Civil Society Futures is a national conversation about how English civil society can flourish in a fast changing world.

Through community events, academic research and online debate, Civil Society Futures will create a space for a much needed conversation among those involved in all forms of civic action – from informal networks to vast charities, Facebook groups to faith groups. Considering how both the nature of civil society and the context it exists in are changing fast, we will investigate how to maximise the positive effects of civic action and provide a guide to how to release its potential to drive positive change.

The conversation will be guided by an independent panel of people with perspectives ranging from theatre making in South Wales to tech investment in Gaza, local government in the North of England to the world’s alliance of civil society organisations. It will be chaired by Julia Unwin, the former chief executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and is made up of Asif Afridi, Sarah Gordon, Bert Massie, Danny Sriskandarajah, Rhiannon White, Carolyn Wilkins, Steve Wyler, Debu Purkayastha.

This panel will be powered by a collaboration of four unique organisations. Citizens’ UK has its roots in communities across England. Goldsmiths University brings skills in academic research, looking at the changing trends in civil society. openDemocracy facilitates wide ranging discussion about the powerful institutions in our society. And Forum for the Future brings years of experience of helping people figure out how the world is changing and how best to respond.

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This report aims to explore current trends and identify future possibilities for civil society that the Inquiry will take up in the next phase of its research and engagement. It begins with a Constructive Summary of key elements from the background research that stand out as underpinning the possibilities for civil society futures, and sets out the key questions they raise. The following sections expand upon this.

Section 1 takes a brief tour around key terms and historical contexts, which is vital to any understanding of what comes next.

Section 2 examines the impact of austerity on the voluntary and community sector.

Section 3 looks at how this has impacted on ‘overlooked’ places and what this means in light of the ‘localism agenda’.

Section 4 picks up the theme of declining trust in elites and institutions both in the UK and across the western world and the extent to which civil society can create more open spaces for deliberation and contribute to a more civil public discourse.

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Constructive summary

Walls and Bridges?

An inquiry into the future of civil society suggests concern about the present. In politics this relates to concerns about a democratic deficit, and a series of public issue crises: an environmental crisis, a refugee crisis, and health and housing crises. This is set against a backdrop of concerns about fake news which adds to and reflects a lack of trust in public actors. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2017), between October 2016 and January 2017 trust in government fell from 36% to 26%; in business from 45% to 33% and in the media from 32% to 24%. Britain also has a significant ‘trust gap’ of 19% between ‘informed publics’ (‘in the upper income quartile, university educated and with a declared interest in politics and the media’) and those with an income of less than £15,000.

In the economic realm, austerity, unemployment, high personal debt, extreme poverty and inequality feature heavily. The impact of these crises is particularly marked for working class and minority communities as well as for young people – whose experiences are also inflected by the ‘war on terror’, student fees, housing inflation, urban riots, and youth unemployment. An important question for the future of civil society in England is whether social stability and harmony can prosper where poverty and inequality are apparent across so many intersecting fault-lines: young and old, black and white, religious and secular. And then there is Brexit: leave/remain emerges as a sort of super-divide: writ large, though too blunt to be sure what the message really is, or how to respond.

Prominent reports have observed, ‘[t]he need for change; the need to seek the voice of marginalised and disadvantaged people in decision-making processes is of undeniable and acute local, national and global relevance’ (RSA and JRF consultations, 2017). For civil society, this has heightened concern but also sharpened purpose. As Viv Slack, co-founder of Street Support, states “For many, 2016 was a year of turmoil - a collective realisation that something about how we function as a society is broken, that we are in an age of disruption. At a global, national and local level, in economic, environmental or social terms, there is understandable cause for concern. Yet for me personally, and for many others, this was a year when our purpose felt clearer, new relationships and networks blossomed, where we opened to learning, and dared to hope that we could see real change”.

Civil society is inherently contested space - where actors jostle for power, influence and impact to enact the things they want. How will those in these spaces respond to the enormous forces for change represented by Brexit and Trump? Will the future of civil society be one of bridges or walls? What factors may determine this?

Less State; More Civil Society?

In 2008 a global banking crisis unfolded, to which governments across the world have responded in a variety of ways. In England between June 2010 and March 2016 welfare reforms enacted reductions of £26 billion in UK social security and tax credits spending, and ‘deficit reduction’ was the primary goal of government. A main aim has been to ‘simplify the welfare reform agenda and make work pay’ (DWP, 2013). 59% of reductions
in income as a result of these reforms fall on working households. More than half of people in poverty are also in work (55% according to Tinson et al, 2016).

It is apparent that these reforms are causing significant hardship: Although the proportion of people in poverty in the UK is the same as a decade ago (21%), the profile has changed. Older people are now far less affected, even though the number of people over 65 has increased during this time (Tinson et al, 2016). But young adults (16-24) are experiencing ‘rapidly falling real wages, incomes and wealth’ (Hills et al, 2013:3). Poverty is also strongly linked with disability and ethnicity, with people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities experiencing multiple forms of socio-economic disadvantage (EHRC, 2016).

Welfare reforms have also hit hardest where reliance on benefits has been greatest. The most affected places are older industrial areas – Yorkshire, North West & North East England, the South Wales valleys, seaside towns like Blackpool, Hastings, Yarmouth & Margate, and some London Boroughs (Beatty and Fothergill, 2013). These places have also been among the most affected in terms of cuts to local government (Hastings et al, 2012; Wilson et al, 2013), reducing statutory funding to voluntary and community sector (VCS) bodies in these areas (Clifford, 2012, Clifford et al., 2013; McCulloch et al, 2012).

A succession of government initiatives over the last 50 years have attempted to tackle economic decline in such areas, including the National Community Development Programme (NCDP) in the 1960s and 1970s, Urban Development Corporations in the 1980s, City Challenge in the 1990s, and the New Deal for Communities in the 2000’s. They have been variously criticised for tending to locate the blame for disadvantage with the disadvantaged communities themselves – bought about by their own lack of skills, motivation or community (see NCDP Editorial Collective, 1977; Faith in the City, 1985; Lister, 2002; Alcock, 2005).

Since 2010 there have been no specific initiatives targeted at these areas, though the proposed ‘Northern Powerhouse’ is intended to give greater powers to the major cities in the north of England, including Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Newcastle, with the goal of promoting social, economic and cultural development in these regions (HM Treasury, 2016). A general devolution of responsibility to local councils is part of a localism agenda,
but is widely criticised for devolving responsibility without power, or funds especially when local authorities in England are currently dealing with a scheduled 40% cut in core funding from central government.

**Participation**

In its 2012 report, Democratic Audit highlighted the role of independent voluntary associations in supporting and strengthening democracy, counterbalancing the power of the state and the market and holding both to account as well as ‘creating a space in which people can empower themselves in association with others’. The Audit concluded that there had been a modest improvement under new Labour in this regard, but the rise of the ‘contract culture’ was a risk to the sector’s independence. It also suggested that this risk had increased under the Coalition government, such that ‘voluntary organisations are now facing threats not just to their independence but to their survival’ as a result of cuts in statutory funding (Wilks-Heeg *et al*., 2012).

Cuts are also related to the search for alternative forms of delivery, wherein people and communities are increasingly emphasised as ‘co-producers’ rather than consumers of services (NESTA, 2009, IPPR, 2014, NHS England, 2014). This has been criticised as hollow concealment of straightforward cuts. It has also been challenged for instrumentalising civil society organisations, and distorting the relationships and values of communities, which in fact underpin the contributions they might make (RSA, 2015, Dinham, 2012).

Charitable resources are also unevenly distributed, with many more located in affluent areas where they are more likely to support cultural activities, rather than basic urgent needs (Lindsay, 2013; Mohan and Breeze, 2015, chapter 3). Both Lindsay (2013) and McCulloch et al (2012) link this to the concept of ‘community wealth’: more people in affluent communities have the time, skills resources and connections to participate.

Meanwhile the possibility of participating in society through defending your rights is diminishing. The Law Society reports that ordinary people are finding it more and more difficult to access justice because of legal aid cuts, court closures and increased court fees, as well as changes to the rules regarding the legal costs a client can recover. In 2009–10 more than 470,000 people received advice or assistance for social welfare issues. This number dropped by nearly 90% by 2013–14, a year after the government’s reforms to legal aid came into force. Cuts to legal aid inevitably hit the most vulnerable in society the hardest.

**Activism**

England has seen a resurgence in collective social protest in recent years, reflecting an international resurgence in mobilisation responding to the great political and economic crises of the early 21st century. Waves of collective action are not isolated, spontaneous events, but rather speak to long histories of dissent and specific contextual changes in opportunities and resources. This is one way of understanding the English Occupy Movement, Student Protests in 2010, the Urban Riots of 2011, the burgeoning Black Lives Matter UK
“Without a secure and independent civil society, goals such as freedom and equality cannot be realised. But without the protective, redistributive and conflict-mediating function of the state, struggles to transform civil society are likely to become more fragmented.”

Source: David Held
movement, recent anti-Brexit and anti-Clinton marches, Refugees Welcome, the Coal Action Network and others.

More social protest is not simply a result of more technology: while social media may be useful in mobilising people, they do not cause protests (Fenton, 2016). And while public perception of civil society activism is partly affected by online campaigning it is also countered by viewpoints disseminated by mass media that support dominant narratives, (e.g. austerity is inevitable, the welfare state is too big to be efficient, the undeserving/deserving poor). As the ownership of mainstream media becomes evermore concentrated (Media, Reform Coalition, 2016) the role of civil society in holding power to account increases. At the same time, serious threats to the voices and independence of civil society have been identified by the Baring Foundation’s Independence Panel (2015, 2016).

This highlights the importance of existing and emerging independent community-orientated media, like the Bristol Cable and Gal-Dem Magazine, which provide bottom-up access to and control over information. A key question for our inquiry is how English independent media can contribute to a strong civil society milieu by better representing the un/misrepresented, highlighting important debates and holding decision makers to account.

Self-help

In contrast to these emerging movements of protest and resistance, a turn has also been noticed towards “…new forms of ‘survival tactics’ and social organization based on solidarity and collective self-empowerment, such as neighbourhood food banks, solidarity economy initiatives, alternative currency networks, prefigurative experimentation, new alternative media initiatives, and so much more” (Zamponia and González, 2017). They argue that this has “potentially transformative long-term consequences, long after the squares are empty”. They observe that they tend to have an online presence but are principally active in the ‘thigh to thigh’ and ‘eye to eye’ world of actual meetings. Examples include:

**DIY Space For London** is a cooperatively-run social centre located in South London that offers low cost creative facilities and social space as well as space for screenings, talks and performances.

**Homebaked** is a Liverpool social enterprise which started as a group of people who wanted to save the local bakery from closure. They have become a co-operative and community land-trust that ‘works collectively to buy, develop and manage land and buildings to improve their area, including potentially providing affordable housing’.

