

Analysing Collective Action: Intersections of Power, Government and Resistance

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Abstract

This research takes the form of ten journal articles and book chapters that were published between June 2008 and February 2018. This body of work encompasses outputs that are focused on community development, community arts, youth work and social movement praxis. These fields of praxis are understood as constituting a vital part of a variegated and differentiated Irish civil society and, while acknowledging their specificities, the body of work situates them together within the contested terrain of collective action. The Covering Document elucidates how, across the ten outputs, collective action is theorised: as the site of and target for complex and dynamic power relationships; as imbricated with various governmental projects through which multiple societal actors seek to mobilise citizens; as a potential site of and resource for resistance to particular expressions of government, ideology and power; and as developing alternative social relationships, organisational forms and modes of communication.

The boundaries between the state and civil society are imprecise and fluid: civil society and state actors seek to induce desired forms of conduct and relationships from each other. This research exposes and critically interrogates associated power dynamics, overlaps, and contestations, and how they in turn shape expectations of collective action. Drawing together findings from youth work, community development, social movement, and community arts praxis, the research illuminates; how and by whom collective action is rationalised and (de)legitimised; the changing role of the state in governing civil society; and the potential for collective action to prefigure alternative forms of relationships and to resist particular forms of government. Therefore, the body of work analyses how the meanings, forms and purposes of collective action are constantly reworked, just as they give expression to important societal struggles.

The Covering Document details the theory, methodology and methods that have underpinned the research. It offers an integrated thematic overview of the ten research outputs, highlighting their coherence, originality, and relevance for a critical analysis of the dynamics of collective action in contemporary Ireland. The research analyses the discourses of collective action as they have been expressed in key policy documents, in newspapers such as the *Irish Independent* and in the documents of protest of social movement organisations. It highlights and interrogates the political, economic and cultural context for collective action in 21st Century Ireland, paying particular attention to the ways though which the recent regime of

austerity has impacted on civil society, the state and on relations between these spheres. The research is critical in orientation, but it draws upon and articulates diverse critical traditions as it analyses the power dynamics associated with collective action. Gramscian style, cultural materialist and Foucauldian governmentality perspectives are variously adopted and adapted within specific outputs. The Covering Document also outlines how and why the body of work troubles the boundaries between community development, community arts, youth work and social movement research and praxis. It calls for an articulated and dialogical theory and practice that challenge the assumed estrangement of these fields.

As the Covering Document outlines, the research records how state policy now seeks to govern youth work, community development and community arts organisations through an increasingly intrusive and prescriptive set of policy ordinances, self-reporting techniques, and accountability measures. Against that, it also points to the potential for collective action to re-politicise issues otherwise framed as non-political by policy-makers and media, to build and be based upon reflexive forms of solidarity, and to reclaim the arts and tactics of protest.

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Dedicated to JJ and Joe: Better 'Forever' than 'Late'...