

**COMMUNITY:
A RADICAL
CURRENT?**

**REFLECTIONS
ON THE
1968
ACT**

Contents

	Page
Abstract	5
Introduction	7
Methodology	8
The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968.	9
The focus on community	11
Implementation	12
Small streams	14
Back to the mainstream?	17
A defining current	20
Some final thoughts	22
References	23

Abstract

The idea of a universal, community-based service was key to the vision of social work that informed the 1968 Social Work (Scotland) Act. In the intervening 50 years did such a vision come to represent a radical, critical current within social work theory and practice in Scotland or did it remain largely aspirational?

This paper draws on survey, interview and focus group data collected from current and past practitioners to consider this question. It argues that the aspirations for the 1968 Act can be seen as radical and far reaching and for a time community-based approaches enjoyed a role in the mainstream. This was, however, short lived and social work in Scotland became subject to similar redefinition as the rest of the UK.

While this might have seen the disappearance of a current that focused on the collective, the preventative and the wider structural determinants of people's lives, several small streams continued to flow. These provided an alternative, critical vision for social work that drew on ideas of community. They can be seen as an important legacy of the Social Work (Scotland) Act that are in danger of being lost. Reconnecting to them, in our current historical context may be key to social work regaining the passion and belief in social change that informed the Act and the early days of our profession.

Introduction

Social work and its histories are the product of particular welfare regimes and the cultural context and political values that give rise to them (Payne 2005: 242). They can be seen as key 'moments' or building blocks each one replacing the former as we move towards the present (Harris 2008: 676), as representing different 'waves of modernization' in which a break with history was attempted (Lorenz 2007: 605) or, taking a more organic approach as 'appearing waters' that sometimes disappear through the permeable rock and sometimes appear- and reappear- on the surface, in a landscape of 'short distances and definite places' (Shaw 2016: 123). The histories will always be contested and Lorenz (2007: 599) argues that it is only when 'we engage in open-minded, critical historical research' that we can 'hope to find meaning in this confusing diversity, to define our place in the diversity of histories with which we are interwoven'.

This paper looks at the role that ideas of community and community-based practice played in the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and subsequent social work theory and practice in Scotland. It considers the extent to which they can be seen to represent a 'radical current' or have remained rather aspirational. It argues

that while the ambitions of the 1968 Act were radical and far reaching and that for a time community-based approaches enjoyed a role in the mainstream this was relatively short lived. Despite notable resistance, social work in Scotland became largely subject to redefinition similar to that taking part in other parts of the UK with the imposition of agendas driven by the primacy of the market, the individual and managerial and technical approaches.

While this might have marked the disappearance underground of a current that focused on the collective, the preventative and the wider structural context of the issues people face, it can be argued that a number of 'appearing waters', small streams continued to flow and provide an alternative and critical vision for social work. These are a significant feature of the historical legacy of the 1968 Act and can play a key role in social work fulfilling its potential in our different historical time. The role of history, it can be argued, is to help us explore continuities and discontinuities as we seek to understand the potential of the present. This research project is an opportunity to do just that and to ground our visions for the future in an appreciation of our past.

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Methodology

This paper is based on a small-scale piece of research commissioned in May 2018 by Social Work Scotland. It included four key elements: a brief review of literature relevant to the topic, a short online survey completed by 68 practitioners, five recorded and transcribed interviews with key informants and a focus group with people who responded to the survey in one particular local authority area. Each element was conducted sequentially to allow them to inform each other and a thematic analysis was used to develop the overall content and conclusions. The time and interest of all those who have engaged with the process is very gratefully acknowledged.

While every attempt has been made within the limited resources available to provide a balance of viewpoints, it is recognised that those responding to the survey and participating in the focus group were self-selecting and thus may represent a biased sample with a particular interest in, or view on, the question under consideration. They were however drawn from a broad cross section of the social work workforce. Interviewees were selected to provide as wide a spectrum of opinion as possible but again this was constrained by the numbers involved. The literature is used in part to provide alternative perspectives.

The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968

The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and the white paper that preceded it *Social Work in the Community* (1966) can give rise to different narratives. One might see the 1968 Act as a reflection of a different institutional and policy context north of the border and a distinctive approach to social work. Brodie et al (2008: 698) argue that 'social work here always was, and remains, significantly different to social work elsewhere in the UK' and Stewart (2004: 12) locates this historically in the degree of social welfare autonomy that continued in Scotland after the Union 'supported by legal, political and administrative cultures that were, to varying degrees distinctive'. These are variously described as more inclusive, more expansive, more social democratic and more closely inter-related.