**Sisters Uncut** combine activism with self-help. With three branches in London and six regional collectives they have highlighted the need for secure social housing for women fleeing domestic violence. Over the summer 2016 the South East London branch reclaimed a vacant shop in Peckham, hosting workshops to discuss the current state of domestic violence services, attended by approximately 700 people over a month. Until they stormed Southwark Council’s cabinet meeting in September, the group received little attention from the council.
Volunteerism

Activism and self-help are very significant parts of the civil society picture, but according to the Community Life Survey long-established forms of ‘volunteering’ have also remained stable for many years.

Time seems to be a major barrier preventing more people from volunteering or increasing the hours they give (Mohan, 2015, Charities Aid Foundation (CAF), 2013, Brodie et al, 2011). More than half (57%) of respondents to a CAF survey (2013) said that more paid volunteering leave and/or fewer work commitments would make a difference, with only 7% of employees able to have some time off work to volunteer. Others have argued that the reality of working life for many people today - insecure, low paid, zero hours contracts – makes volunteering unrealistic (Mohan, 2015, Buckingham, 2012, Coote, 2010). Mohan suggests that ‘if we want to promote more voluntary action we need to recognise that we are working against the grain of economic and housing policy’ (Mohan, 2015:12).

It is equally important to understand what motivates people to participate. The evidence suggests that many do so for personal and social reasons, and especially because of their faith (Dinham 2012). It can also be rooted more broadly in “…values, their sense of community, whether of identity, interest or place, or simply a desire for friendship and conviviality” (Jochum et al, 2005:33).

What volunteers do is also noteworthy. Most people volunteer in the areas of sport and exercise (54%), arts, hobbies and recreational activities (40%) and children’s education/schools (34%) (Buckingham, 2012; Lindsey and Mohan, forthcoming). Others have argued that people participate for their own reasons and not in response to a government agenda (Patel, 2016). Volunteering is not easy to direct or steer towards particular needs.

Civil Society Infrastructures

The need for an active and supportive voluntary and community sector infrastructure to enable local voluntary and community organisations to flourish is a clear theme in the literature (Crisp, et al, 2016, Bolton, 2013, Moore & Mullins, 2013). This is not the capacity-building support to enable organisations to deliver public services that characterised programmes such as Change Up (Home Office, 2004) or its successor, Capacitybuilders (2006). What is highlighted are local infrastructure organisations (LIOs) that can help groups develop and learn, co-ordinate their activities, represent their interests and connect them to resources and decision-makers in other sectors. Yet this goes against the grain of policy, which has sought to promote a market-place of support to ‘empower’ organisations as consumers of LIO services (Rochester, 2013). This has been reflected in the closure of the Regional Development Agencies, and threats to the funding of Councils of Voluntary Service (CVS), as well as the closure of national bodies including the Community Development Foundation and CDX. Yet the value of infrastructure bodies, and LIOs in particular, has been recognised by the Independent Commission on Local Infrastructure (2015), convened by
the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action. This found that many LIOs were struggling with rising demand and cuts to their service. The report concluded that there is a compelling case to be made for long term investment in local infrastructure, but LIOs also need to review their provision in light of the 'new normal' and ensure that the services they offer are relevant to the needs and circumstances of the sector today.

In the gaps, new approaches seem to be emerging: Community Mutuals, Credit Unions, Community Land Trusts, Cooperative childcare etc. While such community action can be valuable, it is often by its nature small-scale 'and cannot be expected to tackle area-wide disadvantage in isolation' (Crisp, et al, 2016:i). The wider social, political and economic context impacts not only on local areas, but also on people’s ability to participate and their power to influence the wider determinants of poverty and disadvantage that affect their lives and the life of their community (Buckley et al, 2017, Crisp et al, 2016, IVAR, 2015).

Partnership with business, local councils and other public agencies, including the NHS, can be an important enabler of (or barrier to) change (Matthews and Pratt, 2012, Aiken et al, 2011).

**Adapting forms of civil society?**

*Trade Unions* are huge presences in the civil society milieu. Part-political, part-activist, part-service provider, their role in the future is also changing and new forms of union activity are emerging. The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) is an example of a new, smaller union working creatively and on a small scale for workers’ rights. It is a small, independent trade union originating from the big unions, whose members are predominantly low paid migrant workers in London. Another emerging shift is towards the unionising of the precariat from traditional city bicycle couriers to gain the London Living Wage to Uber and Deliveroo food delivery couriers.

*Faith Groups* also have a long and leading tradition of service and action in civil society spaces. A 2007 review shows that the majority of faith based community activity takes place through projects and associations (Dinham 2007). What is also clear is that faiths are particularly well placed to engage in such ways. Many traditions have organisational structures which respond to the local, for example in the diocesan structures of the Anglican and Catholic churches. These often mean that they maintain a long-term and very rooted presence in every area, even where many other agencies may have withdrawn. Others draw on their long histories as providers of community support through established charitable organisations. Their values and relationality are often regarded as underpinning effective civil society participation. On the other hand, widespread ideas of faiths as oppressive, sexist, homophobic, evangelical and violent feed into an idea of them as best kept to the private, not public realm. This tension plays out in a context which depends upon faith groups to plug gaps in services and communities, whilst struggling to talk well about them (Dinham 2015).
Call for contributions

Public call for evidence to gather existing knowledge and insights

The call for evidence builds on this initial research report and will help expand and deepen the initial review and its associated open database. This call will further inform the future research direction of the inquiry.

The call for evidence sits alongside a strand of research via community workshops in eight locations across England. Further engagement via a series of Civil Society Futures Conversations will be running in parallel for communities of practise, interest or locality.

Civil Society Futures is an independent inquiry into how civil society can flourish in a fast changing world. In order to answer this question, we want to gather as much wisdom as possible. As such, the Inquiry invites submissions that help answer the following questions:

1. What purposes does civil society fulfill now? What purposes will civil society need to fulfil in the future? What do you think they should or should not be doing?

2. What is driving or inhibiting change in civil society? How will different forms of civil society respond to social, political, economic, environmental and technological change over the future?

3. What new forms of civil society do you see emerging now and why? Given the right circumstances, what might their impact be in the future?

4. How and in what ways can civil society enable human flourishing now and in the future? In what ways is civil society important for a healthy democracy?

Responses should be no longer than 1,000 words and multimedia contributions are encouraged. Contributions may be shared publicly on the online hub, so your submissions will support the creation an open source bank of research into the future of civil society.

All submissions received will be reviewed by the Inquiry panel members and a synthesis will be shared on this online hub as appropriate. We may have an additional call for evidence in Jan 2018 depending on initial submissions.

Deadline for initial submissions is Monday 5th September 2017 - via the form available on civilsocietyfutures.org/call-for-contributions/

We're also seeking opinion pieces on the same topics – you can get in touch with Adam, adam.ramsay@.opendemocracy.net, if you would like to contribute to the hub in other ways.

For any queries, please contact Kharda: k.aden@forumforthefuture.org.
1. The Historical: making sense of the present.

‘Civil society activity meets fundamental human wants and needs, and provides an expression for hopes and aspirations. It reaches part of our lives and souls that are beyond the state and business. It takes much of what we care about in our private lives and gives it shape and structure. Helping us amplify care, compassion and hope.’

(Carnegie UK Trust Commission of Enquiry into the Future of Civil Society, 2010:3)
For many years now the term ‘civil society’ has been the focus of attention for academics, policymakers and others, including some within the voluntary and community sector. Yet in spite of its increasing prominence, and general acceptance of it as a ‘good thing’, its meaning remains contested. This contestation reflects a range of forms of emotional and financial investment in and engagement with forms of societal activity that often defy restrictive categorisations and as such, the term ‘civil society’ is perhaps best understood as a synthesis of these strands (Edwards, 2004; Barber, 1998).

Civil Society as Associational Life

At the core of a definition of civil society is the idea of independent voluntary associations and voluntary action, people coming together without the state (or other ties). Historically (since the 18th century) the liberal or libertarian view of civil society identified it as the realm of individual, private life as distinct from the public realm of the state. More recent commentators have identified it as the space between the state and the market – public and private sectors – as well as family and kinship networks (Barber, 1998; Keane, 1998; Edwards, 2004). Evers and Laville (2004) suggest that the boundaries of this space are not fixed, but rather the different spheres are held in tension with each other, changing over time and from place to place. For example, civil society in western democracies will have a different shape to places such as Eastern Europe in the 1980s and more recently the Middle East, where it has been defined by popular uprisings against totalitarian regimes (Barber, 1989).

A Normative Concept

A second strand is the idea of civil society as the ‘good society’, the ‘kind of society in which we want to live’ (Edwards, 2004). On its own this would suggest that, as a concept, civil society is little more than a ‘hurrah word’ (Dinham, 2012), but allied to associational life it raises the question of altruistic action and mutual support on the one hand, and on the other the ‘uncivil tendencies of civil society’ (Keane, 1998), including its potential for racism, sexism and homophobia (Edwards, 2004). In linking these two strands, civil society ‘tells us something about how we actually do behave even as it suggests an ideal of how we ought to behave’ (Barber, 1998:12). It is likely that many versions coexist and it may be more accurate to talk about civil societies, plural.

Civil Society and Democracy

Both Barber and Edwards emphasise the importance of civil society in protecting and strengthening democracy. For Barber it offers ‘room for us to engage with neighbours, friends, citizens, strangers who must of necessity live together’ (Barber, 1989:34). Edwards argues that the ‘good society’ is not self-evident and therefore draws on a third strand of thought (following Habermas) - the idea of civil society as a ‘discursive public sphere’, where people debate ‘ends and means’, identify common interests and agree – or disagree - upon the kind of society they want to live in.

In theory, a multiplicity of voluntary associations enables different voices, needs and interests to be heard; in practice there are ‘large differentials in the power of associations to make their voices heard [and] advance their own agendas’ (Edwards, 2004:45). These inequalities of power require strong democratic institutions that engage with and take account of marginalised views. As Held (1989) has argued:

‘Without a secure and independent civil society, goals such as freedom and equality cannot be realised. But without the protective, redistributive and conflict-mediating function of the state, struggles to transform civil society are likely to become more fragmented, or the bearers of new forms of inequality of power, wealth or status.’

This suggests the Inquiry needs to understand and explore the breadth and richness of associational life, the diversity of organisations and associations within civil society and how these intersect with other spheres (state, market and family life).

It also highlights the need to look at civil society from both an empirical perspective - what is actually happening to, and in civil society today, and where this trajectory might be leading - and a normative one, linked to questions of power and social justice, and what civil society needs to do to create futures which reflect this.
This also points to a need to focus on democratic institutions and engagement: how to ensure that marginalised voices are heard in the mainstream and how to create safe places for public debate, at a time of apparently increasing polarisation.

