Imagining the past, imagining the future: Communities and Social Welfare in the West of Scotland

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Abstract: This paper is about imagining. The imagination involved in historical research to develop two original accounts of community-based activities in the West of Scotland and the imagination of members of community organisations as they engage with these accounts. This engagement involves the interaction of memory with archival records, myths and story in a process of constructing the past and considering what, if anything, it might offer to contemporary communities as they imagine their futures. The paper is also about the imagining involved in ideas of community, that 'much maligned and yet highly resilient concept' (Crow 2014: 374) and in the aspirations for the role that communities might play in relation to social welfare. This turn to community can be seen particularly at times of transformation and flux and is currently evident in the Scottish Government's approach. The paper draws on historical research into activities at particular points in time within two communities in the West of Scotland where it has been possible to build links with local community organisations to consider their contemporary relevance. The community organisations are the Tannahill Centre in Ferguslie Park, Paisley and the Kinning Park Complex in Glasgow.

Keywords: Historical perspective, community, activism, collectivism

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Introduction

Despite being a source of endless interest and debate, local communities and their activities are not well represented in the historical literature. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged communities whose members often leave scant historical records. These are the very communities that are the focus of social policy interest and prescriptions but often have limited historical perspectives to draw on. Communities are at the centre of current Scottish Government policy-making, particularly in its key areas of responsibility which are in the areas of social policy (Mooney and Scott 2011). They are seen to be key to the transformation of public services which following the recommendations of the Christie Commission will be 'built around people and communities, their needs, aspirations, capacities and skills and work to build up their autonomy and resilience' (Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services 2011). They will be supported to ensure that all their members can contribute their energy, creativity and talents to a 'flourishing and fairer Scotland' and the benefits anticipated from the recent Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 include a boost in democratic participation, higher numbers of people volunteering and more satisfaction with the quality of life in local neighbourhoods (www.scot.gov.uk).

The history of social policy over the past 150 years would suggest that while this represents a new legislative framework and includes some new policy and practice approaches, the impetus behind these current developments is not entirely new or indeed transformational. There is a long-standing link between ideas of community and social welfare that is evident in the range of organisations, initiatives and experiments which have characterised the 'mixed economy of welfare' (Finlayson 1994: 6) and the 'moving frontier' between the different elements of a system in which communities and their organisations have always played an important part.

Background

The study is located in interdisciplinary and contested territory and draws on material from history, sociology, social work studies, social policy and community development. Key concepts are those of 'community' and 'public history', both of which have given rise to a considerable body of literature.

In their research report for the Connected Communities programme Crow and Mah (2011:) identified 100 works that related to the theme of 'conceptualisations and meanings of "community": the theory and operationalization of a contested concept' that had been produced since 2000. While Williams (1976: 66)

remains a key reference point, 'that warmly persuasive word', that 'seems never to be used unfavourably' they suggest that recent conceptualisations of community are more paradoxical:

> the term is used positively to represent social belonging, collective well-being, solidarity and support, but also negatively in relation to social problems and 'problem populations' (Crow and Mah 2011: 4).

Current approaches suggest a fluid, open notion of community based on the range of different identities and associations individuals can develop across time and space in a globalised world. Community is thus emergent, about communication, and constructed by social action and 'a set of practices that constitute belonging' (Delanty 2003: 130). Somerville (2016: 17) argues that while as a concept it remains highly ambiguous and contested, 'its value lies in its core meaning as social attachments, bonds, ties or obligations beyond the family'. It is in notions of well- being, support and mutual obligation beyond the family that ideas of community and social welfare can be seen to connect.

Indeed, these are often seen in attempts to recover community lost or attempts to build new forms of community. Bauman (2001) suggests the impetus for this is a search for security in our currently insecure world. The security we long for and seek in community, he suggests comes at the price of freedom and individuality. Notions of community are at best nostalgic and illusory and will always fail to deliver:

> Paradise lost or a paradise still hoped to be found: one way or another, this is definitely not a paradise that we inhabit and not the paradise that we know from our own experience. (Bauman 2001: 3)

If community is beyond our reach it is in the realm of imagination, of our aspirations and community becomes a powerful impetus to change:

> If there is to be a community in the world of individuals, it can only be (and needs to be) a community woven together from sharing and mutual care: a community of concern and responsibility for the equal right to be human and the equal ability to act on that right (ibid: 149).

