

## “To see ourselves as others see us!”

Charlie McConnell

### Abstract

*In April 2025 there will, I hope, be celebrations across Scotland and beyond to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Alexander report, the Challenge of Change and five decades of community education practice. I shall certainly be raising a glass to a man and a publication that put Scottish community education on the map, not just of Scotland, but internationally. This article traces some of the international influence of the Scottish approach that emerged since the report was published, and in particular of its association with the wider field of community development. I have too often felt that Scots at home, not least policy makers, have not recognised the influence Scottish practice and scholarship has had internationally. In my view, it has been and remains, huge. I hope this article will remind readers of that. And if it reaches the eyes of Scottish policy makers and funders, that they enhance investment in this vitally important work as part of any strategy to support communities to address the challenges of change.*

### Alexander and the role of the local state

Named after its chair, the Scottish Socialist educator, Kenneth Alexander, the Alexander report was published just prior to the creation of Scotland's Regional councils in 1975. Its main recommendation was that these new councils should each establish a community education service, which they did that year<sup>i</sup>. With a background working in a community school and then as an FE college lecturer, I was working in 1975 for the Scottish Local Government Unit (SLGU) based in Paisley. We were a small team, working under its director Ron Young. SLGU had been set up to support research and development for elected members and officials working in the new councils. Ron, who was also a Strathclyde Regional Labour councillor, was one of the lead architects of its community development strategy and later advised local authorities across Europe.

I interviewed Ken Alexander just after his report was published. My particular interests were twofold. First, his thoughts as to extending participation in continuing education across deprived urban and rural communities; and secondly, his thoughts on community development. His report was very much a product of the social democratic thinking in Scottish social policy at that time. And, it also needs to be placed within the context of a divided country with some of the highest levels of relative poverty in Europe, high inflation, growing levels of

unemployment and one of the lowest levels of participation in continuing education in the OECD.

Alexander was especially concerned to extend educational opportunities for more disadvantaged people, including prioritising public sector funding towards designated deprived areas. He believed that local authorities, by harnessing their community education capacity - staff, funding and facilities - would be more able to reach out to and engage with urban working class communities and more disadvantaged and isolated rural ones. His aim was to increase participation levels and thereby contribute to tackling the deep legacy of social and educational inequality.

Alexander knew well of the British government's community development programmes overseas during the period of decolonisation after WW2 and the role Scots had played in that<sup>ii</sup>. They had used a community-based educative approach, whereby community development officers supported these countries' social, economic and political development. He envisaged this community development approach as becoming a growing area of practice within Scotland.

From 1975, the largest Regional council, Strathclyde, took the lead in designing and implementing an extensive area-based positive discrimination programme across over one hundred targeted poor urban and rural communities. And, linked with this, it introduced a holistic multi-disciplinary community development strategy, embracing the council's community education and social work services, working together with schools, FE colleges, the police, health, economic development and District housing services, and the voluntary sector. As other Scottish councils followed Strathclyde's lead in introducing targeted community development type strategies, this was to become a significant test bed for local state-led community education and community development.

### **Creating a new discipline**

Such programmes required competent and trained professional staff. This led to the Carnegie report, published in 1977<sup>iii</sup>. Here the four colleges of education in Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow and Aberdeen were invited to design new undergraduate and post graduate education and training courses for professional community education practitioners. I joined the teaching team in Dundee in 1977, as the lecturer in community development. Alexander also called for a national development agency to be created. This was to become the Scottish Community Education Council (SCEC). It would advise ministers and service providers on policy and

practice, eventually adding oversight over the professional validation and endorsement of the college (later university) training courses called Community Education Validation and Endorsement (CeVe)<sup>iv</sup>.

With some two hundred students graduating annually in Scotland, they were finding jobs not only within the community education services, but also other council departments, most significantly social work, as community workers, together with the voluntary sector. By 1980 25% of the membership of the UK Association of Community Workers was from Scotland<sup>v</sup> and Scottish local government became one of the main employers of community educators per head of population in Europe.

