ALTERNATIVE AGRICULTURE MOVEMENTS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COSMOLOGIES[*]

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INTRODUCTION

Do movements for alternative agriculture contribute to sustainable development? If so, how do they do so? Should they be seen solely as movements for technical change (change in the forces and means of production and consumption to make these less damaging to nature), or can they be understood more broadly as movements for rural regeneration and the recreation of community within rural spaces? In Habermas' (1984, 1987) terms, do they articulate instrumental-strategic or communicative forms of reason as the basis for social and for society-nature relationships? This paper draws on ongoing research into the organic food and farming movement in Ireland (see also Tovey 1997, 1999) to explore some aspects of these questions. It argues that much recent discussion of rural development overlooks the significant part which can be played in this by social movements, and as a result, underestimates some key elements in processes of change, particularly around the reconstruction of rural civil society.

The concept of sustainable development has been subjected to severe critique (see e.g. Adams 1995; Baker et al (eds) 1997; Becker and Jahn (eds) 1999; Redclift 1997; Torgerson 1995). As long as it is defined purely in terms of ecological sustainability, or the maintenance of the ecological conditions necessary to sustain human life over several generations, its meaning and application may be fairly clear. But as Becker and Jahn note, the main interest which social scientists have in sustainability is not conservation of nature but rather 'the viability of socially shaped relationships between society and nature over long periods of time' (1999: 4). In turn this raises questions about equity and legitimacy in social arrangements and about how societies manage processes of change. Thus discussions of sustainable development necessarily involve normative claims and political programmes as well as scientific analysis, to a point where, they suggest, we should treat the term not as a well defined concept but 'a contested discursive field', whose main contribution has been to 'introduce to environmental issues a concern with social justice and political participation' (1999: 1).

Efforts to preserve what is useful in the concept while reducing some of its ambiguities lead some authors to talk of 'sustainable livelihoods' rather than 'sustainable development' (Chambers 1995; de Haan 2000). De Haan explains a sustainable livelihood as a way a person makes a living for themselves, using their capacities and assets, which meets their (self-defined) essential needs and can resist shocks and stress over time. The move from 'sustainable development' to 'sustainable livelihoods' at first seems to substitute a clear economic definition of sustainability for the ecological clarity which initially underpinned it, but it quickly becomes apparent that the 'capabilities and assets' required for sustainable livelihoods include more than just economic resources. For example, the tenth World Congress of the International Rural Sociological Association in Rio de Janeiro in August 2000, which was centered on the theme of 'sustainable rural livelihoods', elaborated this in terms of three elements: 'building communities', 'protecting resources', 'fostering human development'. De Haan similarly links sustainability in livelihoods to the presence of natural, human and social (as well as physical and financial) capital. The problem then becomes that of knowing whether or how these different dimensions or 'capitals' fit together. Does a social group or society which possesses an abundance of 'social capital' necessarily convert that into the sorts of development practices which will lead to sustainable rural livelihoods? What additional factors might be needed for that to happen? Also, how do groups acquire 'social capital' in the first place, and sustain it over time?

The concept of 'social capital' refers us to what sociological discussions have often treated as the presence of 'community' within groups undergoing or needing to undergo development. Social capital is measured through the quality of relations between individuals, in terms of trust, neighbourliness and reciprocity; the quantity and extent of relations, in terms of access to or incorporation into networks, groups and institutions; and a shared culture which offers relatively stable and accepted rules for behaviour and common frameworks for orienting to the future. If 'community' is a difficult and contested concept, 'social capital' also has problematic aspects, including, for some sociologists, its associations with Rational Choice Theory and its recent enthusiastic adoption by the World Bank (see Fine 2001), and for others, the 'reifying' (Sachs 1999) effect of reducing everything, whether or not it can be measured quantitatively, to forms of capital. Research has often been narrowly targeted on social capital as relations of 'trust' between members of a collectivity, and on voluntary associations as the major transmitters of and occasions for the development of trust (van Deth et al 1999). The emphasis on voluntary associations seems unnecessarily limiting, given that crucial experiences in relation to trust occur in relationships either with the state or with the market. It seems attributable primarily to the interest which social capital analysts have in theorising 'civil society', understood simply as that domain of interactions and relationships which is neither private/domestic, nor structured by the imperatives of either economics or politics. Social movements generally enter into research on social capital only to the extent that they encourage or promote the establishment of voluntary associations (Siisiainen 1999), overlooking the possibility that they might be a source of social capital in their own right.

The conceptual transmutation of 'sustainable development' into a combination of 'sustainable livelihoods' and 'social capital' represents one way of trying to overcome the normative associations of sustainability. It moves the debate to an empirical investigation of how attempts to achieve social arrangements which are (relatively) socially inclusive, egalitarian, and/or politically participative, may (or may not) be related to attempts to institutionalise long-term natural resource management to meet human needs. As such, it has some advantages but also some limitations. An alternative move is to drop the term 'sustainable' and return to a renewed concept of '(rural) development'.

