

Rural development in practice: issues arising in Scotland and Northern Ireland

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ABSTRACT Following recent proposals from the EC Commission and UK Ministers for a policy emphasis on *integrated rural development*, this article begins by noting some key elements within a model of endogenous rural development, including the role of *partnerships, community involvement, animation and capacity-building*. The paper focuses on four key questions that we argue are central to attempts to operationalise integrated rural development, drawing on recent practice in Scotland and Northern Ireland. These are: the legitimacy of rural development partnerships and *local governance*; the goals and processes of rural development, the time allocated for pre-development and the articulation of integrated rural development programmes with other programmes. Finally, we suggest some conclusions for future European and national rural development policy and practice.

Introduction

In both the EU and UK a policy discourse has emerged which envisages a fundamental change in support policies from a sectoral approach (agriculture) to one that is more territorial (rural), and which emphasizes the development of rural areas' capacity to support themselves through 'capacity-building', 'community-based initiatives' and 'partnerships'. This emphasis on enabling and empowering rural people to take control of their own destinies through 'bottom-up integrated rural development' owes much to earlier traditions of community development, yet it is not clear that current practice is well-founded empirically or theoretically.

In this paper we focus on four key questions that we agree are central to attempts to operationalize integrated rural development (IRD): the legitimacy of rural development partnerships and local governance; the goals and processes of rural development; the time allocated for pre-development; and the articulation of IRD programmes with other programmes. Finally we suggest some conclusions for future European and national rural development policy and practice.

Issues in the Practice of Integrated Rural Development in the UK

Typically, integrated rural development suggests a territorial or area-based strategy through which sectoral policies and instruments may be integrated at the point of implementation. Development is not only a matter of economic outcomes, however, but is also a process through which people become better able to control their own destinies and cope with threats or opportunities they face. 'Essentially it involves empowering communities. . . . Local development through empowerment must be based on processes of social "animation", "facilitation" and "capacity building" so as to overcome the widespread sense of apathy and powerlessness which is characteristic of many disadvantaged rural areas' (Kearney, Boyle and Walsh, 1994, p. 22). The various elements within this process (partnerships, community involvement, animation, facilitation, and strategic planning) have been elaborated elsewhere and are not unproblematic (Shortall and Shucksmith, 1998). For example, community involvement has often proved difficult to achieve, and area-based community development has often made existing powerholders more powerful and intensified the social exclusion of poorer groups.

Within the EU, LEADER is generally understood as the main rural development programme of this type, although Northern Ireland also qualifies for INTERREG funding as well as funding from the International Fund for Ireland and, more recently, the Peace and Reconciliation Programme, which has a particular rural regeneration sub-programme. As a particularly distinctive region of the UK, Northern Ireland illuminates more strongly some of the issues arising in rural development practice elsewhere in the UK. These issues will now be considered in turn.

Legitimacy of rural development partnerships and local governance

While the ethos of the partnership approach seems to rest on the concept of one inclusive partnership structure, the reality throughout the UK is that any given area may have a number of partnership structures and these may be more or less inclusive. There are many rural development partnerships in Northern Ireland: for example, LEADER II partnerships, partnerships to work on area-based strategies formed by DANI (the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland), and partnerships to handle peace and reconciliation funds. In Scotland, similarly, there are LEADER II partnerships on the one hand, and a system of 'local rural partnerships' arising from a Scottish Office initiative, on the other, and potentially covering the same areas. The composition and form of the partnership generally depends on the relevant funding organization or government body. So, for example, in Northern Ireland, the district council partnership boards which handle

peace and reconciliation monies must have a particular numerical balance of district council representatives, private sector representatives, and voluntary and community sector representatives. This illustrates the first important aspect of partnerships: they are not a uniform entity, and representation of different groups is not automatic with the formation of a partnership, but is frequently inbuilt into a programme's guidelines. Their shape is thus often determined by the body initiating a rural development programme, or administering the funding. Partnerships can be unsuccessful, tyrannical, or representative and egalitarian (Craig, 1995; Mannion, 1996). It depends on the process of formation, the time scale allowed and a great deal of work and effort (Craig, 1995, p. 13). The funding conditions which give rise to the formation of partnerships in rural areas have often meant they are assembled relatively quickly. There are difficulties with the sudden, and largely unprepared, development of partnerships. Issues of representation arise. This is of particular relevance in Northern Ireland, where the 'cross-community' representation of a partnership is often a key question, and one that sometimes determines funding – 'cross-community' being a colloquial euphemism for Catholics and Protestants.