The extent to which such change can be informed by historical perspectives is of interest here and leads to ideas of 'public history'. At a general level these are concerned with new participants in the history making process, with new areas of interest and drawing on non- traditional materials. They might also as Newell suggests involving a different 'attitude or perception about the use and value of history' (quoted Kean and Martin 2013: xvi). While an early focus of public history was on where it was being produced, by whom and how it was transmitted by historians to the 'public', Kean (2010: 26) argues for 'a different

way of thinking about public history that places less emphasis on any distinctiveness of "historian" and "public" and more upon the process of how the past becomes history' and the 'form and processes involved in the creation of history' (ibid: 29).

History in this public sense can be a collective and collaborative activity in which all can engage as active agents (Ashton and Kean 2008). It is no longer the preserve of academic historians and there is a long tradition of alternative histories developed outside the academy. Drawing on Samuel's (1994: 8) legacy and his oft-quoted definition of history as 'a form of social knowledge; the work in a given instance of a thousand different hands', they argue for inclusive histories. These are histories which break down knowledge barriers, value engagement and promote the use of different materials. Such ideas can be seen to have informed the development of the new social histories, the identity histories and oral histories of respectively the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (Flinn 2011).

While such histories expand the range and scope of historical perspectives, concerns have been expressed about the dangers of a focus on rediscovery and essentially local concerns. As applied to work in communities and independent and community archives, Flinn (2011) highlights the danger of a focus on 'reclamation and celebration' and the development of community archives as places of passive collection of the past. This can be addressed, he suggests, by the inclusion of elements of critical reflection and analysis which create the possibility of a radical or oppositional history that can 'become a significant tool for discovery, education and empowerment' (ibid: 9). This, he claims will be a source of 'useful' history, history not produced solely for academic purposes, but histories 'that are explicitly intended to be used to support the achievement of political objectives and mobilization as a means of inspiring action and cementing solidarity' (ibid: 12). Tosh (2014) equally expresses concern that public history might become solely concerned with questions of locality and identity. To avoid this and to ensure that it is 'critical' and 'democratically attuned', he argues, it may continue to need the services of professional historians to provide access to the wider information and critical perspective that they can bring to questions of public interest, 'which not only go beyond what is currently under discussion but also serve as a critique of the received wisdom' (Tosh 2014: 197).

The historical research on which this paper is based would fit an essentially academic model of history, drawing on secondary and archival sources and, in the case of Paisley Community Development project, some witness testimonies to produce detailed original accounts of which only the briefest outline can be provided here. Archival sources consulted included Glasgow City Archives, Paisley Heritage Centre, the National Records of Scotland, The National Library of Scotland, The National Archive Kew and The National Co-operative Archive, Manchester. The accounts were developed however, with the intention of exploring their contemporary significance and were shared, in different formats, with local community organisations. Permissions were obtained and sessions were taped, although unfortunately, the quality of the tape from Kinning Park precludes extensive direct transcription. The discussions and follow-up

activity were analysed to consider what they suggest about ideas of community, public history and the ways in which a historical perspective might contribute to contemporary issues. The work was exploratory and carried out within a framework that stressed the importance of ethical practice and a focus on participatory approaches and community benefit wherever possible.

The historical examples

The two cases are: the Kinning Park Co-operative Women's Guild (hereafter KPCWG) and the Paisley Community Development Project (hereafter Paisley CDP). KPCWG was the first Co-operative Women's Guild in Scotland, founded in 1890 on the south side of Glasgow (Dollan 1923: 143), and the Paisley CDP, which operated in Ferguslie Park in Paisley between 1972 and 1977, was the only one of twelve local action research projects, part of the Home Office Community Development Programme, which was located in Scotland. Both initiatives occurred at points of economic transformation and transition in relation to ideas of social welfare. KPCWG developed while Glasgow enjoyed its reputation as the second city of the Empire and during the debates that led to the liberal welfare reforms of 1906-1914. Paisley CDP as the economy of the West of Scotland was exposed to global competition and at what can be seen as the beginning of the unravelling of the post war consensus which had supported the brief interlude of the 'classic welfare state' (Harris 2004). They also provide interesting points of contrast. KPCWG is an example of local agency. The Guild worked with its own definition of its local community, developed using its own resources, built its own leadership and worked on both local and national issues in relation to social welfare. Paisley CDP in contrast, had an external locus of control; it worked with an administrative definition of its local community, both teams were largely professionals drawn from outside the area. The resources were a combination of central and local government funding and the agenda was determined, at least initially, within the Home Office. Both initiatives had some national impact; members of KPCWG were key to the establishment of the Scottish Cooperative Women's Guild (Buchan 1913: 1), the first organisation of working class women in Scotland, and Paisley CDP, although not well represented in the national literature on the CDPs is covered in two of the joint reports and had some role in bringing learning from the projects to the community development initiatives north of the border (Barr 1991).

