
Economic Geographies of the Urban System: Top-down/Bottom-up Trajectories of Development and Change in Dublin's Inner City

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Introduction

Over recent decades, far-reaching economic restructuring processes have produced shifting patterns of development and inequality with contradictory implications for the work and living conditions of people and communities across different regions, cities and places. The socio-spatial structure of production (manufacturing and service industries) has been reorganised radically on a global scale, becoming much more flexible, a keyword distinguishing the current phase in the capitalist space economy. The main shifts are generally traced to the economic crisis of the 1970s, a period when the post-war 'Fordist' boom came to a halt, hit by the combined shocks of the OPEC oil crisis, economic stagnation and inflation and declining profitability in the core industrial sectors. Among other processes, capital began to 'migrate' in a highly mobile fashion, seeking a 'spatial fix' to restore profit rates (see, for instance, Bluestone and Bennett, 1982, 1988; Scott and Storper, 1986; Castells, 1989, 1998; Massey, 1995). Facilitated by extraordinary technological progress over the same period, particularly the advances in informational and transport capacities (e.g. wide-bodied cargo jets), it was possible to reorganise production lines across regional and national boundaries, decentralising more labour-intensive functions to take advantage of geographic differences in labour markets, notably lower wages and the availability of a large pool of surplus labour or of more vulnerable workers (such as women, children, rural migrants, ethnic minorities, immigrants etc.). Insofar as these general processes have produced very different outcomes at different geographical points (for example the de-industrialisation of core regions, the emergence of newly industrializing countries and the deepening marginalisation of the peripheral, or 'least developed' countries), this emergent economic geography can be interpreted as the manifestation of uneven development at various scales.

At the urban scale, these processes have resulted in a far-reaching restructuring of the economy, reflected in the denuding of the traditional industrial base of many cities in Western Europe and North America and the subsequent increasing dominance of service sectors. There is more to the story, however, than urban areas being 'acted upon' by distant economic forces, which re-script the built fabric and the social environment. The contemporary city may be construed instead in terms of a complex articulation of global and local forces, reflected in, among other features, the restructuring of urban and regional economies, the space of capital flows in the built environment, the 'realignment' of urban planning under conditions of entrepreneurial governance (McGuirk, 1994; McGuirk and MacLaran, 2001) and the reassertion of place through local economic development (informal, community-based, co-operative, etc.) and the creation of various local structures and community initiatives (Punch, 2001, 2002). The aim of this paper is to examine some top-down and bottom-up aspects of

recent processes of economic development and transformation, as these have played out across Dublin's inner city. In particular, the paper offers an overview of the impacts of recent restructuring processes linked to the globalisation of capital and a theoretical-practical exploration of the construction of a putative 'social economy' in the inner city over recent years. This has seen increasing involvement of community activists, traditionally attached to independent grassroots associations promoting the interests of specific urban locales, in the creation and management of bottom-up economic interventions. The intention at this point is to 'map' this emergent territory, raising some critical questions for further research regarding its place and meaning.

Context

This paper draws in part from a recently completed major survey of grassroots initiatives in Dublin¹ and an action-research project on local economic development in Ringsend (Punch, 2000a, 2000b). The point of departure for this work involved an exploration of the contradictions and conflicts engendered through the uneven development and redevelopment of the city over recent decades as processes of economic and spatial restructuring unfolded. These concerns necessarily directed attention towards the strategies and actions (or inactions) implemented by constellations of capital and the state in the urban system. However, it was equally important to attempt a simultaneous exploration of how the resultant pressures and inequalities were experienced and responded to at grassroots level in particular locales. Accordingly, working-class organisation in the community across the inner city formed a central focus.

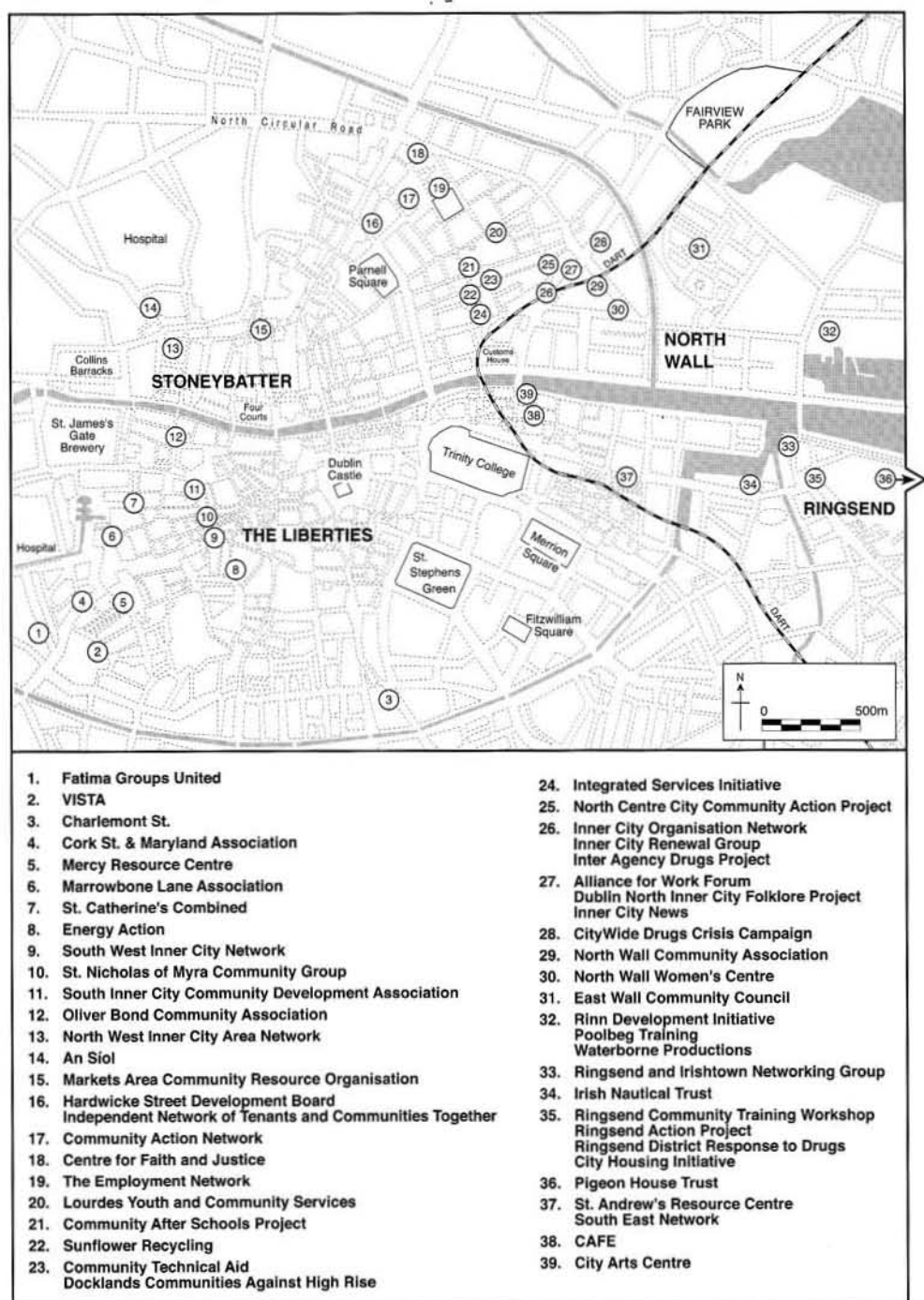
The main survey work involved a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews with key activists and local leaders involved in bottom-up organisations of various forms: community associations, alliances of community groups and local development (or 'social economy') initiatives. The inner-city case study involved a total of 45 interviews, which were carried out 'in the field' - in community centres, parish halls, offices of the organisation, community workshops and other premises, and, where the organisation had no formal space, in the home or workplace of the informant(s) (Figure 1). The interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim for analysis, which was carried out using standard qualitative methods (coding, constructing typologies, etc.). The Ringsend study involved open-ended interviews with key representatives from twelve local development initiatives in the area with links to the Ringsend Development Initiative, an umbrella body for local development, which was created by local activists as a formal structure and a resource for interlinked but distinct groups in the area.

