

IACD in Europe

Welcome to the European region members' contribution to the IACD@70 blog!

At the end of June 2023, IACD had 110 current members based in Europe which represents around 20% of our total membership (of 538). Europe is the third largest region for IACD with Oceania (125 members) in second place and Sub-Saharan Africa (171) in first position.

Our European members can be found in the following countries: Croatia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom represents the largest member base with 70 members, or 63.6% of total membership in the region. Of the 110 current members, 18 are students and at the moment we have 92 individual members and 18 organisational members.

Europe covers less than 7% of the Earth's land area while with 742 million people it is home to around 10% of the world's population; there are 52 countries within the region and it has about 225 indigenous languages. The population of Europe is currently slowly decreasing, by about 0.2% per year, because there are fewer births than deaths. Southern Europe and Western Europe are the regions with the highest average number of elderly people in the world; projections suggest that by 2050 30% of people in Europe will be over 65. The decrease in population is reduced by the fact that more people migrate to Europe from other continents than vice versa. Europe has a GDP of \$24.2 trillion, placing it alongside North America among the wealthiest world regions, but with a huge wealth gap between countries (from over \$60,000 GDP per person to as low as \$10,000) as well as inequality within individual states.

Inequality and a cost-of-living crisis are impacting on communities across Europe. Populist anti-migrant agitation and inadequate or hostile government policies on migration are widespread, as are attacks on democracy, most blatantly evidenced in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The impact of environmental crises is spreading across southern Europe and into countries further north where a sense of immunity has been widespread. Despite hopes of "building back better", and some governments having been in a position to cushion the impact of the Covid pandemic, it has nonetheless reversed progress in many aspects of life, notably for women, for example in terms of caring roles both paid and in the home.

Communities, and community development practitioners working with them, are in the forefront of responses to these issues and efforts to find and drive forward positive alternatives.

We are delighted to share examples of practice, and commentary on current issues for community development, from France, Croatia, Portugal, the UK (England and Scotland) and Ireland. IACD is ambitious to broaden contact with, and involvement by, practitioners across all parts of Europe; several of the contributions highlight that community development is practised in many different contexts often described using different terminology that can disguise common practice principles and methods. We hope that all members will play a part in developing links and shared understanding across these contexts. To support these connections, we recently organised a successful meeting on Zoom for members in Europe and will be holding these regularly two or three times a year.

Community Work in Ireland

Community work in Ireland has deep roots, going back to the 19th century, in resistance to landlords, employers and British rule. Later initiatives secured electrification, and development of infrastructure and community buildings, and challenged the lack of “progress for all” promised in the 1916 Proclamation of Independence.

Those roots resonate with the commitments now articulated in government policy and strategy, e.g., *Sustainable Inclusive and Empowered Communities*¹, campaigned for and promoted by Community Work Ireland, which with a membership of approximately 1000 has acted as a strong voice for community work and the communities it serves.

Community work projects and initiatives lost funding and independence at the time of the 2008 crash. Traveller, women's projects and migrants' rights groups have campaigned to maintain autonomy and are working to develop strong collective work for change and rights' realisation.

The national Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) implemented by 51 Local Development Companies has by far the largest community work associated budget of around €44 million. It has a remit for a community work approach; although its handed-down national plan has left little room for real community work, some good actions have been supported and the next stage is planned to be more flexible.

¹ *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024* <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d8fa3a-sustainable-inclusive-and-empowered-communities-a-five-year-strategy/>

Another positive has been the ongoing state funding of the All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training (AIEB), which supports and promotes community work standards and education based on them; and the associated commitment of funding for professional education.

Our practice is informed by the All-Ireland Standards for Community Work² which speak to collectivity (meaning collective progress rather than individual advancement) rights, social justice and anti-discrimination, to prioritisation of marginalised and minority communities and to inclusion at all levels of the diversity that is part of Ireland - and has been, as Travellers attest to, for centuries.

COVID gave space to both instrumentalisation of communities for delivery of essentials and parity of partnerships with the state and local authorities - with the former rather than the latter prevailing. Nonetheless, community development has a fair wind currently and both geographic and interest-based communities are supported to assert their collective rights and issues and organise to celebrate their identities. The good climate has brought new jobs but these can prove hard to fill so promotion of community work and workforce development (and associated wages and conditions) are key priorities. Commitment remains strong both individually and collectively so we feel that while the shape of the future remains to be seen, community work will endure and flourish.

