

However!

- Many assets are liabilities!
- The policy is to the advantage of the more advantaged communities, and can disadvantage the less advantaged (where assets are few in the first place)
- Channels energies away from mobilising and organising towards managing and representing (but often without the needed skills or resources)
- No investment in additional CD support
- Denial of agency – the idea that ‘communities are doing it for themselves’

And so ...

- EuCDN and its members aim to encourage and support CD that mobilises the powerless and brings about social, economic and environmental justice
- But the voice is weak and largely unheard
- It is time for a more political strategy – but we need to mobilise and advocate
- It is one good reason for us to be here today!