The analysis of the interview data chronicled four key emergent themes: community-cultural, urban-spatial, the drugs crisis and, the main focus here, the local economy. The rest of this paper draws on this research to analyse top-down and bottom-up aspects of economic change in the city, experiences in Tallaght having been explored in detail elsewhere (Punch, 2002). References to specific interviews are coded (Interview 1, etc.) in order to preserve anonymity.

The Global-Local Dialectic

Although a dialectical theory of uneven development necessarily integrates the unfolding of general processes and particular implications at multiple geographical scales, much of the literature in recent years has been dominated by a preoccupation with globalising tendencies. This reflects the apparent concentration of social power linked to the rise of multi-national

Figure 1. Inner City Interview Locations



capital and the 'upscaling of governance' and political arenas to the level of the European Union, NAFTA, GATT, IMF, the World Bank and others, often through 'disturbingly undemocratic procedures' (Swyngedouw, 2000, 69-70). Alongside this political-economic

concentration of power, there has been an attendant geographical re-centralisation, with command and control functions increasingly concentrating in 'world cities' like New York, London and Tokyo. To varying extents, global movements and institutional restructurings of this kind have been key forces in the imposition of a new international division of labour based on increasing distinctions between 'mental' and 'manual' labour (or 'conception' and 'execution'), and the relocation of increasingly mobile firms and branch plants globally to exploit new labour pools and markets (Massey, 1995). In short, there has been a reinforced globalisation of production and financial systems, creating a 'set of interdependent commodity, labour and financial flows' (Scott & Storper, 1986, 8). These economic aspects of capitalist globalisation have had many and complex implications, provoking new rounds of class restructuration and spatial reorganisation, and forcing local and central states to adopt entrepreneurial roles, diverting resources to 'sell' (and prepare) particular locations as sites for investment (McGuirk, 1994). Broadly, these tendencies have generated considerable levels of economic expansion and inequality and a related shift in class power, with labour seemingly unable to find adequate responses to the global organisational capacity and geographical mobility of capital.

In all of this, there is a commensurate sense of an increasingly top-down economic geography, a socio-spatial structure of production way beyond local control or decision-making. In an ideological sleight of hand, such tendencies are often cast as an integrative and homogenising force, universal and inevitable in a shrinking world. Indeed, the meaning of globalisation, whether real or imagined, for many communities lies in an increasing experience of exclusion, dislocation and disempowerment. Such conditions may generate a sense of helplessness, uncertainty, or loss of meaning and a commensurate feeling that this new world order will follow its own course oblivious to particular needs or social activism, or even that such activism becomes a prop of the very system which it set out to change or contravene (Punch, 2000a).

The reality may be more complex, the globalising economy being an uneasy top-down construction built on contradictions and inequalities, crisis-prone and proceeding unevenly geographically and socially. It could be said that much of the dominant discourse on the topic has the quality of myth, promoting an uncritical and unproblematic acceptance of the benefits of global integration and international competition, while disguising the real historical-geographic content in a 'Babylonian confusion that seems to serve specific interests and power positions' (Swyngedouw, 2000, 63). Against the narrow and disempowering neoliberal paradigm, there is a need to analyse the immediacy and specificity of 'place', and its constitutive elements - economic, spatial, cultural - as well as the general restructuring processes working through (and lived) as disruptive or transformative forces. This dialectical view explores how the shifting economic patterns translate into an emergent structure of feeling, while also attending to the possibilities for alternative developmental visions or actions. The intertwining of top-down change and control with bottom up experiences and oppositions raises important issues in the contemporary city with its multiple and shifting economic geographies.

For these reasons, many analysts have focused attention on a global-local dialectic, emphasising the simultaneous reassertion of categories such as community and locale in the midst of a broader global shift. This reflects a rescaling of the 'geometry of social power', whereby political scales shift upward to global institutions and downward to local structures,

'strengthening power and control of some while disempowering others' (Swyngedouw, 2000, 71). In short, alongside the centralisation of power in global institutions, there has been a proliferation of local institutions – including various forms of 'partnership' structures and community-based organisations – taking on developmental and governance functions.

