

From Poverty to Social Justice: Does the terminology make a difference to the practice?

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Abstract

Over the last ten years, the UK has seen a significant shift in terms of the way the poorer sections of society are classified. The Anglo-Saxon tradition of using the word “poverty” to describe those who are economically disadvantaged has given way to the European tradition of looking beyond merely monetary criteria. The term “poverty” has been replaced by “social exclusion” which in turn has been replaced by “social inclusion”, and more recently by “social justice”.

The purpose of this paper is to compare the meaning of these terms both within the context of the theory, and in the minds of those who are practitioners in this area of expertise. The paper presents the results from a survey of key players operating within the Scottish social inclusion framework, with respect to their understanding of the meaning of these concepts and discusses some of the implications that they have for the operation of such projects in practice. The research identifies a lack of understanding of the differences between the terms and discusses how this may impact on ‘social inclusion’ projects.

1. Introduction

This paper begins by discussing the changes in terminology that have taken place in the UK over the last thirty years in terms of the classification of the disadvantaged sections of society. Over the last ten years, the UK has seen a significant shift in terms of the way the poorer sections of society are classified. Much has been written about the nature of poverty and a great deal of debate has taken place regarding what the term actually means. The Anglo-Saxon tradition of using the word “poverty” to describe those who are economically disadvantaged has given way to the European tradition of looking beyond merely monetary criteria. The term “poverty” has been replaced by “social exclusion” which in turn has been replaced by “social inclusion”, and more recently by “social justice”. In the UK this discussion is firmly rooted in the Anglo-Saxon notions of poverty that led to the development of “poor relief” schemes and workhouses in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Within this framework, only the very poorest in society were eligible for help and there was a strong stigma attached to seeking it. While this may be less true in the UK and elsewhere today, the debate about what constitutes poverty and who should receive assistance continues. At the heart of this debate is the issue of definition of poverty itself.

The purpose of this paper is to compare the meaning of these terms both within the context of the theory, and in the minds of those who are practitioners in this area of expertise. The shift from “poverty” to “social exclusion” to “social inclusion” and finally “social justice” is documented and explained in section 2. Section 3 then discusses the methodology and results of a survey of key players in the area of social inclusion with respect to their views regarding how the changes in terminology have affected what they themselves do in practice. Finally section 4 draws together the findings and identifies a number of areas for further research.

2. The Changes in Terminology

This section of the paper discusses the changing definitions prevalent in the field of study and examines the rationale for these changes. It also poses the question of whether these differences are substantive or if there is an element of “policy spin” or “window dressing” in the way in which the focus of activity has changed over time.

2.1 The Meaning of “Poverty”

Two principal groups of definitions can be identified within the literature – those relating to “absolute poverty” and those focussing on “relative poverty”. The former identifies people as poor if they are unable to satisfy their essential physiological needs. The latter argues that the “poverty line” lies above this basic level and is related to what is “normal” for the society in which the individual lives. These views are typified by the following quotes from Rowntree (1902) and Townsend (1979) respectively.

Absolute poverty can be defined in terms of a subsistence level of income, specifically:

“a minimum sum necessary to maintain families of various sizes in a state of physical efficiency.” (Rowntree, 1902, ix-x)

In contrast, relative poverty can be defined as follows:

“Poverty can be defined objectively and applied consistently only in terms of the concept of relative deprivation....individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resource to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities.” (Townsend, 1979, p. 31)

Thus the relative poverty line may be significantly higher than the absolute poverty line within a country at any given point in time. Similarly, what constitutes relative poverty in one country may be seen as relative wealth in another where there is a greater level of absolute poverty. Further discussion of these issues lies outside the scope of this paper, however, given its UK, and particularly Scottish, focus.

The practice in the UK over the last seventy years has been to concentrate on relative poverty as the key measurement of a person’s place in society. Indeed the Beveridge report on which the UK’s “Welfare State” is founded explicitly acknowledges this:

“determination of what is required for reasonable human subsistence is to some extent a matter of judgement; estimates on the point change with time, and generally in a progressive community, change upwards.” (Beveridge, 1942, p. 14)

In line with this, social security related funding has in the past been linked to average earnings rather than more specifically to prices or the cost of living. As a result, in years where average earnings were rising faster than the rate of inflation, the purchasing power of the poor rose with a consequent improvement in their standard of living and vice versa. More recently, however, the link to average earnings has been broken and inflation adjusted increases in social security benefits have become the norm. Consequently the value of these benefits, such as the state pension and unemployment benefit, is falling as a proportion of average income. This has had the effect of widening the income gap between those in or not in work.

The measurement of poverty is therefore rooted in the use of income and/or expenditure related measures. MacDermott (1998, pp. 16-17) identifies four primary poverty measures:

- a) Average or below average income (‘income measures such as HBAI’ [Households Below Average Income])

- b) spending less than average ('expenditure measures' such as the Family Spending Statistics)
- c) the number of dependents on state benefits (a 'benefits' measure)
- d) standards of living lower than an agreed minimum (a 'budget standards' measure).

