

**Working Notes Issue 37:
Community Development in the Age of the Celtic Tiger**

Must The Poor Always Be With Us?

Tom Giblin, SJ

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Cherry Orchard Blossoms

Living in Cherry Orchard these past few years offers a window on the changing face of inequality in Ireland of the Celtic Tiger. A few things strike me as I travel each day from where I live to where I work in U.C.D. There are many more people going out to work in Cherry Orchard than four years ago. More of them are travelling in cars, some of them new. Some of those whom I see coming and going to work are people who, five years ago, I would not have predicted would ever find employment. The opportunities simply were not there.



At the same time there are many others in my area who for a whole variety of reasons stay at home. The reasons include, among others, looking after their children, old age, ill health, addiction problems, emotional problems, and failure to find suitable work. The people who stay at home do not benefit directly from the increased employment opportunities in our booming economy.

En route, I pass near the new family resource centre in Cherry Orchard, and the construction site for the new Ballyfermot civic centre. Coming home in the evening I often get stuck in traffic jams at points in Ballyfermot that are due to be changed under the town development plan. A particular short cut I use might soon disappear if a right turn I take each evening is to be outlawed as proposed. All this is a reminder that resources are flowing into the area and being invested in social and urban infrastructure. There is tangible evidence of benefits from the boom.

A Tale of Two Tesco's

The area around UCD where I work is very different from Cherry Orchard and becoming increasingly so. I notice this most acutely when I stop off to buy groceries on my way home. I have a choice of places to shop - Tesco's on the Merrion Road, or Tesco's in Ballyfermot. Both locations are prone to Tesco's policy of not carrying any surplus stocks so that items I want are often not

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there! Leaving that pet gripe aside however, shopping in both places is shopping in two different social worlds. The cars parked outside, the way customers dress, prices, range of products available, numbers of attendants in the shop, and many other things mark the difference starkly. When I compare the two 'Tesco' social worlds it is all too clear to me that whatever the benefits of the Celtic Tiger for Cherry Orchard, and these are real, the people who shop in Merrion Road are benefiting even more. The gap in living standards between the two areas is growing.

I was interested then to find that my own perceptions are confirmed in recent research into trends in income inequality and poverty in Ireland.

The Celtic Tiger and its Claws

Bishop Brendan Comiskey was asked recently, did he think that the Celtic Tiger was good or bad? His reply was that he thought the Tiger was good but he was not so sure about its claws. I think that this image is a particularly apt one when it comes to considering inequality and poverty.

We have a lot of information about what was happening during the first years of the Celtic Tiger, 1994-1997, particularly in relation to poverty and inequality. The national cake got a lot bigger, with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increasing at a rate of between 7% and 8% per annum. Many jobs were created; unemployment fell from 16% to 11%, and since then has fallen further, of course. Real average household incomes (adjusted for size and composition of household and consumer price inflation) increased by 16%. Social welfare rates also rose in real terms but not as fast as average incomes. Pensions, for example, grew by 6% in real terms over the period.

These facts alone would suggest that while everyone seems to have been becoming better off in the booming economy, particular groups are falling further behind relative to those on average incomes or above. This is true, in particular, for those depending on social welfare or on low wages. So the Tiger, while good, does have claws, even if they appear somewhat retracted.

Recent ESRI work on inequality and poverty - the Facts

Let us first examine relative income inequality. The usual way to measure this is to measure the percentage of households that have, say, less than 40% (or less than 50% or less than 60%) of average household income. Table 1 shows clearly that, despite the booming economy, by 1997 2-3% more households find themselves below these levels of average household income than in 1994.

Table 1: Percentage of Households having less than 40%, 50%, 60% of average household income in 1994 and 1997

	1994	1997

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Less than 40% of average household income	5.0	7.6
Less than 50% of average household income	18.8	21.9
Less than 60% of average household income	34.6	36.5

This does not mean, however, that the poor are getting poorer in every sense. In 1994 for example 20% of all households were below 60% of 1987 average household income while in 1997 only 11% of households were below that level. So the poor are getting richer but not as fast as the rich. In other words they are getting richer absolutely, but poorer relatively.

This picture is confirmed when we look at indications of basic deprivation such as not being able to afford:

- new as opposed to second hand clothes
- a meal with meat, fish or chicken every second day
- a warm waterproof overcoat
- two pairs of strong shoes
- a roast or its equivalent once a week.

Table 2 shows that fewer households experience this type of deprivation in 1997 than did in 1994.

Table 2: Percentage of households deprived of a given number of 8 basic items in 1994 and 1997

Number of items	1994	1997
None	74.9	84.7
One	12.6	8.3
Two or Three	7.2	4.7
Four to Eight	5.4	2.0



The improvement is clear. In 1994 more than one in four households experienced this very basic type of economic deprivation. By 1997 only one in seven households were in such circumstances. Still it is startling that in an economy where there is now so much wealth that there are still many households (about 150,000) who are deprived in such a basic way. This is all the more troubling

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because many households that are deprived both in terms of relative income and in terms of these basic items also:

- experience "extreme difficulty" in making ends meet, (40%)
- feel constantly under strain, (35-45%)
- feel they cannot overcome their difficulties,
- are unable to enjoy their day to day activities,
- are unable to face their difficulties,
- feel unhappy or depressed
- lose sleep over worry.

No nation can be satisfied when such suffering and distress is present in a large number of households within its borders. No matter how bright the economic picture looks it certainly loses its gloss from this perspective. Nonetheless we should not lose sight of the fact that the Celtic Tiger has done more than anything else to reduce the numbers living in such penury. The Irish Government has also set up a National Anti-Poverty Strategy since 1997 that is worth examining.

NAPS - Is It Really a Strategy?

The National Anti-poverty Strategy (NAPS) set itself the aim of reducing the numbers of households who were below 60% of average income and also basically deprived in not being able to afford one or more of the 8 basic items. It set a target for the period 1997-2007 of reducing the percentage of households in this category of deprivation from 15% to 10%. The most recent data shows however, that the percentage in this category, while close to 15% in 1994 (the latest information available when the NAPS target was set), had already fallen to under 10% in 1997 when the NAPS began. So the Celtic Tiger delivered the 2007 target even before the NAPS began to be implemented! This has meant setting a new target for the NAPS which is to reduce the percentage of households in this category of deprivation to 5% by 2007.

