Rooting and reaching: insights from Love Leitrim's successful resistance to fracking in Ireland

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Abstract   What can community development learn from frontline community resistance to extractivism and the fossil fuel industry? In the global North, environmental governance often operates within the dominant mode of neoliberal 'environmentality' (Luke. 1999. Environmentality as green governmentality, in E. Darier ed, *Discourses of the Environment*, Blackwell, Oxford), conceptualizing environmental action in individualized and depoliticized ways. This is compounded by the discursive hegemony of the educated middle-classes, which frames environmental issues in ways that render invisible the concerns of marginalized communities and workers. In this paper, I present an activist ethnography and case study of Love Leitrim, a community group that played a crucial role in the successful Irish movement to resist fracking. I suggest that local environmental justice struggles point to the possibility of a 'liberation environmentality' (Fletcher. Environmentality unbound: multiple governmentalities in environmental politics, *Geoforum*, 2017;85, 311–315); which challenges capitalist modes of environmental governance that facilitate the exploitation of the environment for capital accumulation. The paper identifies how a combination of (i) relational local organizing; (ii) trans-local networking with other frontline communities and (iii) creative political engagement enabled campaigners to organize collectively around the environment, navigate power asymmetries and secure political change across spatial scales. I conclude by suggesting that Love Leitrim's frontline community struggle offers important insights for community development workers who wish to address the environment as a political issue and play a

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role in bringing about a just transition for marginalized communities and workers.

Introduction

Saturday, 14th October 2017 was Global Frackdown Day, the international day of action against the fossil fuel extraction process of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. In County Leitrim, Ireland, campaigners were gathering at the Rainbow Ballroom in Glenfarne. The old ballroom had been the venue of many public meetings over the previous six years of the anti-fracking campaign. On this occasion though, the assembling crowd was there to celebrate the ban on fracking, which had been signed into law in July of that year. Local campaigners and their families were joined by supporters from across Ireland and internationally. Yet even as campaigners celebrated a victory, they were already organizing resistance to a liquefied natural gas terminal on the Shannon Estuary in south-west Ireland that would be used to import gas from US fracking operations. The consensus was clear. They would fight the terminal's construction and stand in solidarity with communities across the Atlantic. No fracking: not here, not anywhere. The group would continue to resist extractivism, the exploitation of the earth for profit.

Initial Irish fracking licences were granted to fossil fuel companies in 2011. This catalyzed the formation of over twenty local groups across the northwest and County Clare (Quinn, 2014; De Boissière, 2016; McDonagh, 2016). This paper presents a case study of one campaign group, Love Leitrim (LL). The group's unique approach to the campaign combined creative community engagement with political advocacy efforts. By presenting a case study of a successful campaign in which the environment was a political matter of collective contestation, I aim to contribute to a critical community work theorization of the environment, which addresses the structural injustice embedded in environmental conflicts. In the global North, environmental governance often operates within the dominant mode of neoliberal 'environmentality' (Luke, 1999), conceptualizing environmental action in individualized and depoliticized ways. This is compounded by the discursive hegemony of the educated middle-classes, which frames environmental issues in ways that contribute to 'environmental classism' (Bell, 2020) and render invisible the concerns of marginalized communities and workers.

Yet many local communities on the frontlines of environmental injustice are mobilizing to resist extractivism in defiance of neoliberal environmentality and my case study of LL offers insight into this. Firstly, local mobilizing based on dialogue, relationships, creativity and solidarity with

other communities built a strong a campaign base. Secondly, campaigners shaped the terms of the debate, engaged with politicians as electors (rather than non-experts) and used creative, collective action to demonstrate public resistance to the fracking project. This combination of relational local organizing (rooting) and robust political engagement (reaching) enabled successful resistance to the fracking project. I suggest that local environmental justice struggles such as LL's point to the possibility of a 'liberation environmentality' (Fletcher, 2010, 2017): a just and democratic mode of environmental management, which challenges capitalist environmental governance's exploitation of the environment for capital accumulation. Finally, I consider the insights, which LL's campaign offers to community workers and grassroots campaigners working for environmental justice.

Extractivism and neoliberal environmentality: twin challenges for environmental justice

Extractivism and community development

The economic logic underpinning fracking is extractivism, a mode of capitalist accumulation based on the removal of minerals, fossil fuels and agricrops from the earth and their sale on global commodity markets. The term originates from Latin American political discourse where the practice 'perpetuates neocolonial power relations based on the export-led growth model, with incalculable environmental consequences' (Raftopoulos, 2017: 390). Extractivism is enmeshed in global material and financial flows, which have been accelerated by the globalization of capitalist economic relations since the 1970s (Harvey, 2005). These flows of raw materials contribute to environmental injustice and human rights abuses across multiple scales (United Nations, 2019) as the pursuit of extractivism often means 'prioritising economic growth and national development agendas over human and environmental rights' (Raftopoulos, 2017: 392).

