

# **Learning How to be an Active Citizen in Dublin's Docklands: The Significance of Informal Processes**

**Dr Marianne Breen & Prof Nicholas Rees**

**Combat Poverty Agency**

**Working Paper 09/08**

**ISBN: 978 1 905485 96 3**

**June 2009**



## Abstract

This study investigated how people learn active citizenship in Dublin's Docklands. Informal (i.e. contextual and incidental) and non-formal (i.e. community education) learning was explored. The various types of active citizenship training were examined. The conceptual and methodological design of the present study was informed by the cross-cultural European project ETGACE (Education & Training for Governance & Active Citizenship). Sixteen life history interviews with active citizens were conducted along with 2 focus groups and 9 interviews in community resource centres. It was found that participants learned active citizenship incidentally and contextually through family influences, motherhood and during a critical event in their community. The collective nature of learning and the importance of political astuteness were clearly evident. Encouragement of the next generation of active citizens emerged as a key issue. The findings indicated that current educational interventions are employing innovative, participative and non-formal learning methods. The conclusions mirrored those of ETGACE.

**Key words:** Learning for active citizenship, Informal learning, Dublin's Docklands.

### Disclaimer

This report was funded by the Combat Poverty Agency under its Poverty Research Initiative. The views, opinions, findings, conclusions and/or recommendations expressed here are strictly those of the author(s). They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Combat Poverty Agency, which takes no responsibility for any errors or omissions in, or for the accuracy of, the information contained in this Working Paper. It is presented to inform and stimulate wider debate among the policy community and among academics and practitioners in the field.

## Table of Contents

Section	Page
<b>Abstract</b>	2
<b>Table of Contents</b>	3
<b>List of Figures</b>	5
<b>List of Tables</b>	5
<b>1 Introduction</b>	6
1.1 Introduction	6
1.2 Background to the study	6
1.3 Project's objectives	7
1.4 History of the Docklands	7
1.5 Outline of chapters	12
1.6 Conclusions	13
<b>2 Literature Review</b>	14
2.1 Introduction	14
2.2 The concept of active citizenship	14
2.3 Learning for active citizenship	16
2.4 Active citizenship in Ireland	20
2.5 Community and voluntary sector in Ireland	23
2.6 Irish community activism in disadvantaged areas	26
2.7 Conclusions	28
<b>3 Methodological Approach</b>	29
3.1 Introduction	29
3.2 Life history interviews	29
3.3 Focus groups	30
3.4 Analysis of interview and focus group data	31
3.5 Ethical issues	31
3.6 Limitations of the study	31
3.7 Conclusions	32
<b>4 Informal learning of active citizenship in Dublin's Docklands</b>	33
4.1 Introduction	33
4.2 Family and home encouragement	33
4.3 Early involvement	34
4.4 When become a mother	35
4.5 The role of critical events and contextual learning	37

4.6	Seen as someone who gets involved	39
4.7	We-ness of learning	41
4.8	Learning how to be politically astute	43
4.9	The label of active citizenship	46
4.10	Rewards of active citizenship	47
4.11	New breed of active citizens	48
4.12	Barriers to getting involved	51
4.13	Conclusions	53
<b>5</b>	<b>Learning for active citizenship in non-formal educational settings</b>	<b>55</b>
5.1	Introduction	55
5.2	Nothing to do with school	55
5.3	Learning methods	56
5.4	Difficulties of course	61
5.5	Extra support for students	63
5.6	Learn tools of the trade	65
5.7	Empowerment	66
5.8	Conclusions	70
<b>6</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>72</b>
6.1	Introduction	72
6.2	Informal learning of active citizenship	73
6.3	Contextual learning of active citizenship	74
6.4	Collective learning of active citizenship	75
6.5	Mapping the process of learning active citizenship	75
6.6	The concept of active citizenship	76
6.7	Formalisation of active citizenship	77
6.8	Non-formal learning of active citizenship	77
6.9	Active citizenship and socio-economic status	78
6.10	The role of active citizenship in combating poverty	79
6.11	Conclusions	80
	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>81</b>
	<b>References cited</b>	<b>86</b>
	<b>Appendix A: Life History Interview Guide</b>	<b>94</b>
	<b>Appendix B: Focus Group Thematic Guide</b>	<b>97</b>

## **List of Tables**

Table [1.4.1]	Age profile of general Docklands' population	Pg 10
Table [1.4.2]	Profile of types of workers in the Docklands	Pg 11
Table [3.3.1]	Age and gender profile of life history interviewees	Pg 29

## **List of Figures**

Figure [1.4.1]	Economic status of general Docklands' population	Pg 11
Figure [6.5.1]	Process of learning active citizenship	Pg 76

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This section provides background information on the present study. The project's main objectives are discussed, along with an introduction to the European ETGACE (Education & Training for Governance & Active Citizenship) study. Following this, the historical context of Dublin's Docklands is presented. Finally, a brief outline of the contents of each chapter gives an overview of the structure of the report.

## **1.2 Background to the study**

This study explores themes from a cross-cultural European research project on learning for active citizenship. The present study is the first to examine such learning in an Irish context. The ETGACE (2003) project examined how adults learned to be active citizens and also what educational methods are effective in improving learning for active citizenship. Although it has been recognised that education plays a key role in the promotion of active citizenship, it is the formal (i.e. learning that takes place in a school system) and non-formal (i.e. organised learning outside the formal learning system) learning contexts that are typically emphasised. The ETGACE study found that formal education teaches people how to be 'good' rather than 'active' citizens. The ETGACE authors also emphasised the neglect of the informal route of learning active citizenship. Informal education or training is more incidental and spontaneous. Typically, mentors take responsibility for guiding learners in acquiring 'real-world' skills. This is done without reference to a pre-established curriculum. The ETGACE project asserted that the learning of attitudes, skills and behaviours of active citizenship is deeply embedded in social contexts, in particular the home and local community.

The present study examines the conclusions of the ETGACE project in an Irish context, specifically in Dublin's Docklands. The ETGACE study also informed the design of the present study, as data collection methods mirrored those used by the ETGACE research team. Furthermore, the ETGACE conceptualisations of the various modes of learning for active citizenship were central to the design of this project.

### **1.3 Project's objectives**

This study investigates how people learn active citizenship in Dublin's Docklands. The various types of active citizenship training were also examined. This project addresses the dearth of research in this field (Kane, 2007). In particular, it is an exploration of themes that emerged from the cross-cultural European ETGACE (Education & Training for Governance & Active Citizenship) study in an Irish context.

As such, the following research questions are posed:

1. How are locals in the Dublin Docklands learning to be active citizens?
2. What educational interventions for active citizenship are currently in place in the Dublin Docklands area and how are they working?

### **1.4 History of the Docklands**

This section describes the global and national factors that led to the Docklands becoming one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas in Dublin. The Docklands district was formerly the centre of the historic Dublin port and somewhat at the periphery of mainstream urban life. During the nineteenth century, most workingmen in the Docklands were employed on a casual basis as labourers, unloading and loading the cargo of ships. Working conditions were harsh, with injuries being quite commonplace (Dublin Docklands Development Authority, 2008).

There was a steep decline in employment opportunities in the Docklands area after World War II. This was due to the growth of container traffic, the switch from rail to road as a transport preference, the decline of coal as a fuel and the closure of local factories. The introduction of containerisation and roll-on/roll-off ferries from the 1950s onwards eliminated the need for large storage and loading facilities on the docks. As a result, sites along the docks became unused and employment opportunities disappeared. Although many companies shipped their finished products and raw materials through

Dublin Port, very few jobs were provided for the Docklands community (Dublin Docklands Development Authority, 2008). The growth of unemployment in the Docklands area from the 1950s onwards added to the widespread negative perception and marginalisation of the locality.

In addition, the effects of globalisation and the growth of the knowledge economy caused many dockland areas in the Western world to decline. Heavy and manufacturing industries relocated to sites in the developing world with lower overhead costs, in particular Asia. This movement towards service industries as well as the growth in air travel rather than passenger ships further led to the traditional employment opportunities in Dublin's Docklands disappearing. As the traditional employment route in the Docklands was manual labour, there was a history of low educational attainment. This, coupled with the lack of investment in private housing, accelerated the physical and social dereliction of the area (Williams and O'Connor, 2000).

Another contributory factor was the growth in suburbanisation from the 1960s onwards. The outward migration of Dubliners to the suburbs, with their accompanying facilities and factories, led to the rapid physical, social and economic decay of the inner city. In contrast to the emerging leafy suburbs with individual dwellings, the local authority housing in the Docklands area was characterised by a lack of open spaces and recreational amenities as well as being surrounded by heavy industrial sites. The majority of housing in the area was built between 1930 and 1952 for dockers. After that occupation declined, a large number of families moved out. The local authority placed 'at risk' families from other areas of the city into these vacant apartments. This resulted in an unbalanced social profile of residents in the area. Indeed, by the early 1980s, more than half of the housing in the area was over 70 years old and of poor quality. All these factors resulted in the Docklands area becoming characterised by poverty and dereliction on a much larger scale than other parts of the city (Moore, 2008).

The regeneration of the Docklands area can be seen within the wider context of the renaissance and revitalisation of cities at the end of the twentieth century. The image of



the city that is currently being promoted is one of a centre for culture, recreation, consumption and living (Silverman, Lupton and Fenton, 2005). Consequently, the Docklands has now been transformed into the home of the Irish financial world, featuring many high end retail and food outlets.

The original regeneration scheme for the Docklands began in 1987 and ran until 1997 under the direction of the Custom House Docks Development Authority (CHDDA). Although the scheme was highly successful from an economic and physical perspective, it was felt that important social and cultural services failed to be delivered to the community, especially for the original residents (Moore, 2008).

The political climate in the mid-1990s was characterised by New Labour in the UK, the Clinton presidency in the US, the national partnership process in Ireland and the establishment of Social Inclusion units within local authorities. These political approaches led to a change in urban revitalisation policy, with community needs coming to the fore (Moore, 2008). Furthermore, as a requirement of EU Strategy to promote social inclusion, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy was published in 1997. Subsequent National Action Plans on Poverty and Social Inclusion (NAPS Inclusion) were published in 2001, 2003 and 2006. Promoting participation in decision-making and active citizenship are key elements of these strategies. It is against this policy background that the second phase of the regeneration of the Docklands area took place.

In 1997 the CHDDA was replaced by the Dublin Docklands Development Authority (DDDA), which featured the statutory inclusion of local communities in the decision-making process. As a result, there has been a high-level interventionist approach to social need, with the local community contributing to solving their own issues (Dublin Docklands Development Authority, 2008). It has been argued that the design of new apartments in regeneration projects encourages transience. This is because these housing units are not designed as traditional, permanent family homes (i.e. own front door and garden) and thus are not conducive to community building (Silverman, Lupton and Fenton, 2005). The prominence of private renting in the new Docklands is at odds

with the previous strong tradition of home ownership in the city. The demolition of the original local authority flats in the area is also said to have resulted in the fragmentation of the previous community spirit. The presence of social and affordable housing as part of the regeneration project may counter the transience of the majority, as these particular tenants generally tend to put down community roots (Moore, 2008; Williams and O'Connor, 2000).

Local community activism is a key feature of the contemporary Docklands, with the development of active citizenship a priority. There appears to be a disparate institutional landscape in terms of community representation, with a wide array of groups representing different issues. Indeed, government agencies tend to view and treat the Docklands area as one entity, whereas residents have very clear, distinct community identities (e.g. Northside, Southside, North Wall, East Wall, Ringsend/Irishtown). Local community groups have emphasised that there is a large variety of communities within the Docklands area with different histories and contrasting contemporary needs (Moore, 2008).

To further contextualise the study, the demographics of the Docklands' population are presented. This demographic profile of the Docklands area is based on data from the Central Statistics Office's 2006 Census and is gleaned from the Dublin Docklands Development Authority's Master Plan (2008).

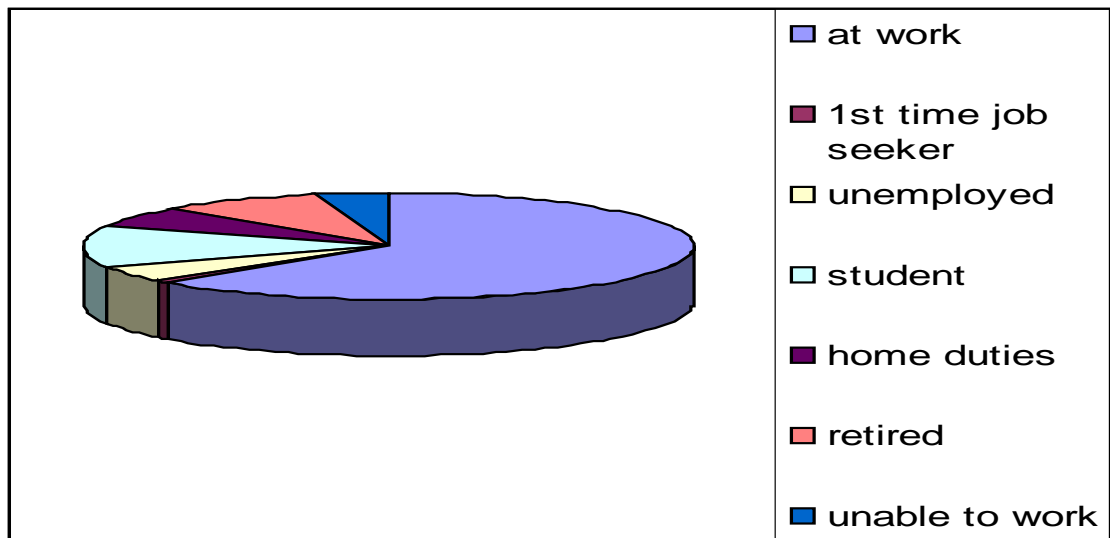
The age profile for the general Docklands area is presented in the table below. The 25-44 years age bracket appears to have the highest number of Docklanders when compared with other age groups.

**Table [1.4.1] Age profile of general Docklands' population**

<b>Age Bracket</b>	<b>Per cent of Docklands' Population</b>
0–14 years	11.2%
15–24 years	19.4%
25–44 years	43.5%
45–65 years	17%
65+ years	8.9%

The economic status of those living in the Docklands is described in the following pie chart. According to these statistics from 2006, the majority of people are at work.

**Figure [1.4.1] Economic status of general Docklands' population**



The breakdown of the various types of workers living in the Docklands is detailed in the following table.

**Table [1.4.2] Profile of types of workers in the Docklands**

Type of Worker	Per cent of Working Population
Professional worker	9.6%
Managerial & Technical	21.8%
Non Manual	14.4%
Skilled Manual	11.7%
Semi Skilled	9.9%
Unskilled	5.1%
Others Gainfully Employed	27.6%

According to the 2006 Census, the average household size in the Docklands has decreased from 2.5 persons in 1996 to 2.3 persons in 2006. The percentage of family units consisting of couples with children has decreased from 46.1 per cent in 1996 to 32.5 per cent in 2006. In contrast, the proportion of couples without children has more than doubled in the Docklands between the years 1996 and 2006 (DDDA, 2008).

## 1.5 Outline of chapters

This research paper is divided into six chapters. The introductory section outlines the context for the study as well as its key objectives. The literature review chapter further contextualises this project by situating it within the latest research and theoretical frameworks on a wide variety of pertinent topics. These issues include the concept of active citizenship and the various ways in which individuals learn how to be active citizens. The key elements of the original ETGACE project are also presented, along with the application of these concepts and theories to the Irish context, especially marginalised communities. The third chapter presents the methodological approach adopted in the study. Data collection methods, sampling and analytical techniques as well as ethical issues are discussed.

The fourth and fifth sections of this paper detail the findings from the qualitative data. Chapter four presents the analysis of themes centring on the informal learning of active citizenship in Dublin's Docklands. The significance of the home environment, the role of critical events, the collective aspects of learning as well as a number of issues with active citizenship are examined. The fifth chapter features the findings on learning for active citizenship that occurs in non-formal educational settings (i.e. adult education courses). The valuable but limited role of learning in the classroom is discussed. For instance, the empowerment and up-skilling that occurs as a result of partaking in active citizenship courses is recounted. The benefits of inclusive, flexible teaching methods and extra support for learners are also demonstrated. The conclusion section further amplifies the findings discussed in the previous two chapters. It draws on the literature presented at the beginning of the paper to contextualise the results of this study. Informal, non-formal, contextual and collective learning for active citizenship are major elements of the conclusions section. Finally, the report concludes by proposing sixteen recommendations for improving learning for active citizenship in an Irish context. These recommendations are informed by the empirical findings and conclusions that emerged from the data.