The value of 'sustainable development', for many rural sociologists, was that it revealed the deficiencies of economistic understandings of development as 'growth' or as 'economic modernisation'. Once understood, these deficiencies may be best dealt with through terms such as 'whole development' (Sachs 1999), or 'rural development practices' (van der Ploeg, Renting and Minderhoud-Jones 2000). Van der Ploeg et al (2000) characterise contemporary rural development as a multi-faceted array of practices - landscape management, conservation of nature, agri-tourism, organic farming, the production of high-quality region-specific foods - which represent the responses of rural households themselves, out of their own 'well-understood self-interest' Van der Ploeg et al (2000: 404), to the fact that rural development policies and ideologies, which still largely articulate modernisationist conceptions of development, are making their livelihoods more and more unsustainable. 'Time and again we see that Rural Development is about: the construction of new networks, the revalorisation and recombination of resources, the co-ordination and (re)-moulding of the social and the material, and the (renewed) use of social, cultural and ecological capital' Van der Ploeg et al (2000: 400). This paper also explores rural development understood as everyday rural practices, rather than as policy or social scientific paradigm. However it asks how the notion of resisting the modernisationist development paradigm and creating new livelihood practices may be introduced as a realistic possibility into rural localities at all, particularly localities which have been marginalised and demoralised by the collapse of farming under agricultural development policies over the past thirty or so years. It suggests that here, in some cases at least, alternative agriculture movements may play a critical role.

A considerable body of sociological research exists on rural community development in Ireland. But this has focussed almost exclusively on associations or groups who are officially and self-labelled as community development agents, detailing their developmental life-cycles, their history, values and management styles, impact on local economies, relations with the state and the European Union particularly in terms of discourses of 'partnership' and 'participation' in 'bottom-up' development strategies, and their increasing 'professionalisation' (see e.g. Cawley and Keane 1999; Commins 1985; Cuddy 1991; Curtin 1996; Curtin and Varley 1991, 1995; Devereux 1991, 1993; Mernagh and Commins 1997; Shortall 1994; Varley 1999). Two issues have dominated: how agencies established for community development goals might involve themselves in setting up economic enterprises and in creating viable livelihoods; and the importance of 'empowering' local actors, or developing organisational structures which will generate a sense of efficacy and self-reliance within the local community which is undergoing development. Looking at alternative agriculture activists as developers of rural community means starting from the opposite end of the spectrum. Their primary concern is not community development as such but economic innovation - the attempt to generate an alternative livelihood within the countryside. Nevertheless their economic entrepreneurialism appears to carry with it some 'empowering' non-economic impacts and dimensions. I link this to the fact that many of the alternative agriculturalists involved in organic farming in Ireland are not just individual entrepreneurs, but members of an alternative social movement.

Within such movements, the issue of finding and maintaining the appropriate balance between instrumental and communicative relations with other humans and with nature is a critical dilemma for members. There are strong pressures from both commercial and political sources to define organic and other alternative agricultures as matters of technical change alone - the development and application of different, or non-conventional, techniques for managing nature in order to produce food (Tovey 1999). Technical innovation, moreover, is typically of great interest to alternative food producers themselves, and a dominant feature of the character of alternative agriculture movements. But such movements are about more than inventing alternative ways of producing food. They follow a holistic vision of reality, in which technical methods of food production are thought of as embedded within interactions with *both* nature and society, and cannot be evaluated separately from evaluation of their impacts on humans, on other species, and on the forms of social organisation which underpin a sustainable rural community.

Rural and agricultural sociologists have generally not evinced much interest in social movements perspectives (an exception is Mooney and Majka 1995), being concerned more with the analysis of macro-structures shaping food systems and regimes than collective (or individual) agency. Equally, social movement theorists have generally lacked any interest in, or have been downright dismissive of, the notion that rural or agrarian social movements could be empirically or theoretically fruitful to study (Mooney 2000). I hope to show that social movements theorising can yield some insights into the dilemmas and contradictions embedded within projects for sustainable development; and simultaneously, that the dilemmas facing rural movement activists can be analysed in ways which advance social movements theorising in general. In particular, I want to use my case-study of Irish organic producers as unofficial community development activists to present the cognitive approach to social movements, associated particularly with Eyerman and Jamison (1991), which has, I believe, been undeservedly neglected by other social movements theorists.

It is appropriate to end this section with a brief note on the data used in the paper. It comes primarily from 20 interviews with organic horticulturalists and livestock farmers, conducted over the past 2-3 years as exploratory work for an anticipated larger study. The subjects were located by the snowball method, where each person interviewed suggested other