The rules of Kinning Park Co-operative Society (hereafter KPCS) registered on July 7th 1871 made provision for an allowance for educational purposes to be made from the revenues (Dollan 1923). From small beginnings, by 1890 these revenues stood at £21,326. 5s 7d in share capital, deposits and loans and reserves of £955. 10s 11d (ibid: 232), and it was members of the education committee who supported the establishment of the KPCWG. Reflecting on the early work of the Guild, Mrs Ritchie (1908:6) states 'our Guilds were first formed to be a source of mutual aid and social intercourse for the women of the movement as well as to spread a knowledge of the advantages and principles of co-operation'. Founded on the co-operative ideas of industry, mutual aid and democratic control, the early work of the Guild

focused on domestic skills with cookery and sewing classes and exhibitions of handicrafts accompanied by cultural and social events. This developed to include the writing and reading of papers on topics of local and national interest, and involvement in some of the major issues of the time, health, housing and women's employment conditions, the feeding of school children, old age pensions, and women's suffrage.

The Home Office press release that announced the national Community Development Project on July 16th 1969 stated:

> This will be a neighbourhood-based experiment aimed at finding new ways of meeting the needs of people living in areas of high social deprivation: by bringing together the work of all the social services under the leadership of a special project team and also by tapping resources of self-help and mutual help which may exist among the people of the neighbourhood' (TNA 1969).

Ferguslie Park was announced as the location for the single local project in Scotland in December 1971 with the first appointment to the staff team starting in August 1972 (Paisley Burgh Council 1971). Building on the tradition of community organising in the area, work focused on a local information and advice centre, the development of tenant groups pressing for repairs, maintenance and regeneration of housing, employment initiatives and education. There was also ongoing support to play-schemes, youth groups, a lunch club and a community minibus.

The instigators of the CDP in the Home Office saw the issue of poverty as essentially limited to small pockets of the country and the result of cycles of deprivation and cultures of poverty. The Community Development Projects developed a different analysis which located persistent poverty and increasing unemployment as the result of wider social and economic conditions associated with the restructuring of the UK economy in the early 1970s. This analysis was shared by the project in Ferguslie Park which stated that 'the basic problems arise from the unequal distribution of wealth and power showing up particularly in the high incidence of unemployment, low incomes and poor housing' (SRC 1977).

Initial engagement

Two different methods were employed to engage with contemporary local community organisations. Both involved an element of cold calling, and developed differently. In the case of Ferguslie Park, this was a slow process and was built via interviews for the case study. An initial series of visits to the local community centre, the Tannahill Centre, looking for potential contacts finally resulted in an interview with the centre manager who provided a key link. In an area which has a history of being researched and written about and an understandable reluctance to engage with yet another researcher, the fact that I had recently worked with a former, well-respected worker in the area, played a key role in gaining access. In

the course of these interviews the possibility of sharing materials was raised and two sessions were organised in conjunction with the Tannahill Centre to do this.

In Kinning Park, the approach was more direct. Aware of an active local organisation based in an old school in the area, the Kinning Park Complex, an e-mail was sent to the Director sharing some basic information about the size and scale of the Kinning Park Co-operative Society and the fact that the KPCWG was the first in Scotland and offering to visit to share findings. This was enthusiastically accepted and a subsequent meeting with the Director and a curatorial student from Glasgow School of Art led to an invitation to provide a 'talk' as part of their regular community meal, linked to International Women's Day.

Initial presentation of materials

Both approaches required some form of presentation of materials and as such can be characterised as public engagement sessions. The fact that Paisley CDP was more recent meant that reports written at the time and some photographs were available as artefacts. These were supplemented by photocopied extracts from community newsletters, local authority and Home Office records and, some basic collations of information such as a staff list for the project and basic time line. These provided the basis for an informal run through the material collected which laid the ground work for a subsequent discussion. A discussion guide was produced although not strictly adhered to allowing for the discussion to flow.

Given the time frame involved, all sources for KPCWG were archival and thus more difficult to provide direct access to. Also, despite being in the context of a community meal, the hall was large and in many ways more formal, so it was decided that a simple PowerPoint presentation would be most effective. This incorporated a small number of available images with direct quotations and an outline of the developing analysis. The presentation was followed by questions and answers and wider discussion.