While these measures are still in use throughout the UK (which enables historic comparisons to be made regarding the levels of absolute and relative poverty), in more recent years, the focus of both the literature and policy initiatives has been shifting towards the use of more wide ranging measures. This in turn has been reflected in the changing terminology pertaining to this subject area.

2.2 Social Exclusion

Social exclusion, while overlapping in some respects with the definition of relative poverty, concerns more than merely income and expenditure levels. It is seen as a wider social concept. Specifically, it focuses on the role that an individual can (or rather cannot) play within society given the resources at their disposal. Julian Le Grand, of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion, makes this link as follows:

- “ A (British) individual is socially excluded if:
- a) he/she is geographically resident in the United Kingdom, but
 - b) for reasons beyond his or her control, he/she can not participate in the normal activities of the United Kingdom, and
 - c) he/she would like to so participate.” (Spicker, 1998, p. 11)

Consequently willingness and/or the desire to participate within society are seen as pre-requisites for identifying the socially excluded individual. By implication, therefore, anyone who satisfies criteria a) and b) is not necessarily socially excluded if they themselves are content with their current situation and so do not deem themselves to be in this category.

This idea of self-identification is problematic at a policy level for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is the issue of what “participation” means and this is inherently subjective. Some may see participation as, for example, being active in local politics or neighbourhood groups, while to many others these would be seen as irrelevant. Secondly, some people may be unable to articulate what they mean by participation and to explain why (or even if) they feel excluded. Thus a number of people who are relatively poor or disadvantaged may be omitted from this category because they lack the necessary skills or knowledge required in order to place themselves within it. Thirdly, under this definition, social exclusion is not synonymous with poverty, for example a relatively wealthy person who has a disability may have limited access to certain services and facilities by virtue of their disability rather than an inability to afford them. This results in a potentially much wider group of people affected by social exclusion than is the case merely for poverty. This in turn may make the targeting of policy initiatives relating to social exclusion more difficult.

The definition cited above is, perhaps not surprisingly, much more strongly aligned to European, and particularly French, ideas of social exclusion than to the Anglo-Saxon

notion of poverty, although lack of money will usually be a contributing factor to social exclusion. Indeed this is recognised by the European Union, which has attempted to reconcile these ideas:

“... ‘the poor’ shall be taken to mean persons, families and groups of persons whose resources (material, cultural and social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member States in which they live.” (Council of the European Communities, 1984, Article 1.2, cited in Golding, 1986)

Within this definition, therefore, ‘the poor’ appear to be a sub-set of ‘the socially excluded’, although there is likely to be significant overlap between the two groups. The difficulties involved in producing a definition which could operate across all member states was articulated by Root (1995) when discussing the differences between the Anglo-Saxon and European traditions:

“ The mutual incomprehension highlighted the very different theoretical paradigms which these two traditions for analysing poverty and social exclusion appear to involve. The notion of poverty is primarily focussed upon distributional issues: the lack of resources at the disposal of an individual or household. In contrast, notions such as social exclusion focus primarily on relational issues; in other words, inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power.” (Room, 1995, p105)

Despite these difficulties, however, the move towards greater harmonisation of social policies across the European Union following the signing of the Maastricht Treaty and subsequently the Treaty of Amsterdam has continued. Agreement on what constitutes social exclusion has, however, proved to be only part of the process - measuring social exclusion and putting into place policy initiatives designed to remedy it has taken significantly longer.

In order to undertake such policy initiatives it is of course also necessary to measure social exclusion so that resources can be targeted towards areas of greatest need. While poverty lines and income/expenditure measures can form part of this analysis, they are insufficient on their own to identify the socially excluded. They need to be supplemented by a range of other, more qualitative measures designed to determine the sections of society who are socially excluded or, more specifically given the issue of self-identification, who believe themselves to be socially excluded. While some qualitative information can be obtained from sources such as the Scottish Household Survey and the Family Expenditure Survey, both of these sources are based on relatively small samples of the overall population (62,000 and 7,000 households respectively) and so do not achieve full coverage of those who might fall within the socially excluded category, depending upon how representative the samples are for each specific social exclusion issue. The most wide ranging source of information, the Census only takes place every ten years, although it is useful in compiling a range of deprivation indices which “measure the proportion of households living in a defined small geographical unit with a combination of circumstances indicating low living standards or a high need for services, or both” (Bartley and Blane, 1994, p8). In summary, therefore, it is difficult to measure the level of social exclusion at an

aggregated level – a smaller unit of analysis may be more appropriate. We will return to this later.