Anastasia Crickley, Chairperson AIEB, Ciara Shanahan, AIEB Coordinator

Working with communities for climate justice in North-West England

Current information about the state of the world indicates the importance of working to address the climate emergency and climate justice, and the importance of local and indigenous communities in tackling carbon emissions is highlighted for example by the 2022 United Nations Environmental Programme (<https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/04/1117122>).

How are communities achieving this work? In a local sub regional example in the North West of England, right at the grassroots level, communities can be seen working together to fight the climate emergency and for climate justice.

² The *All-Ireland Standards for Community Work* 2016, AIEB, <https://www.aieb.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/All-Ireland-Standards-for-Community-Work.pdf>

From the efforts of community groups in my local parks to plant trees – from 47, to 470 and now 4,700 in November 2023ⁱ; to a consortium of NGOs and charities within Greater Manchester working to support communities in tackling their own local green projects through the 'In our Nature' initiative (<https://creativerusholme.c4cp.net/project/47-trees-for-sir-gerald-kaufmann/>). The NGO Groundwork enables communities to tackle both climate justice and the climate emergency, including a response to the cost-of-living crisis, working with diverse communities in Greater Manchester to achieve a greener, fairer city region. (<https://www.groundwork.org.uk/greatermanchester/>).

Despite setbacks resulting from austerity in central government policy, these local impacts, achieved in the face of the destruction of so many community development initiatives, highlight the key importance of the work of IACD in bringing together the International Standards in Community Development Practice, bringing community development practitioners together and sharing information and learning on a global basis. Happy 70th Birthday IACD. Long may IACD flourish!

Dr. Helena Kettleborough is a Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School, and is active in her local community

Advocating for more accessible community-based social services in Croatia

Social services are one of the pillars of a social care system, and also one of the pillars of community development. Citizens in Croatia expect to have good, accessible and inclusive social services, and around 15% of the Croatian population is in need of publicly funded social services.

However, there are three major challenges to be resolved: tremendous regional inequalities, the fragmentation of systems and a lack of holistic development.

For the past three years, there have been significant efforts, both bottom-up and top-down, to achieve "a big bang" change for social services across Croatia and reform the system. A group of community-based service providers formed a Coalition to advocate for universal access to social services and to articulate social services as a social right.

#ZAJEDNICEUKLJUČUJU #COMMUNITIESINCLUDE

This reform programme would provide a more transparent and just funding system, support deinstitutionalisation of services, and empower people to reach a higher quality of life and greater social inclusion.

Ana Opacic is an Associate professor in the Department of Social Work at the University of Zagreb

Portugal: “looking for new ways to achieve the old utopias”.

This is a brief visit to two community development actions happening in Portugal, on the issues of Climate and social inclusion. They reflect many other community development initiatives, led by local people, political militants, professional practitioners, and academics, demanding a different paradigm of society.

Climate Action in 360-degrees

In Coimbra, the climate activism of the group ClimAção Centro is struggling against negative climate politics in this university city located in the centre of Portugal. This collective stems from a struggle against the construction of a highway crossing the only urban wood in Coimbra, the Choupal (Aspen wood). It is animated by a small group, supported by hundreds of inhabitants taking action online, on the streets, and in legal battles.

The group created a new green urban bush using participatory budgeting and in 2021 led a successful campaign, pressuring the local authority to plant hundreds of trees in the city. In 2022, along with other groups, we stopped the construction of a golf course, after brutal devastation of green land on the Mondego river banks, driven by the local authority. The group is now campaigning against the cutting of hundreds of trees, during the construction of a metro-bus mobility system. Very recently, the highway project is back on the agenda in a 360-degree turn and ClimAção is back defending the same urban wood of Choupal.

In the last five years this collective has had an educational role in the city, influencing political forces, involving diverse people, local media, and empowering community groups for environmental awareness.

The Pluriversity of Knowledge

In Lisboa, there is now a university for diversity. The Pluriversidade Comunitária (Community Pluriversity) was created to host, cherish, share and promote the diversity of knowledge, and to demonstrate that knowledge is not exclusively produced by the academic world.

The Pluriversidade stems from the concept of Popular Universities, and from community practices developed with community groups in social housing neighbourhoods of the city: community development practitioners, academics and inhabitants from different cultural backgrounds put aside academic and local knowledge(s).

Based on the utopia of professor and practitioner Rogerio Roque Amaro, it all started in 2022 with 60 people from 16 community groups in the city. In the concept of Pluriversidade there are no students. All are learners. The classes can be delivered anywhere with anybody, on any topic. The "scientific" board is composed of 11 women and 11 men, half academics, called "sistemizators" and half community members, called "inductors".