Twenty years ago Benjamin Barber (1989:11) talked of ‘the growing incivility of our public discourse’ (betokening an uncivil society), yet after Brexit, and the 2016 US election, as well as the rise of trolling and other abusive behaviour on social media, it could be argued that this ‘incivility’ has reached a new low. How can we strengthen civil society so that it can promote a discourse that allows for:

‘The development of shared interests, a willingness to cede some territory to others, the ability to see something of oneself in those who are different and work together more effectively as a result – all these are crucial attributes for effective governance, practical problem-solving and the peaceful resolution of differences.’

(Edwards, 2004:55)

Civil Society and the Voluntary and Community Sector

Although civil society is ‘most often associated with social action and social values, rather than particular organisational forms’ (Alcock, 2010:9), the emphasis on voluntary action and associations suggests significant overlaps with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and a wider third sector. This relationship was brought to the fore by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), which used VCS as the preferred collective term for the sector between 2005 and 2010. In doing so its aim was two-fold: firstly to replace the term ‘Third Sector,’ a definition coined by government and never particularly popular within the sector itself; and secondly as a unifying term for the wide diversity of organisations and activities under its umbrella.

In this context, the voluntary and community sector becomes a vital part of a much wider civil society – not only a collective term for providers of services or meeters of need, but also a catalyst for voluntary action and participation; a promulgator of social values and social justice; and a voice for marginalised and mainstream users, members and communities.

The relationship and articulation between the voluntary sector and civil society is an area that the Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society will be considering throughout its deliberations: to address not only how much attention should be focused on formal organisations and associations, but also how formal and informal activities contribute to civil society in both empirical and normative terms. As Evers (2013) argues:

‘instead of making the term ’third sector’ and ’civil society’ almost equivalent, it might be better to work on an open question concerning the various degrees and ways in which different types of third sector organisations may serve to promote and cultivate civil society … There may be ’uncivil societies that nonetheless have a large third sector and vice versa’

For Evers ‘every attempt to narrow down civil society to the third sector seriously impoverishes the very concept of civil society’ (2010:116). Following Edwards (2004), he argues that the state plays a vital role in providing a legal and regulatory framework to support democratic engagement and help to create a level playing field for citizen participation: a Big Society does not mean a small state. Indeed, as argued above, strong democratic institutions help to make society more civil; they are also necessary to tackle deeper structural problems and manifestations of social injustice that citizens and communities cannot reach.

Faiths and Civil Society

Within the wider VCS, faith groups have a long tradition of service and action, tracing back through Victorian philanthropy. A national review of the literature on faiths’ activities in communities in the UK was conducted in 2007 (Dinham 2007). This demonstrated the breadth and scale of what faiths were doing in communities in England. In the South East, Beyond Belief (March 2004) claims that there are at least two community action projects for each faith centre in the region. In the East, Faith in the East of England (July 2005) identifies 180,000 beneficiaries of faith based community development. In London, Neighbourhood Renewal in London: the role of faith communities (May 2002) identifies 7000 projects and 2200 faith buildings. In
the West Midlands, *Believing in the Region* (May 2006) reports that 80% of faith groups deliver some kind of service to the wider community. In the North West, *Faith in England’s North West* (November 2003) shows that faith communities are running more than 5000 social action projects and that faith communities are generating income of £69m - £94m per annum. In Yorkshire and the Humber, *Count Us In* (2000) suggests that in Hull 90% of churches are involved in social action and *Angels and Advocates* (November 2002) reports that there are 6500 social action projects in churches. In the South West, *Faith in Action* (June 2006) claims that 165,000 people are supported by faith groups in the region by 4762 activities. While in the East Midlands, *Faith in Derbyshire* (May 2006) says that, on average, churches run nine community activities. Though the regions (and nature of the data) differ considerably, one thing is clear: the types of activities which faith communities are engaged in is broad from children and youth orientated projects, to ‘social events’ such as lunch clubs and befriending schemes to cultural events.

The review shows that the majority of faith based community activity takes place through projects and associations and forms a vital part of the history of civil society. But it is also key to its future: what is clear about faiths and social action in community projects is that faiths are particularly well placed to engage in such ways. Many traditions have organisational structures which respond to the local, for example in the diocesan structures of the Anglican and Catholic churches. These often mean that they maintain a long-term and very rooted presence in every area, even where many other agencies may have withdrawn. Others draw on their long histories as providers of community support through established charitable organisations.

**Shift Boundaries**

While the space for civil society is created – and continuously recreated – by the actions of people themselves, the boundaries between this and other spheres are also porous (Deakin, 2001). For example, corporate social responsibility programmes see private companies cross over the border in one direction, while campaigns for ethical consumerism head the other way. Individuals may choose to volunteer in the public sector, as special constables or helping out in a health setting, while voluntary organisations may seek to provide services on behalf of the state, often in competition with private companies. Changes in these other spheres also impact on civil society, as the Deakin Commission (1996:15) noted:

‘... when the tides of change sweep through society as a whole, the contours of voluntary action also shift. When the state advances, the voluntary sector adjusts its role accordingly. When the state retreats and the market advances ... voluntary organisations adapt their missions...’

**The State & Civil Society**

While the form of partnership between state and civil society may have changed over time, it has a long history. For much of the last 150 years, this space has been shaped to a considerable extent by the ebbs and flows of state and voluntary action in meeting people’s welfare needs and furthering social justice. In the late 19th Century there was a proliferation of friendly societies and other forms of mutual aid, such as savings banks, allied to the development of co-operative and trade union movements (Thane, 1996).

Prochaska provides a compelling account of the prominence of the Churches as primary actors throughout this period (Prochaska 1996) – a time when faiths (or rather, Christian traditions) were not just active, but were leaders in providing services in response to need. At the same time it is argued that a growing awareness of poverty led to a flourishing of charitable activity: in London alone over 140 new charities were established between 1850 and 1860 (Fraser, 1981); although the effect of this was often haphazard, with 'some good causes over-patronised, others ignored' (Fraser, 1981:120). Others (e.g. Morris, 2006) contest this as an overly optimistic historiography and point to a rather more balanced mix of public and voluntary aid.

Although these organisations played a key role in the provision of welfare at this time, they did so in association with
statutory agencies, including the Poor Law authorities (Harris, 2010). It is also worth noting that amongst those involved in philanthropy and charitable activity were some of the leading social reformers of the time, such as Lord Shaftesbury and Octavia Hill (Fraser, 1981, Thane, 1996). Again, this suggests a longstanding link between voluntary action and campaigns for social reform, as well as faiths, even if many of these early pioneers also sought to reform or evangelise the recipients of charity.

The development of the welfare state over the course of the 20th Century, and particularly its flourishing between 1945-1979, meant that faith-based, community and voluntary organisations played less of a role in meeting people’s basic needs, often instead providing services that were complementary or ancillary to state provision (Wolfenden Committee on the Future of Voluntary Organisations, 1978). Voluntary action was also influenced by the rise of social movements in the 1980s, which challenged the paternalism of traditional charity as well as providing a broader critique of, and alternatives to state welfare (Deakin, 2001; Pratten, 1997). More importantly they embraced the idea of agency and self-advocacy, people acting and speaking for themselves rather than others doing so for them (Croft and Beresford, 1996). This can be seen, for example, in the decision of the RNIB to change its name from the Royal Society for the Blind to the Royal Society of the Blind.

To Market

Today the relationship between state and civil society remains an important one, but in recent years, and particularly the last decade, markets and market mechanisms have predominated. An emphasis on commissioning and contestability, which began under the Thatcher/Major administrations and continued as part of New Labour’s ‘modernisation’ agenda, has arguably been given greater impetus in the context of austerity. For example, councils and other public agencies have sought further to outsource and share services (both front-line and back-office) as a means of reducing costs and improving performance, although there is little evidence to suggest that either goal has been achieved (Whitfield, 2014).

The impact this has had on civil society appears to be far reaching. First, for civil society organisations (CSOs), marketisation has led to a major shift in government funding from grants to competitive commissioning. At the same time there has been a growing expectation that CSOs should become self-sustainable, generating and diversifying sources of income rather than being financially ‘dependent’ (IVAR, 2016a).

Second, it is argued that an emphasis on out-sourcing has detached them from democracy, depoliticising decisions about public welfare and the public good. Citizens are recast as consumers as collective decisions are transformed into questions of individual need and choice (Croft and Beresford, 1996; Prior et al 1996; Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001, Lister, 2001). If civil society is to offer ‘room for us to engage with neighbours, friends, citizens, strangers who must of necessity live together’ (Barber, op cit), then there also need to be mechanisms to enable people to identify and negotiate their common interests. This space is inevitably reduced when councils are overseeing rather than delivering contracts. Moreover, by focusing primarily on the relationship between consumers and services, the role of relationships outside of such market exchanges are obscured (Sayer, 2016).

In looking at the future of civil society, account should be taken of these shifting boundaries within and between both state and market, how these shape the space for action and how civil society actors can effect change in these other spheres – all of which have been influenced by the attempts...
2. The Organisational: making stuff happen and sustaining activity.

‘The voluntary sector, in all its diversity, has in common both some distinctive forms of governance and a set of values which are not determined by the financial bottom-line or by an electoral mandate. These values include not just what you do, but how you do it. Voluntary organisations also have a set of distinctive relationships with their different stakeholders … Our concern is to try to turn good intentions into accountable and effective action without forfeiting what is distinctive about the sector.’

(Deakin Commission, 1996:121)

UK Government website (Community and Society) 2017

Giving greater power to citizens and communities has been a recurring theme in public policy over at least the last two decades, from New Labour’s ‘Active Citizens’ and its emphasis on civil renewal (Blunkett, 2003) and ‘double devolution’ (D Miliband, 2006) to David Cameron’s short lived ‘Big Society’ and the ‘localism agenda’ (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011). While the Left has tended to emphasise the relationship between the state and the third (or civil society) sector, since 2010 the focus of the Right has been on community self-help (Moore and Mullins, 2013), people doing things for themselves rather than the state doing things for them. The aim has been to usher in ‘new freedoms and flexibilities for local government ... and new rights and powers for local communities’ (DCLG, 2011).

Yet there are inevitable limits to how much communities can do for themselves, as McCabe argues: ‘While communities can affect change, there are structural and global factors (from mass unemployment to the power of multi-national corporations and global warming) that cannot easily be solved at a nation-state level, let alone a “nano” community level.’ (2010:11). This is particularly true of those in more deprived communities as 50 years of regeneration initiatives has found (see for example NCDP Editorial Collective, 1977; Faith in the City, 1985; Lister, 2002; Alcock, 2005).