## **1.6 Conclusions**

This chapter provided a brief introduction to the project. The rationale and aims of the study were discussed, along with the main findings from the ETGACE project. An in-depth historical background to Dublin's Docklands was presented. An outline of the various sections in the paper was also provided.

## **2 Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This section of the paper presents the findings of the literature review and so provides contextualisation for the study within existing research. It also informs our understanding of 'active citizenship' as a concept within the Irish context and enables comparisons to be made with the ETGACE project (Education & Training for Governance & Active Citizenship in Europe). The first three parts of this literature review examine the theoretical basis of civil society, in particular active citizenship and learning for active citizenship. Following this, the application of these concepts to the Irish context is discussed.

### **2.2 The concept of active citizenship**

Shklar (1991) has identified various types of connotations associated with the word 'citizenship'. Firstly, it can form part of a national identity, differentiating members of a nation from outsiders. It can also be used as a form of social status, so as to denote the rights and entitlements of members of a state. Furthermore, it indicates active participation in the life of the community (Body-Gendrot and Gittell, 2003).

The notion of active citizenship is derived from the Athenian tradition of uniting the values of democratic self-determination with mutuality and solidarity (Kymlicka, 2002). The Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007a) defined active citizenship as the voluntary capacity of citizens and communities working directly together, or through elected representatives, to exercise economic, social and political power in pursuit of shared goals. It is important that the notion of active citizenship should not be confined to volunteering and informal social engagement but should also encompass political and civic engagement (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007a). Indeed, the philosophical roots of active citizenship lie in the concept of civic republicanism. This includes the civic virtues of participation, democracy, liberty, equality and social solidarity (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007b).

Civil society relies on community solidarities. However, this can lead to exclusionary attitudes to those outside the community as well as the suppression of autonomy and democratic dissent. Civil society theorists argue that these tendencies of communities need to be counter-balanced by a well established public sphere, wherein individuals are recognised as citizens, not just community members (Cohen, 2008). Moreover, Habermas (1971) argues that the most important characteristic of civil society is in its functioning within the public domain. It is within civil society that citizens can engage in public debate about issues relevant to their lives and where genuine 'public opinion' can be formed. Keane (1998) also asserts that a strong participatory civil society is essential to ensuring that the state continues to abide by democratic principles. Civil society is considered a key element in much of the literature on the transition to democracy, for example in Eastern Europe and Latin America (O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead, 1986; Whitehead, 2006).

Whereas Putman (2000) views trust as essential to the development of high levels of social capital, Keane (1998) argues that distrust rather than trust is a key component of civil society, in particular a distrust of unaccountable power. This would be in keeping with Habermas' ideal of a public sphere of open debate, where all authorities can be called upon to justify through debate their pronouncements and actions (Faundez, 2006). Loss of trust in authority is an increasing characteristic of contemporary societies. Indeed, sociologists who have studied Ireland agree that trust is declining, spurred on by crises of trust in the church, medical institutions and the banks (Share, Tovey and Corcoran, 2007).

Active citizenship is quite beneficial for societies as a whole. Promoting active citizenship leads to the improvement of citizens' quality of life, social justice and meaningful participation, which are central to the democratic process (Honohan, 2005; Meehan, 1997). Participation in local governance and community activism results in empowerment and the widening of individual's social outlook (Schugurensky, 2006; Dunne, 2008). Kirby (2006) also links the task of achieving greater social inclusion with

the need for active citizenship, so as to challenge the dominance of the elites controlling economic, social and political power in the state.

The UK Home Office conducted a research programme into why people become involved civically and how public authorities encourage this involvement (Lowndes and Chapman, 2005; Jones and Roberts, 2005; Andersson et al, 2005; Bastow et al, 2005; Prior et al, 2005). Two perspectives emerged from these studies. The first is that involvement comes from having a set of moral outlooks. The other approach emphasises that active citizenship originates from an assessment of a set of private costs and benefits (Home Office, 2003).

Given the studies on active citizenship to date, it is fair to conclude that it is a highly relevant issue in contemporary society. It is also important to ensure that both the voluntary and civic engagement elements of the construct are included in any debate on the topic. The many benefits of active citizenship behaviour have been highlighted by the literature, namely improving the democratic process and increasing greater social inclusion. These conclusions will inform the theoretical approach adopted in this project.

### **2.3 Learning for active citizenship**

Although it has been recognised that education plays a key role in the promotion of active citizenship, it is the formal (i.e. learning that takes place in a school system) and non-formal (i.e. organised learning outside the formal learning system) learning contexts that are typically emphasised. Formal education refers to the scenario where teachers follow a curriculum derived from a pre-established body of knowledge. This includes the age-graded, bureaucratic modern school system as well as the initiation of youths into traditional bodies of knowledge by elders. Non-formal education involves learners voluntarily opting to engage in self-directed learning from an organised body of knowledge, directed by a designated teacher. This form of learning is typical of adult education courses and workshops (Livingstone, 2006).



Informal education or training is more incidental and spontaneous. Typically, mentors take responsibility for guiding learners in acquiring 'real-world' skills. This is done without reference to a pre-established curriculum. All other forms of intentional or tacit learning that occur without a mentor/teacher or designated curriculum is known as self-directed or collective informal learning. Distinctions need to be drawn between informal means of learning and the general socialisation process (Livingstone, 2006). Informal learning occurs at irregular time and space patterns. Life-course shaping knowledge can be learned through an accumulation of life experiences or within a short intense period such as through a major influential event (e.g. a birth or a divorce). Most adults typically engage in multiple forms of learning to varying degrees. The formal and non-formal modes of learning are most recognised and documented, possibly due to the ease of measurement.

Foley (1999), examining the informal learning of social action, found that the most interesting and significant learning occurs informally and incidentally during everyday life. Jonassen (1994) further points out that situated learning typically occurs when learners engage in authentic and realistic tasks that are a reflection of their social worlds. It appears that the old model of the apprenticeship, which included observation, modelling and frequent social interaction is still relevant to contemporary learning theory (Schugurensky, 2006). This concurs with the Freirean perspective (Freire, 1994), which views education as an experience-learning process that occurs in daily life and across a variety of community settings.

A large body of literature has emerged on the contextualised nature of learning. Social learning theorists such as Vygotsky, Dewey and Bandura have underlined the fact that learning cannot be separated from the activity, culture or social context in which it takes place (Schugurensky, 2006). According to the situated learning perspective, learners are involved in communities of practice that incorporate a set of values, behaviours and skills. As they become more acculturated into these communities, they move from periphery members to more central participants, actively engaged in their community (Lave and Wenger, 1990; Brown, Collins and Duguid,

1989). In other words, the social organisation of communities shape how and what members learn (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002).

Dewey viewed education as being intertwined with collective and democratic action (Greene, 2007). Educating for social change is a way of enabling people to critically evaluate their world and to see themselves as engineers of an alternative social world (Lange, 2004). Within formal education, there is a tendency in recent years to strengthen learner autonomy. There is also an emerging trend to incorporate teaching about civics and citizenship into formal educational curricula. Outside the formal system, public information programmes, community development and community education provide a means of learning for active citizenship. The European Union has recently attempted to incorporate an active citizenship dimension into its prescriptions for lifelong learning (Holford, 2006). Civic education has become a pressing issue in contemporary Irish society due to the encouragement of active citizenship by the government and the proposals for a new Leaving Certificate subject in civic education (Finlay, 2007).

There is a dearth of research examining the educational influences that lead people to become 'active citizens' (Kane, 2007). Self-reported estimates of informal learning probably greatly underestimate the occurrence of such learning, due to the embedded and taken-for-granted nature of this tacit learning (Eraut, 1999). In 1998 the New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL, 1998) conducted the first national survey of adults' informal learning practices in Canada. It found that the community-related informal learning activities include such matters as communication skills, social issues, organisational/managerial skills and fundraising (Livingstone, 2006).

In a similar vein, there has been a lack of attention paid to the informal and incidental learning of the attitudes, skills and values associated with active citizenship. The cross-cultural ETGACE (Education & Training for Governance & Active Citizenship) research project was conducted to address this gap in the literature. The ETGACE project examined how adults learn active citizenship. It also investigated what educational methods are effective in improving learning for active citizenship. Data were collected in

six European countries namely Finland, UK, Netherlands, Belgium, Slovenia and Spain (Van der Veen and Holford, 2005). The RETGACE project replicated the original research design but gathered data from the two relatively new EU member states of Romania and Hungary.

The basis of the ETGACE study was that the attitudes, skills and behaviours required to be an active citizen are not learned formally through educational provision, but rather they are learned incidentally and constructed through socio-institutional and cultural processes. For example, families play a significant role in promoting and teaching active citizenship through caring for the sick and elderly as well as partaking in community activities (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007a). The ETGACE authors emphasised the serious lack of studies exploring the process of informal learning.

The educationalist Illeris (2002) differentiates between cognitive, emotional and social learning processes. The ETGACE study focused on the social dimension of learning, in particular Hurrelmann's (1988) description of the individual as a productive processor of reality. The ETGACE researchers viewed social learning for active citizenship as involving three aspects, namely effectiveness, responsibility and identity.

Conclusions from the ETGACE study indicated that formal education played a very minor role in the formation of the active citizens they interviewed. It appears that formal education taught them how to be good but not active citizens. This research study found that active citizens typically learn their citizenship skills incidentally, by trying to solve a problem or fulfil a mission rather than purposefully setting out to learn to be an active citizen. As learning is a consequence rather than a goal, it is deeply embedded in these processes and in the particular contexts. It is therefore interactive as opposed to the linear process of learning exemplified in formal educational settings (ETGACE, 2003).

It was found that childhood experiences play a significant role in creating active citizens. Predispositions to becoming an active citizen are often developed early in life in the private domains of family and community, with certain role models being particularly

influential (ETGACE, 2003). The evidence points to the lack of recognition for the role the private domain plays in citizenship activity, especially in relation to learning citizenship. This tends to discriminate against women, who are generally more active in the private sphere than men.

The ETGACE authors stated that the potential of civil society as a site for learning is typically underestimated by governing bodies. Learning of citizenship is quite under-resourced, when compared with similar learning in the workplace, as it tends to be short-term and less systematic. Indeed, marginalised members of society continue to be excluded from this form of education (ETGACE, 2003).

The authors advocate that public interventions for citizenship learning should focus on providing individuals with opportunities to explore and acquire skills in context rather than through formal instruction. Such learning should incorporate the interconnected dimensions of learning to solve concrete problems, developing social skills and acquiring critical thinking skills. This approach would enable individuals to be active and challenge stereotypes. Introducing such themes to a more formalised educational context would require allowing learners to collect and analyse information. This process would also need learners to integrate their learning with action and reflection. Indeed, one of the ETGACE project's core recommendations was the creation of opportunities for the development of citizenship skills in both formal and informal contexts. Additionally, education for citizenship was one of the key recommendations contained in the Taskforce on Active Citizenship's (2007a) report to the Irish government.

## **2.4 Active citizenship in Ireland**

A number of recent changes in Irish society has challenged pre-existing notions of citizenship. These changes include the influx of a variety of immigrant communities, the Belfast Agreement and membership of the EU (Harris, 2008). At national level, a number of consultative processes has been put in place, namely the National Economic and Social Forum and the social partnership talks. The government has also involved citizens, if selectively and on an ad hoc basis, in a variety of forums, such as the

National Forum on Europe. At local level, there has been a range of other forums and organisations (e.g. protest groups and NGOs) through which citizens can voice their concerns, especially in relation to particular issues, such as the environment, waste incineration and Shannon airport.

Despite these measures and initiatives, it has been stated that contemporary Irish society consists of consumers rather than citizens (Kirby, 2006). Ireland has experienced a decline in turn-out for electoral participation, similar to other western countries. Over the 25-year period between 1977 and 2002, participation in Irish general elections dropped from 76 per cent to 62 per cent (Laver, 2006). There is a perceived democratic deficit, especially at the local level, where individuals and communities feel powerless to influence decision-making processes (Hughes, Clancy, Harris and Beetham, 2007). It could be deduced that local government in Ireland has failed to engender a higher level of public involvement. This may be due to the fact that the public see tenuous connections between local governance and the delivery of public services.

In Ireland, there is currently an emphasis on promoting active citizenship through strengthening social capital and enhancing citizen engagement in democracy. The 2007 Programme for Government negotiated by Fianna Fáil, the Green Party and the Progressive Democrats refers to active citizenship, volunteering, electoral reform and local government reform. For example, the programme calls for an audit of existing community facilities, the identification of ways to better use schools at evenings and weekends and the establishment of town councils (Harris, 2008).

A range of initiatives has been put in place to encourage citizen engagement such as the Democracy Commission, the Democracy Audit and the Taskforce on Active Citizenship. This is similar to a number of on-going projects in Europe, i.e. Power Inquiry in Britain (2006), Dutch National Convention (2006), Council of Europe's Green paper on the Future of Europe (2004). This is an EU-wide phenomenon with member states actively trying to engage their citizens.

The Taskforce on Active Citizenship was established by the former Taoiseach Bertie Aherne in April 2006. It consisted of representatives from the community and voluntary sector, the trade union movement, the business sector, the churches and senior civil servants. In 2006 the Taskforce on Active Citizenship commissioned a survey of civic engagement, which was conducted by the ESRI. The statistical evidence suggests that in comparison to international indicators, Ireland is average to slightly below average in terms of reported group membership and volunteering across OECD countries. Yet, in terms of informal social networks, Ireland compares quite favourably to many other economically developed nations (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007c).

Despite this, for every adult involved in the community there at least two others who are not. Furthermore, only 38 per cent of those surveyed reported that they were interested in politics. Attention needs to be directed towards groups in society that are not active. Lower levels of engagement were found among those not in the labour force (especially homemakers) or at study, people on low income, persons living in urban areas and early school leavers (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007c).

The Taskforce recommendations emphasised the need for the expansion of learning opportunities for active citizenship. For instance, more education for active citizenship should be provided for the school sector as well as the youth and adult education sectors. The Taskforce also recommended that the Higher Education Authority lead initiatives to promote and support 'service learning' and volunteering at third level. The Taskforce's final report was launched in March 2007 and all of its recommendations were accepted by the Taoiseach. An Active Citizenship office was established along with an implementation steering group, to oversee the office and its work (Harris, 2008).

Whereas the Taskforce focused on civic engagement in both political and community/voluntary spheres, the Democracy Commission focused more on political participation. The Democracy Commission's final report stressed the need to address Ireland's declining levels of political participation (Harris, 2008). The Irish

Democratic Audit's report differs from both the Taskforce's and Democracy Commission's, as it examines more formal participation in public life such as holding a public office (Hughes et al, 2007). The Democracy Commission's and the Democratic Audit's reports stem from projects initiated by TASC.<sup>1</sup>

## **2.5 Community and voluntary sector in Ireland**

Voluntary bodies and movements are seen as creating heterogeneity of thought, institutions and interests. This is in stark contrast to the State which tends to homogenise society and culture. Some organisations are reliant on the State for crucial funding and thereby may have a close partnership with government strategies. Other organisations challenge the State through vigorous social movements that may be viewed as the 'people's opposition' (Powell, 2000). Indeed, social movements are key to marking out the boundaries between the State and civil society.

Irish voluntary organisations in their present guise date back to the late eighteenth century and were active in the fields of medicine and education. These activities today would be considered responsibilities of the State. They developed separately in the Protestant and Catholic communities. During the nineteenth century most of these services became institutionalised, further informed by the Victorian notion of reform (e.g. industrial schools) (Acheson, Harvey, Kearney and Williamson, 2004). Despite the plethora of organisations helping the poor, very few of them went beyond the provision of material relief to examine the underlying causes of poverty and deprivation.

Rural voluntary action also came to the fore during the nineteenth century with the emergence of the co-operative movement in the form of dairy co-ops and co-op banks. The latter developed into today's Credit Unions. The advocates of the co-operative movement viewed it as a means of creating a more just and democratic rural society (Walsh, 2007). Social action played a crucial role in the national struggle (e.g. GAA, the

---

<sup>1</sup> TASC is an independent, Dublin-based 'think tank' that promotes action on social change via disseminating research, stimulating debate and promoting collaboration on topics such as equality, sustainability and accountability in Irish society.

Land League, the Gaelic League). Some of the impetus for the struggle for independence was grounded in notions of misgovernment and the lack of social policies in urban, and especially rural, Ireland (Lee, 1989).

In the post-independence years, the voice of social policy and social movements played a minor role in the new state. Catholic social action, however, continued to be highly influential in the voluntary sector. Under the auspices of the Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, the catholic approach was monopolistic and overwhelmingly denominational (Garvin, 2004). Despite this, the social activities of the church authorities were characterised by professionalism. They employed social workers, set standards for documentation, provided joined-up services and campaigned vigorously to address the underlying causes of poverty (e.g. among Irish emigrants). Towards the end of the twentieth century, catholic social activism began to critically comment on the government's approach to social policy and poverty. Many orders began to operate in more community-based settings, especially in disadvantaged areas. During this era histories of abuses that occurred in catholic institutions came to the fore (Share, Tovey and Corcoran, 2007).