2.3 Social Inclusion

Compared to its predecessor “poverty”, the term “social exclusion” proved to have a relatively short lifespan in the UK. By the late 1990’s “social exclusion” had been replaced by “social inclusion” as the key focus of economic and social policy. At least part of the reason for this appears to have been that the term “inclusion” was felt to have more positive connotations than “exclusion”. An agreed definition of what constitutes social inclusion is elusive and indeed the Scottish Executive in identifying its Social Inclusion Strategy did not explicitly define it at all:

“In developing this strategy, the Government and the Scottish Social Inclusion Network have agreed a ‘vision’ of social inclusion in Scotland. Our vision is of a Scotland in which:

- every child, whatever his or her social or economic background, has the best possible start in life
- there are opportunities to work for all those who are able to do so
- those who are unable to work or are beyond the normal working age have a decent quality of life
- everyone is enabled and encouraged to participate to the maximum of their potential.” (Scottish Executive, 1999)

More recently, however, the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion have defined social inclusion:

“Social inclusion is the process by which efforts are made to ensure that everyone, regardless of their experiences and circumstances, can achieve their potential in life. To achieve social inclusion, income and employment are necessary but not sufficient. An inclusive society is also characterised by a striving for reduced inequality, a balance between individuals rights and duties and increased social cohesion.” (Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, 2002)

In arriving at this definition, they note that:

“In the UK context the government has used their definition of social exclusion to define social inclusion as its opposite: ‘Social inclusion is achieved when individuals or areas do not suffer from the negative effects of unemployment, poor skills, low income, poor housing, crime, bad health, family problems, limited access to services and rurality, e.g. remoteness, sparsity, isolation and high costs.’” (Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, 2002).

The focus on the factors cited in the above definition formed part of the Scottish Executive’s initial social inclusion strategy which was based around three Policy Action Teams whose remits were:

“Excluded young people: what more can be done in relation to excluded young people, with a particular emphasis on 16-21 year olds; the particular exclusion faced by young people not in education, employment or training; the experience of care-leavers; young homeless people; young drug misusers; young disabled people; plugging gaps in service provision; developing preventative approaches.

Inclusive communities: devolving decision making to community level; widening community participation in decision-making processes; building community capacity; resourcing communities; developing the concept of ‘active citizenship’ through participation in voluntary and community activity, community and further education, and sport and the arts; broadening participation to include young people and marginalised groups.

Impact of local anti-poverty action: assessing the effectiveness and sustainability of local anti-poverty action including food co-operatives, credit unions, local exchange and trading schemes, and fuel poverty initiatives; action to ensure correct entitlements to benefits are met; the potential contribution of labour market initiatives; action to ensure correct entitlements to benefits are met; the potential contribution of labour market initiatives; contribution of the social economy.” (Scottish Executive, 1999)

Once again, however, the terminology being applied in this area has moved on, with the focus now being “social justice”.

2.4 Social Justice

As was the case for its predecessors, an agreed definition of what is meant by “social justice” is difficult to identify. Once again, the Scottish Executive chose not to define the term explicitly but instead to use a vision statement to define it:

“Our vision for delivering social justice in Scotland:

A Scotland in which every child matters, where every child, regardless of their family background, has the best possible start in life.

A Scotland in which every young person had the opportunities, skills and support to make a successful transition to working life and active citizenship.

A Scotland in which every family is able to support itself – with work for those who can and security for those who can’t.

A Scotland in which every person beyond working age has a decent quality of life.

A Scotland in which every person both contributes to and benefits from the community in which they live.” (Scottish Executive, 2002)

As can be seen from this description, the concepts of social inclusion and social justice, within the Scottish context at least, are quite similar in terms of their emphasis on the importance of society and community as well as economic well-being. In addition to the above statement, the Scottish Executive identified ten long-term targets and twenty-nine milestones along a path towards the achievement of its social justice strategy in 2020. It is, however, reasonable to expect that these will change as new priorities arise during this time period and the social justice agenda evolves.

2.5 Summary

In summary, the last ten years has seen a significant shift in the terminology within this area. “Poverty” has given way to “social exclusion” and then “social inclusion” and “social justice” as the key framework of reference for Scottish and wider UK economic and social policy. Throughout this shift, there has been an increasing emphasis away from income and expenditure related criteria and towards wider social and community related issues. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations represent this shift:

“Social exclusion describes a lack of or exclusion from full citizenship (this includes civil, political and social rights). Factors usually considered include income, poor housing, poor health, etc. Social justice and social exclusion describe changing systems and shaping culture to guarantee full citizenship. The idea of social justice is founded on the principles of equal worth of all; entitlement of all to income, shelter and other basic necessities; opportunity and life chances for all; and reducing/eliminating unjust inequalities.” (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2003)

The emphasis throughout is on increased participation in society by relatively disadvantaged individuals while, at the same time, the earlier stress on the importance of self-identification as a key part of social exclusion has been removed. This in some ways represents a return to earlier notions regarding who society considers to be poor. The socially excluded are once again those whom society considers to be excluded rather than those who consider themselves to be excluded. This has obvious implications for the social inclusion and social justice agenda as it may be comparatively difficult to rebalance the equation between “rights” and “responsibilities” which is implicit in this approach.

3. The Case Study – Scottish Social Inclusion Projects

3.1 Background

At the time during which the empirical work contained in this paper was undertaken (Kelly, 2003), social inclusion was still the dominant term being used by the different levels of government. Social inclusion policy was being operationalised at four levels of government – European Union, UK, Scotland (in the form of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive) and via local government. In addition to this a range of other groups including voluntary organisations, regeneration partnerships and social inclusion partnerships (SIPs) were active in this field. While a detailed discussion of this multi-tiered framework is outside of the scope of this paper, some

of the differences between the types of activity occurring at each level are worth noting.