relevant people who could also be included, so they can be seen as more or less well-integrated members of an existing network or overlapping networks. Their high levels of community development activities may thus be partly the result of selection bias. However, I believe that this does not invalidate exploring the meanings of that activism for them. I should also note that the interviews were intended primarily to study the issue of technical innovation, since it was this which was most engaging my interest in organic farming in Ireland at the time: I wanted to find out whether these proponents of alternative farming saw themselves as inheritors and re-valuers of farming practices which have been widely categorised - and castigated - as 'traditional' or 'peasant' ways of farming, or whether they saw themselves as the bearers of a new science of farming to replace the productivist type of agricultural science which has been widely accused of damaging natural systems. That in spite of this focus, community or 'social capital' development emerged as such a significant issue for nearly all of those interviewed lends some weight to my interpretation of its importance for understanding alternative agriculture movements. Nevertheless, the data used in the paper are clearly limited in both spread and depth. I do not claim much more for it than that it helps to illustrate and bring to life an argument which at present remains theoretically rather than empirically based.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Since I am emphasising the importance of thinking of alternative agriculture movements as social movements, I start with a brief outline of social movement theorising in sociology more generally, and locate my own approach within this wide and differentiated field. The definition of a social movement is a contested issue in the contemporary sociological literature. That literature has been shaped by two quite different traditions of theorising about social movements, and (more recently) by attempts to generate interaction and dialogue between them. On one side is the predominantly American tradition which emerged historically out of critique of the functionalist 'strain' theory of Smelser and others (Alexander 1996; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1988; Scott 1990, 1992; Zald and McCarthy 1987) and which focuses on social movements as rational actors pursuing political goals through strategic mobilisation of resources; on the other is the predominantly European tradition, influenced by Critical Theory and its meditations on the consequences of the incorporation of the working class into modern capitalism, which addresses social movements as possible bearers (and products) of new societal orders (Clark and Diani 1996; Scott 1990, 1996). Despite vigorous interchange between the traditions over the past decade, the distinction between two more or less opposed ways of analysing social movements persists in the literature, constantly reappearing in reworked forms. It is now more likely to be expressed as a distinction between 'political' (or Resource Mobilisation) and 'cultural' (or 'identity-oriented') perspectives than in terms of geographically-based traditions of theorising, and the emphasis is more on finding ways to integrate than to differentiate the perspectives (Cohen 1996; Maheu 1996). Nevertheless, the historical formation of contemporary debates about social movements has produced competing ways of defining or conceptualising them, which continue to shape interpretations of empirical movements.

'Political' perspectives understand social movements as realised primarily in their formal organisational manifestations, whereas 'cultural' perspectives are more likely to understand them as loosely inter-related informal networks of actors. Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT), widely used as the main exemplar of the 'political' approach, does not ignore the pre-formal-organisation stage of social movement development (McAdam et al 1988). But its particular strength lies in analysing Social Movement Organisations (SMOs) and problems of social movement organisation (Mayer 1995; Scott 1992). This can make social movements hard to distinguish from their representing organisations, and in extreme versions produces an 'instrumentalising and decontextualising' approach to analysis which treats even the ideologies of the movement as little more than rhetorical 'strategies for mobilising masses' (Alexander 1996: 209). On the other hand, 'cultural' theorists like Touraine (1995) and Melucci (1989) strongly resist reducing a social movement to the formal organisations that claim to represent it or to articulate its ideas. Melucci argues that social movements have their most enduring existence within 'cultural networks'. These are not merely a source of recruits to be mobilised into demonstrations and political protests when the occasion demands, but are ongoing 'cultural laboratories' in which new lifestyles and forms of social relations can be developed. 'Cultural' theorists shift the focus of attention away from organisational characteristics and concerns onto forms of everyday living, arguing that social movements are concerned with values and life-styles as much as with demands for the inclusion of excluded groups and categories in the policy formation process. Indeed, the goal of social movement activity is often to alter and extend the boundaries of political discourse itself (Mayer 1995). Social movements seek change through cultural as well as political innovation - reconstructing values, personal identities and cultural symbols, and contributing to the emergence of alternative life-styles. 'Membership' in a movement or movement organisation is a matter of informal networking and grass-roots mobilisation - displaying interest, turning up at events and occasions, participating in the alternative lifestyle - rather than paying a standardised subscription and receiving in return standardised privileges and services. Movement actors may, indeed, express considerable suspicion of the formal and hierarchical types of organisation typical of representative democracy (Scott 1990: 30).

My discussion to this point emphasises the difference between these two theoretical perspectives on social movements, the 'political' and the 'cultural' (Alexander 1996) or 'instrumentally rational' and 'identity-oriented' (Cohen 1996), However, there have been a number of attempts to bring the two perspectives into some sort of dialogue. One which has been widely discussed suggests that rather than treat these as competing theories of social movements, we see them as descriptions of movements which are temporally distinct. 'Political' orientations and strategies are the dominant characteristic of 'old' social movements or the movements of pre-reflexive modernity; when 'cultural' concerns dominate, this tells us that we are looking at a 'new' social movement. This distinction between 'old' and 'new' social movements was

itself originally a key feature separating the 'American' and 'European' traditions of theorising: American theorists rarely invoked it, European ones constantly did. In America, interest in social movements developed out of an interest in understanding collective action in general, and the aim was to identify the characteristics of social movements, as a subset of collective action, in terms that transcended particular historical or cultural conditions. Among European theorists, the influence of Marxist and Critical Theory generated a preoccupation with linking types of movement to types of societal epoch, for example in Touraine's (1995) attempt to identify and contrast the social movements found in Industrial and in Post-Industrial or Programmed Societies.