Another key element of community development, especially in rural Ireland, was the establishment of Muintir na Tíre in 1937 by Canon Hayes. For over 70 years, this voluntary national community development organisation based in Tipperary Town has argued in favour of self-reliant rural communities. For example, Muintir na Tíre opposed the closure of rural sub post-offices, asserting that it would detrimental to rural society (Varley and Ó Cearbhaill, 2002). It has used a number of organisational structures at local level to facilitate its work. These include commodity organisations, parish councils, guilds and community councils (Devereux, 1993). It has been stated, however, that the rationale behind the establishment of Muintir na Tíre was to act as a support for rural producers of a wide range of commodities through a co-operative society and to act as a catholic social movement that advocated state subsidiarity. It has also been claimed that the purpose of establishing Muintir na Tíre was to promote the primacy of 'rural'



values over the declining morality of urban centres and the neutralisation of any potential for class conflict (Geoghegan, 2004).

In the early 1970s, the women's movement gained momentum and rallied against many of the disadvantages formalised in Irish law (e.g. marriage bar, ban on contraception, inheritance laws). A number of women's groups were established that provided much needed social services: Rape Crisis Centres, Well Woman clinics and Women's Aid. Other groups emerged with this tradition of self-help, non-judgementalism and advocacy. For example, environmental activism grew during the 1970s, with campaigns centred on controversial projects such as the Wood Quay Viking site (Acheson, Harvey, Kearney and Williamson, 2004).

Ireland's entry into the European Community in 1973 had a profound effect on the voluntary sector. Not only did membership provide financial resources, it also led to professionalisation of the sector. This was due to the fact that contributing to policy development and more strategic planning became compulsory (Warleigh-Lack, 2001). The 1990s saw the emergence of identity-based social movements concerned with gay rights and anti-racism. The bringing of voluntary and community organisations into local and national social partnership in the 1990s gave the sector a level of leverage and engagement. Although the principle of partnership was welcomed, some were cautious about becoming involved as they feared the sector would lose some of its former critical capacity (Connolly, 2007).

Donoghue et al (2006) conducted the first ever large-scale survey of non-profit organisations in Ireland. This enabled an insight into Ireland's contemporary community and voluntary sector to be gleaned. The research team found that the volunteering population tended to be quite male-dominated, with male volunteers outnumbering females three to one. Nevertheless, females predominated in the employee population of these organisations. The most important relationships for the generation of finance were those with the State and the local community/wider society. Relationships with the State were less significant for older organisations. The most important relationships for

sourcing human resources and service provision proved to be the local community or wider society. The policy development role was ranked as a low priority among organisations surveyed. In contrast, the community building and advocacy roles were viewed as most important (Donoghue et al, 2006).

## **2.6 Irish community activism in disadvantaged areas**

Community development has played an ambiguous role in the Irish State. Whereas community and group action is a low-cost, effective means of solidifying the social fabric, the State has traditionally been suspicious of community action that occurs outside of the conventional channels of public administration and local government (Acheson, Harvey, Kearney and Williamson, 2004; National Economic and Social Council, 2002).

Briggs (1998) and others assert that social capital should be used by members of low-income communities not just to get by but rather to get ahead and enhance their living situations through empowerment (Body-Gendrot and Gittell, 2003). However, there are class differences in the ability to accumulate social capital and to convert it into political and civic action (Gittell, 2003). Studies suggest that participation is most difficult to achieve in socio-economically deprived communities due to resource constraints (Foley, Gittell and Newman, 2003).

The 1970s and 1980s were characterised by community-development projects in urban areas confronting the problems associated with high unemployment, educational disadvantage, lack of public services, uneven urban development and irresponsible planning (MacLaren, Clayton and Brudell, 2007). Two of the first community action groups, North City Centre Community Action Project and Fatima Development Group, emerged from tenant action groups. Similar organisations soon followed in Ballymun, Tallaght and Blanchardstown. The establishment of community resource centres began in the 1980s. These were significant sites as they provided training, information and facilities. They were also a means of empowerment as well as a focus for community and voluntary activity. The establishment of the Community Development Programme in

the early 1990s appears to have signalled a more explicit State commitment to supporting participatory forms of democracy and active citizenship programmes. This Programme provides financial assistance to projects for the staffing and equipping of local resource centres and to other specialised community development projects (Walsh, Craig and McCafferty, 1998).

Community work with women became a significant element of the voluntary and community sector in the 1980s. A number of factors contributed to this, namely the women's liberation movement, the changing nature of the workforce, the employment of women community workers and the situation of women in socio-economically deprived urban areas (Sabel, 1996).

Adult education, and in particular community education, was pivotal to the emergence of active citizenship in disadvantaged areas in Ireland (Finlay, 2007). Adult education and community education have differing theoretical and policy backgrounds. Adult education courses are designed so that learners can return to education in flexible ways that take account of the particular needs and circumstances of adult learners. Formal qualifications are not required in order to partake in the majority of full-time and part-time courses (Schugurensky, 2006). These include programmes like the Adult Literacy Scheme, courses for early school-leavers, opportunities to return to study for the Leaving Certificate and a wide range of vocational training linked to business and industry.

Community education refers to adult education and learning, generally outside the formal education sector, which aims to enhance learning, empower people and contribute to society (Freire, 1994). It is a distinctive element of the adult education sector in Ireland and has the capacity to reach marginalised people in disadvantaged communities. The community education sector grew out of the established Vocational Education Committee (VEC) night classes and adult literacy movement of the 1970s and 1980s. The goals of the community education sector include not just individual development but also community advancement, especially in marginalised

communities. It allows participants to challenge existing structures and encourages them to influence the society in which they live. A key feature of community education programmes is that they provide the supports necessary for successful access and learning, particularly guidance, mentoring, continuous feedback and childcare (Share, Tovey and Corcoran, 2007). Thus, community education has played a key role in promoting community activism in marginalised communities in Ireland.

## **2.7 Conclusions**

This chapter presented a wide variety of literature so as to provide a contextualisation for this study. Firstly, the concept of active citizenship was explored. This was followed by a discussion on the various ways in which individuals learn how to be active citizens (i.e. formal, non-formal and informal processes). The dearth of research investigating the informal learning of active citizenship was highlighted. The key elements of the original ETGACE project were also presented. Following this, the application of these concepts and theories to the Irish context was reviewed. In particular, Irish community activism in disadvantaged areas was examined.

### 3. Methodological Approach

#### 3.1 Introduction

This section describes the methodological tools that were used to answer the research questions. A two-pronged approach to data collection was utilised, namely focus groups and life history interviews. Firstly, these methods are described and justified. The analytical procedures adopted are also disclosed. Following this, the ethical issues pertaining to the study and the limitations of the research design are outlined.

#### 3.2 Life history interviews

The life history method was used to interview participants.<sup>2</sup> This study focused on the learning of active citizenship rather than biographies as a whole. As with the original ETGACE research project (2003), respondents were asked through in-depth interviews to reflect on their own lives as active citizens. In particular, the critical moments, incidents, confrontations, influential people and phases in life that appeared to have influenced their learning of active citizenship were probed. Please see appendix A for further details.

The sample size included 16 respondents. The primary criterion for selection was related to the definition of active citizenship given earlier. A sampling framework similar to that of the ETGACE project was used (i.e. 16 per country in the case of ETGACE).

**Table [3.3.1] Age and gender profile of life history interviewees**

Age	Female		Male	
	Existing active citizens	Becoming active citizens	Existing active citizens	Becoming active citizens
<b>25-40 yrs</b>	2	2	2	2
<b>55-70 yrs</b>	2	2	2	2
<b>Total</b>	4	4	4	4

<sup>2</sup> A life history interview invites the participants to look back over the details of their life story. It provides an opportunity to interpret the sense of reality that people have about their own life within their social worlds and their attempts to give voice to that reality (Atkinson, 1998; Josselson and Lieblich, 1995).

Purposive sampling was used. With purposive sampling, participants are selected as they relate in some way to the study's research questions (Bryman, 2004). Participants were selected on the basis of their experiences of becoming/being an active citizen in the Docklands. The sample was chosen from existing participative governance structures in Docklands, namely membership of Docklands Community Liaison Council 2000-2007. Also, the 'becoming active citizens' cohort were graduates of the National College of Ireland's Certificate in Active Citizenship.

### **3.3 Focus groups**

Focus groups were also used for data collection.<sup>3</sup> They were employed to elicit information on the supports available to enhance learning for active citizenship in the Docklands. The focus was primarily on the Community Resource Centres located in the Dublin Docklands area. Individuals were chosen on the basis of their experience, insights and perspective on learning interventions for active citizenship in the Docklands area. As such, the technique of purposive sampling, as outlined above, was used. It was originally proposed that five focus groups would be conducted. Two focus groups were completed. Each focus group had nine participants. Unfortunately, there were difficulties in setting up the other three groups. As an alternative, nine supplementary interviews in the various community centres were conducted with course co-ordinators and tutors. The ETGACE study also encountered this problem and similarly supplemented its groups with interviews.

A discussion guide for the focus groups was devised from the research questions and literature review. The guide centred on the following topics: current and new ways of learning active citizenship, types of learner supports, benefits to the local community and the role of the community/voluntary sector as teachers. Please see Appendix B for further details on this guide.

---

<sup>3</sup> A focus group is a structured discussion in which a small group of people, led by a trained facilitator, discuss their perceptions, opinions, attitudes and experiences (Silverman, 2000). This method enables participants to build on each other's ideas and comments (Patton, 2002). It also provides an opportunity to explore a variety of perspectives (Bryman, 2004).

### **3.4 Analysis of interview and focus group data**

The interview and focus group data were transcribed and entered into the qualitative data management software package Nvivo (Version 7). Thematic analysis was applied to both the life history interview data and focus group data (Patton, 2002). The themes in the thematic guides acted as the preliminary analytical framework. These initial themes were developed and refined in the light of new and emerging findings. Quotes used in the analysis were chosen to represent typical or common responses. Any variations or negative cases were also described and explained. This is deemed the most systematic and reliable way of treating qualitative data, as the findings become more fully explored, explained and evidenced (Dixon, 2004).

### **3.5 Ethical Issues**

It was of utmost importance that the research was carried out ethically to protect the interests of both the study participants and the service providers. The ethical guidelines published by the Social Research Association in the UK (2003) and those outlined by the Sociological Association of Ireland were closely adhered to. In both the focus groups and interviews, details of the research project and the data collection process were discussed verbally as well as being available to informants in writing. This ensured that any literacy difficulties were not an issue for participants. The anonymity and confidentiality of the project was made clear to all respondents. The voluntary nature of participation in, not only the focus group/interviews, but also particular topics or issues that were raised during data collection was highlighted.

### **3.6 Limitations of study**

As in any study, there are inevitable limitations to the research design. For instance, the geographical area in which this study was undertaken was limited to one specific area of inner-city Dublin. It is also important to bear in mind that the sampling frame for the life history interviews is somewhat narrower than that of the ETGACE sample. All the active citizens are drawn from the Dublin Docklands Development Authority's

Community Liaison Council, whereas in the ETGACE study they were drawn from a range of organisations in each country. Similarly, there is a narrow profile to the 'becoming active citizens' sample, which comprises adult graduates of a course in active citizenship run by the National College of Ireland. Hence, the study may be too limited to form the basis for generalisation to groups of active citizens with different profiles.

### **3.7 Conclusions**

This chapter outlined the methods used in the study. Descriptions and justifications for the two methods of data collection were provided. The analytical processes that were employed were also detailed. Finally, the ethical aspects of this study as well as the limitations of the study were explored.



## 4. Informal learning of active citizenship in Dublin's Docklands

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of data pertaining to informal learning of active citizenship. The significance of the home context in fostering active citizenship is clearly highlighted in a number of themes below such as 'when become a mother', 'early involvement' and 'family and home encouragement'. The importance of contextual and collective learning becomes apparent in the 'role of critical events' and 'we-ness of learning' sections. The process of how one is drawn more and more into activism is evidenced in 'seen as someone who gets involved'. Learning how to become politically astute is also discussed. Towards the end of the chapter, issues around the next generation of active citizens, as well as the rewards, barriers and concept of active citizenship itself are explored. The findings are discussed under eleven key thematic headings. Each theme features representative quotations from a variety of participants.

### 4.2 Family and home encouragement

The family and the home context are seen as key environments in which active citizenship is first fostered, nurtured and supported. One participant spoke of her mother being a highly influential figure in promoting active citizenship in the home.

*I got my feel for active citizenship was from home. Because my mother was, it was a religious thing, I suppose, more so because my mother was religious and she kind of encouraged us to give a hand out in the church or you know, making teas for First Communion or helping to clean the church or you know, so you kind of got the sense of help, that you needed to help people, to help other people. Same with, in your, you know, neighbours, if they needed help, you were kind of encouraged to do that ... I mean that's what I always say that it goes back to my mother, you know, what was bred into me. (Interviewee#1)*

Another spoke of how a family relative recruited her and her husband into various community activities.

*My niece, she's on the committee for the (name of centre) and all that. So she kind of got us involved in doing things. She asked for help, so she'd ask us if we had any time to spare, to help out, do things like, you know, practical things that needed to be done as well, like. (Interviewee#11)*

### **4.3 Early involvement**

Many active citizens became involved in the community early on in their lives. This participation was often motivated by the poverty they saw in their social environments or by other issues that they identified with.

*When I was 12, I was active in, of all things, the Legion of Mary. And on Friday, Thursday evenings, I used to go around telling the old folks that the priest would be coming with Mass the following morning. People who were bedridden or housebound. Now, in the old tenements mainly. Or in the flats complexes... Yeah. And then and I'd also bring kids from the corporation buildings to Mass on a Sunday. (Interviewee#5)*

*And particularly the environment I was living in when there was huge amounts of poverty. The notion of the division between the rich and the poor and the class makeup of society made obvious sense to me when I looked around me. So that's what drew me into that. But the politics, you know, when you're young, there's all sorts of kind of utopian visions and dreams, but I was very active. I've always been active about what I've believed in, right from an early age. (Interviewee#5)*

*And there was a lot of protests around that time around fees. This was back in the eighties. So I was very involved in those and I became the women's rights officer. And it was the first time there had been a women's rights officer, I think, in nearly a decade. (Interviewee#9)*

#### 4.4 When become a mother

Almost all the female participants indicated that they were drawn into active citizenship when they became parents, in particular when their children started either pre-school or formal education.

*Well, I would have got involved years ago because I had young children. Children are a great opener to getting involved. Once your child starts playschool, you're in because you will be asked to do this and that. And when you're doing it, you say, some people then turn around and say, 'Will you come on the committee?' And that's the start of it then. (Interviewee#7)*

Some participants proactively decided that they wanted to develop facilities for their children and joined a group to ensure this development took place.

*I wanted to make sure that for my children growing up, that we would have a future and there was very limited in the sense that we didn't look very healthy in the sense that you know, like nobody was, everybody was ignoring us. (name of organisation) was ignoring us, there was nothing being done. So we kind of went on from that, getting involved and the community council. When my children came along, I got involved in the school myself, so I was on the board of management and I was on the parents' council. (Interviewee#1)*

*Okay, well, I'll tell you how it really started. I had two very inquisitive daughters. From the offset, and one of them wanted to find something to keep her occupied. So originally, I'm from the area of (name of area).*

*So I started off in (name of area) then, looking at, to see what was available for my youngest, or eldest to go into. So we started off initially with the Irish dancing. That's how we started.*

*Loved the Irish dancing, so through the Irish dancing then, with the different organising of events, it became clear that the dancing school that I went to, they had no one to give them a dig out. So I started to do a bit of work that way.*

*And when we went into the Irish dancing, she decided then that, she saw some kind of act, some kind of a show, anyway, she'd seen. And she'd seen this majorette.*

*Now, they had no majorettes in (name of area) at all. So me being me, which is the type I am, because there was nothing there, I kind of said to myself, 'It'd be nice if there was something there.' So I got a couple of women I hang around with and asked them would their kids be interested in doing majorettes. So that's we started up the majorettes in (name of area).*

*Did the same with any kind of bit that I got into, I would take one of the roles on. And then the summer project, that was the other thing that my kids wanted to get into. So again, I went along as a volunteer. I think really, I didn't want to let my kids, I wanted to make sure wherever they went, they were happy, and I knew what they were doing. So I think that was my ...*

*Looking back on it, I'm kind of thinking to myself that's really why I did it, not that I was that interested in joining all these things. I just didn't like to let my kids go anywhere that I didn't go. (Interviewee#8)*

Others stated that due to the presence of their children in local schools, they felt drawn into various child-related community activities. From this, they developed an interest in community activism.