As importantly, this new localism has been introduced against a background of austerity and resulting state retrenchment, with a predicted ‘black hole’ in local government funding of £5.8 billion by 2020 (Local Government Association, 2017). It is difficult for people and communities to be ‘makers and shapers’ (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001) when local authorities are needing to be ‘cutters and shutters’. And it is especially difficult to find equitable solutions to social problems when resources are unevenly distributed and scarcest where they are needed most. Cuts of 40% to core local authority funding and welfare reforms have had a cumulative impact, hitting people hardest where deprivation (and therefore reliance on benefits) is greatest, with older, industrial areas and seaside towns worst affected (Beatty and Fothergill, 2015; Wilson et al, 2013).
The Voluntary and Community Sector

Although voluntary action has existed for centuries in various forms, the idea of a distinct ‘voluntary’ or ‘third’ sector is relatively recent, shaped – and contested - by policy-makers, practitioners and academics (Alcock, 2010). This notion of a sector emerged from a growing interest in the role of voluntary organisations and their relationship to the state (Wolfenden Committee on the Future of Voluntary Organisations, 1978, Faith in the City, 1985, Deakin Commission, 1996) and reached its zenith under the New Labour governments of 1997-2010 (Kendall, 2000, Alcock, 2010, Alcock and Kendall, 2010).

The concept of a distinct ‘third sector’ was constructed in response to the New Labour agenda, as a ‘strategic unity’ rather than a unified sector (Alcock, 2010), and one that is ‘fractured, fragile and potentially fragmentary’ (Alcock and Kendall, 2010). This is evident in the fact that today few people use the term third sector. Recent Coalition and Conservative Governments have preferred to talk of a ‘voluntary, community and social enterprise sector’ (VCSE), and even then primarily in relation to delivering public services rather than any wider role. Policy has tended to focus on citizens and communities, rather than organisations.

Questions of distinction

This changing terminology reflects ‘a long-standing, unresolved and arguably irresolvable issue of labelling and definition in relation to voluntary and community action’ (MacMillan, 2015: 42). These issues tend to be linked to attempts to define and defend boundaries with other sectors and thus to claims that CSOs are unique because they are mission- and values-driven (Blake et al, 2006, Third Sector Network, 2006). In particular their closeness to users and communities, and their capacity for innovation is often highlighted (NCVO, 2017, Office of the Third Sector, 2006). This was once referred to as the sector’s ‘added value’, although such claims cannot always be assumed (Bolton, 2005). A question is whether these characteristics are core or contingent: what evidence is there for this in practice, for example, how do organisations ‘live’ their values (Jochum and Pratten, 2009)?

In the context of an increasingly mixed economy of welfare, some have questioned whether this notion of distinction is still relevant or if it has been replaced by more ‘hybrid’ organisations in all sectors (Billis, 2010, Buckingham, 2011). Others have warned of ‘isomorphism’, the idea that CSOs are becoming indistinguishable from the state or from business. This has most often been raised in relation to Housing Associations, but interestingly the end point has changed over time: in 2001 Deakin questioned whether they were too close to the state and had become ‘little more than its passive agent’ (2001:9), ten years later Purkiss asked whether they had prioritised market share over social purpose (2011).

While claims of hybridisation and isomorphism may have been over-stated, this does raise questions as to how the prevailing policy environment impacts on CSOs and the extent to which an organisation’s distinctive characteristics may be contingent on external factors (Macmillan, 2013).

Size and Scope of the Voluntary Sector

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>Micro - &lt; £10,000</th>
<th>Small £10,000 -£100,000</th>
<th>Medium £100,000 -£1m</th>
<th>Large £1m -£10m</th>
<th>Major £10m -£100m</th>
<th>Super Major &gt;£100 m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No of</td>
<td>81,104</td>
<td>54,477</td>
<td>22,150</td>
<td>4613</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of orgs</td>
<td>49.8%</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>£0.2bn</td>
<td>£1.9bn</td>
<td>£6.8bn</td>
<td>13.3bn</td>
<td>14.6bn</td>
<td>8.6bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of income</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCVO UK Civil Society Almanac 2017.
Attempts to measure and scrutinise voluntary action have led to an accidental over-emphasis on formally constituted organisations because they are visible and reachable (Salamon and Anheier, 1997). This is the approach taken by NCVO’s much-respected annual Almanac, which is based on annual reports and accounts filed with the Charity Commission, although this inevitably means there is a slight time lag and the latest year for which we have figures is 2014/15.

According to the latest Almanac (2017), in 2014/15 there were 165,801 registered charities in the UK with a combined income of £45.5 billion. As table 1 below shows, most (49.8%) have an income of less than £10,000 a year, but just over 50% of the sector’s income is held by a small number of ‘Major’ and ‘Super Major’ sized organisations – just 0.42% of the organisations in the sector.

### Statutory Funding

Although most organisations do not receive funding from government sources, it is the second largest source of income for the sector as a whole. Moreover, organisations working in more deprived areas (Clifford, 2012; Clifford et al., 2013; Mohan and Clifford, 2016) and/or with women (Walby and Towers, 2013, Women’s Aid, 2016) and BME communities (Ware, 2013) tend to be most reliant on statutory funding and it is here that the impact of cuts can be seen most clearly.²

Under New Labour, government funding for the sector increased steadily from 2000/01, reaching a peak of £15.2 billion in 2009/10. This was primarily a result of voluntary organisations delivering more public services: in 2003/04 more than half of the sector’s income was from government and of this £12bn, £6.1 billion was in the form of grants. By 2014/15 the proportion of income from government in the form of grants had fallen to 19%, or £2.89 billion. In 2014/15 81% of the £15.3bn the sector received from government was earned through contracts or fees (Bernard et al, 2017).

The latest figures from NCVO show that in 2014/15 government spending stood at £15.3bn, an increase of around £0.2bn on the previous year. This is the second consecutive year that statutory funding has increased, (though the increase was ‘rather less’ than the £0.5bn increase to 2013/14), which accounts for 17% of the increase in the sector’s income over the last two years (Bernard et al, 2017) However, this growth has been predominantly in the very largest organisations, those with an income of over £100 million, the category NCVO now define as ‘super major’ (Bernard et al, 2017). The number of organisations in this category rose from 40 to 42 in 2014/15 (compared to only 33 in 2012/13).

In contrast, it has been a much harsher and more insecure environment for the small and medium-sized organisations (with an income between £25,000 and £1 million). These organisations have experienced significant fluctuations in income since 2009/2010 with proportionately bigger losses in government income during this time. Gains from other sources, particularly individuals, have not been sufficient to cover the shortfall, with the total income of small and medium sized organisations staying the same or decreasing between 2013/14 and 2014/15. (NCVO, 2017). This includes organisations working with, and often very much embedded in more marginalised communities. Although the sample on which this analysis was based was not large enough to be representative it points to a potential concern for those types of small organisations that have significant specialist knowledge about the needs of the communities they serve and expertise in working with them effectively to meet those needs (see for example, Department of Health, 2016; Lloyds Bank Foundation, 2016a), yet many are struggling to survive in this environment – if they fail this knowledge and expertise will be lost (Imkaan, 2016).

While the nature of voluntary sector funding means that some fluctuation is normal, the current financial environment has exacerbated this, leading to much greater volatility and mounting insecurity (NCVO, 2017, IVAR, 2016a). For many CEOs, funding has become ‘a critical concern’ (Cracknel et al, 2014; Pratten, 2014). The squeeze on public sector budgets means that funding does not always cover the full cost of providing a service and organisations are therefore drawing on their reserves to keep going: 62% of organisations in the north east of England (Pharaoh, et al, 2014) and 75% of women’s organisations (Pratten, 2014) have said they are using their own funds to subsidise services in this way. Across the sector as a whole, the value of reserves fell by almost £2 billion between 2010/11 and 2011/12 (Kane et al, 2014), and in 2013/14 around one third of small and medium-sized organisations reported having no reserves.
at all, (NCVO, 2016), suggesting that this response is not atypical.

Changes to Commissioning

A more competitive commissioning environment means that small and medium-sized organisations may now find themselves in competition for funding with private sector companies as well as other charities. The following quote from an environmental organisation is typical of many organisations from all parts of the sector:

‘Loss of public sector funding across the board. Tight procurement rules requiring public sector to run expensive and time consuming tenders before supporting projects, even where these have been initiated by non-profits, and development time carried out at our risk. Aggressive competition for local work from national and regional organisations that were previously fully funded by government.’

(Cracknel et al, 2014:11)

Yet the key issue appears to be size rather than sector (Rees et al, 2013), with the process seemingly weighted in favour of larger organisations. For example:

- Fewer, larger contracts make it harder for small and medium-sized voluntary organisations (or private businesses) to compete;
- Much tighter financial requirements are being used in the early ‘prequalifying’ stages of the procurement process and many organisations do not get past this stage;
- Public procurement is now dominated by a relatively small number of key players: in 2012/13 four major contractors, Capita, Serco, Atos and G4S held around £4 billion worth of government contracts (Public Accounts Committee, 2013/4);
- The introduction of ‘payment by results’ shifts financial risk from funders to providers and precludes those who cannot afford to invest up-front, primarily but not exclusively voluntary organisations (Rees, 2013; Shiel and Briedenbach-Roe, 2014).

Successive governments have committed to developing a social investment market to provide loan finance to CSOs to help them scale up and compete more effectively in this market place (SIFT 2005, 2010, DCMS, 2016). Yet this assumes that it is both appropriate and desirable for organisations to do this. And in practice demand for social investment appears to be driven more by a need for working capital to alleviate cash-flow problems arising from deferred payments for services provided (IVAR, 2016c). Similarly the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 allows commissioners to factor in social value as well as cost when awarding contracts, which could favour CSOs although it has not been well used. However, questions of value are not neutral and needs and priorities are determined by commissioners, not by voluntary organisations or their beneficiaries.

More recently the Minister for Civil Society has announced a programme of changes designed to overcome the barriers that smaller organisations face in commissioning processes (Wilson, 2016). What is not clear is whether these challenges can be overcome by tinkering at the edges, or whether it is the model itself that is at fault: is it possible or desirable for mission-driven organisations to thrive in a market driven world?

Transfer or Transformation?

Throughout the New Labour years (1997-2010) it was apparent that a policy agenda supporting civil renewal and collective decision-making sat ‘uncomfortably alongside other elements that give greater priority to involving individual consumers’ (Jochum et al, 2005:33). Yet by the end of the decade these ‘other elements’ had come to the fore, with choice and contestability driving public service reform (see for example the NHS Act 2006).

Although some voices, notably the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO, 2004), had argued that voluntary organisations should ‘replace the state’, there was limited support for this. What most voluntary organisations wanted was the opportunity to bring their specialist knowledge, experience and skills, including their knowledge of community needs and experience of involving service users, to service delivery. From the government’s perspective, they were also seen as coming
67.8% of all business investment in arts and culture and 90% of individual giving goes to organisations in London.

Source: Arts and Business 2014
with less ‘institutional baggage’ and therefore better able to respond to user needs than bureaucratic imperatives (HM Treasury, 2002). But while these aspirations were shared, at least in part, funding mechanisms have not enabled them to be realised, as NCVO recognised early on:

‘Commissioners need to review what it is they value in public service delivery, and how that is recognised and rewarded through the procurement process, if they are not to drive out many of the very characteristics and benefits that VCOs at their best can bring to service delivery.’