The fact that the NAPS targets had already been eclipsed before the programme started should lead to a thorough rethink of the whole anti-poverty strategy. Looking at the other targets set in the NAPS we see that the unemployment targets, namely

- Reducing unemployment as measured by the Labour Force Survey to 6% of the labour force by 2007
- Reducing long term unemployment to 3%

have also largely been delivered by the Celtic Tiger, to a considerable extent independently of NAPS policies. Unemployment, for example, was 5.5% of the labour force in 1999 and is expected to fall to 4.5% this year.

The targets on disadvantage urban areas and on rural poverty according to ESRI commentators are "so unspecific and anodyne as to scarcely merit the name". They contribute little to the strategy. They simply say that educational disadvantage, income inadequacy and unemployment should be tackled in these areas. This leaves just one meaningful target for the NAPS, - the one relating to educational disadvantage, namely:

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- To eliminate early school leaving before the junior certificate,
- have 90% completing the senior cycle by the year 2000, and 98% by 2007,
- to ensure no student with serious literacy and numeracy problems in early primary education within five years.



This remains an ambitious target. It is genuinely a target since the outcome is both measurable and should make a considerable contribution to meeting the overall anti-poverty target.

What is also striking however in the Annual Report of the Interdepartmental Policy Committee 1998/1999, that deals with NAPS, is that even where there is a good target (i.e. in education) there is no attempt by the Department of Education to monitor outcomes on the ground. One would expect that, of all Departments, Education would be the one best placed to measure the numbers leaving school early and also to evaluate the impact of its programmes to counter early school leaving. After all everyone who goes to a school is registered within the system. To date however, there is little sign of this happening.

What are cited throughout the report are activity levels by the different Departments, - so much has been spent on this, that programme has been initiated etc. Nothing tells us whether this activity by the Departments is having any effect. This of course is not to deny the value of many of these programs, just to note that their impact, in terms of reaching the targets set, is not known.

On the issue of education, there is widespread anecdotal evidence on the ground in Ballyfermot and elsewhere that it is the Celtic Tiger economy that is having an impact, rather than government activity. Worryingly, however, the impact is not towards the NAPS targets but away from them, as increasing numbers of secondary school children quit school and take up relatively low skilled and low paid jobs. These individuals will be particularly vulnerable in any future economic recession. So the seeds of future poverty may be already planted.

Finally, and most surprising of all, while the Interdepartmental committee acknowledges that real increases in social welfare have been critical in reducing the numbers living in consistent poverty,

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the NAPS makes no reference to policy issues affecting social welfare. There is no discussion of whether growth in social welfare should keep pace with growth in average incomes. Nor does it discuss what the consequences of increasing relative poverty will be if it does not so keep pace. Nor is there adequate discussion of the proposal for a significant increase in child benefit, that many commentators argue would have a significant impact on poverty. The Budget increases are noted, but there is no discussion of what should be the desirable level of this benefit.

One is left with the impression that we have no national anti-poverty strategy but simply a set of national anti-poverty targets of varying quality and relevance and a listing of government activities that relate in some vague and unsubstantiated way to meeting these targets.

Reproducing Poverty

Claws once clipped grow again. As we have seen there are many indications that poverty has been decreasing in our booming economy. At the same time it is troubling to note that there has been an increase in the percentage of households in the most extreme poverty. These households have less than 40% of average household income and are also deprived of one or more of the 8 basic items. In 1994 2.4% of households were in this situation while in 1997 this had risen to 3% of households. So the numbers in extreme poverty may actually be increasing even though the poor generally are becoming better off. This suggests that the Celtic Tiger is leaving a small but increasing minority of households far behind.

The ESRI have compared the share of disposable income that each 10% of the population had in 1994 and 1997. The results are given in Table 3

Table 3: Shares in Disposable income of each 10% of persons

10% of population	1994	1997
Bottom 10%	3.8	2.8

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2 nd	4.8	4.6
3 rd	5.5	5.4
4 th	6.4	6.2
5 th	7.4	7.6
6 th	8.8	8.9
7 th	10.5	10.4
8 th	12.4	12.4
9 th	15.3	16.0
Top	25.1	25.7

This shows that between 1994 and 1997 the poorest 40% of the population lost 1.5% of their share in disposable income, while the wealthiest 20% gained 1.3% in their share. Clearly if Budgetary policy continues to give bigger gains to the wealthy as several recent Budgets have done, and social welfare increases do not keep pace with the growth in average income, then we can expect to see income inequality increase in Ireland.

This should be of particular concern in Ireland because we are one of the European countries with the most unequal income distribution. Only four countries,

Portugal, the U.K., Spain and Greece have similar or greater inequality.

Conclusion

The evidence shows that there is much to be grateful for in recent times in Ireland. Living standards have improved for most people. Yet there are several important qualifications to this otherwise rosy picture:

- the distribution of income is becoming more unequal; relative poverty is increasing and this will tend to reproduce poverty over time;
- a small, but increasing, minority of households are falling into the most deprived category;
- our national anti-poverty strategy is weak on targets, poor on evaluation, and does not include an

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adequate discussion of or decision about the use of some of the most important means to tackle poverty in the hands of government, namely social welfare and child benefit.

In relation to this last point, if NAPS is to be made more effective, the following steps are necessary:

- NAPS should be integrated with fiscal and budgetary policy and Partnership agreements;
- proper evaluation should be made of the impact of the more significant NAPS programmes, rather than mere reporting of their existence;
- the NAPS targets should be revisited, to make them more explicit and relevant in areas other than Education.

Acknowledgments:

Thanks go to Eithne Fitz Gerald for discussion on the NAPS, also to Brian Nolan for discussion at the Irish Economics Association. The article depends heavily on the recent work done at the ESRI.

Notes:

[1] Tim Callan, Brian Nolan, Christopher T. Whelan, "Targeting Poverty: The Irish Example", ESRI, paper for the Irish Economics Association Annual Conference, Waterford, March/April 2000.

[1] Ibid., p. 7.