They are seen as the reflection of deeply held cultural beliefs which at a particular point in history coalesced into a vision for social work which went beyond the ideas of organisational restructuring seen in the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 in England and Wales and ideas of a 'generic' approach, to a belief that social work could be 'a positive and radical force for social change' (Brodie et al 2008: 699). The vision was for comprehensive state provision available to the whole community; the one door on which anyone could knock. The provisions in the 1968 Act that invested in the new social work departments a responsibility 'to promote social welfare by making available advice guidance and assistance on such a scale as may be appropriate for their area' (S12) and established the principle of lay involvement in the children's hearing system provided a radical, expansive, vision of social work with ideas of community at its heart.

In this narrative, such a distinctive approach survived the change in ideological climate from the 1970s and post-devolution, Cheetham (2001: 628) argued that the new Scottish Parliament provided an opportunity for social work in Scotland to be 'expansive and inclusive' and 'aspire to excellence'. Post-devolution Scotland developed a Scottish approach to policy making; one which has defended, supported and developed the social democratic 'classic welfare state' (Stewart 2004: 145). The approach based on the pillars identified by the Christie Commission (CFDPS 2011) and in the recent Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 is one that is inclusive of community and service user interests, promotes effective partnership working, prioritises spending on prevention and maximises the efficient use of resources across the public, private and third sectors.

As applied to social welfare this gives rise to policy prescriptions aimed at personalisation, asset-based approaches, co-production, early intervention, resilience and well-being. Indeed Mitchell (2015: 2) cautions that 'we have become adept at inventing the language of reform with new terms invented or old terms polished up to be used as evidence of reform mindedness... We need to acknowledge that an abundance of ideas can be a form of displacement activity'.

An alternative narrative might take as its starting point the distinctive approach in Scotland to the operation of the Poor Law (unlike their counterparts in England and Wales the parochial system in Scotland provided no support for the able-bodied poor) which attracted a level of interest from those concerned to reduce the level of poor law assistance south of the border. It also left a legacy of parsimony and a 'smack of meanness' in social work provision (Bryant 1975: 345) and a fondness for supervision. This was seen in the supervised housing schemes that provided tenancies for some families on condition of their acceptance of close monitoring and supervision by local authority wardens that survived in many areas until the 1970s. While Scotland clearly has had a distinctive institutional and policy framework, it has not been as radical or as inclusive and expansive as we might wish. In this narrative, the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 while radical in the expansive role it envisaged for social work was hindered in its implementation by a legacy of underinvestment in provision and skills shortages among both practitioners and local politicians.

Subsequent developments north of the border and since devolution may not be as markedly different as imagined. Far from being the 'land of milk and honey' and or the 'happening place for social policy' (Mooney and Poole 2004: 249), post-devolution Scotland is not immune to trends in the UK or indeed elsewhere. Differences where they do exist, remain largely at the institutional and policy level with the social relations of social welfare largely mirroring, if not falling behind those experienced in the rest of the UK.

In such a narrative social work has been subject to the same forces of neo-liberalism and managerialism as south of the border. Despite a discourse of social justice and transformational change the focus has shifted from the collective and its potential to bring about social change to something that is more individualised, targeted not on the needs of the whole community

but on individuals and their families (Brodie et al. 2008: 712).

Some of those interviewed highlighted the level of ambition involved in the 1968 Act. The Act was a product of the determination of those who were driving it who had a clear focus on community.

*There was a clarity and social workers were working together. They were supported in this by a range of people across universities, professional social workers, civil servants, and including the Minister, Judith Hart. Richard Titmuss and Kay Carmichael and the people right in the middle, who were driving the development of our social work service in Scotland were very, very clearly wanting it to be community based.*LT

The Act was:

a very, very ambitious piece of legislation. At the time – great – but very ambitious. LT

Asked whether they saw it as a radical approach another interviewee suggested that:

Yes, I suppose I do. I can see that in the legislation. I think actually its more ambitious than the Local Authority Social Services Act. There are some similarities... but there is a very strong, a radical theme within it that I would recognise as lost... it's been overtaken by events. AT.

While recognised as foundational by those who had been in the profession for some time, one interviewee working in the voluntary sector at the time was less certain:

*I was kind of far removed from professional social work, but I can't say that I felt that that was a radical change. Anything that I saw that I thought was a radical change was small groups of people doing things that really made a difference – that worked, but that we never funded so you were always struggling for funds to keep on doing what you were doing. Social work, official social work, I think has just been totally underfunded and over- stretched all along... there was some overlap but there was feeling that we were filling in some of the gaps.*MH.