*So it started with primary school when my sons, eldest son started in primary school and immediately I got roped into – now I wouldn't have had any track record of involvement at that time – I got roped into bringing kids out, the school kids out to, say, the Zoo or out on trips. (Interviewee#3)*

#### 4.5 The role of critical events and contextual learning

Several active citizens were drawn into community activism by the occurrence of key events in their locality. These critical events typically occurred in their own communities.

For example, one active citizen spoke of how he became involved in community work due to flooding in his area. This critical event resulted in him and his neighbours organising and tackling issues that were impinging on their quality of life.

*Well, I've always been somewhat involved, but I got majorly involved back in 2002. We had a major flooding in the area. I live in (name of area). And we'd a major flooding.*

*Within a week when we were all gathering together, seeing what we were going to do about insurance and all that, a small cohort of us, kind of got together, kind of proactive, you know. Always kind of said hello to each other on the street, but never kind of met in any other fashion.*

*We decided to set up a new (name of area) residents' association. So we lobbied, we got out on the streets, we stopped traffic. Wrote a couple of articles.*

*We finally got the 1.6 million out of them to build the wall, so at least it won't get flooded any more. But that was about our work. That was getting to the streets, pounding, literally pounding the streets. (Interviewee#12)*

Similarly, the following long-term active citizen became motivated to become involved in her community when changes started happening around her.

*So we kind of start looking at, I was living up by, I had got married, and I had my first child, and became aware that some houses around the back of me were being threatened by the landlord that they were going to be evicted because he was an absentee landlord. So I got involved in helping them to solve the problem.*

*And so from that on, I went from that onto a community council, getting involved in looking after because at that time, all the area was being redeveloped in the sense of not in the way it is now, but for offices.*

*So I got involved in that end of it, you know, watching planning and so I kind of felt that this is my community, it's where I've chosen to stay. (Interviewee#1)*

These critical events prompted people not to tackle issues on their own, but rather groups of community members decided to join together to combat an issue that was impacting them all. This long-term active citizen spoke of the learning that took place during this process of mobilised collective action.

*People were panicking, the bulldozer's coming in, you're all going to be scattered to the four winds. So we decided that we'd, we wouldn't accept that situation ... But suddenly, community associations, even into the wider city, in Ballymun and anywhere, you know, suddenly realised, you know, we're going to be walked on here, you know. We're being totally disregarded here, you know. You know, we have to get together, we have to get a voice, and we have to get up there and we have to be heard, you know. And, you know, putting pressure on politicians or whatever, you could do it, that's what you done, you know. But you had to learn the, all the, the lingo and everything else and, you know, and figure out how you were going to do it, you know. (Interviewee#4)*

These critical incidents were key ways for participants to learn how to be active in their community. They learned during critical events. This learning was therefore contextual. For instance, partaking in the anti-drugs movement was a learning experience for community members. It was an empowering exercise, as activists learned that they could tackle a major issue in the community and have an impact.

*We learned a lot from different campaigns. Like the first anti-drugs campaign in the eighties was genuinely a mass movement, you know what I mean, and we learned a lot from that. And the people in the community learned a lot from it because they realised*

*that in a fight, you can win. We had, you know, to begin with in the eighties, we had a horrific drugs problem, which nobody expected. It came all of a sudden and it was very difficult, extremely difficult to deal with and it was very divisive. But one of the outcomes of that struggle was that young people no longer saw it as the attractive thing to do, to go on drugs. We had young people, loads of young people, out on the marches and all that stuff. So I think a lot of people learned from that. (Interviewee#5)*

#### **4.6 Seen as someone who gets involved**

As individuals become more and more active in the community, they become viewed as someone who can get things done. As a result, they get pulled into various projects and committees.

*I found that once I got onto one (committee), it was no bother to get called onto two, three and four. And it's been like that from as long as I can remember. (Interviewee#8)*

Once they become viewed as leading active citizens, they tend to be actively sought out by others in the community.

*I'd already been on a few other committees anyway. Between being secretary, being chairman of a few things, so I was automatically nominated chairman, which I have no problem with because it can be the easiest job after doing secretary for years of other things. And then the more meetings you attend, the more meetings you'll be asked to attend. Are you with me? Oh, (name of interviewee)'s a good guy. He'll sign up for that. He'll sign up for that. (Interviewee#12)*

Thus, it was found that the process of becoming a leading active citizen does not involve a conscious decision.

*I can't actually remember ever making a decision that yes, this is what I'm going to do. It's just more or less something I fell into and continued on because I would have been*

*seen as somebody who would get involved and could be called on. Then naturally I became a leader, looked on as a leader. (Interviewee#3)*

Indeed, many participants mentioned the phrase 'knock on the door' in relation to someone visiting their home trying to recruit them for a local initiative.

*So a knock came to door and this guy (name) said to me, 'We're setting up this group,' you know and I said, 'Ah yeah.' 'We'll be back to you.' Fine, he went off you know. But he was persistent coming back to the door, you know. So they were having a public meeting and he said, 'Will you come to the public meeting?' So I said, 'Okay.' (Interviewee#6)*

The downside to this is that active citizens could become overburdened with the vast number of projects they are involved in. One participant recalls that he learned how to say no.

*As I say, if you want something done, ask somebody that's busy, you know. But you have to learn to say no ...*

*As I was chairman, I had these little subcommittees. And one of them was, I was chairing the fundraising committee and I actually approached her. And I said, 'Would you be interested in ...' I've hardly finished the sentence and fair play to her, she said, 'No.' And I've never had anyone say that to me before. And I learned from that ...*

*But that was it. She actually said the word 'No' just like that, directly. And I went, 'You know what? If I could just do that.' And pretty much after that point, I just said, 'No.'*

*'Ah (name of interviewee), can you come to this thing this night and can you come to that and can you come to this AGM?' And when you do go, being the kind of person you are, you know when they're looking for volunteers at the end, you're going to put your hand up because you can't help yourself.*



*You know, you're passionate at the time, but then you don't know. Do you realise what you're signing up to here, you know? So no, I pulled back quite a bit. I have.*

*(Interviewee#12)*

It was recognised that it takes a certain type of person to become involved in the community. It was felt that there is a section of the community who do not have any inclination or interest in being involved.

*I mean there's women over where we live, and they do nothing, sure they don't? But they don't want to do anything. They say, 'Ah, let it.' Do you know what I mean, and that's the wrong attitude to take as well, because then the community is going to go downhill. But it does, it takes a certain kind of person. (Interviewee#7)*

#### **4.7 We-ness of learning**

Learning collectively or in a group from others (known as 'we-ness' in this study) is another theme that emerged from the data. Long-term active citizens stressed the significance of learning from their peers. Not only did their contemporaries act as a support network, they also served as collective role models by inspiring each other.

*There's three of them, four of them were very much, I suppose we supported one another, so they would be role models instead because we supported one another through bad times and through good times. (Interviewee#1)*

There is a tendency among highly committed, long-term active citizens to highlight the important role of others in community work. They did not want the focus to be directed solely at themselves as individuals.

*It's not about me. It's about the community. And I mean the work that I do, I don't do it for me. I do it for the community. And the same with all the other volunteers. And I mean you're interviewing me, but you could be interviewing any one of 20 of the other people, and they would give you exactly the same interview. And they come in at exactly the*

*same level. So it's not just about one individual. It's about a group of people that wake up in the morning and they've one thing on their mind, is working for their community. And that's all the satisfaction that they need to get, to know that they're putting something back into the community. (Interviewee#2)*

The same people appear to characterise community activism in the various areas. This was recognised as being due to the wealth of knowledge and level of commitment these people have for their communities.

*Yeah but it's normally the same faces all the time that get involved in these things, so you'll know ... If you want to find out something or get something done somewhere, I'd know to go to (name of activist) in (name of area) and say 'Listen', you know. Or (name of activist) in (name of area) or (name of activist) up at (name of area) or (name of activist) in (name of area). So it is all of the same heads. (Interviewee#6)*

However, it was emphasised by others that this can lead to certain people dominating community activism in an area.

*I think one thing I find with communities, though, and certain individuals within the community become very powerful. And there's, like, a happy circle. And to try and break that circle I find very difficult. (Interviewee#11)*

It was also felt by long-term active citizens that sharing their knowledge, skills and expertise with the younger generation is key to ensuring the development of the community into the future. Not letting go of power and not teaching the next generation is seen as counter-productive to the enhancement of the community.

*I think the worst thing that we could ever do is to hold onto power, not give room for anyone to move in and then of course the time will come when you are no longer there for one reason or another and there is nothing behind you ... So that is the greatest gift that you could give, is to leave, that you have given space to the younger people. (Interviewee#3)*

There was widespread recognition that fresh faces on committees bring new insights. It was argued that this requires balancing with the experience of long-term activists.

*So it's good because other people coming in, it's grand. They're bringing in new ideas. And you see, I'm a great believer in this, that you don't throw away the old. You have to keep some of the old because it's very easy, people coming in with new ideas and you get carried away and you know, and so it's good to have the balance, I think. Get a bit of both, and I think that works out very well. (Interviewee#1)*

#### **4.8 Learning how to be politically astute**

Learning how to be politically savvy is crucial when one is becoming active in community. Learning how to negotiate and play the political game with statutory and other agencies is key. If one is to secure funding and cultivate working relationships with influential bodies, it was found that this is an essential skill.

*We've built a very good relationship with the local business and corporate community as well. And we'd have a lot of good sponsors there, you know. I believe that being positive and being friendly, having as many allies as possible is the best way. (Interviewee#14)*

However, not compromising on core principles was an underlying element of this strategy. Playing the strategic game was seen as being worth the effort if it enhanced the community.

*Well, other people might say, 'Well, you're too tame and that's why they leave you there.' I don't know. That's a value judgement. But I would think that we've made substantial progress and it was well worth doing, and continues to be well worth doing. (Interviewee#5)*

These active citizens stressed the point that they do not go to meetings or approach various stakeholders with problems; rather they tackle community issues from a solutions-focused standpoint.

*It was difficult because when we started first. There was no climate there for communities being involved or influencing policy or having your say really. There was a lot of sense in communities of anti-establishment; you had to fight and battle your way. Where we had a different way of operating, I suppose. It is the type of people we are. We weren't agitators or agitators in the sense of fighting for our community but we were more looking to change, influence policy. So that meant learning how to articulate your needs, not going to a table with problems, bringing the problem but also suggested solutions and how to deal with that.*

*Yeah, yeah because you were always conscious that you weren't there to get a name for yourself as being shouting, bawling and demanding. My idea is that you go with a problem but you have a couple of options to address it.*

*And you give the people at the table options and the compromise is how you win.  
(Interviewee#3)*

Trying to understand where other stakeholders are coming from was highlighted as another core aspect of being politically astute in community activism.

*And then there's other things that we learned on the way. Like you know, the realisation that the person on the other side of the table that you're negotiating with has a boss as well. Or has a constituency that he or she has to answer to. And therefore there's no point in demanding things that he can't bring back to his boss and get approval for. So you know, you start looking at problems and solutions in a different way, you know. But you try to get the maximum you can that will have the maximum effect on the people you're trying to work for, you know. (Interviewee#5)*

This key skill was learned from trial and error, whereby attempting to tackle issue issues from a conflictual, antagonistic point of view did not yield any positive results.

*On the basis really that at that stage, we had been campaigning for years and years and years, and we were always in conflict with the state, and it wasn't getting us anywhere. It just struck us, this partnership model struck us as a new way of approaching the thing. Now, a lot of people, including myself, were very skeptical about the idea, but nevertheless, we decided since the other road wasn't taking us anywhere ... (Interviewee#5)*

Conversely, some long-term active citizens that were interviewed saw this way of relating as negative and counter-productive.

*They don't want anyone in there that's going to cause any kind of, kind of, rock the boat or kind of be controversial or anything like that, you know. You know. They want everyone to be, play happy families and we'll all, everything is wonderful. But what's wonderful about it, anyway?(Interviewee#4)*

Indeed, some of the 'becoming active citizens' cohort recounted instances where they experienced conflictual situations and adversarial relationships when dealing with statutory and other organisations.

One of the new active citizens detailed how he left a meeting frustrated at the lack of information being made available to the community. He believed this had a strategic, exclusionary purpose.

*So the last couple of meetings I left early. On our seventh meeting, I actually, I called it a diva moment, where I actually just stormed out. I just, I couldn't handle it any more. It's just lack of information. Actually, not getting information. The information is there. It's getting it. I made the point of any time we do receive any information, it's by accident, or*

*as I said, by slip of the tongue. And there's one particular consultant that I thought it was going to get personal with us. That's why I walked out. (Interviewee#12)*

Another of the new active citizens discussed how he became aware of the strategies that were being used to intimidate him. He learned how to turn these methods against this particular organisation.

*I thought they were highly-educated people when I started. Right. But by the time I'd got a number of months under my belt, I realised, all these people around this table are stupid. Because they didn't know what they were talking about. And they hadn't got a clue. They were just there to intimidate us at that point. But when I caught one of them out, when I'd go to this meeting and I'd catch them out on different things they'd say, I think I threw them back. They didn't want to be at the meeting. They didn't want to be there. They were afraid of me. They became afraid of me, actually. (Interviewee#11)*

Some long-term active citizens recounted heated debates and walk-outs from meetings down through the years. Now, they have come to see the political aspect as an inevitable part of active citizenship.

*So when you get involved in active citizenship normally you get involved in politics as well, it just happens. It's a political game anyway and you have to manoeuvre yourself in certain ways, in a certain tactic to get what you want and whatever. So politicians will normally come to you anyway. You get courted by certain politicians as well. That's fine. But sometimes you need them to get an extra bit of a push on. So you get involved in politics in a way. Normally you would say that you don't want to get involved in them but you have to; that's the game. (Interviewee#6)*

#### **4.9 The label of active citizenship**

There appears to be some resistance to the label of active citizenship. It is seen as a new, almost faddish term. It is not seen as a 'native' term, but rather it is viewed as

being imported from the US. Interviewees indicated that the activities that are now labelled as active citizenship had previously been called something else.

*I never was a great lover of the word because I think it was just a branding name. Like community development was before. And then it was just pure volunteers. So it's only words, I think, you know. (Interviewee#1)*

There also appears to be a lack of awareness and recognition of the concept among people who are actively engaged in their community. One interviewee recounts a trip abroad where community activists went to learn about active citizenship. They found that they had long been engaged in these activities but just had not applied the label of active citizenship. This interviewee highlights the 'naturalness' or everydayness of unlabeled active citizenship in people's lives.

*And I could not believe that we had been working in, you know, doing active citizenship in (name of area) a lot, lot longer than these people. What we were learning off these people, I walked away and I said, 'Sure, we've been doing this for 20 years.'*

*We just hadn't got the label of active citizenship.*

*And that was exactly, and more. And more. And so many more people, but they hadn't got a piece of paper in their hand to say, 'I'm doing active citizenship.' It was a way of life – and still is for a lot of people. They wake up in the morning and then they get dressed, and they come out of their homes, and they're doing it every day of the week. (Interviewee#2)*

#### **4.10 Rewards of active citizenship**

Active citizenship is spoken about as an intrinsically rewarding activity. Those who are in paid employment still view their activism as a hobby and as something that they cannot imagine their life without.

*Don't know what I would have done with my life if I hadn't have gone down that road. That's been very rewarding. I mean people say, 'God, how did you?' I say, 'Well, it's my saving grace as well in a sense of, you know, I got as much out of it as I gave, you know.'*

*And it's a nice way to feel, I mean after all these years, I still feel I still want to continue, you know. (Interviewee#1)*

*Getting involved in the active citizenship and why you get involved in it is, I like it anyway. It's like a hobby to me, in ways, but I do like it. (Interviewee#6)*

Several active citizens spoke about getting high levels of personal satisfaction from various aspects of their active citizen role, such as seeing young people securing a college place.

*So I mean that's where I get my enjoyment from. My enjoyment is to see the smile on these young people's faces. And my biggest achievement is when I see them placed in jobs or placed back in college, and you know, I suppose when I see that happening, that to me is active citizenship. (Interviewee#2)*

*So the one thing that gives me a thrill, when people come here or groups come here, is when you walk into this building you feel the buzz. (Interviewee#3)*

#### **4.11 New breed of active citizens**

Many long-term activists differentiated themselves from the new generation of active citizens in the community. They believe that becoming an active citizen is far more structured, organised and mapped out than it was previously. A body of knowledge on 'how to do things' has been built up, that the new generation of community activists can tap into and avail of. They do not have to learn how to be active in an ad-hoc manner in the way that previous generations of active citizens had to endure.



