

In-Active citizenship and the depoliticisation of community development in Ireland

Niamh Gaynor¹

¹ Niamh Gaynor, School of Law and Government, Dublin City University, Glasnevin, Dublin 9, Ireland. niamh.gaynor@dcu.ie.

Abstract: At a time of rising stress for communities, families and individuals coupled with a growing disillusionment with government, the concept of ‘active citizenship’ has arrived as a salve to many of the social ills of our time. Emphasising citizen’s own responsibilities, and espousing values of solidarity, community and neighbourliness, active citizenship embodies all that is good, rendering it somewhat immune from criticism. While agreeing that community values of solidarity and neighbourliness are indeed critical, this paper takes issue with what it argues is a significant revisioning of the three core concepts embodied within active citizenship - citizenship, social capital and community development - and argues that active citizenship, as it is currently promoted by state and select civil society organisations alike, substitutes self-help for redistribution and self-reliance for state accountability, in the process depoliticising the principles and practice of community development and denying community actors a voice in their own development.

Introduction: What’s active about ‘Active Citizenship’?

The concept of ‘active citizenship’, in particular as applied to the sphere of community development, has gained much currency in community discourse and practice in Ireland. This is perhaps not surprising. Enveloped in wholesomely positive values such as cooperation, cohesion, caring and neighbourliness, and evoking heart-warming ideals of belonging and solidarity, the idea appears all at once virtuous, worthy and highly seductive. And seductive it has proven. With the much celebrated Celtic Tiger presiding over a period of growing marginalisation, stress and, for some, despair (see Jacobson and Kirby, 2006, Hardiman, McCashin and Payne, 2004 and Kirby, 2004 for detailed accounts of the growing socio-political polarisation and inequality that has characterised the Celtic Tiger period), state and civic actors alike have embraced the concept as offering a salve to a range of social ills, from the promotion of physical and mental health and well-being² to overcoming violence³. Active citizenship appears a panacea for dealing with much of the social fallout of our time.

The principles behind the concept are quite straightforward. Embraced within a virtuous triad including social capital and community development, and encapsulated by the neat slogan ‘Together, We’re Better’, the principal idea is that by working

² Sports bodies campaign for charitable status under new Bill’, *The Irish Times*, Thursday, November 27th, 2008

³ ‘Prelate (Catholic Archbishop Diarmuid Martin) calls for community cohesion and active citizenship to overcome violence’, *The Irish Times*, Tuesday, October 2nd, 2007.

together in a spirit of neighbourliness and solidarity, we can improve both our own lives and those around us. As the former Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern⁴ puts it,

*At the heart of active citizenship is that sense of shared values, of belonging to the community and of pride in our place and our country...It [active citizenship] is accepting a responsibility to help others and being happy to contribute to improve the quality of life of those less fortunate than ourselves.*⁵

This particular discourse has been vigorously promoted by state and select civic actors alike through a wide-ranging active citizenship campaign conducted by a Task Force of select state and civic actors appointed by Bertie Ahern in April 2006 for this purpose. Narrowly equating active citizenship with volunteering and ‘helping out’ in local communities, this campaign has gained considerable momentum as it has percolated through towns, villages and communities throughout the country.

Active citizenship, as promoted through this campaign calls us to action in solidarity with those most marginalised. All well and good. However, something is missing. While, through the agency of community development, active citizenship aims at mobilising local communities to ‘volunteer and help out’ (Taskforce, 2007a: 6), it does not aim at mobilising them to query, question and analyse why this is necessary. While we are told that ‘*we cannot afford to ignore the pressures brought by modern lifestyles and the consumer culture*’⁶, the reasons for these pressures are not up for discussion.

While wholeheartedly agreeing with the concept’s central tenets of the need for engaged and active communities, this paper argues that the concept of active citizenship, as it is contemporaneously promoted and understood, constitutes a highly selective rendering of the interrelated concepts of citizenship, social capital and community development. Specifically, it is argued that a conceptual revisioning has occurred, where active citizenship is employed in a manner which encourages

⁴ Taoiseach (Prime Minister) from 1997-2008.