It is obvious, then, that while partnerships can be inclusive and representative, they are not necessarily so. What then is the legitimacy of partnerships? While the model envisages rural development partnerships as inclusive of the key players, it often fails to contextualize this arrangement. Frequently partnerships exist alongside democratically elected local government structures. Indeed, a recent study of the implementation of EU rural development programmes in Britain, France and Spain concludes that, like the situation in Ireland (Curtin, Haase and Tovey, 1997), 'the British approach to implementing EU structural support has been marked by the concerted efforts made to leave elected authorities on the sidelines' (Smith, 1995). In France similarly, despite the recent decentralization programme, the inter-ministerial Delegation à l'Aménagement du Territoire at a l'Action Regionale (DATAR) 'was opposed to the introduction of the LEADER programme and took strong exception to the idea that the Commission was to form partnerships directly with local areas, thus circumventing their authority' (Curtin, Haase and Tovey, 1997).

Bryden (1994) considers the source of legitimacy of new groups and partnerships. As he points out, the state is legitimate by virtue of its democratic structure. Yet can the state transfer this legitimacy to non-state bodies who are not themselves legitimated? What 'is "going on" when the state bypasses legitimate authorities (local elective authorities) in transferring power and responsibility to quasi-autonomous, or autonomous, bodies like Local Enterprise Companies (LECs), ad-hoc local groups, committees, etc.?' (Bryden, p. 233). This question was also carefully deliberated in a recent rural development report in the Republic of Ireland (Commings and Keane, 1994; NES, 1994). The establishment of partnerships inevitably raises questions about their relationship to local government, and their

relative legitimacy. This has particular relevance in Northern Ireland, where close attention is paid to what provides a mandate to a group who wish to represent people. In Scotland, similar issues arise as part of the wider constitutional debate (Shortall and Shucksmith, 1998). Representation on LEADER boards in Scotland derives from LECs who have a franchise from a quango whose membership is determined by the central government minister. This is not obviously a 'bottom-up' process. It is not surprising that most seek to include a representative of the local authority, but nevertheless the LAGs are essentially creatures of the LECs. In other countries, LEADER partnerships have often been much more closely linked to structures of local government [e.g. in Spain (Smith, 1995)], or gained legitimacy from community participation (e.g. Ray, 1996). The influence of placing Scottish LEADER LAGs within the LEC structure extends beyond representation, moreover, into their goals and activities, as discussed further below.

Beyond this, the power and effectiveness of new structures are weakened if there is not a clear channel linking them to government structures. It is crucial in the interests of effectiveness, and ultimately accountability, that within an institutional framework, roles are clear, and power is formal and legitimized. How new arrangements relate to existing government structures and procedures must be clear. This was illustrated in a recent review of part of the institutional apparatus established in Northern Ireland (LRDP Review, 1995). The Rural Development Council (RDC) was set up with a brief of influencing and advising government on rural development policy. The evaluation, however, concludes that the RDC was restricted in its ability to fulfil this role because it was ill defined and meant different things to different organizations, and the mechanisms for communicating policy advice to government were weak (p. 3). Furthermore, the study concludes that the RDC lacked *formal* powers to exercise a function in developing policies or strategies for disadvantaged rural areas. The institutional apparatus created in Northern Ireland to deal with rural development is impressive. What this review illustrates, however, is how the lack of clarity about formal powers, and links with existing structures restricts effectiveness. It also leads to questions about the national commitment to rural development partnerships. If normal structures of governance continue to exist without engaging with the newly emerging partnerships, or without clearly established channels of communication, then partnerships occupy a very tenuous position.

