

**Alternative Forms of Non-Governmental Organisation:
Lessons for the UK from the Commonwealth of
Independent States and East Asia**

17th June 2010

**Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health
University of Birmingham**

Seminar Report

**Third Sector Research Centre
Department of Political Science and International Studies (POLSI)
Birmingham Business School
University of Birmingham**

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and by POLSIS**

**Alternative Forms of Non-Governmental Organisation:
Lessons for the UK from the CIS and East Asia
Date: 17 June 2010**

Location: CEIMH, Watson Building, University of Birmingham

- 9.45-10 Opening welcome: Professor Pete Alcock, Director of the ESRC Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC)
- 10-12.00 **Panel 1 Theories & Methods for the Comparative Study of NGOs**
Chair Professor Pete Alcock,
Panel
Professor Richard Batley, International Development Department, University of Birmingham: *Whose Public Action? Analysing Inter-sectoral Collaboration for Service Delivery*
Dr Kevin Morrell, Senior Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour, University of Birmingham Business School: *Governance and Narrative*
- 12-1.30 Network lunch
- 2-3.30 **Panel 2 CIS & East Asia in comparative perspective I: History**
Chair Dr Julie Gilson, Department of Political Science & International Studies, University of Birmingham
Panel
Dr Irina Bregvadze, Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia: *Civil Society Sector in Georgia – Development trends and Challenges*
Dr Estevao Cabral, Research Fellow, Department of Political Science & International Studies, University of Birmingham: *The changing roles of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in East-Timor*
Angus McCabe, Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham: *Marginal and Mainstream: Reflections on the UK and International Third Sector*
- 2.30-3 Coffee break
- 4-5.30 **Panel 3 CIS & East Asia in comparative perspective I: Key actors & spaces**
Chair: Angus McCabe
Panel
Dr Julie Gilson, University of Birmingham: *Transnational Advocacy in East Asia*
Mr Andrew Wells-Dang, Country Director, Vietnam, Catholic Relief Services: *Agency and Created Space among Civil Society Network in Vietnam*
Dr Eka Datuashvili, Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia: *Civil Society Actors in Historical Perspective, Georgian Case*

Attendance List

Pete Alcock, Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham
Richard Batley, IDD, University of Birmingham
Irina Bregvadze, Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia
Estevao Cabral, Research Fellow, Polsis, University of Birmingham
Eleni Christodolou, Doctoral Student, Polsis, University of Birmingham
Bethan Cobley, One World Action
Gillian Cowell, British Council
Eka Datuashvili, Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia
Andy Forster, Commission for the Compact, Birmingham
Julie Gilson, POLSIS, University of Birmingham
Matthew Hilton, History, University of Birmingham
Angus McCabe, Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham
Kevin Morrell, Business School, University of Birmingham
David Norman, Doctoral Student, Polsis, University of Birmingham
Tereza Novotna, Doctoral Student, CREES, University of Birmingham
Andy Rutherford, One World Action
Chris Skelcher, INLOGOV, University of Birmingham
Daniel Stevens, Institute for Volunteering Research, London
Andrew Wells-Dang, Country Director, Catholic Relief Services, Vietnam

Summary of the Workshop

Angus McCabe welcomed everyone and thanked the ASSC and Polsis for funding this event.

Professor Pete Alcock, Head of the Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham, gave the opening address. He explained the role of the Third Sector Research Centre and emphasised the value of bringing together practitioners and academics in workshops like this one.

The first panel was designed to examine **Theories & Methods for the Comparative Study of NGOs**, and was chaired by Pete Alcock. It examined some of the methodological issues inherent in this kind of work. Professor Richard Batley examined the role of nonstate service providers in fragile states, with a particular focus on the relations between governments and those nonstate providers. He drew on examples from his work in Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and Malawi, amongst others. His principal question involved considering how partnerships operate, particularly where nonstate providers and states hold different values. His work suggests that a combination of organisational structure and agency must be considered: thus, nonstate providers are conditioned to an extent by their environment, but at the same time nonstate providers are social agents able within those confines to shape their own destiny.

Dr Kevin Morrell then presented a consideration of social learning in and around crises, and the way in which media representation configures the narrative of

resistance. His presentation was exemplified with video clips from Eisenstein's *Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin*, as well as a clip from the more recent *Billy Elliot*.