⁵ Speech by an Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern TD, at the first regional seminar of the Taskforce [on active citizenship] (nd), <http://www.activecitizenship.ie/index.asp?locID=12&docID=52>, accessed January 5th, 2009.

⁶ Idem.

communities to overcome growing deficits in infrastructure and services without questioning the reasons for these. Put differently, it substitutes self-help for redistribution, self-reliance for state accountability, in the process contributing towards an ongoing depoliticisation of the principles and practice of community development and affording ‘ordinary’ people little say over the direction of their country and their lives. Moreover, in glossing over the contradictions and conflicts inherent in communities, it is argued that active citizenship, as it is currently promulgated, negates the possibility that community actions of ‘volunteering and helping out’, while benefiting one section of the community, may well lead to the exclusion and further marginalisation of others.

While this paper focuses specifically on the Irish context, its central argument – which highlights more broadly accepted narrow conceptions of the core associated concept of social capital – has significance far beyond Ireland. In an increasingly polarised world, where people marginalisation and alienation at political, as well as social and economic levels is on the rise, there is a need to critically interrogate concepts and strategies which seek to dilute peoples’ voices and power over the directions and courses of their lives.

The argument is developed as follows. First, tracing the dominant discourse of active citizenship associated with the work of the Task Force from 2006 to the present, I demonstrate its highly apolitical nature with its narrow focus on harnessing voluntary endeavour whilst seeking to build goodwill and neighbourly solidarity within local communities. I then go on to explore the theoretical origins and developments of the three core concepts of ‘citizenship’, ‘social capital’ and ‘community development’. On the concept of citizenship, I highlight the balance between rights and duties, and note that traditions emphasising duties include an explicitly political dimension, affording people a voice in decisions and choices affecting their future. Returning to the seminal but now often ignored work of Pierre Bourdieu on social capital, I re-introduce the issue of power and highlight how social capital possessed by one section of a community can serve to marginalise others. Having thus highlighted the highly selective appropriation and promotion of these three core concepts, I then go on to explore the context for this revisioning. Resituating the local (communities) within the global and, drawing on both the Irish state’s own vision of community

development and Manuel Castells' theorisation of a 'network state', I argue that active citizenship, as it is currently popularly promulgated, constitutes a mechanism through which the state, facing challenges to its legitimacy as its role in maintaining existing levels of social protection is undermined, attempts to rebuild public legitimacy and support employing the active citizenship project through the aegis of community development. I conclude by arguing that, at a time when the significant failings of the globalised 'growth and competitiveness at all costs' development model are clear to all, there is a need for community development actors and activists to recolonise the space offered by active citizenship, re-inserting power and politics into the spirit and practice of community development and recovering their voices in articulating the contours and directions of their futures and that of their communities.

Depoliticising community development: State and civic discourses on active citizenship and community development

The Irish state has long seen community development as an apolitical space devoted to the nurturing of local self-help and self-reliance (this is clearly laid out in the White Paper on the community and voluntary sector published in 2000 – see Ireland 2000: 23). This view has found considerable institutional support from within the community and voluntary sector with a wide range of partnership arrangements bringing attractive financial reward to select civic actors. The more recent active citizenship campaign represents yet another step in this process. Enveloped in a powerful ideological cloak embodying all that is good and wholesome, it proves perhaps even more potent than the financial inducements targeted at more formalised groups heretofore. Being also more cost-effective than financial support, its tentacles have spread widely across all levels of society.