(Blackmore, 2006)

The growing marketization of services and the impact of austerity has driven out many of these characteristics and benefits. As a result many smaller organisations are struggling to survive, while the very largest appear to be increasing their market share. Yet as Lloyds Bank Foundation suggests, these organisations play a critical but often unseen role, able to be flexible and responsive to need, embedded in the community and offering a holistic service to those facing the greatest disadvantage (2016:1).

Cuts to public services have led to a growing interest in alternative forms of delivery, whereby people and communities are ‘co-producers’ rather than simply consumers of services (NESTA, 2009, IPPR, 2014, NHS England, 2014). The Department of Health’s VCSE Review, for example, highlighted the value of organisations working with communities to address ‘service resistant problems, like loneliness and stigma’ and design ‘more effective, sustainable services and systems’ (Department of Health, 2016:7).

Charitable Giving and Volunteering

Money from individuals, in the form of donations, legacies and fees for services, continues to be the most important source of funding for the majority of voluntary organisations, accounting for £20.6bn in 2014/15 - 45% of the sector’s income and a £0.8bn increase on 2013/14 (NCVO, Bernard et al, 2017). It is the most important source of income for the very smallest organisations, with ‘Micro’ and ‘Small’ organisations receiving 59% of their income from individuals in 2014/15. It is also important for the very largest who are able to fundraise most effectively – in 2014-15 income from individuals provided 44% of income for ‘Super-major’ organisations and 45% of income for ‘Major’ organisations. (NCVO Funding Commission, 2010). According to the 2015 Charitable Giving Survey (CAF, 2016a), more than two thirds of the population (67%) in the UK had given to the charity in the previous year and 42% had donated in the previous month, with levels of charitable giving remaining stable over time. In terms of global comparisons (CAF, 2016b), the UK is the most generous country in Europe.

Although most donations are still in cash, in recent years a number of online platforms have been developed to simplify giving, such as Justgiving and Localgiving as well as CAF Donate, set up by the Charities Aid Foundation. CAF Donate was set up in 2014 and has since collected over £70 million for 2,800 charities (CAF, 2017). Although this is still only a very small proportion of the total amount of individual donations many charities are increasingly looking to social media to support fundraising (Harris and McCabe, 2017). Oxfam, for example, have introduced a MyOxfam app, making it easier for people to find out about how their money is spent as well as to donate.

As part of the Big Society agenda, the Government made a commitment to ‘establish giving as a social norm’. In 2011 the Giving White Paper set out a number of ways in which government hoped to encourage and stimulate people to give their time and money to good causes. This includes, for example,

- The Innovation in Giving Fund, a £10 million fund managed by NESTA to enable organisations to create a step change in charitable giving;
- Changes to Gift Aid, making it easier to submit claims, particularly for small organisations (HMRC, 2013);
- Improving Payroll Giving, making the system easier for both employers and employees (HM Treasury, 2013).

While these developments are welcome it is unclear whether they have had any notable impact. Fundraising at scale is expensive. In 2010/11 the voluntary sector as a whole spent £2.9 billion on fundraising and publicity, of this £0.8m out of every £1 was spent by major organisations, those with an income of £10 million or more. These organisations invested 14% of their total
expenditure on fundraising and gained 42% of their income from donations, raising on average £4.40 for every £1 spent (Kane et al, 2014). But for organisations that cannot afford to invest in this way, individual donations are little more than a ‘useful extra,’ (Pratten, 2014) rarely enough to fund a project or pay a wage.

But will increasing the number of people who are willing to give, or give more frequently, increase the range of causes they give to? Charitable giving reflects a person’s ‘tastes, preferences and passions’, and people ‘do not give to the most urgent needs, but …support causes that mean something to them’ (Breeze, 2010:2). Over the years there has been little variation in the ‘most popular’ causes, with more people regularly giving to medical, children’s and animal charities than other causes – although the balance between them may change. In 2015, for example, charities supporting children and young people topped the list, with medical research coming a close second (CAF 2016).

There is also evidence of uneven distributional effects between places as well as causes. For example London receives a higher proportion of philanthropic funding than other areas: 67.8% of all business investment in arts and culture and 90% of individual giving goes to organisations in the capital (Arts and Business, 2014). This is not a new phenomenon, Fraser (1981) notes that in the late nineteenth century east London charities were relatively well-provided for because of their proximity to the wealth of the City. This is a potential concern for the future of civil society if welfare provision, and other good causes, are to become more reliant on charitable giving and philanthropy.

Allied to this is the increasing number of major donors (giving £1 million or more) who also use their own ‘time, networks, expertise and convening power’ to actively control where the money goes and how it is spent, primarily through their own foundations (Coutts, 2016). While this level of generosity is to be welcomed – in the UK 355 donors gave a total of £1.83 billion in 2015 – it also raises questions about the distribution of power within civil society particularly if we compare this to the £185 million raised by bake sales (CAF, 2013). In 2015, higher education was the top recipient subsector, accounting for 35% of the total value of donations worth £1m or more (Bernard et al, 2017). The highest overall donation went to the University of Oxford, made by the Wellcome Trust across a number of separate grants.

### Role of Grant-Makers

Nevertheless, more organisations appear to be looking to charitable trusts and foundations for support at this time. This is a recurring theme in a number of recent studies, for example those looking at the state of women’s organisations (Pratten, 2014), environmental organisations (Cracknel, et al, 2014); and the arts (Arts and Business, 2014). Although not the most significant source in terms of monetary value (£3.8 billion in 2013/4 or 9.2% of the sector’s income), trusts and foundations tend to be valued by recipients, not least because they are seen to be less bureaucratic and more aligned with an organisation’s mission and values than other sources (particularly statutory) (Pharoah et al, 2014, Cracknel et al, 2014). It would also appear that a number of foundations have recognised the impact of austerity on voluntary organisations and have increased their support to charities as a consequence.

### Trust and Confidence in Charities

As in other institutions (see section 4), public trust and confidence in charities has fallen in recent years (Edelman, 2017). The most recent survey undertaken by Populus for the Charity Commission (Charity Commission, 2016) found that on a 10-point scale, public trust and confidence had fallen from 6.7 in 2012 and 2014 to 5.7 in 2016. One third of respondents (33%) said they now had less trust in charities than previously, only 6% said it had increased. Despite this, 93% think charities play an essential role in society today.

This survey followed a series of negative media stories about chief executives pay, the demise of Kids’ Company and scandals about fundraising tactics. Perhaps the most egregious of these was in relation to high pay in the sector. A subsequent review commissioned by NCVO found that there was not a problem of high pay in the sector with only 1% of charities employing someone earning more than £60,000 (and these were mainly independent schools, care home/health care providers or research charities) and only 0.2% had anyone earning £100,000 or more (NCVO, 2014). However, the review concluded that
3. The Social: making life liveable

‘Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places close to home … the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.’
Eleanor Roosevelt, 1948

charities should be transparent about staff remuneration, with the information easily available to donors and supporters on the organisation’s website.

The spotlight on fundraising appears to have been of a different magnitude, revealing unethical practices, such as ignoring the Telephone Preference Service and selling personal data about donors, by some of the best known charities. These appear to have been long-standing practices: in one study in 2010 interviewees spoke of the ‘impossible amount’ of direct mail from charities and their regret at not being able to respond to the number of requests they received (Breeze, 2010:21). In response to media concerns about this issue, in 2015 the government asked NCVO, to undertake a review of fundraising practice in England. As a result there is now a new Fundraising Regulator, responsible for overseeing compliance with an agreed code of practice and adjudicating on potential breaches, in co-operation with the Charity Commission and the Information Commissioners’ Office. In addition, individuals must now actively consent to receiving information from charities (NCVO, 2016b).

The Parliamentary Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee held two separate inquiries into charity fundraising (PACAC, Third Report 2015-16) and Kids’ Company (PACAC, Fourth Report 2015-16). In relation to fundraising it accepted the recommendations of the NCVO Review (as had the government), but warned that it was ‘the last chance for self-regulation’. Both reports also highlighted the role of trustees in ensuring proper oversight of charities. In response to this a revised Governance Code for Voluntary Organisations has been developed and consulted on, which includes stronger standards for larger charities. It is suggested that large charities should adopt a ‘comply or explain principle’, whereby large charities that do not comply with these standards must explain why not (Governance Code, 2017).

In all these reviews, a common theme is that charities should be more transparent to demonstrate that they deserve the public’s trust. Evidence suggests that people are less likely to question organisations and causes that reflect their own values and beliefs, and this can be a strong basis for trust (Yongjiao, et al, 2016). But this also suggests that trust could be lost if organisations do not put their values into practice, if they are seen to act unethically. External regulation and codes of practice can be useful, but could signal that organisations cannot be trusted to act ethically of their own accord (Keating and Thrandardottir, 2016). This suggests that charities themselves must grasp this nettle and seek to generate greater understanding of what they do, what they are for and what they have achieved.
In a context of austerity and welfare reform, there is a greater emphasis on voluntarism. Do communities have the capacity to take on new roles or will this lead to new manifestations of inequality and social need? As importantly, what role will civil society play, will it simply seek to fill in the gaps or become an engine of social change?

**Welfare reform and the impact of austerity**

Between June 2010 and March 2016 welfare reforms resulted in reductions of £26 billion in UK social security and tax credits spending (10% of the overall bill) and 59% of reductions in income as a result of these reforms fall on working households. The number of people in poverty who are in a working family is at a record high of 55% (Tinson et al, 2016). Although the proportion of people in poverty in the UK is the same as a decade ago (21%), the profile has changed, with many fewer older people affected, even though the number of people over 65 years has increased during this time (Tinson et al, 2016). In contrast, younger adults (16-24 years) are experiencing ‘rapidly falling real wages, incomes and wealth’ (Hills et al, 2013:3). There are also strong links between poverty and disability (ibid) and ethnicity, with people from Black and minority ethnic communities experiencing multiple forms of socio-economic disadvantage (EHRC, 2016).

**Geographical Inequalities**

Welfare reforms have also hit hardest where reliance on benefits has been greatest, the worst affected places being older, industrial areas – Yorkshire, North West & North East England; the South Wales valleys; seaside towns such as Blackpool, Hastings, Yarmouth & Margate; and some London Boroughs (Beatty and Fothergill, 2013). These places have also been most affected by cuts to local government (Hastings et al, 2012; Wilson et al, 2013) and this has had a knock-on effect for voluntary and community organisations, which are more reliant on statutory funding in these areas (Clifford, 2012; Clifford et al, 2015). Yet

“54% of people who volunteer are involved in sport or exercise.”

Source: Buckingham, 2012.
many of the underlying problems in these regions are structural rather than cyclical. They existed before the recession and, if current trends continue, will remain after it has ended.

