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Civil Society and Social Capital in Australia and New Zealand

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Introduction

Australia has been populated for around 60,000 years by aboriginal peoples from Asia who spread thinly over the continent. Organized into tribal and clan structures they spoke over 300 languages. By contrast, New Zealand is one of the most recently settled major landmasses. The first settlers were Eastern Polynesians who came probably in a series of migrations between 700 and 2,000 years ago (King, 2003).

Europeans, mainly from the British Isles, first settled both countries at the end of the eighteenth century. By the middle of the nineteenth century several British colonies had been established around the Australian mainland, in Tasmania and the two islands of New Zealand. Over the next 50 years the population of these colonies grew greatly, the consequence of several major gold discoveries. Self government was negotiated and at the beginning of the twentieth century the five colonies on the Australian mainland and Tasmania federated to form Australia. New Zealand became a separate nation. Both countries gradually separated themselves from the influence of the British government. Between the 1880s and 1914 both countries saw the granting of male and then female suffrage, the emergence of trade union controlled labour parties, a consequent polarization of the polity along class based lines and the first governments anywhere

to be formed by the labour movement. Australia and New Zealand were studied and praised by progressive Europeans as social laboratories.

The nineteenth century settler societies that emerged in what were to become two nations reproduced and amplified the civic institutions and active civil society that characterized British society. Colley (1992: 88) identifies this as a time when voluntary associations were “breaking out like measles over the face of Britain and the rest of Europe.” Indeed, some of these organizations had previously “helped drive the colonial enterprise: missionary and emigration societies encouraged British intervention and then facilitated the movement of settlers [to New Zealand]” (Tennant et al., 2008: 6). Trade unions, friendly societies, cooperatives, mechanics institutes, sports clubs and a vast variety of hobby and interest groups proliferated. So too did business and professional associations. The better-off supported benevolent societies and hospitals for the poor. In the absence of an established church a great variety of Christian denominations fought for adherents in an increasingly skeptical populace. In those parts of Australia, especially along the east coast, where large numbers of Irish Catholic migrants mixed with people with English and Scottish ancestry, occasional outbursts of sectarian conflict sustained many denominational charities: hospitals, child and more general welfare services and, especially, Catholic schools. When, in the middle of the twentieth century, governments came to take over and expand hospitals and welfare services, they did not touch the existing denominational providers, but instead added to the subsidies many already received. In the 1960s government assistance was provided to nonprofit schools. Thus even today, on the east coast of Australia there is a stronger nonprofit provision of education, health, and welfare services than in the western parts or in New Zealand.

The last 50 years of the twentieth century saw large changes in the shape of civil society in both Australia and New Zealand. The friendly societies were the first to shrink in the face of public provision of sickness, unemployment, and other benefits beginning with the passage of the New Zealand Social Security Act in 1938, followed by similar Australian legislation over the next 10 years. Then, beginning in the 1970s most large finance and insurance mutual associations succumbed to competition from for-profit enterprises, a process encouraged by government policy. In Australia, of the big mutuals, only hospitality clubs and credit unions survived unscathed into the twenty-first century. Trade unions and the major Christian denominations also lost adherents. Class based

political parties ceased to be mass movements and were replaced by a variety of social movements: feminism, environmentalism, and various rights based movements. But many new forms of association emerged, in health, in the arts and among the growing immigrant populations from continental Europe, Asian, and Pacific countries.

A major difference between civil society in Australia and New Zealand is the place of indigenous organizations in each country. In Australia, European settlement disrupted the way of life of the aboriginal peoples. Many died from introduced diseases or were killed; the remainder coerced into settlements. Only since the 1970s have government policies and the law come to recognize their prior settlement and continuing rights to land. There are now many thousands of aboriginal associations but most are in dependency relations with state and national governments. By contrast, in New Zealand, the strength of Maori social organization, and the encouragement of missionary societies, meant that settlers recognized their prior occupation and sought to purchase land and develop a treaty with Maori chiefs. The role then of indigenous Maori social organization in New Zealand has been identified as distinctive by international standards, not only in maintaining traditional kin-based associational forms – indeed with “renewed potency” since the later twentieth century – but also “participating in the organizations of mainstream society, bringing distinctive cultural perspectives to them, while borrowing some of their structural forms. . . ., result[ing] in distinctive forms of organization which do not readily fit internationally recognized non-profit sector categories” (Tennant et al., 2008: 3).

