

**The context for intercultural community development in Europe
today**

Conference Discussion Paper

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European Year of
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Bliain Eorpach na
Dialóige Idirchultúrtha



Preface

At a time when issues such as migration, poverty, social inclusion and human rights are transforming both urban and rural European contexts, identifying the principles and challenges for Intercultural Community Development practice has never been as important. Community development in the 21st century is taking place in a greatly changed environment. Cultural diversity, globalisation and increased mobility within states have directly impacted on social economic and cultural ways of life in European states, to create a more diverse Europe.

The question arises as to whether an Intercultural dimension to community development exists and if so, what impact will it have on human rights of migrants and ethnic and indigenous communities. Intercultural community development has the potential to interface in these new environments regardless of whether it goes by the name of community action, capacity building, or the capability approach.

This paper will address these issues in light of the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, which recognises Europe's cultural diversity as a unique advantage. This European Year of Intercultural Dialogue provides an opportunity to critically appraise the application of community development principles and practices in the now enlarged Europe and its border territories.

This document will be used as guiding point in facilitated conversations of a Networking and Discovery Café organised to take place as part of the Conference.

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Conference Inter Agency Planning Group

Together in Diversity

The context for intercultural community development in Europe today

Community development is taking place in a rapidly changing context. Globalisation and increased mobility are having significant impacts on social, economic and cultural ways of life in both the Global 'North' and the 'Global South'. As the crisis in banking systems has been so graphically illustrating, civil society organisations, including trade unions, face new challenges in an evidently more uncertain world. Economic shock waves can and do spread across national boundaries more speedily than ever, bringing enhanced risks of poverty and social exclusion, together with the associated risks of social dislocation and conflict, threatening sustainable livelihoods and well-being in increasingly competitive environments. These changes are having major impacts upon communities, posing the risk of further polarisation and the exacerbation of social tensions within and between communities. There is an even greater need, then, to counteract these threats through the pursuit of a European Social Agenda offering social justice, equality, solidarity and human rights to all. This is a particularly significant time to be addressing these issues, given the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

This paper sets out to summarise these changes as they can be may be expected to impact upon the context for community development. What new challenges are being posed? And most importantly, what might intercultural community development approaches and practices offer in response, focussing upon learning and sharing across different cultures based upon mutual respect for diversity and difference? How might community development contribute to the pursuit of such a European Social Agenda?

Globalisation, migration and population churn

Communities are tending to become increasingly diverse. As social scientists have been pointing out 'People today are exposed to 'foreigners' to a degree and on a scale never before seen in history' (van der Pijl, 2007. vii). Of course peoples moved and encountered other peoples in the past, from the tribal encounters of ancient times to more recent migrations across Europe and beyond, over the past millennium (van der Pijl, 2007). But this is an increasing phenomenon, and one that has been gathering momentum in recent years, with increasing globalisation.

The term 'globalisation' represents a contested concept, with varying definitions depending upon differing perspectives and approaches (Cohen and Kennedy, 2000, Sklair, 2002). To unpack these would be beyond the scope of this particular paper. A minimum definition, as proposed by Tarrow (Tarrow, 2005) emphasises the increasing velocity and volume in the flux of capital, goods, information, ideals, people and forces connecting actors between countries, impacting upon the political and cultural, as well as the economic spheres. The point to emphasise in the context of this paper, then, is simply this – that globalisation has been associated with unprecedented migratory pressures in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. People have been moving in search of sustainable livelihoods – or fleeing in search of refuge from the consequences of disasters whether natural or man made. The effects have been momentous, whether politically, socially and/or culturally.

We are constantly being reminded that the globe we inhabit is becoming smaller and more integrated in many ways, it has been argued, yet we are also 'witnessing a rebirth of ethnic nationalism, or religious fundamentalisms and of group antagonisms which were thought to have been long buried' (Smith, 1995, 1-3). Since the mid nineties, 'community cohesion' has

become identified as a major challenge for public policy, however 'community cohesion' is being defined or framed. And this was before the attack on the Twin Towers in New York, the bombings in Madrid and in London and the so-called 'War on Terror'.