[1] Ibid., p. 9

[1] Annual Report of the Inter-Departmental Policy Committee, 1998/99, Social Inclusion Strategy, National Anti-Poverty Strategy. p. 70-80.

[1] Brian Nolan, Bertrand Maitre, "A Comparative Perspective on Trends in Income Inequality in Ireland", ESRI, paper for the Irish Economics Association Annual Conference, Waterford, April 2000.

[1] Ibid. p. 10.

Community Development in the Age of the Celtic Tiger

Bill Toner, SJ

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Introduction

Some dreadful planning decisions and environmental blunders were made in Irish cities between the 1930s and the end of the 1960s. It is hard to imagine them taking place today. For instance, there is no possibility that the authorities in Northern Ireland would today be allowed to drive a motorway through the middle of Belfast, effectively cutting it in two. No local authority would now be allowed to design an area like Drimnagh in Dublin, a development of over 5,000 houses built in the thirties without a single green space. The destruction of part of Georgian Dublin's Fitzwilliam Street, to build new offices for the E.S.B., could not happen today.



Given the recent revelations regarding payments to some county councillors to influence zoning decisions, it may seem surprising that matters have actually improved in recent decades in relation to planning. In spite of the power of councillors and other politicians, and possible abuses of this power, there are far more popular constraints today on bad planning. One constraint is the tightening up of planning laws and regulations in recent decades, as illustrated for instance by the halting of the building of an interpretative centre in the Burren. But another important constraint has been the mobilization of local communities. While community organization was always a feature of rural Ireland, in the cities it came comparatively late. In recent years the empowerment of local communities is described under the general term of 'community development'. This empowerment has become a potent force in the improvement of disadvantaged communities, or at least in the prevention of gross disregard of their interests.

Community Development

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Community Development focuses on the fact that many of the interests and problems faced by certain communities, particularly poor ones, cannot be tackled on an individual basis, and require collective organization and action. The main objective of community development is thus seen as the empowerment of local communities to make a difference to their economic and social environment. An important requirement for this is seen to be the participation of as many members of the community as possible in the process.

The issue of participation is complex in this context. In practice some of the problems faced by communities could be addressed by a small group of residents or community workers lobbying in concert. For instance such a group may persuade the local authority to improve road cleaning in the area. This group might not be very representative, with participation by residents very limited. However there is a strong body of thought within community development circles that sees the process of community development, with participation as a key component of this, as at least as important as the outcomes. This view has a long lineage, going back even to Aristotle, and is related to the idea of the 'good citizen'. In this view people are not 'fully alive' unless they are taking part in the governance of their country or local area. Thus implicit in contemporary 'community development' is the need for personal development, to the extent that people are enabled to participate fully in deliberations and decisions affecting them. However the process is circular, in that (following the view of the ancient Greeks) participation in civic life is also a means to personal development.

As one aspect of participation, a lot of emphasis is placed on the need for consultation in community development. In practice this is often difficult, because most residents will not attend general meetings or respond to questionnaires. Sometimes it is the format of meetings that is not attractive; better success has been reported at 'house meetings', where residents host people on their own street. Men are more likely to attend meetings of this type. But at best, the response is apathetic.

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Residents' committees or other 'representative' groups may also be reluctant to consult because they see it as slowing up the decision-making progress, and the committee may get caught up in local politics where they have to 'horse-trade' on issues at meetings with agencies.

Limitations to Community Development: Poverty and Crime

A further feature in contemporary community development is its focus (often stated rather than actual) on anti-poverty measures. In practice community development is seen as important only in poor areas. In wealthier areas, there is little talk of community development. In these areas it is considered that people are self-sufficient and have enough income and other resources to overcome the kind of problems that people in poor areas face (such as poor educational or medical facilities). This is a very narrow view of community development, as will be discussed below. Of course there are often powerful residents' groups in wealthy areas, but they tend to focus on narrow issues, such as halting sites, and are not concerned with personal development or other issues.



In fact, the evidence that local action in disadvantaged areas can make major inroads on poverty is not compelling, unless such local action is combined with major lobbying activity at a national or at least regional level. Poverty is often due to deep structural problems and national policies. Only action at national level can influence, say, the level of social welfare payments. Ironically, most of the people in the poorest areas do not vote, and do not influence national policies through the ballot box. Few local community development initiatives are focused on the wider structural issues that contribute to poverty, but tend to focus more on addressing undesirable characteristics of poor areas such as drug abuse, joy-riding, litter, poor appearance, lack of information and office facilities, and so on. Some of the concerns of local community development groups regarding structural poverty do feed through to national fora or are picked up by elected representatives. But such concerns usually occupy only a small proportion of the time and resources of community development projects.

Community development work may also combat poverty indirectly, by giving people increased access to employment. This happens in a variety of ways, through provision of adult or second-

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chance education, help with C.V.s and interviews, information about jobs, improving the word-of-mouth network in the area, and through improvements in the area that lessen the impact of a 'bad address' on an application form. This is not community development in the classical sense, though many activists would consider it to be just as valuable to the people in the area.

Another area where community development cannot 'deliver' is in the area of law enforcement, though this burden is often laid on it. Agencies such as Dublin Bus, and even the Gardai themselves, are in the habit of lecturing local community committees regarding the bad behaviour of some of the residents, for instance, regarding children throwing stones at passing buses. But it is never clear what the local residents are supposed to do about this. It is very difficult, and even dangerous, for local residents to try to impose social control on their neighbours. If local people do try to take matters into their own hands, say in relation to drug dealers, the Gardai will come down on them 'like a ton of bricks'. It is very demoralizing for local activists to see drug dealing and 'shooting up' going on openly in their estates, with the Gardai saying they do not have the resources to deal with the problems. It is not surprising that in this vacuum, shadowy semi-political groups move in to 'sort the junkies out' sometimes with tragic results.

Community Development: A Minority Occupation?

The degree to which 'community development' in the strict sense is ever achieved in practice is debatable. Privately many professionals involved in community development projects will admit that the level of participation and effective consultation in most communities is extremely low. It is unusual for even 5% of the people in any disadvantaged community to get involved actively in community development projects, or respond to surveys or attend general meetings. Most of these are female. The males involved are mainly professionals working in the area, and local males are few. On occasion males in greater numbers can become involved in an aggressive fashion, to combat drug-dealing for instance. Many males get involved in sports coaching, though voluntary work in this area is also in decline, and it is not strictly community development.