Today, 21 million Australians occupy a land mass of 7,692 million hectares, an extremely dry continent but one rich in minerals. Around 60% of Australians live in the five mainland state capital cities. Four million New Zealanders occupy just under 270 million more temperate hectares; almost one third in the North Island city of Auckland.

Civil Society

In Australia and New Zealand the term civil society has no agreed meaning and little popular resonance. Michael Edwards (2004) has attempted to group the great variety of ways the term is used into three broad conceptions: associational life, the good society and the public sphere. All three can be found in the thin discussion of civil society in both countries.

When it first emerged, in the 1990s, civil society was intertwined with the concept of social capital and barely moved beyond the pages of a few pamphlets. In 1994, Nick Greiner, an ex-Premier of New South Wales, in a conference

speech called for a renewal of “the institutions for common action” which relied on the instincts for voluntary collaboration and cited several well known voluntary associations. He championed these institutions and deplored the common polarization between the institutions of state and market. An expanded version of the speech, published by a right-leaning think tank (Greiner, 1995) cited many key American and British writers on these matters, such as Robert Putnam, Elinor Ostrom and David Green, but while Greiner talked of civil society, his preferred term for this set of institutions was civic capitalism. Social capital was described as an important institution for facilitating coordinated action. This idea of civil society as a third set of institutions between state and market received little attention. The powerful polarizing force of the conventional state/market dichotomy soon reasserted its influence.

The first time civil society received popular attention in Australia was when the feminist commentator Eva Cox titled her 1995 Boyer lectures *A Truly Civil Society* (Cox, 1995). She argued for a stronger role for the state in preserving and growing the institutions of civility, especially the allocation of basic rights. She claimed these had been weakened by the growing power of markets. She too invoked social capital: a civil society was one that had strong social capital.

At the same time the Business Roundtable, a major New Zealand right wing think-tank, commissioned *From Welfare State to Civil Society: Towards Welfare that Works in New Zealand*, from a visiting UK commentator and champion of friendly societies, David Green (1996). This sparked a considerable local debate – though one with little if any New Zealand content or analysis. Although Green argued that his philosophy was not individualistic, but based on a “rich view of community,” he essentially argued for greater private responsibility and a smaller role for the state, assuming greater voluntary activity would emerge to produce his vision of civil society.

At the end of the decade a study for the Commonwealth Foundation, *Civil Society and the New Millennium*, used Michael Walzer’s formulation of civil society as a space for uncoerced citizen action. Based on an analysis of secondary data, focus groups and interviews the Australian report for this study noted a decline in the membership of many well-known associations and reported claims that the capacity for associational life was not as strong as it had been a generation ago and that alienation from government was growing. The report noted the growth of new forms of association and of political engagement and concluded that civil society was undergoing a transformation (Stewart-Weeks & Lyons, 1999). Four years later two prominent social scientists at a leading university, in final

reflections at the conclusion of a multivolume study of Australia's institutions regretted that they had not included any examination of Australia's civil society (Brennan & Castles, 2002). The New Zealand research for the Commonwealth Foundation study noted a dearth of data on New Zealand associations, threats and opportunities for citizen engagement, and the relevance of concepts of social capital in reforming public policy as it related to civil society organizations and citizens (Bradford et al., 2001).

The term civil society remains on the periphery of public discourse, available to be invoked in one or other of its conceptions. In 2004, the executive directors of two large umbrella organizations representing many church sponsored health and social service nonprofits edited a book entitled *Church and Civil Society* (Sullivan & Leppert, 2004). The context explained the title. Church sponsored nonprofits provide many health and social services in Australia. Many of these and other church leaders had become increasingly critical of Australian government policies and were in turn told by government ministers to keep out of the public sphere. The book was a claim that the churches contributed to a civil (i.e., a good) society and had a right to participate in wider public debates.