*The next generation of active citizens won't be voluntary workers. They will be paid workers who are highly-skilled and professional and they will do things differently. We had to learn on the hoof. They are learning by example and by being skilled; they will know. We had to learn as we went along. (Interviewee#3)*

As there are now established career paths in community activism, new active citizens view their role in a professional sense rather than in a voluntary capacity. Along with this professionalisation of the sector comes the requirement of formal qualifications.

*I mean when I started first, I mean people just, you know, did it because they volunteer to do things within their community. And then all of a sudden, people started to want to do it as a job. So that's when the whole piece of paper business came in. That people start realising, 'Well, if I have that down on paper now and it's worth' which is great. I mean it's good for people. (Interviewee#1)*

This formalisation of the sector is not necessarily interpreted as a negative feature; rather it is seen as allowing people to be assigned to their most suitable role to maximise their potential.

*But now I would say, like, community development workers will be different now. They will have a plan and it will be more organised, delegation being, you are delegated to work with that group and you are delegated to work with that group, you know.*

*A more formal response.*

*A more structured response to needs.*

*It was so informal; everything was so informal. You wouldn't be putting a square peg into a round hole now. You would say, 'The square peg goes in that corner and the round one goes in there,' you know. Then you can establish the different skills people have. You can recognise the skills though, whether there is an organisation or whether it's a people person.*

*Yeah, well we had to fit in everything, square, round, triangular, you name it, we had to squeeze ourselves in. I don't know what shape I came out as! (Interviewee#3)*

Some view the fact that active citizens are increasingly being paid as a negative trend. They fear that the motivation of paid active citizens may not be as heartfelt as pure volunteerism. Furthermore, there were fears that these active citizens may disappear if funding runs out.

*But for people who want to go on to do it as a job, I mean I think that's fine. But I think it's slightly different and I think that when it's coming from the heart, it's a bit different. (Interviewee#1)*

*I've often said, like, the voluntary worker is an endangered species, you know. And if you take it out, and, like, the government, kind of, suddenly puts a block on the funding, like, it'd be interesting to see how many of these people are still around, you know. (Interviewee#4)*

There was also concern expressed about the lack of young people becoming involved in the community and the lack of promotion of the next generation of active citizens.

*You have a good few people who keep the whole thing running, but they're getting older now – they keep telling me they can't go on forever. (Focus group#2)*

In response to this issue a Youth Forum has been established. Yet, there is still a need to try and attract the 'hard-to-reach' cohort of young people.

*One of the problems that we all surfaced 3-4 years ago at the National Conference Docklands meeting was that we have good active citizens now but that we're not training the community activists of the future. We have lots of them now, but are not bringing them through for the future. We suggested a Youth Forum – and the Docklands listened and started the Youth Forum and each year the Docklands Local YF comes*

*and addresses the forum and they are really good and confident. But the issue is how do you get the hard cases involved – how do you break into the kids like the ones we have. (Interviewee#20)*

One participant noted that there are no young people on any of the committees that he is involved with. However, he then proposed that there is possibly an age-related pattern. Individuals are not invited onto committees until they have demonstrated through years of service that they are dedicated active citizens.

*I am just looking at some of the committees that I am on at the moment. There's no one under 50 on any of the committees I am on. So that's a problem. But a lot of younger kids don't want to get involved. They don't want the hassle of, you know, getting involved. Although when you think about it I suppose it evolves over time that ...*

*So maybe there is a kind of a progression that you start off doing something like that you like and then someone comes along and says, 'Listen will you get involved in a training workshop?' or 'Will you get involved with the housing project?' So maybe it does evolve in ways that you have to come to a certain age before you get involved with something, the next bit, do you know what I mean?*

*But yeah now that I'm thinking of it, a lot of the groups involved in the football would be the under fifties. So yeah there is probably a transition period that you go through that you evolve up the line or something like that. But yeah, yeah, now that I think of it, it's not that bad, it's not that bad. (Interviewee#6)*

#### **4.12 Barriers to getting involved**

A number of key barriers to becoming involved in community activism were identified. One of these is the issue of time. People do not appear to have the same amount of time to dedicate to the community as they had in the past.

*My view of that is that in any community, particularly a community with a lot of problems, the people who have the time and the energy and the interest to be active volunteers is very, very small as a proportion of the population. Well, maybe, I don't know, you'd be only guessing, but it's very small. Some people like to be active and some people, you know, have no interest in that, and that's the world we live in.*  
(Interviewee#5)

*But trying to attract people to give up time in the evening, it's quite difficult now because people are working themselves during the day. They pick up their kids from childcare or they're minding or they might have a little night job or something like that.*  
(Interviewee#14)

Older people were viewed as excellent volunteers as they would have the spare time.

*Across the board, people are so caught up now with trying to survive, you know what I mean. And especially at these times, it's older people now. In some senses, older people are fabulous volunteers, you know – and they are great, and they have the time ... But the volunteer base and the commitment that people can give would not be as kind of strong as it would have been in the eighties.* (Interviewee#14)

Another barrier is people's perception of whether their efforts actually make a difference in their community.

*People need to think there'll be results ... and to feel that 'Well, I've been going to all these meetings and nothing may happen or the opposite to what I wanted', you know.*  
(Interviewee#13)

Certain anecdotes can discourage people from becoming involved in their community. For instance, it is perceived that becoming an active citizen can sometimes lead to negative personal consequences such as intimidation.

*The people who got beaten up because they took on drug addicts, you know, not drug addicts, sorry, pushers. You know, who took on criminals or took on guys involved in anti-social behaviour, what happened to them. That fear of things, all that fear that can come with it. (Interviewee#13)*

#### **4.13 Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrated how learning for active citizenship typically occurs in the private, domestic sphere. It was found that the process of becoming an active citizen does not involve a conscious decision to become active; rather people get drawn in by family encouragement, by becoming a parent or by a critical event in their community. Family relatives were seen as both active encouragers and inspiring role models for becoming involved in the community. Many active citizens indicated that they have been involved in their neighbourhood since a very early age. Others, especially the female activists who were consulted, spoke about how when they became mothers they were either 'roped' into child-based community activities via their own children or they proactively became involved in their area so as to develop facilities for their children.

Critical incidents in individual's locality were also seen as spurs that motivated people to become actively involved. These events typically resulted in groups of community members mobilising together in pursuit of a common goal. A large amount of contextual learning was said to have occurred for individuals during these initial campaigns. As individuals become more involved in their local area, they began to be seen as people who can get things done and so they continued to be invited into various projects and committees.

The findings also highlighted the collective nature of learning, as active citizens recounted how they learned from others. There appear to be a cohort of highly-committed active citizens who tend to be most active in certain areas. This was viewed as negative by some participants. Developing ways of encouraging young active citizens is a way of tackling this. Learning how to play the 'political game' was seen as a key skill by long-term active citizens. It was indicated that it takes a large amount of

experience to learn how to negotiate strategically, without compromising on the community's core principles.

A number of other issues in relation to active citizenship emerged from the data. There appears to be a dislike of the label 'active citizenship'. It is seen as an imported, 'faddish' term. Engaging in active citizenship was seen as an intrinsically rewarding activity. Even those who are in paid employment in the community view their work as a highly satisfying hobby. Concern was expressed about the need to encourage the next generation of active citizens in the Docklands. The current context for new activists was seen as contrasting sharply with the past. The sector is seen as being more formalised, with qualifications almost mandatory. However, the sector has also developed a store of established knowledge and expertise. Several barriers to getting people involved in the community were described, such as people's lack of free time.

## 5. Learning for active citizenship in non-formal educational settings

### 5.1 Introduction

This section deals with learning for active citizenship in non-formal educational settings (i.e. adult education courses). Analyses of the views of active citizenship students are presented. Inputs from adult education co-ordinators based in community education centres are also considered. The findings are discussed under six key thematic headings. Each theme features representative quotations from a variety of participants.

### 5.2 Nothing to do with school

The essential characteristics of an active citizen are seen as something that cannot be learned in educational settings. These characteristics are the result of innate traits, as well as experiences of engaging 'on the ground' in the community with real issues. Whereas aspects of active citizenship can be learnt in a classroom, life experience and a certain personality were viewed as key to the creation of an active citizen.

*I don't care about bits of paper. I care about having that caring nature and that empathy for the issues that affect the community and they can go and learn the rest.*

*(Interviewee#3)*

Formal education in active citizenship is repeatedly referred to as 'bits of paper'. These formal qualifications are recognised as being part of the contemporary route into community activism. However, the most significant aspects of active citizenship are learnt, not from theories, but from interacting with the community.

*That's active citizenship, you know, to me, at its best. It's not about the bit of paper that you have in your hand. It's not about going to college. It's about working on the ground, giving something back to your community. (Interviewee#2)*

In the past, community activists did not take courses. They built up their own curriculum by witnessing community issues and activities.

*I don't know if I could sit an exam in the community department in (name of university) and pass it, but it's not of particular concern to me. Most of what I know about the work, I've learned through experience. (Interviewee#5)*

Long-serving active citizens encourage and support the younger generation to partake in taught courses. This community worker spoke of how her line manager suggested that she undertake a certificate in active citizenship.

*My manager, who's very active herself, would have recommended so many different people over the time to go for it. And she came to me and said, 'Look, you know, I think this would be a good one.' (Interviewee#8)*

Lack of high levels of educational attainment can be a barrier for local Docklanders seeking employment in the active citizenship arena.

*A lot of the people who work in those community organisations don't live here, and that's partly imposed upon us by government regulations about various programmes, the level of qualifications required and all that. And if you're talking about anything above the Leaving Cert, well, there ain't no candidates really around in the poorer areas, you know, in the flats complexes, very, very few. It's rare for anybody to go to university, for instance. That's slowly changing. (Interviewee#5)*

### **5.3 Learning methods**

New active citizens, who have completed a course in active citizenship at the National College of Ireland, spoke of the benefits of the class group. A group environment facilitates learning from each others' insights and experiences.

*Then you kind of got to talk to the people in the course itself, and like they were fascinating, and they had fascinating stories and they had issues, but I didn't even, things that didn't even come into my head, you know. And their different approach. Like*



*we learned so much from each other, it was unreal, the amount of information that was shared in the room. And the amount of, the different ways that people learned. I think that was the thing that struck me so much, that everybody had their own different way of approaching the same subjects, but I wouldn't come up with half the ideas that they did. (Interviewee#8)*

Learners indicated how community education was very different from their formal schooling experiences. They found that the environment and learning process was far more inclusive, non-threatening and engaging. For example, participating in group discussions was highlighted as a very appealing teaching method. This approach to learning gradually builds the self-esteem of students.

*It's a lot more fun. A lot more less boring. Like if you're sitting there just listening, you just go asleep. If you're participating and you're giving your opinion and all and listening to what other people have to say, trying to get more into it, you learn more, don't you really? Like, than constantly just sitting there. (Focus group#1)*

*This approach builds self-esteem while keeping people in their comfort area. Normal teaching methods scare people. (Interviewee#20)*

A facilitative approach is seen as essential to teaching active citizenship. Students are enabled to play an active role in their learning by being central to the design and implementation of the course.

*So but the way of working that would kind of underpin both approaches would be very much around a facilitative style, drawing on sort of the life experience of kind of learners, encouraging them to be kind of actively involved in sort of some of the delivery.*

*So we do a lot of kind of peer learning as part of the, as I said, the classroom setting, so group work, discussions, all of that are very much part and parcel of how we kind of facilitate learning.*

*That it's not just sort of somebody at the top of the room. I mean we would probably hope that if you went into one of our rooms, you'd be kind of thinking, 'Who is the tutor here?' You know. (Interviewee#19)*

Students felt that they were more active in their learning as they were not 'spoon-fed' but rather self-directed learning prevailed. This led to self-exploration.

*And it wasn't, it's not something that somebody can put up on a blackboard and say, 'Right, this is the formula and this is how this works and that works.' It just, I don't know, it just happened – with the stuff that we were given.*

*Because you had to go and discover it for yourself there was a lot of self-discovery in what we did.*

*You know, and you have to do an awful lot of thinking. Like you weren't spoon-fed, and I thought we would be. I thought we would be given the information.*

*You didn't get given the information. We were given the opportunity to go out and find it, but you were given direction. (Interviewee#8)*

One of the community centre co-ordinators spoke of the innovative methods being used with youth groups to encourage active citizenship in the area. Discussions encouraging critical reflection are a core element of this process. They chose tangible topics that are applicable to young people's everyday lives such as gender or conflict resolution. They also co-ordinate international trips which are very successful at activating young people's political interests. Promoting critical reflection is a pivotal part of this process. This is continuously facilitated through group discussions as well as attendance at protests and seminars.

*But yeah, it is a lot about, that's a very obvious reason of us getting young people more active and politicised, but we do a lot of dev. ed. work, developmental education in all our groups. It's kind of a theme that we've to run, that we run with. Generally, we pick something, be it poverty or gender and different issues like that, and that's what we constantly bring up with the young people. Like gender is a very, very tangible one, particularly because there's so much pressure on girls in particular to look a certain way, to have their hair straightened and bleached, and to be a certain size and wear certain clothes and so there's huge pressures around that. And that's something that we, on an ongoing basis, work with on girls' groups and discussions we have with lads as well. (Interviewee#17)*

*And so, and conflict resolution, in particular, So we set about setting up a group. And I was looking at targeting young people who were experiencing conflict in their own lives, via family or you know, different neighbourhood conflicts and you know, because this is an area where there is a lot of violence. There is a lot of, you know, there's drugs, there's guns. There's all this. They see it all the time. So we worked with them, and we did stuff around like conflict and then about the North/South issue and we did a trip up North and ... (Interviewee#17)*

*And then other times, we would sit down and just kind of discuss what we'd seen and there was lots of debates and discussions. And it was quite interesting. And the young people wrote. They wrote different, some of them wrote articles for like local magazines and papers and then we, they also attended, there were some things that I just told them about that were on. (Interviewee#17)*

*But what's the most important thing, I think, is and the international trips are good and definitely they challenge the young people a lot, but I think what has to go hand in hand is that there's kind of a critical thinking – that there's a lot of discussions with the young people over why these problems are. (Interviewee#17)*

*In how much they suddenly found this like a really interesting topic and began to understand the reality of what it must be like to live out there. So, and then also it kind*

*of, it linked in as well to the Lisbon Treaty, which was going on at the time because it was June. And there was a lot of discussion in here. The kids here actually can be quite politicised, more than I would ever have been in my youth. (Interviewee#17)*

Another method that was mentioned was the concept of peer-learning, whereby past students act as mentors for the current learners.

*We thought it would be really, it would be kind of a useful thing to do to harness some of that kind of knowledge and skill, so we developed a peer mentoring programme.*

*In other words, they've been there, done that, and who's, you know, who's having done that is a really vital sort of reference point for perhaps new learners because they can readily connect with them and say, 'Look, yeah, I know what that struggle is.'*  
(Interviewee#19)

Making learning relevant to students' daily lives is seen as paramount. The application of learning to real life scenarios ensures that learners are more engaged in the course. It also is key to bringing their understanding from a theoretical, abstract level to a grounded, real world context.

*So again, it's trying to connect, I suppose, again, with sort of the ways of, you know, engagement that people have as well. You know, people are interested in film and television and so on.*

*– kind of tapping into those pieces as well. Yeah. I mean we're currently, again, one of the things we're looking at as part of it, we're looking at some social issues that are confronting people. You know, and I mean for many, I mean the critical one or the key one is drugs, you know. So again, we will tailor the programmes. (Interviewee#19)*

*But one of the things that somebody said as part of our discussions when we were reflecting back on the programme, you know, which kind of I thought it was really, really strong is that learning is, she said, 'It's not just stuff you get out of books.' And that was*

*their experience from the programme. We brought in very sort of real scenarios for people to work through and figure out and see, you know, 'What do you think of this?' So we would use a range of kind of different sort of sources. (Interviewee#19)*

It is essential that the community feel ownership of the courses that are run in their locality. They must be viewed as integral to the design and delivery of the courses. These courses also need to be seen as relevant by the community they are serving. A number of the tutors on these courses are past pupils from the locality. As well as acting as positive role models, this further fosters community involvement.

*So the programme has gained kind of or has been, I suppose, a credibility within the community, that people like what they see and want to be part of. And that's kind of important for us because community ownership of the programme is for us a key kind of quality or a key aspect of community education, that the community very much feel it's their programme. And that they have a say and an input into what goes on, what they can learn, you know, and how that learning is sort of facilitated. (Interviewee#19)*

*Actually, one of our tutors, she does maths and computers, had herself been a participant on an earlier programme. So I guess we're kind of again, it's kind of showing and kind of harnessing the potential that is in the community. And she's a powerful role model. (Interviewee#19)*

#### **5.4 Difficulties of course**

This section deals with the obstacles and challenges which students of active citizenship courses often encounter.