Extractivism treats the earth as a pool of raw materials to be extracted and exploited in the interests of transnational capital (Acosta, 2017). This requires the objectification of nature and devaluation of communities at the point of extraction, who are displaced or otherwise negatively impacted (Jewett and Garavan, 2018). Thus, although extractivism is indelibly linked to global processes and flows of capital, the destructive impact of extraction is felt first and worst at a local scale – often by marginalized and disadvantaged communities. Such sites have been described as 'sacrifice zones' and 'commodity frontiers' (Healy *et al.*, 2018: 219), where communities are subjected to the 'slow violence' of displacement and landscape destruction effected by the extractivist assumption of 'conjoined ecological and human disposability' (Nixon, 2013: 4). Nixon describes 'slow violence'

as environmental destruction that 'occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all' (p. 19). However, this violence is not passively accepted by the communities upon whom it is wrought. Extractivism has led to significant political resistance by communities affected by mining operations, mega-projects and associated infrastructure (EJ Atlas, n.d.).

With the extractivist model, 'the realisation of value for transnational corporations is achieved through the international market rather than the internal market' and so extraction has limited developmental benefits for either communities at the point of extraction or for national economies (López, Vértiz and Olavarria, 2015: 157). Yet the imbrication of the extractivism and neoliberal modernization agendas means that extractivism is often equated with development by states, which pursue it as an economic strategy (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2014). This presents a challenge for community development, as the practice has been adopted by transnational corporations, which 'see themselves as obligated to develop material and symbolic strategies to counteract resistance generated at the local level' (López, Vértiz and Olavarria, 2015: 161). As a result, community development initiatives are often 'sponsored and constructed by corporate entities themselves' with the 'potential for disastrous disconnects to transpire' (Maconachie and Hilson, 2013: 349). The appropriation of community development approaches by transnational corporations raises important ethical and political considerations for community workers (Ranta-Tyrkkö and Jojo, 2019). Yet the community development literature on extractivism has sometimes taken a reformist approach focused on the potential role of community development initiatives to improve outcomes for mining impacted communities (Gilberthorpe, 2013; Kemp, 2010). Taking a different approach, my focus is a community's right to resist the implementation of an extractivist agenda altogether.

Neoliberal environmentality and the challenge of environmental collective action
For community workers who wish to stand in solidarity with communities resisting extractivism, it is important to consider the wider political discourses at play in environmental governance. In Ireland, as in much of the global North, the dominant mode of environmental governance is a form of green governmentality, which has been described as 'neoliberal environmentality' (Luke, 1999; Fletcher, 2017). The concept of environmentality has emerged in the political ecology literature as 'an optic to examine environmental politics, state-society interactions, and the process through which technologies of conduct create new subjects concerned about the

environment' (Jepsen, Brannstrom and Persons, 2012: 853). Fletcher (2010, 2017) identifies several forms of environmentality that seek to regulate environmental behaviour through different modes of governance, or 'governmental rationalities'. These include the disciplinary (internalizing norms and values), the sovereign (implementing regulations) and the neoliberal (incentivizing the market).

Market-based neoliberal environmentality conceptualizes environmental action as individualized and environmental governance as apolitical. Environmental action becomes a consumer choice: buying organic products, electric vehicles and making our homes more energy efficient. We 'substitute acts of personal consumption . . . for organised political resistance' (Jensen, 2009). With environmental governance, neoliberal environmentality promotes a 'weak' vision of sustainability that is market based and assumes that once natural capital is 'given an exchange value reflected in price, then the environment will be incorporated into a self-regulated economy and the price mechanism will then protect the environment' (Scandrett, 2006: 74). Strong sustainability, on the other hand, refuses to incorporate the environment into the economy but rather points out that the environment places limits on economic activity which, if over-shot, will trigger both global and intergenerational inequalities (Neumayer, 2003).

Wilshusen (2014) demonstrates the ways in which neoliberalism came to be embedded in sustainability and development discourses, leading to the hegemony of weak sustainability today. He illustrates how the World Bank adoption of social capital emphasized the 'importance of social connectivity in empowering the subjects of development but also turned attention away from the structural inequities of neoliberal capitalism' (p. 134). The language of capital, promoted within the sustainable development discourse reinforces the logic of neoliberalism within the governance architecture. He suggests that the accumulated labour of communities engaged in conservation and sustainability initiatives is appropriated by the market, whereas the power dynamics associated with this flow of capital (from social to economic) are concealed. This has the effect of decoupling 'natural capital' from its social and ecological contexts and opening it up to the market. Thus, by obfuscating inequalities in the accumulation of capital, the regime of green neoliberalism inherent in sustainable development leads to an 'evasion of inequality' (Fletcher and Breitling, 2012) and the 'erasure of power' (Wilshusen 2014: 155).