The term civil society is used rarely to describe the sum or even a part of either country's large and diverse nonprofit or third sector. Bradford et al. (2001: 84), for example find only a handful of authors using the term in the New Zealand literature up to that time. There is little understanding of the scope of the nonprofit sector, even among leaders of various parts of what some academics would describe as nonprofit sector or civil society. People talk loosely of NGOs, of not-for-profit organizations, of community groups and voluntary organizations, of private or nongovernment schools, of sports groups, of unions, of churches, of environment groups, of charities and of the community sector without ever seeking to provide definitional clarity and without trying to encompass them by reference to civil society or to any other overarching term (Lyons, 2001; Tennant et al., 2006). Increasingly leaders of nonprofit organizations providing social services claim to speak on behalf of the nonprofit sector, but examination of their claim reveals that they are speaking only for social service nonprofits. Civil society is rarely invoked by groups of nonprofit organizations to describe themselves. In 2006, the Australian Council of Trade Unions organized a meeting of national umbrella groups encompassing unions, environment groups, churches, and social service nonprofits to explore common grievances with government policies. It called itself the National Civil Society Dialogue (Australian

Conservation Foundation, 2008). It meets annually, but has had little impact. In late 2008, anyone searching the ubiquitous Google website for "civil society" in Australia would first find a link to Civil Society, an agency that provided bands to music festivals!

Social Capital

The concept of social capital has had a higher profile in Australia and New Zealand than civil society. It has been examined by many academics and taken up by governments and applied in many policy settings. But its popularity has been at the cost of conceptual clarity; it has been increasingly criticized and has now declined into infrequent use.

The term social capital was already being used in sociology and education disciplines before Robert Putnam's popularizing of the term in the mid-1990s. As a result there were a score of Australian articles using social capital as an identifier in the decade before Cox's Boyer lectures gave it a wider public airing. In the next 3 years there were 69 articles (Winter, 2000). The range of topics are wide: the meaning of social capital, whether it is always a good thing or whether it can be found in discriminatory associations, whether it can be measured and whether government policies can strengthen its positive forms (Winter, 2000). Some of these studies were conceptual and sought to establish the importance of social capital by examples. They drew on focus groups and vignettes and were designed to explore strengths and weaknesses of social relations at the local level. Some of their authors had also contributed to the civil society literature and were interested in the well-springs of collective action (Norton et al., 1997; Stewart-Weeks & Richardson, 1998). Other work focussed on measurement. One of the most important of these was a demonstration that social capital could be operationalized and measured along different dimensions in different communities (Onyx et al., 1997; Onyx & Bullen, 2000). In New Zealand, there was also a particular interest in the Maori tradition of social capital, as a collectivist kin-based culture – for example, Williams & Robinson (2002).

The potential that an understanding of social capital held for shaping more effective public policies generated considerable interest within and outside government. Robert Putnam was brought out to New Zealand in 1996 by some nonprofit activists and researchers. The intention of at least some is summed up in the title of a paper presented to an Institute of Policy Studies seminar the following year – "Bringing Back Balance: The Role of Social Capital in Public Policy." The balance referred to in that paper included recognition of the importance of

social as well as economic goals, of community as well as individual interests, and of the important place of “church, voluntary and other civic bodies” in society (Riddell, 1997: 13). Putnam spoke in private and public sessions with senior politicians, bureaucrats, and non-profit leaders. With the direct interest and support of the then Prime Minister, Jim Bolger, high level policy work on the application of this concept was undertaken in a wide range of agencies – including those responsible for finance, health, conservation, justice, trade and industry, community development and local government. The Institute of Policy Studies sponsored workshops in 1997, 1998, and 2000 on aspects of social capital and public policy (Robinson, 1997, 1999 and 2002) Statistics New Zealand developed a framework for the measurement of social capital (Spellerberg, 2001).