### **Going Europe**

By the late 1980s, recognition of Scotland's experience and expertise had come to the attention of the Council of Europe, with its recommendation that regional and municipal authorities across Europe should adopt and promote community development, highlighting Scotland's approach<sup>vi</sup>. I attended the debate in 1989 that launched its report, held at the European Parliament building in Strasbourg. By this time, I had become the European director of the Community Development Foundation, the UK government's lead quango adviser on community development<sup>vii</sup>. The Council of Europe report guided our work with local authority associations. Significant European Union policy initiatives and funding programmes were concurrently providing new opportunities for Scottish local authorities and voluntary organisations to engage in European partnerships, including the Leader programme which supported rural development and community-led initiatives to promote social inclusion, and the PHARE programme that funded work in Eastern European countries after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

COSLA, (the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) set up a Brussels office alongside national associations of local authorities from other European countries. SCEC also opened an office in Brussels in 1994 to source EU partnership funding opportunities. CeVe added a Recognition function to its work, in order to process and recognise relevantly qualified practitioners from other EU countries who now had the right to apply for jobs in Scotland. And the wider Scottish non-governmental sector was engaging in European partnerships, with SCVO (the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations) taking the lead.

This contrasted dramatically with the neo-liberal approach the UK Conservative Government was taking, cutting back and in part privatising the role of the state. This was a period with dramatic increases in unemployment and redundancies across much of Scotland's manufacturing sector, its coalfields and steel industry. And in 1996 the Conservative Government abolished the Regional councils, transferring their responsibilities to smaller local authorities. This caused considerable dislocation, including the near end of community education services across the highly rural Borders Region.

### **Publications, practice and policy development**

From Alexander on, practitioner/academics in Scotland contributed a rich canon of research and more polemical and critically reflective publications<sup>viii</sup>. They contributed to the 1970s ACW/Routledge series of books and later to the Policy Press Community Development series. In 1982/83 Dundee College of Education published two books on continuing education and on community development in Scotland. Later, Moray House College of Education along with local practitioners, launched the Journal of Community Education Practice Theory (CONCEPT). Community Work teachers at Glasgow university set up a Radical Community Work Journal. SCEC launched the Scottish Journal of Community Work and Development. Mae Shaw, from Edinburgh university later became the co-editor of the Community Development Journal, the leading international peer refereed academic publication in the field.

Where I believe Scottish scholarship had strengths, was in its eclecticism and recognition of the multi-disciplinary, multi-sector contributions informing work in Scotland. And whilst critically reflective, most of these publications were intended to support practice on the ground. Academics in Scotland as elsewhere, often fell into the trap of social science jargon, in order to secure their peers' recognition, but there was a strong and welcomed plain language style in much of these publications, what one of these writers, Colin Kirkwood, called vulgar eloquence! Considering its small population (5.5 million), no other European country, other than England, (with ten times Scotland's population) produced such a quantity of publications in this field.

Where community education practice in Scotland differed from many other countries, was in its extensive use of the mass media, especially newspapers and radio. SCEC had a regular four page supplement within Scotland's most popular national newspaper, the Daily Record, used to support public education campaigns around e.g. drugs prevention, health education, crime

prevention, adult literacy - supporting community education teams on the ground. Community education in Scotland was never assumed just to be a 'bottom' up method. Open learning technologies were harnessed in Scottish community education from the late 1970s. These expanded greatly in the 2000s with the National Grid for Community Learning and later, the use of social media.

Scotland also had, and compared with most countries still has, a strong architecture to support practice development. Besides SCEC, there was a Community Learning and Development Managers forum (CLDS) and a forum for the main national agencies supporting community development, later called CDAS (Community Development Alliance Scotland). Although the UK ACW no longer exists, there remains in Scotland an active practitioners' association called the Scottish Community Development Network. CDF in partnership with Glasgow university set up the Scottish Community Development Centre, which offered CPD training for the field and undertook contracts for the government and other public agencies. Later it became the secretariat for the European Community Development Network. CeVe was pioneering competence based training, and prepared guidance for other disciplines such as community architects and community health workers, wanting to adopt community development approaches. After the UK Labour government was elected in 1997, Scottish interests played a lead role in setting up a UK government funded body, PAULO, which set occupational standards for the community learning and development employment sector across the UK<sup>ix</sup>. And in 2013, CeVe's successor body, the Community Learning and Development Standards Council introduced the world's first registration scheme for professional practitioners.