Summary of Panel 1

The capacity of actors to shape relations and even invert power structures is dependent on the delicate balancing of 'insiderness' when working within the confines of changing environments.

Networking Event

Lunch then followed, and involved the creation of network dialogues, facilitated by Angus McCabe. Individuals were encouraged to post notes about their current or planned work projects, and as a result of these posts, small groups with similar interests were brought together. The following groups were formed:

- Advocacy and Action: trans-national networks and spaces for governance
- Community Base Organisations in authoritarian states: roles, opportunities and threats
- The Impact of Non-Governmental and Community Based Organisations: economic, social and political

There was no formal plenary from these groupwork sessions. Participants were encouraged to stay in contact and further discuss and develop their ideas into research proposals or action projects.

The second panel was chaired by Julie Gilson and examined the **CIS & East Asia in comparative perspective I: History**. As its title suggests, this panel focused on the historical development of civil society sectors in particular loci. Dr Irina Bregvadze of the Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia examined the history of the civic sector in Georgia. The institutionally well established groups have a complex relationship with Western donors and have to find ways of ensuring sustainability.

Dr Estevao Cabral examined the case of East Timor and the changing influence of CAFOD, Amnesty International and others, as they raise human rights' violations, lobby government and international organisations, and support the Catholic Church. He emphasised that groups have different remits, interests and agendas and that their historical involvement is differentiated.

Angus McCabe examined the UK third sector, with a focus on questioning whether the 'export model' is appropriate. He traced the size, scope and characteristics of the many groups loosely designated as the 'third sector' and focused on recent developments before considering *inter alia* issues of accountability and sustainability. His conclusion was that the third sector is increasingly mainstream, but also marginal, in the sense that small organisations are not directly related to delivering state agendas.

Summary Panel 2

This panel demonstrated the need for case-by-case analysis of the role of nonstate actors, both between different countries, but also between different groups within a given locale.

The final session was chaired by Angus McCabe and followed directly from panel two to look at space and agency. Julie Gilson talked about the need to reconfigure ideas of the social and political space occupied by transnational advocacy networks. Drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre, she advocated a breaking of traditional scalar readings of the transnational, to focus instead on the three intersecting dimensions of interactive practices, the significance of place and the discourse of collectivity. She drew some brief examples from East Asia.

Andrew Wells-Dang examined advocacy strategies of networks in China and Vietnam. Drawing on network and social capital theory, he considered how networks construct politics, and the types of strategies they adopt to do that. He assessed how in the cases he examined nongovernmental groups can create space, not through legal structures, but rather by linking nodes and de facto expanding their networks and by leveraging other actors.

Irina Bregvadze returned us to the case of Georgia, and emphasised that the role of most nongovernmental groups has not been to create a public discourse and question the accountability of the government, but rather to focus on civic education, social welfare and service provision to unprotected groups such as women and children. This turned the focus onto the role of 'soft advocacy'.

Summary Panel 3

This panel demonstrated how the space created and inhabited by nonstate actors can shape nodes of intersecting interests and create successful strategies for 'soft advocacy'.

Funding which was independent of government or external aid donors was important if NGO's were to retain a credibility with a wider public and their independence.

Overall Benefits

This workshop served to bring together two particular groups:

1. First, it served as a means of bringing together individuals from different disciplinary backgrounds with a shared interest in non-state actors (variously defined) from different places.
2. Second, it engendered a dialogue between academics and a range of practitioners based within the UK and internationally.

This was the first major opportunity to bring together individuals from across the University of Birmingham with an interest in civic activism. It is clear from the findings of this workshop that in order to understand the role of nonstate actors in comparative perspective, it is useful to draw on different disciplinary heritages and

to apply a range of methodologies. More significantly this workshop showed that as academics it is imperative to conduct detailed fieldwork, examining fully the history of nonstate actors within a given context and defining the contours of the individual environments in which they function. There is evidently the potential for collaboration among this group of academics at the University of Birmingham and this workshop provided an important networking opportunity.

In terms of developing relations with practitioners, this workshop benefited greatly from the active participation by a range of nonstate group representatives. These individuals offer a significant resource for any future research grant applications and for developing contacts in a range of sectors and in a range of states.

Julie Gilson, Angus McCabe and Kevin Morrell
5 July 2010