Equally, for the interviewee who was relatively new to

practice, while there was some awareness of the Act subsequent legislation and guidance was much more pertinent to his day to day practice.

The focus on community

Introducing their study into community and its role in social work Stepney and Popple (2008: 6) argue:

The concept of community has always occupied an important place in the development of British social work as well as in contemporary theory and practice. Although.....the term may be considered contested and contradictory, there is no doubt that in relation to social work, community has enjoyed a position of some significance.

Indeed Woodroffe (1962: 60) covering the early history of the profession, highlights the division within the Charity Organisation Society (COS) between those who favoured a focus on the individual and their particular circumstances and those, chiefly involved in the settlement movement, who advocated more collective ways of working as a means of achieving wider social reform.

While it is of significance, community can be a difficult concept. Indeed attempts to define and conceptualise it have generated an ever increasing literature (Crow and Mah 2011). In his recent work on community studies Crow (2018: 1) considers the difficulty of definition suggesting that while it 'can readily be agreed that a community involves a group of people with something in common' it is 'less easy to find agreement about what that thing is'. This may be one of the attractions of a concept that can be enlisted to a range of policy perspectives. Studdert and Walkerdine (2016: 614) drawing on their 2012 survey of conceptualizations of community in the social sciences conducted for the AHRC report a 'sorry state of affairs'; while there is a substantial history of academic debate within some disciplines as a term used by policy makers and in applied fields, 'it was rarely conceptualised or even defined'. The impact of this is that community all too easily becomes a 'spray-on' term liberally applied to a wide range of policy areas masking a range of implicit assumptions often about community as an objective rather than action.

The concept of community informing the 1968 Act reflected the cultural context and political priorities at the time. It was largely that of place, of shared geography although it also drew on the thinking informing the Seebohm Report (Cmnd 3703: para 475) which stated in its separate chapter on community that this interest in community:

...was not nostalgic in origin, but based on the practical grounds that the community is both the provider as well as the recipient of social services and that orientation to the community is vital if the services are to be directed to individuals, families and groups within the context of their social relations.

A focus on community highlighted the collective; the recognition of the wider social context of people's lives, the need for this to inform the development of social work services and the collectivisation of individual issues. It reflected the wider political and policy concerns of the time, the rediscovery of poverty, questioning of the extent to which the 'classic' welfare state as it developed post- 1945 had fulfilled its aspirations and the challenge to received ideas of early post- modernism and the new social movements.

In the work of the Home Office sponsored Community Development Projects, just one of which was in Scotland, in Ferguslie Park in Paisley, the development of the analysis extended to one that challenged ideas of individual inadequacy and cultures of poverty and found the roots of poverty and inequality across the communities they worked with, in the operation of wider social and economic forces. The solutions were to be found at the collective, community level; for the sponsors of the CDPs, the Home Office and Local Authorities this was to be improved co-ordination of services, the stimulation of community activity and limited social action; for many of the workers in the CDPs it was social action linking individual issues to local community based activity and wider political action.

As these ideas developed in social work Ferguson (2008: 96) described a combination that links 'a structural analysis of the issues faced by clients to an ethical imperative to act' that has proved attractive 'to social workers who feel that a concern for social justice should be a central part of social work'. Such a 'radical' approach was often contrasted to a 'professional' approach with its focus on the individual and casework approaches.

Implementation

The 1968 Act led to the initial creation of 50 social work departments across Scotland. McGarvey and Midwinter (1996: 211) suggest that the unforeseen level of demand and their small size placed stress on their capacity to deliver and that after a little more than five years they were abolished and reconstituted as part of the reforms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. A further important issue in the early days was highlighted by one interviewee:

I think in the beginning when we started in 1969 we didn't have a huge number of qualified social workers and many of those who were qualified had been trained in social casework, working with individuals so we didn't really have the base for taking a community approach forward.

The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 created a two tier structure for local government on the Scottish mainland with social work sitting within the nine Regional Councils and the three unitary island authorities. Strathclyde which became the largest Regional Council with a population of 2.5 million representing some 46% of the population of Scotland at the time, prided itself in being the largest social work department in Western Europe and the vision for a community led service had political support from the newly elected Regional Council one of whose first policy documents was on Community Development. Their subsequent social strategy 'represented the single most extensive commitment by local government to anti-deprivation work anywhere in the UK, employing the principles of community development' (Barr 1991: ix). An interviewee recalled the approach in Glasgow:

The phrase being used at the time ... was about making sure that people were not pathologised and individualised... it was to put people's problems into the wider social context and to make sure that you tackled the wider determinants of people's difficulties rather than just focusing on them as 'failed' individuals. KMM.