This surge of policy interest, however, was short-lived, as Bolger was replaced as Prime Minister in December 1997 by his own political party. Two factors led to his demise: perceptions that he was not tough enough in his dealings with a minor coalition partner and his use of “social capital” as the theme of his Leader’s Address to that years annual regional conferences of his political party’s members.

In Australia, some of the interest in social capital was driven by a lively debate about the decline of rural communities and the associated emergence of One Nation, a populist movement with racist overtones that stole votes from all parties, especially the conservative coalition. Social capital was used to understand why some communities adjusted more readily to decline than others and to develop policies to strengthen communities. This work was most fully developed by the Victorian government. In 2001 and again 2002 the Australian Institute of Family Studies published papers proposing approaches to the measurement of social capital (Stone, 2001; Stone & Hughes, 2002). In 2003 the Australian government’s economic think-tank, the Productivity Commission published a paper on social capital arguing that while it was difficult for governments to grow social capital, government actions could diminish it and these should be avoided (Productivity Commission, 2003). In the following year the Australian Bureau of Statistics published a framework and a set of indicators for measuring social capital (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004). Data on these indicators were collected by the ABS in its 2006 General Social Survey, but by the time results were released in 2007, interest in social capital had waned (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007a). In July 2008 the director of a leading university based social policy research centre observed that social capital “had been superseded in the political lexicon” and claimed that

it “has become an overburdened and tired expression with little meaning” (Katz, 2008).

Empirical Data

One interpretation of civil society equates it with non-profit associations. It has been estimated that there are around 700,000 nonprofit associations in Australia (Lyons et al., 1995). Of these only around 40,000 are what the ABS describes as being economically significant (in effect large enough to employ staff). According to a survey of a sample of these organizations conducted by the ABS in 2007, they employed 885,000 persons, or 8.6% of all employed persons. Their revenue was Au\$74.5 billion. Of this 38% came from the sale of goods and services, 34% from government and 14% from fundraising and membership fees (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

These economically active nonprofits were found in many industries. The sample was too small to allow much disaggregation, but 21% of total expenditure of Aus\$68 billion was by nonprofits in education and research, 16% by those providing social services, another 16% by those providing culture or recreation, 14% by those in health and 13% by business and professional associations and unions. Nonprofit organizations provide a majority of social services and over 30% of children are educated in nonprofit schools. In both cases a majority of these nonprofit organizations have links to religious organizations. The best guide to Australia’s nonprofit sector is Lyons (2001).

The size and economic value of New Zealand’s nonprofit sector was first systematically reported in *Non-profit Institutions Satellite Account 2004* (Statistics New Zealand, 2007) and put in international comparison by Sanders et al. (2008). Around 97,000 nonprofit organizations were identified. Ninety percent of these employed no paid staff; relying entirely on volunteers. The remaining 10% employed just over 100,000 people or 5.4% of employed people. Thirty percent of these were employed in social services and 19% in education & research and 16% in culture and recreation.

Overall, the income of these organizations in New Zealand was NZ\$8 billion. Of this 45% came from the sale of goods and services, 25% from government, and 24% from fundraising and members fees. In addition, the contribution of volunteers has been conservatively costed at NZ\$3.3 billion.

Nonprofit organizations are widely supported by Australians. Around 87% belong to at least one association (Passey & Lyons, 2005); a similar percentage support them each year with donations worth Au\$5.7 billion in 2004 (Lyons & Passey, 2005). A 1999 study found that 70% of

New Zealanders identified themselves as belonging to an organization, club, or group (Ministry of Social Policy, 2001).