The concept of capital (i.e. human, social, natural, physical and financial) was imported into sustainable livelihoods programmes, which emerged in the 1990s (Scoones, 1998; DFID, 1999). Sustainable livelihoods sought to address Chambers' (1989) critique that sustainable development did not sufficiently address poverty. However, as Acre (2003: 202) notes, it was eagerly

adopted by international institutions and donors who were 'promoting the withdrawal of the state from community development programmes and favouring the promotion of a neoliberal development discourse based on individual economic values'. Given this, Brocklesby and Fisher (2003) argue that the sustainable livelihoods model is at odds with community development values and approaches. Yet, in the same special issue of the *CDJ*, Hinshelwood (2003) and Hocking (2003) make a case that the sustainable livelihoods approach can offer a useful critical tool to focus on poverty. Acknowledging this, the editors call for a critical openness, suggesting that despite the potential pitfalls, skilled community workers may be able to use the sustainable livelihoods to promote transformative change (Brocklesby, Fisher and Hintjens, 2003).

Yet the difficulties of attempting transformative practice within the dominant paradigm are significant. Agrawal's (2005) empirical work on environmentality enacted through forest conservation in Kumaon, India, illustrates how the concept of community can be used by the state as a mediating structure through which environmental subjectivity is constructed to achieve what he calls 'intimate government', defined as 'dispersing rule, scattering involvement in government more widely, and encouraging careful reckoning of environmental practices and their consequences among Kumaon's residents' (Agrawal, 2005: 178–9). This form of environmentality, in turn, 'depends upon the channelling of existing flows of power within village communities toward new ends related to the environment' (ibid.).

Environmentality generates new forms of social capital by establishing regimes of environmental governance, for example in forestry through initiatives such as REDD+ (Cabello and Gilbertson, 2012). In this way, the labour of environmental subjects produces capital, which is expropriated to allow for the financialization of nature (Brockington and Duffy, 2010; Sullivan, 2011).

Agrawal (2005) highlights the tension between meaningful empowerment and 'dispossession through participation' (Collins, 2006) inherent in the use of community as a unit of social action by states. This tension is a familiar one for community workers: it is 'at the crossroads' (Miller and Ahmad, 1997) of this dichotomy that our practice is situated and this issue has generated ongoing debate in this journal (e.g. Geoghegan and Powell, 2009, McArdle, 2020). Acre (2003: 100) highlights community development's origins as intervention 'contributing to the extension of the nation-state in promoting modernisation and political control'. As such, community work can 'be responsible for drawing people into bureaucratic structures [. . .] which too often turn out to be managerial procedures rather than democratic processes' (Shaw, quoted in Motherway, 2006: 9)

It is important to consider the implications of neoliberal environmentality for critical community work which aims to support communities to address

extractivism and other environmental injustices. The analytical framework provided by the environmentality scholarship points a way for practitioners to critically engage with these issues. Indeed Fletcher (2017: 314) suggests that the purpose of the political ecology critique of environmental governance is to champion a liberation environmentality that aims to

> 'identify forms of environmental management, grounded in an ideology of participatory egalitarianism, that transcend the growing hegemony of neoliberalism to appropriate and redistribute surplus in ways that do not exploit wage labour and for ends other than capital accumulation'.

However, he notes that the potential for a liberatory environmentality remains under explored in the political ecology literature and calls for further exploration of 'cases in which this type of liberatory politics may be enacted' (p. 314). In seeking to flesh out what a liberation environmentality might look like, what insights can be drawn from the successful community struggle to resist fracking in Ireland?

Methodology

Case study design
This research takes the form of a qualitative case study in order to build a 'complex, holistic picture' (Creswell, 1994) of LL's campaign to resist fracking. By capturing richness and nuance, case study's epistemological value comes from abductive reasoning, generating *phronesis*, or practical knowledge supporting ethical judgement and professional discernment on the basis of experience (Thomas, 2010).

Seeking to generate such practical knowledge, I immersed myself as a participant-observer in LL's campaign and as a resident of County Leitrim. I was guided in the research process by my commitment to justice, belief in the value and potential of solidarity and my professional integrity as a community worker (AIEB, 2016). I developed an approach to case study research that was dialogical (rooted in conversations and active engagement) and diachronic (committed over time to the group, the people and the place). LL became the single subject of my case, wherein I studied the process by which a community influenced decisions in an environmental dispute when faced with procedural barriers and power asymmetries. As such, it was 'instrumental' study (Stake, 1995), which sought insight into local environmental disputes in order to generate knowledge for community work practice.

Fieldwork, methods and data analysis
To undertake fieldwork, I moved to Leitrim in March 2016 and lived there until February 2017. I became a member of LL, participating actively in the

work of the group. My 'insider' identity as a climate movement activist who was known to LL helped me to negotiate access to the case study site. From the outset, I fully disclosed my researcher role and negotiated my presence as a researcher with LL. The research was approved by my university's ethical review committee. Recognizing my power as a researcher, I aimed to limit power asymmetries and hierarchies by participating as a member of LL and opening myself to group accountability over time. This included sharing my tentative findings in a workshop as well as inviting informal reflections from the group.