Often the level of community involvement by locals will vary simply according to the distance people live from the community centre. Some communities have tried to organize street committees, in an effort to get more people involved, especially those living at a distance. The main difficulty with this is that it is very labour-intensive, as it involves finding good contacts on each road, and persuading them to do the local organizing. It is difficult to do this without a team of well-motivated volunteers prepared to knock on doors, but nowadays it is getting harder to find volunteers for any community work, leading to a Catch-22 situation.

There is, admittedly, often a passive acceptance and recognition by the community of residents' and other groups, in the sense that most of the people in the community are prepared to let a few activists 'get on with it', as long as they do not plan, or allow to happen, something very unpopular, such as a road closure. In many cases people with no involvement in the residents' group are very happy to criticize it for lack of achievement. Occasionally residents will attend a meeting in large numbers because of a crisis, such as an invasion of drug-dealers, or a proposed redevelopment. But this level of involvement usually subsides rapidly.

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The Crisis in Volunteerism

Indeed, the biggest challenge facing community development workers at the moment is finding local people willing to become involved. The story seems to be the same in every county in Ireland, with many people saying that 'volunteerism is dead'. Most local groups report difficulties in finding people to sit on management committees, quite apart from doing more active work such as helping with summer projects.

The decline of volunteerism is due to many reasons. Some of these are aspects of the Celtic Tiger, but others pre-date it. Among some of the factors can be listed:

- An increasing number of people are being paid by the government or other agencies to do work that used to be done voluntarily. Accordingly some people feel that only a 'mug' would work for nothing. Other people feel that if there were no volunteers the government would be obliged to employ people to do their work. There are stories of volunteers being verbally abused by people for 'taking away jobs'.
- There are more recreational activities available, particularly watching television. Organizers of meetings have to take account of innumerable T.V. programmes, particularly 'soaps' and football matches.
- As people become better off, they and their children become more 'privatised', spending more time in their houses, or visiting places outside the area by car. They become less dependent on their local community and are less inclined to give time to helping develop it.
- Many more people are at work, in particular more women, and thus are not available during the day. In the evening they may be too tired or busy with other chores to get involved in community affairs (this point is expanded below).

Whatever the reason, volunteers are in short supply, and most of the local people involved in community development have been involved from the very start; there are very few new recruits.

Incidentally, one of the problems of weak community involvement is that it is relatively easy for a small group of residents with a particular agenda (for instance, a vigilante group) to take over a management committee.

The Role of Activists

Although many community development projects do not live up to their promise, they often achieve a great deal for the community because a few hard-working individuals are prepared to make the effort. Nowadays it is fashionable to be cynical about 'do gooders', but without initiatives from individuals little community development would take place. Often it is a concerned individual within the community that makes the first move, worried perhaps about the future for his or her children. But sometimes too it is an 'outsider' that takes an important initiative.

For one thing it may be easier for an outsider to ask people to do things, whereas a local may attract the comment: "Who does she think she is?". It may also be because local people who 'stick their head above the parapet' are often targeted by anti-social elements in the community, for instance drug dealers. 'Outsiders' such as members of religious orders who choose to live in poor areas, or

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professionals who live elsewhere, are better placed to ride out this antagonism. Their presence at meetings of residents also gives confidence to locals to face up to intimidation. It is fashionable to decry 'blow-ins' who try to improve the quality of life in a disadvantaged area, but this can display a lack of realism about the way change takes place in very depressed situations.

That said, if there is to be worthwhile and lasting community development, the first priority of the 'outsider' must be to involve as many local people as possible and to help them to gain more control over their situation. For one thing it is important if the 'outsiders' move on that they will leave something enduring behind them. Otherwise the community can be confirmed in their helplessness. More importantly, local people can achieve considerable personal development through involvement in community affairs, and this benefits not only the community but themselves personally. When local people get involved in community development it may be the first time they become fully aware of concepts and practices such as planning, strategy, training needs, meeting procedure, constitutions, budgets, evaluation and so on. In fact the staffing of the increasing numbers of government-funded community projects in recent years has only been made possible through the 'coming on stream' of individuals who worked initially as volunteers or committee members in local projects. Many of these individuals became sufficiently interested in the community development process to go on for training (such as diplomas in community work) which enabled them to compete for positions either in their own community or elsewhere.

The Impact of Full Employment on Community Development

Community development activities are often focused on disadvantaged communities, where unemployment has been high. In practice, one of the objectives of community development is to help local people to find work or create employment opportunities.

It is ironic, however, that insofar as community workers are successful in helping people into employment, they make their work harder in one respect. Because, as stated above, one of the reasons why it is harder to get volunteers for community work today is that many people who were unemployed for years are now at work. When they were unemployed they had time for community activities. Now their job, and travelling back and forth to it, absorbs much of their interest, time and energy. Because they have more money they can afford to spend more on entertainment which also takes up time and draws them out of the area. Often they will acquire a car, which draws them out of the local community to socialize or recreate. Worst of all, from a community point of view, is that many of the people who 'get on' move away from the area, into more affluent areas.

This brings us the difficult question: What is the purpose of community development in an area where employment levels are quite good and affluence is increasing? As areas become better off many of the visible problems that afflicted them before gradually disappear. As the job market improves, staying on at school (at least until an employment opportunity presents itself) seems a better idea. With more point to their lives, young people are less likely to take up hard drugs. People with jobs or prospects of jobs have less time and inclination to drift into crime. Children with cars in their family are less motivated to steal cars and joy-ride. As families become better off they become more concerned about image, and so graffiti and gross littering of the area decline.

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But perhaps this is to go too far, too fast. In practice the improvement in the fortunes of individuals in the area runs far ahead of improvements in the area itself. Although there is more spending power in the area, facilities such as shops or recreational facilities, are developed only very slowly. Many of the old structural problems of the area can last for years. However, people who have a reasonable income are less likely to worry so much about these problems, and sometimes only the 'activists', often outsiders, continue to labour away at 'community development', which is now focused more on the social than on the economic environment.