Over the last 50 years there has been a succession of government initiatives aimed at tackling economic decline in such areas. Notable are the National Community Development Programme (NCDP) of the 1960s and 1970s; Urban Development Corporations in the 1980s; City Challenge in the 1990s; and the New Deal for Communities in the 2000’s. Some constructed disadvantaged communities themselves as the problem (in lack of skills, motivation, and community). Some focused on local agencies and partnerships. Others emphasised ‘enterprise’. But all failed to address the underlying structural causes and consequences of industrial decline (see for example NCDP Editorial Collective, 1977; Faith in the City, 1985; Lister, 2002; Alcock, 2005). As Faith in the City reported, then as now: ‘Viewed against the magnitude of the problem, government action has been pragmatic: treating the worst evidence of economic decline and poverty by small-scale intervention’ (1985:173). These same post-industrial areas remain ‘overlooked and too often ignored’ (Unwin, 2016:4).

Since 2010 there have been no specific initiatives targeted at these areas, but the proposed ‘Northern Powerhouse’ is intended to give greater powers to the major cities in the north of England (including Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Newcastle) to promote social, economic and cultural development in these regions (HM Treasury, 2016). Alongside this there has been a more general shift to devolve responsibility to local councils and local communities as part of the localism agenda, but against this background of long-term decline and 40% cuts in core funding from central government, there is a danger that under localism already deep divisions could become deeper still. Giving greater power to communities may be a positive aim, but this looks very different if driven by an austerity agenda than by one with social justice as a core concern (Taylor, 2011).

Volunteering & Community Participation

According to the Community Life Survey 2015–2016, commissioned by the Cabinet Office, the number of people volunteering has remained stable for many years, for example:

- 47% said they had volunteered in the previous month (the same as in 2014/15) and 70% in the last year (69% in 2014/15);
- Fewer people volunteer formally, for an organisation: 41% had done so in the last year, compared to 60% who had volunteered informally (providing unpaid help to people who are not related to you);
- The number of people engaging in employer-supported volunteering also remains the same at 8% (although slightly higher than in 2012/13, when it was 6%).

Other studies have shown that people are more or less likely to volunteer at different stages in their lives (Mohan, 2015, Brodie et al, 2011). For example, students in full time higher education, are more than twice as likely to volunteer as other age groups (CAF, 2016). Therefore it is possible that more people engage over a lifetime than can be seen from these surveys which only provide a ‘snapshot’ (Mohan, 2015). Nevertheless, findings from the Community Life Survey (since 2012) and its predecessor, the Citizenship Survey (2001 – 2011), have been consistent with only minor fluctuations over time. This suggests it is by no means certain that there is a latent pool of ‘willing localists’ (Moore and Mullins, 2013) waiting to come forward.

Lack of time seems to be one barrier preventing more people from volunteering (or volunteering more), when people have busy lives and are already juggling paid work and caring responsibilities (Charities Aid Foundation (CAF), 2013, Brodie et al, 2011). The reality of working life for most people today - insecure, low paid, zero hours contracts - not only makes it extremely difficult for people to commit to regular volunteering, it also renders calls for time off work to do so unrealistic (Mohan, 2015, Buckingham, 2012, Coote, 2010). Moreover, in the current economic climate, when resources are scarce, people in low income areas tend to give less priority to community-based activities (Crisp et al, 2016). Mohan suggests that ‘if we want to promote more voluntary action we need to recognise that we are working against the grain of economic and housing policy’ (Mohan, 2015:12). As IVAR (2014) has noted: ‘The challenge of getting people involved, keeping them involved
and widening the numbers involved is sharpened when welfare and other reforms are biting.

It is equally important to understand what motivates people to participate. The evidence suggests that they do so for personal and social reasons, because of their ‘faith or values, their sense of community, whether of identity, interest or place, or simply a desire for friendship and conviviality’ (Jochum, et al, 2005:33). Studies show that most people choose to volunteer in the areas of sport and exercise (54%), arts, hobbies and recreational activities (40%) and children’s education / schools (34%) (Buckingham, 2012). In other words, people participate for their own reasons and not in response to government initiatives (Patel, 2016), unless of course they are taking part in action opposing government policy (McCabe, 2010), such as anti-war demonstrations or encouraging people to welcome and support refugees (Citizens UK, 2017).

The Civic Core

But it is not just a question of numbers: looking at who gives to charity, who volunteers and/or participates in civic activities, the Third Sector Research Centre has shown that there is a relatively narrow ‘civic core’:

‘a group constituting less than 10% of the population contribute between 24% and 51% of the total civic engagement, depending on which dimension is examined. … The social characteristics of members of these ‘core’ groups are analysed and it is shown that members of the ‘civic core’ are drawn predominantly from the most prosperous, middle-aged and highly educated sections of the population, and that they are most likely to live in the least deprived parts of the country.’

(Mohan and Bulloch, 2013)

Charitable resources are also unevenly distributed with many more located in more affluent areas (Clifford, 2012) where they are more likely to support cultural activities, rather than ‘urgent needs’, and less reliant on statutory funding or paid staff (Lindsay, 2013). Both Lindsey (2013) and Mohan (2015) attribute this to socioeconomic segregation and varying levels of poverty and affluence with more people in more affluent communities having the time, skills resources and connections to engage in this way. Lindsey and Bulloch (2013) asked respondents if they felt that ‘the communities they live in have the capacity to meet their own needs through volunteering’. While no-one felt very confident, some in more affluent areas were aware that there were ‘capable and committed’ people (often retirees) with the wealth, skills and time to give to local causes in their community. In contrast people in more deprived areas were more doubtful, as this account from an ex-mining community suggests:

‘So there is a community, definitely, but unfortunately not one that would pull together to make things happen. There’s a kind of fatigue that’s come with being economically downtrodden, a fatalism. People don’t seem to have much confidence and rely on others to make a stand’.

(Lindsey and Bulloch, 2013)

Capacity Building and Infrastructure

When people in more deprived areas have less ‘community wealth’ to draw on and face greater challenges in securing the necessary skills, knowledge and contacts they need to achieve change (Lindsey, 2013, Moore and Mullins, 2013, Aiken, et al, 2011), voluntarism alone will do little to ameliorate the impact of austerity or the experience of long-term industrial decline. Proposals that seek simply to increase volunteering as a means to build community capacity without recognising the consequences of long term industrial decline and deeply felt, multi-layered forms of deprivation will not be able to effect social change. To do this will require more purposeful support, including a transfer of power which enables people to become agents of change, not just objects of policy.

In recent years charitable foundations have shown an interest in developing programmes focused on local people and places (see for example, IVAR, 2017, Bolton 2015, 2013, Telfer, 2013, Phillips et al, 2011). Recent projects in this vein include the Big Lottery Fund’s ‘Big Local’ programme, which gave residents in 150 local areas £1million to use to improve their local area, with minimal strings attached (IVAR, 2015) and the RSA’s project within the Connected Communities programme, which aimed to research and strengthen relationships within communities (Parsfield et al, 2015). There is now a growing literature setting out the lessons that can be drawn from such initiatives. This includes, for example,
an historical review of place-based approaches by IVAR for Lankelly Chase Foundation (IVAR, 2016a, 2017); a review of community-led approaches to reducing poverty in neighbourhoods (Crisp et al, 2016); and a scoping study of community-led responses to climate change (Matthews and Pratt, 2012) as well as learning from the projects mentioned above. It is clear from these studies that place-based initiatives do little to compensate for the massive withdrawal of place-specific statutory funding such as the abandoning of Labour’s regeneration programmes.

However, research also points towards the importance of focussing on, and valuing relationships within communities, not just responding to austerity or a service delivery agenda (RSA, 2015, Dinham, 2012). Examining the benefits of community-led projects to tackle poverty Crisp et al highlight the complexity of this:

‘Identifying what works in tackling poverty imposes an instrumental concern with outcomes and impact on activities which are not necessarily conceived and delivered in those terms. Community led approaches are often as much about the process of mobilising individuals and communities as pursuing a clear defined set of outcomes.’ (2016:3)

Whilst volunteering rates and levels of social capital are linked, to effect social change requires long term support, ‘changing cultures and addressing complex issues that have developed over decades takes time’ IVAR, 2017:29). McCulloch, Mohan and Smith (2012) also argue that in the absence of significant mainstream efforts to sustain the economies of neighbourhoods, raising levels of volunteering is unlikely to bring about change. Long-term support includes on-going financial support. As Matthews and Pratt note ‘intermittent or poor funding’ is one of the main reasons that initiatives ‘fizzle out’ (2012:iii). In spite of a growing interest in community enterprise, in practice it is very difficult for community initiatives to be financially self-sustaining (Crisp et al, 2016, Moore and Mullins, 2013). Indeed, IVAR suggests that for CSOs and funders, ‘sustainability’ has multiple meanings and the idea that organisations can become self-sustaining is often a ‘fantasy’ (IVAR, 2016b). While market logic might suggest that successful organisations can scale-up and increase their market share, this creates a real dilemma for locally-led initiatives. For organisations such as credit unions or self-help housing associations, there is a tension between achieving growth and leveraging in external resources and preserving local leadership and the community-led ethos that drives them (Crisp, et al, 2016, Moore and Mullins, 2013).

An ‘asset-based’ approach can also be applied to community capacity-building, recognising that community development and learning is not the same as ‘training’ (McCabe and Phillimore, 2012). While communities need on-going, targeted technical (and financial) support (Moore and Mullins, 2013), building collective rather than individual capacity is critical. As McCabe and Phillimore’s study on community learning found, ‘Social networks were the key to the development of each group and to the accessing of the skills and knowledge they need to get on. Furthermore, social activity and solidarity played a key role in "resilience" and affecting change’ (2012:16) although there are clearly limits to what such strategies can achieve.

This suggests a need to understand the complexity of associational life and community as both a lived relationship and a site for learning (Dinham, 2012, Ledwith, 2011) and develop approaches to social action that enable both to flourish. This includes enabling people within communities to work together to question and explore the problems they face and the forces that shape their lives (Ledwith, 2011). It also involves enabling them to determine what skills and talents they have to achieve change and what additional resources they need (Dinham, 2012). For example, partnership with business, local councils and other public agencies, including the NHS, can be an important enabler of (or barrier to) change (Matthews and Pratt, 2012, Aiken et al, 21011), the question is how to bring these resources together to support the agendas of communities themselves.

A clear theme in the literature is the need for an active and supportive voluntary and community sector infrastructure that can build relationships within and between communities and between civil society and these other sectors (Crisp, et al, 2016, Bolton, 2015, Moore & Mullins, 2015). Organisations that can help groups develop and learn, co-ordinate their activities, represent their interests and connect them to resources and decision-makers. Yet this
A crisis of trust

Percentage of trust in institutions, 2016 vs. 2017

Source: Edelman Trust Barometer 2017

Building Community

As Edwards (2004) has argued, associational life can reflect and shape wider social divisions and inequalities, of class, gender, ethnicity and faith. It is therefore important to understand how these divisions are reproduced or countered within civil society (Mann et al, 2100) particularly in the context of on-going concerns around social integration and rising hate crime in the UK (Casey, 2016) and globally (Amnesty International, 2017).