A lot of community activity going on, at the time it was funded and at the time for emergency payments before the Children's Scotland Act we were using section 12 payment, a lot, to support individuals who were in need. I think there was a pretty broad understanding of section 12 being about promoting welfare. KMM.

For a period, social workers largely worked in generic teams based in local areas and often alongside community development colleagues. Ideas of community and community based approaches featured as part of social work education and training. Working in Edinburgh, one interviewee recalled a 20 day course 'Exploring Communities' offered to first year social work students in the 1990s and, reflecting on his own training another recalled the clear emphasis on such approaches on the social work course in Glasgow.

Such developments, particularly in relation to Strathclyde, Barr (1991: 5) argues were the result of 'time specific conditions' which created the 'potential for innovation'. These included the publication of the 1971 census results that revealed Strathclyde to be in a league of its own in relation to levels of deprivation, that key people in the newly elected regional council were able to draw on their personal experience of working in community work projects in the west of Scotland and that others including the first Convenor of Strathclyde, Geoff Shaw, shared an ideological commitment to community work as an approach.

The alliance that developed between social work and the Labour Regional Councils was to be important in challenging policy developments in relation to social work by the Thatcher and Major governments' post-1979. Perhaps most totemic of this was the use of section 12 payments to support the families of striking miners in March 1984. One focus group participant recalled this as a 'defining moment for social work in Strathclyde... there was a clear role for social work in communities and for community workers'.

Despite this clear focus, at least in the largest local authority at the time, it is important to reach a balanced judgement of this period. One interviewee spoke of the near 50% vacancy rates that he encountered when joining a social work team in the west of Scotland; asked whether social work as it developed from 1968 fulfilled the vision for a community based service another that:

I think it tried to and some people actually managed to keep that alive, but it didn't actually survive with any strength because I suspect there may not have been enough people with – it may have been energy or drive or they weren't in a position to push it through hard enough. In some places, and for some time, the vision was realised but its impact

was limited probably because it needed deeper push and application in the new Departments and teams, which was maybe too big an ask . There was some very clear community based work – social work in some communities was the community offering to work with the support of a social work team and I was aware of that and in touch with a number of people who were in those teams but it was scattered it wasn't everywhere.LT.

For the women another interviewee worked with 'their experience of social workers was that they hadn't turned up when they said they would so they had waited in all day and they had not let them know that they couldn't come... there was this lack of respect'. Daniel and Scott (2018: 6) report interviewees who saw the regions as challenging places to work and spoke of 'cultures which were male dominated and bullying'. This reflects the critique of the 'radical' tradition in social work at this time that it failed to engage with the emerging social movements around race, gender, sexuality and to work with ideas of oppression.

Small streams

The alliance between social work and the Labour regional councils that saw support for community-based practice and a wider role for social work delayed the implementation of a consumerist agenda north of the border but perhaps could not prevent social work in Scotland being subject to similar forces for change. The new political agenda focused on reduction of spending on public services, targeting of resources, the introduction of the market particularly in health and social care with The Griffiths Report (1988), Community Care: Agenda for Action and NHS and Community Care Act (1990), the re-designation of those using social work services as customers and consumers and the introduction of private sector managerial approaches to the public sector.

At the same time a series of reports into social work failures including the Clyde Report into Orkney provided a platform from which to argue for greater control of and professionalization of social work and as Jones (1996) argues a gradual stripping out of social science from the social work curriculum. One interviewee suggested that for a time social work had become 'in a sense a social movement' and that many were unhappy about this. With the development of Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW), new qualifications such as Certificate in Social Work (CSS) and later Diploma in Social Work (DipSW), employers' interests led to a change in priorities in social work education (Jones 2011: 40).

Legislation in Scotland reflected a changed agenda. The Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 replaced the 9 regional councils with 32 unitary local authorities each with their own social work service. The Act also replaced the Director of Social Work post with that of Chief Social Work Officer and removed the need for the new authorities to have a separate social work committee. This was seen by many as a demotion of the role of social work within local authorities and a move away from social work being seen as the key player in tackling social issues. The Children's Act 1995 also replaced the previous general welfare duty with a 'duty to safeguard and promote only the welfare of 'children in need'' (Hill et al 1998: 109) a move that they suggest was vigorously opposed by children's agencies which argued this would work against the open access family and youth centres that had developed to assist 'communities' in need.