Fronted by the well-respected Mary Davis, CEO of the Special Olympics Council in 2003 (when Ireland hosted the event which generated a wave of goodwill throughout the country), the active citizenship campaign officially commenced in April 2006 with the appointment of a Task Force of key public figures mandated to examine the status of active citizenship nationwide. The inevitable 'consultation process' which followed in fact constituted a very efficient mechanism of disseminating a particular, and highly selective view, of the concept throughout society. From the outset, the

concepts of active citizenship, civic engagement and volunteering were employed interchangeably in both the documentation prepared by the Task Force and by leaders of public seminars on the campaign with no discernible distinction. In a strategy which made a mockery of the notion of open consultation, seminars were held nationwide to ‘explain’ the concept, while the questionnaire (distributed widely to civic groups throughout the country) was accompanied by a ‘public consultation paper’ which neatly and succinctly equated active citizenship with volunteering. The paper begins with an introduction from Mary Davis evoking the virtuous, heart-warming ideals that underpinned the 2003 Special Olympics event.

The 2003 Special Olympics Games was one of the most recent and most dramatic examples of the depth and wealth of civic spirit that still exists in Ireland today. It was a striking example of the willingness of people from all walks of life to give their time, talent and enthusiasm to community endeavour... I am keenly aware that in today's society the most difficult thing for people to give is their time. However, as the Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern T.D., recently pointed out 'the quality of life in society and the ultimate health of our communities depends on the willingness of people to become involved and active.'... In short it is our belief that 'Together, We're Better'.
(Task Force, 2006: 2)

The definition of active citizenship which follows within this key paper, mirroring that within a broader concept paper produced thereafter (2007a), while making reference to an element known as ‘civic participation’, restricts this participation to engagement with the institutions of formal politics (voting, consulting a TD, and attending (not participating, or engaging with, and certainly not organising) a public meeting). The two other elements of the definition provided both relate directly to volunteering. Having thus set out some very narrow contours of what constitutes active citizenship, the first question in the consultation is posed as follows, ‘*For you, what does it mean to be an ‘active citizen’?*’ The answer, following what has gone before, is clearly someone who volunteers within their local community, and perhaps also who votes, consults their TD or attends the odd public meeting. The same format is provided throughout this key document, with a preface setting out select parameters for each section foreclosing possibilities for wider responses to the ensuing questions. Thus, the section entitled ‘*What barriers are there to ‘active citizenship’?*’ focuses exclusively on time available for volunteering, with the two ensuing questions focusing on factors influencing volunteering rates. There are separate sections each

on young people, older people, people from the business community, from the media, and, of course, from community and voluntary organisations. The exclusive focus within all of these is on increasing volunteering among these groups. Even the elderly are not to be afforded a well-deserved rest ‘*Given growing awareness of demographic changes, there may be scope for encouraging more active engagement by older people*’... (question) ‘*How do you think older people can be encouraged and supported to participate more actively in community and society?*’.

This narrow and almost exclusive equation of active citizenship with volunteering and ‘helping out’ is replicated across a range of other documents associated with the Task Force. Thus, six of the eleven tables providing a statistical overview of active citizenship in Ireland (2007b) provide data on volunteering, with the remaining tables exploring the wider context for this data. The Report of the Task Force, arising from their consultation process, unsurprisingly also focuses in this area with the unsurprising conclusion that ‘*Voluntary and community organisations are the backbone of active citizenship, with the ability to achieve trust, cohesion and confidence in ways that governments cannot.*’ (2007c: 43). The Report furthermore notes (2007c: 44) that ‘*Active citizenship will not happen by itself and will require a concerted and consistent effort to address current obstacles to it...*’. With the establishment of an Office of Active Citizenship in 2008, together with the assignment of special responsibility for active citizenship to the Minister of State within the Department of an Taoiseach, Pat Carey, as well as the establishment of a Steering Committee in the area, a concerted state-civic effort to develop and consolidate current efforts is now underway. The narrow equation of active citizenship with volunteering and local civic engagement in a decidedly apolitical sense persists. As Minister Carey notes in his Forward to the recent Progress Report on the campaign ‘*The Government is committed to supporting communities to sustain and strengthen their capacity to access the significant potential we have in this country to create better neighbourhoods through partnership.*’ (Task Force, 2009: 7 – emphasis added). As we will now see, this narrow equation of active citizenship with volunteering, ‘helping out’, and ‘doing good’ represents a highly selective rendering of the interrelated concepts of citizenship, social capital and community development, ignoring the conflicts inherent in increasingly diverse communities, the potential for exclusion, and the central tenets of citizenship.

