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**Losing political innocence?
Finding a place for ideology in understanding the
development of recent English third sector policy**

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Losing political innocence? Finding a place for ideology in understanding the development of recent English third sector policy

Abstract

The dominant way of thinking about the relationship between the third sector and political ideology is probably in terms of victim and perpetrator. After all, two of the most conspicuous European political events of the twentieth century could be argued to be the rise and fall of ideologies justifying and exercising the suppression of what we would now tend to label organised civil society. The storyline on this account would tend to associate ideologies with totalitarian worldviews, point to at best the marginalisation and displacement of, and at worst the crushing and liquidation of, independent associational life in those contexts in which attempts were made to put these ideas into practice. In terms of contemporary policy discourses, ideology also seems to find little room. The third sector is increasingly now being recognised and coaxed into allying purposefully with States - but with such strategies framed as 'problem solving', 'partnership' and 'governance'. All these buzzwords seem to signify smoothness, co-operation and pragmatism – for many, almost rendering ideology irrelevant by definition - with its connotations of wilful commitment, ideational struggle, contestedness and conflict.

This paper is not written to deny that these formulations contain important insights. However, it is premised on an anxiety that such ways of thinking overstate the extent to which a turn to the third sector can or should supercede debates about ideology, and underplay inevitable and irresolvable clashes in the values and beliefs of third sector policy actor. In other words, when it comes to ideology and account taking of worldviews, we should avoid throwing out the baby with the bathwater. It will be suggested that - assuming that the third sector and ideology alike are understood in appropriately flexible ways - the topic can and should be of enduring - and even increasing - interest. It will refer to the extent to which what initially appears as the displacement of ideology instead may represent the adaptation and re-location of the ideological dimension of politics. Drawing on the synthetic formulations of Michael Freeden (Freeden, 1996, 2003) and socio-cultural viability (or 'cultural') theory (Thompson et al, 1990; Hood, 1999) originating in the work of Mary Douglas, the paper will discuss shared ideological reference points, but also some of the fundamental ways in which ideas about the third sector's actual and potential roles may clash, even within the bounds of the consensus on the third sector's social, political and economic emergence which has emerged in a post-mainstreaming environment (Kendall, 2003).

Keywords

Ideology, third sector, civil society, cultural theory and political analysis.

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I Introduction: why bother with ideology and the third sector?

The relationship between the third sector and ideology is vexing. On one hand, in recent times, these frames of reference can be pictured as in tension, or even mutually exclusive. On the international stage, the dominant way of thinking about the relationship between the third sector and political ideology is probably in terms of victim and perpetrator. After all, two of the most conspicuous European political events of the twentieth century could be argued to be the rise and fall of ideologies justifying and exercising the suppression of what we would now tend to label organised civil society. The storyline on this account would tend to associate ideologies with totalitarian worldviews, point to at best the marginalisation and displacement of, and at worst the crushing and liquidation of, independent associational life in those contexts in which attempts were made to put these ideas into practice.

At home, some of the most influential promoters of the third sector as a public policy actor in Britain have appeared to favour its strengthening precisely for the reason that it is, by (most) definition(s), neither part of the market, nor part of the state, thus, it is claimed, seeming to place it above or beyond traditional ideological debates taken to be framed in terms of 'market fundamentalism' versus 'unreconstructed statism'. On this view, some years ago built up as a component of 'third way' thinking by some commentators, it can and should be pictured as an essentially pragmatic ally, at a distance from or even 'beyond' ideological disputes. It to be supported on the basis of 'evidence' and 'what works', where claimed advantages are believed to follow from, inter alia, community embeddedness, access to volunteers, and a special capacity to innovate collaboratively. Here, while organisations are prized because of their 'values' (for example, see HM Treasury, 2005) any ideological component thereof is treated as essentially incidental, advantageous if it productively motivates and engenders organisational commitment from those involved.

On the other hand, the two constructs could be argued to be fundamentally related. Third sector activities have long been recognised as irreducibly political – as the institutional vehicle of choice for relatively organised social movements and as an important player in helping constitute the socio-political space in which both reformist ideas and actions come into play, and clash with powerful established actors and their agendas in the state and in business. As British and other societies become more culturally rich, diverse and complex in the face of migration and globalisation, and as – notwithstanding current financial difficulties – economic development means that the resources available for collective organisation have increased, one might expect that this aspect of third sector activity to come to *greater* prominence.

Developments in technology and media, especially the ability to exchange rapidly information and argument, could reinforce this. This could be since the consequent heightened awareness of a wide range of societal needs and problems that is thus made possible should help to catalyse collective action motivated by sympathy or empathy in the face of suffering; agitation in response to inequalities; or anger at injustice to see the world in more confrontational terms. A strengthened ideological sensibility more generally would be expected to follow, so that – whether or not – actors understand

themselves as 'ideologists' or 'ideologues' (and in Britain, pluralistic and pragmatic traditions frowned on this self-understanding likely; cf. Barker, 1997), they should at least be more likely to recognise ideological tendencies in the positions of others. Confrontations over ideology seem, therefore, to become key.