In the area of policy development, in 1998, COSLA published a report about community education, called *Promoting Learning: Developing Communities*<sup>x</sup>. And the government followed this with its first review of community education since Alexander<sup>xi</sup>. Following the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and Executive in 1999, Margaret Curran MSP, a former community development educator, was later appointed the Cabinet Secretary for Communities. The Scottish government established a short lived community regeneration executive agency called *Communities Scotland*<sup>xii</sup>. And policy initiatives around community learning and development, community planning, budgeting and empowerment were introduced by the new Scottish government, each highlighting a role for what it now called community learning and development staff.

## Going global

It was with this supportive context and perhaps a strong dose of chutzpah, that SCEC hosted an international conference in 1999, to propose that a new international body be established for practitioners and others supporting this work. This became the International Association for Community Development (IACD)<sup>xiii</sup>. Upwards of 300 attended from Scotland and around the world. This interest was undoubtedly due to marketing support provided by the CDJ, together with research we undertook to contact other national practitioner networks. The event confirmed a clear appetite to create a new international forum for those working in the field to meet and network, whether fieldworkers, agency managers, researchers or community development educators and from the wide range of disciplines now adding a community development approach to their work. We had community educators, community workers, adult educators, community artists, community architects, community enterprise workers, community environmental practitioners, community health workers, and university extension professionals and academics from both developed and developing countries attending. We invited people to join a new board at the conference, emphasising the need for diversity and geographic spread. People from the USA, India, China, UK, Canada, Israel, Cameroon, Malaysia, Kenya, Australia and South Africa stood. Gary Craig, the former long serving editor of the CDJ became President, I became Secretary General.

Since then, with its HQ in Scotland<sup>xiv</sup>, IACD has organised twenty five international conferences, always in partnership with national networks and others, the most recent being held in Australia in 2023. They have been held in Edinburgh, Tel Aviv, London, Rotorua, Montreal, Ithaca, Budapest, Yaoundé, Hong Kong, Nova Scotia, Brisbane, New Orleans, Lisbon, Glasgow, New Delhi, Minnesota, Ago-Iwoye, Auckland, Manila, Maynooth, Dundee and Darwin, with participants from Scotland at all, presenting papers or running workshops. The 2021 and 2022 conferences were held virtually. And since 2018 have been called the World Community Development Conference (WCDC). The 2022 WCDC attracted on-line participants from sixty countries. The office also organised smaller field study trips, called Practice Exchanges, for example to Cuba, Chile, Indonesia and India, and a feature of all conferences was time for participants to visit local projects in the host country. With UN accreditation IACD representatives, again including members from Scotland, attended a range of UN led events and consultations. These include the Millenium Development Goals consultations, the World Social Development Summit, The World Congress against Racism,

The World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation, and the Sustainable Development Goals consultations.

In 2010 the office launched IACD's website and later two Facebook social media pages. The official fb page currently has around 10,000 followers and the one for members, has over 5000. In 2017 its website received over 50,000 visits in the first three months. It then launched a practitioner magazine twice yearly for members called *Practice Insights*. It has an extensive You Tube channel of videos and other teaching and learning resources, including a podcast series linked to the association's work to enhance standards of practice internationally. With support from the Community Learning and Development Standards Council for Scotland, in 2016 IACD undertook a two year consultation with its several hundred members, leading to a report called *Towards International Standards for Community Development Practice*. This has become the association's most disseminated publication, translated into over a dozen languages. It is largely based upon the competencies approach used in Scotland for forty years. In 2022 Routledge published a book linked to these standards, entitled *International Community Development Practice*.<sup>xv</sup> It has 70 IACD contributors, with essays and case studies showcasing work from around the world, again including Scotland.

## Conclusion

Gauging the impact of the work in Scotland over five decades in a brief article is impossible. The Scottish government's Inspectorate (HMI) and work led by SCDC (Scottish Community Development Centre) on evaluation has helpfully supported the field over many years to assess its quantitative and qualitative impact. My experience of working within the Scottish government as the first Head of Community Learning and Development, was that the institutional memory within the civil service was poor and you had to continually fight your corner with respect to securing investment, irrespective of evidence on impact. Scotland's rich scholarship and the work of Scottish based organisations like IACD highlights I sense an influence internationally perhaps greater than at home.

