Structure and Agency: a debate for community development?

A paper prepared for the Community Development Journal
International Symposium
Community Development in an Age of Uncertainty

London
September 3rd - 5th 2009,

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Word Count: 6017

Abstract

An orthodox dichotomy has come to dominate and shape debates regarding agency and this has led to a number of difficulties in articulating a coherent theory of practice for community development. If by asserting agency, one adopts a methodological individualism, particularly as expressed by an increasingly predominant rational actor theory, behaviour is reduced to the pursuit of self interest by relatively atomised individuals, and the notion of community and society appears to dissolve. In contrast, if social structures are to provide the starting point for analysis and practice, there appears to be little justification for recognising the agency of individuals and communities, because it is the structures that provide the explanatory and causal forces in society, with individuals appearing to be little more than flotsam and jetsam on the tide. A resistance to this false dilemma, in part explains why there has been a desire and need to move on from such discussions and why many in community development have found a great deal to be attracted to in the situated and networked theories of agency that seek to dissolve the structure-agency dichotomy. However, as desirable as this attempt to move on may be, it is argued that at the very least, a note of caution needs to be heeded before the theory and practice of community development draws exclusively on situated and pluralistic perspectives. Instead it is argued that any 'rediscovery' of agency, should not only seek to resolve the rather strained debate between structure and agency, but offer a form of praxis resistant to attempts to co-opt the work of community development. It is argued that such an 'alternative' can be found in the literature and practice of those who seek to sustain an analytical dualism where agents are seen as being both potentially constrained and enabled by the social relations they occupy.

Keywords: Structure, Agency, Community, Welfare, Practice & Theory

Introduction

This paper argues that 'agency' represents both the best hope for a radical transformative social action and a significant obstacle to the possibilities of realising such a project. In an attempt to explain this apparent contradiction, the paper is organised around an orthodox dichotomy that has come to shape debates regarding agency, where a methodological individualism is contrasted with structural accounts for explaining social phenomena. This dichotomy is frequently characterised by rather demanding debates where the problem of bridging the gap between agency and structure is one that continues to vex contemporary theorists. Individualised forms of agency are criticised by exponents of a structural position, for identifying single actors as the immediate causes of events, which is not only considered to be a erroneous starting point for understanding society, but a premise from which individuals are to be held responsible and accountable for their circumstances. In response, the deterministic nature of structural accounts is criticised due to the subsequent denial and neglect of the potential for 'agents' to not only make choices but shape their circumstances.

Following what is admittedly a polarised debate; a discussion of alternative notions of agency and the implications and of these models for community development is outlined. It is argued that a remodelled form of agency needs to recognise the intentionality of actors, alongside a consideration of the capacity of agents to perform such an action. The source and nature of this capacity is established through the agent's position within wider social relations. In this way, the potential for agents to surmount the positions ascribed to them is held together with an interest in the position of agents to access the resources required to secure their chosen ends.

It can be questioned as to why there is a need to revisit a rather rudimentary debate, particularly one that can appear to be so far removed from the requirements of everyday practice. However it is argued that unless some clarity is achieved, rather disjointed if not contradictory accounts of theory, policy and practice will continue to be a feature of the community development literature and practice.

Rediscovering agency or neglecting structure?

It is what can be described as an orthodox account of agency that has become prominent in the analysis and development of policies with regard to social welfare and governance (Taylor-Gooby: 2008). This orthodox conception of agency embodies the idea that 'actions, activities, decisions and behaviours', represent a 'meaningful choice' (Deacon and Mann, 1999: 413). Intentionality and the capacity of actors to exhibit conscious and goal driven behaviour are considered to be the defining characteristics of agency with the implication that beliefs and desires can provide the motives and explanations for the actions that individuals take (Callinicos, 2004). A variety of social welfare policies have increasingly started to not only draw on a particular conception of agency, but have sought to shape the form of agency that is to be considered desirable by individuals and communities (Deacon and Mann, 1999; Greener, 2002; Hoggett, 2001; Le Grand, 1997; Taylor-Gooby, 2000). In the context of attempting to improve the welfare of communities, discussions of agency have tended focused on the degree of reflexivity exhibited by individuals (Hoggett, 2001; Titterton, 1992; Williams, Popay and Oakley, 1999), the degree to which individuals can be considered to act as Knights (public spirited), Knaves (self-interested) and Pawns (passive) (Le Grand, 1997) and the extent to which agency can be awakened and appealed to through the provision of incentives and rewards (Murray, 1984) or should be drawn out through the development and enforcement of duty and obligations (Dwyer, 2000, 2004; Etzioni, 2000; Mead, 1986).

