Neither in nor against the state? Revisiting the role of the third sector in constructing civil society

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Welfare workers were in the state, but also against it – challenging current structures, practices and outcomes.

- Law Centres

Welfare reform and improvement required both internal activity and external engagement.
Third Sector Dilemma

Independence threatened by public sector contracts
- incorporation, hybridity, isomorphism
  - Baring Independence Panel, NCIA, Rochester
  - Carmel and Harlock – ‘Governable terrain’

Advocacy and campaigning stifled or suppressed
- Legislation restricting TSOs from political campaigning
- ‘Gagging clauses’ in public service contracts
False Dilemma

Should TSOs be ‘in or against’ the state? Cannot be both!

Irony in this dilemma - LEWRG authors in the 1970s emphasised the need to do both.

False dilemma – TSOs do not have to choose - They are neither exclusively in the state, nor entirely against it. Rather - their role is, and should be, one of working with state (and market) actors to construct a civil society
Changing Relations

Not a new phenomenon -
Harris - trace this back over three centuries
Lewis - passes through a number of different phases
Kendal three recent shifts -
• Phase 1 – charity centric institution building – up to late 1970s
• Phase 2 – voluntary sector consolidation and engagement – following Wolfenden ()
• Phase 3 – hyperactive mainstreaming – following Deakin and New Labour.

6 and Leat - constructing a voluntary sector in policy discourse (‘sectorisation’ – Rochester)
Labour and Partnership

Third Way – working across state, market and third sector to deliver welfare – concerned with ‘what works’

Partnership

• Formalisation of state sector relations – Compact(s) – Deakin’s concordat

• Providing direct support for TSOs therefore - Futurebuilders, Change-up, etc. – horizontal funding, capacity building

• Engagement and support for TS representatives – strategic partners, advisory group, recession summits (see below)

• Creation of OTS - led by Campbell Robb

Created - ‘Strategic Unity’ across a broader TS
Interdependence

Interdependence of the state and the TS.

• The third way needed TSOs to expand options for diversity and choice in delivery of welfare.

• TSOs needed support from the state to respond to the new opportunities for service development and organisational growth.

Growth in state income - absolute and proportionate

Recession Summits – how to respond to recession together.

The sector asked for, and got, increased support from state.
Broader Policy Context

Engagement and support for sector from state are not new – though terminology and discourses change

• Vertical support - advice, social care, community development, mental health, and more
• Horizontal support - Voluntary Services Unit and Charity Commission.

Scale and intensity may alter, but interdependence always there
Broader Policy Context

Not only a UK phenomenon

- Overlapping boundaries, ‘tension fields’, and hybridity in European debate – Evers and Laville, Dekker, Brandsen
- US non-profits debate the impact of contracts for public service delivery and the fears of isomorphism.

Within the UK’s relations vary following devolution - different policy regimes, and differing (and increasing) degrees of interdependence across England - Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
The Conservatives and the Big Society

Promoted by Cameron as leader of the Conservative Party prior to 2010 election, Hugo Young speech – November 2009

• *Our alternative to big government is the big society. But... we need strong and concerted government action to make it happen*

Changed the nature of interdependence after 2010 election,
Coalition Government

• Relations cooler – Compact weakened, support for strategic partners withdrawn
• Horizontal support withdrawn – OTS spending decimated focus on projects: National Citizens Service,
• OTS retitled – reduced role in promoting good practice and ‘championing’ sector
• Big Society – not the big state

BUT – support and engagement continued and public funding though reduced, still significant and higher than early years of hyperactive mainstreaming under Labour.
Big Society Failure

Big Society discourse did not work - irrelevant in Scotland, Wales and NI anyway!

- Opportunities to challenge and replace the state (Right to Challenge and Right to Provide) did not lead to significant demand for TS alternatives.
- Most public service contracts went to private sector providers
- Community campaigners and sector activists argued for more support from state to prevent them TSOs going under

The Big Society needed a big state.
Civil Society

- Why did Conservatives change name of OTS to OCS?
- Did they know what they were doing?

Change of terminology to distance from Labour engagement with TS. But in practice location and scope of OCS did not change (Compact retained) – though resources, personnel and policy priorities did.

For Cameron in practice Civil Society was a synonym for Third Sector
Civil Society

Contrast with how Civil Society is conceived more generally, and in a range of other discourses by a range of other actors across the world.

- Journal of Civil Society – democracy, freedom of association, political change
- Civil Society and associational life, the commons, in the US
- Civil Society in post-communist countries and Global South, working with and outside state agencies
Civil Society

Michael Edwards, *(Civil Society 3\textsuperscript{rd} Ed.)* argues that there are the distinctive, though over-lapping discourses on civil society

- Civil society as associational life – where we participate in formal and informal organisations
- Civil society as the good society - where we debate what values should inform social relations
- Civil society as the public sphere – where all public action and debate takes place

Together embrace civil society as the interaction of the state, the third sector - and the market - in promoting associational activity, progressive social relations and a vibrant public sphere.
Civil Society

A normative discourse - how we can act together to make our world a better place. Edwards:

- *Civil society is simultaneously a goal to aim for, a means to achieve it, and a framework for engaging with each other about ends and means*

I have taken this up in final chapter of my new Policy Press book – *Why we need welfare: collective action for the common good*

http://policypress.co.uk/why-we-need-welfare
Civil Society

Civil society is

• The *means* for achieving collective action and promoting the importance of associational activity
• The *ends* to which we aspire through this collective activity. We want, or should want, all to be members of a civil society

• A challenge to a hostile *neo-liberal* discourse of individual freedom and market competition.
• The means to achieve this through associational activity and participation in the public sphere.
• The ideological framework though which we can articulate the need for investment in the common good.
Civil Society

New discourse on Civil Society - third sector has a central role

• Creating space for changing forms of associational activity
• Empowering citizens through collective engagement and community action
• Supplementing public services
• Challenging policy and practice
• Advocating for citizens and communities
• Improving business practices and corporate responsibility
• Promoting collective investment in public welfare

• Working both in and against the welfare state