The cumulative effect of such changes might have led to a loss of focus on community. Some contributors to the

online survey suggest that this was the case particularly in their day to day work. It is, however, possible to identify several threads that suggest small streams that continued to flow, perhaps away from the mainstream, but nevertheless retaining some of the focus from 1968.

The first of these is found in the continued focus on public services accountable to the communities they serve. Considering community care and the personal social services, Taylor (1998: 74) argues that while Scotland was subject to the same legislation to introduce the market into health and social care, 'implementation was slow and patchy particularly north of the border'; that where social work departments did look for alternative suppliers they 'invariably have a preference for voluntary over private agencies (ibid: 81) and that Scotland generally retained a stronger role for the public sector. Stewart (2004: 11) equally quotes sources that suggest that on the eve of devolution 'Scotland's welfare state remained more old-fashioned, better-resourced and less privatised than England's'. Such a conclusion is supported by one interviewee who described coming to work in Scotland:

I found when I came from England to Scotland... nearly twenty years ago, I came into contact with a service that still had at its core some fairly clear values whereas I felt in England, already the mixed economy and the various competing ideologies had already... so it was moving very much more towards a more fragmented and commercial model.AT

Alongside this there were examples of community-based practice within public services:

It may be seen as slightly outside the mainstream but for me there have always been social workers who have picked this up on the hoof and worked with it. An example is the Normanton team written up by Hadley who could do social work on the street – being around and available, talking to people and listening – finding out who and what this community is and working with this. There are also examples in Scotland and still are although they would not necessarily be seen as mainstream social work.

Turbett (2010) argues that community-based and community-oriented practice were particularly suited to the issues faced by workers in close-knit rural and remote rural areas and his recent publication (2018) provides a critical history of community social work initiatives in Scotland.

The voluntary sector equally continued to work with communities developing new models of practice and, in some cases retaining areas of focus that perhaps were receiving less emphasis in statutory services. One interviewee described the themes of her work across the communities that she was involved in.

My main themes are partnership and love and relationship... Looking back on all of these experiences I have talked about, the partnership with people is the most important thing of all.MH

This included a commitment that family members were part of the committee and the decision making in the organisation. In what might now be seen as an example of co-production this included a decision to pay all staff at the same rate.

A further stream can be found in the continued policy interest in the potential of community and communities, although with important changes of emphasis. Moves to ideas of a 'mixed economy of welfare' were accompanied by a resurgence of interest in voluntarism and the ways in which voluntary and community activity had always existed as a key element in the interaction between the public, private and informal sectors in the provision of social welfare (Harris 2004). Civil society and voluntary activity was to be encouraged to supplement and indeed in some cases replace the services that central and local government were no longer willing, or able, to provide.

With the advent of New Labour, communitarian approaches linked to the politics of the third way, emphasised the role that the individual, family and civil society play in developing a moral sense and creating a 'good society' (Etzioni 1998), and the links, ties and networks created by civic participation which create and mobilise social capital within communities and build a strong civil society (Putnam 2000). Both were concerned to reinforce the obligations and responsibilities of citizens alongside their rights, a move from the ideas that informed 1968. The emphasis was on the development of active citizens and participation; community engagement and community empowerment.

Changing Lives, the Report of the 21st Century Review of Social Work (2006) included a role for social workers in prevention and building community capacity although some questioned the extent to which this could be

seen to leave the door open for a return to community development as part of the social work task or rather as a transfer of risk and responsibility to communities already struggling to survive (Ritchie and Woodward 2009: 517).

Community development and community work continued as a stream within statutory services. Gilchrist (2009: 21) suggests that one of the key origins of community development was as 'the preventative arm of social work' and although it developed as a separate discipline to social work the links remained strong. In many cases, however, this involved a move from social work to housing, education or health and an increased focus on supporting corporate policy objectives rather than community action. Banks (2011) highlights a keen awareness of the extent of the vulnerability of community work to co-option as service delivery agencies adopted discourses of 'community empowerment' and 'social justice' to describe essentially reformist, externally defined agendas as opposed to the social action which she argues is more akin to community work values. As early as 1975, Mayo had argued that the perceived radical potential of community development could be over-estimated.

Community development also continued as an element in social work education and training in Scotland and academic discourse was important in maintaining a focus on community. One of the observations about radical social work theory is that despite its minority status it has been a key influence in social work theory. As it has developed it provides a link to ideas of critical, ecological and critical realist practice (Pease 2009, Forde and Lynch 2015) and developments such as the Social Work Action Network (SWAN) and the Manifesto for Social Work and Social Justice (Ferguson 2008: 127) with a wider global focus.

Asked whether they thought community-based approaches could be described as a 'radical' tradition interviewees provided a range of responses.