At EU level, assistance, in the form of funding, for social inclusion projects, was occurring primarily via the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). Scotland has received three forms of funding via these initiatives – Objective 1 funding for Highlands and Islands as a special programme to promote social inclusion in the most remote area of Scotland; Objective 2 funding which is targeted towards smaller regeneration projects in areas of serious deprivation across Scotland; and Objective 3 funding which is available across Scotland to reduce the degree of social exclusion suffered by particular disadvantaged groups, for example lone parents and the homeless.

At UK Government level, social inclusion policy has covered a range of areas including welfare (and benefit) reforms, education initiatives, the New Deal series of employment promotion measures, and the National Childcare Strategy. The Government also established a Social Exclusion Unit under the auspices of first the Cabinet Office and since 2002 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The role of this unit is to co-ordinate policy in order to ensure “joined-up thinking” across a range of reforms which span a number of government departments.

Since 1999, there has been a split in the implementation of social inclusion policy between the UK and Scottish Parliaments. For example, social security policy and overall economic policy are reserved powers for Westminster while other areas relevant to the social inclusion agenda such as education, health, housing, some transport and economic development are devolved to Scotland. Within the Scottish framework, the Scottish Social Inclusion Network (SSIN) was established to co-ordinate social inclusion initiatives within Scotland. The role of SSIN was:

- “- to help Government develop its strategy for promoting social inclusion in Scotland; and
 - to help agencies co-ordinate their inclusion strategies.
- It will fulfil this role:
- by discussing and considering strategic aspects of Government policy on inclusion in Scotland;
 - by discussing and considering the overall progress of the Government’s initiative on inclusion in Scotland; and
 - by providing a forum within which various agencies can discuss their respective strategies.” (Scottish Executive, 1998)

The SSIN had a committee structure with twenty-eight members, half of who were civil servants and the rest of whom represented a range of local authorities and non-governmental organisations which were already working in the area of social inclusion policy. Thus on the one hand, the Scottish Executive gained a pool of external expertise, whilst, on the other hand, the external membership gained the opportunity to influence social inclusion policy from the inside. By March 2000, however, the remit of the SSIN had been shifted away from a co-ordinating role to being “advisory to ministers on matters of social justice” with a greater role being played by the Scottish Executive’s new “Social Inclusion Division” (Fawcett, 2003). This transfer of responsibility for the social inclusion/social justice agenda was

completed shortly after the May 2003 Scottish Parliament elections with the abolition of the Scottish Social Inclusion Network.

At local government level, a wide range of social inclusion initiatives have been identified within the literature (Alcock and Craig, 1998; Craig, 1994; Harvey, 1998). Specifically, within the Scottish context, Higgins and Ball (1999) found that approximately 25% of respondent local authorities had social inclusion strategies. Most of these strategies focussed on social exclusion rather than poverty; most included partnerships with the voluntary sectors, community groups and private and public sector bodies; most were based in urban rather than rural areas; and some element of decentralisation of council services and/or the provision of non-statutory services formed part of them.

At sub-governmental level, voluntary organisations, regeneration partnerships and social inclusion partnerships have played a key role in delivering the social inclusion agenda in recent years (McQuaid, 2000). The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations estimates that around 60,000 people are employed (40,000 full-time) by Scottish domiciled charities with around 300,000 Scots regularly acting as volunteers. These organisations are financed by donation and/or grants from a range of organisations. Many are community based and focussed on marginalised groups such as the elderly, lone parents etc.

Regeneration partnerships have often taken the form of targeted anti-poverty initiatives to assist areas of cumulative and enduring disadvantage. For example, MacLennan notes:

“Very often areas that are deprived and disadvantaged now have been deprived and disadvantaged in the last census and the censuses in 1980, 1970 and 1960. If you look at the poorest areas in London now, they were also poor areas 60, 70 and 80 years ago.” (MacLennan, 1998)

While some regeneration partnerships such as the Urban Programme (which was targeted on the most deprived 10% of wards within Scotland) have had some success in the past, they have largely been either supplemented or replaced by the newer Social Inclusion Partnerships. This can be seen from the following quote from the website of the Dundee SIP:

“Urban regeneration in Scotland has evolved into a distinctive approach, which relies on the geographical targeting of aid, the principles of partnership and empowerment and the implementation of initiatives within a strategic framework.” (Dundee SIP, 1998).

The Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs) themselves are local umbrella bodies whose membership includes local authorities, health boards, the voluntary sector, community representatives, universities and colleges and the private sector. Their common remit includes the need to prevent further exclusion from happening, the need to co-ordinate approaches to tackling social exclusion (including focussing on the sustainability of initiatives), and the need to look at innovative new approaches to regeneration (Scottish Executive, 1999). Within this remit there are a number of different types of SIPs whose focus is slightly different depending the area in which they are operating

and or the particular social group which they are targeting. Some, for example, target rural and others urban areas, while some target young people and others ethnic minorities. In total, however, at the time the research was undertaken there were thirty SIPs operating across Scotland.

