

Can culture, market and state relate?

In February the School celebrated the launch of the Centre for Civil Society (CCS). As the Centre's director **Helmut Anheier** explains, the aim is nothing less than to become the European academic centre of excellence for the study of civil society, social economy, non-profit or third-sector organisations, and philanthropy.

The term 'civil society' was first in vogue in the 18th and 19th centuries. Since then it has fallen into disuse, becoming a term primarily of interest to historians. Now, however, there is a sudden resurgence of interest. Why?

For a long time social scientists believed that we lived in a two-sector world. There was the market or the economy on the one hand, and the state or government on the other. Our great theories speak to them, and virtually all our energy was dedicated to exploring the two institutional complexes of market and state. Nothing else seemed to matter much.

Not surprisingly, 'society' was pushed to the sidelines and ultimately became a very abstract notion, relegated to the confines of sociological theorising. Likewise, the notion that a 'third sector' might exist between market and state somehow got lost in the two-sector view of the world. Of course, there are many private institutions that serve public purposes – voluntary associations, charities, non-profits, foundations and non-governmental organisations

(NGOs) that do not fit the state-market dichotomy – yet until quite recently, such third-sector institutions were neglected, if not ignored outright, by all social sciences.

Such a short-sighted approach had disastrous consequences, of which the inability of the social sciences to predict and understand the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe is just one of many examples. One of the most important events of the 20th century escaped the attention of mainstream social science – until after the fact.

Nicholas Deakin, a CCS visiting professor, suggests that events in Central and Eastern Europe were indeed instrumental in bringing the topic of civil society to the attention of social scientists in the west. Concern about civil society is also of very much interest to the European Union. 'The Civil Dialogue initiated by the Commission in the 1990s was a first attempt by the EU to formally give the voluntary, non-profit and third sector organisations – and not only governments and businesses – a voice at the policy-making tables in Brussels,' says Jeremy Kendall, a CCS research fellow. It is within this context that civil

society now emerges as a 21st century idea of great importance.

What is civil society?

Firstly, to define our terms. Civil society is a concept located strategically at the cross-section of important strands of intellectual development in the social sciences. It is, in fact, this strategic quality which civil society shares with the concepts of the market and the state. Examples of such strands are democratic association (Locke, de Tocqueville), the rule of law (Montesquieu, von Stein), state-society relations (Hegel), the public sphere (Habermas), popular participation (Verba), social capital (Putnam, Coleman), and community (Etzioni).

Civil society is also a contested concept. There is little agreement on its precise meaning, though much overlap exists among core conceptual components. Some adopt an abstract, systematic view and see civil society as a macro-sociological attribute (Hegel, for example); others take on individualistic views and emphasise the notions of agency and citizenship (Coleman); while others still see civil society as a set of institutions and organisations

located in the public sphere (Habermas). In essence, the combination of being both contested and strategically located makes civil society a very fruitful concept to examine social, economic and political changes in our societies.

Moreover, as a term, civil society goes beyond the confines of the nation state and the national economy, and allows us to examine critical aspects of globalisation and internationalisation. In this respect, the Centre has a keen interest in studying the emerging global civil society and works closely with Mary Kaldor and Meghnad Desai in LSE's Centre for the Study of Global Governance. 'Human rights issues, environmental concerns, and the internet are just three examples of this process. It is high time to start analysing this emerging global arena in a systematic way,' says Marlies Glasius, a CCS research officer in charge of editing the Global Civil Society Almanac, being developed with the Centre for Global Governance to provide just such analysis.

To take account of the diversity of the concept, CCS adopted an initial work-

ing definition that is meant to guide research activities and teaching, but is by no means to be interpreted as a rigid statement:

'Civil society refers to the set of institutions, organisations, and behaviours situated between the state, the business world, and the family. Specifically, this would include voluntary and non-profit organisations of many different kinds, philanthropic institutions, social and political movements, forms of social participation and engagement, the public sphere, and the values and cultural patterns associated with them.'

Of course, any such definition must remain broad at first, and the Centre will approach it from a social economy perspective primarily. Social economy itself has a complex history in economics and political economy, and generally refers to economic activities that for a variety of reasons serve social rather than primarily economic aims such as profit maximisation. Historically, scholars differ on the extent to which this definition includes public agencies and other forms of government-owned and run institutions. In recent years, the term has moved away from state-cen-

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tred views, and now refers primarily to private institutions that serve quasi-public goods in the broadest sense, for example, non-profit organisations, foundations, associations and clubs, NGOs, self-help groups, some co-operatives and mutual organisations as well as public-private partnerships.

Combining civil society with a social economy approach moves the CCS to a central position in an emerging interdisciplinary research arena that examines the relationship between state, economy and society from new perspectives. CCS lecturer Susannah Morris believes such an interdisciplinary approach is very much needed: 'As a historian, I am keenly aware that reconciling social welfare objectives with market economies is an enduring problem to which the voluntary sector, the market and the state have offered a variety of responses over time. While the Victorians may not have used the same concepts and theories, they certainly faced similar social problems and current debates about issues such as housing, social service provision and many other areas of social policy could benefit from a historical perspective.'