The case study is informed by seventeen in-depth, semi-structured interviews with campaigners. Participants were recruited through open invitation followed by a purposive sampling strategy to ensure a balance of gender representation and a mixture between participants with different levels of involvement and group role. My interview guide structured the conversations around my central research curiosity of how grassroots campaigners navigate procedural power asymmetries in environmental disputes. Interviews were transcribed and participants received a copy of the transcript, which they were invited to check and amend for clarity. In addition, I undertook participant observation at public meetings, demonstrations, press conferences and campaign meetings. Documentary analysis was also utilized to build a case description, including public documents, meeting minutes, workshop reports and working documents.

Nvivo qualitative data analysis software was used to undertake a thematic analysis of the data based on Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network approach. This approach allows the researcher to 'unearth the themes salient in a text at different levels . . . and facilitate structuring a depiction of these themes' (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 387). Using her approach, I developed a thematic network of the strategies which enabled LL to navigate procedural power asymmetries and secure a ban on fracking.

Case description and findings

The best gas is in Leitrim: waking up in a sacrifice zone
Leitrim is a historically marginalized county on the national periphery and Northern Irish border. The county experienced significant depopulation and economic decline throughout the 20th century. Farming is a major economic activity, despite land that is amongst the poorest in Ireland. Eco-tourism and recreation have become significant economic activities and some small manufacturing enterprises provide employment. Levels of affluence in Leitrim are below national average and there is a higher than average level of unemployment. Many districts at the centre of the fracking development were

categorized as disadvantaged (Pobal, 2016). Leitrim's relative marginality in economic and political terms set the scene for the arrival of the fracking companies and the company initially framed the project in terms of jobs and local economic development.

In February 2011, the Irish government awarded licences for initial exploratory works to three fossil fuel companies, including Tamboran in Leitrim. This was done through a commercial competition without public outreach in the affected communities. Most people in the licence area first realized about the plans to frack when Tamboran began a public relations exercise. In an optimistic interview with the *Leitrim Observer,* the Tamboran chief executive told the paper that 'the best gas is in Leitrim'. However, Tamboran's strategy of active engagement with the community did not lead to acquiescence and there was significant public concern about the project.

As the communities of the licence area sought to make sense of fracking, Josh Fox's documentary *Gasland* became a significant source of information. The film's producer Trish Adlesic came to Ireland and attended *'a packed-out screening which included not just members of the community concerned about the project but also, critically, public representatives' (Chris).* The Gasland screenings set a precedence for Leitrim campaigners connecting elsewhere, and particularly to North America where the fracking industry was well advanced, for information and support. Encounters with another Irish community resisting Shell's pipeline project at Rossport in Mayo were also important in building early awareness.

Love Leitrim: a prefigurative community response
In late 2011, concerned members of the community began to meet in Manorhamilton, north Leitrim. An early consensus emerged: *'one of the very first things agreed upon amongst all the different characters at the time was that we were going forward in a positive, proactive way'* (Heather). Resisting fracking by celebrating the positives about Leitrim life was a conscious strategic decision and became a hallmark of LL. A significant backdrop to the fracking project was the 2008 banking crisis, the financial bailout of the Irish state by the International Monetary Fund and subsequent austerity measures. These issues were very much on campaigners' minds as the group developed and grew. Triona highlighted how:

> *'We've been through so much in this country, I suppose there's a realisation post Celtic-Tiger you know? The Church has fallen, the banks have fallen . . . everything that we would have looked up to in the past has crumbled around us. And at the end of the day you have nothing but yourself, your family and your community. That is the only thing that you can totally rely on. All of the things that people looked up to and adhered to have come down around our ears'.*

Triona went on to suggest that the anti-fracking movement should be seen in the context of communities responding to the financial crisis and 'rethinking' our relationships to one another:

> *'So I think it's a time for re-thinking all of that and I think that a community group like LL and the other groups, the other anti-fracking groups, are a space for that to happen as well. So that community and self-reliance can be supported in groups like that'.*

By asserting that Leitrim is a *'vibrant, creative inclusive and diverse community'* (LL constitution), the group directly challenged the underlying assumptions of the fracking project. The attempted imposition of fracking on the north-west imagined large-scale industrialization and depopulation – which assumed that the communities and the landscape could be sacrificed for the purposes of gas extraction. Ultimately, the fracking project placed a lesser value on the landscape and communities of Leitrim than on the fossil fuel buried beneath them.

Strategies for rooting: relational local organizing

Listening and dialogue in the community

One of the first things LL did when it formed was to engage in conversations in the community. At an early meeting it was agreed that *'everybody had to go out and talk to at least 10 people about fracking'*, and from there things *'spiralled out in terms of awareness'* (Bernie). The group's *'modus operandi was not to come in as an expert but to start a conversation'* (Triona). Campaigners emphasized the importance of open and undirected conversations with friends and neighbours, taking the time to listen to their concerns. This slow, grassroots engagement approach allowed the group to respond directly to the concerns of others. Over time, out of that close engagement with the community, the group developed its messaging and communications. These focused on issues of greatest concern to the community such as the dangers to tourism and agriculture, public health and democracy. This process of developing campaign framings through dialogue points to the relational and contextual nature of meaning-making in community, which motivates people towards taking collective action.