These positions represent a methodological individualism that attempts to explain 'social' phenomena through an examination of the motives, properties and actions of the individual (Callinicos, 2004). Humanist ideologies see society as the totality of inter-subjective relations between individuals. This can include a number of philosophical systems (Phenomenology, Existentialism) where choice is considered a critical part of the Humanist 'assumptive world'. In other words, the starting point and fundamental unit of social life is the actions of individuals (Elster, 1989). A range of theories and writers can be subsumed or attached to this label, but for the purposes of this

paper, what is argued to be an increasingly influential and strong form of methodological individualism can be found in the model of *homo economicus*, particularly as expressed in 'rational actor theory' (also described as rational Choice Theory).

Homo *economicus* assumes that an agent is rational in the sense that they will be driven by 'economic' motives, i.e., solely by the intention of making the maximum possible (material or monetary) utility or benefit. This is best reflected in an oft cited quote from Adam Smith:

> Give me that which I want, and you shall have this that you want...it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self love, and never talk to them of our necessities but of their advantages.
> (1776: 118)

An approach that has long been the dominant paradigm in economics for understanding human, or more specifically consumer behaviour, rational actor theorists have argued that the same general principles can be used to understand interactions in which such resources as time, information, approval, and prestige are involved. Rational actor theory normally begins with an examination of the choices made by one or more individual decision-making units (consumers and/or firms) and draws on a number of axioms, a full discussion of which lies behind the scope of this paper. However, most notable is the notion that an actor will choose the most preferred alternative, one that will maximise utility. The 'decision rules' that maximize utility choices vary with changes in circumstances such as changes in income or in the prices of goods. Rational actor theory also involves assumptions about the environment in which choices are made, where the presence of constraints makes choice necessary, and how the choices of different agents are made consistent with one another. The logic is simple. As it is not possible for individuals to achieve all of the various things that they want, they must also make choices in relation to both their goals and the means for attaining these

goals. Rational actor theories hold that individuals must anticipate the outcomes of alternative courses of action and calculate that which will be best for them.

As noted above, *homo economicus,* although borne of efforts to understand the choices made in markets, has come to be extended to attempts understand social interaction and society as a whole? Considered a reliable and consistent starting point for understanding motives, the pursuit of self interest becomes pivotal to the analysis of social interactions. For this to occur, social interaction needs to be understood as a process of social exchange, where parallels, if not quite equivalences, are drawn between the exchange of goods and services that one might find in a market and the 'exchange' of approval and other valued behaviours that one may find in social relationships. 'Rewards' are weighed against costs and it is argued that no exchange or relationship will continue unless both parties perceive themselves as making a profit (Homans 1961).

Despite attempts to extend the explanatory scope of rational actor theory, it has been subject to a number of criticisms. Rational actor theory has difficulty in explaining the co-operation of individuals in different forms of collective action? Economic models also have difficulty in accounting for the norms, morality and the construction of what counts as 'interests' (Duncan, 2000). It at this point that possibly the most telling criticism of methodological individualism and rational actor theory is the neglect of power in an understanding of exchange relations. As the resources that people bring to their social relations are rarely equal, the outcome of any particular exchange will depend upon the relative power of the participants. If people are able to obtain a particular goal only through one specific social relationship, then they are highly dependent on that relationship and so will have little power to influence the 'price' that they have to pay. In this regard, it can be questioned whether it is true to say there is no such thing as society, or at the very least, whether it is feasible to treat society as 'nothing more than the aggregate of its component individuals' (Amin, 1998: 133). It is also more than fair to ask whether the axioms and assumptions of methodological individualism,

particularly as expressed by rational actor theory, really offer an unveiling of the laws that explain human behaviour and social interaction, or are they better understood as a model of how society should be, at least according to those set to benefit from such a 'ideal' social order.

Beyond a consideration of rational actor theory, there has long been scepticism, if not outright hostility, to the discussion of agency in the context of welfare (Donnison, 1979, Ryan, 1976; Townsend, 1979). Focussing attention on agency not only detracts from attending to the operation and transformation of the enduring social and economic inequalities that confine the life chances of individuals, but can also be a precursor to a disciplinary and punitive individualism.

