

# Culture and the state

## Institutionalizing 'the underclass' in the new Ireland<sup>1</sup>

A. Jamie Saris, Brendan Bartley, Ciara Kierans, Colm Walsh and Philip McCormack

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*This paper analyses some of the activities of a community development group connected to a very poor neighbourhood in Dublin, Ireland within the context of anti-poverty discourses and types of targeted funding generated by the European Union. Community development groups and discourses are saturated with terms such as the 'social market', 'inclusion' and 'community' that are an interesting combination of progressive politics and concepts recognizably connected to social science disciplines like Anthropology and Human Geography. In this essay, the authors examine a 'community' response to the so-called 'horse protest' in Dublin, a response in large part funded by EU mechanisms geared to combating 'social exclusion'. They also trace back some of the connections between the institutional actors in this community and EU policies and funding mechanisms. Finally, they examine the trajectory of the Republic of Ireland, especially its experience of a booming economy, that has influenced perceptions of, and reactions to, problems in this neighbourhood. This work represents an attempt to merge ethnographic data and policy analysis within one textual frame, and in particular it represents the authors' attempt to understand how certain discursive sign-posts like 'social exclusion' are given content as concrete social-historical processes.*

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**T**his paper represents our attempt to make sense of an ethnographic situation whose spatial and conceptual boundaries were (and remain) frustratingly difficult to demarcate. We are trying to approach ethnographically the relationships between terms like power, space, discourse and subjectivity. At base, we are interested in the experience of poverty in the midst of growing wealth. In this context, we are confronting a revived 'culture of poverty' argument—a means of connecting unhappy social and market outcomes to perceived deficits within populations and individuals—but rather than simply despairing of the return of this social science revenant, we

are searching for some way of making this social fact one of the objects of our analysis. As part of this process, we argue that any ethnography of poverty in the modern state has to have some sense of policy initiatives and institutional arrangements that recognize and regulate it, not as a simple container around field data, but as objects that need to be problematized as part of the field experience. Perhaps most importantly, this paper also represents our attempt to take seriously our consultants' attempts to theorize their own situations, which, at the end of the argument, we suggest might be a way forward in understanding some of these issues.

### Left behind in the new millennium

It is no secret that social inequalities have widened considerably in Western countries in recent years as a consequence of 'global restructuring' (United Nations, 2001; Peck, 2001), although it seems that different countries or blocs of countries are managing this problem rather differently. Not surprisingly, the American response has been largely to valorize and promote individual transformation in the face of market forces. Workfare, 'ending welfare as we know it', and a grudging tidying up of the worst of the market outcomes with respect to, say, health insurance and child care are all connected to a project of the reform of the individual from a liability or deficit state into a marketable labour commodity (e.g. Schneider, 1999). Such collective analyses that have made it into public discourse, such as the idea of 'underclass' (Wilson, 1987, 1992; Murray, 1990), tend to reproduce many of these same ideas at the level of the (dysfunctional) community.<sup>2</sup>

European Union policy on 'social exclusion', on the other hand, looks different, at least at first glance. Since the end of the 1970s there has been a growing acknowledgement in the EU that the problem of poverty was not going to disappear simply as a consequence of wealth creation. During the 1980s, several member states developed the notion of *social exclusion* as an approach to problems associated with poverty and multiple deprivations. This discourse was generated in a variety of EU White Papers, heavily influenced by French thought on social policy. These documents suggest that 'exclusion' is a multi-axial concept, more broadly defined than (but generally related to) poverty, comprising dimensions including, but not limited to, civil rights, democratic participation in the economy and familial and community relationships (Room, 1995). Social exclusion, then, has come to refer to populations who, by virtue of a range of structural conditions and other attributes, are cut off from the mainstream

economic, social and cultural resources of a nation.

The Republic of Ireland has largely absorbed this language into its own social welfare policies. The analysis of the identification and amelioration of *social exclusion* in Ireland, however, is complicated by a sort of packrat mentality of the Irish state with regard to its social safety net.<sup>3</sup> Historically, it has accumulated the shiny bits of social welfare policies developed elsewhere, while throwing little away in the process. Thus, we find aspects of newer ideas about welfare reform originating in North America and Britain as well as social exclusion policies derived from the Continent, accreting around a well-established (if not lavishly funded) traditional welfare-state structure. This conflicted situation allows Ireland to be hailed as a beacon of economic growth in an otherwise low-growth Euro-zone by neo-liberal economists, while providing a hopeful vision of a strong welfare regime based on social consensus prospering in the new millennium for commentators concerned with the harsh effects of globalization.

The social exclusion discourse appeals to Irish and European policy-makers in part because of its relative lack of content and its lack of historical and ideological overtones (Bartley, 2000). In other words, its vagueness is its strength. The EU social exclusion discourse also has several attractive features from the perspective of both progressive politics and various social science disciplines. It seems to analyse levels beyond that of the individual, mobilizing terms and concepts like 'community' and 'social market', to make the case that any unhappy individual outcome has structural factors that need to be both understood and addressed. Even more interesting from the point of view of Anthropology and Human Geography, this discourse is replete with a sense that distinct populations connected to specific areas share certain values, life patterns and aspirations. In other words, there seems to be at least a recognizable, if rather old-fashioned, sense of 'culture' motivating some of this thinking.



**Figure 1** Site for the new Equestrian Centre in Cherry Orchard, Dublin.

The genuinely attractive idea is that there are strengths in any community and that these strengths can be built upon for socially desirable ends. Such language seems to promote an inclusive solution to problems by encouraging and (ideally empowering) various actors at the local level – business, residents, and representatives of statutory bodies and voluntary agencies (what in ‘Blairspeak’ in the UK are referred to as ‘stakeholders’) – to address issues as they arise. Finally, these policies seem to move away from top-down decision-making structures, associated with older understandings of governance and towards flatter ‘regulatory’ models of decision-making and action.

### **Community action: responding to the horse protest in Dublin**

For reasons outlined below, all the poorer suburbs of the Dublin fringe, Fettercairn, North Clondalkin and Cherry Orchard,

including ‘high-rise’ urban areas like Ballymun, have recently completed, or are currently building Equestrian Centres, under the auspices of ‘community development’ organizations, known collectively as partnerships<sup>4</sup> (for more extended background to this struggle to keep horses in Dublin, see Saris *et al.*, 1999). The communities in question are in substantial agreement that such facilities are necessary to give local youth something positive in which to be interested, and in local consultative meetings such stables have been pointed as one the most pressing local needs (Figures 1 and 2).