I would recognise this but it is not something I would agree with. It may not be what is usually done, or what is usually taught but I think it is essentially quite a conservative idea- it is about tackling the issues that affect people where they are at and I don't think there is anything radical about this – possibly sadly just too rare.LT.

*I don't think we ever did (see what we were doing as part of a 'radical' tradition), no and I wouldn't now. It's very basic, being with people, responding in whatever way you can to their needs and passing them on to the appropriate professional help if that's what needed, if you can. I don't see that as radical.
MH*

It shouldn't be radical, it absolutely shouldn't be radical but because of the way things have changed over the last 50 years it probably would be seen as quite radical.TM.

Back to the mainstream?

The fact that an interest in community has survived the changes of the last 50 years is supported by responses to the survey. Asked to rate the importance of ideas of community to current social work practice in Scotland on a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 8 (highly important) the weighted average across all responses was 6.36. Asked if this had changed over their career in social work, 74% of those completing the survey answered yes: 26% answered no. Of those answering yes, 80% had worked in social work for over 10 years with 59%, for 20 years plus. Of those answering no, 87.5% had worked in social work for under 20 years with just 12.5% for over 20 years.

Some thought that the importance of community had been lost;

Less important. People and families treated more as small units and less emphasis on how they fit in with the wider community and supports (R44).

There appears to be much less emphasis and importance placed on 'community' – we have a much more individualised approach to care and support and this is regrettable. (R37)

Community work and locality, generic working were seen as an integral part of SW education and practice in the late 70s. Now the focus is primarily on the individual/ family unit, and community and group influences tend to be side-lined. (R2)

Others that there was now an increase in interest:

...looking to the community for strengths in order to help families rather than all the supports coming from professional involvement. (R42)

It used to be all about what Social work could provide, now it's about working in partnership with local communities. (R26)

There is much more focus on community and the assets within communities which can assist in reducing dependency on social work services. (R64)

Some who had worked in social work for longer suggested a change in focus over time:

...think that there has been a change from emphasis on community to less emphasis then focus again on

community. (R32)

I think we lost a sense of community for a number of years and concentrated on "the individual". I have 40 years' experience in social work and I have seen in recent years a far greater emphasis placed on the importance of communities.... We had returned to individual pathology and over emphasised "risk assessment" and procedure ...but we are beginning to return to concepts of communities, people, peer support, mentoring, supportive adults, community empowerment and less dependency on the state but more support and facilitation of communities. (R23)

Some contributors highlighted the economic case for an increased emphasis on community:

In my line of work it is far more important to keep children within the community rather than finding care providers all over Scotland. Also the community spirit is reflected in getting family/friends networks around children to provide support rather than professionals. This is obviously a consequence of tightened budgets but it has its advantages. (R41)

As social work resources get less, we rely more on the support and opportunities present from the communities. (R36)

Focus from senior managers on using community resources to find cost neutral measures to support individuals; however, community is lacking in many areas. (R19)

Two attributed this to broader ideological change:

We use to have community SW teams, community workers attached, group workers, family centres etc. These are all out of fashion and this is an ideological position. (R37)

Less of a strategic overview based on a structural understanding of politics and communities. Social work now has a business mentality, blames individuals for their problems. When there are budget cuts to be made, community development and 'soft' preventative initiatives are the first to go. (R68)

Interviewees discussed the changed context of integration and participation agendas and a sense of

different generations of workers who had been trained in different traditions.

I recognise that the world is a very different and very much more complex place...that the agenda for radical change and the legitimacy for that doesn't probably exist in the same way... I don't see it in the new students coming through. It's very much more an occupation whereas it was a vocation for me. I was motivated through it and it linked really with a view of the world. I'm not sure I recognise that radicalism... it could be that I am being harsh and that I am in a rural authority now, but I don't see it.AT

I think there was a pretty broad understanding of section 12 being about promoting welfare and I think that's disappeared...with the advent of consumerism in the mid- 90s I think and maybe a downgrading of the importance in training of that kind of approach... and maybe the new Act coming in as well, new social workers coming off courses now don't seem to have been trained in that way is my impression. KMM.

This was reinforced by the comments of a relatively new worker:

They (the lecturers at college) used to talk about having done that in the 70s and things and being a community worker and some of the literature we read was people out there working in the community, but it was all historic...TM.

The extent to which ideas of community and community based practice are an important part of mainstream social work in Scotland today was one of the themes explored in the focus group. There was general agreement that participants would want it to be:

Community is crucial and critical to how we develop the service over the next few years. It's right back on the agenda.