It is evident from the above, therefore, that there are a range of bodies operating within this area, all of which may be deemed to be ‘key players’ within the Scottish social inclusion framework. It is towards this group that the empirical part of the paper is focussed with a view to answering the question: “Does the terminology make a difference to the practice?” Or, to put it another way, is the practice in tackling social inclusion really any different from what went before in terms of dealing with social exclusion or even poverty? Finally, taking this a stage further, is the most recent change in terminology from social inclusion to social justice really going to change what is happening in the field, or will it just be more of the same?

3.1 Methodology

The results presented in this paper arise from a series of in-depth interviews with a number of key players in social inclusion. A qualitative methodology was used in order to gain detailed insights into the experiences of practitioners across a range of issues related to social inclusion (Kelly, 2003). Although the actual research was more wide ranging, the focus here is on the views of the participants regarding the changing terminology of poverty, social exclusion, social inclusion. At the time the research was undertaken in 2001-2002, the term “social justice” was only beginning to be heard in policy circles so that the survey participants’ knowledge of it was likely to be limited. Analysis of the data obtained from the interviews was undertaken using content analysis. This involved the recording and transcribing of all of the interviews undertaken so that the text could be coded into categories on a variety of levels such as word, phrase, sentence or theme. These were then examined using one of content analysis’ basic methods: either conceptual or relational analysis.

In order to encourage participation, prospective respondents were given prior information regarding the purpose and nature of the research, allowed to comment on and amend the transcripts of the interviews if they wished, and were given assurances of confidentiality. Despite these measures, however, a number of those approached declined to be interviewed. As a result of this it was not possible to obtain the hoped for balance in terms of representation from the five groups of key players in social inclusion which had been identified – funding/policy, policy, evaluation, programme and project – which correspond to the different levels of operation within the area ranging from strategic to operational. Specifically, those organisations operating at the most strategic level – funding/policy - were under-represented compared to those operating at ground level. In total, thirty-six interviews were undertaken. Of these 36, 7 organisations were in the funding/policy category, 6 in the policy category, 4 operated in the area of evaluation of social inclusion initiatives, 6 were programme SIPs undertaking a range of initiatives, and 13 were single project based SIPs. The latter two groups were representative of a much wider range of SIPs which were sampled by geographical area in order to give a balance between urban and rural SIPs and by project/programme type in order to ensure that SIPs focussing on a range of client groups were covered.

In terms of the people who were interviewed, a significant number had been working in the social inclusion field for many years and so had experienced at first hand the changing terminology being used. Six had worked in the field for over 20 years, 3 for 15-20 years, 5 for 10-15 years, and 6 for 5-9 years thus spanning at a minimum the change in emphasis from social exclusion to social inclusion. Nine of the respondents had job titles that reflected their front line coordination and management roles, with another five having fieldwork related job titles. Nine respondents had titles relating to non-front line management positions, and four had research-based titles. The areas their respective operations/areas of expertise covered were: learning (18); employment and childcare (15); information (14); young people (14); community (13); strategic outputs (13); health (8); isolation and confidence building (7); equality (6); housing and environment (5); income (4); community safety (3); and volunteers (3). Thus the respondents had a wide range of experience, roles and responsibilities in the field of social inclusion.

3.2 Views on the terminology

The main theme of the research was on the monitoring and evaluation of social inclusion projects and the respondents' comments regarding the similarities and differences between the terms poverty, social exclusion and social inclusion reflect this. Their responses may well also have been influenced to some degree by the decision at the start of the research to provide each respondent with a "working definition" of these terms, which they could then amend or qualify themselves. This was designed to ensure some common ground between the respondents in terms of how the terms were defined. The definitions of poverty and social exclusion were those of Townsend (1979) and Spicker (1998), see above. Given the still under-developed nature of definitions of social inclusion at the time, however, the respondents were not given a definition of this per se but rather a definition of what was meant by a "social inclusion project". Specifically this was defined:

"Social inclusion projects aim to give their users the skills, knowledge, advise and support they need to participate in their community and in wider society." (Kelly, 2003, p. 127).

The focus of social inclusion on participation in the community and the need to ensure that individuals have the ability (and by implication the willingness) to participate is in line with later definitions of social inclusion, for example that of the Centre for Economic and Social inclusion (2002), see above.

Despite this, however, the possibility that the respondents may be interpreting these terms, and particularly social inclusion, slightly (or even very) differently needs to be borne in mind and consequently the results from the survey need to be treated with care. These interpretations may be influenced by the actual work that the respondents are undertaking in practice, their client groups and the targets that the projects have been (or have) set if they are to be deemed to be successful and/or eligible for additional funding.