These centres were to fulfil several functions: to house horses owned by locals, provide jobs for the local economy, and give a focus for youth, other than drugs and crime. The partnerships that are bringing these ambitious plans to fruition are relatively new institutions that are designed to target resources to specific areas of deprivation, and for many of them these equine centres are amongst their most ambitious



**Figure 2** Site for the new Equestrian Centre in Cherry Orchard, Dublin.

programmes to date. They are financed, under EU targeted funds designed to mitigate 'social exclusion' directly from the Exchequer and they exist parallel to, if not truly independent of, government. In modern Ireland, such organizations are ubiquitous to all of the poorer neighbourhoods in the greater Dublin area and to most poorer neighbourhoods in cities and towns outside of Dublin.

Cherry Orchard is precisely the sort of community that such groups are tasked to 'include' within the broader ambit of Irish society. It is a part of Ballyfermot, a western suburb of Dublin. Although only about five miles from the city centre, it is worlds away from the new construction and 'high street' capitalism remaking the Dublin built environment. Its 5500 strong population answers to the demographic profile of a neighbourhood in trouble. It is a high-crime area, with low employment and high rates of illicit drug use, particularly heroin abuse amongst young people. Middle-class folks from Dublin and most people from up the country see in

Cherry Orchard the prototype of the dark underbelly of urban life: squalid, drug-infested, anti-authority, welfare-dependent and crime-ridden. In turn, this area has a strained relationship with most official organs of the state: the schools, the Gardaí (police) and Dublin Corporation (see Bartley and Saris, 1999; Saris *et al.*, 1999).

The Equine Programme in Cherry Orchard is one of the initiatives known collectively as the INTEGRA Project. It is a direct outgrowth of a community development organization/partnership known as LINK, originally funded exclusively with EU money, the financial burden of which is now substantially taken over by FÁS,<sup>5</sup> an Exchequer-funded organization concerned with unemployment and job-training. The centre has also had some input from other institutional actors in this area, such as the Ballyfermot Area Partnership (BAP) and the Ballyfermot Drugs Task Force (BDTF).

The Development Plan for the Cherry Orchard Equine Centre gives a good sense for how Ireland has seemingly taken on



**Figure 3** Wall mural in Cherry Orchard, Dublin.

board and operationalized the social exclusion discourse outlined above.

“The Cherry Orchard Area has always been reknowned for its keen interest in horses. Before the Control of Horses Act [see below] was introduced, this was evident from the large number of horses grazing in the Cherry Orchard area. For many people here, this interest is seen as positive, in that it acts as an outlet for many young people to grow and develop, whilst, at the same time, providing a very enjoyable leisure activity.

The Equine Centre will help to preserve the horse culture in Cherry Orchard and develop the skills of those young people, who through their long association with the horses, have a natural rapport with them. The popularity of the horse will act as a catalyst in attracting young people back into training and education.” (LINK, 1998, p. 9)

This description of both Cherry Orchard and horses is interesting for what it says and what it does not say. It implies, for example, that horse ownership is ‘traditional’ amongst Cherry Orchard’s population. In this way, it follows a line of foreign and domestic

observers who have highlighted the phenomenon of urban/suburban horse ownership in the Greater Dublin area. Films, like *Crushproof*, *The Commitments* (and other Roddy Doyle novels that have reached a mass market beyond the island), for example, have made the urban horse one of the peculiar, quasi-ethnic features of Dublin working-class areas. It is the surprise at seeing a horse in a poor urban setting (and the further surprise of how non-plussed the natives are about encountering such animals in flats, suburban gardens or apartment block lifts) that indexes the exotic quality of this working-class population for middle-class audiences in Ireland and for most audiences abroad. In the fragment of the brochure quoted above, this sort of internal exoticization extends to the undefined (but decidedly primitivist-sounding) ‘rapport’ that Cherry Orchard’s residents have with their beasts.

### **The roots of the horse protest**

It is certainly true that throughout the 1990s, for many folks in Cherry Orchard, especially young people, horses blossomed as an area’s and population’s badge of identity, exhibiting



Figure 4 Suburban horse.

qualities of symbolically resisting structural violence, and invoking issues like identity and community ownership. Besides being kept as pets, they are competitively displayed in informal horse shows in the neighbourhood, as well as being a popular subject for many of the local wall murals (see Figures 3 and 4).

Horses, however, became an especially charged issue in Cherry Orchard's existence at the end of 1996, not long after the formal incorporation of LINK, and a little more than a year after the worst civil disturbance in the Republic of Ireland in living memory, the Halloween riots of 1995, centred in Gallantown, one of the housing estates in Cherry Orchard (see Bartley and Saris, 1999; Saris *et al.*, 2002).<sup>6</sup> In December of that year the Dáil (the Irish parliament) passed novel horse licensing laws (the Control of Horses Act) at the urging of Dublin City Council (formerly Dublin Corporation), the organization responsible for planning and social housing in the capital. This law effectively

made every horse in the city illegal, changing the *status quo ante* where horses had been tolerated on Dublin City Council waste ground for many years. The new law came on the back of some lurid stories concerning the supposed mistreatment of horses in built-up areas without the facilities to care for them properly, alongside a concern voiced by various authorities about the dangers posed by wandering horses (Mooney, 1996). These depictions constructed such poor urban/suburban owners as ignorant, careless and casually brutish. Such people represented a danger in need of a new regulatory regime to protect both their mute beasts and the gentle public from their depravity.

The gist of the 1996 law is this: (1) all horses in Dublin are to be licensed and electronically tagged, and (2) horses which cannot show that they have an acre of land attached for their upkeep (in effect all working-class horses in the city and the suburbs) cannot be licensed and are thus liable for

# New horse licensing laws will have a dramatic effect on ghetto culture

The sun is setting for the urban cowboy as the Control of Horses Act comes into effect in Dublin city and county this month. Declan Walsh reports on how new regulations will severely curtail a working-class horse culture.

DEPRIVED Dublin areas have gone horse-mad over the last few years. One time, kids asked Nanny for Power Rangers or Cindy; suddenly they want horses for birthdays, for Christmas, even for Holy Communion. Nobody's quite sure from where it sprung. The travellers, traditionally owned most but nothing like the current estimated 3,000 urban horses.

Nobody cares where it came from anyway. In communities like Ballymun, bent low by unemployment and heroin, the phenomenon was a godsend. For the parents it meant no needles, no cars, no crime; for the kids, freedom.