Moreover only a very narrow view of community development would see it as irrelevant in better-off areas. No matter how well off people are, they can still have problems that would be alleviated, or needs that could be met, by a better quality of local community. Loneliness, depression, problems with children, alcohol and drug abuse, declining health and mobility, disability, bereavement and even poverty are found in the most exclusive private estates. None of these problems can be adequately addressed by statutory bodies, nor perhaps even by relatives. Initiatives within the local community can make a big difference to people facing these kinds of problems. There are also possibilities of promoting leisure or civic activities that will bring people closer together. Everybody, rich or poor, needs to belong, and a caring local community can give a great sense of security, as well as a chance to contribute to our shared society. It would be a useful exercise to locate one or two Community Development Projects (C.D.P.s) in more affluent areas to see what kinds of initiative emerge, and also to counteract the growing identification of 'community development' with disadvantaged areas

There is also the considerable value that derives to individuals, and thus to the community, from involvement in community affairs. A democracy cannot be said to be strong where people's only ambition is to get a job, put their feet up and live private lives after work, and delegate every other issue 'upwards' to local and national politicians. The kind of personal development that takes place through community involvement cannot be obtained in any other manner.

Community Development and Education

The role of education is very important in community development as it is an important means of empowerment.

One of the most disempowering things for poor communities is often relatively poor levels of literacy. By literacy here is not meant the ability to read and write fairly simple material, but the 'functional' literacy needed to understand more complicated forms and documents, and to express complex ideas in writing. Groups pursuing community development are sometimes seriously disadvantaged because they have no members who can, for instance:

- take accurate notes or minutes of a meeting;
- write a well-phrased letter, with correct spelling and grammar, to a statutory agency;
- write a report;
- understand technical documents such as certain funding applications;
- fill in an application for funding;

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- organize and conduct a meeting;
- maintain financial records.

Incidentally, The government department which deals with Community Development Projects (C.D.P.s) requires regular plans, budgets, reports, and sets of accounts from the projects it funds. The levels of literacy required for doing these mean that in most cases outside professionals have to be employed by the local management committee. (This would be true even if Government regulations did not require that the main posts be advertised nationally). While it is possible to enumerate many good reasons why highly literate professionals should be employed, one can only speculate on the effect this can have on a poor community, who may be further confirmed in their helplessness by it, and who see a relatively large salary going outside the area. It would be interesting to see if a different or parallel model could be designed that that did not require the employment of highly-educated professional, and whether it would enhance the true 'community development' dimension of a project. For instance, one or two local people could be funded to do outreach work on a part-time basis for existing residents' or community education groups.

Of twelve developed countries recently studied, Ireland came second last in all measures of literacy. About 25% of people in Ireland are reckoned not to have reached the literacy level necessary to cope with the complex demands of everyday life and work. Low educational attainment in Ireland, particularly in years gone by, is the greatest single cause of illiteracy so there is some hope that literacy levels will gradually improve.

It is important to note that literacy produces an effect on income that comes on top of that produced by education. For some reason this literacy 'premium' is greatest in Ireland of all the countries studied. Persons who are literate are likely to have better jobs, higher levels of productivity and earnings, and are less vulnerable to long-term unemployment.

In setting up, or in facilitating, education projects in disadvantaged areas, a choice (though not always a clear-cut one) has to be made between an education programme which is primarily directed at community empowerment and one which is directed more at individual empowerment. The choice between these two is, in practice, not simply the choice of the programme provider. Many people will have an eye to education for themselves and this may generate a higher demand for programmes directed at the individual (such as V.T.O.S. programmes). While education for individuals may benefit the community, those who take advantage of it may be interested only in gaining employment which will result in them spending more time outside the community; and if successful in this they may then decide to move to a more affluent area.

Since there is fairly adequate provision for second-chance education for individuals in many colleges and centres, there is a strong case for concentrating, in programmes within disadvantaged areas, on education for community empowerment. These programmes will, in any case, give individuals the confidence to pursue further education.

Community Development in Rural Areas

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Rural areas present a particular challenge for community development initiatives. Many areas of the Republic experience large and persistent population decline. The National Development Plan 2000-2006 summarizes the problems:

These areas have unfavourable age structures, fail to gain access to an adequate share of investment, and frequently experience extreme forms of marginalization. Rural areas also have higher than average dependency rates particularly in the western and border counties. The combination of a high dependence on agriculture, the lack of a diversified employment base to sustain off-farm income and employment opportunities, and the out-migration of those with higher levels of education, has undermined the economic structure of many rural areas. The demographic situation has implications for public and private service delivery...

In 1961 360,000 people, or 35% of those at work in Ireland, worked on the land. By 1997 this had shrunk to 134,000, or 10% of those at work. This trend has profoundly altered the nature of rural communities. Many rural dwellers now live in non-farm families and have little direct connection with 'the land'.

There have been other developments too which have blurred the distinction between city and country-side. For instance, agriculture has become mechanized and is run increasingly according to considerations of price and profit, just like industrial work. The 'meitheal' or 'team' concept is almost dead, as farmers employ contractors to harvest crops. This lessens the differences in modes of social life between urban and rural people. Improved road connections have shrunk distances, drawing the country closer to the city and vice-versa.

The term 'rural' itself is used rather loosely. Many people use 'rural' to denote any area outside the cities (Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, and Waterford). But many people live in large provincial towns which are not at all 'rural' in character. The 1991 Census gives the following breakdown of the population:

Cities

Dublin City 971,932

Cork City 121,968

Limerick City 49,748

Galway City 48,640

Waterford City 38,828

Total Cities: 1,231,116

Towns of 1500 or more: 710,263

Rural Areas: 1,491,669

(i.e. towns with less than
1500, and rural areas)

Total Population 3,433,048

(Derived from Census 91, Volume 3, Table 2. Central Statistics Office 1994)

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Since 1991 there has been growth, as well as shifts, in population, but the overall picture remains roughly the same. About 43% of Irish people still live in rural areas, either out in the countryside or in very small towns or villages. This trend has been greatly facilitated by tolerance of 'ribbon development'. This type of development may be criticised on visual, and to a lesser extent, on ecological grounds, but it does allow many people to live in rural settings even where they do not work the land.