In particular, many recent studies have excavated the theoretical and practical implications of bottom-up economic development. Arruda (1998) conceptualises a model of bottom-up development based on the values of cooperation, sharing, reciprocity and solidarity, which emerges in direct opposition to the values of global capitalism. Drawing on experiences in less developed countries, Friedmann (1992) explores an alternative development based on empowerment and the political organisation of autonomous, local communities in dialectical opposition to the relentless accumulation at the heart of the dominant system. Wilson (1996) offers an empowerment model of community economic development from the 'inside out', which involves a participatory approach resting on self development in the first instance, rather than transfers of power from top-down, which may simply reproduce dependency. Korten's model of 'people-centred' development suggests the need to promote alternative values (human rather than monetary) and greater economic democracy through local economic institutions, which internalise different values and dynamics (Korten, 1999). In Portugal, 'local economic initiatives' denote a 'range of activities which involve the mobilization and development of local resources, generally stimulated by the need to tackle local economic and social problems' (Syrett, 1993, 527). In the context of recent economic restructuring processes, Nel (2001) examines the progress of local economic development in South Africa at two levels, formal (involving state and private sector institutions) and informal (community-based development and bottom-up coping or self-reliance strategies in the informal sector). In Britain, research has documented the emergence of community businesses or locally controlled trading organisations directed towards creating sustainable jobs and providing services (McArthur, 1993; Thake and Zadek, 1998), Local Exchange and Trading Systems (Williams, 1996; North, 1999; Seyfang, 2001) and other autonomous development initiatives (Pacione, 1990; Lawless et al., 1998).

Critical questions arise – theoretical and practical – regarding the meaning of these emergent local structures and initiatives. Are these marginal interventions in reality, particularly in the light of the hardening inequalities and exclusions of the globalised urban system? What are the ideological implications of an increasing emphasis on 'localism' in EU and state policies? Is the social economy merely 'a form of fragmented local crisis management' (Geddes, 2000, 797), a by-product of increasing entrepreneurial governance (McGuirk and MacLaran, 2001) or a potential stratum of autonomous local development? The rest of this paper attempts to contribute to some of these debates by exploring top-down and bottom-up dimensions of development and change in Dublin over recent decades.

Recent Patterns of Change in Dublin

On the periphery of Europe, Ireland's integration into an international capitalist system proved a slow process, which unfolded through different stages of isolation and openness, underdevelopment and expansion, all the time exhibiting a tension between the residual and emergent dimensions of the social formation. Arguably, this integration only approached maturity in recent decades, which witnessed a rapidly changing political economy as the globalisation of capital worked its way through various regions and urban areas with differential socio-spatial effects. Prior to this, significant pre-capitalist residual elements

persisted, agriculture remained dominant both in terms of produce and employment, and industrialisation was limited (Breen, *et al.*, 1990). Most importantly, the Irish republic experienced a changing political economy since independence (1922), which saw important shifts between isolation and openness, attempts at self-sufficiency and increasing dependence on foreign capital (Perrons, 1986; Drudy, 1998). In the post-war era, the international restructuring of capital has been an important force, contributing to economic and social transformation.

In Dublin, recent decades have seen a rapid restructuring of the urban economy, producing variable impacts, evident in patterns of urban social inequality. The County Borough (inner city and inner suburbs) lost 55 per cent of its industrial employment between 1961 and 1996 (Table 1). This represents the decline of much of the indigenous industrial fabric based on docks-related employment, textiles, brewing, glass-making and other relatively labour-intensive manufacturing, as well as a fine-grained network of small-scale enterprises and informal economic activities. At the same time, employment opportunities in services did not compensate. Indeed, decline during the 1980s ensured that total employment in services in 1991 differed little from 1961. However, while there has been renewed expansion in the 1990s in line with international experience, the general category hides its dual nature. The work varies qualitatively, ranging between relatively secure and well-paid professional employment and low-paid service work, including personal services and clerical work, which may be part-time or temporary. This bifurcation of employment in terms of autonomy, security, job 'satisfaction', social power, remuneration, benefits, etc. is a critical issue in recent rounds of restructuring (see also Drudy and Punch, 2001).

Dublin's inner-city crisis was one of the more striking artefacts of uneven development, an area losing out heavily to capital flight and rationalisation (job shedding, technical change). Indeed, it was estimated that the inner city lost 2,000 manufacturing jobs annually during the late 1970s. In the case of the docklands, for example, various decasualisation schemes led to a 60 per cent decline in the post-War port labour force by the late 1970s. Similarly, the workforce on the cross-channel section of the port declined by about 90 per cent over the same period following the adoption of Load On-Load Off and Roll On-Roll Off techniques (Bannon *et al.* 1981). The working-class communities, which traditionally functioned as a labour pool for the city's economic base, were faced with redundancies, mass unemployment

Table 1. Employment in Dublin County Borough and County, 1961-1996

	1961	1971	1981*	1991	1996
<i>Dublin County Borough</i>					
Industry	86,364	88,450	64,901	42,239	39,339
Services	124,453	130,706	136,698	124,665	144,049
Total	210,817	219,156	201,599	166,904	183,388
<i>Dublin County</i>					
Industry	21,632	33,566	48,444	46,214	50,074
Services	38,173	57,112	106,188	141,046	172,899
Total	59,805	90,678	154,632	187,260	222,973

**The trend is indicative due to boundary changes after 1981*

Source: Census of Population, 1961-96

Table 2. Unemployment Trends in Dublin, 1961-1996

	1961	1971	1981*	1991	1996
Co. Borough	10,727	12,600	25,694	46,416	43,906
Dublin County	1,951	3,369	13,603	31,265	31,020
Dublin (All)	12,678	15,969	39,297	77,681	74,926
Co. Borough. (%)	4.8	5.4	11.3	21.7	19.3
Dublin Co. (%)	2.9	3.5	8.0	14.1	12.1
Dublin (All) (%)	4.4	4.8	9.9	17.8	15.5

*The trend is indicative due to boundary changes after 1981

Source: Census of Population, 1961-96

and related problems of poverty. Unemployment increased steadily in Dublin from 4 per cent in 1961 to 18 per cent in 1991 (Table 2). However, unemployment in the inner city was 33 per cent by 1991, some communities moving from a position of full employment to mass unemployment over a few decades (Drudy and Punch, 2001). A range of attendant social problems ensued and community life became marked by general alienation, discontentment and the emergence and persistence of a heroin crisis since the late 1970s. Inner-city communities were further disadvantaged by long-term state neglect, as economic policies retained a regional emphasis, encouraging foreign direct investment and development in the western periphery of the country, while largely ignoring structural problems in the urban economy.