Volunteering is another form of support for nonprofit associations; it is also taken to be an indicator of social capital. In its latest Voluntary Work Survey (for 2006) the ABS estimated that 35% of adult Australians had volunteered more than 700 million hours during that year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007b). Eighty-seven percent of these hours were volunteered for nonprofit associations, the rest for government agencies or for-profit firms. This has been estimated as contributing the equivalent of a further Au\$13 billion to the nonprofit sector. One million New Zealanders (31% of the population 12 years and over) volunteered an estimated 270 million hours in 2004 (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). Internationally, New Zealand nonprofit organizations are more reliant both on volunteers (making up 67% of the full time equivalent nonprofit workforce, compared to a 41 country average of 42% and 40% for Australia) and philanthropy (making up 20% of nonprofit income, compared to 15% for a 38 country average and 10% for Australia) (Sanders et al., 2008).

Another measure of social capital is the percentage of people who are prepared to trust strangers. Only 54% of those surveyed by the ABS in 2006 felt that “most people could be trusted” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007a). This was relatively uniform across population groups and regions. In 2006, 76% of New Zealanders said they believed people can be trusted, with 18% reporting people can almost always be trusted and 58% reporting people can usually be trusted. This is relatively high by international standards – sixth highest among 25 OECD countries. Levels of trust increased with personal income, and was lower among Maori and Pacific Island populations than European New Zealanders (Ministry of Social Development, 2008).

Outlook/Concluding Assessment

The terms civil society and social capital encompass a range of institutions and practices: voluntary associations, public civility, high levels of civic and political participation, responsive governments, a tolerant public. At a superficial level signs of change can be found in many of these institutions: declines in membership associations, the professionalization and corporatization of large charities and sports, a levelling-off in numbers volunteering, but these can be balanced by new forms of association emerging around new causes, some using new web-based technologies. In Australia and New Zealand, although it is unlikely that the terms will be widely used, it is likely that the institutions of civil society and social capital will continue slowly to transform, but fundamentally will remain strong.

Cross-References

- ▶ Clubs and Clans
- ▶ Missionary Societies
- ▶ Nonprofit Organizations in the System of National Accounts
- ▶ Putnam, Robert
- ▶ Social Trust
- ▶ Volunteering

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organizations were the *Santa Casas de Misericórdia*, charitable organizations originated from Portugal's medieval guilds' effort to organize its communities' needs. In Brazil the Santa Casas were established as Civil Counsels maintained by society's notable men, rich, and related to the Catholic Church. Historically these organizations cared for the sick, widows, orphans, abandoned children. With time, their main service became the maintenance of hospitals, providing free services of health (Landim, 1993).

These organizations of social welfare and health were the only ones authorized by the Portuguese government to work with the population, as they served the interests of Portugal by dealing with popular demands. The participation of the charity organizations with religious ties continued even after independence, with the advent of the Brazilian Monarchy (1822–1889), that had yet Roman Catholic faith as official state religion, and in the subsequent republican period, even though the republican constitution established a freedom of faith and religion.

The social movements emerged with more emphasis only after 1920, with industrialization and urban population growth. Such movements have been influenced by ideologies such as Marxism and Anarchism, relating to the labor issues and policies, but, in general, were not yet expressed through independent and formal organizations. The State was driven by established oligarchies, but the social movements represented expressions of disagreement with the existing sociopolitical situation. Later, during the government of the authoritarian and populist Vargas (1930–1945), the labor movement was organized under State regulation and unionism had expression in national scenario. Despite the strengthening of the labor movement, the Civil Society was based more on welfare than on political institutions.

During these years the organization groups of different ethnic origins, in associations and foundations, are created to attend the needs of migrant communities. In general, these groups emerged after the economical success of some of the immigrants' community.

From 1964–1985, during the military government, various organizations of Civil Society did not meet the State's interests, and were considered illegal and then banned. The free expression of popular interests with political connotations was restricted. Many organizations with social goals were established with government support to act in areas considered strategic for the socioeconomic development. The unions continued to exist, but under intense monitoring of their activities. Since 1986, considering the democratization of politics and with the new Brazilian Constitution issued in 1988, the Civil Society has watched the emergence of various Civil Rights organizations and protection of

Civil Society and Social Capital in Brazil

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Introduction

The Brazilian civil society had its foundations laid during the process of colonization by Portugal at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The first nongovernmental