As noted in section 2, the changing terminology from poverty (Townsend, 1979; MacDermott, 1998), to social exclusion (Scottish Executive, 1998; Spicker, 1998), to social inclusion (Scottish Executive, 1999; Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion,

2002 and social justice (Scottish Executive, 2002; Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2003) has occurred within a relatively short time frame. It might therefore be expected that there would be some blurring of the definitions/terminology on the part of the respondents depending on the extent of their awareness of the changes taking place and the extent to which these had impacted on their particular organisation or project.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, however, as social inclusion was the term at the forefront of contemporary use at the time of the study, most participants viewed it as being highly relevant to their work. In total, 28 of the 36 respondents (82%) were positive about the use of the term social inclusion as a description of what their programmes and projects were trying to achieve. Disaggregating these responses revealed that the specific positive comments made regarding the applicability of the term social inclusion could be sub-divided into three categories. Firstly, with respect to the concept of social inclusion, five respondents agreed that the term recognised the importance of individuals' ability to participate in society, while a further four stated that it described their client group appropriately. Secondly, with respect to the usefulness of social inclusion as an approach to the type of work which they were undertaking, two respondents (both SIPs) stressed the value of the term in bringing together different agencies. In addition, a further three respondents (all policy organisation members) said that the term suitably described voluntary sector activity; and another two identified the value of using the holistic approach to tackling deprivation which the term implied. Thirdly, in relation to the terminology, four respondents explicitly stated that social inclusion was preferable to poverty and social exclusion as a term for describing the work which they were doing. These four respondents were quite well spread across the spectrum of interviewees, being a funding organisation, an evaluator, a policy organisation and a project SIP member respectively. The funding organisation thought that social inclusion was an improvement as it brought both social and economic strategies together. The evaluator similarly noted that social inclusion recognised the social (*as well as the economic*) aspects of deprivation. The policy organisation representative commented that social inclusion was preferable as a term to social exclusion, although did not explain why, and the project SIP member thought that social inclusion was a more descriptive term than its predecessors.

One of the programme SIP interviewees also implied this, however, in their subsequent answers:

“It’s probably fairly relevant in that what we are trying to do is to look at all the issues that affect the lives of people in the community. So that it’s not a case of just looking at poverty, it’s also about looking at the whole issue of people’s ability to take part in society, their ability to compete in the job market, their ability to compete in the education system.”

The issue regarding terminology also generated the most negative comments about the usefulness of the term social inclusion in relation to the participants' work. Although only 8 of the 36 respondents (18%) were classified as wholly negative about the concept, each of them identified more than one major issue in relation to it. Specifically, while there were only five negative comments regarding the concept of social inclusion and just two regarding social inclusion as an approach to work, a total

of 17 negative comments were recorded regarding the terminology. All of the comments made relating to the concept of social inclusion were based on the respondents' views that the real problem was poverty and jobs rather than social inclusion/exclusion. In the case of those comments relating to social inclusion as an approach to work, the criticisms expressed solely focussed on the geographical targeting of social inclusion initiatives. Specifically, it was argued that geographical targeting ignored a significant number of socially excluded people living outside of the designated areas. In contrast, there were three key criticisms of the use of the term social inclusion, some of which came from those respondents who took an overall positive view of social inclusion. Ten respondents stated that social inclusion was jargon and/or was not meaningful to client groups; four stated that social inclusion was a wide, imprecise term; and three stated that social inclusion was inherently subjective, being interpreted differently by different people.

With respect to the negative comments made regarding the concept of social inclusion and its failure to tackle the fundamental issues of poverty and unemployment, the following comments were made by different respondents – a policy maker, a project SIP worker, an evaluator and a funder respectively:

“... I think that poverty is a more helpful concept at the end of the day. Social exclusion and social inclusion are interesting takes on it, but I think at the end of the day, what we're talking about is poverty in its widest sense, and that's people's – the poverty of wealth, influence, material possessions and the poverty of their quality of living and I would use, I prefer to use the wider term poverty. It's not fashionable, although it is becoming more fashionable, and I suppose that if people find that poverty is too, has a particularly narrow meaning by thinking it's about financial poverty, as the Scottish Exec. would use, then I think the social justice concept is a more useful one and more, and probably better understood, and also related to issues of power and rights, and the reality of the influences that actually affect where people, you know, whether people are experiencing financial poverty or poverty of living conditions or poor health. So, yes, I prefer those two terms.”

“When we're talking about young people not taking part in education, young people taking part in crime, you know, people then tend older adults not to take part in education, you know why are those things happening and I think you look to there where it where it comes from and it does it comes from poverty and unemployment.”

“work is a way of plugging people into all sorts of distant and close networks, and eh, so it's actually, what you are getting in these communities is you get quite tight knit communities, and people say I'm not socially excluded at all, you know they wouldn't say that, but they are actually excluded from the bigger, wider world, of work, and leisure, and shopping, and activities, and so on in all sorts of ways, unless they are working, and, eh, I think there is quite a danger of forgetting the centrality of work. Not just because the government places a great focus on it and funding is now increasingly being linked to work outcomes, but also

because the reality for many people living in deprived communities is that it is a way out.”

“I prefer to see economic and social together as a term, so either using the term community economic development or economic and social regeneration cohesion or something. Because I think the key thing is that European funds have been able to do is to bring together economic and social strategies. If you go back 10 years or so, there would be people that would argue you’d have separate economic strategies and social strategies and the term social inclusion in a sense takes you back, I think, a stage in people’s thinking.”