If the classical social movements of industrial society differ from those new forms emerging in late modernity, then collective action is undergoing a historical change in character - becoming less formally organised (Plotke 1990; Scott 1990), less involved in the pursuit of 'emancipatory' political goals (Giddens 1991), more concerned with meaning, culture and the elaboration of alternative values (Goldblatt 1996) and in particular with the articulation and defence of new or marginalised social identities. This shift from 'instrumentalising' to 'expressive' (Rucht 1990) collective action demonstrates, for New Social Movement theorists, that a real transformation has occurred in contemporary society as a whole. But the historical accuracy of the argument has been challenged by a succession of researchers who point out that workers' movements in the 19th century, or feminist movements of the mid-20th century, both of which might be considered to be examples of 'old' movements, contained elements of both instrumental and expressive action (Cohen 1996; Scott 1992).

A second attempt at reconciliation produces what is called the 'stage' or 'lifecycle model' of social movement development (Cohen 1996: 199). The stage model, found in authors as far apart theoretically as Przeworski (1985), McAdam et al (1988), and Jamison (1996), says that the 'political' and 'cultural' designations do not refer to different theoretical perspectives on movements, nor to movements located in historically separated periods, but to the different stages of development through which individual movements characteristically pass. All social movements, it is suggested, undergo a developmental process in which they pass from non-institutionalised, mass protest forms of action to institutionalised and routine interest group or party politics. Features often attributed to 'new' social movements, such as the presence of loose network forms of organisation and the absence of distinctions between leaders and followers, members and non-members, simply indicate that the movement is in an early developmental stage. This inevitably gives way to a second stage of movement activity when action shifts from the expressive and solidarity-creating to the instrumental and strategic: 'The logic of collective action at this stage is structured by the politics of political inclusion', and social movements undergo 'a learning process involving goal-rational adaptation to political structures' (Cohen 1996: 200).

A major problem of the stage model is its linearity. Cohen (1996) argues that rather than assuming social movements undergo linear patterns of evolution, we should recognise that many, perhaps most, contemporary movements have had 'a dual organisational logic' from their inception. Tendencies towards rationalisation, formalisation and institutionalisation exist and may be particularly marked at certain points in time, but they never entirely exclude co-existing tendencies towards decentralisation and democratisation, the proliferation of cultural networks and alternative lifestyles, and activities oriented towards collective identity construction and new knowledges. Cohen (1996) says that contemporary social movements have a 'double political task': they must engage in a 'politics of influence' in the political sphere, and simultaneously in a 'politics of identity' in the life-world or civil society sphere. Another way of putting this is to say that social movements target both political and civil society. For Cohen, this insight is the undoubted contribution of 'cultural' theorising about social movements: 'Contemporary collective actors consciously struggle over the power to construct new identities, to create democratic spaces within both civil society and the polity for autonomous social action, and to reinterpret norms and reshape institutions. It is incumbent on the theorist to view civil society as the target as well as the terrain of collective action...' (Cohen 1996:181).

Stage models recognise that social movements target both, but treat them as 'either/or' orientations, assuming that the normal history of a movement is to pass in a linear fashion from one to the other, and that this represents some sort of learning or maturing process. Cohen's (1996) 'dual logic' approach insists that movements are continuously engaged in acting on both civil society and polity/economy, even if one or the other may have greater significance at particular times. More importantly still, she insists that the dualism be seen as belonging to the movements themselves, rather than to theorising about them: the presence of two different ways of understanding movements in the theoretical literature is a response to the presence of divergent activities and goals within movements themselves. It reflects the different praxes utilised by movement actors at different points in the life-history of the movement. This seems to me a very important argument. Although Cohen herself does not take this step, being apparently content to treat duality within social movements as an unproblematic source of strength, it does open up the possibility that the choice, at any one time, between 'cultural' and 'instrumental' action is not just a function of the movement adapting to changing circumstances: it may in fact be a hugely problematic dichotomy which actors within movements themselves have to confront and somehow manage in their movement lives.

The idea that movement activism is shaped by the constant need to manage and balance instrumental and cultural goals is central to my own approach to studying organic farming as a social movement in Ireland (Tovey 1999). To develop it here, I draw particularly on that version of a 'cultural' approach to social movements which has been elaborated by Eyerman and Jamison (1991) and Jamison (1996). Their work offers a useful way of elaborating the 'political/cultural' dichotomy which opens it up to empirical observation and analysis. Although they themselves do not do so, we can use

their conceptual framework to uncover the extent to which social movements like the organic farming movement and other movements for sustainable development confront and struggle with a 'duality' of aims and values that place problematic choices constantly before the actors concerned.

Eyerman and Jamison (1991) broaden the notion of 'culture' to include not just symbolic and expressive dimensions of collective behaviour, but also and most importantly, the cognitive dimension. They see social movements primarily as *cognitive actors,* engaged in the construction of new sorts of knowledge and in attempts to produce cognitive change in society. Social movements are collective knowledge innovators - 'breeding grounds for innovations in thought' or 'bearers of new ideas' (Eyerman and Jamison 1991: 3) which can transform our understanding of the age we live in and of its future possibilities. The cognitive aspect of social movement activity tends to be ignored by perspectives which see social movements primarily as political organisations whose main concern is to mobilise resources and act as vehicles for particular political campaigns (Jamison 1996: 238). But it has equally been underplayed by identity-oriented perspectives, which treat social movements as engaged primarily in the creation of collective identities, and thus overlook the central role of collective cognitive praxis in constituting distinctive movements.