A major difficulty, especially for women students, is balancing coursework and class time requirements with childcare and household demands. Participants expressed this as a time management issue.

*It's just more time-consuming and more head-wrecking a bit when you haven't got the time. You haven't got stuff organised. If you have kids in school, you have to get them minded or they're rushing here and there. Trying to sort everything out before. And juggling that with finance and deadlines and everything like ... You're trying to do that, trying to bring your coursework home then – trying to get an hour then – You know? It's a bit hard, isn't it? Trying to get an hour at home. (Focus group#1)*

Another challenge was students' previous negative experiences in the formal educational system. This resulted in high levels of anxiety about assignments and a lack of confidence in their own ability.

*I mean, I found it difficult. I'm not saying I didn't find it difficult. I didn't still find it – I think it brought back, I had problems in school. Not that I didn't learn, I just had the one teacher for six years, and I didn't have a good relationship with her. So, from, kind of, first class till I left the primary school. Yeah, it's a long time. So I was apprehensive, even, about coming back to start anything. (Interviewee#11)*

A large number of participants indicated that they did not fully understand the concept of active citizenship when they began the course, even though they had attended introductory sessions.

*Because I actually feel a lot of people didn't know what they were getting involved in, and I don't know how you get over that, or how you explain to people what it is. It's very difficult to explain to somebody what active citizenship is, but I don't think the first night or the explanation night gave people enough information for them to work on. (Interviewee#8)*

They found that this was initially quite an obstacle in the course as the first few sessions were difficult to comprehend. After this time, however, they began to appreciate the construct of active citizenship.

*And I went to the opening night then and there was ... They were speaking about active citizenship. I hadn't got a clue what that even meant. I knew the active bit and citizen of course, but you know? Together like what do you do and what's involved in this and all. So the very first couple of nights I did find it very hard to break it down and to do the work and then when I sort of got into it then because I started off with one little story about my daughter in the youth club and that sort of made me get more determined to get into it because it was a personal interest. (Interviewee#10)*

Some participants stated that this confusion is due to the 'newness' of the term.

*I don't know if I fully understood what it was about, do you know. I suppose when you say active citizenship, it doesn't have a tradition here. (Interviewee#9)*

Others argued that it is not possible to understand the concept by 'talking' but rather by 'doing'.

*But as it turned out then, while we were in the throes of it, it became very clear what we were doing. (Interviewee#8)*

## **5.5 Extra support for students**

Extra support for learners is a key ingredient of community-based courses which are trying to motivate active citizens.

These courses are learner-centred. This means that they are tailored to suit individuals and do not have a prescriptive, preconceived content.

*People come to participate in our programmes on the basis of the needs they have themselves, as opposed to us offering a very prescriptive programme that says, 'This is what it's going to be.' We very much work along the lines of what our learners want of us. What are the things that are most useful and most relevant for them to know and to find out about? (Interviewee#19)*

The tutors on these courses are seen as playing a pivotal role in supporting the learners. They are not viewed as merely 'traditional' teachers who disseminate information and knowledge. Rather, they maintain high levels of communication with the learners so as to become aware of students' issues as they occur.

*So the tutor who would be running that programme would have to do all that. She wouldn't just be the tutor teaching the classes.*

*But her job would be to make sure the girls were not getting out of their depth, that the course wasn't running away from them, that they were kept in, you know, that they were attending every day. And whatever problems come up around that, she would liaise with me around the childcare needs of the participants. (Interviewee#18)*

If certain learners having particular needs arrangements are made to accommodate them. This is contrasted with the typical college experience where large classes prevent tutors from being able to maintain such a high level of support for their students.

*Maybe they wouldn't get that in a college situation, where the tutor might have 50 students coming in for an hour and then they go, and another 50 come in, do you know? So it'd be more hands on, the way we work it – community education aimed at the community and based in the community. (Interviewee#18)*

Tutors are very aware of learners' prior negative experiences of school, as well as current difficulties that they may have in their lives. For example, some learners may not have a quiet study space available at home. Some community centres would provide the necessary facilities for their students to overcome this obstacle.

*Usually, the people who come here looking for help would be people who are educationally challenged and would have maybe left school early. Or dropped out of*



*school for whatever reason. You know, and the reasons could be that they had a baby early or could be that they got involved with drink or drugs and just fell out.*

*You know, and just got lost in the system. And we would try our best then to put them back on the road. (Interviewee#18)*

*Well, that's it. Like we've often had girls here who maybe have two children and they're living in their mother's house. And their mother would have children a little bit, just a little bit older than theirs, and they're kind of sharing rooms with their siblings and homework; they can't do it there. And they're, they can't even keep their bags there because the younger kids get into them and took the paper and the pens and all. So all those kind of things at the project, we would have to factor into any course that we're delivering.*

*You know that girls don't always have their own bedroom, their own little place to keep their stuff. Their own computer to do their work on. They might need that kind of support, so we have to be able to offer it. It's no good offering a course and saying, 'Oh yeah, you can all come and do this course. It'll be great and you will have great fun.'*

*And not putting the basics there to help them to actually achieve it. You know, so we've always kind of looked into the background. (Interviewee#18)*

## **5.6 Learn tools of the trade**

This theme deals with the recurring point that participants made in relation to the usefulness of completing a course in active citizenship. They stated that such a course provided them with the 'tools', skills and 'know how' to more fully engage in active citizenship.

*I feel much better equipped. And the placements were key to it. They were such good placements, and they were such good people. So, yeah, I found the course extremely useful. (Interviewee#13)*

New active citizens indicated that completing an active citizenship course provided them with the language or 'lingo' to engage with various agencies.

*I've never really, I suppose, not had the confidence to talk to people about stuff, but on the other hand, it's good to know the terms and the procedures for actually if you need to get a campaign together, or if you need to talk to somebody up in an office somewhere about such and such a thing, you know how to do it. (Interviewee#9)*

They indicated that the courses provided the theoretical frameworks and labels to apply to the issues they had previously encountered 'on the ground' in the community. They felt that this was a valuable learning experience.

*Then it began when we came to the college, when he (the teacher) started to ... we had done, actually, a lot of what he had said. What he was teaching us. But we hadn't got in the same perspective as he was coming from. You know what I mean?*

*Although you do it in a different way, it's like you're making a cup of tea and I can make it, but a chef will come in and he'll tell you, 'No, this is the right way to do it.' It's the same thing in the end.*

*You had done a lot of it before. You didn't have, actually, you hadn't – but you hadn't actually a word to describe it. (Interviewee#11)*

## **5.7 Empowerment**

This theme had a greater amount of data coded than any other in the project. This reflects the significance of this issue. Both students and educational co-ordinators repeatedly spoke about how learning about active citizenship fosters a sense of empowerment. For instance, it makes people aware of their rights and entitlements.

*I'm active now. Nobody will walk on me any more.*

*We didn't realise at the time until we done this course, the active citizenship course, how many doors are opened up for us as a person living in a community. As a person living in the inner city. (Interviewee#7)*

It also develops their feelings of self-confidence and self-efficacy.

*I was like a little bulb and I was starting to flower. You know, I just opened up a little bit. And then some more. I was getting active and going out and I was opening up a bit more and the confidence and self-esteem was building and growing inside me then. And there was no stopping me now, you know? (Interviewee#10)*

Studying active citizenship results in learners being more critical of the world around them, in particular messages from the media.

*In everyday life, really, you know. Even if you're, you become more objective about things rather than tunnel vision, you're just, you're more, you get the bigger picture. Before, you kind of, even listening to the radio, before you'd be listening, and you'd say, you know, you just take it the way it sounds without ...*

*Yeah, you wouldn't question the bigger picture. You'd take it factual, what you were hearing. (Interviewee#11)*

*I mean it's certainly, we want, we would hope that people would come away with a much more critical view of the world around them. Right? And from that point of view, you know, be able to, I suppose, examine things in a kind of a much more objective kind of way. I mean we live in the age of the sound bite, where kind of things are just kind of thrown at us, you know, to sort of to take, without any real kind of attempt to kind of say, 'Well, what's behind all of this?' So part of what we would want and try to encourage within all our participants would be that kind of ability to sort of stand back, look at stuff. You know, see what its significance is. You know, be able to sort of, I suppose, unpick*

*the ideas that are being kind of thrown out there, and see what they make of them.*  
(Interviewee#19)

Course co-ordinators highlighted the need to examine and explore active citizenship in the private sphere.

*So when we look at kind of activation, we are conscious of it, not just because typically, it's seen in terms of it being something that's about participation in the labour market. It has that particular slant, but it has an economic, primarily an economic focus. And we would see that that's one aspect, one dimension of people's lives. There are other aspects that people also need to be supported to be able to kind of take control. Right? And say, this is where sometimes the discussion say on citizenship tends to focus primarily on the public sphere, as opposed to the private sphere. For us, the role of family life, the role of parents and so on is absolutely crucial in terms of nurturing and encouraging sort of the next generation. Right? That it's something that it needs to be kind of an ongoing process and is highly valued in our terms, from our point of view.*  
(Interviewee#19)

The following example clearly demonstrates the impact that active citizenship courses can have on interpersonal relationships in the home.

*I was sitting there and I looked over and my heart was, oh it was nearly broken, Marianne. She was just like a little orphan, God bless her. And I said, '(name of child) love, are you okay?' 'Oh I'm okay, Mammy.' I said, 'What's wrong? I can see there's something bothering you inside there.' I said, 'Speak to mammy and if I can help you I will. If I can't', I said, 'we can go to somebody that will help.' Because usually I wouldn't have asked these things or said these things to her but because of going through active citizenship I said, 'Why not? I could do it now.'* (Interviewee#10)

Many active citizenship students mentioned the project that they undertook as part of their course. These projects dealt with a particular issue in their locality that was

impacting upon them. They frequently recounted the euphoria they experienced when they realised that they have the power to impact upon and change their community.

*And I remember taking my little notepad and my little pen and I walked into the building site because I was ringing places, umpteen places, to find out information and nobody was giving me any feedback whatsoever. So I took it upon myself to be a positive individual and get in there and be active and find the information for yourself. And actually I found doing the research, research was very interesting. I enjoyed it as well.*

*So I actually got my notebook and pen and I walked in and I asked the gentleman that was minding, the security guard minding the apartments and he gave me some information. And I asked him for the name of the person that was you know, who was building the apartment etc. as well and ... So I actually went around my home town and I knocked in to the neighbour and she told me her husband or nephews should I say, his brothers, they were working in the place as well. So I went over and I got some information off them as well.*

*And when they were coming in to be built then I went over to that neighbour and I asked him what they were like and what was being put inside, etc.*

*Then I went down to the TD. I remember, this was very funny because the tutor, he found this hilarious. I was standing at the bus stop across the road from where the TD, our local TD does be. I kept looking over and looking over and there was no sign of the door being opened.*

*And I was waiting at the bus stop looking to my right, and there was no sign of the bus. So as soon as I looked again to the left, I could see the big fancy car pulling up with the TD. Well I said to me daughter (name of child), I said, 'Wait there love,' and I ran across the road. I went over. I had a list of paper for him with how many apartments were going to be built, how many was going to be given to the Social, who was going to be in the run of them, who will have the priority of giving them out and taking them back private to*

*social assessor. And I ran over to him and his little understudy was with him, his right-hand-side man. I don't know what you call him.*

*And the bus was coming, as I was just about to reach the two of them. Me daughter was screaming, 'Mammy the bus.' 'This won't take one second, so hold that bus.' So the bus was sitting there waiting for me. Smiley as we call him, he knows me; he was waving. I said, 'One moment.' So I said to the TD, I said, 'Now you told me that you had no information about any of these places that they allocate people. So I've done your work for you. I've done the research.' I said, 'Here's a list of the people, the owner, etc. The (name of organisation) is going to be dealing with them. How many is going to be given out, the percentage for Social, the percentage for private.' And the right-hand-side man turned around and he looks at me and says, 'You've actually done his work for him?' I started laughing. I said, 'Well he had no information. He had no feedback.' I said, 'I've done the work and the research. Now you go fight for me please.' So that was the start. That was the beginning. I actually felt good in myself. You know, I thought I was making use of myself.*

*And then when I found out that I could do the likes of this, oh there was no stopping me after that then. I was running up to the (name of organisation) after that, and I was dashing here and dashing there. I thought I was invincible like. I was able ... I thought I had the power. I can do this. (Interviewee#10)*

## **5.8 Conclusion**

This chapter presented findings on adult education courses aimed at promoting active citizenship among its learners in Dublin's Docklands. It was suggested that active citizenship is not something that can be learnt entirely in a classroom setting. Courses were recognised as playing a valuable but limited role in equipping people with the necessary 'tools' of the trade (e.g. 'lingo' or language of community activism). It was felt that the best way to learn is from 'on the ground' experience in the community. Completing such courses empowered individuals in a range of ways. It enhanced people's feelings of self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-esteem. The experience of partaking in these courses also made learners more critical and reflective of the world around them. In addition, the students began to see themselves as being able to

successfully and pro-actively tackle issues in their community that were impacting on them personally. Some students on these courses had previous negative experiences in formal educational settings. Therefore, the learning methods employed were more inclusive and participative. They were designed to be more engaging and relevant to the learner's daily lives. It was widely recognised that some learners may face a number of obstacles such as childcare demands, literacy issues and their own personal problems. Consequently, various extra supports for students are put in place in the community educational centres to address these challenges.

## 6. Conclusions

### 6.1 Introduction

This study addresses the dearth of research exploring how people learn active citizenship (Kane, 2007). In particular, it investigated how locals in Dublin's Docklands are learning active citizenship. The other research objective of this study was to examine the educational interventions for active citizenship which are currently in place in Dublin's Docklands. Specifically, this project explored findings from the cross-cultural ETGACE (Education & Training for Governance & Active Citizenship) study in an Irish context.

The ETGACE (2003) study examined how adults learned to be active citizens and also what educational methods are most effective for learning active citizenship. Although it has been recognised that education plays a key role in the promotion of active citizenship, it is the formal learning contexts (i.e. learning that takes place in the school system) and the non-formal learning contexts (i.e. organised learning outside the formal learning system) that are typically emphasised. The ETGACE study found that formal education teaches people how to be 'good' rather than 'active' citizens. The ETGACE authors also emphasised the neglect of the informal route of learning active citizenship. The ETGACE project asserted that the learning of attitudes, skills and behaviours of active citizenship is deeply embedded in social contexts, in particular the home and local community.

The findings of the present study clearly mirror the conclusions of the ETGACE project. Therefore, this paper answered the first research question by discussing the various influences and social contexts in which Dublin Dockland's residents informally learned how to be active citizens. The second research objective was also achieved as the findings identified and explored the different aspects of education for active citizenship in the Docklands area.



## **6.2 Informal learning of active citizenship (Research question one)**

As outlined in the literature review, there is a lack of research investigating the educational influences that result in people becoming active citizens. In particular, the informal learning of active citizenship has been neglected. Eraut (1999) stated that informal learning is grossly underestimated due to the taken-for-granted and embedded nature of this learning. The NALL (New Approaches to Lifelong Learning, 1998) national survey from Canada found that community-related informal learning activities include communication skills, social issues and fundraising (Livingstone, 2006).

In answer to research question one, this study underlined the crucial role that informal learning plays in creating active citizens. Similar to the ETGACE findings (Van der Veen and Holford, 2005), early life experiences in the home and in the community were found to have been key factors in forming active citizens. Parents acted as role models. Also, exposure to poverty in their local community motivated participants to become active. The ETGACE (2003) researchers asserted that the lack of attention and recognition of the significant role of the private, domestic sphere in creating the next generation of active citizens effectively discriminates against women.

Informal education is both incidental and spontaneous, with mentors taking responsibility for guiding learners in acquiring 'real-world' skills (Livingstone, 2006). Social learning theorists such as Vygotsky, Dewey and Bandura have stressed that learning cannot be separated from the social context in which it occurs (Schugurensky, 2006). Similarly, the situated learning perspective underlines that the social organisation of the communities in which people learn are highly influential (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002).

The present study found that not only was the home environment key to cultivating active citizenship among children but also that becoming a mother resulted in women becoming involved in their community. Mothers were drawn into various activities through their children's participation in school. Other women proactively sought out organisations to become involved in as they wanted to develop facilities for their

children. Thus, this project addresses the first research question by highlighting the significant role of informal learning for active citizenship in Dublin's Docklands.