It was a brilliant story which practically sold itself: "ghetto" children astride noble steeds against a grainy canvas of tower blocks, drugs and urban deprivation. Topped off with a pinch of class conflict — in the form of middle-class evangelists from the Dublin Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, saying the kids were abusing the horses — it was practically served on a platter.

The international media descended in droves. Channel 4 commissioned a documentary called *Urban Cowboy* and then made another series of its own. A photographer for *Focus* did a series of portraits and called it "Pony Kids". Camera crews, journalists and photographers came from France, America, Scandinavia. Suddenly, the world was taking an interest in their communities for the right reasons; because there was something good there, something to be proud of.

But it couldn't last forever; that much fun doesn't come free. The horse owners are now learning that with power comes responsi-

bility. With the advent of new horse control laws, it appears that the sun is setting on the urban cowboys.

Under the provisions of the Control of Horses Act, 1996, which comes into effect in Dublin city and county this month, all horses will have to be licensed at a cost of £25, and identifiable by an implanted microchip tag. Nobody is arguing with that much.

Where the death-knell sounds is in the licence requirements. Horses must kept in stables that meet rigorous standards and their owners must be at least 16 years old. Horses not meeting these requirements will be impounded and held until a licence is produced. If that doesn't happen, the horse will be put down.

The Corporation will start rounding up "unlicensed" horses straight away and the pounds will be filled to capacity until the problem is eradicated, according to Declan Wallace, assistant principal officer at the Corporation's Community and Environment Department. The Department of Agriculture has earmarked £2 million to implement the Act, of which Dublin will get the biggest share. Travellers have been invited to form a third horse pound, which will boost the total capacity in the city to about 150 animals.

He agrees that the majority of current owners won't be able to meet the licence requirements, but said it is not corporation's role to "pander to what has built up over the years". One in five complaints to his office are about wandering horses, he said, and they are "impractical pets" in built-up areas.

"We don't have the land to build houses, let alone care for the horses. Next week, the pet of the



For the parents, the Dublin horse-eraze phenomenon has meant no needles, no cars, no crime; for the kids — freedom. Photograph by Pat Langan

month could be elephants or crocodiles. Do we have to provide facilities for them?

"There's a myth that there's a huge tradition of horses in Dublin. Eighty five per cent of people bought them because they are cheap and good value. The horses are mistreated, they damage property and are a danger to children. This law is aimed at making horse ownership fair on the horse."

There's no doubt that regulation is badly needed. The DSPCA campaigned vigorously for the introduction of the horse laws and their vocal spokesperson, Therese Cunningham, has few friends in horse circles.

In one memorable scene from *Urban Cowboy*, she is seen in an

animated argument with the Ballymun Horse Owners at the Smithfield Horse Fair. She hasn't been back there since someone hit her on the head with a horsehoe while she was speaking to a reporter.

Vicky McElligott set up the Ballymun Horse Owners' Association, a group of parents which took over a local burned-out building and converted it into make-shift stables for their children. "Anyone who doesn't have horses can't identify with us," she said. "They have no idea of the kind of contact and healing you can get from an animal like that. A horse is not mechanically driven. It takes love and care and education and responsibility for a young person to grow with it."

She can't deny that wandering horses have wreaked havoc in parts of Ballymun. They have eaten shrubs. They're a danger to small children. They clean out their bowels at inopportune moments and in inappropriate places, and occasionally they stray onto the roads and get themselves knocked down.

"It's like the Wild West," a local Dublin Corporation Regional Development Officer, Brendan Kenny, said. "The horses have caused horrendous damage and a lot of fear. The majority of people don't want them at all. At every meeting I go to, there are two things people are concerned about: drugs and horses."

It's true there is cruelty to horses, 14-year-old Danno Mur-

phy from Ballymun said. "I know kids that jockeyed their horses every day until they went like a rasher. Then they'd have to get the vet out for a worm dose. But I looked after my mare every day, cleaning out her stable and feeding her."

Danno recently sold his mare, which he says was a "poxy" decision because now there's nothing to do except hang around the house or buy a car from the travellers and rally around the fields with his mates.

He won't touch drugs though, he said that he and his friends are copped on, "not like the zombies you see around the place, walking around in the middle of the summer with big jackets on them". He knows only too well that it's bad news. His 18-year-old brother died of an overdose earlier this year.

"Horses are all we have to keep us out of trouble," 13-year-old Tricia Dorman said. She hasn't got a horse of her own, but borrows her neighbour's and brushes the horse down for him afterwards. "I've been thinking of getting a horse, but I know it'll be taken off me. The Government needs to give us a chance to show that we do know how to look after them. They don't know what the horses do for people around here."

Most of the horse trading in Dublin takes place at the Smithfield Horse Fair, in the small, cobble-stoned square just off the Liffey quays. A modern office complex is currently being built on the site of the old Jameson distillery which takes up one side of the square.

City planners hope to turn Smithfield into a leafy, airy, town square bordered by cafes that serve good cappuccino. The presence of a smelly, noisy monthly horse fair doesn't quite fit in with such plans.

It's not the first time the Corporation has tried to shut it down. But the new horse laws will probably do the job. If there's no demand for these horses then the market will collapse, and with it the horse fair.

Figure 5 Article in *The Irish Times* about the effect of the new Control of Horses Act (Walsh, 1997).

seizure. The new law also took the enforcement of these rules away from local peace officers and gave it to a professional (privately contracted) arm of Dublin City Council. Very quickly, this much more intrusive inspectorial regime also became increasingly proactive, seizing as many horses as possible. These changes have turned a law that originally looked like a simple sop to sentimental, middle-class animal lovers into yet another large social fissure around already-excluded communities and areas in Greater Dublin. Many locals, moreover, see an ulterior motive in these seizures, to wit, that Dublin City Council was interested in selling (or facilitating the development of) what had suddenly become valuable industrial-zoned

land in easy distance of the city centre, without the economic and public relations hassles of having to offer poor kids some kind of compensation for taking the land upon which their pets were grazing (Saris *et al.*, 1999).

The initial result of this manoeuvring was that the state became responsible for scores of horses, serious assaults were perpetrated on several enforcers of the new law, as well as the death of many animals, as dozens of horses that were deemed too sick by state veterinarians were put down, while many others died through outright neglect in the care of the government (the government simply did not have the facilities to keep up with the seizures). Currently, there is a sort

# CORPO HORSEMAN DEFENDS ACTIONS

## "I'm proud of what I did"

A Ballyfermot man who rode his horse into the Civic Offices last week has told *The Echo*: "I'm proud of what I did."