Follow on activities

In both areas the initial engagement has led to follow up activities. In Ferguslie Park the idea of an exhibition and archive using the CDP materials as a starting point was discussed and subsequent meetings held to develop this, involving local residents, the local library and the manager of the Tannahill Centre. This resulted in an initial small-scale exhibition of photographs taken by one of the CDP workers at the local gala day to develop interest. In Kinning Park, the material on the KPCWG fed into activities around the twenty-first anniversary of the complex. Links were made between the banners used by the KPCWG, a banner made by local women during the sit-in which saved the building from closure in 1992 and the commissioning of a new banner as the centrepiece for a 21st anniversary march and exhibition. The open call for the banner spoke of it contributing to 'a week-long event to celebrate the power of collective voice'. Material on KPCWG was incorporated into the exhibition and Glasgow Museum's Resource

Centre exhibited one of the original KPCWG's banners at the opening. Here too, there is discussion about a longer-term project curating materials from the history of Kinning Park Complex and the wider community and as a potential repository for material gathered for the case study.

Themes

Common themes are explored in relation to the ideas of community and public history as concerned with place and locality, with new areas of interest and discovery, as being a potential source of empowerment and means of inspiring action. It also considers the extent to which the issues in relation to a focus purely on locality and 'reclamation and celebration' are evident and themes of wider concern in relation to social welfare are covered.

Place and locality

Ferguslie Park remains an identifiable area despite the fact that it has been almost completely re-developed since the time of the Paisley CDP. Kinning Park, while originally the smallest, independent police burgh on the outskirts of Glasgow, lost some of its identity when it was incorporated into the City in 1905 (McMahon 2003: 15), and has equally been extensively redeveloped with a motorway built through a large part of it in the 1970s. It remains a destination on the Glasgow subway but even here, is overshadowed by its larger and more famous neighbour, Govan.

In both cases the response to the material included a link to a sense of place, of locality. Discussion in Ferguslie Park covered the geography of the area; the boundaries around the area, and the fact that in the words of one local resident, 'it was known as the biggest cul-de-sac in the world', the internal divisions within the community and the role that the CDP played in building links between the different neighbourhood groups and organisations.

> The CDP did play a role in bringing the scheme together and largely the basis of FLAG was the tenants' associations. Ferguslie League of Action Groups, and most of the action groups were the tenants' associations.

Participants spoke of a strong sense of place and, despite a changing demographic, a sense of Ferguslie Park as a distinct entity and the need for new residents to understand the history of the area:

> Lots of different people have moved into the area as well…we need to be looking at that as well but based on the history of that whole thing…that people have looked at issues, have fought together, they've campaigned together, they've said "this isnae good enough, we need places for our kids to come, we need places to go and meet…"

This was not the case in Kinning Park where the sense of place was less strong. The Kinning Park Complex has strong local roots, having been saved from closure by a sit-in of local women, and it also draws on a wider constituency of artists and activists who rent studio and other space in the building. A key area of initial interest from the Director was how the materials might provide a link to a sense of place, rooting the building in a distinctive Kinning Park identity, rather than it being seen as part of it more famous neighbour, Govan. Interestingly, discussion in the session covered the extent to which this was possible and there were views on either side.

A connection to the past and hidden histories

In both cases the materials created an interest in a connection to the past. In Ferguslie Park where some participants had been directly involved, this took the form of reminiscences about the actual project and also of subsequent developments and initiatives in the area. Memories shared were not exclusively about the CDP but in places more generally a discussion about the past and how it differed from the present. They also at times contradicted the materials from the archival records, raising issues in relation to memory and its role in constructing interpretations of the past.

> Looking back over the past 30-40 years, I just think things have got worse and I think Ferguslie Park has just been decimated. When you look at the projects etc., the support that was in the area, it's just gone. I think the stuffing has been knocked out of the people of Ferguslie Park. There is still an element of community cohesion, but in terms of actually going out and doing things and the things we used to get involved in, it's just gone.

There was no-one to provide such a direct connection to the material in Kinning Park and so, rather than a focus on reminiscence, the discussion centred more around discovery, wanting to explore more information on different aspects of the material. In response to a photograph of the first committee of KPCWG, someone asked if they really were working-class women as 'they looked a bit too grand'. There was a series of other questions about how they connected to other organisations in the city at the time, to women who have had a higher public profile such as Mary Barbour (active in the rent strikes of 1915) and the extent to which they met with opposition from men both within and outside of the co-operative movement. Comments also touched on the idea of 'people's history' and the fact that 'a lot of this is missing' and the importance of such materials in allowing people to re-establish a link to their own history. The importance of this not always being written by 'outsiders' was also highlighted.

The focus on discovery also extended to the mechanics of the archival work; what had been looked at, where records are located and how participants might access them. 'How easy was it to find out about this group – could you just google it or did you have to look at archives?' This connected to ideas of the

invisibility of women's histories particularly on the internet and the need to think about how best to make the material accessible and searchable on the web.