It is apparent from these comments that there is some debate regarding the relative merits of poverty, social exclusion and social inclusion as terms to describe the type of work being undertaken by the survey participants. Two of the above quotes indicate a clear preference for the use of the term poverty, although in one case in its widest sense, far beyond merely financial poverty. In addition, two of the respondents – from the funding and policy organisations respectively - view all of the existing concepts as being too narrow to be of use. At the policy level, a preference for the term “social justice” is expressed, perhaps being indicative of the shift in terminology which was about to take place shortly after the survey was completed. It is interesting to note, however, that this did not yet appear to have filtered down to those working in the field, or at least was not explicitly mentioned by them within this context. In contrast the representative from the funding organisation argued that the use of the term “social” was problematic in itself as it focussed attention away from some of the key economic issues involved in this area of work. Consequently they expressed a preference for a term which highlighted both the economic and social aspects of what they were trying to achieve.

There is some overlap here with the issues which were raised with respect to the terminology of social inclusion. The criticism that social inclusion (and/or social exclusion) is a broad, imprecise term was expressed by one of the project SIP interviewees as follows:

“I suppose the limitation for our project is social exclusion is quite a broad term and we’re actually working in the area that we’re looking at quite specific things in relation to exclusion.”

With respect to the subjectivity of the term social inclusion, one of the programme SIP representatives stated:

“I think one of the problems is that it [social inclusion] has different meanings for different people. Certainly some of the other SIPs that we have spoken to, they really are a true regeneration package. They’ve looked at maybe a run-down inner city area, or a run-down area full stop, and gone, ‘well if we invested in that building, brought it up to scratch, people could use it, use it as a community centre.’ We haven’t got that same sort of focus. And that is very different to the type of work that we are doing. We are concentrating on young unemployed people, so what

impact we are having on, say, elderly retired people in SIP areas is minimal.”

The fact that the term can mean different things to different people was also borne out by a comment from an interviewee connected with a project SIP:

“Social Inclusion Partnerships can be a bit confusing in places because the assumption is, for example, in [name of local authority area], that anything to do with social inclusion came to the SIP.”

This confusion relating to the work that some of the organisations do, or are expected to do, may be linked to the issues raised regarding the terminology of social inclusion. The comment that the term social inclusion was jargon was made repeatedly. One interviewee from a programme SIP stated that:

“I think social inclusion is another word for equal opportunities, tackling poverty. It’s all within that. It’s just a redefinition of that through, em, New Labour. I mean, the term has come largely through that political agenda. Em, so, yeah, (*its*) absolutely vital to us.”

A second respondent from a policy organisation stated:

“I’m conscious that we’ve defined and re-defined social what fundamentally is about poverty and I think poverty is a more helpful concept at the end of the day.”

A third interviewee, from another programme SIP described social inclusion as a buzzword:

“I think people don’t really understand what social inclusion or social exclusion is. It is quite a new buzzword, and I think it is difficult for people to understand the terminology of it, I do. I don’t know what else they would call it now, so it seems to be the right buzz word. I think it’s, for us I think it’s a bit about regeneration and anti-poverty work.”

Consequently there appears to be a potentially serious issue relating to the meaningfulness of the language of social inclusion to both practitioners in the field and, perhaps to an even greater extent, their clients. With respect to the latter, the relevance of the concept to the target client groups was explicitly questioned by some of the respondents. One of the project SIP respondents replied:

“I don’t think it is relevant necessarily to the people we are working with. It is relevant to the people that fund us, I suppose, because that is the term they invented, and the term they use, and perhaps they understand. So, in terms of, em, getting funding we have to speak the language which uses these words. But I don’t think...its not words that members of this community use about themselves, or about their friends.”

The above statement may of course identify an implicit reason for the level of support for the term social inclusion by the interviewees, that it is necessary to use the “right” terminology in order to secure the necessary funding in order to carry out their work. One of the programme SIP representatives made a similar point:

“It’s just the nature of largely white, largely middle class, largely well educated, driven, caring professions in the public sector that need to create, em, words like social inclusion to bring their strategies round and actually it has very little meaning to people in the community in a direct sense. Em, obviously social inclusion is a massive agenda in the Scottish Executive and good on them for doing that. Em, I wouldn’t say that social inclusion per se, em, is it central to what we do? Yes, but it’s not grasped by the community. It’s not grasped.”

As might have been expected, this appears to have been more of an issue for the project SIP representatives who were in closest contact with client groups. Two particular comments made by project SIP representatives illustrate this:

“I think a lot of young people do laugh at the name. We never tell them it’s a social inclusion project, because it’s a big horrible word, but the odd one or two has been interested, so we’ve discussed it and said, ‘Well this is what we do blah, blah, blah.’ And they’ll all say but ‘we’re socially included already in [name of town].’ But they’re not socially included, they’re not involved in the proper activities to actually secure long-term employment, to improve their education, to improve their housing knowledge, to improve their life skills.”