And he added: "I'm proud of the kids who forced their way in [the offices] in defence of their rights."

Eddie Kershaw (28), from Cherry Orchard Drive, was arrested last Thursday afternoon after he led a 'break-in' at the headquarters of Dublin Corporation.

Around 20 youths from Gallanstown Vision, led by Mr Kershaw on horseback, forced their way through a door at the Christ church entrance, activating intruder alarms and defences.

By Robert Kennedy-Cochrane

They then marched through the building chanting the names of Corporation staff, according to a Corporation source.

"It was very intimidating for those people to hear their names called out like that," the source said.

The incident took place during a protest by about 100 horse owners from West Dublin against the Control of Horses Act.

Earlier the protesters had visited the Dáil and Mansion House, where they said they were received with courtesy.

Mr Kershaw said that they had been left no choice because senior Corporation officials refused to meet them.

"If they had come out and spoken with us like they did at the Dáil and the Mansion House, then we wouldn't have had to enter the building," he said.

He said that unselected Corporation



Eddie Kershaw, who led a 'break-in' on horseback at Dublin Corporation headquarters last Thursday. Picture by Paddy Flannery

officials were "sitting in their offices fully aware of the holocaust that is going on."

"I took the horse in to the building to show them what beautiful animals they are slaughtering."

Kevin Street Gardaí are investigating the incident under the Public Order Act and a file is being prepared for the DPP, according to a Garda spokesman.

A Dublin Corporation spokeswoman said any comment beyond deploring the damage to property and the intimi-

dation of staff, would only give the protesters further unwarranted publicity.

## the way

Similar plan was agreed out fell through. Ship is now in negotiation with Corporation's cleaners-out providing an open and maintenance for

said: "We want the operate and maintain solely for use in Ballyberry Orchard. The people to see this as a difference to the area."

### ACCIDENT AT WORK?

Talk to our Industrial Accident advisor Patrick McMahon

at B. P. O'Reilly & Co

SOLICITORS Tallaght Village Tel: 4525211

Figure 6 Article in *The Echo* about an 'urban cowboy'.

of strange, almost ceremonial, exchange going on, where kids purchase horses at the Smithfield Fair in the city centre, very often with money earned on the black market,

fully expecting these beasts to be seized within a month or so, which requires more criminal activity to raise funds to repeat the cycle. Officially, these state actions provoked



a couple of marches on Mansion House (the seat of municipal government) in protest (Dooley, 1998). Not missing a beat, the middle-class media have used these marches to comment on some of the more exotic aspects of 'ghetto culture' (Walsh, 1997; O'Hallaran, 1998; Smith, 1998), all the while practically celebrating its 'demise' (Figure 5).

Ironically, given that horses have been rendered effectively illegal in Dublin city, the ideology of traditional horse ownership has also been expanding in this community (and others like it), mirroring the middle-class media's exoticized portrayal of this area and population. Some of the more savvy locals effectively used this image of the 'urban cowboy' during the horse protest, which certainly helped gain official support for the Equestrian Centre (Figure 6).

In pursuing this tactic, however, these locals tended to elide aspects of their own history. It is very easy, for example, to elicit statements in Ballyfermot and Cherry Orchard like, 'There's always been horses here', or 'There's been a horse culture passed down'. While it is a fact that, into the 1980s, certain families in Cherry Orchard used horses commercially to haul coal and milk, it is also the case that the local ideology of horse ownership being 'traditional' in this community hides a great deal, not the least of which is that few families actually have (or had) anything to do with horses in any Dublin neighbourhood. Also, horse owners can be very different from one another: even at the height of the Horse Protest one could find animals in Cherry Orchard that looked dispirited and underfed, as well as beasts that were (and are) maintained at near-dressage quality. The struggle around horse ownership, then, is at the intersection of a tradition of *some* families involved in horse ownership for several generations, Cherry Orchard's experience (and historical memory) of often oppressive official institutions, and the current configuration of Cherry Orchard's social problems, particularly an expanding youth drug problem. These links allow

horses, amongst any number of other problems, to be constituted as an issue internal to the community. This slippage also allows another: the elision between the idea of difference in this community (a potential strength) and deficit (i.e. a weakness needing to be addressed, generally with professional help). The very flexibility of the social exclusion discourse allows for both of these readings at the same time. In the rest of this paper, we argue that this flexibility generally works against residents, in other words, problems are almost always diagnosed as being internal to the community and help always comes from outside, always with strings attached.

### Institutions: old and new

LINK, the Cherry Orchard community development organization, is one of the primary players in the drama outlined above. It grows out of a couple of local committees, the Cherry Orchard Development Council and the Orchard Centre, preparing an application for a Community Development Project to obtain EU funds, in 1992. From late 1993 onwards, training for the committee was provided by Combat Poverty<sup>7</sup> representatives, and later by CAN (Community Action Network). The Project was successful in obtaining a generous training grant through Combat Poverty, and training and development for committee members and staff has been a regular feature of the Project ever since.

LINK's objectives are the following:

- 1 To act as a source of information for the community.
- 2 To act as a catalyst in motivating community action.
- 3 To provide a service facility for the community and its associations.
- 4 To develop links/bonds with existing groups and centres in the area and outside.

- 5 To support groups seeking educational opportunities in Cherry Orchard at least equal to those in other areas.
- 6 To give support to groups with special needs, e.g. unemployed, lone parents, youth.
- 7 To work with groups to improve the image of Cherry Orchard.
- 8 To encourage cultural and artistic development in the area.

The Ballyfermot Drugs Task Force (BDTF) and the Ballyfermot Area Partnership (BFAP) were more tangential players in this drama. The former is a co-ordination body designed to provide a venue for policy-implementers, from social welfare workers to community police, to more efficiently use public resources to combat the drugs menace. While it was originally conceived of as a temporary body, the expanding opiate consumption problem in west Dublin has meant that it has been one of the more stable institutional presences in this area for the past 12 years. The Ballyfermot Area Partnership is another Area Partnership Company (APC) and community development organization, slightly older (and better established) than LINK. There is some tension between these two organizations that is difficult to outline in the course of a short piece. Basically, the main difficulty is Cherry Orchard's relatively stigmatized status. While the Ballyfermot area as a whole scores in the worst category in the government's deprivation index, Cherry Orchard scores worse than the rest of Ballyfermot. It suffers the sort of multiple deprivations that tend to attract the attention of commentators, policy-makers, and, it must be said, researchers. In the new social exclusion regime, such problems at once attract area-based funds *and* make funders despair that anything meaningful can actually change in these communities. Despite the occasional friction, however, all three organizations share members of their Boards of Directors. Each group, moreover, considers the Equine Centre a rousing success.