### **6.3 Contextual learning of active citizenship (Research question one)**

This section of the conclusions also attends to research question one. Critical incidents in people's community were another route into active citizenship. These events typically resulted in groups of community members mobilising together in pursuit of a common goal. Dublin in the 1970s and 1980s was characterised by community-development projects addressing the problems associated with high unemployment, educational disadvantage, lack of public services, uneven urban development and irresponsible planning (MacLaren, Clayton and Brudell, 2007; Acheson, Harvey, Kearney and Williamson, 2004). A large amount of contextual, incidental learning occurred during these campaigns.

This finding is supported by theories of learning (Schugurensky, 2006; Foley, 1999; Freire, 1994; Jonassen, 1994). Indeed, the informal learning of social action occurs incidentally while engaging in authentic and realistic tasks (Foley, 1999; Jonassen, 1994; Freire, 1994). Dewey viewed education as being inextricably bound up with collective and democratic action. Educating for social change is a method of helping people to critically evaluate and understand their social worlds. It helps them imagine and create alternative social worlds (Greene, 2007; Lange, 2004).

This is also mirrored in the findings of the ETGACE (2003) study, as the researchers found that people learned incidentally by trying to solve a problem or fulfil a mission. Thus, learning is a consequence or by-product, rather than a goal. In a similar vein, it was found that as individuals become increasingly involved in their community in the Docklands, they begin to be seen as people who can get things done. As a result of this, they continue to be invited into various projects and committees. It has been noted that local community activism is a key feature of the contemporary Docklands, with a wide array of groups representing different issues (Moore, 2008). This finding ties into research question one.

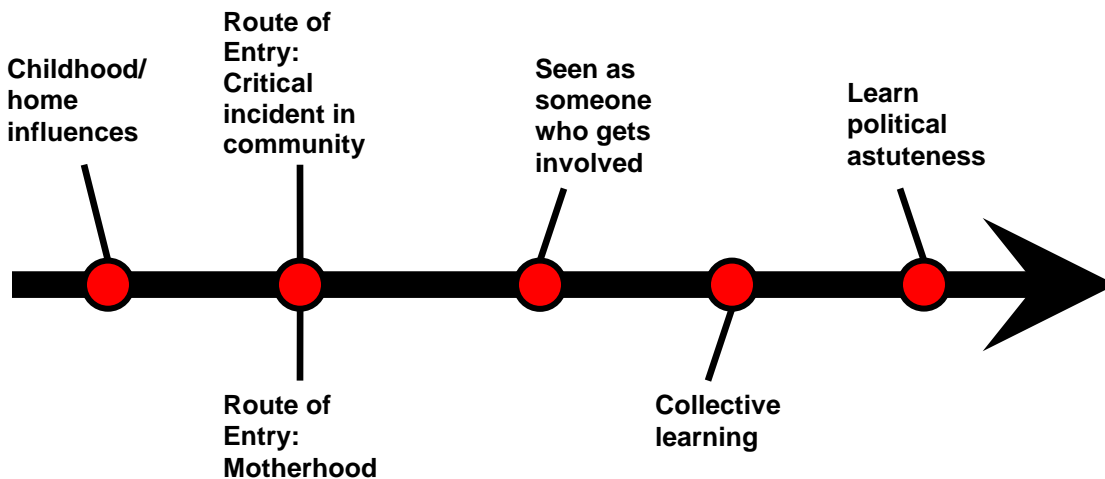
#### **6.4 Collective learning of active citizenship (Research question one)**

This section of the conclusions provides answers to research question one. The collective nature of learning was clearly evident as active citizens recounted how they learned from others. There appear to be a cohort of highly-committed active citizens who tend to be most active in certain areas. This was viewed as negative by some participants. Long-term activists recognised that the ideas of new active citizens need to be balanced with the expertise of the more experienced.

Becoming politically astute was seen as a crucial skill to acquire in order to function effectively as an active citizen. Building up a large amount of experience is required so as to know how to negotiate strategically. Viewing issues from other agencies' perspectives without compromising on the community's principles is also learnt through 'on the ground' experience in the community. The ETGACE (2003) study similarly concluded that learning is interactive and ongoing throughout the life course. This strand of the study's findings link into research question one.

#### **6.5 Mapping the process of learning active citizenship (Research question one)**

A map of the typical process of learning active citizenship was constructed from the life history case studies. This timeline conveys the concept of gradual progression into active citizenship. The findings emphasised the significance of early, childhood experiences in the home for cultivating active citizenship tendencies. Typically, a critical incident occurs in their local community that draws people into active citizenship. Becoming a mother is another route of entry into active citizenship that many participants identified. Eventually, the active citizen becomes known as 'someone who gets involved' and is recruited into other organisations and committees. At this stage collective learning occurs, with people learning from each other during differing events and activities. Active citizens also start to develop a level of political astuteness at this point. This process is illustrated in the figure below and so graphically addresses research question one.

**Figure [6.5.1] Process of learning active citizenship**

## 6.6 The concept of active citizenship

A range of other issues in relation to contemporary active citizenship emerged from the data. There appears to be a dislike of the label 'active citizenship'. It is seen as an imported, 'faddish' term. This may be due to the relatively recent emphasis on promoting active citizenship through strengthening social capital and enhancing citizen engagement in democracy. For example, a range of initiatives has been put in place to encourage citizen engagement, e.g. the Democracy Commission, the Democracy audit and the Taskforce on Active Citizenship (Harris, 2008). However, engaging in active citizenship was seen as an intrinsically rewarding activity.

Concern was expressed about the need to encourage the next generation of active citizens in the Docklands. Several barriers to getting people involved in the community were described. These included issues such as people's lack of free time and whether they feel their effort will make a real difference in their community.

### **6.7 Formalisation of active citizenship**

Ireland's entry into the European Community in 1973 had a profound effect on the community and voluntary sector. Not only did membership provide financial resources, it also led to professionalisation of the sector. This was because contributing to policy development and more strategic planning became compulsory (Warleigh-Lack, 2001). Given the increasing professionalisation of the sector (Acheson, Harvey, Kearney and Williamson, 2004), formal qualifications were seen as a necessary element of becoming an active citizen in today's climate.

It was indicated that unless local Docklanders pursue such qualifications, they will be unable to apply for jobs in their community in the future. This is due to the increase in regulations in recruitment. However, it was noted that a store of established knowledge and expertise has been developed in the community over the past few decades. This can be 'tapped into' by the new active citizens in the area. The ETGACE (2003) study concurs with this as it found that professionalisation of the community and voluntary sector has led to the emergence of 'professional activists', resulting in these organisations becoming more estranged from their 'grass-roots' origins.

### **6.8 Non-formal learning of active citizenship (Research question two)**

The study examined non-formal courses in Dublin's Docklands which are aimed at promoting active citizenship among its learners. This section of the conclusions attends to research question two. As outlined in the literature review, adult education and in particular community education was highly influential in the emergence of active citizenship in disadvantaged areas in Ireland (Finlay, 2007). Community education aims to enhance learning, empower people and contribute to society (Freire, 1994).

The findings suggested that active citizenship cannot be learnt exclusively in a classroom setting. Nevertheless, taught courses were recognised as playing a useful role in providing people with some of the skills necessary to be active (e.g. knowledge of the language and procedures of statutory bodies). Completing such courses empowered individuals in a range of ways. The courses enhanced people's feelings of

self-efficacy and self-esteem. They also increased learners' critical and reflective capacities about the world around them. As part of their action research project, students began to pro-actively tackle issues in their community that were impacting on their own lives. These findings tie in with the results of the original ETGACE (2003) project.

Courses and centres within the Docklands area appear to be adhering to notions of non-traditional means of teaching active citizenship, espoused by the ETGACE study. This is perhaps due to the community education background of these courses. Many participants on the Docklands courses had negative experiences during their formal schooling years. Therefore, the teaching methods used on these courses are more inclusive, participative and relevant to the learners' daily lives. For example, group discussions, learner input into the design of the course and dealing with tangible, real-world issues are techniques that are used. Course co-ordinators and tutors were very much aware that some learners may face a number of obstacles such as childcare demands, literacy issues and addiction. Various extra supports for students are put in place in the community educational centres to address these challenges. This concurs with Livingstone's (2006) conceptualisation of non-formal learning. Thus, these conclusions answer research question two.

## **6.9 Active citizenship and socio-economic status**

The only topic on which the findings of this study diverge with the ETGACE project is on the issue of social class. The European study indicated that active citizens tend to have higher educational qualifications than their peers. The authors were conscious that such a trend may result in citizenship becoming an area of 'elitism' and exclusion. This was in stark contrast to the findings of the present study. The active citizens from the Docklands who participated in this study did not appear to have high levels of education; rather they had built up their learning and expertise over the years. This was attained via experience and engaging in community activism. Indeed, the term 'piece of paper' was frequently used to denote educational qualifications. They were viewed as

peripheral to the core requirements of being an active citizen. Empathy and compassion for the community were seen as being key attributes.

This disparity of findings may be explained by the uniqueness of the Docklands community. Given its history as a socially and economically disadvantaged area, there is a low level of higher education participation but a high level of community activism tackling issues of exclusion (Moore, 2008; Williams and O'Connor, 2000). As mentioned in the literature review, 'grass-roots' campaigns were a key feature of inner-city communities during the 1970s and 1980s (MacLaren, Clayton and Brudell, 2007). Furthermore, the data collected from course co-ordinators underlined the negative experiences of formal education among learners on their courses. These influences may have affected the attitude to formal education that emerged from the data.

Another explanation for this disparity of findings is the narrow sampling frame used in the present study. Participants were drawn from one specific area of Dublin city centre, whereas the ETGACE sample was recruited from a variety of locations within six different countries. All the active citizens are drawn from the Dublin Docklands Development Authority's Community Liaison Council, whereas in the ETGACE study they were drawn from a range of organisations in each country. Similarly, there is a narrow profile to the 'becoming active citizens' sample, which comprises adult graduates of a course in active citizenship run by the National College of Ireland. Further studies should test the findings in a wide variety of Irish contexts, so as to glean a broader national perspective (i.e. rural areas and middle class urban areas). Thus, it seems appropriate to be cautious in relation to any conclusions on the role of formal education in fostering active citizenship.

### **6.10 The role of active citizenship in combating poverty**

The findings from this study demonstrate the link between active citizenship and combating poverty. It was found that it was often the social exclusion evident in the participants' social environment that was the key motivator for them becoming involved in active citizenship. However, the findings indicated that education often poses a

barrier for locals to enter community activism due to the increasing professionalisation of the sector. The particular critical events which drew the participants into active citizenship were anti-poverty in nature. A huge amount of contextual learning occurred during these social movements. Learning about the political culture and becoming politically astute was crucial for active citizens to combat poverty. Becoming skilled politically ensured that they could achieve objectives for their community through negotiations with the State and other powerful agencies.

Non-formal education for active citizenship results in the empowerment of students. It enables them to become more critical and reflective of the world around them. It also promotes awareness of the various agendas of the media and other power brokers in society. Consequently, it informs active citizens of the causes of inequalities in their social context. Indeed, the action research project element of the active citizenship course meant that learners were proactively tackling an issue in their community which was impacting on them personally. The extra supports for students (e.g. literacy support, study facilities ) that are provided by the various community education centres in the Docklands help the learners overcome obstacles created by poverty such as addiction and early school leaving. These courses also resulted in new active citizens 'learning the lingo' and the various 'tools of the trade' of community activism. This study has therefore underlined the positive impact that active citizenship has on the quality of life in local communities.

## **6.11 Conclusion**

This study has highlighted the pivotal role that informal, incidental and contextual learning plays in creating active citizenship. It was also found that current educational interventions in Dublin's Docklands are employing innovative, participative, non-formal learning methods. Therefore, both research objectives of this project were examined. This is the first time that the findings of the ETGACE study have been explored in an Irish context. In most cases, this study concurs with findings from the European project.



## Recommendations

### Informal learning of active citizenship

#### *Findings:*

- Early life experiences, in the home and in the community were found to have been key factors in forming active citizens. Parents acted as role models.
- Exposure to poverty in their local community motivated participants to become active.
- Becoming a mother resulted in women becoming involved in their community.

#### *Recommendations:*

1. Given the centrality of the home and the family in creating active citizenship, the government and educational agencies should **direct support and duly recognise the crucial role that parents play** in teaching active citizenship. For example, this could be achieved via the establishment of parent award schemes.
2. The findings indicate that mothers, as role-models, are a potential source of new active citizens, especially when their children begin pre-school or formal school. It is recommended that **all parents are encouraged to become active in their communities** through the various schools they are attached to.
3. More **research** funding should be directed at trying to understand the **processes of informal learning** for active citizenship.

## Contextual learning of active citizenship

### *Findings:*

- Critical incidents in people's community were another route into active citizenship.
- These events typically resulted in groups of community members mobilising together in pursuit of a common goal.
- A large amount of contextual, incidental learning occurred during these campaigns.

### *Recommendations:*

4. It is recommended that **reflective practice and action learning projects** are encouraged in community organisations, especially during **critical events**, to promote and capture the learning that is taking place.
5. Similarly, it appears that **during local critical incidents** new active citizens become mobilised. The **promotion of active citizenship** should be targeted at these potential active citizens for the community.

## Collective learning of active citizenship

### *Findings:*

- Learning for active citizenship is collective, interactive and ongoing throughout the life course.
- There appears to be a cohort of highly-committed active citizens who tend to be most active in certain areas. This was viewed as negative by some participants.
- Long-term activists recognised that the ideas of new active citizens need to be balanced with the expertise of the more experienced.

- Becoming politically astute was seen as a crucial skill to acquire in order to function effectively as an active citizen.

*Recommendations:*

6. **Mentoring schemes** should be developed, whereby a new recruit in a community organisation regularly spends time 'work shadowing' and learning from informal interactions with long-term active citizens.
7. The **sharing of experiences** of good practice among community activists should be encouraged **via seminars and regular brainstorming sessions**. Statutory resources should be targeted at this.
8. It is important to **make information about various organisations more readily available** in the community. **Regular open-days** could be set up in community centres where locals can see and talk to the range of groups operating in their area.

**Next generation of active citizens**

*Findings:*

- Concern was expressed about the need to encourage the next generation of active citizens in the Docklands.
- Certain youth groups are encouraging active citizenship in the area through international trips, workshops and reflective group discussions

*Recommendations:*

9. Organisations should also be resourced to **run recruitment drives** throughout the local community and in schools to encourage young people to become involved. Initiatives could include **introductory or 'taster' evening events**,

whereby people can get a flavour of the types of activities that the various organisations are engaged in. Information could also be distributed **via flyers, local newsletters and local radio.**

10. As a priority, the next generation of active citizens in the Docklands should be encouraged via the mechanisms suggested above.

11. Given the need to develop the next generation of active citizens in the area, it is paramount to continue to **provide support and resourcing for youth groups** that promote active citizenship.

### **Non-formal learning of active citizenship**

#### *Findings:*

- Taught courses were recognised as playing a useful role in providing people with some of the skills necessary to be active (e.g. knowledge of the language and procedures of statutory bodies).
- Completing such courses empowered individuals in a range of ways (e.g. enhancing learners' self-esteem and reflective capacities).
- Teaching methods used on these courses are more inclusive, participative and relevant to the daily lives of the learners (e.g. group discussions, learner input into the design of the course).

#### *Recommendations:*

12. Continue to provide **support, encouragement and resourcing for on-going community-based courses** that are activating citizenship in the Docklands. The learning methods that are employed are most suitable for encouraging the critical reflection and empowerment aspects of active citizenship.

13. Encourage the **sharing of best practice** among course providers through a number of initiatives. For instance, a **network of community education providers** could be established. **Seminars** could also be organised whereby international and national speakers will provide information on the latest developments in the sector.
14. It is important to ensure that the **content of taught courses is structured around experiential learning** and does not become over-formalised. In other words, courses should be skill-oriented rather than knowledge-oriented. In addition, it is crucial to ensure that courses are **based on people's experiences in practice**.
15. Learning citizenship is deeply embedded in social contexts. Thus, to be most effective, educational interventions need to focus on **enabling people to acquire active citizenship skills in context** rather than through formal instruction. For example, **action research projects** based in the learners' community or international trips for youth groups.
16. The link between community and schools should be strengthened. The formal educational sector should promote learning for active citizenship through **service learning in third level**, as well as through **transition year** and other applied projects at second level.

## References cited

Acheson, N., Harvey, B., Kearney, J. and Williamson, A. (2004) *Two Paths, One Purpose: Voluntary Action in Ireland, North and South*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

Alexander, J. (1998) *Real Civil Societies: Dilemmas of Institutionalisation*, London: Sage.

Andersson, E., Warburton, D. and Wilson, R. (2005) *The True Costs of Public Participation*, London: Home Office Civil Renewal Research Programme.

