

# Marginal and Mainstream? The UK Third Sector: History and Policy Contexts

Alternative Forms of Non-Governmental Organisation

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## INTRODUCTION

- A history of NGOs as ‘agents of aid’ in developing nations
- Post 1990’s – the ‘exporting’ of UK models of ‘the third sector’/civil society to Eastern Europe
- Promotion of NGO’s as a response to Pacific Rim economic crisis
- Questions: is the ‘export model’ appropriate?  
Which model?

## A (VERY) SHORT HISTORY

From Lewis (2005)

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>Providers</b>     | C19 voluntary organisations as <i>providers</i> with little competition or support from state   |
| <b>Complementary</b> | C20 first half <b>Complementary</b> role of voluntary sector where state services absent or underdeveloped (hospitals, social care)   |
| <b>Supplementary</b> | Post War Welfare State more comprehensive public services – <b>supplementary</b> role for voluntary action – additional or specialist services e.g. hospices, CAB or challenging and campaigning roles e.g. Shelter, CPAG |
| <b>Partners</b>      | Post 1980 period variously described – mixed economy of welfare, neo-liberalism, <b>'Era of Partnership'</b> (latter particularly strong in state policies for sector)  |

## SIZE AND SCOPE

- 870,000 civil society organisations (2006-07)
- Estimated total income: £116bn
- 1,347,000 paid staff
- 170,905 registered charities
- Estimated total income: £33.2bn (£16.9bn 1996-97)
- Earned income (£17bn) growing faster than voluntary income (£13.6bn)
- 634,000 paid staff (2.2% of the UK workforce)
  - Full time 63% Part time 37%
  - Female 71% Male 29%

## OTHER CHARACTERISTICS

Growth but no change?

- Density and affluence
  - a variable geography of the sector? ‘Charity deserts’?
- By sub-sector
  - Social services (23%), education (18%), culture/recreation (13%)
- The large...
  - Major (£10m+): 0.2% of charities but 43% of total income
- and the very small
  - Minor (£10K): 55% of charities but 0.8% of total income

## AND CONFUSIONS?

- Charities, Charitable sector
- Voluntary Sector
- Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)
- Third Sector
- Non-Profit Sector
- Mutuals and co-operatives
- Social economy and social enterprise (Community Interest Companies)
- Civil Society
- ‘Below the Radar’ groups and activities
- First and third force organisations
- Plus ‘sub-sectors’: BME organisations, Refugee and Migrant Organisations, Community Based Organisations, Faith Based Organisations

## (SOME) RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

***‘the sheer rate of change latterly experienced in this sector, has caste the English policy environment as hyper active by EU standards’.***

***Kendall 2009***

*For example*

- The Compact (1997 – revised 2009)
- PAT 9: promoting community self help (1999)
- Cross-cutting review (2002): promoting third sector delivery of public services
- 2006 Charity Act (modernisation)
- Capacity building (professionalisation)
- Social Enterprise strategies (2004 onwards)
- From double devolution to big society
- From Active Community Unit to Office for the Third Sector to Office for Civil Society
- Etc etc

## UK CIVIL SOCIETY IN WIDER CONTEXT; KEY ISSUES

### 1

- Which tradition: service delivery, philanthropy, self help, (radical) mutual aid. Dimensions of class and community history
- Accountability – to whom?
- Funding and sustainability
- Public perceptions: the distrust of ‘charity’, public services ‘on the cheap’ – who funds and why?
- Loss of vision (NCVO: 2012 Vision Statement 2003); more income, growth in service delivery, increased regulation – and social justice?



## UK CIVIL SOCIETY IN WIDER CONTEXT; KEY ISSUES 2

- The ‘push’ to social enterprise
- Addressing democratic deficit – but which model of democracy?  
Representative, deliberative, participatory? Government or governance?
- Closing down spaces for autonomous/radical action?
- The co-option of community by the ‘far right’/for political ends?
- The personal costs of activism: risk in risky societies/communities?
- Blurring private/public/voluntary boundaries: hybrid organisations?
- Regulation, innovation and independence?
- The ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ – a coherent Third Sector?
- Partnerships or competition
- Social return on investment: third sector costs – and benefits?
- Full cost recovery: preparing for a ‘new future’?
- Responding to globalisation – community as an antidote/panacea?

# THE POLICY VISION(S)

- Prime Minister *“Government and the sector fulfil complementary roles in the development and delivery of public policy and services, and.....the Government has a role in promoting voluntary and community activity in all areas of our national life”*. November 1998
- Clare Short, as International Development Secretary, NGOs a key role in International Development
  - Key roles for (Southern) NGOs seen as:
  - building a popular base for development
  - lobbying governments and international institutions
  - helping to empower the poor. January 1999
- And the Big Society/Small Government agenda?

## MAINSTREAM OR MARGINAL?

- Mainstreaming voluntary sector provision in a mixed economy of welfare
- Marginal – campaigning, advocacy and (actual) community interests – cultural identity, organising for social purposes
- AND
- The issue of power and power relationships

# AND FINALLY

- Do the issues and questions raised have a wider resonance beyond the UK?
- To what extent do culture and histories 'shape' voluntary action
- The future of third sector activity with a global economy in recession: funding, roles and expectations.