



Voluntary Sector Studies Network: Day Conference, London, 26th November 2015

The caged crusaders – the
constraints on voluntary
sector voice in a period of
continued austerity

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What are the constraints on voluntary organisations seeking to influence policy?

- **Loss of resources** – austerity/funding cuts (NCVO 2015, York CVS 2015)
- **Loss of bases of influence/power** – legitimate, reward, expert, referent, coercive (French and Raven 1959, Raven 2008)
- **Shadow state** – danger of incorporation – voluntary action against state ‘perceived as biting the hand that feeds them’ (Wolch 1990 p.216)
- **Financial dependency** – ‘muzzled by contract and neutered by subsidy’ (Whelan 1999)
- **Continuing Neo-liberalism** – Increased demand for services, decreasing resources, intensified competition (Crouch 2011)
- **Social consequences** – poverty and inequality and food banks (O’Hara 2014)
- **Radical Community Approaches** (Holgate 2013, McBride and Greenwood 2009)

The changing, intermediate role of the voluntary sector

- **Capitalist Industrialisation** – voluntary and private sector failure (Wolfenden 1978)
- **The undeserving/deserving poor** – the Webbs versus the Bosenquets (McBriar 1987)
- **The Welfare State** – voluntary sector to campaign for new needs – flexible and close to people (Beveridge 1948)
- **Voluntary Sector Marginalisation** – campaigning and advocacy – state funded but independent
- **1980s – Contracting** – a trusted alternative provider
- **1998 – New Labour partnership** – the mainstreaming of the third sector (Kendall 2000)
- **2008 – Financial crisis** – austerity and funding cuts, Big Society/voluntary action, restrictions on freedom to campaign (Alcock 2012)
- **2015 – Recent events** – David Cameron’s love affair with the voluntary sector is over (Guardian 30/09/15)

Research Methodology

- **2004-05**
- 7 'Vertical Slice' case study organisations
- 54 Interviews, 22 organisations, 11 voluntary sector organisations, 28 manager interviews, 131 employee survey responses
- **2014-15**
- 8 Interviews – 6 Longitudinal Qualitative Interviews – 2 Additional Interviews
- CEO/Senior Directors in housing, homelessness, mental health, drug and alcohol, trade union, sector infrastructure and faith organisations
- (Corden and Millar 2007, McMillan 2011, Hermanowicz 2013)

Longitudinal Qualitative Interviews 1 and 2

- **LQI 1** – ‘we have as much autonomy as we like but we would lose funding [if we resist] . . . [so] you judge carefully what to take a stand on’
- ‘we are too large to survive as a small hand to mouth existence because we pay 250 people a month erm and as a result I have to know that on the 21st of each month if we have £650,000 cash in the bank to pay people . . . It’s a tricky position about the hand that feeds you, how much you challenge that’
- **LQI 2** – ‘Tendering has gone mad in the last few years . . . you have a completely different approach to commissioning . . . because its subjected much more to the kind of blasts of competitive wind that, if you like, local authorities themselves are feeling’
- ‘what you have seen in the last ten years is consolidation where smaller organisations just cannot compete any more’
- ‘It really started to be chipped away at . . . in terms of what we can do for people, in having to cut corners . . . Having less one to one time with people’

Longitudinal Qualitative Interviews 3 and 4

- **LQI 3** – ‘We are involved in some of the service user campaigns . . . but the main bit of campaigning that we are doing is campaigning for the for the model.
- ‘if you make too much noise you not going to get your funding . . . If it’s not being said people are worrying about that anyway and they’ll adjust, they’ll self-regulate their behaviour accordingly’
- ‘I am a strong advocate of the process of individualisation erm . . . the pitfalls within individualisation is that its erm . . . It’s much easier . . . for service users and carers to rally around the closure of a day centre . . . but if you are going to reduce 29 budgets you can do that at the stroke of a pen . . . many people are in dire situations’
- **LQI 4** – ‘we are not paternalistic but recent legislation is making it very difficult for our customers and so very difficult for us as a business’
- ‘we went to the houses of parliament, met ministers and put our case to them but their mind is set, they were going to take £18bn off the welfare budget and you can only cut that budget if you take money off the people who are going to receive it . . . the next tranche is going to be harder. What we are waiting for in the next year we think is going to be quite hard’

Longitudinal Qualitative Interviews 5 and 6

- **LQI 5** – ‘As a citizen . . . I also notice an increase in rough sleeping, which was all but non-existent 10 years ago’
- ‘It is really hard to develop radical approaches . . . I do think it is possible . . . the way forward is for clients to form their own group to, as a group, take on their own accommodation and they are then freed from the dead hand of bureaucracy’
- **LQI 6** – ‘[Voluntary Organisations] wanted to replace statutory services rather than provide originality and as a result of moving into provision they then lost their uniqueness’
- ‘People are cracking up, that’s what’s happening in the statutory sector but it is also coming into the voluntary sector where the cuts are really hitting because they are still 100% committed to service users, want to provide the best service so not wanting them to experience the pain that they are seeing so they stretch over that gap’
- ‘some will organise and fight back but . . . it’s more kind of shut down and try to cope . . . It’s got to be about going back and organising grassroots and building that organisation back . . . It’s just lost it’s teeth . . . I’d like to see the voluntary sector kind of go back to its kind of traditional place really’

Additional Interviews

- **A1** — ‘In 2010 it felt like it hit a brick wall . . .still grappling with the leftovers . . . we don’t have the resources . . . we have a very good relationship with our local authority and they are getting hit like anyone and we are doing our best to support them’
- ‘we are just now seeing the more organisations beginning to close . . . and I think that will continue’
- ‘the government says they will work with us and give that public impression but if you speak out it puts the brakes on an ongoing dialogue . . . since then I have the majority of those conversations in private’
- ‘we’ve sort of accidentally found ourselves saying the same sort of thing but it hasn’t been organised . . . there are still years of cuts to come . . . We are moving from erm we’re all in it together compliance to this isn’t fair resistance . . . the lobbying bill was a kind of pre-emptive strike, in that sense it’s kind of warded us off from campaigning’
- **A2** — ‘council resources stretched to breaking point . . . our resources are stretched as well’
- ‘clergy are massively overworked . . . and they are not social workers . . . there’s a bit of fatigue actually’

Kids Company



Interviews

1. CEO, Medium size homelessness organisation, Southern England
2. Regional Director, Large drug and alcohol organisation, Northern England
3. CEO, Small mental health organisation, Southern England
4. MD, Medium size housing group, North West England (was Regional Director North west for a large Housing Group)
5. Housing Strategy Officer, North West Local Authority (was Chief Officer of small midlands housing organisation)
6. Voluntary sector organiser, Large national trade union, London (now MP North East England)
7. CEO, CVS, North East England (Now moved to West Midlands CVS)
8. Communications Officer, Church of England, North East England

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