“Maybe it’s a wee bit of a cop-out, maybe, but I would be wanting to take my lead from the people I am working with. And you know, if folk were using the term poverty, or social inclusion then I would certainly use it. There is no reason why not to then. I wouldn’t, the branding of people that live in poverty, I don’t know how helpful that is unless they themselves choose that label, in which case I would support, that’s a very graphic term. But not using it....I think other people sometimes use other words as well, perhaps less powerful. People may talk about being ‘skint’ or whatever.”

This raises the issue of whether individuals who do not understand the terminology will be able to, or will even try to, access the support on offer if they do not believe it is relevant to them. The same can also be said to be true of previous poverty and social exclusion initiatives, however, and indeed the stigma attached to the former may have been instrumental in the failure of previous initiatives. This highlights a particular gap in this research, that it’s focus on the professionals operating in the field of social inclusion means that the views of the users of the projects and programmes in question were not canvassed. This would be an interesting area for further investigation. One particular question which might be asked arising from the above is whether the stigma attached to poverty and social exclusion has now been transferred to the term social inclusion and whether this may be part of the reasoning behind the more recent terminological change to social justice. This seems unlikely, however, as much of this impetus appears to be coming from central government, EU

and other international institutions such as the United Nations. Further exploration of these forces for change is, however, outside the scope of this paper.

To return to our immediate focus, what else did the interviews conducted tell us about practitioners' response to the changing terminology? The key outcome for many of the respondents was to increase the participation in society by socially excluded individuals. Only four respondents identified tackling poverty as a primary outcome, although the importance of education and employment (which in turn of course reduces poverty) was cited by a large majority of them. Confidence building was also seen as important while the importance of other factors such as improving relationships was deemed to be minimal. Consequently, the key outcomes identified by the interviewees correspond, perhaps unsurprisingly, to those mooted by the Scottish Executive indicating a degree of "buy-in" to the social inclusion agenda. The extent to which this was increased by the interviewees being "on the record" in terms of their comments is, however, a matter for conjecture.

Overall, therefore, at least on the surface, the majority of respondents were positive about the use of the term social inclusion as a description of their work while recognising that there are a number of difficulties associated with the terminology. While the relative newness of the term social inclusion was part of the issue, it is also possible that the move from social exclusion to social inclusion may have taken place too quickly and before the true nature of social exclusion had been identified. This point was made by a representative of one of the policy organisations:

"My experience in social inclusion was saying that there is maybe a much more deeper rooted, fundamental question that needs to be asked, and that is, 'what is the nature of social exclusion?'. And not to summarise it, and simplify it along the lines of the mantra 'oh it's high unemployment, it's poor health, it's poor housing' and that gives rise to 'we better set up a whole heap of employment projects, and health projects, and arts projects' and things like that. All in the name of what you and I might think is doing something useful. I'd much rather, based on now my known experience, cut to the chase much more, and look at the individuals, and the people with families, and the networks of people that are actually suffering from this term 'exclusion', and get much more to grips with what it means."

In summary, therefore, it appears that while most of the respondents were comfortable with the use of the term social inclusion to provide a framework for their activities, there were some differences of opinion about what the term actually means and the impact that it has (or not) on the clients of social inclusion initiatives.

4. Conclusion

From a theoretical perspective, the shift in terminology from poverty to social exclusion and then social inclusion has had the effect of moving the emphasis away from purely economic to a wide range of social factors. Indeed as noted by some of the respondents, and as implied by the Council of Economic Communities (1984)

definition above, poverty and ‘the poor’ can almost be considered to be a sub-set of the wider social inclusion issue. Relative, rather than absolute, poverty is now firmly the focus of policy and the self-identification originally associated with social exclusion appears to have been abandoned once again in factors of the identification by society of socially excluded groups. What is clear from the theory, however, is that the boundary between social exclusion and social inclusion is poorly defined beyond the principle that inclusion is the opposite of exclusion and is the more desirable state of being. The Scottish Executive’s statements on this issue corroborate this to a degree in that they present a ‘vision’ of social inclusion without clearly defining what it actually is. The same is also true with respect to the more recent shift in terminology from social inclusion to social justice. This raises a challenge for Economics research into poverty and its metamorphosis into “social inclusion “ or “social justice” in the policy arena.

While most of the survey respondents believed that the term social inclusion was highly relevant to their work, it was also clear that there was some debate regarding what the terms actually meant. Some of the interviewees welcomed the addition of social as well as economic factors within the new terminology, while other argued that this shift had gone too far and had happened at the expense of a greater focus on key issues relating to poverty and unemployment. Only one of the respondents, perhaps not surprisingly given that the represented a policy organisation, favoured a shift towards the term “social justice”. The extent to which this position has now changed given the Scottish Executive’s current focus on social justice would be an interesting area for further research. Similarly, further investigation of the clients’ views of the changing terminology would be a valuable addition to the research. This would give us further insights into the relevance of the concepts to the beneficiaries of social inclusion related projects, given the negative comments on this issue which were made by some of the survey respondents. Finally, further investigation of the extent to which the changes in terminology have resulted in changes to what is actually happening on the ground in terms of social inclusion projects might be productive as there was little evidence from the survey that much has changed at all.

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