People continue to move within and between states, whether to escape the effects of war, famine, flood, drought, ethnic, religious or political persecution or whether to seek new opportunities for education and employment – or some combination of the above. Forced displacements, as measured by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees' statistics on refugee trends (www.unhcr.org), have begun to rise again, - following some falls in recent years - reaching some 10 million in 2007, the highest in five years. Overall, industrialised nations have been receiving fewer applications for asylum however (although there have been variations between countries in terms of the numbers of applications and the numbers actually accepted as refugees). Increasing numbers of those displaced have actually been displaced as a result of major development projects such as dams or fleeing in search of safety from violence within the borders of their own countries, with an estimated 24.5 million civilians, mostly women and children, internally displaced in 2007. The Global South has actually been increasingly affected, then, rather than the industrialised North. Despite these facts, however, myths, negative stereotypes and popular fears about there being 'floods of refugees and asylum seekers' persist, too often amplified by the tabloid press in industrialised countries such as Britain. Migrant workers may be simultaneously blamed for taking jobs away from established residents AND for 'scrounging' by living off welfare benefits for the unemployed.

Meanwhile economic migration has also been increasing in recent years, as people move in search of better employment opportunities. Since the accession of a number of East and Central European states (2004) there have been significant shifts across the enlarged European Union, with an estimated three quarters of a million migrants coming from Poland to Britain for example (almost certainly a considerable under estimate, in fact). Too often these newcomers have also experienced exploitation, discrimination and social exclusion (Spencer et al, 2007). Far from benefiting from unfair advantages, as the less responsible sections of the media have been suggesting these migrants have been disproportionately likely to be in low-skilled jobs (whatever their actual qualifications), living in poor housing conditions and lacking effective access to services (Markova and Black, 2007).

Despite these facts, however, there have been disturbing cases of social tensions when established communities, including more established minority communities, have come to blame newcomers for their problems in accessing social housing and other services themselves – situations that risk being exploited by political groupings of the extreme Right. It is important not to exaggerate the scale of such tensions. As the British Commission on Integration and Cohesion pointed out, in 2007, over 80% of those who responded to the British Citizenship Survey agreed with the view that their local area was a place where people from different backgrounds got on well together (COIC, 2007). But there are serious issues to be addressed all the same. These are issues to be faced across Europe, in fact (see the European Network Against Racism Concept Paper, 'Framing a Positive Approach to Migration', 2008).

In summary then, communities have been changing rapidly, in recent years. Increasing globalisation has been accompanied by increasing movements of peoples within and across national boundaries, for whatever reasons (including reasons associated with the impact of globalisation, exacerbating conflicts across the globe). This has been leading to super diversity and population churn. As Robert Putnam, that controversial, but much quoted, social scientist has reflected 'One of the most important challenges facing modern societies, and at the same time, one of the most significant opportunities, is the increase in ethnic and social heterogeneity in virtually all advanced countries. The most certain prediction that we can make about almost any modern society is that it will be more diverse a generation from now than it is today' (Putnam, 2007. 137).

Case Study – S.T.E.P. South Tyrone Empowerment Programme

The borough of Dungannon and South Tyrone lies along the southwest shore of Lough Neagh and stretches to the Fermanagh county border. It also borders Armagh and Monaghan, in the Republic of Ireland. It is a rural area of approx. 780 sq km (including inland waterways and lakes) as measured in the census 2001. The estimated population in June 2005 was 50,747 an increase of 1,440 (2.9%) on the 2004 population of 49,307. The population density is 0.61 persons per hectare compared to the 1.19 average for N. Ireland. The population is concentrated around the medium sized town of Dungannon (population 11,000 approx) and neighbouring small town of Coalisland (5,000 approx).