Citizenship, social capital and community development: From roots to revisionism

Citizenship: Reinserting the political

Citizenship is a rather amorphous concept and one which proves difficult to pin down definitely. Academic literature on citizenship often distinguishes between liberal, communitarian and civic republican traditions (see for example Jones and Gaventa, 2002). Classical liberal theories promote the idea of universal rights, viewing the role of the state as being the protection of citizens in the exercise of their rights. Communitarians, taking issue with the concept of the ‘independent’ or ‘self-interested’ citizen, argue that an individual’s sense of identity is produced only through relations with others in their community. Community belonging and social-embeddedness are thus at the heart of communitarian theory and it is easy to see how closely this aligns with community development. Civic republicanism, the tradition explicitly associated with active citizenship (see Task Force, 2007a: 3-4), is underpinned by a concern with individual obligations to participate in communal affairs. Such participation is broadly understood to include social, political and economic participation, thus suggesting a more active notion of citizenship - one which recognises the agency of people and communities to shape their own futures. This political dimension is critical and much contemporary civic republican writing promotes deliberative forms of democracy – political fora where people come together to debate and exchange views on diverse conceptions of the ‘public good’ (see Cohen, 1989, Habermas, 1990, Fishkin and Laslett, 2003). Thus citizenship, in its manifold theoretical forms, embodies a distinct political dimension. Primary among the many rights encompassed within the concept, is the right of individuals and communities to participate and have a voice in plans, strategies and decisions affecting their futures.

Social capital: ‘Missing link’ or instrument of exclusion?

Heralded by one World Bank expert as ‘*the missing link in development*’ (Grootaert, 1998), and by Ireland’s former Taoiseach as ‘*hugely relevant to what’s going on here*’

[in Ireland]’⁷, social capital is identified by the Task Force on Active Citizenship as the ‘close relation’ of active citizenship (Task Force, 2007a: 7).

Most often associated with the work of Robert Putnam and his influential publication *Bowling Alone* (Putnam, 2000), social capital has been defined as the resource or asset resulting from voluntary associations and networks within society. Building on his study of development disparities between northern and southern Italy, wherein social capital is identified as the key to development (Putnam, 1993), Putnam transferred his analysis to the United States arguing that, as civic associational life declines (i.e. as people go bowling alone), so too does a stock of capital capable of addressing the nation’s economic and social malaise. Thus, for Putnam, the trust and well-being engendered by associational life constitutes an asset which can contribute to addressing economic and social issues.

Stocks of social capital such as trust, norms, and networks, tend to be self reinforcing and cumulative. Virtuous circles result in social equilibria with high levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civil engagement, and collective well-being...

(Putnam, 1993: 177)

Putnam’s work in this area has attracted considerable attention from academics and policy makers alike, most particularly in the US, but also in Ireland. The World Bank has a dedicated website on the topic where it is asserted that ‘...*social cohesion – social capital – is critical for poverty alleviation and sustainable human and economic development.*’⁸. The former Taoiseach has described Putnam as ‘*an extraordinary genius*’⁹, and, in September 2005, Robert Putnam, who was invited to come and address the Irish parliamentary party on the topic, noted that ‘*there is no political leader anywhere in the world who has had the sustained interest in the issue of social capital as the Taoiseach*’¹⁰.

⁷ “Meeting at the crossroads” *The Irish Times*, September 3rd, 2005.