There is a marked difference between the urban:rural densities in the two designated Regions of Ireland, the Southern and Eastern Region (S&E) and the Border, Midland and Western Region (BMW Region). The urban:rural density is 68%:32% in the S&E Region, and exactly the reverse, 32%:68%, in the BMW Region. Many of the more remote areas in the BMW Region are becoming totally deserted, as people move to nearby towns or further afield.

In 1975 39% of the world's population lived in urban localities, whereas the figure today is estimated to be 50% and rising fast. There is a draw towards the cities, but it is mainly in response to job opportunities rather than just an attraction for the 'bright lights'. It is interesting to note how Dublin flatland becomes relatively deserted at weekends as tens of thousands of young people head back to their homes in the country. Many people want to live in the country even though they have no farming interests. Some of them are seeking peace and quiet, nicer scenery, or a more intimate community; or they are trying to avoid traffic congestion (at least on local trips), pollution and crime. Many of them are people who always lived in the country and appreciated its good points.

Apart from the rural people themselves, there are various wider interests that want to preserve rural life. Successive governments have seen it as undesirable that all the people of the state should congregate in and around one or two cities. For one thing this would lead to a deterioration in the quality of life for all, as cities become overcrowded and the countryside becomes deserted. Perhaps most of all there would be concern about the decline of rural culture. This is not always easy to define, but many people (rightly or wrongly) see the countryside as a reservoir of creativity, of people who are healthy in body and mind, of family life, of ancestral characteristics and so on. To take but two examples on the cultural level, many people believe that the revival of Irish traditional music sprang out of rural places like Gweedore and Doolin, not out of Dublin pubs. Similarly few people believe that the Irish language can survive if the rural communities in which it survives are extinguished.

The National Development Plan speaks of the need "to achieve a rural Ireland in which there will be vibrant sustainable rural communities where individuals and families will have a real choice as to whether to stay in, leave or move to rural Ireland." . This means that an important focus for rural community development projects is making the area as attractive as possible so that most current inhabitants will stay (or return) and that other people will want to come to live there. This is not an easy task, as the kinds of development that will make many young people stay (industrial jobs, places of entertainment, bigger, car-owning, population) may be precisely the ones that will be unattractive to 'outsiders' who have come seeking peace and quiet. Rural Ireland needs both to survive.

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Even more than in the city, community development in rural areas is relatively powerless in directly bringing about the kind of changes that would make living in the country more attractive, particularly for the poorest people there. For instance, transport provision is particularly bad, and only the government and local authorities can improve it. The National Development Plan states: "The success of the rural economy is dependent on having an adequate transport and environmental infrastructure" (p.206, emphasis added). It is hard to see this as more than a pious exaggeration by the writers of the Plan when it is noted that a mere paragraph (11.28) is devoted to expanding this topic, and that this is exclusively devoted to the provision of a local road network. This is of no earthly value to a couple in their sixties living half way up a mountain in North Leitrim who cannot afford to run a car because of government imposed taxes and levies. Nowadays a car is a necessity in much of rural Ireland. But, to give one example of the ambivalent attitude of governments towards rural development, there was little evidence of 'poverty proofing' in the way the National Vehicle Test was introduced last year. For many country people it was the last straw in trying to keep a car on the road and some way of helping poorer country people to pay for it should have been devised.

Central to the survival of 'rural life', and to rural community development, is the survival of small farms. There is a qualitative dimension to the contribution made by small family farms to the local community, which is absent in the large ranch-type farms. But small farms can only survive if there is adequate state support for them, and if the government resists the EU policies that have the effect of discriminating against small farms.

All this is to say that lobbying in relation to public services and social policy is as important an activity for rural community development projects as encouraging locals to take initiatives.

Conclusion

True community development is a slow process, and can take many years to reach maturity. This is because it requires above all a change in attitude, with more and more people in the community accepting responsibility for what happens in their own areas. The achievements of community development have been considerable. One could single out in particular the mobilization of communities in the face of threats to their physical environment. Another success is women's education, which has raised the consciousness of women in disadvantaged areas, benefiting not only themselves, but their families and communities

In the era of the Celtic Tiger, where there are now fewer people able and willing to give their time to community affairs, the prospects for further growth in community development are currently poor. At the same time the main reason for the decline in community development, full employment, is bringing economic salvation to many communities and individuals through another route.

Given present trends, the future shape of community action is likely to be an increasing number of professionals delivering various services in local areas, under increasing supervision from government departments rather than from the locals. This is not to say that such an outcome would

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be worthless, but it would not be community development. Alternative models, such as giving more training to local people to carry out community development roles, should be considered.

It is not easy to see how the crisis in community development can be arrested. But it is clear in any case that community development is not the answer to all the problems of disadvantaged communities, whose problems cannot be solved simply 'by throwing money at them'. Just as putting money into railway stations will not make the trains run on time, putting money into local communities will not help poor people unless the wider structural problems at a national level are tackled as well. Many of the problems that are found in disadvantaged communities are mainly 'national-structural' and to a lesser extent 'personal'. For instance poor parenting is a 'personal' issue, but poverty and lack of education (both strongly contributed to by national structures) make parenting more difficult in a highly-literate society. Although there are 'micro-structures' at community level that contribute to the problems of parenting, they are not as dominant as the other factors.

At a national level there are a number of areas where government spending is of particular relevance to the development of poor communities. In this respect, areas which are notably underfunded are education (primary, remedial and adult), family support by social workers, drug addiction treatment, community policing and probation services, shelter and other support for the homeless, and certain parts of the health and transport services. In the absence of resources for these areas, community development can make only a limited impact on social disadvantage.

Acknowledgments:

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B.T.

Notes:

[1] In this section, I have drawn on Barry Cullen's excellent report, *A Programme in the Making: a Review of the Community Development Programme* (Combat Poverty Agency, 1994).

[1] Data taken from the Second Report of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society*. Data refers to 1994-5. See www.nald.ca website.

[1] Ireland: *National Development Plan 2000-2006*, Dublin: Stationery Office, p.199.