### A place of their own?

The INTEGRA Horse Project is nearly complete, with an anticipated capacity of 30 horses (although the original plans called for a facility to house about three times this number, and it is unclear whether expansion is a viable option). Its purpose is described in its official literature in the following terms:

"The project represents one of the most imaginative and constructive initiatives yet undertaken to imbue a sense of pride and purpose in the local community. It is targeted specifically for young people who are at risk to crime/substance abuse, many of whom have their own ponies..."

"The Equine centre aims to harness the positive aspects of a phenomenon that has generated much adverse publicity — in the process building up the self-esteem of the youths involved in transforming today's 'urban cowboys' into accomplished and caring horsemen with a genuine stake in what tomorrow can bring for both themselves and their community." (Eddie Harty, Equine Consultant)

Not surprisingly, these Equine Centres are pointed to both nationally and internationally as examples of successful grass-roots initiatives to combat social exclusion. Nonetheless, this project has been remarkably divisive at the local level. From early on in the development of the initiative, it was clear that the INTEGRA Project was going to have difficulty accommodating the very elements most concerned with the loss of their horses, i.e. young males, many of whom have, or are 'at risk' for, criminal connections, if only because the number of horses catered for was not adequate to house their number of horses, even after the local herds had been substantially reduced through government seizures. Indeed, the one meeting that had the best community response at the end of 1998 almost ended in disaster. The meeting quickly deteriorated into a shouting match, as it became clear that the management committee of the project and many of

the horse owners had had little contact, and arguably even less sympathy, with one another. An 11-year-old boy summed up the general feeling of the audience in the following fashion, "We love our horses, and we want OUR horses on OUR fucking land, not Bal-fuckin'-briggan, County-fuckin'-Meath!"<sup>8</sup> (an alternative Equestrian Centre suggested as at least temporary housing for those beasts not able to be accommodated at the new centre).

Originally, we thought that this might be the reaction of a young hothead, egged on by some of his compatriots. A short while later, however, one of our team was talking with two of the 'community members' on the management team of the equine-centre-to-be. While we had been aware of and, indeed, tangentially involved in, this project since the beginning, we were surprised by the vehemence of the arguments that had festered beneath the surface of these meetings (some of which we had attended), and between people whom, we thought, we knew reasonably well. It is necessary to produce a long transcript fragment here, in order to tease out some of these issues.

- A. C'mere. Did you here about all the hassle we're having?
- Z. What?
- A. We're after separating ourselves from LINK.
- Z. Why?
- A. Fucked them all off it . . . Dermot an' all . . . [Z: When?] A little while ago. They took it over . . . the Board. Now don't repeat a word of this to anyone. It happened since the launch. They wouldn't let us give over to that. I was there like but they wouldn't let us help to organize it like. And I mean it's OUR project. Speaking in code at that stage we were . . . What happened was Dermot was holding the Project back holding it up for ransom all the time. Dermot wants to run the show and he said a few things that night. [T]o cut a long story short, we were getting ignored . . . And one day I

says 'I'm leaving the Horse Project'. And Bridie says 'you're fucking mad.' So Bridie was getting all upset as well. But then he started on Mary and that's where he made his mistake. Ah, there was killin's. Did you ever read the story 'Give them a rope long enough and they'll hang themselves'. Really true. It's really true . . . 'Dick-head Dermot'.

- B. He's too fucking young. He chairs those fuckin' Council meetings [the Board of directors of LINK]. I should have stayed on that Council, I'd 've fuckin' reeled him out of that chair.
- A. The Council is at the centre of everything. . .
- B. No it's not. Nothin' fuckin' happens on the Council.
- Z. You might not see a whole lot happen but that's where the possibility for things to happen is.
- B. I'll let you in on a secret right. I got the word that they were putting 'phoy' into the clinic next door right. Fucking phoy! You check that out right! [B also sits on the Drugs Task Force]. Just see if I'm right.
- A. This is why you have them all sticking by their Corporation, sticking by their fuckin' builders . . . 'cos they're gettin' something out of it. They have to. They have to be! [B laughing].
- B. Stupid fuckers they are! God forgive me!
- A. They're only there cause they're paid to be fuckin' there.
- B. They clock off at 5:30 and that's the end of them, them and their committee, the centre, the whole lot.

It is very difficult to unpack this conversation in the scope of a short work, but since it so clearly runs together the varieties of institutions at work in this community, and local dissatisfaction with them, some attempt needs to be made. First, this conversation was our first knowledge (it was then only a couple of days old) of the split in the management structure of the project. The

two local women (A and B) are complaining bitterly about the professional head of the community development organization (Dermot, affectionately referred to as “dick-head Dermot”). They clearly have some difficulty with him personally, but it is clear that their main problem with him is that he does not live in the community (“They clock off at 5:30”). In other work, we have explored this dilemma of community development organizations (Bartley and Saris, 1999). Essentially, the problem is that such groups are simultaneously committed to ‘community involvement’ as well as a sense of ‘fiscal-bureaucratic accountability’. This dual mandate means that a small number of long-term residents of ‘socially excluded’ areas (such as A and B) tend to become involved in the initial running of such organizations, alongside professionals who liaise with funding agencies and more established state bodies. As projects develop, those with the cultural capital to write grant applications and provide ‘accountability’ tend to be thrust into leadership roles, and those residents on the board tend to see their roles diminished.

There is more to this transcript fragment, however. While voicing worries about losing any chance of gaining real leadership roles in the Integra Horse Project, B moves easily into a critique of another community initiative, the recently completed Eastern Health Board<sup>9</sup> Resource Centre. Ostensibly, this is a community health clinic, with General Practitioners and dentists being housed locally. As this project developed, however, local people almost universally came to believe that the real target population of this centre was the seemingly ever-increasing number of opiate addicts in the neighbourhood. ‘Phoy’ is the local term for methadone in a liquid base.<sup>10</sup> Until the recent tightening of prescription procedures at the end of 1998, brown and yellow phoy (the dyes indicating two different strengths) were very easy to come by in Cherry Orchard because of lax controls exercised by some GPs in different parts of the city. Indeed, many locals felt that phoy was a bigger problem than heroin. Thus, far

from being understood as a potential resource, then, this ‘community’ centre was read as merely another problem-directed ‘service’ to the community, at best contributing to the stigmatization of the area as the home of junkies and scumbags, and at worse actually exacerbating the problem against which it was directed. Even more galling, while Cherry Orchard still has no telephone kiosk, no post office, no pub, only a small shop and a very patchy public transport service, an addict’s methadone was soon to be available within easy distance, in plain sight, by the way, of his or her neighbours.