⁸ <http://www1.worldbank.org/prem/poverty/scapital/index.htm>, accessed 11th January, 2007.

⁹ “Harvard professor my guru since early 1990s, says Ahern”, Interview with Taoiseach Bertie Ahern *The Irish Times*, 3rd September, 2005.

¹⁰ Cited in Brennock, Mark, “Change in outlook to work and new citizens urged”, *The Irish Times*, 6th September, 2005.

Putnam's concept of social capital has attracted some harsh critiques however. First, it is argued that the concept of social capital and the closely related idea of trust serve to de-politicise social relations and the development context. Harriss (2002), in particular, makes this case in relation to the adoption and use of the concept by the World Bank. He returns to Bourdieu's earlier (and now largely ignored) work in this area which theorises social capital not as an attribute of society as a whole, but rather as an aspect of the differentiation of classes. Social capital thus, following Bourdieu's theory, constitutes an instrument of power. Social capital for one group of people may result in the exclusion of others. Thus, according to Bourdieu, *'The field of power is a "field of forces" defined by the structure of the existing balance of forces between forms of power, or between different species of capital.'* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 76). Thus, the possession or otherwise of 'stocks' of social capital defines the social position of actors and hence their control over social resources (see also Bourdieu, 1986). Consequently social capital can produce and/or reproduce social inequality, both in material terms and ideologically.

The second main charge fuelled against popular conceptions of social capital highlights its failure to critically engage with dominant socio-economic norms. It is argued that introducing social capital as the solution to development ills draws attention away from the economic and social policies that cause those ills, thereby leaving the underlying framework intact. Economist Ben Fine, bemoaning the incursion of economics into the social sciences, argues that *'the reintroduction of the social has the troubling dual aspect both of rhetorically smoothing the acceptance of at most marginally altered economic policies and of broadening the scope of justifiable intervention from the economic to the social in order to ensure policies are successful'* (2001: 20). A similar point is made within an Irish context by Powell and Geoghegan (2004) who stress that it is important to connect civic engagement with democratic inclusion in the public sphere. They argue that, while democracy is the voice of society, social capital is conceptually disconnected from it. This brings us to the third element in the conceptual triad – community development and its role vis-à-vis active citizenship.

Community development: consensus, conflict or something in between?

Community development in Ireland certainly defies many attempts at classification, in both its origins and its development. Shaw (2008: 26), speaking of community development in the UK, notes that *'the contradictory provenance of community development with its roots in both benevolent welfare paternalism and autonomous working class struggle has created a curiously hybrid practice, which has awkwardly (and sometimes unconvincingly) embodied both of these meanings simultaneously'*. Such complexity also characterises the Irish community development terrain where a dichotomy is also apparent with, on the one hand, a range of more professionalised groups acting in partnership with the state as its 'softer arm', providing a range of local services in attempts to mitigate the social fallout of the Celtic Tiger, and, on the other, more radical, transformatory groups seeking to transform the very structures and processes that give rise to this fallout. A third, less visible category may also be identified across the country however. Not necessarily linked to any formal, externally-funded groups, this category comprises the more 'ordinary' people, the self-organisers who, with a quiet determination, yet sometimes a palpable frustration and anger at significant developmental shortcomings, are busy redressing redistributive failures and inequalities within their own communities. These are the local sports club leaders, the 'new community' leaders, the youth club coordinators etc..., and it is at these people, community developers in a very real sense, that the active citizenship campaign, promoted on an ideological rather than financial basis – and all the more potent for that – appears specifically targeted.

As promoted and promulgated by state and select civic actors alike, the active citizenship campaign therefore entails a conceptual revisioning of the allied concepts of citizenship, social capital and community development, neatly glossing over the conflicts and contradictions inherent in the country's increasingly diverse communities, ignoring the divisive and exclusionary aspects of social capital, and transforming active citizenship from *'the right to have rights'* as Isin and Wood (1999) put it, to an apolitical, disembodied project of self-help and self-reliance. In a rapidly transformed Ireland, the key question is why. To answer this question and thus understand more comprehensively the conceptual revisioning that is taking place under the guise of active citizenship, we need to look beyond our own communities to our situation within the wider global economy. It is to these rapidly changed circumstances we now turn.