Atkinson, R. (1998) *The Life Story Interview*, Sage University Papers Series on Qualitative Research Methods, Vol.44. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bastow, S., Beck, H., Dunleavy, P. and Richardson, L. (2005) *The Role of Individual Incentives Within Strategies Promoting Civil Renewal*, London: Home Office Civil Renewal Research Programme.

Bauman, Z. (2002). Individually, together, in Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E. (eds.) *Individualisation: Institutionalised Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences*, London: Sage.

Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002) *Individualisation: Institutionalised Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences*, London: Sage.

Benn, R. (2000) The genesis of active citizenship in the learning society, *Studies in the Education of Adults*; 32(2): 241-56.

Body-Gendrot, S. and Gittell, M. (2003), *Social Capital and Social Citizenship*, New York: Lexington Books.

Boix, C. and Posner, D. (1998), Social capital: Explaining its origins and effects on government performance, *British Journal of Political Science*; 28(4): 686-95.

Brannan, T., John, P. and Stoker, G. (2006). Active citizenship and effective public services and programme: How can we know what really works? *Urban Studies*; 43 (5): 993-1008.

Brown, J.S., Collins, A. and Duguid, S. (1989) Situated cognition and the culture of learning, *Educational Researcher*; 18(1): 32-42.

- Connolly, E. (2007) *The Institutionalisation of Anti-Poverty and Social Exclusion Policy in Irish Social Partnership*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency Research Working paper.
- Cohen, M. (2008) *Political Philosophy: From Plato to Mao*. New York: Pluto Press.
- Coombs, P. (1985) *The World Crisis in Education*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Corcoran, M., Gray, J. and Peillon, M. (2007) Ties that bind? The social fabric of life in the new suburbs, in Fahey, T., Russell, H. and Whelan, C. (eds.) *The Best of Times? The Social Impact of the Celtic Tiger*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.
- Devereux, E. (1993) The lonely furrow: Muintir na Tíre and Irish community development 1931-1991. *Community Development Journal*; 28 (1), 45-54.
- Donoghue, F., Prizeman, G., O'Regan, A. and Noel, V. (2006) *The Hidden Landscape: First Forays into Mapping Nonprofit Organisations in Ireland*, Dublin: Centre for Nonprofit Management, Trinity College Dublin.
- Dublin Docklands Development Authority (2008) History and Heritage of the Docklands, Retrieved from [www.ddda.ie](http://www.ddda.ie) on 5 Aug 2008.
- Dublin Docklands Development Authority (2008) *Dublin Docklands Area Master Plan*, Dublin: Dublin Docklands Development Authority.
- Dunne, T. (2008) Good citizen Europe, *International Affairs*; 84(1): 13-28.
- Elliot, J. (2005) *Using Narrative in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, London: Sage.
- ETGACE (2003) *Lifelong Learning, Governance and Active Citizenship in Europe*, Guildford: University of Surrey.
- Faulks, K. (2000) *Citizenship*, London: Routledge.
- Faundez, J. (2006) *On the State of Democracy*, London: Routledge.
- Finlay, G. (2007) Comprehensive liberalism and civic education in the Republic of Ireland, *Irish Political Studies*; 22(4): 473-93.
- Flap, H. and Volker, B. (2004). *Creation and Returns of Social Capital: A New Research Program*, London: Routledge.

Foley, G. (1999) *Learning as Social Action: A Contribution to Understanding Informal Learning*, New York: Zed Books.

Foley, P., Gittell, M. and Newman, K. (2003) The rhetoric and reality of community involvement in regeneration in the United Kingdom and the United States, in Body-Gendrot, S. and Gittell, M. (eds.) *Social Capital and Social Citizenship*, New York: Lexington Books.

Freire, P. (1994) *The Pedagogy of Hope*, New York: Herder and Herder.

Garvin, T. (2004) *Preventing the Future: Why was Ireland so Poor for so Long?* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

Geoghegan, M. (2004). Movement beyond the state? Towards reconceptualising community development in Ireland, in Herrmann, P. (ed.) *Citizenship Revisited: Threats or Opportunities of Shifting Boundaries*, New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Gittell, M. (2003) Participation, social capital and social change, in Body-Gendrot, S. and Gittell, M. (eds.) *Social Capital and Social Citizenship*, New York: Lexington Books.

Granovetter, M.S. (1973) The strength of weak ties, *American Journal of Sociology*; 78: 1360-80.

Greene, S. (2007) Including young mothers: Community-based participation and the continuum of active citizenship, *Community Development Journal*; 42 (2): 167-180.

Habermas, J. (1971) *Towards a Rational Society*, London: Heinemann.

Harris, C. (2005) *The Report of the Democracy Commission: Engaging Citizens the Case for Democratic Renewal in Ireland*, Dublin: TASC at New Island.

Harris, C. (2005) *The Report of the Democracy Commission: Engaging Citizens, The Case for Democratic Renewal in Ireland*, TASC at New Island.

Harris, C. (2008) The Irish Taskforce on Active Citizenship – The CLEAR Analysis, *Representation*; 44(1): 15-26.

Hems, L. and Tonkiss, F. (2000) Introduction, in Tonkis, F. and Passey, A. (eds.) *Trust and Civil Society*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.



Holford, J. and van der Veen, R. (2003) *Lifelong Learning, Governance and Active Citizenship in Europe: Final Report of the ETGACE Research Project*, University of Surrey. Retrieved from [www.surrey.ac.uk/politics/ETGACE/Final-Report-Screen-version.pdf](http://www.surrey.ac.uk/politics/ETGACE/Final-Report-Screen-version.pdf)

Holford, J. (2006) The role of lifelong learning in building citizenship: European Union approaches in the light of British and colonial experience, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*; 25 (3): 321-32.

Home Office (2003) *Active Citizens, Strong Communities: Progressing Civil Renewal*, London: Home Office.

Honohan, I. (2005) Active citizenship in contemporary democracy, in Harris, C. (ed.) *The Report of the Democracy Commission: Engaging Citizens, the Case for Democratic Renewal in Ireland*, Dublin: TASC and Democratic Dialogue.

Hoskins, B. and Mascherini, M. (2008) Measuring active citizenship through the development of a composite indicator, *Social Indicators Research*, July, Online First.

Hughes, I., Clancy, P., Harris, C. and Beetham, D. (2007). *Power to the People: Assessing Democracy in Ireland*, Dublin: TASC at New Island.

Hurrelmann, K. (1988) *Social Structure and Personality Development: The Individual as a Productive Processor of Reality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Illeris, K. (2002) *The Three Dimensions of Learning: Contemporary Learning Theory in the Tension Field between the Cognitive, the Emotional and the Social*, Leicester: NIACE.

Inkeles, A. (2001) Measuring social capital and its consequences, *Policy Sciences*; 33: 245-68.

Jerome, L. (2006) Critical citizenship experiences? Working with trainee teachers to facilitate active citizenship in schools, *Teacher Development*; 10(3): 313-29.

Jonassen, D.H. (1994) Thinking technology: Towards a constructivists design model, *Educational Technology*; 34(4):34.

Jones, S. and Roberts, C. (2005) *Examining the Involvement in Community Involvement: A Case Study of Referral Order Volunteers in One Youth Offending Team*, London: Home Office Civil Renewal Research Programme.

- Josselson, R. and Lieblich, A. (1995) *The Narrative Study of Lives*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kane, L. (2007) The educational influences on active citizens: A case study of members of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), *Studies in the Education of Adults*; 39 (1): 54-76.
- Keane, J. (1998) *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Kirby, P. (2006) Bringing social inclusion to centre stage: Towards a project of active citizenship, in Jacobson, D., Kirby, P. and O'Broin, D., *Taming The Tiger: Social Exclusion in a Globalised Ireland*, Dublin: TASC at New Island.
- Kymlicka, W. (2002) *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lange, E.A. (2004) Transformative and restorative learning: A vital dialectic for sustainable societies, *Adult Education Quarterly*; 54(2): 121-39.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1990) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Laver, M. (2006) Voting Behaviour, in Coakley, J. and Gallagher, M. (eds.) *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, London: Routledge.
- Lee, J.J. (1989) *Ireland 1912-1985 Politics and Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Livingstone, D.W. (2006). Informal learning: Conceptual distinctions and preliminary findings, in Bekerman, Z., Burbules, N. and Silberman-Keller, D., *Learning in Places: The Informal Education Reader*, New York: Peter Lang.
- Lowndes, V. and Chapman, R. (2005) *Faith, Hope and Clarity: Developing a Model of Faith Group Involvement in Civil Renewal*, London: Home Office Civil Renewal Research Programme.
- MacLaran, A., Clayton, V. and Brudell, P. (2007) *Empowering Communities in Disadvantaged Urban Areas: Towards Greater Community Participation in Irish Planning?* Combat Poverty Agency Research Working paper.
- Meehan, E. (1997) Political pluralism and European citizenship, in Lehning, P.B. and Weale, A. (eds.) *Citizenship, Democracy and Justice in the New Europe*, London: Routledge.

Moore, N. (2008) *Dublin Docklands Reinvented: The Post-Industrial Regeneration of a European City Quarter*, Dublin: Four Courts Press.

National Committee on Volunteering (2002) *Tipping the Balance: Report and Recommendations to Government on Supporting and Developing Volunteering in Ireland*, Dublin: National Committee on Volunteering.

National Economic and Social Council (2002) *National Progress Indicators Economic, Social and Environmental Development* (Report no.108), Dublin: National Economic and Social Council.

New Approaches to Lifelong Learning. (1998) *Lifelong Learning Profiles: General Summary of Findings from the First Canadian Survey of Informal Learning*. ([www.nall.ca](http://www.nall.ca)).

Newton, K. (1999) Social and Political trust in established democracies, in Norris, P. (ed.) *Critical Citizens*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Onyx, J. and Bullen, P. (2001) *Social Capital and Participation in Everyday Life*, London: Routledge.

O'Donnell, G.A., Schmitter, P. and Whitehead, L. (1986) *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Peillon, M. (2001) *Welfare in Ireland: Actors, Resources and Strategies*, Westport, CT: Praeger.

Peillon, M., Corcoran, M. and Gray, J. (2006) *Civic Engagement and the Governance of Irish Suburbs*, Dublin: The Policy Institute, Trinity College Dublin.

Powell, F. and Guerin, D. (1999) *Civil society and Active Citizenship: The Role of the Voluntary Sector*, Coleraine: University of Ulster.

Powell, F. (2000) State, welfare and civil society, in Tonkis, F. and Passey, A. (eds.) *Trust and Civil Society*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Prior, D., Farrow, K., Spalek, B. and Barnes, M. (2005) *Anti-Social Behaviour and Civil Renewal: A Study of the Hodge Hill District of Birmingham*, London: Home Office Civil Renewal Research Programme.

Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Schuller & Schuster.

Sabel, C. (1996) *Ireland: Local Partnerships and Social Innovation*, Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Schugurensky, D. (2006) This is our school of citizenship: Informal learning in local democracy, in Bekerman, Z., Burbules, N. and Silberman-Keller, D. *Learning in Places: The Informal Education Reader*, New York: Peter Lang.

Share, P., Tovey, H. and Corcoran, M.P. (2007) *A Sociology of Ireland (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

Silverman, E., Lupton, R. and Fenton, A. (2005) *A Good Place for Children? Attracting and Retaining Families in Inner Urban Mixed Income Communities*, London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Sinnott, R. (1995) *Irish Voters Decide: Voting Behaviour in Elections and Referendums Since 1918*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Tam, H. (1998) *Communitarianism: A New Agenda for Politics and Citizenship*, London: Macmillan.

Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007a) *Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007b) *Statistical Evidence on Active Citizenship in Ireland*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007c) *The Concept of Active Citizenship*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Varley, T. and Ó Cearbhaill, D. (2002) Towards a theory of state-community partnerships: Interpreting the Irish Muintir na Tíre movement's experience, *Journal of the Community Development Society*; 33.

Van der Veen, R. and Holford, J. (2005) A critical educational perspective on localisation, governance and citizen education, in Wildemeersch, D., Stroobants, V. and Bron, M. (eds.) *Active Citizenship and Multiple Identities in Europe: A Learning Outlook*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Volunteering Ireland. (2007) *Facts and Figures*.  
<http://www.volunteeringireland.com>.

Walsh, J., Craig, S and McCafferty, D. (1998) *Local Partnerships for Social Inclusion?* Dublin: Oak Tree Press.

Walsh, J.A. (2007) *People and Place: A Census Atlas of the Republic of Ireland*, Maynooth: NIRSA, NUI Maynooth.

Warleigh-Lack, A. (2001) *Citizenship and Governance in the European Union*, London: Continuum.

Webster, L. and Mertova, P. (2007) *Using Narrative Inquiry as a Research Method: An introduction to Using Critical Event Narrative Analysis in Research on Learning and Teaching*, London: Routledge.

Wenger, E., McDermott, R. and Snyder, W.M. (2002) *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Whitehead, L. (2006) *Latin America: A New Interpretation*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Williams, J. and O'Connor, M. (2000) *The Employment and Socio-Demographic Profile of the Dublin Docklands Area*, Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.

## Appendix A: Life History Interview Guide

## **Life History Interview Guide**

Please think about your life in relation to being active in your community.

In particular, could you focus on how you learned to be active in your community.

### **Experiences as an active citizen**

- What have your experiences of being active in the Docklands area been like?
- What kinds of community and voluntary organisations have you been involved in?
- How did you end up doing the type of community work you do?
- What transitions/turning points have you experienced?
- What have been your experiences dealing with the State in relation to community activism?
- What are your experiences of local politics?
- What would you view as your greatest accomplishment in relation to community activism?

### **Family Background/childhood**

- Is there anything from your childhood/family that you think helped you learn to be active in your community?
- How much of a factor in your life do you feel your background has been?

### **Community context**

- What was it like to grow up in your neighbourhood?
- What is different/unique about your community?

## **Formal education**

- What was school like for you?
- What is your view of the role of education in a person's life?

## **Learning**

- What has been your most important learning experience in relation to being active in the community?  
– what did you learn?
- What has been your most important lesson in relation to community activism?
- Who has shaped/influenced your life in the community the most?
- Who are the heroes/guides/helpers in your life?
- What was the most important thing that you've had to learn by yourself?

## **Future thoughts**

- What do you see for yourself in terms of community activism in 5/10/25 years?
- Do you have any advice/wisdom for the younger generation?

## **Specifically, look out for/address the following:**

- Critical moments
- Key incidents
- Confrontations
- Influential people
- Influential phases in your life
- Transitions
- Changes in perspective/outlook and possible causes



## Appendix B: Focus Group Thematic Guide

## **Focus Group Thematic Guide**

### **How are residents in the Docklands currently learning how to be actively involved in their communities?**

- What do these involve? Content? What's learnt? How is this taught/communicated?
- Does this typically occur through oral/written/behavioural communication?
- Formal means of learning, e.g. Courses – Workshops – Seminars
- Non-formal means of learning, e.g. Non-formal mentoring – Shadowing of experts/long-time active citizens
- Informal means of learning, e.g. Informal mentoring – Key learning experiences/incidents/transitions/influential people
- Strengths/weaknesses of these approaches?
- What seems to be most effective?
- How improve these interventions?
- Any learner feedback /learner's experiences?

### **What types of new approaches for educational interventions are being developed as part of the Docklands regeneration project?**

- What do these involve? Content? What's learnt? How is this taught/communicated?
- Does this typically occur through oral/written/behavioural communication?
- Formal means of learning, e.g. Courses – Workshops – Seminars
- Non-formal means of learning, e.g. Non-formal mentoring – Shadowing of experts/long-time active citizens
- Informal means of learning, .e.g. Informal mentoring – Key learning experiences/incidents/transitions/influential people

- Strengths/weaknesses of these approaches?
- What seems to be most effective?
- How improve these interventions?
- Any learner feedback /learner's experiences?

**What kinds of supports are being provided to enable people learn how to be active in their community?**

- financial support for courses etc
- childcare facilities
- meaningful representation at public forums
- meaningful participation in decision-making processes
- mentoring programme
- promotion of community/voluntary sector in the community
- advertising activities and events
- advertising courses and facilities

Will these change in the future? How?

**What needs to be present (both individual and context) for learning to be an active citizen to occur?**

**What are the benefits of residents learning to be active citizens/active participants in their community?**

**What do you think is the role of the community and voluntary as teachers of active citizenship?**

Should interventions be government policy or grass-roots led? Both?

## Contact Details

Dr Marianne Breen  
School of Community Studies  
National College of Ireland  
Mayor Street  
IFSC  
Dublin 1.  
[Marianne.breen@ncirl.ie](mailto:Marianne.breen@ncirl.ie)

Professor Nicholas Rees  
Department of Politics and History  
Liverpool Hope University  
Liverpool  
L16 9JD  
UK  
[reesn@hope.ac.uk](mailto:reesn@hope.ac.uk)