This conversational approach also enabled the group to embed itself in local life by building on existing social networks. Bernie stressed that:

> *'what the anti-fracking campaign has very much been about is personal contact. And obviously we live in a quite under-populated part of the country, so the numbers are quite small, and I think that personal contact is something that LL has always promoted as being very important. So people actually talk to others, your family, your friends, your neighbours, and obviously getting more and more people on board'.*

Personal contact and relationships were essential to the growth of the awareness, which built on existing social bonds to grow the campaign. Who is involved, and who is seen to be involved, were crucial question for rooting the campaign in the community. Robert felt that local people were far more likely to trust and accept information, which was provided by those they knew. He explained that:

> *'You're an open book in your own home, so when you discover something or learn something, people can really understand it in the proper context in which it's given . . . They can hear what's being said and they can look at the information through their knowledge about who says it . . . We were able to access people because of the relationships that we had built previously. But when the stranger comes to say it there isn't that knowledge'.*

Stitch the campaign into the local social fabric
Building on existing relationships and social bonds, LL became deeply rooted in local life in a way which provided a powerful social licence and a strongly rooted base to enable resistance to fracking. LL members ran stalls at many different local events, including the local agricultural show that is the highlight of the farming calendar. At the stalls they sold campaign t-shirts, gave information or invited participation in the campaign. They also contributed to creative local events such as the local scarecrow competition. In addition to asking the community to engage with the campaign, members of the group also volunteered to support events run by other community groups, such as acting as marshals at fun-runs and parades. These place-making activities, and LL's '*good record with attending events*' were essential to '*building up trust between people, between the group itself and its name and what it wants, with the community*' (Heather).

The group regularly reached out to a wide range of people in the community to support activities and events, which had an anti-fracking angle but were not solely about fracking. People who might not be willing to take part in an explicit protest were happy to be involved in positive, community focused events that nevertheless had an anti-fracking element. This was an important approach for the building of trust in the group and gaining legitimacy by making practical and positive links between LL and the wider community. As Triona recalled:

> *'We did a 10k walk and run a few years ago as a fundraiser. And people who were never involved in the campaign before or after were involved. I just rang them up and said: "Is there any chance you'd do the registration for us?" I really wanted different faces to be at registration. So they came and people said: "oh are you involved?"'*

LL's participation in community events was also essential to the realizing of the group's vision of '*a vibrant, creative, inclusive and diverse community*'.

A sense of community was an intrinsic value, which LL promoted in its way of working. This was typified by the group's organizing of a street feast world café event during a 2017 community festival, which saw people come together over a meal to discuss the questions 'What's your wish for Leitrim?' and 'What's your wish for your children's future in Leitrim?'. Celebrating and strengthening community in this way challenged the fundamental assumptions of the fracking project – a politics of disposability, which assumed that Leitrim could be sacrificed to fuel the extractivist economy.

Engage culture to open-up space for counter-narratives

Campaigners saw culture as a medium to open-up space to catalyse conversations and connect with popular folk wisdom. LL worked with musicians, artists and local celebrities in order to relate fracking to popular cultural and historical narratives that resonated with communities through folk music and cultural events. This enabled campaigners to connect into and accentuate the more radical strands of the popular imagination, drawing on critical counter-narratives through creative processes in ways that overcame the potential for falling into negative activist stereotypes. Through culture, campaigners could present new or alternative stories, experiences or ideas in a way that connected with people imaginatively and emotionally. Reflecting on the benefit of cultural events for the campaign, Shane suggested that *'whenever you do imaginative events [. . .], it has an unpredictable spin off benefit [. . .] once you get people together: ideas bounce of each other'*. By presenting new or alternative stories, experiences or ideas in a way that connects with people imaginatively and emotionally, creative approaches connected the lived realities of people in the community with the more critical or counter-hegemonic ideas infused in popular wisdom and with the stories of similar communities facing similar challenges.

Build networks of solidarity with frontline communities

Reaching out to other frontline communities was a powerful and evocative way to raise awareness of fracking and extractivism from people who had experienced them at first-hand. Campaigners from many other communities impacted by extractivism visited Leitrim and LL worked to *'connect up with people'* who could share their *'experience of being in fracked areas'* because *'when someone comes, I think it's kind of on a human level people can appreciate and understand. When they tell their personal story, that's made a difference'* (Bernie). Perhaps the most significant guest speaker was Canadian activist Jessica Ernst, whose February 2012 presentation to a packed meeting in the Rainbow ballroom was described by many campaigners as a key moment in the campaign. Ernst is a former oil and gas industry engineer who found

herself battling against the pollution of fracking industry on her own land in Alberta. She told her own personal story, the power of which was heightened by own industry insider credentials and social capital as a landowner. Reflecting on the event, Triona recalled that:

> *'I looked through the room and I could see all the farmers, the landowners, who are the important people to have there, the Irish Farmer's Association… And people were really listening. Really listening'.*

In addition to solidarity visits, Twitter and Facebook allowed campaigners to *'follow what's going on all around the world'* (Fergus). Besides the intrinsic value of solidarity and friendship, connections with other frontline communities were extremely useful because they supported Leitrim campaigners to develop their political analysis. Michelle suggested that globally *'there are huge similarities in terms of the types of things that people are up against'*, like *'how it's very often very poor areas. There's obviously the promise of employment'*. Similarly, when Shane met Lakota activists in the US and spoke about the oil and gas industry's approaches to divide the community and secure consent in Ireland, *'they said exactly the same tactics are used there as here. Very, very similar'*. Indeed, Michelle felt that *'in terms of conscientisation, to see how these tactics are used universally, that's hugely important for a local community'*.