Understanding conceptual revisionism: Ireland's network state and the global economy

Foreign Policy's globalization index has consistently ranked Ireland among the top five most globalized economies in the world (A.T. Kearney Inc./ Foreign Policy, 2005, 2006, 2007). Fuelled by a range of favorable tax incentives, together with a relatively low cost base, Ireland, despite the global economic downturn, remains one of the largest global recipients of foreign direct investment on a per capita basis (Rios-Morales and Brennan, 2008). Viewing such economic developments from a political perspective, Held et al (1999: 16) define globalisation as '*a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions... generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power*'. The work of Held et al (1999), Castells (2004), Carnoy and Castells (2001) and Held and McGrew (2003) argues that contemporary globalisation invites a significant rethinking of democratic theory, most especially in respect of traditional accounts of liberal democracy and the role and influence of both the state and civil society therein.

Two main issues are readily apparent from these developments. The first is that states' roles and monopolies of power have significantly altered. While once states exercised exclusive political authority within their national boundaries, delivering fundamental goods and services to their citizens, they now share this authority with networks of international agencies and institutions including bodies such as the European Union (EU), the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and transnational business corporations. Thus, while the Irish state, as a strongly capitalist state, has long negotiated its authority with domestic capitalist interests, this authority is now far more widely and broadly dispersed. The second implication arises inevitably from the first. With state authority declining within this widening web wherein the '*visible presence of rule*' is replaced with the '*invisible government*' of corporations, banks and international organisations (Held and McGrew, 2003: 10), both state sovereignty and legitimacy are challenged. With national governments now sharing power and authority with international forces, their ability to carry out their traditional functions is seriously compromised and undermined.

Sovereignty is challenged because the political authority of states is displaced and compromised by regional and global power systems, political, economic and cultural. State legitimacy is at issue because with greater regional and global interdependence, states cannot deliver fundamental goods and services to their citizens.

Held and McGrew (2003: 13)

Ireland corresponds closely to these conceptualisations. The country's high level of dependence on foreign direct investment leaves it highly exposed to the vagaries of global financial markets and mobile capital (O'Hearn, 1999, Kirby, 2004). Within this context the state's traditional role and source of legitimacy in maintaining existing levels of social protection in delivering fundamental goods and services to its citizens is challenged (see Kirby, 2004). This is further exacerbated by the congruence of globalisation with growing levels of inequality within Irish society (see Jacobson and Kirby, 2006, Hardiman, McCashin and Payne, 2004 and Kirby, 2004) as elsewhere (Castells, 2004, UNDP, 1999).

Allied to this is a growing disillusionment with political leadership as evidenced in falling voting rates (Laver, 2005) and widespread evidence of political corruption (Collins and Quinlivan, 2005). A growing disillusionment with the state as protector and guarantor of basic rights is evident within current public discourse. An *Irish Times / MRBI* poll conducted in 2007 in the run up to the last national elections indicated that the Irish public's primary consideration was their deteriorating quality of life¹¹. Within this context a key question becomes – what strategy does the Irish state employ to maintain and build its legitimacy?

In the second volume of his expansive three-volume study of the transformation of state-societal relations, Manuel Castells (2004) posits that states react to the legitimacy crisis engendered by globalisation by re-configuring themselves along two axes in order to try to accommodate the new pressures and demands exacted by their insertion into the global political economy and rebuild legitimacy domestically. On the one hand, states work together with other states to build international, supra-national and co-national institutions (e.g. the EU, WTO, IMF and World Bank), in

¹¹ "Key Issues for the Electorate", *The Irish Times*, May 20th, 2007.

order to try to manage the process of globalisation that threatens to overwhelm individual states (2004: 323-332). Also along this outward axis, states seek to attract international investment and foreign capital in order to foster growth and productivity domestically (2004: 364-366).