In the most recent Community Life Survey, 89% of people agreed that ‘their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together’, an increase of 3% on the previous year - the highest level recorded since 2003 (Cabinet Office, 2016). While this finding is very welcome, it must be seen against a rise in reported hate crimes in recent years. Between 2014 and 2015 there was a 526% rise in reported street-based anti-Muslim incidents (Hansard, 29.6.2016). In the days after the EU referendum (23rd-26th June 2016) there was a 57% increase in reported hate crime, with more incidents reported in areas that voted leave (Stone, 2016) a trend that was sustained for at least another month (Travis, 2016).

While some have linked a lack of community accord to the effects of spatial segregation, with high concentrations of minority ethnic communities living in separate neighbourhoods from their white British counterparts (Cantle, 2001; Cantle and Kaufmann, 2016), a recent comprehensive review of social scientific evidence has shown that income inequality and deprivation are far more important determinants of community discord in the UK (Demireva, 2015). In its response to the Casey Review (2016), the Runnymede Trust argued that these inequalities are
4. The Political: making change possible

Participation, Resistance and Dissent

‘[..] A country’s democracy lies as much in the vitality of its citizens self-organisation in all aspects of their collective life – what has come to be called civil society – as well as their formal relation to government. Civil society is both an important arena within which citizens are empowered in the management of their own affairs and a key agency for making government accountable and responsive.’


‘persistent and widespread’, they ‘remain a major barrier in modern Britain, and that responding to these inequalities and creating the condition for everyone to interact as equals should remain the starting point for any integration policy’ (Runnymede Trust, 2016).

Immigration

In the media and elsewhere, diversity, integration and immigration are too often conflated in ways that are unhelpful (Demireva, 2015). Immigration has long been high on the list of people’s concerns, with successive polls recording significant majorities in favour of reducing the number of migrants entering the UK (Edelman, 2016, Blinder and Allen, 2016). However, ICM research on public attitudes towards immigration for British Future, undertaken after the Brexit referendum, suggest that ‘beyond the most vocal extremes’ public opinion is more nuanced with most people being ‘anxious reducers’. For example, the poll found there is support for skilled workers being allowed into Britain, with 46% willing to see this increased and only 12% believing it should be reduced. Proportions among leave voters were similar at 45% and 15% respectively. While there is much less support for unskilled workers, ‘once one paints a picture of an actual person, rather than a generic figure, even if it is just by stating their job, people are more likely to give them a fair shot at joining our society’ (ICM 2016:12)

This report suggests that, overall, there is no strong public desire to reduce immigration at all costs, but people are concerned that politicians want to close down debate rather than engage with their concerns (Edelman, 2016). In response to this British Future suggests that a ‘national conversation on immigration is needed so that people’s views are heard and they can have a role in shaping policy in this area:

‘While immigration remains a high profile issue, we are not good at talking about it. This means we do not have the opportunity to put forward our views or to hear the opinions of others. Contested narratives are not articulated and renegotiated; communities are not offered a space in which to come to a consensus about immigration and integration. Talking about immigration and how we live together, and agreeing on what constitutes a decent debate, also helps communities to challenge hate crime and prejudice.’

(Katwala, et al, 2016)

How can civil society help to develop approaches to social action that respond to the needs and aspirations of people themselves, rather than those of elites in a society that is becoming more economically and socially segregated? And at a time when views are becoming more polarised, how can it create space for debate and deliberation where people can develop shared interest and ‘see something of oneself in those who are different and work together more effectively as a result’ (Edwards, 2004 op cit)?
Twice as many 65 – 74 year olds as 18 – 24 year olds say they are absolutely certain to vote.

Source: Hansard Society 2016
A n active and vibrant civil society is a vital pre-requisite for a healthy democracy, enabling different voices to be heard and different ideas about the good society, and the values that underpin it, to be contested and debated.

Trust in politics

Yet across the world, trust in political and other institutions has been in decline, and in Britain it is at a historic low and apparently still falling. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2017), between October 2016 and January 2017 ‘trust in government fell from 36% to 26%; in business from 45% to 33% and in the media from 32% to 24%. The authors describe this steep plunge as a ‘crisis of trust’ and Britain itself as being ‘on a cliff edge’. Similarly polling by Ipsos MORI saw trust in politicians in the UK fall from 21% at the end of 2015 to 16% at the end of 2016.

Britain also has a significant ‘trust gap’ of 19% (second only to the United States) between ‘informed publics’ (‘in the upper income quartile, university educated and with a declared interest in politics and the media’) and those with an income less than £15,000. Moreover both groups have less trust in government this year than they did last year. Amongst the least affluent it has hit a new low of just 20%, but it has also fallen significantly amongst the wealthiest, from 54% in 2016 to 38% in 2017 (Edelman, 2017).

Disenchantment with, and disengagement from, the political system is not new. Turnout at elections and party membership has been largely in decline since the 1960s, particularly amongst working class voters (Heath, 2016) and young people (Gardiner, 2016); although the last general election and the surge in Labour Party membership when Corbyn became leader bucked this trend (see below). But as the Power Inquiry (2005) found, the general disengagement from formal institutional political processes appears to have less to do with voter apathy than with a preference for pressure politics. Even in 2005, before the MP’s expenses scandal, politicians were ‘held in very low esteem and widely distrusted’ (2005:16).

Political participation

The Hansard Society’s 2016 Audit, undertaken before the Brexit referendum, found formal political participation had increased overall - with voter turnout in the 2015 general election at 65%, the highest since 2001, and more people claiming to be strong supporters of a political party (41%) than at any time since 2003 – but inequality had also increased: ‘there is now a 57 percentage point difference between the certainty to vote levels of those in social classes AB and DE, an increase of six points in 12 months’ (Hansard Society, 2016, p.6). The audit also highlighted a distinct generational divide, with more than twice as many people aged 65 – 74 years (80%) than 18-24 year olds (39%) saying they were absolutely certain to vote (ibid, p.55).

At the same time, overall confidence in the system, and especially in people’s ability to influence decisions, is low:

‘Only a third of the public think the system by which Britain is governed works well (33%) with those living furthest from Westminster most likely to be dissatisfied. Just 35% believe that when people like themselves get involved in politics they can change the way the country is run. Only 13% feel they have some influence over decision-making nationally although 41% would like to be involved in decision-making. More people (46%) would like to be involved in local decisions but just 25% currently feel they have some influence at the local level.’

(Hansard Society, 2016, p.6)

This is the backdrop against which the EU referendum turnout of over 72% took place, apparently bringing to the surface deep divisions of class as well as generation, divisions that ‘cannot be divided from the economic dislocation that has taken place since the 1980s’ (Dorling et al 2016). Studies by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Goodwin and Heath, 2016) and the Resolution Foundation (Clarke, 2016) both find that low skilled and working class voters in the most deprived regions were more likely to vote Brexit. Given the longstanding decline in working class participation at elections (Heath, 2016), particularly in these ‘post-industrial’ areas (Power Inquiry, 2006), it is interesting that it only came to public attention when these voters re-engaged.

The counter movement against globalisation has loosely been called ‘populism’ and comes with a revival of political participation as new parties spring up (UKIP) and new leaders come forth (Corbyn). The surge in voting is largely linked to those who are outside of the
post-war party system; those deemed to be outside of a professional political elite. This is joined by a revival in the notion of democracy and the possibility of those at the bottom reminding those at the top that they matter.

**Why engage?**

This suggests that the 'democratic deficit' is not a sign of apathy: people will turn out to vote if they think it will make a difference. Even amongst the younger generation turnout for the EU referendum was higher than predicted, with 65% of 18-24 year olds voting (75% of whom for remain), while 60% of all ‘new voters’ (who had not voted in the 2015 election) voted leave.

Arguably, the scope of political decision-making has become much reduced since the 1990s, particularly at a local level. An emphasis on economic efficiency has depoliticised much government decision-making, transforming social, political and moral dilemmas into technical and managerial problems, leaving little room for public voice (Prior *et al*., 1996; Pratten, 1997). At the same time, little attempt has been made to understand or address underlying structural inequalities. Instead globalisation has tended ‘to be treated as an immutable economic fact rather than something that can be shaped politically’ (Lister, 2001:431). As Unwin has argued, ‘people in the overlooked and too often ignored parts of the country ... voted leave because they weren’t satisfied with what they have. And they didn’t feel able to change things’ (2016:4).

**Voluntary Organisations, Voice and Advocacy**

In its 2012 report, Democratic Audit highlighted the role of independent voluntary associations in supporting and strengthening democracy, counter-balancing the power of the state and the market and holding both to account as well as ‘creating a space in which people can empower themselves in association with others’. The Audit included an assessment of outcomes for civil participation and engagement, including ‘a healthy and vibrant civil society,’ since 2002. It concluded that there had been a modest improvement under new Labour, but the rise of the ‘contract culture’ was a risk to the sector’s independence - something the Deakin Inquiry had pointed out six years earlier.

While austerity measures do appear to have had both direct and indirect impacts on the sector’s voice and independence - for example, through ‘gagging clauses’ in contracts (Independence Panel, 2015) - even more pervasive have been changes in the political environment. Since 2010 there has been mounting criticism of charity campaigning, not least from within government. For example organisations such as Oxfam and the Trussell Trust have been much criticised for drawing attention to poverty in the UK today, with both organisations accused of being ‘overtly political’ (Butler, 2014), and the Trussell Trust being accused by the Department for Work and Pensions (*ibid*) of ‘drumming up business’. Most recently the Red Cross has been admonished for ‘meddling in politics’ after it spoke out about the crisis in the NHS (Phillips, 2016). The EU referendum also appears to have emboldened certain sections of the media, which have been very quick to jump on dissenting voices as ‘enemies of the people’, whether this be Gary Lineker or Supreme Court judges (Williams, 2017).

The Institute for Economics Affairs continues to accuse voluntary organisations that campaign of being ‘fake charities and sock puppets’ (Snowden, 2012), arguing that charities should be helping poor people rather than campaigning against the causes of poverty. This argument has carried weight with some parts of government, leading to the now (mostly) rescinded ‘anti-advocacy clause’. It also appears to have implicitly informed Charity Commission guidance on campaigning by charities in the EU referendum, which was much more restrictive than that produced by its counterparts in Scotland and Northern Ireland (Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2016; Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, 2016; Office of the Scottish Regulator, 2016).