It is worth asking whether the rediscovery of agency witnessed in contemporary welfare policies suggests that social and economic inequalities are no longer a problem or that we can be confident in discussing agency as it no longer so closely associated with a 'moral' and 'punitive individualism'? The answer to both of these questions is clearly no. It would be more accurate to describe the 'return' to agency as one that treats the social and economic conditions as a pre-given and enduring reality against which individuals need to adapt and respond, i.e. the preferred subject position of neo-liberalism (Schild, 2007).

Structures

A range of theories and approaches can be described as representing a structural approach to understanding society. The term social structure signifies, particularly when used in relation to the idea of agency, some form of enduring material, but possibly ideational, relationship between individuals and communities (Musolf, 2003). In this respect structures refer to supra-individual phenomena that, most importantly for the purposes of this discussion, need to be considered when examining the operation of society as a whole and attempts at explaining the behaviour of individuals.

Social structure has been described as an 'absent concept', for although its

place in the literature is undeniable, rarely is it accompanied by attempts to define or account for its presence (Crothers, 1996: 21). Discussions of structure tend to be rich with connotations (Blau, 1975), most notably, a notion of determinism (Crothers, 1996: preface). The position of actors within wider social relations is highlighted and used to explain people's attributes, attitudes and behaviour. A term that is used to 'conjure' in the social sciences, structure becomes a metonymic device, ill defined, but taken as explaining, if not determining, a complex social reality (Sewell, 1992: 2). Arguably, the acid test for a structural account is whether or not varying the individuals involved is likely to lead to significant changes (Crothers, 1996: 2-3).

This is epitomised and reflected in the structuralism of Althusser (1969, 1971) where individuals are conceived as the 'supports' or bearers of self reproducing systems, hence the notion of history as a 'process without a subject'. It is the relations between the elements (i.e., their places) in the totality, what can be described as a 'structuralist combinatory', that are deemed significant. The occupants of these places are relative arbitrary. The real protagonists of history are the social relations of production, political struggle and ideology, which are constituted by the place assigned to these agents in the complex structure of a particular social formation (e.g., the relationship of the labourer and the capitalist as defined by their different relations to the means of production within a capitalist mode of production). 'Corporeal' individuals are only the supports or a bearer of the guises assigned to them by the structure of relations in the social formation, in what is an 'ever-pre-given structure'.

Consequently structures become the 'determining mechanisms' and in effect make redundant the consideration of an orthodox conception of agency. None of this is to say that individuals do not 'exist', but rather that they should not provide the starting point for an analysis of society. Instead, the agency that exists in the structures of society needs to be considered. Complicating matters, there are a variety of social structures the relationships and arrangements between these structures change under different social circumstances. So, if you want to understand how society works, you need to

examine the structures and be attuned to the different configurations at particular times and places (Crothers, 1996: 3).

The deterministic connotations associated with structural accounts, can be read as a pessimistic and unpalatable account, particularly for those engaged in practice and seeking to organise individuals and communities in part explains the particularly trenchant criticisms an Althusserian notion of structures has received (e.g. Thompson, 1978). To 'neglect' agency, not only potentially limits the degree to which the nature of society can be understood, but also denies the potential and capacity of individuals and communities to shape their own lives. The neglect of agency can also create a conceptual vacuum that, as Fitzpatrick (2005) notes, those who are keen to advocate a moral and punitive form of individualism are all too quick to fill. The idea and desirability of individuals becoming and being active is not being questioned. This is preferable to the passive / object status of individuals that has been witnessed in a range of policy, social welfare and community practices.

However, as with the discussion of rational actor theory, for the purposes of this paper, rather than consider in detail the merits or otherwise of each account, the intention is to demonstrate the range of positions available for the positions of agency in social theory. To this end, the paper, now considers those accounts of 'agency' that have sought to move beyond the polar positions of rational actor theory and structuralism.

Situated Practices

A number of writers, arguably most notably Bourdieu (1990) Giddens (1984), and Latour (2005) have sought to square an orthodox conception of agents that recognises people as the initiators of action, with the notion that social structures have causal powers. There are significant differences between the theories of agency that each of these writers posits, but it is argued that what they share is an attempt to recognise the situated nature of people's practices and establish a position where sufficient account is given to both structure and agency (Parker, 2000).