Strategies for reaching: scaling up and influencing political outcomes

Shape the terms of the debate

Initially, fracking companies engaged the community in conversations around the narrow technical issues surrounding single drilling sites and how they considered that a well could be made safe. *'The way in for the industry is one well at a time'* suggested Robert. This 'project-splitting' approach:

> *'isn't safe for communities but it's easier for the industry … because they're getting into a position where they're unstoppable … No government has the money to give these companies to compensate them later on'* (Robert).

Addressing the entire project at a policy level became a key concern for campaigners who felt fracking *'had to be fought at government level. There's where you had to get it stopped. When you have to go out to the gate to stop them you're too late'* (Fergus). Campaigners sought to actively shape the terms on which the policy debate took place. When engaging with decision-makers, regulators and the media, the group framed its concerns around the issues of public health and democratic governance. These frames carried resonance and meaning in the local community but also carried currency at a national scale.

Public health was a key grievance, which mobilized a wide base of opposition to fracking in the communities of the licence area. As a result, LL *'zoned in [. . .] on the public health issue because we thought public health affects everybody'* (Bernie). In 2013, campaigners secured a moratorium on fracking while the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) undertook a review. Campaigners were anxious that this study would consider public health. However the *'draft study plan didn't mention public health [so] our push was to get people to sign submissions to include public health in the study'* (Aidan). LL organized community meetings and facilitated people in the community who had no internet access to be able to engage in the consultation. In total, 1356 submissions were received by the EPA. The majority of submissions referenced public health, establishing it as a key test of the public's trust in the study's legitimacy. The EPA conceded and amended the study's terms of reference. This enabled campaigners to draw on emerging health impact research from North American fracking sites. This research provided evidence, which could be marshalled in interactions with policy makers because peer-reviewed medical studies and the opinions of the medical profession *'have more cache with the politicians'* (Alison). Recognizing this, members from LL were instrumental in the establishment of the Concerned Health Professionals of Ireland (CHPI) advocacy group, mirroring a similar, highly effective New York group. CHPI was crucial to highlighting the public health case for a ban on fracking and shaping the political debate as draft legislation was introduced to the Irish parliament in summer 2016.

Claim power as electors
LL's approach to holding public representatives accountable positioned the group strategically as concerned citizens in a democracy. Chris stressed the importance of holding the democratic system to account as a *'central tenet of the whole campaign'* as the group sought to *'use the [democratic] system that's there and make it work'*. This was particularly important because communities often face procedural injustices in navigating environmental governance structures, which privilege scientific and technical expertise. Rather than attempt an asymmetrical engagement with regulators, campaigners sought to ensure public debate in the political arena. They positioned themselves as electors holding politicians to account rather than as lay-people with insufficient scientific knowledge to contribute to the policy making process. The group engaged critically and creatively with local politicians, adopting a *'get them in the t-shirt'* (Heather) approach to public accountability. Campaigners used anti-fracking t-shirts strategically for photo opportunities with politicians. A politician who might not make

a public statement on the issue of fracking would find it harder to refuse a photograph in the moment. Campaigners made effective use of social media and the local newspapers to publicize politician's wearing of the t-shirts.

The 2013 'Application Not to Frack' is illustrative of this strategic approach. In 2013, when the company submitted an application to extend their initial licence, LL submitted a counter application, which placed an emphasis on public participation in the democratic process. The list of rights called for a recognition of rurality as a way of life to be respected. It claimed a right for communities to be rooted in the locality of the licence area and to '*carry out our indigenous businesses of tourism, food production, farming and agri-food'*. The application also addressed the distribution of environmental burdens by fracking, including the water, noise and light pollution. It contrasted the potential public health burden on communities with the potential benefits accrued to multinational companies. The application calls to account the structures of representative democracy by affirming the '*right to have our elected representatives carry out our wishes'*. It expresses popular democratic control over *'our natural resources'*, which should not be *'used for the benefit of others'.* On the day of the deadline for the state to consider the company's applications, LL gathered at the Irish parliament to deliver their application to politicians. The group issued a press release:

> *'Throughout this process people have been forgotten about. We want to put people back into the centre of decision making. It's as simple as this. We are asking the Irish government: Are you with your people or not? We need them to show us they are with us by halting any further licences'* (LL press release, 28 February 2013).

The application and statement highlighted grievances with the lack of accountability and public participation in the licencing process. This focus on governance enabled campaigners to discursively jump from the scale of a localized place-based struggle to one which was emblematic of wider democratic discontents and of national importance. By constructing the application as a moral question and evocatively asking if the government was *'with* [its] *people or not?',* LL tapped into popular disillusionment with the political establishment in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 financial crisis.