Eyerman and Jamison's (1991) development of the notion of cognitive praxis has been particularly shaped by Habermas' conception of 'knowledge-constituting interests'. Thus, they identify three distinct dimensions of cognitive praxis: *cosmological* - the basic assumptions and beliefs which are taken for granted by movement activists and which enable them to create and express a distinctive world-view (e.g. ecological holism, in the case of the environmental movement); *technological* (which includes both the specific techniques and artefacts against which movement actors are protesting, and the alternative techniques, as in biodynamic agriculture or renewable energy, which they are trying to develop); and *organisational*, which includes in particular their visions of how knowledge should be produced and disseminated. This usually involves insistence on greater democratic participation in decision-making, and the rejection of conventional distinctions between 'experts' and others (Jamison 1996: 239), but it can refer more broadly to any ethics of human relationships. Eyerman and Jamison (1991) do not say much about this third dimension, but what they do say points us towards exploring movement actors' ideas about appropriate ways of organising social relations to put technological innovations into practice. The social management of technology - or the social relations which are developed in the course of applying new techniques for acting on the external world - is thus indicated to be as important an issue to movement activists as is technological innovation itself. The three dimensions echo Habermas' (1971) distinctions between emancipatory, instrumental, and communicative 'interests', which underpin the constitution of what he saw as three very different bodies of knowledge: critical, scientific, and hermeneutic. This is why 'organisational praxis', in Eyerman and Jamison's (1991) discussion of it, is not just to do with innovating techniques for organising people so to achieve instrumental successes, i.e. subsumable within the 'technical' dimension - although without the link back to Habermas, why that should not be so is not always clear.

Eyerman and Jamison (1991) discuss the fact that social movements face serious problems in trying to maintain the integration of all three dimensions of knowledge over time. Other social actors or institutions (particularly state or corporate groups) will bring very strong pressures to bear on movements, trying to single out those elements of the cognitive praxis which most interest them (usually, these are the innovations in technical knowledge), so that they can incorporate these individually within their own knowledge sets, while discarding the rest. It is thus inevitable that social movements are impermanent and transient sources of what may be permanent and far-reaching political and cultural change. Social movements define themselves in the process of creating, articulating and formulating new knowledge, but once this new knowledge has become formalised and accepted, whether within the scientific world or the established political culture, then it has 'left the space of the movement behind' (1991: 60).

This is an interesting argument which could be developed further, but for the moment I want to stress how, in emphasising it, Eyerman and Jamison (1991) leave other possibilities largely unexplored. They do not address the possibility, for example, that relations between the three dimensions of knowledge may be incoherent or contradictory within a single given movement, or that there may be a constant tension between the cognitive praxis which actors develop around one dimension, and the praxes manifest in the other two. The assumption is that tension and confrontation occurs between movement and outside institutions, not within the movement itself, between or within individual members. But it is also possible that actors' interests in innovating technologically run up against absolute values articulated in their cosmology. How do movement actors come to recognise this sort of contradictory outcome from their work as activists, and how do they respond to and deal with it when they do recognise it?

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE ORGANIC MOVEMENT IN IRELAND

Eyerman and Jamison's model of the cognitive project of a social movement draws largely from one specific case: the environmental movement of Western Europe from the 1970s on. The argument that movement actors display a marked interest in technical issues and forms of knowledge should be seen in that context; it may be less evident in other types of movement at other times, which are less concerned about science and its uses. The organic movement itself is sometimes characterised as a movement so narrowly preoccupied with technical change in the process of food production that it scarcely merits the label of 'environmental social movement' at all (e.g. Buttel 1994). The data presented here suggest that, while innovating in methods of food production is of passionate interest to many Irish organic farmers and growers, they also live within and take for granted a cosmology which prevents them from considering techniques of production in isolation from their effects on both nature and social relations.

The dominant feature of the members of the movement to emerge from interviews was that they see themselves as people engaged in trying to establish or maintain innovatory forms of livelihood connected with food. They understand natural-resource-exploiting forms of activity as absolutely central to the survival of 'rurality' in contemporary Europe (see also Curtin, Haase and Tovey 1996). They argue that with the loss of small farming, rural Ireland is becoming 'suburbanised' (Interview 7); or that living in a countryside in which productive work on nature is not encouraged is like living in 'a huge museum' (Interview 4). Livelihoods based on food can be innovatory in a range of different ways: in the methods used to grow or rear it, or the social relationships through which labour is made available to produce it, or the way linkages between growers and processors are organised, or the methods used to sell to consumers, or the connections created between local forms of food and other dimensions of local 'heritage' and identity, or the conferring of economic value on local food-producing knowledges and skills through the establishment and policing, for example, of systems modelled on 'appellation d'origine controllee'. The Irish organic farmers interviewed were most prepared to speak about the first of these; but as the discussion went on, it became increasingly clear that other forms of innovation, particularly around social relationships with labour or with consumers, were also a key concern.