More recent rounds of restructuring and economic growth have seen the form and function of the city within the international economy shift once more, as a long trajectory of disinvestment was finally reversed in some areas. Economic growth in the late 1990s was exceptional, and employment has expanded, recalling the buoyancy of the 1960s. Among the more striking effects in Dublin, the financial services sector has grown rapidly, and the city has taken on a new role as a site for the back-office service functions of a range of foreign-owned corporations and for various stages in software manufacturing, all of which are largely dependent in terms of decision-making on external transnational corporations (Breathnach, 1999, 2000). The emergence of this economic function for Dublin derives from its insertion within a new spatial structure of production. This saw the separation of routine and non-routine office activities, with the former relocating internationally to avoid the high land costs in 'world' cities and to tap into reserves of labour, particularly female labour, which is 'seen as being both cheap and diligent, and prepared to put up with the routine, boring and demanding work involved' (Breathnach, 2000, 1). For example, female employment accounts for 70 per cent of all jobs in the international call centre sector in Ireland, and these jobs are low-paid, despite high skill requirements (*ibid*).

The commercial function of the city has also been strengthened, reinforced by economic buoyancy (the 'feel-good' factor), tourism growth and a rising 'consumer' culture, including elements of conspicuous consumption. After decades of disinvestment in the urban fabric and consequent physical decay, property capital has refocused attention on the inner city, resulting in large-scale redevelopment of high-grade office and residential space, but raising attendant threats of segregation or displacement for indigeneous communities (MacLaran,

1999; Punch, 2001). The inner city has also seen an 'internationalisation' of the retail sector, as foreign chains have dominated recent developments (Parker, 1999). Arguably a downside of the tourist and consumer boom and retail internationalisation has been a certain diminution of cultural distinctiveness. Much may be lost as the city is increasingly drawn into the homogenisation process at the heart of the dominant cultural logic of late capitalism (Jameson, 1984). This process equally extends to the city itself, increasingly packaged and 'imagineered' as a commodity for high-end consumption.

The important point to note, however, is that those displaced from employment by the restructuring of industry cannot simply transfer into whatever employment opportunities emerge in other sectors, particularly when the new employment is qualitatively worlds apart from the old. This reflects a contradiction at the heart of the restructured city: the juxtaposition of deprived inner-city communities and the high-tech frontier of the informational economy. The traditional spatial correlation between work and living space, central to the economic and cultural history of the inner city, was sundered. There was a dislocation between the use of space in the global flows of capital and the local economic needs of particular places. The effects caused great concern to local communities. For example, the recent development of the 'International Financial Services Centre' in the docklands had 'no spin-offs to the local economy at all. We were very annoyed about that - there were no local people getting jobs...about 50 local young people got apprenticeships out of it and other than that we got bugger all to be honest with you' (Interview 8).

Overall, the key analytical point in all of this is the fact that the 'fortunes' of any locale are tied up to some extent in the operation of distant (top-down) forces and imperatives far beyond local control or influence (CDP, 1977; Logan and Molotch, 1987). It can be said that in recent decades the inner city was embedded in a radically changing spatial structure of production, and this restructuring carried sometimes painful contradictions and social costs at local level. Uneven development also takes on a hard edge at the urban scale in the devalorisation-revalorisation flows and rhythms of speculative investment in the built environment, a dialectic of decay and renewal repeated in cities internationally (Smith, 1996). In general terms, it can be seen that the function of the inner city in the international economy has been reconstituted, changing from meeting the needs of indigeneous industry to accommodating international financial services, new shopping precincts, the tourist hordes and the homes of the new young middle classes. In this context, the most important resource of the inner city changed from the availability of local labour to the land itself, which was 're-commodified' as high-grade commercial and residential space.

Mapping Economic Alternatives in Dublin

'Society, economy, culture: each of these 'areas', now tagged by a concept, is a comparatively recent historical formulation. 'Society' was active fellowship, company, 'common doing', before it became the description of a general system or order. 'Economy' was the management of a household and then the management of a community before it became the description of a perceived system of production, distribution, and exchange. 'Culture', before these transitions, was the growth and tending of crops and animals, and by extension the growth and tending of human faculties.' (Williams, 1977, 12).

The rhythm and pattern of growth and decline in Dublin's inner city is intimately bound up

with broader processes of uneven development, as traced above, reflecting the imperatives of capital in a globalising system. This 'top-down' economic geography is clearly important in itself, but it is not sufficient merely to attend to the intentions and actions (or 'praxis') of capital and the state in the urban system. There are always other kinds of pressure, other struggles, other goals, which the analysis must seek to comprehend. In short, it is necessary to become aware of the real and complex variations within a received socio-spatial configuration: different events, experiences, practical consciousness, intentions and social practices - in fact, a whole structure of feeling - which connect across the urban system. As Williams (1961, 62) pointed out 'since the particular activities will be serving varying and sometimes conflicting ends, the sort of change we must look for will rarely be of a simple kind: elements of persistence, adjustment, unconscious assimilation, active resistance, alternative effort will all normally be present, in particular activities and in the whole organisation'.

In this light, the emergence of alternative economic development strategies at community level in the inner city is a phenomenon of some interest. As discussed above, the inequalities and exclusions that pertain to the contemporary urban system create many difficulties at the level of everyday life for working-class communities and those socially marginalised. From the perspective of communities such as these, there are a number of available economic strategies or responses to meet the material needs of daily life.

The first possible response is largely passive, whereby the isolated individual simply slips into the apathy and disillusionment born of alienation or outright exclusion from economic participation. The oppression and degradation of low pay, vulnerable employment conditions, redundancy, unemployment and other symptoms of powerlessness are unchallenged, situations which may be endured with the minor assistance of welfare payments from the state. Such policies may alleviate poverty to a degree, but they also serve a hegemonic purpose, helping to co-opt social unrest. For instance, following massive job losses in inner-city areas linked to 1970s restructuring processes 'a very small amount of redundancy payment was put in when they all went to the wall, and secondly, your unemployment benefit was increased a bit, just enough to stop people having a revolution' (Interview 40).