The remainder of the population is in small village settlements of less than 1,000 people and scattered rural communities. Of the 26 current district council areas it ranks 9th on a scale of 1-26 in relation to multiple deprivation where 1 is the most deprived. It has two local wards Coalisland south and Ballysaggart (Dungannon West) which fall within the most deprived 10% of NI wards. Both these areas are characterised as ‘catholic/nationalist/republican.’ Current estimates (school census; Southern Health Board) indicate that 7-10% of the population of Dungannon ‘conurbation area’ have come into the area since 2001 from within and beyond Northern Ireland) - 38% of expectant mothers in the Dungannon Surestart area (covering the two ‘deprived’ wards) are not citizens of either the U.K. or Republic of Ireland.

The STEP programme was initially established as a cross-community network of grassroots organisations in 1996. Its mission: to support community organisations in Dungannon in negotiating the process from violent political conflict to:

‘ the development of a rights based, integrated community which respects difference and celebrates diversity, and actively participates in the decision-making processes which impact on their individual well-being and collective sustainability’. (STEP founding document).

The network facilitated and supported the community in the development of a five –year community empowerment programme to develop capacity and infrastructure across the district council area. This programme was EU funded and its key features are:

Territorial approach: The core community was spatial – any person whose feet were currently located within the council boundaries belonged

Rights based approach: All persons and communities retained the same rights

Equity approach: all persons and communities were entitled to equality of opportunity, access and outcome.

Collective ownership: all infrastructures developed belonged to all the community, and needed to be equally accessible by all the community.

Community development approach: built from the ground; open, accountable; transparent; ethical; non-judgemental of persons

Partnership building and working: recognition of need for inter- and cross-sectoral interculturalism and shared working

Within this framework the organisation developed as a key community resource in actively positioning those traditionally at the margins of the community at the centre of development and planning; the first to be consulted, not the last. This community development process created a dynamic understanding that processes needed to change; attitudes needed to change but that fundamentally people just need room to be themselves and to develop their individual and group potential.

So before the migrant workers' project began in 2001, STEP already had a well-developed training/learning and resource centre as well as its core programme of community capacity development. This involved building anti-sectarianism, prejudice awareness and reduction processes, and conflict resolution skills into almost everything we did. The value of the model was tested when the 'difference and diversity' within the local space expanded almost overnight to include people from Africa, Portugal, Goa, and then Eastern Europe.

STEP now had credibility and influence, not only across the horizontal axis, but also vertically, with local, regional, and national statutory organisations, government departments and voluntary sector organisations, and using the same methodology called all these stakeholders together, creating the first Migrant Worker Support Forum. The purpose was to pool resources and assets to meet the immediate emergency need as well as to plan. The second step was to meet the new people, wherever we could, and begin the communication process. We needed bilingual mediators for this, and found them in the migrant worker population.

Because the methodology worked, we made rapid progress, and became regionally recognised as people who seemed to know what to do. The organisation's role in relation to anti-racist practice, training and development, rights based integration (or interculturalism), advocacy, inclusion, and independent voice took on a regional perspective, and we found ourselves, as a neighbourhood based organisation 'at the front of the bus.' With the support of grant-aid from The Atlantic Philanthropies we are now developing an evaluation framework and a conscious strategic edge to our existing practice and policy development.

The question we are most often asked is whether racism is the new sectarianism in Northern Ireland? There are two ways of looking at this. From the plain person's perspective, one might ask: *'If sectarianism is the North's excuse for racism, what is the explanation for racism on the southern side of the border?'* Personal prejudice reinforced or underpinned by a flawed understanding of history and conditioned by a range of narrow '-isms,' acceptance of inequalities and injustices from which we marginally and temporarily benefit, produces our view of others. Racism and Xenophobia are an integral part of our learned behaviour and have been since we were sold the lie, that Christopher Columbus discovered America, that women could be witches, or possibly that some God made some men in their own image and likeness, and that entitled them to be considered better than the rest of us. It is as simple and complex as learning that survival cannot be based on making other people's lives hard.