Thus, for example, they spoke at length and enthusiastically about new strategies they have developed to deal with pests on their vegetables without using chemical protections; about ways in which they have been able to overwinter numbers of cattle on grass without either overgrazing the land or starving their cattle; about rotating their use of land to avoid a build-up of worms in the animals; about selecting the right breeds of animal and right species of grasses to survive and thrive under organic conditions ; and so on. Their interest in and emphasis on creating technical responses to problems was so marked that it would be easy, on a superficial reading, to attribute to them a discourse of organic farming which is almost purely technicist, with little environmental or social content. I argue that that would seriously misrepresent their position. A brief focus on three other strands also evident in the interviews help to illustrate that. These are: a holistic vision which sees nature and society as intertwined (and food, or food production, as a significant mediator between the two); an insistence that organic farming is inseparable from rural development; and an interest in innovating organisationally as well as technically.

A number of those interviewed said explicitly that environment, food production and community are intertwined and cannot be dealt with separately:

> I'd see it as being part of a very wide thing really and I think, I mean everything in the countryside is interconnected to some way or another anyhow so from that point of view, yeah, I'd say its like a network really. People who are kind of environment conscious tend to belong to a lot of different organisations even though I don't personally but I would support a lot of different causes like that as well (Interview 1).

> It's environment, it's organics, it's community. The very way we're running the farm, which incidentally developed rather than was planned, we have a consistent flow of people through the farm. Most people come to learn as well as work and wherever possible we give them as much backwards…(Interview 3).

> I suppose partly why we are organic farmers, it's not just the environmental thing, there's a bit of a no nonsense approach in a way. We like to do things in a way in which we consider the right way to do it. And I'd be terribly concerned about what's happening to rural Ireland and I'd be terribly concerned about food production, all that and keeping people here…. (Interview 6).

The influence of an ecological holism was evident in many interviews, where the organic farmers made initial connections between producing good food and environmental conservation, and then went on to include people, social relations and community as well. Nearly all made some connection, implicit or explicit, between organic farming and rural development, because, as one said:

> There's so much going on at the minute with so many going out of farming and farming becoming such a business, and needing business managers more than farmers. And because it is not easy for that to happen in the West [of Ireland] and because you wouldn't want it to happen anyway and we would be keen to keep family farms going and greater diversity of activity on the farms which is the organic thing. And we would also see it as a community development thing, to try and feed a community from within a community as much as possible. But realising as well that we'd export and import things too. And seeing opportunities there for export, for niche markets in organic… (Interview 13).

The connection mentioned by most was with the labour-intensive nature of organic production - that it ought to be a good source of employment for rural people which would help to keep them in the locality. In practice, most conceded that its potential for generating local employment had not been realised so far, but they were still optimistic that it would become significant, over time.

Most of those interviewed were not originally from the locality in which they were farming. Some had previously farmed elsewhere, but many had had distinctive career histories which involved working with innovative groups before they turned to organic food production, such as helping to administer a vegetarian whole-food co-operative and supporting its producers, or editing an alternative magazine and working with its writers. In their contemporary farming lives, many are committed to selling their food through relations which are personal as well as economic - particularly through direct selling to food consumers at local markets or via the box system, but also through building up a good relationships, for

example, with chefs in local restaurants. This gives them opportunities to develop social relations with others in their locality which are not so available to the conventional farmer. It also illustrates how the organic activists largely took for granted that market exchanges are social exchanges and are to be valued for both aspects.

Among the organic growers and farmers interviewed (and as noted above, they may over-represent the best-known people in the movement), involvement in broader developmental activities and organisations - both directly connected with the organic movement, and not connected at all or only peripherally - stood out as a pronounced characteristic. This was particularly striking given the heavy labour demands which organic production makes on producers and which all of them complained about in one way or another. They were Chairmen, ex-Chairmen, or Board members of one or other of the three national organic organisations in Ireland; active members of their local community councils; office-holders in local co-operatives; key figures in the LETS (Local Exchange and Trading Systems) movement for developing local trading currencies; extensively involved in organising courses on organic production in conjunction with LEADER groups in Ireland or with Teagasc, the national food and agricultural authority. Beyond this, there were a number of interviewees who had a specific interest in innovating techniques of social organisation around organic farming, in much the same way, if less strongly, as they were interested in innovating production techniques.