The second possible response to economic difficulties is emigration. Indeed, global flows of labour and the concomitant disruption of communities and households have always been central components within the international restructuring of capital (Feagin and Smith, 1987). Accordingly, emigration has long been a traditional feature of the cultural life of communities throughout Ireland, with Irish labour relocating internationally, particularly to Britain and America, in line with the emergent socio-spatial structure of global capitalism. Similarly, emigration was also an important response to the economic difficulties that emerged in Dublin in recent decades: between 1981 and 1996, there was a net out-migration of close to 80,000 people from the Dublin Region (Drudy and Punch, 1999).

The third possible response is to turn to alternative economic strategies, in various ways located 'outside' the 'formal' economic system, to varying extents beyond the relations of the dominant mode of production. One such strategy is to enter into the 'criminal' economy, including, for example, the drugs trade, which has flourished in many parts of the inner city, creating tensions and conflicts locally. This is the 'shadow economy', which is necessarily hidden from the state. There is an immediately apparent class distinction within this economic

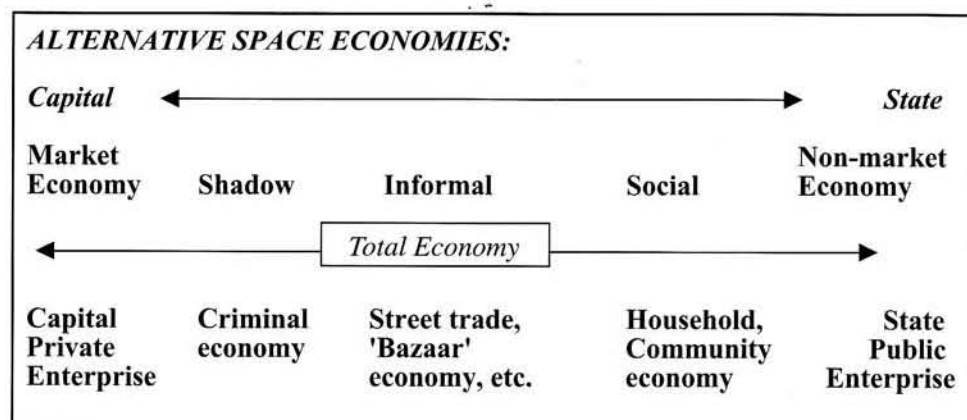
sub-sector, in that it includes both the evasive strategies of the middle classes seeking to avoid taxation ('white-collar' crime) and the 'underworld' of petty crime, drugs trading, etc. ('blue-collar' crime). It is important to note the link between class, criminalisation and incarceration. It is well known that the prison population in Dublin's Mountjoy is overwhelmingly drawn from a limited number of urban working-class communities. For example, one recent survey in Dublin showed that 73 per cent of District Court² defendants are from the most economically deprived areas of the city. Furthermore, defendants from more deprived areas are 49 per cent more likely to receive a custodial sentence than those from more advantaged communities. This led the authors to conclude that 'one might be forgiven for suggesting on the basis of the data that the Dublin District Court system appears to be there *for* people from deprived areas' (Bacik, et al., 1998, 25). This is an important distinction in the context of uneven development; for Castells (1998, 145), the 'ultimate expression of social exclusion is the physical and institutional confinement of a segment of society either in prison or under the supervision of the justice system'. The 'substantial effect' of such policies is to delimit 'the boundaries of social exclusion in terms that blame the excluded for their plight, delegitimize their potential rebellion and confine social problems into a customized hell' (*ibid*, 149).

A fourth possible economic strategy involves working in the 'bazaar economy', a highly visible and busy street-based world of microeconomic activity in Dublin's inner city, based primarily around trade in various consumer goods, including clothing and fruit and vegetables. Some of the trade is seasonal, such as the sale of fireworks at Hallowe'en, wrapping paper and small gifts at Christmas, chocolate eggs at Easter, etc. Some such trade is 'legitimate', carried out under license, but much of it drifts into the shadow economy as it involves at best quasi-legal activity (e.g. trade in tobacco or fireworks). Tensions sometimes emerge between such street traders and retailers operating in the formal economy, particularly where the street trade occupies space on an informal basis directly adjacent to high-street locations.

A fifth economic strategy involves the 'household economy', which revolves around the 'informal work of everyday domestic life' (Flynn and Pahl, 1983, 108). This economic sphere is one of the 'unstructured aspects of urban life' (*ibid*, 121), involving 'production, not for money, by members of a household and predominantly for members of that household, of goods or services for which approximate substitutes might otherwise be purchased for money' (Gershuny and Pahl, 1992, 248). Informal economic activity may also extend beyond the household, as networks of support are constructed around kinships or friendships (Mingione, 1991; Friedmann, 1992). Such reciprocity may be a constituent part of local culture in working class communities: 'Middle class people, upper class people tend to be more atomised than working class people... That's to do with, I think, much more sort of communal living because of poverty and sharing scarce resources – if someone has a few bob, all that sort of thing. And then kinship' (Interview 19). Equally, however, much 'informal' economic practice is actually integral to the dominant economy, being carried out under conditions of super-exploitation, as the most vulnerable groups, particularly immigrants, ethnic minorities and youth, are employed in unregulated, underpaid positions (Castells, 1989, 1998).

The final economic strategy involves a different kind of 'informality', the local development of alternative economic models built around the production and consumption needs of particular communities. The term 'social economy' has been adopted in many quarters to denote this work. The social economy essentially derives from community or cooperative

Figure 2. Re-Mapping the 'Total Economy'



efforts to create alternative local development initiatives, which operate on a nonprofit basis and are informed by alternative goals to the accumulation imperative at the heart of fully capitalistic enterprise. The ultimate aim from a bottom-up perspective is local control over economic activities directed towards meeting the material and socio-cultural needs of everyday life. This has gained broad currency among grassroots activists in Dublin, and the sphere of practice and organisation it embodies has also attracted considerable interest from the Irish State and the European Union (Government of Ireland, 1996, 1998; European Commission, 1993, 1995). Existing examples in Dublin include local service initiatives, community arts, environmental projects, collective housing provision etc³.

These various spheres of economic activity can be summarised diagrammatically (Figure 2). The dualism of capital-state activity within the formal economy (with its 'market' and 'non-market' elements) is disrupted by the introduction of a third space of informality, which exists on a continuum between private capital and state enterprise. This informal economic activity may be 'residual', that is, surviving from pre-capitalist social configurations. The household economy, co-operation and mutual aid can be seen as residual in this sense. Informal economic activity may also be emergent, representing new forms of economic organisation. These three spheres are necessarily seen as a continuum, as elements of 'formality' may affect or interconnect with informal economic activity to varying degrees. Community organisations may offer goods or services on the market or contract capitalist firms to provide goods or services, for instance. More importantly, much informal economic activity depends to some degree on some kind of state support.