Czechoslovak revolution, 1989

CCS' past and future?

Established initially as the Centre for Voluntary Organisation in 1987 within the Department of Social Policy, CCS has pioneered the study of voluntary associations in the UK, and the role of non-governmental organisations in developing countries. A great deal of gratitude is owed to David Billis and Margaret Harris who built the CVO and developed its teaching programme at a time when most would have questioned the importance, even future, of the voluntary sector. Because of what David and Margaret achieved, the new Centre can now take on a broader agenda, its four main objectives being:

- to improve understanding of civil society and social economy institutions;
- to inform policy-making at local, regional, national and international levels;
- to educate voluntary sector, social economy and non-profit managers, foster leadership and effectiveness;
- to monitor major developments affecting both civil society and the social economy.

The Centre currently has a staff of 16 and expects to expand. Through the Department of Social Policy, the Centre offers two MSc courses. The MSc in Voluntary Sector Organisation has 34 students and was the first postgraduate degree in Britain tailored to the needs of those working in or with the voluntary sector. The MSc in the Management of NGOs is a unique course designed to meet the needs of NGO staff from developing countries. Now in its fifth year, the course has over 40 graduates from nearly as many countries, and 21 current students. There are 12 PhD students based at the Centre, with an additional six new fellowships to be named after former LSE Director Lord Dahrendorf. The aim of these scholarships is to draw in the best talent from across disciplines and countries to work on projects that are comparative (cross-national, historical), empirical with a clear conceptual import, and/or address methodological and measurement issues.

The research remit is exciting and broad-based. Current projects include:

Mapping the non-profit sector
Helmut Anheier and Jeremy Kendall participated in the world's largest project to measure the size, structure and finances of the non-profit sector in over 30 countries. Helmut served as the

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co-director of the project internationally (1990-99), while Jeremy was the principal investigator for the UK work.

Methodological development

With the UN Statistical Division, and in collaboration with Johns Hopkins University, the Centre is developing a Handbook on Non-profit Institutions as part of the United Nations System of National Accounts.

NGOs and development

David Lewis is addressing the 'chasm' in non-profit/NGO literature, and exploring ways in which both approaches, that is, the 'northern' non-profit tradition and the 'southern' NGO tradition can benefit from each other.

History of housing associations

Susannah Morris is exploring the organisational development of British housing associations.

The EU and the voluntary sector

Jeremy Kendall and Helmut Anheier have carried out the first ever policy analysis of the role of the voluntary sector in EU policy-making. Their analysis identified central policy dilemmas and stresses the need for a basic overhaul of EU policy-making in this field.

Studying small, local organisations

Most non-profit theories address organisations with paid staff and formal organisational structures. By contrast, small, local organisations, typically informal and less structured, have received much less attention. Colin Rochester has carried out such an analysis and the differing management needs of these small organisations.

During the next five years the Centre will also focus research on the culture of giving in Britain; mapping global civil society; civil society and value changes in Britain (an analysis of the European/World Values survey); a policy analysis of the future role and visions for trusts and foundations in Europe; in-depth quantitative studies on the structure and change of paid and unpaid labour; and developing a management model for non-profit organisations.

Finally, the Centre plans to develop a professional education programme to assist future practitioners and policymakers. As David Lewis, a lecturer and anthropologist at the Centre says: 'For too long we have had preconceived notions of 'the' market and 'the' state that were seemingly independent of local societies, histories and cultures. The debate about civil society ultimately is about how culture, market and state relate to each other.' When this happens, CCS hopes to play a major role in nurturing what seems certain to be an ever more complex three-way relationship. ■



CCS recent seminars and symposia

FEBRUARY/JUNE 1999 – Foundations in Europe symposium, over 30 researchers from 20 countries.

JUNE 1999 – Third Way/Third Sector? event, over 150 participants and 25 presentations. Proceedings to be published as a CCS Report.

OCTOBER 1999 – Jointly with the journal *Voluntas* and Charles University in Prague, the symposium *Ten Years After: The state of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe*. Over 20 papers presented, with a special issue of *Voluntas* out later this year.

NOVEMBER 1999 – Civil Society and the Public Good: Towards a new regulatory framework? An agenda-setting meeting for experts and policymakers.

CCS journals

Voluntas: The international journal of non-profit organisations, the official journal of the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) edited by Jeremy Kendall.

Non-profit Management and Leadership. The Centre serves as the international editorial office for this journal.



HELMUT ANHEIER

BECAME DIRECTOR OF THE CCS AFTER 20 YEARS IN THE US AT YALE, PRINCETON AND JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITIES, AND THE UN.