For the purposes of this paper, a particularly instructive illustration of such an approach can be found in the work of Norbert Elias. Attempting to maintain a notion of intentionality when examining agency, Elias was critical of an atomised individualism, *homo clausus*, where people are conceived in the singular and where a rigid barrier is created between the person 'inside' a sealed container and the world 'outside'. Described as 'thinking statues', Elias noted how *homo clausus* is always thought of as an 'adult', already fully equipped with the skills necessary for living. Elias observed that part of the problem is the concepts employed to make sense of the world:

> The complexity of many modern sociological theories is due not to the complexity of the field of investigation which they seek to elucidate, but to the kind of concepts employed. These may be concepts which either have proved their worth in other (usually physical) sciences, or are treated as self-evident in everyday usage, but which are not all appropriate to the investigation of specifically social functional nexuses.
> (Elias, 1978: 111)

As such, it was argued that what were needed are concepts and practices better attuned to the study of networks of interdependent human beings. For instance, Elias criticised what he described as a 'process reduction', the tendency to reduce and describe processes as states where the eternal and immutable is privileged, over the changeable'.

> Consequently, we always feel impelled to make quite senseless conceptual distinctions like the individual and society', which makes it seem that 'the individual' and 'society' were two separate things, like tables and chairs or pots and pans. One can find oneself caught up in long discussions of the nature of the relationship between these two apparently separate objects. Yet on another level of awareness one may know perfectly well that societies are composed of individuals, and that individuals cam only possess specifically human characteristics such as their abilities to speak, think and live, in and through their relationships with other people – 'in society'.
> (Elias, 1978: 113)

Against this orthodox conception, Elias argued that people are bonded together in a continuum of changes in time and space. Pivotal to Elias is the notion that the 'bondings' between people are as real as the individuals themselves and that individuals are as much intellectual constructs as any

apparent abstractions such as society. In this conceptualisation, no person's knowledge has its beginning in him or herself. Each of us stands on the shoulders of others. Both people, the reading of a situation and the goals that people pursue on the basis of these readings are shaped over time and space within figurations.

Unintentional human interdependencies, with shifting asymmetrical power balances, lie at the root of every intentional interaction. Actions interweave to produce compelling trends, which no one has planned or intended and which then constitute and constrain, the perceptions, purposes and actions of the future (see Mennell, 1992: 258). The consequences of people's actions are felt, not at random, but according to the figuration in which they are enmeshed. The knowledge of the networks within which people are resident is virtually always imperfect, and incomplete, but this in itself does not deny that intentionality and a degree of power and control can be exhibited by individuals. Through a stress on interdependencies, their asymmetry and the 'networked' and 'situated' nature of agency, Elias attempts to reframe our understanding of power and subjectivity

The appeal to community development of such work is clear. Implicitly and explicitly, the influential work, at least in policy circles, of Etzioni (1995) and Putnam (2000) are a variation on a theme of attempts to move beyond an orthodox dichotomy of structure and agency. However, no matter how well intentioned, there are clear problems with attempts to dissolve structures into an esoteric flux, particularly when it comes to attempts to develop and sustain a critical practice. Unless clearly articulated, reviewed and practiced, any attempt to remodel agency as a situated practice, can all too easily resemble a rather facile call for a middle way or quickly collapse back into one of the dominant poles. For instance, by appealing to the claim that power lies everywhere, such an analysis singularly fails to, if not explain, then provide a direction, for addressing the question of why power and wealth continues to accumulate and be concentrated in the hands of the few. Of course any particular social formation will have an inherent pre-given' complexity (Althusser, 1971), but this should not be taken as just a random assemblage.

By neglecting the existence and operation of social structures, whatever form these may take, the conditions of life continue, by and large, to be shaped by the powerful so that the adoption of situated practices can quickly descend to a subtle form of victim blaming.