The Meaning of the Social Economy: Divergent Views

In some respects, the 'meaning' of any social phenomenon - such as globalisation or local development - is always *produced* through a long, difficult process of discourse, practice and engagement underpinned by the enduring tension between dominant and alternative conceptualisations and imperatives. This is a political as well as a cultural fact: the meaning attached to any phenomenon is never immutable; rather it is an unstable social and historical artefact embedded in a particular system, and therefore always subject to remaking. In the case of an emergent sphere (whether potentially or achieved) of alternative development such as the social economy, this is particularly evident, as conflicting or contradictory

meanings are attached to the term at various points socially or geographically in line with different intentions. It may be useful to examine this conflict by summarising divergent top-down/bottom-up views before examining some examples of the practical effect of social economy development in Dublin's inner city.

Interest and involvement of the Irish state in local development has intensified in recent years, reflected in the creation of a plethora of partnership and consultative structures involving community representatives and a number of funding channels (including training schemes funded by the state training agency, area-based partnerships, community development programmes and Local Drugs Task Forces). A recent report produced for the Irish Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, provides some insight to top-down views as to the place and meaning of activity of this kind, including the social economy. In this case, the social economy was construed primarily as a useful mechanism in adjusting to the contradictions of post-fordism: 'The perceived potential of the social economy to provide new services and develop new markets was seen as a means of combatting disadvantage on consumer markets and on labour markets in the post-fordist era' (WRC, 1999, 2). The assumed 'target group' for social-economy initiatives provided further indication as to the state conception of the function of a social economy:

'Usually men and heads of households, they have become virtually completely detached from the normal economy and are very unlikely to find work there again. While some may have worked at some stage in their lives, others, often with young families, have never had a full-time job. What many of these individuals want is the opportunity to do a whole-time job which gives them and their family a way out of poverty and social exclusion.' (Department of the Tanaiste, 1995, 87, quoted in Byrne et al., 1999).

Apparently, this emergent sphere of local development is to function as an adjunct to the 'normal' (that is, fully capitalist) economy in order to absorb those excluded and discarded by the very logic of that system. Indeed, the subtext here seems to reflect the 'culture of poverty' view of the undeserving poor ('what many of these individuals want is...') excluded by their own deviance rather than by the logic of capital (CDP, 1977). In this manner, the social economy may play a fully incorporated role legitimising the inequalities of the dominant economic model, but cannot be allowed to evolve as an *alternative* mode of economic organisation and development, which contradicts that dominant mode. Instead, it is reconstrued, in discourse and in practice, as a plank in the broader neoliberal scaffold of global capitalism, wherein public policy adheres to a number of core principles: 'purge the system of obstacles to the functioning of 'free markets'; restrain public expenditure and any form of collective initiative; celebrate the virtues of individualism, competitiveness, and economic self-sufficiency; abolish or weaken social transfer programs while actively fostering the 'inclusion' of the poor and marginalized into the labor market, on the market's terms' (Peck, 2001, 445).

Understanding of the potential contribution of a social economy at grassroots level in Ireland suggests a view at some variance from this top-down perspective. In the view of the Community Workers Co-op (CWC), a national network of community workers, the social economy emerged in response to the tendency of the market to create unemployment, distribute the benefits of economic growth inequitably and fail to meet social needs (Fahy,

1998). The social economy is further distinguished through the aims of improving the general quality of life and developing community control of and benefit from local resources (PLANET, 1997; Fahy, 1998). In the mission statement of an inner-city grassroots initiative, the aim of building a social economy is to 'ensure that the choice of products to produce, the means of producing them, the type of services to be produced, their prices, their distribution and the distribution of any surplus are all in some sense socially just or determined by the community' (Interview 5).

The promise of the social economy for some practitioners is seen, therefore, in terms of developmental autonomy and local economic ownership and control, aspirations which the Irish state, with its tendency towards a high level of centralisation, is unlikely to share in any meaningful way. A recent community publication isolates a second important divergence between such a grassroots view and an opposing state view of the social economy as a labour market mechanism to absorb surplus labour:

'The former seeks the development of the social economy as an economic sphere in its own right and to explore the contribution it can make to economic and social development. The latter engages with the social economy for its potential to provide a 'quick fix' to long-term unemployment. The danger of the social economy becoming underpinned by labour market mechanisms is that it will be regarded as a 'second class' economy designed to stimulate, however effectively, individual employment trajectories.' (Rush, 1996).

In short, there is a tension between grassroots aspirations to create a social economy organised around local social and economic development concerns (improving quality of life in a given neighbourhood) and state pressures to restructure this emergent field as a tool for market integration. In this latter vision, its primary function is to improve the market 'employability' of participant workers (Byrne et al., 1999).

The Emergent Social Economy in Dublin's Inner City

As noted earlier, action on economic issues was one of four core themes of grassroots praxis recorded in the survey. In total, 60 per cent of organisations interviewed, or 27 cases, had attempted to instigate some form of intervention, ranging from welfare-rights information to local economic development. Many groups have also been successful in drawing down income from various sources (often multiple sources). Most organisations relied on state support for finance, with only 16 groups using independent sources (earned income through trading or fund-raising in the locality). In total, the 45 organisations surveyed in the inner city employed a total of 847 paid workers. This section offers an overview of the importance of economic concerns in community development and then highlights a number of organisations, which were set up specifically as social economy initiatives. Table 3 summarises the economic, cultural urban and environmental effects of these social-economy initiatives.