One activist, for example, said that he became involved in organic growing because he wanted to develop 'sustainable lifestyles' (Interview 3). He has innovated organisationally in a number of ways to deal with labour shortages in a very labour-intensive horticultural enterprise. He belongs to the local LETS system and has 'two or three people on average coming up, they'd work a day in exchange for local currency in vegetables'; he exchanges hospitality and a holiday in the countryside to visitors in return for help with the work; and given the constraints on individuals working in organic production (hard work and small returns) he is trying to develop a new organisational form which he calls 'community gardening'. A lot of people want organic vegetables but cannot take on the responsibility of running a garden themselves, so…

> I'm interested in the idea of setting up gardens where people can come and work more or less when it suits them. So you'd need an overall manager there and then you can have children there, you can have adults there, you can have unemployed, coming and working as they choose and getting from it what they need…It's very idealistic but I see it working as better than a co-operative system where you have maybe 12 guys on a FAS course in the room and if they don't get on, so what happens? (Interview Three)

He's currently trying to get funding from the Local Partnership body to develop this idea, and is playing around with a range of imaginative ideas about how, once established, it could best be managed, including various types of share-cropping arrangement.

Another organic grower who is also organisationally creative is a nun in a well-known religious order in Ireland. One of her current projects is setting up a community recycling organisation in her locality to compost organic waste. She has other projects in mind too:

> We have plans for an 11-acre plot that we have ownership of and we're hoping to develop that. This is a dream that we have: of having a mini eco-community where there would be maybe four or five families occupying that land, both the dwellings and the methods of growing would be organic. That's in the pipeline. There are a couple of centres around the country, we have friends in X have built a house out of straw bales actually. So we have a network of people. We have friends in Y who have also developed a project down there, they have done a school thing down there where the children would be very much in tune with the organic garden that surrounds them… (Interview 19).

She also mentioned friends on a new housing estate in the South West, who got the estate landscaped with fruit and berry plants instead of 'fancy landscaping' .

Underpinning the organisational praxis of organic movement members is an emphasis on collectivism, on networking and mobilising groups to respond collectively to dilemmas and problems that they encounter. Most of the people interviewed appeared to be strong individuals who were well able to take on individual leadership roles; but their 'cosmological' response to any issue was not to act on their own but to look for others who could engage with them in addressing it. This appears to be connected to a belief in the superiority of technological solutions which are reached through sharing knowledge and experience, which in turn is linked to the activists' own experience of setting up as organic farmers at a time when few formal supports were available to them. As one put it,

> It has been a very small community, the organic one, in this country, and so there's been a huge interchange of knowledge and that sort of thing and you find that it is very common for people to have open days and farm walks and visiting each other and you learn an awful lot that way (Interview 1).

But along with this goes an assumption that co-operation as a principle of social relationships is both ethically desirable and the only rational way of proceeding:

> It is very important to make sure that they (new entrants into organic growing) don't all produce the same half a dozen things and hit the market all at the one time. That's where the co-operation comes in. And that is another mindset we have to change. Because in conventional farming all the people producing the same thing hit each

other head on, face-to-face. What should happen is co-operation so they don't all suddenly arrive in the market with a vanload of lettuce… (Interview 6).

The point I want to emphasise, however, is that the interests which these organic farmers display in technical and organisational innovation are not regarded by them as straightforwardly coherent or mutually reinforcing. What was particularly interesting was that a number saw innovation in the techniques of food production as something which has dangerous possibilities and which could pose future dilemmas for the movement. They have, in effect, a dualistic orientation towards it. They recognise that intensive labour can easily become drudgery and do not see this as a desirable lifestyle, and so they look to technological innovation to remove as much of the hard work as possible from organic production. They are also passionately interested in issues of technique, almost for their own sake. But at the same time they recognise that industrialising food production, even in ecologically friendly ways, tends to lead to concentration of production and the expropriation of the smaller producer. The nun quoted earlier put the contradictions particularly clearly:

> I lived on a farm where the whole co-op movement was in full swing. And the Green Isle [vegetable processing] factory in Ballinrobe was up and running then. We had six acres of Brussels sprouts and twelve acres of sugar beet and four acres of French beans and we harvested all that in the bitter cold of winter: four girls. Being the oldest I had no option but to work the land. So I wouldn't be advocating that people return to that with labour. But I would feel that there's a way of doing it with modern technology and still be organic. But I wouldn't like it to go the road of Germany where instead of enabling people to work the land they have so industrialised it that fewer people are working the organic than previously on traditional, conventional farms. So it's a dilemma. I don't know where it will go… (Interview 19)

DISCUSSION

The paper argues that our understanding of sustainable development, and the part played in this by alternative agriculture movements, could be expanded by incorporating social movements theory - and particularly the cognitive perspective of Eyerman and Jamison (1991) - into our approach. Among other things, this might help us to get a better grasp on the creation and effects of 'social capital' in depressed rural areas. I noted earlier that one problem facing the organic movement as an alternative agricultural movement in Ireland and elsewhere is the tendency of outside observers and agents, particularly the state and commercial interests, to treat it as a movement purely for technical change, with no wider ideological commitments or social implications. This makes its technical innovations available to be absorbed into and developed as commercial practices within the mainstream food industry, while suppressing the extent to which the organic movement is critical of the practices of conventional food production. A belief that environmental problems can be solved through technical change is a feature of Ecological Modernisation policy orientations (Hajer 1996), probably the hegemonic worldview of contemporary state environmentalism. It would be understandable if movements like the Irish organic movement were attracted by that position. What is interesting then is that it is not, apparently, the hegemonic view among my network of organic activists. As a 'cultural' as well as a 'political' movement, pursuing a set of alternative cognitive projects, these activists seem able to resist pressures to integrate themselves into and collude with the instrumental, capital-rationalist orientations of eco-modernist regimes. The interview material suggests, if it can do no more than that, that although technological innovation often seems to dominate their practices, social or organisational innovation remains of great concern to them as well, because for them this is the way in which civil society can check the proliferation of instrumental rationality associated with technology; in Habermasian terms, it is what enables 'the lifeworld' to resist the continuous expansion and incursion into it of 'the system'. Movements which wish to act on civil society try to prevent interaction with others which is based on communicatively achieved agreement, through unforced participation, from turning into occasions for instrumental action, where other human subjects are treated as merely part of the environment in which the actor must strategise to achieve his or her own interests. The cosmological commitments of Irish organic producers are what prevent their passion for technique from undermining their concern with interpersonal interaction, community, and the development of new forms of rural social organisation.