An analytical dualism

It is argued that the fundamental critique to be levelled at the predominant and orthodox notions of agency and structure is the ahistorical manner in which they are applied and discussed. Whether it is the pre-formed notion of the rational actor or the leviathan like ascription of structures, little attention is given to the creation and maintenance of these phenomena. Far from being eternal, structure and agency are both the producers and products of historical processes. For some, there are good reasons for neglecting this history, particularly those interested in the preservation of the existing order. First, once one rejects the assumption that both agency and structure are enduring entities, investigations quickly reveal that far from representing natural and endless states, tremendous amounts of energy are required to produce and reproduce the existing social relations. This provides a useful rejoinder to the alleged givens of structure and agency and helps to avoid an essentialism, 'where something either is or 'has' agency or structure but not both' (Fuchs, 2001: 26).

Therefore, structure and agency should remain analytically distinct categories (Parker, 2000: 72). The two are plainly different entities with different properties. One can ascribe intentions, beliefs and desires to agents, whilst to do so to 'structures' is a rather ridiculous form of anthropomorphism (Callinicos, 2004). At the same time, insisting on the real differences between structure and agency does not deny their relatedness, particularly when considered over a period of time. Consequently what is suggested is that an orthodox notion of agency that recognises the potential of individuals to exhibit conscious goal driven activity and exercise power in order to follow through on these intentions should be adopted along with one very important qualification. That is, the power that 'agents' are able to exercise and the interests that may help inform the goals to which this activity is to be directed

are, in part at least, determined by the position that the actor in question occupies in prevailing social structures (Callinicos, 2004).

This moves discussion and analysis away from a methodological individualism, as structures are no longer the property of individuals. That is, although structures typically involve establishing relationships between agents, which is not far removed from the methodological individualist conception of institutions and 'society', a subtle but important distinction is that structures are not the property of 'named individuals'. In this respect, structures can be thought of as representing 'empty places' (Callinicos, 2004: xxv), which exist prior to our arrival and unless transformed, will exist after our departure. This in itself can explain why structures appear to persist in time. However, this should not be taken as an attempt to reduce agency to the adoption of particular scripted social roles which are then performed. Instead, agents are seen as being both potentially constrained and enabled by the social relations they find themselves in. This is because structures are recast as 'power conferring and quintessentially relational' (Archer, 1995). What Wright (1978) describes as the 'capacities' made available through structures helps illustrate the role they have in partially determining the powers, and to some degree, the interest and intentionality of actors. In this way, the potential of human action to determine history is maintained, whilst also recognising that the scope for human action depends on historically specific conditions.

Different, yet clearly interdependent, structure and agency should not be considered co-extensive or representing a mutual constitution, as each possesses non-reducible emergent properties (Callinicos, 2004). To conflate structure and agency would leave us uninformed over the contribution of each (Musolf, 2003: 6). An extension of this argument is that social structure and agency are capable of independent variation as each is constituted by 'emergent properties that have relative autonomy from one another and therefore are able to 'exert independent causal influence in their own right' (Archer, 1995). Therefore, placing a particular emphasis on agency or structures in particular circumstances can be legitimate, as at one point in time the scope and capacity for collective or individual agency may be either

heightened or limited. The challenge is to know when such occasions arise and for the other side of equation to always be included in the final calculation. Thus, the importance of this analytical dualism is that the distinction facilitates an examination of the interplay between these two 'entities' and thus can contribute to explanations and engagements with society in a meaningful way.

This is not a particularly original proposition and one that the author is deeply indebted to the authors cited above for asserting. However, the true value of this argument is to be found in the application of this theory in practice, where it is the implications of this analytical dualism for the response to the current conjuncture that is of particular interest. That is, how an analytical dualism can inform an understanding of how and why collective forms of agency can and should develop. To this end, it is argued that it is in the shared occupation, or at the very least, shared orientation to particular empty places in the structures, that the mutual interests and potential to develop their capacity can be found. It is argued that it is the identification and the development of these sites that community development can and should find a space, and that this represents an approach that is considered far more desirable and achievable than attempts to draw a 'rhetorical appeal' to community, duty and obligation. The ability to occupy the empty places in structures provides agents with additional capacity to transform society, as long as the occupation of these positions is seen as a means rather than an end? Thus the question is not whether one exhibits agency, but at what level and to what end.