The process and goals of rural development

Rural development, area-based development, and a term used more frequently in Northern Ireland, community development, all imply a style of development that attends to the *process* as well as the end *product* (see Matthews, 1995, p. 351). This is characterized by an emphasis on local

participation in the formulation and implementation of development objectives for an area, the attempt to integrate social as well as economic development, and a preference for developing indigenous skills.

The importance of economic development as a goal of rural development is clear in all analyses of the subject. There is a great deal more confusion about social and civic, or community development as a goal. More usually, the latter is seen as a process to a goal, and frequently it is justified as a means to the goal of economic development (Zeheri *et al.*, 1994; Johnson and Rasker, 1995). An evaluation of Northern Ireland's Rural Development Council illustrates this conflict between community development and capacity building as a process and as a goal, and the difficulties for organizations when the value of each is not made clear at the outset of a programme. The evaluation refers to criticisms that there was too much emphasis on the community development 'process', and insufficient attention to the 'product' of social and economic regeneration. It states that 'an underlying assumption was that the capacity building work of the RDC would produce a "pool" of groups and proposals which could be supported by main programmes' (LRDP review, pp. 9–10). At the end of a three year period though, the review found the majority of the organizations to be at a very early/early stage of development, and unable yet to access and manage major funding for development (pp. 2–3). However, the majority of the groups themselves placed stronger emphasis on social and community development than on economic development and so had quite different goals in mind. For many local groups community and social development is an end. This is not to suggest that they do not also recognize the importance of economic development. There is evidence to suggest that those groups who undertake economic development may be different from those that undertake social and civic development (Bryden *et al.*, 1996), largely because of the narrow focus of their funding sources. A Scottish evaluation found that in practice communities focused either around issues concerning employment, work and business enterprise, or around issues concerning quality of life such as health, youth, disadvantage, or the environment. This derived from their origins in links with particular funding agencies, with remits which precluded a more integrated approach. Thus, '[I]nitiatives which deal with both of these domains are much rarer' (Bryden *et al.*, 1996, p. 4).

Interestingly, the Rural Economic Development aspect of the Peace and Reconciliation Programme in Northern Ireland states as its first objective: 'to promote the economic and thus social regeneration of the communities in the worst affected rural areas'. Here we see economic development preceding social regeneration. The idea of a linear process remains, however, simply the order is reversed. The review of DANI's rural development strategy presents a converse process: firstly animation and capacity building (similar to the community development work carried out by the RDC), followed by early stages of development, and finally self-sustaining

development (DANI review, p. 39). The programmes then reflect a certain confusion about what comes first, probably reflecting the limitations of a linear concept of the process to begin with. Interestingly, the International Fund for Ireland tacitly acknowledged this problem when it introduced its Communities in Action Programme two years ago. The IFI stated that while it had focused on economic regeneration activities in the past, it also recognized that the social and community development sectors have important roles to play in revitalizing disadvantaged communities: 'given the nature and scale of deprivation experienced by these areas, people living in them are often unable to reap the benefits of economic development' (IFI pamphlet). The IFI have recognized that economic development alone is insufficient. The question remains, however, regarding the policy commitment to social and civic development goals, rather than social and civic development as part of the process to economic development.

A similar confusion exists in Scotland. In LEADER 1, some programmes emphasized *process* goals (e.g. the Western Isles, Skye and Lochalsh where the Co-ordinator described the main aim as being 'to change the way people think'), while those where LECs exerted a narrower influence focused more on job creation and other similar *outputs* (Ekos, 1997). Questions remain, then, not only about the status and sequence of social and community goals as against economic goals, and about process goals as against output goals, but also fundamentally about how either of these partnership initiatives can be regarded as *integrated* rural development.

