

**Liam Dwyer**

## **The Impact of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014 on the Community Development Sector in Ireland (2018)**

The focus of this research is the “alignment” process which is a set of Local Government Reforms known as the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) and the Public Participation Network (PPN) which has impacted on the Community Development Sector in Ireland. The LCDC derives from the Local Government Reform Act (LGRA) 2014. The PPN was rolled out following the enactment of the LGRA 2014 and was influenced by the report “Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government” 2013. Such a study is important in order to reveal the impact of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) (2015-2017), the new funding programme established during this process, and its associated structures, the LCDCs and the PPNs on community development practice, on community workers and volunteers and on those working within local authority areas. The research approach adopted a qualitative methodology where actors belonging to the LCDC’s, the PPN, Programme Implementers (PI) for the SICAP and other key figures participated in a series of semi-structured interviewees. These offered them the opportunity to share their first-hand experiences of the “alignment” process and the impact that the Local Government Reforms (LGR) have had on their lives and others within community development. The findings from the research provide evidence of how “new managerialism” has influenced the way community development is being delivered with a growing demand for accountability and oversight finding its way right up to the top with ultimate responsibility for the appropriate distribution of scarce financial resources belonging to the SICAP resting with the representatives of the LCDC. The findings also reveal how stress has been felt by all who have been affected in some way by the changes brought about by the “alignment” process with power as a central theme to describe the relationship between the community development sector and the state. The main conclusions drawn from this study suggest that community development in Ireland has experienced a loss of autonomy and has found itself continuously

diluted as market forces driven by priorities based around economic prosperity taking precedence over organic community development practice. However, hope still remains with the LGR being in their infancy that over time positive change will result in an outcome for the betterment of society. This dissertation recommends that the state reconsider how it views the community development sector's role within wider society and instead uses it as an arena whereby state policies can forgo a process of rigorous scrutiny whose feedback can be used to implement potentially more robust social policies that work in favour of the most marginalised within society. It also recommends that both the community development sector and the state reflect and have an open and honest debate around clear expectations from either body.