Finally, these women refer to another then-current sore point in the neighbourhood, that is, new building in the Elmdale Housing estate by Dublin Corporation to create more social housing (‘the fuckin’ builders’ above). This construction has blocked some critical pedestrian access to this neighbourhood for an area in which it is already difficult to get around.<sup>11</sup> Children inevitably played on the building site and mud was practically impossible to keep out of the houses. While, for some residents, the building site represented a providential opportunity for slips and falls (and consequent compensation claims from ‘the Corpo’ [City Council]), most of the women were upset that there was no warning about this construction and no consultation with locals about how its environmental impact might be lessened. To make matters worse, the builders were then beginning work very early in the morning as part of an incentive scheme to get the job completed by a bonus deadline. Thus, heavy machinery was operating sometimes as early as 4 a.m. The troubles in the running of the INTEGRA Project, then, easily led to a discussion of many of the other fissures around this community. Every one of these situations involved remote professionals making decisions that affect the lives of people in this neighbourhood with few and ineffective means for either consultation or accountability. From these women’s perspective, seemingly disparate events are seen to be all of a piece, as they all involve

decisions being effectively imposed on them. The content of 'remedying socially exclusion', in this case, means an unhappy combination of technocratic control without much in the way of democratic accountability in a fashion that would be impossible to imagine in a middle-class neighbourhood.

### Doing good while doing well

To understand the bitterness expressed here, it is necessary to widen our analysis again to discuss the national context in which the drama detailed above played out, specifically Ireland's recent historical economic trajectory. In the 1980s, when policy initiatives related to ameliorating social exclusion were diffusing throughout the then EC, Ireland was one of the more economically marginal areas of Europe. Since the late 1980s the Irish economy has developed at a tremendous pace (Gray, 1997; Sweeney, 1999; Allen, 2000; Kirby, 2002). Between 1986 and 1996 the annual growth rate of the GDP was above 6% whereas the European average increase in GDP for the same period was about 2%. In 1988 the GDP per capita in Ireland amounted to slightly over 71% of the European average, while unemployment was at 16%. About a decade later, in 1997, the corresponding figures were 97% and 10%, respectively. The GDP per capita for 1999 was estimated to be 105% of the EU average,<sup>12</sup> and for the first time in the history of the Irish state policy-makers and economists are talking about 'full employment' and labour shortages in the Irish economy. Despite some reservations about the causes and sustainability of Ireland's economic success, as expressed by Gray (1997), Kirby (2002), Allen (2000) and Sabel (1996), the term 'Celtic Tiger' has been coined<sup>13</sup> and is frequently used to describe Ireland's thriving economy (Breathnach, 1998; Sweeney, 1999).

Like other booms driven by neo-liberal macroeconomic policies, 'Celtic Tiger' Ireland has witnessed better-off segments of

Irish society gaining more in both absolute and relative terms than poorer ones. During this period, Irish society has also largely reconceptualized poverty in terms of particular spaces and specific populations, substituting what we might call an ecological model of poverty for a moral one. "We as a society have poor members" has pretty much given way to "there are poor communities in our environment". At the same time, Ireland introduced area-based approaches to tackling unemployment and poverty with a focus shifting from labour market participation strategies and resource deprivation to the wider issue of social inclusion. Initially, the major reason for this shift in focus was the availability of substantial resources from Europe to address social exclusion (Bartley and Saris, 1999). The designation of disadvantaged areas based on an index of deprivation (Haase, 1999) was an integral part of the implementation of the new local development process in Ireland. Within the designated areas, public-private partnerships, such as the Ballyfermot Area Partnership, were established by the Irish Government with strong financial and organizational support from the EU (Walsh, 1999).

Because this concern with the 'new poverty' has occurred during the course of an economic boom, it has yielded some interesting, if somewhat perverse, results from the point of view of the communities being assisted. Ideologically, the Celtic Tiger is being constructed as the making good of the sacrifices of previous generations in Ireland [conveniently near a round-number year (150) commemoration of the Great Famine (1845–1852)]. This triumphalist celebration renders doing poorly in the current environment more unpleasant than is strictly necessary. Such celebration suggests that those being left behind are simply feckless, and need to get on with the project of individual and community reformation to enjoy material prosperity.

In this sense Ireland has imported aspects of an underclass argument from the USA and

the UK. This is perhaps best exemplified in the Walsh piece cited above when he describes an interest in horses in areas like Cherry Orchard as an icon of 'ghetto culture'. This term, as recently as the mid-1990s, would not have been found in the lexicon of Irish social commentators. Here is the rub: what is pointed to as diversity and potential strength in the new discourse on social exclusion and community development gets read as 'pathology' in media sources and other public discourses. Thus, with regard to horses, the middle-class media often portrays Cherry Orchard (and other parts of Dublin) as 'horse crazy', marking the peculiar affection that many (particularly children) feel for these beasts (Smith, 1998). The sense here is of a sort of mass hysteria to which poor children are particularly prone, a recent pathology from which this population suffers, the last in a long line of other pathologies associated with 'ghetto culture' (drugs, broken families, domestic violence and the like). This pathology also has an infectious quality — drugs and violence spills out into respectable areas. Robberies at syringe-point, for example, were a regular occurrence in 1990s Dublin. Similarly with horses: at some point in 1997, the figure of 3000 horses running more or less loose in the city became conventional wisdom amongst many commentators (Walsh, 1997). Despite, the guesswork that went into this figure, it was quoted throughout much of 1998 (Smith, 1998), retrospectively reassuring people that the legislation passed in late 1996 was probably a necessary response to a bad habit clearly at odds with the health and safety requirements of a modern city.