The evolution of an infrastructure of community organisation in Dublin's inner city was closely bound up with the general economic transformation imposed in top-down fashion over recent decades (Punch, 2001). In particular, there were fledgling attempts to develop community-based training for local youth, struggling to adapt to the demands and pressures linked to inner-city restructuring, alongside efforts to construct a social economy, providing sustainable jobs for local people and contributing to an alternative developmental vision. In

Table 3. Social Economy in Dublin's Inner City: Summary of Effects

<i>Project</i>	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Community-Cultural</i>	<i>Urban/Environment</i>
<i>DNICFP</i>	- Creating local jobs	- Recording and archiving - Local folklore (oral accounts) - Publishing local history	
<i>Energy Action</i>	- Creating local jobs	- Training long-term unemployed - Advice to community groups: ten presentations provided on setting up energy-based social-economy initiatives	- Insulated 13,000 homes - Insulated 2,000 attics. - Fitted 4,000 smoke alarms - Fitted 3,000 low energy light bulbs
<i>INT</i>	- Supporting local enterprise	- Safeguarding maritime heritage - Promotion of marine activity - Training	- Renewal of canal basin - Provision of local enterprise space
<i>Pigeon House</i>	- Creating local jobs for LTUE	- Training - Local history publication - Publication of Newsletter	- Renewing disused public facility (power station)
<i>RDI</i>	- Supporting local enterprise - Anti-poverty action	- Training in boat-building - Community response to drugs	- Renovation of disused cinema - Construction of 55 houses in Ringsend
<i>Sunflower</i>	- Creating local jobs	- Training workers in recycling practices	- Recycling - Promoting environmental awareness
<i>TEN</i>	- Creating local jobs for LTUE - Providing labour for local development & community action	- Community action - Sports groups - Education - Local Culture - Mutual Aid/Advocacy	- Recycling Project - Horticulture

the late 1970s, some early action of this kind included the creation of the North Central Community Council and, subsequently, the North Central City Community Action Project (NCCCAP). Such grassroots formations were set up by local activists in working-class communities in the north-east inner city seeking to explore 'the positive strengths of the locality, and trying to turn the more traditional kinship and friendships and networks into more formal structures' (Interview 19). The NCCCAP took action to help unemployed people to develop confidence and skills, access the jobs available locally, explore the possibilities for cooperative economic development in the community and organise local cultural events, publications, drama and folklore projects.

Similarly, the Alliance for Work Forum (AWF) was set up in 1985 by a number of activists in the same locale as a grassroots community development organisation, which now oversees an informal network of local projects. The impetus behind this intervention was described in economic terms: 'It was set up because the whole city of Dublin was changing. In the late sixties you had the decline in the docks. Containerisation came along and it replaced the work, the manual work that the dockers were doing. That brought about a big change within the inner city - we saw a lot of people being made unemployed' (Interview 14).

The continuing aim of the AWF is to 'maintain a centre of innovation in the areas of cultural identity and production, communications; work, training and income with opportunities for long-term unemployed people to use and develop their potential' (Fagan and Savage, n.d., 45). With the help of funding acquired from FÁS, the state employment and training authority, it set up two initiatives, *Inner City News* and the Dublin North Inner City Folklore Project (DNICFP). The underlying intention was to promote and facilitate 'cultural and communication activities and products in the context of community development in Dublin's north inner city' (*ibid*, n.d., 45). More particularly, DNICFP was set up in reaction to establishment disregard for the cultural history of the working class in the inner city. To date, DNICFP has developed a wide-ranging archive of local folklore and oral history, as the main day-to-day work involved interviewing local people and recording their life experiences in an area that has been radically affected by the spatial and economic restructuring processes traced earlier.

Energy Action was established in 1988 to promote job creation and alleviate 'fuel poverty' through the development of energy conservation programmes targeted at low-income households in Dublin. Although based in the south-west inner city, it has expanded its role to take on work all over the city and has liaised with community groups further afield in an advisory capacity. Energy Action describes its role as working for elderly, low-income families and those otherwise socially deprived; it is an example of 'the community working for the community' creating multiple local benefits (Roarty, 1998, 48).

More recently, two local women in the north-east inner city established the Sunflower Project (now Sunflower Recycling) in 1995 as a community-based initiative to provide jobs for local people while also enhancing their living environment. The impetus was partly an awareness of local culture. Having grown up on a 'city farm' in the inner city, one key actor was strongly aware that until the 1960s, the local informal economy was largely based on recycling (Interview 13). The project developed by bringing a group of local people together who became sponsors and then applying to FÁS to fund the wages of the workers. Matching European funding (under the EMPLOYMENT Integra scheme) was also acquired. Waste material is collected from 364 commercial enterprises in the inner city, which pay a fee for the service, and from 60 community organisations and 100 inner-city households, for whom the service is free.

A separate strand of local development also emerged in Ringsend, a long-established docklands community in the south-east inner city, organised through the Irish Nautical Trust (INT) and the Ringsend Development Initiative (RDI). The INT was created in 1986 under the auspices of the Mount Street Club, itself a long-running voluntary organisation exploring alternative responses to unemployment and poverty, to foster marine-based local economic development in the inner city. RDI is a coalition of bottom-up organisations with a range of aims, including anti-poverty action, community-build housing, anti-drugs work and a number of local development initiatives focused on marine enterprise and training, in a general attempt to safeguard and promote the traditional economic and cultural heritage of the area (Punch, 2000b). In 1994, a separate social-economy venture emerged in the Ringsend vicinity, the Pigeon House Trust Heritage Project, under which the local community entered into a development partnership with the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) to redevelop an obsolete facility (the Pigeon House power station) in the Poolbeg peninsula as a science museum. Although it relies on support from the ESB and outside expertise, the project is seen as

community-based and -driven, and it created 20 jobs (Interview 21).

The Employment Network (TEN) was established in 1996 under the auspices of the Inner City Organisation Network (an alliance of community organisations) in the north-east inner city. It oversees the operation of a local employment programme, the Whole-Time Jobs Initiative, directed at providing community or voluntary organisations with the means to hire local people who are over the age of 35 and long-term unemployed to work on local service or development initiatives. Although an important source of public funding for local development, there has been top-down pressure recently to cut back schemes of this kind on the grounds that workers should be moved into the formal economy under the current conditions of economic expansion. This has caused much alarm and resistance locally. It also raises questions regarding the differential aspirations for the social economy between the grassroots and the state: autonomous local development or a store of surplus labour to be undermined as the labour requirements of capital change.

The Potential and the Limits to Local Development?