In the mid 1970s there had been high, and probably unrealistic, expectations of fieldworkers. Some of the academic and polemical scholarship in our field has also been somewhat hyperbolic. Although community development programmes involved investment running into tens if not hundreds of millions of pounds, community educators were in the most part relatively young and community education and social work community work teams had, in

relation to local government spend, very modest budgets. The reality was that, at best, these fieldworkers and these programmes could only contribute marginally towards tackling Scotland's structural socio-economic inequality. Notwithstanding this, they have over five decades supported hundreds of thousands of people, individually and collectively, to deal with many of the challenges of change their communities have had to face. They have also had a considerable financial multiplier impact, securing funds from government, the EU, the Lottery and foundations for community based initiatives. And, through the work of IACD and others, greatly influenced this work internationally. There is much we can be proud of here. I have no doubt that Alexander would have been.

---

<sup>ii</sup> Snyder. J The Fabianisation of the British Empire, In Britain and the World, (2020) Volume 13 Issue 1, Page 69-89, ISSN 2043-8567

<sup>iii</sup> Report on Professional Education and Training for Community Education, chaired by Elizabeth Carnegie. (1997). HMSO, Edinburgh.

<sup>iv</sup> SCEC was set up in 1982. Its professional training validation and endorsement function was added following the 1984 Training for Change report, the second official review of community education professional education and training, chaired by Geoffrey Drought. This recommended the setting up of a government funded body to oversee the validation and endorsement of community education training. The government set up a third review of professional training in 1999, chaired by Fraser Patrick. This called for the creation of what became the Community Learning and Development Standards Council Scotland, which took over the work of CeVe, proposed more work-based professional training opportunities and, the registration of practitioners. These were all supported by the Scottish Government.

<sup>v</sup> In 1979 we established the Scottish Association of Community Workers as part of the UK ACW.

<sup>vi</sup> Community Development in Towns. Report prepared for the Council of Europe by the Committee of the Regions and Municipalities. (1989). Council of Europe.

<sup>vii</sup> Henderson. P and Vercseg. I. Community Development and Civil Society: Making connections in the European context. (2010) Policy Press; and Community Development in Europe: Towards a Common Framework and Understanding.(2014) EuCDN.

<sup>viii</sup> Selected extracts from many of these publications can be found in McConnell. C. Community Learning and Development: The Making of an Empowering Profession. (2002). CLS. Edinburgh; for the period from 2002-2016, see Ross. C. The Making of an Empowering Profession. Volume Two. Influencing Change. Community Learning and Development in Scotland. (2016) CLDSC.

<sup>ix</sup> PAULO was the name of the National Training Organisation for Community Learning and Development. It is not an acronym, but named in honour of Paulo Freire. In 2003 it merged within the Lifelong Sector Skills Council for Lifelong Learning. This was closed by the UK Conservative/Liberal government in 2012.

<sup>x</sup> Report prepared for CoSLA. Promoting Learning: Developing Communities. (1998). CoSLA.

<sup>xi</sup> Communities Change Through Learning. Report of a Working Group on the Future of Community Education. (1998) Scottish Office.

<sup>xii</sup> SCEC was closed by the new Labour/Liberal Scottish government in 2002, with Communities Scotland, the new community regeneration agency, taking over its community learning and development remit. Communities Scotland was closed by the SNP administration after it took power in 2007. Three national development agencies took over SCEC's previous work around youth issues (YouthLink), adult education (Scottish Adult Learning Partnership) and community development (Scottish Community Development Centre). The new devolved government created three government departments responsible respectively for adult education, for youth work, and for community development. Prior to 1999 community education was the responsibility of one government department.

<sup>xiii</sup> Prior to 1999, there had existed an international network that supported community development practice in developing countries. IACD aimed to network practitioners across both developing and developed countries.

<sup>xiv</sup> Financial and other support for IACD's head office has all come from within Scotland - from SCEC, the City of Dundee Council, Carnegie UK Trust and, since 2015, the Scottish Government. Its activities, such as conferences, are intended to earn income.

<sup>xv</sup> McConnell C, Muia D and Clarke A. eds. International Community Development Practice. (2022) Routledge.