Other specific threats to the sector’s voice and independence are identified by the Baring Foundation’s Independence Panel (2015, 2016) and include:

- Commitments to recognise the sector’s right to campaign, and to be consulted at an early stage on policy developments, set out in the Compact between the government and the sector, have been watered down (National Audit Office, 2015);
• The Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 (the 'Lobbying Act') has created a 'chilling climate' for charity campaigners and remains unchanged in spite of recommendations for reform identified by Conservative peer Lord Hodgson (2016); and

• Reform of Judicial Review, particularly the imposition of new financial restrictions, will make it much harder for voluntary organisations to challenge government decisions, as it was intended to do, according to the then Secretary of State for Justice:

‘The professional campaigners of Britain are growing in number, taking over charities, dominating BBC programmes and swarming around Westminster... Britain cannot afford to allow a culture of Left-wing dominated, single issue activism to hold back our country from investing in infrastructure and new sources of energy and from bringing down the cost of our welfare state.’

(Grayling, 2013)

Civil society has long given rise to calls for social justice, from the abolition of slavery to the (on-going) campaign for the living wage. Its continuing ability to do so should therefore be of central concern to an inquiry into its future: If ‘the space for civil society is closing’ and developments in the UK are ‘helping to legitimise regressive trends in the treatment of civil society organisations globally’ as the Charities Aid Foundation has argued (2016:2) then any inquiry into the futures of civil society should make clear the possible consequences.

The Inquiry should also look to places and spaces where civil society is growing such as examples of new trade union impulses and organising. One example is the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain that has successfully organised amongst cleaners, security guards, couriers and foster care workers. In 2015 Brixton Ritzy’s staff and their union Betcu successfully challenged bosses about living wage rates and redundancies. The first campaign achieved wage increases to the London Living Wage. Bosses then threatened up to 34 redundancies because they said they could not afford to pay the increased wages. News of the potential sackings prompted a public boycott and campaigning from high-profile figures such as the writer Will Self. Bosses then backed down and said no one working at the Brixton cinema will face redundancy. Despite these gains, there appears to be a lack of faith in the Trade Union movement, as in politics and the media. Union membership is at 6.49 million in May 2016 (ONS), representing 24.7% of the workforce down from 32.4% in 1995, even though the workforce has grown significantly.

Social Media and Social Activism

Other new forms of activism are emerging that are much less dependent on formal ‘bricks and mortar’ organisations (Bennett and Sederberg, 2012). Digital technology has enabled people to ‘self organise,’ building and sustaining new social movements and grassroots campaigns. As Fenton states, this has led to ‘a new means of, and a new meaning of being political’ (2016:25).

Such movements are often consciously political, seeking to challenge the prevailing political and economic orthodoxy (the Occupy, Blockupy and Indignados movements), oppressive regimes (Arab Spring) or practices (Black Lives Matter, #Muslim Ban). While each of these are alike in so far as they have used social media to facilitate action, they each need to be understood in their particular historical and political context (Fenton, 2016); civil society is as much about common history as common activities (Edwards, 2004). Nevertheless in all cases social media has made it easier to connect, collaborate, mobilise and report on resistance in real time.

Social media has also enabled small producers, including local enterprises and small charities, to emerge and develop where previously this would have been difficult’ (McCabe and Harris, 2017a:13). This can be seen in local campaigns in the UK that have been enabled by digital communications, for example:

• Focus E15 is a campaign started in 2013 by young mothers threatened with eviction from the hostel where they were living, after Newham Council cut its funding, to be rehoused outside of London,
away from their families and social networks. The campaign came to prominence in 2014 after they occupied a block of flats on a local estate that the council was planning to sell to private developers. Since then they have continued to be active, building links with and supporting tenants on other estates, including the Guinness Trust-owned Northwold estate in Hackney, a third of which is under threat of demolition, to be replaced by ‘luxury’ flats for sale at market prices.

- Acorn UK was founded in 2014 by private tenants in Easton, Bristol to campaign to ‘end evictions, rip-off tenancy fees and unhealthy housing’ and help communities to organise in support of more ethical housing. It now operates in 8 cities in England and has just successfully won its first national campaign, getting Santander to agree to drop a clause in its contracts requiring landlords to raise rents to the maximum.

- Just Space is an informal alliance of community groups, campaigns and independent organisations established in 2006. It aims to enable Londoners to participate in planning decisions and ensure that those decisions take account of community needs and not just the interests of developers. Recent actions include a public protest in Haringey against selling public assets to private developers (14.2.17) and working with the Chair of the London Assembly Economy Committee, encouraging people to tweet their views on the needs of small enterprises to inform the committee’s deliberations (21.2.17).

Digital technology changes the dynamics of communication, ostensibly facilitating opportunities for individuals to participate. But this on-line presence is most effective when linked to off-line activities and opportunities to build solidarity (Cammaerts, 2015, Gerbaudo, 2012, Taylor, 2015). For example, 38 Degrees, best known for organising e-petitions has begun to set up local groups, hosting events and organising meetings with MPs (Fenton, 2016). Similarly, Sisters Uncut has a strong online presence which it has used to drive direct action, but a network of off-line groups has since emerged, enabling women to meet face-to-face and organise on the ground locally: connective ties supporting collective action.

However, the internet and social media in particular, also stands accused of naturalising the segregation of society into echo chambers. Based on the notion that birds of a feather flock together the internet predicts who we are depending on who we follow on Twitter, who we ‘like’ on Facebook, the ads we linger over, producing network analytics that naturalises the segregation it finds and making a commercial and political virtue out of the fact that we tend to be similar to our friends. Social media is also criticised for facilitating mass-surveillance, enabling the state to over-ride civil liberties and pre-empt dissent (Fenton, 2016).

Furthermore, connective activity online does not transcend social and economic inequalities. In the UK almost all of the wealthiest people use the internet while this falls to 58 per cent amongst the lowest income group (less than £12,500) (Dutton et al., 2013). Just as patterns of economic inequality are replicated in access to healthcare and educational attainment (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009) so they map onto access to and uses of technology (Pew, 2015). There is a ‘digital divide’: internet users are still younger, more highly educated and richer than non-users, and more likely to be men than women, and more likely to live in cities. Furthermore, the Oxford Internet Institute point out that the one aspect of internet usage that correlates with social class and educational attainment is use for informational or political purposes (Blank and Groselj, 2015). Social media does not exist in a vacuum. While it has the potential to bring new voices into political debates, it can also reflect and reinforce existing social relations and patterns of privilege. The
5. Remaking Possibilities

‘Fewer people feel they can influence local decisions, disenchantment with the political system remains widespread and communities are less strong. A market-based model for reforming public services is concentrating power in the hands of new ‘quasi-monopoly’ private sector providers rather than in the hands of local people and is reducing, not increasing transparency and accountability.’

(Civil Exchange, 2015:6)

internet may be democratizing, but more often than not its effects are felt most strongly amongst the middle class (Fenton, 2016).

Civil Society Organisations and Social Media

The more established and formal civil society organisations appear to have been slow to adopt, or adapt to digital technology and there has been little research on the potential of social media to support social action by voluntary and community organisations (Harris and McCabe, 2017a). Where it has been used, it has been largely to support marketing and fundraising, rather than campaigning or community action (ibid). This has led some to suggest that CSOs might be ‘missing a significant opportunity to build mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders’ (Bortree and Selzer, 2009, cited in Harris and McCabe, 2017a:8). The limited research there is suggests that where communities have had an active on-line presence this has tended to strengthen offline activity, often social activity, rather than promote social action or community activism (Matthews, 2016, Harris and Flouch, 2011).

Recent research by Harris and McCabe (2017b) suggest that there are very good reasons why community organisations don’t use, or no longer use social media, noting the time and resources invested, and the technological challenges incurred. Other research has indicated that NGOs are frequently seduced by the potential of new technology but this quickly turns into a ‘tyranny’ with CSOs needing to constantly update their systems and chase the latest trends with ever diminishing resource (Fenton, 2010).
Call for contributions

Public call for evidence to gather existing knowledge and insights

The call for evidence builds on this initial research report and will help expand and deepen the initial review and its associated open database. This call will further inform the future research direction of the inquiry.

The call for evidence sits alongside a strand of research via community workshops in eight locations across England. Further engagement via a series of Civil Society Futures Conversations will be running in parallel for communities of practice, interest or locality.

Civil Society Futures is an independent inquiry into how civil society can flourish in a fast changing world. In order to answer this question, we want to gather as much wisdom as possible. As such, the Inquiry invites submissions that help answer the following questions:

1. What purposes does civil society fulfill now? What purposes will civil society need to fulfil in the future? What do you think they should or should not be doing?
2. What is driving or inhibiting change in civil society? How will different forms of civil society respond to social, political, economic, environmental and technological change over the future?
3. What new forms of civil society do you see emerging now and why? Given the right circumstances, what might their impact be in the future?
4. How and in what ways can civil society enable human flourishing now and in the future? In what ways is civil society important for a healthy democracy?

Responses should be no longer than 1,000 words and multimedia contributions are encouraged. Contributions may be shared publicly on the online hub, so your submissions will support the creation an open source bank of research into the future of civil society.

All submissions received will be reviewed by the Inquiry panel members and a synthesis will be shared on this online hub as appropriate. We may have an additional call for evidence in Jan 2018 depending on initial submissions.
A theme of this report is that the market has encroached on other domains, making alternatives appear unattainable and requiring public and voluntary sectors to adapt to its logic. This has brought renewed attention to the concept of social capital, ‘important because of its positive contribution to a range of well-being aspects relevant to policy makers and researchers’, with known benefits to personal well-being, health, reduced crime rates and increased economic growth (Siegler, 2014:2). It may be that stocks of social capital are in short supply in areas where it is needed most, but this approach emphasises its role as a resource for achieving wider ends and not as a product of real, lived relationships (Dinham, 2012). As McCabe argues:

‘Clubs, societies, village fetes etc all make significant contributions to social cohesion as well as to combating isolation and promoting health and mental well-being. These are all government agendas (both now and in the recent past) but this is not why these groups exist. They are there to meet basic human needs, not deliver on policy agendas.’

(McCabe, 2010:12)

A challenge for future civil society may be to maintain a focus on human needs: not just recognising the assets within communities, important though this is (RSA, 2015), but developing people’s capacity to be and do (Sen, 2010, Nussbaum, 2003). For Sen ‘the capability approach focuses on human life’, shifting attention from ‘the means of living to the actual opportunities of living’ (2010:233). This is useful because it focuses on people’s needs and aspirations and how these are shaped and constrained by ‘often unjust background conditions’ (Nussbaum, 2005:54) of social and economic deprivation, enabling us to ask different questions about how to promote human flourishing and the kind of society we want to live in.

This might mean challenging the idea that economic growth is the ultimate goal for societies, and market mechanisms the most effective way of determining human affairs, and increasing the space for, and autonomy of civil society and voluntary action. How do we promote ties based on moral obligations and relationships, not contracts? These questions are particularly important at a time when both economic prosperity and environmental sustainability are so fragile, and the need for fair and just solutions, both locally and globally, is so urgent.

As civil society has been delimited by socio-economic circumstances and re-framed by social policy so it has also always found new ways to respond to social need as it arises. How it does so next is the focus of this Inquiry, which is presented with a series of important questions that will stimulate our explorations and analysis:
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