A source of inspiration

The size and scale of the Kinning Park Co-operative Society surprised participants. Figures extracted from the accounts and information about the shops, warehouses and factories based in the area were new to them. Equally while there was some knowledge of the KPCWG as the first in Scotland, largely derived from one photograph which survives in the Glasgow City Archives collection, participants were unaware of the size and scope of their activities. Participants spoke of the role that an awareness of such developments in the past can play in inspiring activity in the present. In addition the importance of uncovering these often 'hidden histories' of working class communities and their organisations, and the role this can play in creating a sense of continuity and possibility.

A sense of continuity and possibility was present in Ferguslie Park, provided by the activists who could trace their involvement back to the CDP. Here, inspiration appeared to be drawn from remembering a time when the scheme was 'on the up' and there was a level of community activism to make things happen and a level of resources to support this. Responding to the material one local resident commented:

> I think it may well just enthuse, because it certainly enthused me just to have a wee look at it and I think it does spark a lot of things.

This was followed by discussion on whether the historical material might remind people of former 'exciting times' and how useful it would be to 're-ignite the passion again'.

A focus on activism and collective approaches

While much of the focus was undoubtedly local, it was not exclusively so and connections were built to wider issues of public concern and activism around social welfare. In Kinning Park, links were made to current small-scale workers co-operatives in the city and whether these might build into a new co-operative movement more akin to that of Kinning Park than the 'big business' that the co-operative brand has become. There was also speculation about whether members of KPCWG drew on previous experience of activism in the area with mention of Chartist activity. In Ferguslie Park, a thread connecting much of the discussion was identified as the 'strength of the people' and a key legacy of the CDP was that:

> People had the knowledge of what they could do if they got together and held together. And they knew how to argue their case, they were not stupid…it gave people the knowledge that I can challenge you, I can tell you what is wrong.

There was also a recognition of the dangers of just focusing on a celebratory story; on the tremendous spirit and capacity of many people to thrive in adverse circumstances. Participants discussed anger at the fact that the area continues to be the single most deprived area measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and that the need for this to change should be an important theme in any future work. There was also a recognition of a changed context and the impact of the 'welfare to work' agenda and new employment patterns on people's ability to be involved in community activity.

A link to current practice

Comparisons were drawn in both settings between the historical material, the time under consideration, and the present. In both cases connections were made to issues of concern. In Ferguslie Park participants highlighted the fact that despite numerous different programmes over the years since the CDP, the issues of poverty, unemployment, education, the need for advice and information continue to be key issues affecting the area. Differences in resources were highlighted. From being one of 26 community libraries in Renfrewshire with a staff of eleven, Ferguslie Library is now one of six libraries, with a staff of three.

> The last time it (Ferguslie Park) was on the up was about 20 years ago. That was a big… you had a strong library, you had the arts, the health project… you had everything, community radio…and a sense of workers and volunteers working together.

In Kinning Park, discussion covered the so called 'domestic agenda' of the KPCWG and their interest in health, women's working conditions and the medical inspection and feeding of school children. The fact that KPC raised its own funds from its retail sales and was able to determine its own priorities was compared to the social enterprise model currently operating within the Complex and parallels were drawn between the KPCWG meetings which combined home industries with the reading of papers, discussion and social activities, with the community meal, talk and banner-making workshop which were taking place alongside the session.

Conclusions

The analysis supports the contention that an historical perspective and an awareness of past activity can be of value to contemporary community organisations as they imagine their futures. Two communities have access to original accounts of past activities within their communities which they can now draw on as they imagine their futures. While there are clear caveats based on the size of sample, there is evidence that access to such historical material can play a role in building links for current community organisations to a sense of their past. In both cases it appears to have reinforced a link to ideas of place

and locality and the discovery, and rediscovery of past initiatives in those places. Ideas of 'reclamation and celebration' were important but it was not solely this; and in both cases the materials offered some form of inspiration. Given a focus on activism and collective approaches this can be seen to be akin to ideas of empowerment which are important to the current policy context, and in both cases this has led to follow on activities and an appetite for further work involving the development of histories. While the initial work has been carried out largely within an essentially academic model of history, this creates the possibility for experimentation with more collaborative approaches.

Engaging with the historical examples also provided the basis for comparisons to be made between the present and the past; with the current situations the organisations are working in and exploration of the continuities and discontinuities in the issues being worked on and in the practice approaches adopted. This provided the basis for discussion about how things might be different in the future, including ideas of hopes and aspirations for their local area and the work of their organisations. While this was limited by the time involved, there is also potential here to expand such conversations building engagement across all the examples in the study and the communities involved to take a more detailed look at what, if any, lessons the historical material can offer to the present.

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