The 'cultural' perspectives on social movements developed by both Cohen (1996), and Eyerman and Jamison (1991), recognise the dual, or in the latter case, triple orientation of such movements. However, neither asks how multiple orientations are experienced by movement actors, making an implicit inference that this is not problematic, or that the different dimensions are well integrated and coherent with each other. My approach questions that, and suggests that movement actors can experience considerable difficulties in balancing what can often appear to them as conflicting imperatives - to develop technical efficacy, and to maintain communicative or communal relations with others. How they resolve the difficulties may depend very considerably on the strength of the movement cosmology. Movement activists in Ireland and elsewhere may have reason to be concerned about the recent influx of organic practitioners who have been attracted into the field, not through becoming members of the movement but as a result of state- or corporate-sponsored programmes of technical re-education (Lyons and Lawrence 2002).

More broadly, the ambivalence and contradictions which so many commentators have detected at the heart of movements for sustainable development are not, or not only, a product of political attempts to capture and de-radicalise the concept. They may actually be an expression of the difficulties in choosing how to act - communicatively or strategically - which constantly confront movement activists themselves.

A related question posed by this paper concerns the nature of the rural development praxis exercised by organic movement activists. What, if anything, is distinctive or valuable about it? Following van der Ploeg et al (2000), I suggested that in researching rural development it may be useful sometimes to focus on 'unofficial' agents and activities, instead of starting from officially identified community development agencies and groups. My interviews open up the possibility that across rural Ireland, we could locate a layer of community development activity, possibly of considerable significance for rural regeneration, which is undertaken not as a goal in its own right so much as a by-product of attempts at economic innovation. This type of 'practical philanthropy' has been largely ignored in research on rural community or civil society development. People active within the organic movement also appear to be often quite extensively involved in voluntary or informal types of rural community development, ranging from volunteering to provide educational courses in organic horticulture through their local Community Development Council, to providing extensive support, friendship and advice on an individual basis to novice organic producers, and from mobilising farming neighbours into sellers' collectives to negotiate with food processors, to establishing and supporting alternative economic systems such as LETS in their local area. They contribute to maintaining a philosophy of voluntary initiative and help to re-construct the notion of 'community' within a rapidly changing, de-agrarianising or suburbanising Irish countryside.

A number of the organic growers interviewed are not native to the locality in which they are farming, but have moved in from elsewhere. The 'stranger', as Simmel reminds us, can develop close relationships with members of a local group which others in that group are not able to do, simply because they are seen as disengaged or transient and as therefore not interested in exploiting locals for their own advantage. The research reported here adds to this the suggestion that organic food producers are people who have been seized by a cosmological belief that existing social arrangements could be organised differently, and that individual initiative can make a long-term difference. While their particular concern is to alter the way in which social relations with nature are organised, specifically within contemporary agriculture, that concern is intertwined with a wider interest in devising alternative models for social and economic life and a generalised optimism that such efforts can be effective. Finally, the nature of the organic food producers' working life tends to give them quite extensive contacts with different types of groups and individuals across their local area. The growth of the organic movement has brought into rural Ireland activists who think both developmentally and collectively, who expect to take part in any initiatives occurring in their locality, and who bear witness in their own lives to a belief in the efficacy of local action in bringing about social change.

These characteristics – a degree of disengagement from local competition, combined with a belief in the value of thinking about alternative models of socio-economic organisation, and access to a wide-ranging and varied network of local social contacts - are significant elements of 'social capital', even if their precise effects in achieving local development remain to be shown. Yet, they are generated out of 'career' and occupational concerns rather than concerns for community development. Involvement in community development appears to these actors to be indistinguishable from their practical problems of making a livelihood out of an alternative or innovative relationship to food, within what are often demographically, economically and/or culturally impoverished rural neighbourhoods, and in the context of belonging to a social movement characterised by some distinctive cognitive praxes. If it can do no more, the very limited data reported here suggests that in trying to understand 'sustainable' development in rural Ireland, it would be useful not to overlook the part played by actors whose primary concern is their own livelihood problems but whose worldview leads them to assume that these can best be addressed, not as isolated individuals, but through collective and co-operative construction of new social as well as technical knowledges.

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