### **Between difference and deficit**

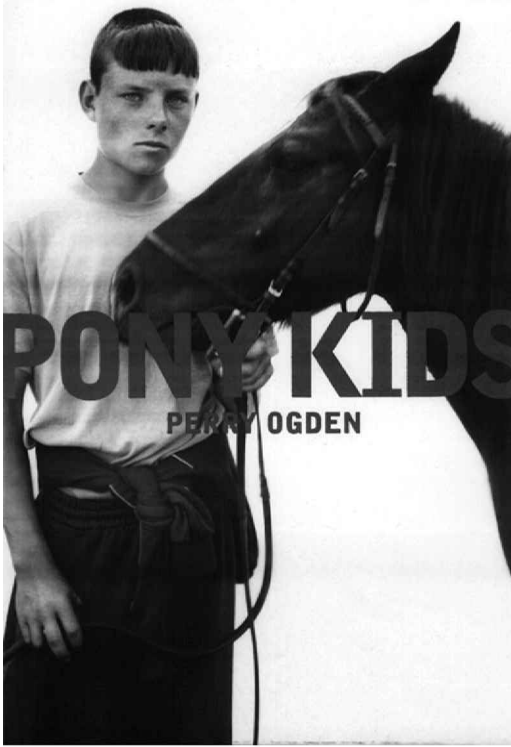
It is at the overlap of the ecological model of poverty and the designated or marked area quality of the social exclusion discourse that the slide between difference and deficit is most commonly experienced. At base, the

ecological model of poverty not only imagines something like national parks containing the potentially dangerous forces of the socially excluded, it also provides socially designated rangers, such as specially trained police, social welfare officers and community development workers to handle the natives. The fact that, in Cherry Orchard, some of the natives ride bareback reinforces this dual sense of exclusion and exoticization.

This exoticization, however, never exists on local terms. Horses are legislated out of existence, in part on the back of middle-class worries about their mistreatment, in part on the back of the spiralling value of the 'waste ground' on which the horses were traditionally corralled and run. Once illegal and disappearing, their 'traditional' resonance is enhanced and becomes, ironically, romantically desirable. Photographs of urban/suburban horse-riders are now quite popular in Ireland. This trend probably finds its current acme in the work of the one-time fashion photographer, Perry Ogden (Figure 7).

Here, socially excluded kids and their horses (freshly purchased at Dublin's Smithfield's Horse Fair and likely to be seized within the month by those enforcing the recent legislation) are materially cleaned up and symbolically air-brushed of any qualities that might make a middle-class viewer squeamish, from stray dirt in the horse's mane to track marks on children's arms. In this picture, a classical, timeless depiction of horse and boy stare through their posed representation and local context to share a moment with a viewer. The presumed authenticity and purity of the boy's relationship to his horse, and his seeming unconcern for his surroundings (which are, in the event, conveniently covered by a white sheet) are desirable qualities in a world where such authenticity and purity is presumably lacking. Such icons of authenticity now appear in up-market coffee-table books in respectable homes.

Necessarily, Area Partnerships do something similar. In the inevitable competition for funds, they need to cast their appeals, and



**Figure 7** Cover of the book *Pony Kids* (1996) by photographer Perry Ogden.

to advertise their success, in terms that tend to stress the peculiarities or unique qualities of their patch and to de-emphasize broader connections, especially issues of power (or the lack of it). One of our interviews was with an Area Development Management official, that is, someone who looks over money requests from Partnerships, while evaluating their performance. During the course of the interview this gentleman insisted that a successful project was a 'high-profile' project. When we followed up on this term, he responded:

'Lots of publications about the work they've done, high-profile launches of the evaluations of the work they've done, things like that. It would be known very much throughout their area that they're there . . . That they are quoted in the paper. The Ballyfermot equine project has been

mentioned in the editorial of one of the countries main papers on two separate occasions. That would be high-profile, that's very good.'

There are, in short, things to say, and ways of saying them, but the authorization to speak is not shared by all, and the terms themselves mean different things at different times. The anger of A and B in the transcript fragment above has no place in such high-profile productions, mostly because 'power'—the ability to make a difference, to say that 'this situation isn't good enough' and make it stick—is completely unmarked in these discourses.

## Conclusion

The worry for Anthropology, Human Geography and related disciplines interested in terms like culture, locality and neighbourhood is that terms and concepts that were substantially created in these disciplines are living independent (and seemingly successful) lives in other discourses that are impacting on areas and populations similar to Cherry Orchard. Drawing upon Foucault's concept of governmentality, for example, Rose (1996) has argued that the way in which we have conceived and constituted the 'social' is currently being colonized by a language of 'community'. These communities come complete with their own 'cultures' (e.g. they are responsible, entrepreneurial and independent, or they exhibit pathological, dependent and irresponsible attributes that hold them back from full participation in the global market). This symbolic reimagination of the nation-state has occurred at the same historical moment that, materially, the economic fates of citizens within nearly all national territories have come substantially undone from one another.

Perhaps, then, it is time for certain disciplines to check on their intellectual offspring. While in Anthropology, for example,

the past 20 years or so has seen a revolution in the critical awareness of what Marcus refers to as the *mise en scene* in classic ethnography, this critical awareness has coincided (with a few notable exceptions) with a marked decline in the popularity of the term 'culture' in anthropological writings and what looks like a veritable aversion to use the term theoretically. Ironically, during this same period, what we might call the classic, if we were to be charitable, 'untheorized', sense of 'culture' has never been more ubiquitous outside of the discipline, or possessed more explanatory power in popular consciousness, in large parts of academia, or, indeed, in many policy-making circles. Sahlins' observation of a few years ago — that globalization has largely meant 'culture' emerging as perhaps the primary structural principle of differentiation — every year looks less like a theoretical provocation and more like a social fact.

As part of this process of checking up on disciplinary progeny, we might develop a radically expanded vision of what belongs in ethnography, no matter what discipline is doing the research. Too few scholars, for example, have investigated the concrete process of how uncoupled areas and populations each with their own 'cultures' are being managed by professionals in new institutional structures, who are operationalizing definitions of 'culture' and 'community' in the pursuit of their mandates. Cherry Orchard, for example, has been effectively re-institutionalized within the ambit of such novel structures. Far from the oft-heralded or -bemoaned roll-back of the state, residents in neighbourhoods like Cherry Orchard regularly experience the state in both its old guises, such as police and welfare officers, and in its newer forms of Partnerships and Task Forces. Indeed, few of their fellow citizens have anywhere near as much state contact, and few have so many aspects of their lives managed and normalized by state and para-state structures, while having around their life-world so many social fissures. To date, however, scholars researching

these neighbourhoods have downplayed this dense institutional web.