Pre-development and time scale

Pre-development is a phase when local groups are animated, and a capacity is generated among local people to work purposefully in collective action (NESC, 1994, p. 164). A provision for animation is generally accepted as very important. Mannion (1996) points out that all of the actors, including local government and central government departments as well as rural development groups, need to be trained and prepared for development undertaken on a territorial basis. Otherwise the success of the process is jeopardized from the beginning.

Pre-development, as the term implies, is usually presented as a stage that precedes development (see Commins and Keane, 1994; NESC, 1994). It is about capacity building and animation. There are some difficulties with this view of pre-development. Frequently a time scale for pre-development is not specified. The RDC in Northern Ireland employed development workers with a brief of animation and capacity building. A review of the organization pointed out that the time scale required for the development model to work itself through in deprived rural communities was never stated. The review asks how long does it take a community development process to develop into a process of successful social and economic regeneration? Is it possible to produce strong local groups and quality plans and

proposals within a period of two to three years? Might the process of capacity building require a longer period, perhaps even ten years or more in some areas?

It is unclear how long there is, or should be, a policy commitment to animation and capacity building. This question has particular resonance when we consider the Peace and Reconciliation Programme in Northern Ireland. The stated objective of the Rural Regeneration Sub Programme is: 'to promote peace and reconciliation in rural areas by encouraging activities which bring the communities in these areas together and by helping to develop the rural economy'. The amount of time it can take to build up a sense of community immediately becomes apparent in such a context. The two communities in Northern Ireland do not have a history of working together. Indeed the opposite is the case; while sharing a geographical space, they live separate and distinct lives. Two types of youth clubs, two churches and church activities, two women's groups and so on is the norm in bounded rural areas in Northern Ireland. Anybody engaged in rural development in Northern Ireland immediately has to contend with the politics of space: to meet in the Orange Hall, or the GAA Hall (Gaelic Athletics Association) is a loaded decision, and will exclude a certain group of people. There is little history of a shared, neutral space. Meeting places are tied up with politics and identity, and people do not use the one that does not 'belong' to them. The Peace and Reconciliation Programme is providing a means of doing things differently. The most palpable change is the discussion and awareness in rural areas that it is possible to act together. However, it is going to take a very long time.

Rather than pre-development being regarded as a stage that precedes development, there is an argument for it continuing alongside development. In other words, there is a role for animation and capacity building even after collective action has arisen. This role relates to the ability of animators to engage groups who may be slow to participate in the development process. If the animators pull out when collective action materializes, it is likely that those who mobilized in a short period of time have relevant skills and experience of participation. Commins and Keane (1994, p. 171) argue that where LEADER groups do not take on a proactive role, they are supplementing the capital resources of those already prepared and able to start or expand an enterprise. Those who do not have a history of involvement, or relevant skills, will require more capacity building, and continuing animation. This is clear in Northern Ireland, where many women's groups and individual women need increased animation and capacity building to reach the stage that other actors in the local area have achieved more quickly. This point does not only relate to groups in rural areas, but also to differences between rural areas. Some areas have a greater history of local, collective action (social capital) and this immediately places them in a better position to benefit from rural development programmes. In Northern Ireland this has a political dimension. Development workers have long noted the

greater ease of initiating participatory development programmes in catholic/nationalist areas (McDonagh, 1996). These areas have typically felt distrustful of the state, and have been more willing to undertake self-help activities and give voluntary labour. In Northern Ireland, protestant/unionist communities need greater animation and capacity building and the time scale allowed for this process in such communities might need to be longer. Is there the political commitment to what might be a very lengthy process, with little visible 'output'? And is the length of this process adequately recognized?