This may not follow a straightforward trajectory of course. Economic recession might be expected to have major effects, for example, whether to decrease or indeed to increase the flows of people in search of livelihoods. So might further foreign policy interventions such as those pursued by the United States and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance, lead to significant causes of displacement as a result of violence? But the overall trend towards increasing diversity would seem unlikely to be reversed over the longer term. Super diversity would seem likely to pose continuing opportunities and challenges for agendas for social justice, equality, solidarity and human rights for all. As Putnam has concluded, people might retreat 'hunkering down' in their comfort zones within their own communities, in response. But alternative futures were – and are still possible.

Challenges for community development

The challenges for community development can be summarised as two-fold. Firstly, new communities include some of the most vulnerable sections of society within the European Union. Yet migrants, along with refugees and asylum seekers face particular barriers accessing employment, training opportunities and other services, just as they face additional barriers in making their voices heard in the structures of governance. There are major challenges here for community development; working with communities of interest and identity as well as with communities rooted in particular neighbourhoods and localities.

Secondly, new communities face particular challenges as a result of prejudices and stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes and behaviours amongst more established communities, including more established minority communities. Community development workers and activists need to be working with established communities as well as with newer communities if they are to avoid exacerbating potential tensions, working towards increasing social solidarity within and between communities.

In Britain there has been increasing recognition of both aspects of these challenges. For example, a study of community engagement and community cohesion has identified evidence of the particular barriers which new communities face, when it comes to accessing rights and services, let alone finding ways of making their voices effectively heard in the structures of governance that have responsibility for providing these services in the first place (Blake et al, 2008). On the basis of over 100 interviews with service providers and with the representatives of voluntary and community sector organisations and groups in their areas, the research found widespread recognition that new communities were the least likely to have their voices heard.

New communities faced practical barriers such as lack of information and understanding about how to access rights, services or decision-making processes, as well as barriers such as lack of transport or childcare. They faced personal barriers such as a lack of confidence and/or feelings of discomfort, operating in unfamiliar environments, especially if they were also grappling with language barriers. And they faced socio-economic barriers, including the lack of time, new arrivals being particularly likely to be working long, often unsocial hours in low paid jobs, too often needing several different jobs in order to support themselves and their dependents. They also faced additional problems relating to legitimacy and recognition. New arrivals have tended to organise themselves in relatively informal ways, linked through unformalised networks that have tended to be beyond decision-makers 'radar'. As it will be suggested subsequently, community development workers can and do play key roles here, enabling new communities to organise and engage in ways that work for them in the British context. For asylum seekers, especially 'failed' asylum seekers, there have, of course, been very particular reasons why they have been unable to access services, let alone contribute to shaping services to meet their needs more effectively.

Cairde

Cairde is a non-governmental Irish organisation that works to reduce health inequalities amongst ethnic minorities. Cairde's Community Development and Health Pilot Initiative (2005-2007) was a phased initiative that incorporated the following:

- **Capacity building** to engage in primary care. This includes knowledge and skills training in primary care strategy, health needs assessment, population health, community development, primary health care, health education, health policy development, outreach skills, communication and information technology (IT). Experiential learning and the use of creative methodologies as tools for learning characterise the approach to training. Participants have completed a community work placement, which raised their awareness of the issues affecting disadvantaged communities in the inner city and outer suburbs.
- **Health needs assessment** and analysis using a range of participative methodologies. The project's comprehensive computerised database allows for a filtering of findings and specific issues across a range of themes, e.g. Immigration and health; Accommodation, housing and health; Employment, education and health; Access and experience of health services; Racism, discrimination and health.
- **The establishment of a community health action team** that will work in partnership with a range of stakeholders in response to the needs emerging from the assessment. These stakeholders include health service providers, minority ethnic groups and other relevant bodies.
- **Mainstreaming the learning.** In each stage of the project there is a documentation and sharing of the experience and learning, highlighting and disseminating best practice to the HSE Primary, Continuing and Community Care, Dept of Health and Children, Primary Care Steering Group and Task Force, and NAPS/incl and Health Working Group.