Lisboa is a multicultural city framed by African people and descendants of African culture, Romani communities, migrants from Eastern Europe, South and Central America, former Portuguese emigrants returned from France, Switzerland, USA or Canada, and people from several parts of Portugal's mainland, and the islands of Azores and Madeira. Animating and empowering this universe of plural knowledge(s) is breaking stereotypes and bringing new, positive opportunities for people and their communities.

Mario Montez is a Sociocultural animator, teacher and trainer, and currently works at the Education School of the Polytechnic of Coimbra

Opportunities for community development in France

There are multiple instances of community development in France, led under various names by practitioners from different backgrounds: "animateurs" in community centers, urban and rural developers (working as civil servants) with a background in geography or political science, social workers... This diversity of status and academic background has hindered capitalization of knowledge and practice in the field.

However, in the past few years, there has been a growing interest in transitions, environmental justice, and how they intersect with community development practice, which could provide a lever for mutual action and research. Moreover, the growing recognition of knowledge by experience, the rise of the third sector (recognized by law in 2014), and new, more participatory modes of democratic governance also represent favorable signals for community work.

France is strongly ideologically divided, as illustrated by several recent social movements, such as the yellow jackets movement in 2018-2019, or the massive protests against pension reform in 2023. Learning to live together and to negotiate democratically around common resources seems particularly necessary in this context. Community workers, for example in social centers, are strongly engaged in such approaches.

Laure Lienard is a Lecturer at the Institut Social de Lille, Lille Catholic University

Scotland – Raising the profile of community development.

Community Development Alliance Scotland forms a strong coalition of 130 national organisations adhering to the core values, ethics and principles of community development. By bringing organisations together, we believe that this supports the overall improvement agenda for communities in Scotland. We are also delighted to have over 2000 social media followers from all parts of the globe who often advise that we are seen as a model of good practice internationally.

With a strong historical background in community development, Scotland has many skilled, qualified and experienced community development practitioners. At CDAS, we continue to raise the profile of community development by driving policy and practice. This not only ensures that practitioners feel supported and valued but also enables us to liaise with policy makers to influence decision making and national policies.

Of course, equality and inequality remain among the biggest challenges nationally and internationally. It is our collective moral and ethical obligation to continue to expand coalitions to ensure neo-liberalism does not dominate. We must stand united to expand community development alliances and influence social policy driving equality and citizen participation.

We were delighted to host our Annual National Conference in September, involving many of our membership organisations in facilitating workshops, reverse panel discussions and marketplace stalls. Our 3 keynote speakers included Clare MacGillivray from IACD, along with Tom Arthur, Minister for Communities, and Sabir Zazai, CEO, Scottish Refugee Council.

Colette McGarva, Community Development Alliance Scotland

Displaced Peoples, Government Policy and Community Development

Frenetic government policy in the UK and much of wider Europe is compounding the issues for refugees, displaced peoples and those seeking asylum.

In the UK the government's continued outsourcing to security firms has seen basic human needs for those arriving in Britain barely met and the "Stop the Boats Campaign" appears to be designed to deflect the failings of the UK Home Office whilst further fuelling nationalistic and right-wing sentiment.

Such knee-jerk responses in the face of deeply inter-connected, longer-term global challenges faced by many if not all European governments does little to support or address the human lived experience of uprootedness from homes, families and wider communities.

In the early May Bank Holiday weekend of this year, my own community development team were given a few hours' notice of Sudanese evacuees being housed temporarily in a local hotel. Limited information was provided. Much of that weekend was spent ensuring access to decent food, clothes, laundry facilities, basic advice and support to those who were anxious, confused and traumatised. The team rose to this challenge without hesitation when government departments executing the orders had closed for the 3-day weekend. At what human cost?

Community development is increasingly needing to step into the breach of basic welfare provision. There are countless examples across the UK of bridging hotels for Afghan refugees being supported by local community and voluntary sector organisations providing culturally appropriate and nutritious food, access to support and advice, wellbeing and mental health, children's activities, support for survivors of trauma, trafficking and sexual abuse.

The list is non-exhaustive and whilst the temporary nature of such displacement is at the mercy of government policy there is a space for community development to advocate human rights and social justice. This requires nimble and agile community organising efforts based on collective experience to better the circumstances for new arrivals to towns and cities across Europe, no matter how temporary their stay.

It also relies upon a growing coalition of community development organisations to be a strong voice of advocacy and cohesion in local areas but also at a national level, where a void in strong government policy is desperately waiting to be filled.

Rob Gregory is Operations Director for Housing and Communities at Stevenage Borough Council