The relationship to mainstream programmes

A final, outstanding issue is that of the relationship between integrated rural development programmes and the mainstream programmes which dominate in expenditure terms, and which have become increasingly centralized in recent years. Commins and Keane (1994) show that in Ireland (and we would argue elsewhere) the policy framework is still 'distinctly and strongly sectoral' such that a number of measures for local area rural development have emerged in a compartmentalized form from individual sectoral perspectives. Curtin, Haase and Tovey (1997) suggest that 'the absence of an adequate mechanism for horizontal coordination of programmes and partnerships at the local level and vertical coordination between agencies at the local, regional and national levels is likely to result in a considerable degree of deadweight (activity which would have occurred anyway) and displacement of existing activity.' They argue that local authorities should be made the core administrative organization for coordinating local and rural development through partnerships of the public, private and voluntary sectors. Councils would thus become 'the focus for the horizontal coordination of local groups and the vertical links with national administration', while also providing permanence and stability. The introduction of 'community planning' in every local authority area in Scotland during 1999 may offer a mechanism of achieving this in future.

Apart from compartmentalization, the other major weakness which follows from a failure to synergize with mainstream programmes is that integrated rural development initiatives may not survive after the initial funding period. Community development programmes are characterized by their temporary nature (Curtin, Haase and Tovey, 1997). Very few LEADER groups in the UK are likely to continue beyond the current funding, especially since the EU Commission envisages only 375 LAGs in LEADER+, compared to 930 in LEADER 2. And, as Shortall (1994) argues, 'if on the withdrawal of funding there is no significant change in how [governance structures] are organised, then what happened was not a genuine re-thinking and re-ordering on the basis of local and regional authority, but a short-term measure.'

Conclusions

To conclude, integrated rural development which pursues an approach emphasizing animation, capacity-building, community involvement and partnership became the orthodoxy during the 1990s, and is now espoused by the European Commission and by national governments within the UK. We have considered some of the issues that arise in practice.

The practice of rural development in Northern Ireland raises the same issues as rural development practice elsewhere in the UK, but some of the issues have a sharper edge. There is some suggestion that an approach organized through decentralized rural development partnerships represents a new form of governance (NESC, 1994). While this is questionable in itself, it raises enormous questions regarding the legitimacy of these partnerships, especially where this might be at the expense of local government. Following Jones and Stewart (1992), the replacement of the elected by the selected in rural Scotland has been characterized as 'the new rural magistracy' (Lloyd, 1995). This takes different forms in Scotland and in Northern Ireland, where the legitimacy of initiatives associated with LECs and district councils respectively is questioned. The relationship with local and national government has not been adequately addressed in either case. If there are not clear, formal links, integrated rural development partnerships are likely to be ephemeral, and disappear with the EU funding that is responsible for their creation.

In neither Northern Ireland nor the remainder of the UK is it clear what is valued as a *goal* of rural development, and what is considered to be part of the *process*. The value of social and civic development in their own right remains to be established. Many development programmes have a linear understanding of the relationship between economic and social development, with one leading to the other. The relative commitment to each is not always clear, and nor is the process by which one might lead to the other. Separating responsibilities for social and economic goals calls into question the extent to which such initiatives can be regarded as *integrated* rural development at all.

The need to outline a time scale for capacity building and animation is an issue throughout the UK, but is particularly glaring in the context of Northern Ireland. This is a region where overcoming cultural and political divisions within rural areas will take an especially long time. The lack of a stated time scale sometimes causes doubt about whether there is an adequate understanding of the length of time that might be required. Are rural development programmes committed to shorter term output goals, or a longer term, and more deep-seated, process? How does time-scale interact with objectives of social inclusion?

Perhaps what rural development programmes in Northern Ireland illustrate most clearly is their inability to tackle larger political problems. The

divisions in rural areas in Northern Ireland did not arise because of a lack of economic or social development. They are a reflection of a much greater problem, that cross-community activity in rural areas or economic and social regeneration alone cannot resolve.

In sum, a number of key issues are outstanding for integrated rural development practice. The issues most prevalent in Northern Ireland and Scotland are the legitimacy of rural development groups, the need to clarify the process and goals of rural development, the necessity of establishing the commitment and time scale for animation and capacity building and finally, the role the state will undertake to address the larger questions that are beyond the capacity of rural areas.

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