As an overview, the economic elements of the social economy initiatives surveyed in the current study are summarised in Table 4, providing a view of the existing and potential nature and extent of the inner city social economy. Overall, there are 260 jobs in the seven initiatives described here. In most cases, there is a mixture of public funding and 'earned' income (through trading, services, private fund-raising, etc.). However, most are primarily dependent on public support, particularly where the aim is to provide a local service or develop a local resource on a non-profit (in some cases no-charge) basis. This raises issues regarding their economic vulnerability, particularly to competition from private business in potentially more profitable sectors and the possibility of displacement in the rhythms and flows of city property markets.

Table 4. Overview of Economic Dimensions of Local Development Initiatives

	No. of Workers	Public Funding	Earned Income
<i>DNICFP</i>	1	FÁS	Sale of publications
<i>Energy Action</i>	51	FÁS and other state bodies	Fund-raising, contracts from Dublin Corporation (housing renovation)
<i>INT</i>	32	FÁS	Rental income, training, retail
<i>Pigeon House</i>	20	FÁS and other state bodies	Fund-raising
<i>RDI</i>	35	FÁS and other state bodies	Service provision
<i>Sunflower</i>	46	FÁS and other state bodies	Recycling service
<i>TEN</i>	75	FÁS	None (services provided free of charge)
Total	260		

The concern here is that the activities are economically marginal in that they do not earn substantial income through trade or service provision, not least because of their social aims. This leads to vulnerability and dependency on state support. However, in other cases, activities are carried out in fields that may become quite commercially attractive. This may generate private-sector competition, which may make it difficult for a social-economy initiative to survive with goals of training and work opportunities for disadvantaged local residents. In the case of Sunflower, for instance, the recycling business is likely to expand, particularly as EU legislation will probably force larger public and private bodies to recycle a greater proportion of waste material. Accordingly, 'the only fear about that I'd have around it would be that waste management can become a lucrative business if it's done properly the way it has been abroad. If it got to the stage where that's going to happen, then you'd get the big guys coming in putting in tenders for the same contract' (Interview 13).

A further concern is that the value of this work is undermined by inappropriate state attitudes towards the social economy insofar as central agencies tend to view it as a temporary or secondary economic solution and there are constant pressures to move people into 'real' employment as soon as possible. In the 'FÁS mindset' (Interview 5), success is measured in terms of placement rather than in terms of self- or community development. Against this, it was argued that workers in the social economy fall into three broad groupings. First, there are those seeking experience and improved earnings (relative to social-welfare payments), who may move relatively easily into the formal economy if opportunities arise. Second, there are those who want to work in community development out of commitment or for the sense of empowerment derived from meaningful work of local benefit. Third there are workers who are unlikely to move into the formal economy either because they do not possess the 'bundle of skills and attitudes' currently rewarded by capital (e.g. computer literacy, middle-class cultural values, disciplined to formal work relations, etc.) or because of discrimination due, for instance, to class origins, age, the possession of a prison record, lack of educational qualifications, disability, psychiatric problems, or former drug use.

There are also concerns that the relationship between the state and the grassroots in the social economy will become one of centralised control rather than autonomous development (see also Punch, 2001; 2002). In this way, the whole sector may become fully incorporated, a process which may form the subtext to the escalation of top-down interest in bottom-up development. These contradictions were recognised in interviews in a number of ways, particularly in fears regarding the funding structures put in place, which are felt to be top-down and, in effect, 'distancing' and controlling. Local activists have to work through area-based partnerships, which in turn work through the administrative body for local-development funding (Area Development Management), which in turn deals with the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation, the state agency with responsibility for local development. The top-down funding structure is also seen as complex and in some respects actually unsympathetic to local development, while placing frustrating and sometimes nebulous strictures on activity: 'I remember being told we shouldn't work in some area because they don't have enough people who are unemployed' (Interview 39).

The outcome may see many community organisations restructured from an oppositional to an incorporated position, with the energies of activists increasingly channeled into chasing funding, filling forms and participating in partnerships, while autonomous action or critical comment are increasingly stifled (Punch, 2001). Indeed, many 'activists' now find themselves

spending far more time talking than taking action, and there is a real sense of fatigue at grassroots level among many who are 'worn out from partnership' (Kelleher, 1998). Furthermore, this can be very divisive locally, as 'places at the table' and funding streams are in reality limited. For some, the major effect of funding is that 'it splits communities who were once united addressing issues' (Interview 43). Thus, while local development in the social economy has achieved useful economic, cultural and urban outcomes to date, with real benefits for working-class people in disadvantaged inner city communities, there are important concerns regarding vulnerability, co-option and social control, issues deserving careful attention and further research.

Conclusions

This paper explored some top-down and bottom up aspects of the recent economic geography of Dublin's inner city, highlighting the interpenetration of general processes and local experiences in a global-local dialectic. The uneven development of the urban economy under conditions of globalisation and the attendant contradictions of such processes for working-class communities were traced. The possibility of alternative economic strategies was then explored through a brief theoretical reformulation of the 'total economy', highlighting its formal (capital, state) and informal components. The paper revealed an apparent contradiction between a top-down view of a social economy serving a useful labour-market function and a grassroots view of a potential sphere of economic development in local ownership and control, organised in line with the community's socio-cultural values and concerns. The recent evolution of a social economy in Dublin's inner city has succeeded in mobilising local energies, articulating a bottom-up developmental vision and achieving a range of positive economic, cultural, urban and environmental outcomes at community level. However, there are critical structural limits to local development of this kind in the contemporary city, notably, the marginality or vulnerability of many emergent or residual economic forms and the tendency of the state to co-opt or control. This raises concerns as to whether the *effects* of social-economy development can match the progressive *intentions* of the activists involved within the urban social system as it is currently configured.

Overall, the discovery of a social economy in the urban system holds promise for more progressive forms of development, but there are serious limitations. Existing social economy praxis highlights the possibility of creating development activity constructed around the spaces of daily life which are not commodified, not externally controlled, not fully alienating. However, there are tremendous vulnerabilities to destruction within the flux of the urban economy and unresolved concerns regarding the possibility of co-option. These experiences in Dublin provide insight as to the place and meaning of the social economy in the global-local dialectic and raise concerns regarding its broader material and ideological significance.

Notes

1. This research was carried out with funding organised through the Trinity Foundation under the 'Third Sector Programme'.
2. The lowest – and busiest – rung in the judicial system.
3. In a comparative context, this reflects most closely the Development and Housing (Group 6) category proposed under the International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations (*Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project*), which includes economic, social and community development, housing and employment and training (Archambault, 1997).

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