The world they suggested, however, had changed and both the role of social work and ideas of community were different to those informing work in the 60s, 70s and 80s. Ideas of community were seen to have moved on from geographic communities often, in a former mining area also based on occupation, to that of potential membership of multiple communities

some of which might want to exclude the very people social work is in contact with. Social work was seen to have moved from an overtly political role to a more 'muted approach to change' in what was seen by one participant as a 'more rights based, more individualised, more professional and integrated environment'. This was linked to ideas of a loss of autonomy for social workers and the fact that whereas previously 'there was a clear task then about challenging injustice and disadvantage... now we are expected to be part of the system, part of the machine and do not have the autonomous role we once had'. The challenge was identified by one interviewee who stated:

There's an irony there because clearly with all the cuts community has to be the way forward but they have created a situation where social workers being a part of the community is more difficult that it perhaps was back in 68. So there is something there that needs to be overcome.TM

Discussion of obstacles covered expectations on social work within integrated structures, the level of caseloads and the impossibility of finding time and space to consider collective and community-based approaches, a focus on technical skills rather than relationships, a narrowing of the focus of assessment, a focus on outputs such as reports, statistics and documents rather than outcomes, and the personalisation agenda that is being interpreted in an individualised rather than collective way.

The overall sense was of more restricted, restrained role for social work some of which was linked to austerity and limits on resources but some also to losses and gains associated with professionalization and the greater definition and regulation of social work. It was also clear that community development work was now more likely to be the remit of other departments within the local authority and voluntary sector agencies than of social work.

Interviewees further identified issues in relation to workloads and the time it takes to develop community based approaches:

Social work is pressured and social workers may not necessarily have the time to take in and understand the wider situation that someone is living in. Unless social workers have the time to elicit information they may miss important parts of someone's life

which could actually be helpful in resolving the issues they face. It needs social workers not to be limited to awareness of 'clients' but extend their attention to the relationships between people and between the people in the area and the features of their physical and service environment – their community. Failing to pay attention to the community in which we work is likely to lead to missed opportunities and – even worse – limited understanding of the circumstances in which our clients live.LT.

From a voluntary sector perspective:

I think people must get disillusioned with ideas of community work, and then not have the time to work in that way. It does take a lot of time... we were able to decide to take that sort of time.MH

This linked to discussion about the different timescales and expectations involved which do not necessarily marry well with managing demanding, busy caseloads.

Despite such very real obstacles both focus group participants and interviewees identified current examples of community – based practice. These ranged from the development of an advisory and support service for women living with an addiction to street heroin in a rural area, the development of village plans across a rural authority, an anti-poverty initiative addressing the needs of a particular section of a school community, to a peer mentoring service co-produced with unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.

At a wider level there was discussion of the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014, the wider partnership structures required to address multiple and complex problems and the extent to which the policy focus on community empowerment 'and the whole thinking that people have the right to have some influence on and some say in how their communities are supported and to contribute to the discussion about what the priorities are and now they should be delivered... feels very democratic and very appropriate'.

A defining current

One focus group participant suggested that 'The big issue for me now is whether I would be motivated to come into social work now... would I see that as the obvious vehicle for what I wanted to change in the world...?' Others were optimistic for the future:

I feel quite optimistic for social work in the longer run. I think the skill mix and the interfaces that we operate on as an occupation will continue to be there in the future. I think that arguably other occupational groups have a role but that actually some of those key interfaces, thinking in particular of children and families, but it would apply also to adult services, are likely to be the focus... communities are going to want these issues addressed... issues to do with assessing and managing risk, providing support and social care, with children achieving their full potential. Yes, I think there is a role there and there is a need for the social work profession to recognise that it has something distinct to offer. AT.

Indeed one interviewee highlighted the fact that many people currently in senior management positions trained when ideas of community and community-based approaches were more mainstream. This they suggested might be something that could be tapped into. Moves in some areas to locality based teams provided the potential for exploring different ways of working:

if we are moving to a locality model it will allow other teams to link in and learn about their local communities in a way that they are not able to at present and just from that linking up process stuff will emerge... projects and ideas will emerge... and I hope our service (social work) will maybe lead on some of these things because in my view we are probably one of the few agencies that has that more global perspective on the individual. KMM

Focus group participants also agreed that there was space for community work within the social work task and that with the creation of space and time to develop community-based approaches and increased autonomy there was very real potential for change. The discussion also highlighted what might be gained by a return to generic practice and increased community presence with social work located within, known, and accessible to the communities it serves. There was also discussion of training that prepares new workers for community based practice 'to ensure they have the professional confidence to make decisions about taking

on community based work... the idea that it's OK to be a bit radical, it's OK to come up with different solutions, to improvise, come up with new ideas rather than seeing the role as prescribed'

A key theme was a sense that what has been an important current in social work theory and practice since its earliest days might be in danger of being lost:

So I think in the 80s and early 90s that sense was around but that people of my age group and maybe older who were trained in that way are probably now in posts like team leader, service manager, heads of service and so it doesn't take a great deal to speak to those individuals and to kind of set off that wee spark again. It's still there and that's a good thing, but at the grass roots level, the new workers coming off courses, it's just not there... they just don't have that way of thinking. KMM.