Community development needs to ensure that the opportunities available to its agents, at a regional, national and global level, are not limited to the potential role they can play in attempts to secure the participation of the population in 'delegated' governance structures and / or ensuring the duty and capacity of communities to play a vital role in the prefiguring and constitution of the subjects so vital to a neo-liberal project. None of this is to say that those engaged with community development are trapped within a neo-liberal web. There are a number of material and discursive strategies available to not only resist but continue to develop alternative forms of practice. Structures and the

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relations of power that they represent are never complete and need to be continually remade. With structures defined as transient, constraining and enabling, rather than expending energy ensuring their upkeep, when change is required and possible, it is argued that the role of community work is to enable individuals to not only enter the number of existing empty places available, but to then help reconfigure the structures so that more spaces are made available. This is considered to be the means and end of a radical social transformation.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to review and contribute to debates that have attempted to construct agency. A range of different theories of agency have been outlined. Rational actor theory illustrates a strong form of methodological individualism that attempts to explain all social phenomena in terms of the rational calculations made by self-interested individuals. Rational Actor theory sees social interaction as social exchange. Modelled on economic action, it is assumed that people are motivated by the rewards and costs of actions and by the profits that they can make. A range of criticisms are available, most notably, the neglect of power and the problems of explaining collective action, but these do not appear to have dimmed the influence rational actor theory has had on contemporary economic and social policies. In sharp contrast, an Althusserian structuralism casts individuals as subjects merely inhabiting pre-existing constraining, if not determining structures. In some respects, seen as representing midpoint between these two poles, networked and situated notions of agency, can appear to be an attractive proposition to those working within community development. What these situated accounts of agency appear to offer, unlike structuralism, is a recognition that subjects are capable of making history and in sharp contrast to rational actor theory, an acknowledgment that the exclusive pursuit of private self interest erodes the network of social environments on which we all depend. However, it is argued that, although the appeal of such 'situated practices' are clear, if a 'shallow syncretism' (Callinicos, 2004: 2) is to be avoided, then an analytical dualism in response to the question of structure and agency needs to be maintained.

Rather than focus on the motives and relative degrees of reflexivity exhibited by individuals, it is better to orientate discussions towards the scope of the activity to which agency can be directed (Anderson, 1980). That is, a distinction is drawn between those goals that take place within the existing framework of social relations and those goals that in some respects can be considered unprecedented. The former represents those goals which range from getting dressed, cooking a meal, shopping, driving a car, through to educational achievements, securing paid employment, caring for friends and relatives and participation in civic and political life. Whereas the latter reflect those goals that seek to transform the conditions and relations in which people operate, including the distribution of opportunities and resources required in order to achieve the former. It is argued that for those who consider the transform of relations a necessary and legitimate goal, there needs to be a move beyond orthodox conceptions of agency.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, it is argued that 'agency' represents the best hope for radical transformative social action and a significant obstacle to the possibilities of realising such a project. In this respect, a rediscovery of agency in discussions of governance and social welfare, of any sort can be equated to a progress of sorts, and community development is in a good position to take full advantage of this rediscovery. However, a note of caution needs to be heeded, before embracing the particular form of agency that is being rediscovered. It is clear that attempts to recognise the agency of citizens can all too all too easily been appropriated and emptied of their progressive intent (Schild, 2007). Without a critical engagement with those policies that seek to recognise the agency of individuals, community development can all too easily descend into a 'moral' and 'punitive individualism' (Deacon and Mann, 1999). Thus it is not agency per se that needs to be questioned but the form and scope of activity and agency that has come to be sanctioned. Local, regional, national, state and global institutions continue to attempt to recuperate community development in a form that all too often equates agency with the language of choice and the consumer.

If people are to be called upon to play a part in the shaping of society, then it should be recognised that it is possible to go beyond attempts to include people within the existing structures and equipping them with the ability to be idealised consumers and producers (Clarke, 2004). Structures, in whatever form they take, are not to be seen as some 'nebulous force', but as ongoing material processes that can not only be resisted but overturned. People collectively construct the structures of the world and that world is alterable through and by human agency. History abounds with examples of people opposing those with more power and resources and despite this managing to succeed and change the social structures that affect their lives (Musolf, 2003). At the very least, discussions of agency need to be engaged with and reclaimed so as to include the capacity of individuals to redefine the parameters of their actions (Connor, 2010). Of course attempting to better articulate a more informed notion of agency does not take one very far down the road of challenging existing social relations, but it is argued that such a remodelling is timely. Within what can be cast as rather grim circumstances, there is an opportunity to identify and work with the agents and spaces left cold and empty by attempts at recuperating community development within a neo-liberal project, and wish to play their part in becoming agents for transformative social action.

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