

Civil society and ageing populations: What is the role of community organisations and volunteers?

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'Ageing societies and civil society'

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Civil Society and Old Age

From the sixteenth century... “the emergence of civil society was itself a key to understanding the invention of a special status of being old or elderly”

John Keane (2008)



“Like nailing a pudding to a wall”

- “the sphere of ideas, values, institutions, organisations, networks, individuals located *between* the family, the state, and the market and operating *beyond* the confines of national societies, polities and economies” (Anheir 2001 on Global Civil Society).
- A specific type of social action
- A specific social sphere
- A core utopian project



Contested and paradoxical

- A realm of dialogue and human relations that is connected to, but separate from, the state, markets and private life (Kocka 2004).
- Multi-layered and encompasses a diverse range of associational life including charities, self-help groups, voluntary organisations, community groups, non-governmental organisations, pressure groups and social movements, trade unions as well as sport, leisure and arts societies (Perez-Diaz 2011),
- Long term decline with deleterious effects for social cohesion (Putnam 2000).
- Non-governmental space of plurality, transparency, rights based approaches and solidarity (Alexander 1998)
- An alternative to statism most recently conveyed through the rhetoric of a 'Big Society' (Edwards 2012).



Changing forms of Civil society

- Previous values of persuasion, influence and charity
- Based increasingly on ethical and rights based concerns
- Replaced by new social networks of trust, reflexivity and reciprocity, Solidarity and Subsidiarity (Castells, Donati)
- Professionalisation and marketisation of Civil Society Organisations
- Global/National/Local Organisational levels (tensions)
- New Social Media (Arab Spring)



Civil Society and Later Life

- Studies of social participation in later life have focused on how engagement in retirement (participating in activities, volunteering and local politics) leads to mutually beneficial effects for the well-being of older people and the communities they inhabit.
- Seem by some as a positive response to the apocalyptic narratives of ageing
- Actively promoted by government and NGOs
- **BUT**
 - Productivism (Walker and Maltby 2012)
 - Successful ageing (young old v old old)
 - younger generations more engaged in new civil society forms



Frameworks for understanding civic engagement in later life

- **Norms**
 - Labour market norms, retirement norms, age discrimination, consumption, institutional ageism
- **Values**
 - Democratic institutions, religious institutions (possible spill over effects to secular institutions), social capital, path dependency
- **Structures**
 - Welfare state regime types, family types
 - Crowding in, crowding out, contingency
- Hank (2011) McNamara and Gonzales (2011)



Findings on Volunteering and Civic Engagement in later life

- **Definitional and Measurement Problems**
 - Formal, Informal, voting, membership, activity, scale of institutions
- **Patterns**
 - Age, gender, education, SES, Family and Kinship, Health, Labour market, welfare states, religion, family forms, Country (USA v Europe and Within Europe), time
- **Motives**
 - Altruism, helping others, future generations, connection to community, duty, values, morals, mixed with egoistic motives, meeting people, increasing skills, personal pleasures
- **Barriers/Facilitators to engagement**
 - Age discrimination in orgs and institutions, stereotypes, transport/access, costs, psychological barriers
- **Impact and well-being/health outcomes**
 - Health status, use of services, individual and community networks BUT Causal direction

is difficult



Policy

- **Europe**
 - Lifelong Learning and Active Citizenship in Europe (LACE); European Older People's Platform; Retired and Senior Volunteering Programme in UK
- **USA**
 - Senior Corps Programmes; Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme (RSVP), Senior Companions Programme (SCP) Foster Grandparents Programme (FGP)



Policy Implications

- **Third Sector changes**
 - Shift from charity models to social enterprise model could exclude older people
- **Recruitment strategies**
 - word of mouth, on a group basis, in mid life while still working
- **Economic incentives**
 - transport costs, tax credits, vouchers
- **Volunteering and intergenerational relations**
 - Generativity
- **State retrenchment**
 - Cost savings



Questions

- What roles are older people being encouraged to play?
- What roles do older people want to play?
- What meanings are associated with these roles?
- What are the economic and political driving forces?
- What types of associational life are not included?
- What might this mean for inter-generational relations?
- Is there a civil/civic pattern in later life?
- In what spheres (economic, political, social normative, cultural value) are older people active?



Today's presentations

- Dr Martijn Hogerbrugge: 'Comparative perspectives on volunteering in Europe'
- Dr Martina Feilzer: 'Intergenerational aspects of fear of crime'
- Dr Tanja Bastia: 'Dreams and aspirations in later life: grassroots organising and activism by migrants' elderly parents in Bolivia'