The thoughts of practitioners resonate with the work of social work academics from a number of directions. Considering the links between social work and community development Forde and Lynch (2015: 19) argue that although they have had different histories they share values, skills and 'knowledge intersections' which include a commitment to social justice and challenging inequality and oppression. Community development they suggest can be part of the scaffolding for social work within a framework of critical practice. Ferguson (2008: 136) equally charts a resurgence of radicalism since the mid-1990s that links oppression and material inequality and calls for a social work based on ethics, relationship and process. This includes reclaiming the social, the structural and the political and for social work to move from 'being a quiet profession to play its proper role in the struggle for a more equal, more just society'.

Smith (2018: 35), draws on the work of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers and the idea of a Scottish approach to ethics, to argue for 'a reassertion of a moral impulse which might be called benevolence, sympathy or community as integral to what is it to be human' and which would see social work not as a technical, rational endeavour but rather as an ethical one; a service rather than a bureaucratic activity. Webb argues (2006: 200) that 'in a society in which the narrow pursuit of material self-interest is the norm, adherence to an ethical stance is more radical than many people realise. This, he suggests is one of the defining strengths of

social work. Indeed Bauman in his address to the 100th anniversary of the Amsterdam School of Social Work argues, somewhat starkly, that in the current context when the welfare state is everywhere under attack and that no rational arguments can be raised in favour of its continuing existence, the ethical justification for it is the 'only remaining line of defence'. Social work can trace its origins to such an ethical impulse, a focus on our collective responsibility for each other and might re-engage with the complexities that this entails. This he suggests (2000: 10) 'is bad news for the seekers of peace and tranquillity'.

Some final thoughts

The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 saw the surfacing of a current that had existed in social work from its earliest pre-professional days. Aspirations for the new service were high and post 1968 it can be argued that there was a brief moment in the sun when ideas of community, community – based practice and universal state services enjoyed support across practitioners, policy makers and politicians in Scotland. There were clearly issues in relation to implementation and questions as to whether ideas of a radical current remained largely theoretical and difficult to implement. There is no doubt however that those who worked through this period had a sense of ambition and belief for social work and its potential to contribute to social change.

In the changed context of the 80s and 90s the consensus was challenged and in many ways social work in Scotland was subject to similar pressures as that in other parts of the UK despite some notable resistance. Local government re-organisation, reduction in budgets, changes in leadership within social work, to social work education and training all contributed to a loss of focus on the collective and structural determinants of the issues people face. It was not, however, completely lost but became dispersed into what might be seen as a number of smaller streams that continued to flow and maintain an alternative vision.

These still exist, some stronger, some weaker within our current context. This context might be interpreted as one that is more restrained, more restrictive and more threatening to social work, or alternatively as one that provides the policy levers and possibility for social work to step up and do what it says it can. Community empowerment and service transformation are key priorities for the current Scottish Government and yet notions of community and the collective within social work appear somewhat fragile and in danger of becoming the concern of other partners and not that of social work. This represents the loss of a defining current in the professions historical legacy, one that is key to our claim to be a unique profession rooted in ideas of social justice.

Action to curate and build from such a legacy might best be taken forward in the type of creative partnerships between practitioners, academics, policy makers and politicians that characterised the work on the 1968 Act. Such action would have communities at its heart and would include:
Critical engagement with the current policy aspirations

for communities, current conceptualisations of community, the role for social work within this and a realistic appreciation of what is possible.

The creation of time and space for practitioners to pilot community-based approaches across diverse communities in Scotland and to develop evidence of best practice.

The inclusion of critical and current thinking on the potential role of community and community-based approaches in social work education and training. Investment to build research and training partnerships across our diverse communities in Scotland to develop theory and practice in relation to community, social work and social justice.

In this way, social work might dip its toe again in a key current that informed the development of Scottish social work and reconnect to the passion and belief in social change that informed the 1968 Act and arguably will be crucial to its future.

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