Today Cairde supports the National Ethnic Minority Health Forum. This is a representative body open to all minority ethnic community organisations, groups and activists in Ireland. Its aim includes working to ensure that the voices of ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum seekers are heard in the planning of health services.

Clearly existing communities face barriers too, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods where services have been least adequate in the first place. But new communities face additional barriers too. Asylum seekers and refugees were identified as the most disadvantaged in these respects. Economic migrants were also identified as facing particular barriers, including migrant workers from the Accession states with legal rights, as well as those without the rights due to those with EU citizenship (Blake et al, 2008).

This study also provided evidence of tensions between established communities (including established Black and Minority Ethnic communities) and newer arrivals. People spoke of their fears – particularly fears of conflict as a result of competition for scarce resources such as affordable social housing. Although it is important not to exaggerate the problem, other studies have also been documenting the ways in which new arrivals have been facing discrimination and racist abuse, including new arrivals from Poland and elsewhere in the EU, as well as new arrivals from further afield.

As the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears has recognised, although British society ‘has been greatly enriched by the huge contribution made by new and emerging communities’ ‘there can be a sense of mistrust between the established and newer members of some communities’ (Blears, 2008. 4). To overcome these challenges, she endorsed the conclusions of recent research on ways of addressing such tensions, identifying the importance of skilled community development support to help local communities ‘reach out to new people, develop a joint agenda for action and begin to work together effectively to achieve change’ (Wilson and Zipfel, 2008 .9) As the authors themselves concluded, community development initiatives do not, by themselves ‘provide a solution to racial tensions and the complex issue of community cohesion’ but such initiatives do ‘offer an important starting point’ (Wilson and Zipfel, 2008. 9).

So what can community development contribute?

So what, exactly, can community development approaches and practices contribute? Recent research reports have provided a range of examples of the ways in which they can contribute to the development of social solidarity, equalities and social justice (Blake et al, 2009, Wilson and Zipfel, 2008). For example, community development workers can undertake outreach work to make contact with new communities, building upon informal networks to establish links, to enable them to access rights and services. They can use their knowledge and skills to support new communities in developing ways of organising and representing themselves, effectively and inclusively, ensuring that the voices of women and younger people are heard as well as those of more traditional spokespeople. Most importantly, community development workers can work engage established communities, addressing their fears and challenging myths and stereotypes, supporting them in identifying the underlying causes of social problems, going on to develop shared strategies to tackle them, working across community divides. They can facilitate the development of forums such as multi-faith forums, for example. And community development workers can work towards bringing communities together in safe spaces, including shared events.

These types of contributions can be and are being made by other professionals too, using community development approaches and practices in their own professional spheres. For example, in one area, it was the housing worker with responsibility for working with new arrivals who took a lead in developing outreach initiatives, working through informal leaders and networks to facilitate the development of a new communities forum (Blake et al, 2008).

In other areas, voluntary and community sector organisations were taking the lead. Key roles were being played by the staff, volunteers and activists of ‘anchor’ and ‘umbrella’ organisations (such as community empowerment networks, refugee and migrant community support organisations, voluntary action councils and other voluntary sector consortiums, including Black and Minority Ethnic forums). They were making contact with new communities and providing them with advice and support to enable them to access rights and services effectively. In some cases, for example, community activists and volunteers were involved in the provision of Welcome Packs, together with training to ensure that these packs were being used effectively. Voluntary and community based organisations were also contributing by providing safe spaces for new arrivals to meet – a room in a community centre – a cupboard or a filing cabinet to store their materials. These were very practical forms of support, with wider symbolic importance too - forms of welcome and recognition, even if shared space was less than satisfactory, many groups aspiring to have their own spaces (a problematic aspiration, however, as the subsequent discussion suggests).