[1] It is interesting to note that in pre-1990 Albania nobody was allowed to live in deep countryside, with everyone herded into 'villages', usually dominated by concrete flat complexes, from where they walked to work on the land. Critics of ribbon development should consider the possible alternatives!

[1] Ireland: *National Development Plan 2000-2006*, Dublin: Stationery Office, p.200.

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Doing Cultural Analysis

Bill Toner, SJ

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Introduction

The November 1997 issue of Working Notes featured an article entitled 'Working Class Cultures: Can They Adapt', which referred to the process of cultural analysis. The focus of that article was certain features of lower working-class culture (such as early school leaving) which made it difficult for young people in working class areas to participate fully in our modern economy.



This article discusses more fully what cultural analysis is, and how it can be carried out. It may be possible for community workers, for instance, to carry out a modest project in this area, perhaps as an alternative to the more common 'needs analysis' carried on in communities.

Cultural Analysis

Cultural Analysis describes the attempt to discover the key assumptions, values, artifacts and symbols that are operative in a group. These four different 'levels' of a culture are as depicted below :[1]



In this model there are, firstly, basic assumptions in the culture (or sub-culture). These form the bedrock of the culture and are unconscious for the most part.[2] These assumptions concern such things as:

The relationship of humanity to the wider environment. For instance, in our culture there is a assumption that, to a certain extent, nature can be subjugated and controlled; whereas many older cultures see nature as the controlling force, even needing to be 'appeased'. Hitchcock's allegorical film 'The Birds' depicts a conflict between these two points of view, with some of the characters in the film seeing the attacks of the birds as retaliation against humans for their maltreatment of the natural world.

The nature of 'truth' and what is 'real'. For instance in our culture we mostly accept as true and

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real what is scientifically verifiable; whereas in other cultures the 'spirit world' is considered as just as real. But in many parts of rural Ireland people would consider it foolhardy to dig up a 'rath' or 'fairy ring'; whereas in urban culture it would be a matter of indifference.

The nature of human relationships. For instance, in some cultures there is an assumption that humans are inherently aggressive, in others that they are inherently cooperative. Golding's novel, 'The Lord of the Flies', in which a group of boys marooned on an island turn on one another savagely, is a vivid portrayal of one point of view.

The relative importance of the individual vs. the group. In modern Israel, the kibbutzim are running into difficulties as a culture gap opens between the young people, who are more interested in pursuing individual careers outside the kibbutz, and their parents, who have spent their lives in the communal living of the kibbutz. In Ireland the family meal is almost a thing of the past.

· The nature of human nature itself. For instance in some cultures people are thought of as basically good, in others as basically evil, in others again as neutral. There are also basic assumptions about whether people are 'perfectible' or whether they are intrinsically flawed and fallible. Consider the assumptions in Carole King's song, 'You've Got a Friend':

"Ain't it good to know that you've got a friend,
When people can be so cold.
They'll hurt you, and desert you,
And take your soul if you let them..."

· The nature of human activity. Some cultures display an orientation towards 'doing', other towards 'being'. It used to be said that German people live to work, while Irish people work to live. But there is some evidence that in this respect the two cultures are coming closer together.

Values describe what 'ought' to be done, in the light of the basic assumptions. For instance, whether or not people believe that ghosts are 'real' may affect their attitudes towards ploughing up graveyards. Or, if there is an assumption that life is competitive rather than co-operative, there is seen to be a value in fighting rather than talking. Although values arise out of basic assumptions, these values also play a major role in creating the basic assumptions in the first place. For instance suppose a new headmaster coming into an unruly school believes in the value of strict discipline, and introduces suspensions and other penalties for even minor misdemeanors. If this policy works, the value may gradually start a process of what is called cognitive transformation among the school staff. It gradually becomes a belief among the staff, and ultimately an assumption, which is not even consciously adverted to, about the correct way to run a school.

Artifact is a technical expression, and while it does include technology and art, in anthropology it also includes visible patterns of behaviour. The artifacts are derived from, or built on, basic assumptions and values. Schein explains:

The most visible level of the culture is its artifacts and creations - its constructed physical and social environment. At this level one can look at physical space, the technological output of the group, its written and spoken language, artistic productions, and the overt behaviour of its members. [3]

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Some artifacts become highly symbolic for the culture, for instance Orange marches for the Protestant sub-culture in Northern Ireland. In general, a symbol is any act or thing which represents something else or carries a deeper meaning or significance. Some artifacts of our culture in the Republic of Ireland which have high symbolic content would be the tricolour and the national anthem, the Angelus on TV, Croke Park and Lansdowne Road, Christmas and so on.

Uses of Cultural Analysis

Cultural analysis is particularly valuable in understanding changes in society, and in gaining insights into the success or failure of institutions and structures to adapt to change. Many institutions go through an ageing process and this is often because they are unable to adapt to deep cultural shifts.

It is useful to divide total culture as described above into two sets of components, viz.

(1) Assumptions & Values

(2)

Patterns of Behaviour:

Artifacts

Symbols

These can be described in various ways, such as the less visible (1) and the more visible (2); or as primary (1) and derivative (2). This latter description can be an over-simplification. While it is generally true that assumptions and values are primary, and that artifacts etc. derive from them, it is also true that there can be a reverse causation, and changes in symbols and artifacts can modify the basic assumptions and values over time. For instance if a chief executive begins to come in to work without a tie, in an effort to create a more 'democratic' climate, this symbol may over time modify basic assumptions of employees about hierarchy and power.

At any rate the dichotomy serves a useful purpose for analysing the process, and the effects, of change in culture. Some examples:

- A change in basic assumptions can lead to a change in patterns of behaviour. (For instance, if a group of people cease to see themselves as 'outsiders', they may take a more active part in community activities. The basic assumption may be that "that's not for people like us")
- Changes in basic assumptions and values may not be matched by changes in patterns of behaviour and symbols, leading to revision of assumptions and possibly cultural crisis. (For instance, if a previously divided community moves towards peaceful coexistence, the continuation by the authorities of patrolling with armoured cars, maintenance of dividing walls, barbed wire etc. can erode the basic assumption of peace.)