Horses in Cherry Orchard, then, are merely an especially instructive example of how these new technologies operate. Cherry Orchard residents have had to adapt to their refiguring around horse ownership, among other issues for their neighbourhood, within a variety of power-laden discourses deploying such terms as 'values' and 'habit'. Whatever else this refiguring has accomplished, it has tended to fragment one of the main aspects of their social experience, that is, of being consistently denied access to meaningful control over their lives. One of our consultants, at the closing of a symposium on 'community development', put it very well. In a floor response to a paper, she said, 'All this talk of integration, intervention, partnerships and all — it all seems like the most beautiful words for the most incredible mess.' The challenge for modern research into populations and areas 'left behind' by a new globalized economy is to make sense of this mess. We have tried to take the first step in the analysis above by framing ethnographic, policy, institutional and disciplinary data within the same analysis. The next step, it seems to us, is to develop a theoretical language that more effectively speaks to power, specifically power *in* this new and old version of 'culture', one that can outline its specific shape and capabilities, and that can, hopefully, make apparent ways to make more voices count.

## Notes

- 1 This research was made possible by the generous support of Combat Poverty, The Catherine Howard Foundation, The Ballyfermot Drugs Task Force and The Ballyfermot Area Partnership. The authors would also like to gratefully acknowledge those individuals who have shared their lives with us for nearly four years in the process of providing us with some of the insights we have relayed here. Aspects of this work were also presented at the 2000 American Anthropological Association Annual Meetings in San Francisco, CA at the session, 'Where is the Field? Anthropology and the European Union: Problematics and Possibilities',



- and in 2002, in an Invited Lecture at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester. The authors are grateful for the comments received in these venues. Any mistakes and/or omissions are entirely our own.
- 2 There are clearly serious issues raised in using Wilson's ideas, although they are issues that are not necessarily in the original work. First, the fundamental dimension which shapes this theory is social cleavage along racial lines. Although race and ethnicity is a dimension of exclusion which is relevant throughout Europe (Madanipour *et al.*, 1998), it is by no means the only relevant dimension, while different cleavages may be more or less important in different national and local contexts (cf. Mingione, 1996). In practice, European commentators tend to privilege economic change as the key motive variable, no doubt reflecting the taken-for-granted significance of employment as the basis for solidarity in the European social welfare model (see the various contributors to Roche and van Berkel, 1997). The second problem with using Wilson's work is the way it has been taken up by the popular media, so that the phrase 'underclass' has come to be widely used as an acceptable euphemism for what used to be called the disreputable, undeserving or feckless (generally Black or Brown) poor. The political valence of Wilson's concept, then, has been reversed through this process—from a cry of outrage that such a situation should exist to a mischievous justification for the poor treatment of large groups of people. This transformation of the moral content of the theory is no doubt a sign of the strength of the process of stigmatization.
  - 3 On the whole, Ireland has spent much more time reacting to international debates about welfare reform than it has spent proactively contributing to the international discussion of these issues. Indeed, some official observers have worried that the Irish government has "lapsed into a pattern of reacting to policy initiatives and viewpoints originating from Brussels" (National Economic and Social Council, 1995, p. 114). In any case, EU initiatives at social level have been mirrored in Irish policy—historically, because of the need to satisfy EU requirements and standards for funding support since the reforming of Structural Funds in 1988.
  - 4 In the following we refer to these institutes as area partnership companies (APCs) or local area partnerships. Walsh (1999, p. viii) describes partnerships as formal organizational frameworks for policy-making and implementation, which mobilize a coalition of interests and the commitment of a range of partners, around a common agenda and multi-dimensional action programme, to combat social exclusion and promote social inclusion (see also, Stewart, 1998, p. 79).
  - 5 FÁS is the national training and employment authority in Ireland. Established in 1988, from the merger of two older state organizations, it sets itself four main areas of responsibility, (1) training and retraining, (2) employment schemes, (3) placement and guidance services, (4) providing assistance to groups and workers' co-operatives to facilitate job creation.
  - 6 As in any important event, accounts attributing both the cause and the meaning of the Halloween Riots vary considerably. The magnitude of the incidence, though, is not in doubt. On Halloween night, several units of the Gardai were lured into the area in hot pursuit of joy-riders in stolen cars. They were then surrounded and driven off the street by crowds bearing rocks and petrol bombs. The Gards then came back in force and were driven off the streets again. Over the course of several hours, tens of people were injured, two children very seriously, and dozens of arrests were made. In addition, a number of Gardaí were severely traumatized by these events (we know at least three early retirements connected to this incident). This civil disturbance is viewed by the authorities as one of the most disturbing incidents of public unrest in the Republic of Ireland within living memory.
  - 7 The Combat Poverty Agency is an independent, state-funded body created in 1986. It has several areas of responsibility from advising government on anti-poverty strategy, researching the nature, content and extent of poverty in the Irish state, implementing and evaluating government anti-poverty initiatives, and supporting community development as a means of combating poverty.
  - 8 For those of you familiar with Irish geography, you will note that the young man places Balbriggan, which is in County Dublin in the neighbouring county of Meath. For many Dubs, Dublin ends at the city limits.
  - 9 The public health authority for this area of Ireland.
  - 10 Probably a contraction of Physeptum, the brand name of methadone.
  - 11 Cherry Orchard is composed of wide streets and culs-de-sac. It is designed for a car-using population. Unfortunately the population who lives there has one of the lowest car ownership rates in the Republic of Ireland. At best, it is a long walk to anywhere in the neighbourhood. Losing one of the pedestrian access points can turn a long walk into a veritable hike.
  - 12 As a result of the substantial increase in the GDP, Ireland's financial support from the European Union is tapering off over the next few years. This reduction in payments manifests in the new National Development Plan (NDP) 2000–2006

where Ireland is allocated 3.374 billion ECU (including the EU Cohesion Fund). In the previous NDP 1994–1999 Ireland received 246 million ECU from the EU Cohesion Fund (9% of 2.75 billion ECU) and about 6 billion ECU from the EU Structural Fund (4.5% of 128 billion ECU) (see Allen, 2000; Gray, 1997).

- 13 The term, of course, relates to the East Asian Tiger Economies (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore), even though the 'Celtic' development path is, in its very nature, different to the development process of the East Asian Economies (Sweeney, 1999). The Irish economic growth phenomenon is heavily based on FDI from transnational corporations and seemingly very susceptible to external forces. Even with the post-September 11th worries in the global economy, however, Ireland's GDP looks like it will grow nearly 5% in 2002.

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*A. Jamie Saris, (PhD), is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at National*

*University of Ireland, Maynooth. E-mail: AJamie.Saris@may.ie*

*Brendan Bartley is a Lecturer in Urban Geography and Planning at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. E-mail: Brendan.Bartley@may.ie*

*Ciara Kierans, Colm Walsh and Philip McCormack are in the Departments of Anthropology and Geography at National University of Ireland, Maynooth.*

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