Cross-party advocacy

LL engaged with politicians from all parties and none with a public interest to prevent fracking. Heather described this attempt to transcend partisan politics as '*trying to be apolitical yet try[ing] to work a political system'*. Given that the lack of initial public consultation, campaigners expressed serious concern with *'the way the system ran'* because the decision to frack might

be taken with the community having '*no way of knowing it was happening, no way of preventing it, no way of even making our feelings known about it*' (Alison). In seeking to overcome this procedural injustice, LL adopted an approach of robust engagement with elected representatives and candidates. In the political culture of Ireland, with multi-seat constituencies and a proportional representation electoral system, local politicians must cultivate a reputation as assiduous workers on behalf of the constituents in order to distinguish themselves as politicians, including from members of their own party. Thus, campaigners recognized that in Irish politics, constituents have particular leverage over their representatives who are responsive to elector pressure.

LL sought 'ins' with political parties by building working relationships with politicians across the political spectrum. Robert explained:

> '*We're afraid of our lives and we're talking to all of the population and we're looking at all of the political divides. So we're looking at what do Fianna Fáil people think? Who in the campaign is talking to Fianna Fáil? Who's talking to Fine Gael?*

Campaigners used these relationships to demand that local politicians represent their concerns and support a ban on fracking. Meetings of the group were open, with some politicians attending regularly and many attending at key points in the campaign such as during the Belcoo drilling crisis of 2014, when the company attempted a test borehole (see White, 2015). This engagement was respectful, but also critical and robust. Working with other campaign groups, LL built local political consensus to secure the inclusion of a ban on fracking in the 2014 Leitrim County Development Plan. This secured a local democratic mandate to ban fracking. LL also supported the 'Vote Frack Free' initiatives of the Frack Free Network during the 2014 local and European elections and the 2016 general election. These initiatives turned the individual act of voting into a public and collective tactic, which demonstrated that voters would hold politicians to account for their position on fracking. Following the 2016 general election, thirty-six elected members of parliament from across all political parties had pledged their support for a ban on fracking. Campaign pressure led to various parties proposing legislation to ban fracking, and in 2016 a bill sponsored by a local member of parliament began to be debated. In response, Love Leitrim launched the #BackTheBill public campaign.

As legislation progressed, campaigners understood the different roles that politicians across the political spectrum, and between government and opposition, could usefully play in the parliamentary process. The group took a non-partisan approach to engaging with decision-makers in parliament, approaching politicians across the political spectrum to (i) submit parliamentary questions to the minister; (ii) use their party's

speaking time to address the issue and (iii) raise issues at parliamentary committee hearings. Although the politicians were also not generally experts in environmental regulation, their position as elected representatives meant that regulators were accountable to them. Thus, by working with politicians across the political spectrum and through various stages of parliamentary process, campaigners ensured their concerns were addressed and procedural asymmetries between regulatory experts and the community were overcome.

Creatively demonstrate resistance

Creative collective action raised awareness, intervened in public debate, strengthened the campaign's social licence and demonstrated fundamental community resistance to fracking. Campaigners adopted many creative approaches to collective action including rallies, media stunts, a cross-country march to parliament and solidarity actions with other frontline communities. A key challenge was to reach the media and public in the capital city and campaigners gathered at the parliament in Dublin at key moments throughout the campaign. LL received a life-sized plastic mould of a cow from local sculptor Jackie McKenna and 'Daisy the Cow' became the group's public mascot. Daisy found herself *'on the road to Dublin, up and down, up and down. She was outside the Dáil maybe about 10 times'* (Triona). Daisy was eye catching and evocative of rural life. She provided an attention hook because she *'added a bit of fun element to a very serious campaign and the media loved her'* (Triona). Such creative, fun and celebratory elements were an important part of LL's approach to collective action, which aimed to be *'a little bit pleasant, a little bit funny and have a bit of a surprise in it'* (Heather).

LL campaigners used collective action in order to demonstrate the social licence of the campaign's resistance to fracking. Campaigners worked with key community groups to organize public demonstrates against fracking. The group used the 2013 G8 meeting, which took place in Northern Ireland, as a strategic mobilizing moment. Rather than going to the march in Fermanagh, LL felt it was *'actually more important'* to work locally with members of the Irish Farmers Association (IFA) to organize a tractorcade as *'a show of solidarity with the farmers who are the landowners'* (Triona). As local farmer and member of both LL and the IFA, Fergus played an important bridging role in organizing the event through *'word of mouth . . . knocking on doors and phone calls and what have you'*. Using this informal approach through his social networks he *'went around a lot of [farmers] and they all agreed to come on the tractor run'*. Triona recalled how the group organized the event with the aim of *'really bringing the farming organisations on board'*. She felt that this aim was achieved when local farming leaders, who had yet to make any public

statement on fracking *'realised, "uh oh, we're not representing the members here!"*
I mean 60 tractors in Leitrim is a lot! It mightn't be a lot anywhere else, the French
farmers on the Champs Elise, 60 wouldn't be many but here it is' (Triona).