In addition these types of ‘anchor’/umbrella organisation staff and/activists were able to provide support, when new community groups wanted to formalise themselves, in order to access public funding (public funding being normally available only to groups with sufficient levels of formal organisation to provide financial accountability at bureaucratically acceptable standards). In one city, for example, the refugee centre enabled over 40 informal groups to become formalised, so enabling them to apply for local authority funding so that they could provide mutual support within their communities.

Most importantly community development approaches and practices have been rooted in commitments to the promotion of equalities agendas, contributing to the development of democratically accountable and socially inclusive forms of organisation and structure. Otherwise, community consultation can fail to reach beyond the ‘usual suspects’. As one of those interviewed commented ‘When the MP comes or the police want to consult, everybody knows who you go to’. But, as another reflected, with every community ‘there is somebody to represent them, but some are better somebodies than others. There are the movers and shakers, but sometimes the movers and shakers are moving and shaking for themselves and not for their whole communities’ (Blake et al, 2008. 50). The research identified examples of community based support to refugee women’s groups, for instance, providing safe spaces for them to meet and to organise themselves to make their voices heard more effectively (Blake et al, 2008). In other areas there were examples of working with young people, developing a youth forum to enable young people from different communities to have a voice. ‘It’s a positive thing – it’s getting young people’s voice heard’ reflected a 15 year old, adding that decision- makers were ‘slowly changing their minds’ in terms of taking young people’s views seriously. (Blake et al, 2008. 34).

This brings the discussion on to the challenges of working with established communities – and bringing them together with new communities in solidarity, based upon respect for diversity and difference. Community development workers have been involved in challenging myths and stereotypes for example. ‘Myth busting’ has featured in strategies to promote community cohesion in Britain more generally, but the evidence suggests that these need to be applied with caution. By itself, myth busting leaflets can actually re-enforce the very prejudices in question (one study concluding that people with prejudices may simply read the sections that outline the myths, ignoring the contrary evidence, set out on the opposite page (IPPR, 2007). Myth busting may be more effective as part of wider communication strategies, set in the context of longer term community development and community education initiatives, working with established communities over time to unpack the underlying causes of population movements, together with the underlying causes of social problems and the common policy solutions needed to address them (Grayson, forthcoming).

Akina Dada wa Africa – AkiDwA

Akina Dada wa Africa – AkiDwA - is a minority ethnic-led national network of migrant women living in Ireland. AkiDwA is a Swahili word for African sisterhood. The non-governmental organisation, with charitable status, was established in August 2001 by a group of African women to address the needs of an expanding population of African and migrant women resident in Ireland. The organisation is a recognised authoritative, representative body for migrant women, irrespective of their national/ethnic background, tradition, religious beliefs, and socio-economic or legal status. AkiDwA's advocacy approach is based on a gender perspective and the organisation promotes an equal society, free of racism, discrimination and stereotyping.

Membership of AkiDwA is open to anyone who agrees with its mission and vision and has three membership categories that include individual, groups or support members; to date the organisation has 34 organisations who are affiliates and 2776 individual members. Members include indigenous women's groups, ethnic minorities and migrants.

AkiDwA employs three key strategies to achieve its objectives. These include networking, policy work and capacity building/organisational development. AkiDwA develops migrant women's capacity for participation and representation in their communities and in decision-making structures, through training, consultation, focus groups, information provision and research. The work of the organisation is mainly dictated by its strategic plan, which was developed after consultation with its members. The organisation offers a safe place together with non-judgemental support where women are encouraged to articulate their needs and some of the responses to these needs.

