

NGOs in Britain 1945-1997

This Leverhulme-funded project examines the history of NGOs in Britain since 1945. It has run from May 2008 and will be completed in October 2011.

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The history of post-war Britain can only be properly understood with reference to the phenomenon of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They have been right at the heart of every major socio-political initiative: from environmentalism to consumerism; from international aid to human rights; on identity issues such as age, gender, race, religion, disability and sexuality; and on social policy issues such as homelessness, education, child protection and mental health. NGOs as a sector have transcended the categorisations of left and right, progressive and reactionary, and have constructed networks of activism that reach from the face-to-face work of awareness raising groups, to major international lobbying organisations. Look to any major issue of the last sixty years, and NGOs will be there, mobilising supporters, shaping the terms of debate, and influencing policy outcomes.

This project examines the history of NGOs in Britain since 1945. It will offer an overview of the NGO sector in late 20th century Britain. It will also address questions regarding the specific dynamics of NGO influence within three key sectors: international aid and development, environmentalism and homelessness thereby enabling evaluation of the main characteristics and role of the sector as well as its socio-political influence. The project seeks to understand better the power of NGOs, not simply in terms of influencing legislative change, but also as forces impacting upon the way society perceives itself, conceptualises its problems, and selecting the solutions with which to address them. We need to appreciate and analyse the great themes that are played out within the stories of NGOs: professionalisation; secularisation; identity politics and the equality agenda; democracy; the role of government; and citizenship.

The project has three objectives

- **Mapping:** This will address the size, growth, shape, key features and definition of the NGO sector, as well as its leaders, the nature of participation and its relationship to other definitions of the third sector (charities, voluntarism, civil society, etc).
- **Role:** This will explore the activities of NGOs, how they have seen their role, how they have campaigned (in Westminster, devolved government and EU contexts), how they have organised (as mass membership, voluntary or professional), how individual activists have been involved, and how they have contributed to issues of citizenship and political participation.
- **Power:** This will explore the influence of NGOs, their success in achieving policy goals and legislative remedies, their impact on the terms of debate of an issue, their changing relationship with - and autonomy from - the state and their role in advanced democracies.

The project continues the AHRC-funded [DANGO \(http://www.dango.bham.ac.uk/\)](http://www.dango.bham.ac.uk/) project.

For further information, please visit the [NGOs in Britain 1945-1997 \(http://www.ngo.bham.ac.uk/index.htm\)](http://www.ngo.bham.ac.uk/index.htm) website.