Community resistance established and enforced a bottom line for com-
munities, which made it clear that they would not accept fracking or any
research leading to drilling. This was illustrated by resistance to Tamboran's
attempted drilling in Belcoo, as well as the 2015 Lock the Gate campaign,
which prevented geological research in the area. Robert argued that com-
munities can be local nodes of resistance to *'fundamental, large problems that*
aren't that easy to solve' because *'one of the things small communities can do is*
simply say no'. And while that can mean that a project or industry *'moves off*
to a place where the community isn't as strong', at the same time he felt that
'every time a community resists, it empowers another community to resist'.

Towards a liberation environmentality: implications for environmental community work

Fletcher (2017) invites political ecology and environmental justice scholars
to consider how their work contributes to a 'liberation environmentality'
that supports forms of environmental management that are 'grounded in
an ideology of participatory egalitarianism' (p. 314). A politics of liberation
environmentality seeks to support communities to actively manage their
environment in ways which are of benefit to the community rather than
just the market or the state. Yet, even as various modes of environmen-
tality are employed to regulate environmental subjectivities, there contin-
ues to be many troublesome environmental subjects mobilizing resist the
structural inequities embedded in the environment. My case study of LL
identified the strategies of rooting and resisting, which enabled campaign-
ers to build a strong local campaign, effectively navigate power asym-
metries and resist the extractivist project of fracking. Local mobilizations
such as LL's offer examples of critical dissent and collective action around
the environment, pointing the way to what a liberation environmentality
looks like.

LL's frontline community struggle offers important insights for com-
munity development workers who wish to address the environment as
a political issue and play a role in bringing about a just transition for
marginalized communities and workers:

- **Take a critical, problem-posing approach to the environment**
  Our local environment is a space where taken for granted assumptions about
  our human relationships with one another and the earth may be questioned
  and problematized. A critical conceptualization of the environment as a site

of struggle where meaning is made and values are contested through every-day interactions provides an important starting point for bold and imaginative environmental community work. LL's campaign illustrates the power of finding points of connection between environment issues and people's daily lives in order to problematize extractivist logic and catalyse action for environmental justice.

- **Resist framings of the environment that depoliticize or individualize issues**

  It is important for practitioners to consider how different discourses, reflecting different material interests, seek to shape both our understanding of environment problems and the solutions proposed to them. The weak form of sustainable development that is dominant in mainstream policymaking places emphasis on green growth and individual behavioural change. This is a challenge for community work because it obscures the structural causes of environmental degradation. LL's campaign offers an example of how a community mobilized and took collective action for environmental justice, challenging the individualizing discourse of weak sustainability and forcing the state to enact strong regulation against extractivism.

- **Foster translocal networks of solidarity and support**

  By focusing on community as a locus of environmental action there is a danger that responsibility for environmental action could be placed solely on communities, reinforcing neoliberal environmentality. It is therefore important for practitioners to consider how local action may be connected to wider movements for environmental justice and be scaled-up influence structural outcomes. Building translocal networks of solidarity and exchange between communities with common concerns or experiences is one way to begin to address this. LL built links of solidarity with other frontline communities. This located their local campaign within broader networks of resistance to fracking, extractivism and environmental injustice. Such translocal networks can provide practical support, such as with New York campaigners' assistance with the establishment of CHPI.

- **Engage politicians rather than regulators and emphasize the democratic right to shape policy**

  Environmental policy that governs outcomes for communities remains broadly the preserve of scientific experts. Thus, it is essential that community workers consider how environmental action by local communities can navigate power asymmetries in order to influence structural outcomes. LL's reaching strategies illustrate potential avenues for scaling-up local action. In seeking to engage with and influence environmental policy, LL's campaign was fought around questions of public health, governance and democracy rather than on narrow technical or legal terms. Such an approach is crucial to enable communities to side-step potential power and knowledge

asymmetries within regulatory spaces that could devalue their perspective and inhibit their ability to participate effectively.

Conclusion

The strategies of rooting and resisting enabled LL to successfully resist the extractivist project of fracking. These strategies offer a practical insight into how environmental community work might support consciousness raising and collectivization around the environment, as well as assisting communities to negotiate power asymmetries across scales in order to influence campaign outcomes. This case study points to how community work contributes to a critical, collective and liberatory politics of environmental justice. The escalating climate crisis starkly highlights the need to halt the exploitation of fossil fuels, curb extractivism and decarbonize our societies. It is crucial that equity and justice for workers and communities are cornerstones of economic transition. The strategies of rooting and reaching may provide signposts supporting collective action for climate justice. The skills and values of community work practitioners will play an important role to ensure that the transition is not just a technical question of mitigation and adaptation, but also contributes to the building of equitable and resilient communities. Taking a lead from community struggles like Love Leitrim's, community development workers have much to offer in the fight against extractivism and for environmental justice.

Acknowledgements

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