On the other hand, states attempt to regain legitimacy domestically and represent the increasing social diversity of their constituencies through processes of decentralisation and the devolution of power and resources nationally (Castells, 2004: 340) in attempts to improve the living standards for the large majority of the population. This is achieved by building 'civil society' at local level, both formally, through NGOs and community groups, and informally. In a paper with Martin Carnoy, Castells argues that *'the dramatic expansion of non-governmental organisations around the world, most of them subsidised or supported by the state, can be interpreted as the extension of the state into civil society in an attempt to diffuse conflict and increase legitimacy by shifting resources and responsibility to the grassroots.'* (Carnoy and Castells, 2001: 13).

The result of this re-configuration, following Castells' theorisation, is a new form of state, a '*network state*' which is characterised by outward and inward relations wherein nation-states find themselves integrated outward into global networks of accumulation and domination, while, at the same time, attempting to respond to increasing pressures and demands engendered by the global development project from their national populaces. Castells' idea of the network state helps us understand the rationale and thinking behind the Irish state's drive for active citizenship. Deeply embedded in the global economy, the state has neither the power nor the resources to address the growing inequalities this global development project has engendered. As Allen (2008) points out, Ireland has the lowest level of spending on social protection in the EU as state resources are channelled into attracting and maintaining foreign investment.

With its role as social protector thus compromised, the Irish state is seeking to transfer this role to the community and voluntary sector through the fostering of self-help initiatives within local communities. This is laid out in the government's White Paper published in 2000 (Ireland, 2000: 23, paragraphs 3.13-3.14). Within this paper, the

State is described as *'not the answer to every problem, but just one player among others'* (2000: 9), with the government's vision of the community and voluntary sector described as being *'one which encourages people and communities to look after their own needs – very often in partnership with statutory agencies – but without depending on the state to meet all needs'* (2000: 10). With a firm focus (in both policy and funding terms) on harnessing community energy, resources and goodwill, in other words in attempting to minimise the social fallout of the global development project, the Irish state is not devolving power as Castells suggests however. On the contrary, in exhorting communities to address their own needs while simultaneously denying them a voice in querying how these needs have come about, the state is effectively depoliticising the community sphere. It is by no means alone in this however. In their political and professional rapprochements to the state, a range of civic organisations have become complicit in supporting this depoliticisation. Bolstered by the political and financial capital gained through such relations, the core political tenets of community development appear to be lost. With a powerful and well-resourced range of actors, state and civic alike, actively de-activating citizenship around the country, control and decisions over development policy – policy constrained within the confines of the broader global financial architecture – remain in Dublin while communities suffering the brunt of these decisions are urged to simply get on with it. In ignoring the explicitly political dimensions of citizenship and glossing over the socially divisive potential of efforts to enhance social capital, the recent campaign for active citizenship is a misnomer in that, in reality, it seeks to de-activate citizenship (in the republican tradition of the concept), in the process depoliticising the community sector.

Conclusion

While, for a period, the hyperbole of the Celtic Tiger era successfully drowned growing empirical evidence of growing inequality and marginalisation, reducing it at best to murmured concerns about so-called 'supply-side' issues threatening our much celebrated growth, the global financial crisis has revealed the exceedingly shaky foundations upon which such hyperbole was based. With unprecedented job losses and associated pressures and stress affecting communities across the country all is clearly not well, nor has it been for some time. At this moment in time, when the significant failings of the current development model are clear to all, there is an

urgent need for community development actors and activists at all levels to recolonise the space offered by active citizenship, re-inserting power and politics into the spirit and practice of community development and recovering their voices in articulating the contours and directions of their and all our futures.

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