Process of Cultural Analysis

Step 1 - Data Collection

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You cannot directly experience another person's values, assumptions or symbolic interpretations, but you can directly experience their artifacts. Therefore, observation of artifacts and the behaviour that occurs around them is a typical starting point in a study of culture. In this instance, artifacts are isolated objects, events, rituals, or linguistic forms (e.g. stories, jokes, metaphors). The best way to proceed is to examine as many artifacts and significant patterns of behaviour as possible. It is important too to note any symbolic uses of artifacts or behaviours.

Through interviews it may be possible to discover the interpretations that members give to the artifacts that you have observed. Initially, it is important to write down or tape record as much of the actual language as possible, rather than putting ideas into your own words. Sometimes during this part of the study you may begin to sense the degree of symbolic significance in the artifacts you have collected. It is important not to confuse interpretations with the basic descriptions, and therefore they should be recorded separately

Step 2 - Analysis

In this phase the data must be organized and reorganized until patterns suggesting specific norms and values, and symbolic themes, can be found. Progress will be made when you can link a fair number of artifacts to several norms and values and when you can identify the convergence of some key symbols on one or more cultural themes (e.g. status). It is important to read and re-read the basic data and let it 'speak', rather than impose an order or meaning based on your own biases.

Further examination of, and reflection on, the data may gradually reveal deeper beliefs, assumptions and symbolic patterns. These in turn may reveal linkages between the norms, values and symbolic themes.

It is important to recognize that there is a lot of uncertainty in cultural analysis. Things may not be what they first seem. Interviewees may themselves be unaware why they do certain things or what basic assumptions they are working from. So cultural analysis is always open to revision.

What Artifacts to Select

Obviously it would not be possible to select all the artifacts in a culture for examination. A selection has to be made. Yet it is important not to select in such a way as to bias the study. Remember that 'artifacts' include 'visible patterns of behaviour'.

There may be some merit in selecting some artifacts or behaviours that seem 'quirky'. In doing this there is some advantage in being an 'outsider' to the culture, as the 'quirkiness' may not be adverted to at all by 'insiders'. One example would be the relatively high expenditure on First Communion and Confirmations among poor families, which puzzles middle-class people. Or among the better off, the ways in which social 'networking' is used to get on in business, even where it would be quite possible to operate without it. An advantage of taking 'offbeat' artifacts of this kind is that important basic assumptions and values may reveal themselves better, whereas they are deeply buried in more conventional behaviour.

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At the same time it is important not to restrict the analysis solely to behaviours and artifacts that appear unusual or incomprehensible, as otherwise many basic values and assumptions may be missed.

It would be useful to do a 'brainstorm' to select artifacts and behaviors to be examined. Remember that it is important that people closely involved with these artifacts and behaviours be interviewed before any analysis is attempted. Interviews should be relatively unstructured, avoiding questions which would lead the interviewee in a particular direction. Otherwise there is a risk of the questions imposing a prior interpretation on the data, instead of letting the data 'speak'.

A Sample List

If one were to undertake a cultural analysis among young people, for instance, a typical list of questions might include:

- What makes you feel good about this community, and what makes you feel bad about it?
- How do you spend a typical evening or weekend, and what do you spend most time doing?
- What do you spend your money on?
- Of all the things you do, what do you get the most satisfaction from? Can you say why?
- Who do you spend most of your time with, and why?
- What do you talk about? (The problem here is that most people could not accurately say what they talk about. This may best be studied by asking volunteers to agree to be tape-recorded, though this could obviously have an influence on what is said. It might also be possible to ask volunteers to listen in to 'public' conversations in buses etc.)
- Do you ever take part in community activities? Why, or Why Not?
- Do you devote any time to 'cultural' or artistic pursuits (going to films, watching videos, listening to music, reading etc.). Which do you like most and why?
- Do you have any interest in topics, or such things as tarot, fantasy books, zen etc. How is this interest shown or acted out in practice?
- Are you taking any steps towards a job? Why have you chosen this kind of job?

Some room could also be left for questions in relation to the 'quirky' artifacts and behaviours mentioned above.

Note that none of these questions ask about opinions or wishes. For instance the last question is not, 'What would you like to be?'. The questions ask rather about behaviour, and reasons for it, and about other 'artifacts' of the culture.

As explained above, sifting through this material, and reflecting on it, may lead to the discovery of other levels of the culture, i.e. symbols, in the first place, and, subsequently, values, and even basic assumptions. Remember that 'symbol' refers to meaning. For instance playing or following a sport may mean far more than running around after a ball or enjoying the skill of others doing it. Such books as Nick Hornby's 'Fever Pitch', or studies of football hooliganism, reveal the levels of meaning that can be associated with an apparently quite ordinary activity such as sport.

Conclusion

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What would be the value of a process of cultural analysis in a local community?

One outcome would be the identification of important symbols and values, and perhaps even the basic assumptions that underlie them. This could have many uses. To give one example, many centres that have run personal development courses for working class women have found it extremely difficult to do the same for working class men. A carefully prepared cultural analysis might discover what it is that 'turns men off' courses of this kind, and it might be possible to devise ways of producing the same results by other means.

Another example would be the issue of early school leaving. A cultural analysis carried out among parents, including some parents of early school leavers, might reveal differences in values and assumptions that could be explored and built on.

Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank Gerry O'Hanlon S.J. and Tom Giblin S.J., who read an earlier draft and made helpful comments.

B.T.

Notes:

[1] The basic model comes from Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1987. Mary Jo Hatch (*Organization Theory: Modern Symbolic and Post-modern Perspectives*. Oxford University Press 1997) has added the 'level' of symbol to Schein's model.

[2] See Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass. 1987, Chapter Four, 'Content and Levels of Culture'. Schein draws heavily on F.R.Kluckhohn, and F.L.Strodtbeck's study of a number of cultures in the south-western United States in *Variations in Value Orientations*. New York: Harper & Row, 1961.

[3] Edgar Schein, *op.cit.* p.14. Emphasis added.

Please Note:

Another version of this paper, 'Cultural Analysis and Religious Practice' applies the techniques outlined here to religious practice. This paper is available, free of charge, on request from the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, Tel. 01-855 6814 or Fax. 01-836 4377 or email cfj@s-j.ie.