AkiDwA has and continues to encourage positive integration. Since 2002, the organisation has designed and delivered several training packages mainly related to some of the concern and issues that have been identified by the founders and target group. These training packages include the following topics:

Understanding racism and its effect in the society

Race, women and cultural diversity

Training African women to present

Linking local Irish women to global issues

The aim of these training packages is to reach out to people within Irish society, raise awareness and for migrant women, to share their experiences but most importantly, to bring people away from migrant and indigenous communities together to interact, share their lifestyle and way of life and their experience, opening doors to the beginning of a positive dialogue that could enhanced respect and value diversity.

These training options have been very well received, the participants, both indigenous and migrant, explore similarity and differences but are asked to value and recognise this diversity - which includes food, religion, childbearing, societal expectation. This has built a very positive outcome of our work and while it is all based on a community development perspective, it has resulted in many migrant women getting involved in their local communities; becoming more open and very welcoming.

The promotion of shared activities and events can be similarly challenging, illustrating once again the importance of building long-term relationships of trust over time, drawing upon community development approaches and expertise. Shared events such as community festivals, music and sports events and community outings can bring diverse communities together. But without sensitive planning they can actually exacerbate tensions. The use of alcohol can offend some communities, for example, as can events where men and women are mingling too closely for some people's comfort.

Research has identified a range of shared events that have been successfully organised. However, taking account of such cultural differences – a programme of summer musical events celebrating different types of music in the park, in one area, for example, a joint bus trip to the seaside with 500 people from another area (organised jointly by local residents – ‘talking to their neighbours, for the first time’) - multi faith celebrations bringing different faith communities together in a third (Blake et al, 2008. 62).

The use of shared spaces, such as shared community centres has also been advocated as a way of bringing diverse communities together (COIC, 2007). Here again, sensitive community development work may be needed, however, if the result is to be enhanced understanding rather than increasing tensions. As it has already been suggested, for many new communities, having their own space has symbolic as well as practical value, signifying recognition as well as safety. Groups may be reluctant to settle for less. But the provision of separate spaces may further institutionalise differences between communities. And in the British context, there is unlikely to be sufficient funding to meet all such requests, in any case. Once again, this highlights the importance of community development approaches, taking account of differing needs, interests and cultural practices.

Research has, in addition, identified the contribution of joint community action, bringing communities together around shared issues and taking action together to address them. Wilson and Zipfel's study (Wilson and Zipfel, 2008) identified a number of examples, including community action in response to drug abuse in one area, for instance, taking action on local environmental issues in another. The study concluded that ‘the experience of working together can result in powerful changes in people's attitudes and behaviour towards each other’ (Wilson and Zipfel, 2008. 45). But they also cautioned against assuming that local action, on its own, would be sufficient to promote community cohesion and social solidarity. This brings the discussion back to the starting point – concerns with community cohesion have arisen in the context of wider social changes, changes associated with processes of globalisation, requiring interventions beyond the locality too.

In conclusion

Super diversity would seem likely to be a continuing feature of European societies, whether or not migration patterns vary in response to economic downturns in the short term. Globalisation has been associated with massive social, political and cultural as well as economic changes, posing new challenges for those concerned with agendas for social justice, equality, solidarity and human rights. Community development approaches and practices can contribute to the pursuit of these agendas whilst pointing to the need for economic, social and political action, at national and at European levels and beyond.

Culture and the arts have been identified as key elements of community development strategies to promote community solidarity, including the contributions of music, drama and the visual arts. Oral history, poetry and other forms of creative writing have been featuring too. Significantly, this year, 2008, the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clezio, a French writer who was born in France to a French mother and a British father with connections with Mauritius, a writer who has likened the process of writing to that of travelling, a writer who has been concerned with issues of exile and migration. Following the announcement of the prize, Professor Horace Engdahl, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy told a journalist that Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clezio was ‘a nomadic writer who spans many cultures, yet feels equally at home in them all’ (http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2008/announcement) – an aspiration with wider implications, perhaps, for intercultural community development.

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