The goal of this paper is to propose a way of representing the contemporary developmental trajectory of the relationship between ideology and the third sector in England that helps us to see how both types of claim are *partially* accurate, but that each has oversimplified and incompletely represented the nature of the linkage. It will also be suggested that the balance between the more consensual and the more conflictual orientations of third sector state relations at the general, horizontal policy¹ building can shift over time – and as a matter of empirical record, seems to have done so. The first representation of the relationship is misleading, because it assumes that any ideological tension can be expressed and contained – or even resolved – technocratically through debate in the context of essentially collaborative working arrangements with the State (framed by highly general horizontal principles on one hand, and concrete field-specific policy implementation practices on the other). The reality that some values or ideological positions may be hard to reconcile with one another – or even fundamentally incompatible – has been ignored, or at least underplayed. Thus, the possibility that principled reasons to avoid, cajole, or actively obstruct State policies, individually or collectively, is misleadingly bracketed. In Part III, this paper will try to respond to this lacuna by sketching out one of the ways in which, especially since the middle of the decade, an ideological dimension of policy has explicitly reasserted itself. It points to contrasts in the beliefs of key political figures and some third sector allies in relation to the specific horizontal policy implementation arrangements that have been put in place in recent years.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that, while the ideological dimension must be understood in part in terms of conflict, this does not exhaust its application: we should also pause to consider the possibility that it need not always be understood purely in an adversarial sense. Attending to ideology – defined with an appropriate degree of flexibility – should also mean recognising the 'de-contestation' process: the extent to which actors in situations with irreducibly ideological aspects will respond to their policy environments by engaging and mobilising in a co-operate and inclusive way in relation to other sectors (Freeden, 2003).² Part II of this paper will try to capture the extent to which the more confrontational climate which we are now living through was actually preceded by precisely such a relatively consensual phase understood in these terms.

The paper draws on evidence and argument assembled in developing an account of the horizontal policy architecture as it has evolved in England in recent years as part of activities of the Third Sector European Policy (see Kendall, 2009).³ This study has revealed the uniqueness of the English policy case resulting from the way it combines at least three features. First, the ideational legacy of its liberal reformist (rather than revolutionary or totalitarian) political history, with intellectual figures ranging from Adam Smith, through John Stuart Mill to William Beveridge routinely invoked as bestowing a liberal way of thinking to which both the Left and Right now claim to be inheritors (for example, see Himmelfarb, 2007). This has tended to generate a sort of 'default' supportive predisposition towards voluntarism and co-operative endeavour.

Second, the existence of a relatively well established and structured specialist horizontal policy infrastructure, centred initially around the notion of charity regulation, but in recent years expanding to look well beyond regulation to include many other cross cutting issues, not least funding, volunteering and governance, broadly understood; and explicitly and systematically, relating to an increasingly wide collective grouping of organisations (see Part II). Very large numbers of groups can be understood as part of this sphere (see Kendall, 2009), but for illustrative purposes we can note here that obviously significant specialist ‘policy community’ actors at national level have included the statutory bodies, such as the Charity Commission and its sponsoring Central Government Department (the Home Office), the Compact Commission and the Office for the Third Sector; representative umbrella groups, and those geared towards particular categories of interest, for example National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), the Association for Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) and Volunteering England; and other significant players whose legitimacy comes from expertise and experience, including, for example, Community Service Volunteers, the Community Development Foundation and independent trusts like Rowntree, Baring and Carnegie.

These and other organisations have been partly preoccupied with the ‘technocratic’ issues which pre-occupy any specialist policy community where relations with, and learning from, fellow expert and representative bodies is important (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Rhodes, 1997). But they have also interacted with generalist bodies – that is, non-specialists who have nevertheless had a major stake in the sector as policy designers, funders, and regulators – most importantly, including the Treasury, and Government Departments. As we shall suggest, some of these specialists and generalists have been players not only technocratically, but through following Ministerial imperatives (inside the state) have necessarily taken political positions which have an ideological dimension. And in some cases, groups outside the State, by appearing to align themselves with the agendas of powerful actors, seem to have become much more visibly embroiled in general political processes, in which ideology has come increasingly into play.

Third, the sheer rate of change latterly experienced this sector, has cast the English policy environment as hyper active by EU standards. In the early 1990s, this was a consequence of relatively disjointed, separate dynamics playing out within key policy fields, such as social housing and social care. However, since 1997, institution building has consciously been pursued as a matter of cross cutting policy priority, with close to half a billion pounds now apparently loaned to, or spent on, the third sector’s ‘infrastructure’ (most obviously through ‘builder’ policies: *Futurebuilders*, *Capacitybuilders* (formerly, *Change Up*) and most recently *Communitybuilders*). The direction of travel of all this activity is at one level based on an apparent consensus that the third sector should have a greater role in delivering public services, fostering citizenship and strengthening community life. Yet, as we will see in what follows, below the surface there is increasing contention concerning what each of these elements actually concretely means, how the mix of contributions has evolved, and normatively what balance that can and should be struck between these priorities. Some other countries have relatively well established horizontal policy communities, but it is important to stress that they have contrasting physiognomies, being institutionally constituted in fundamentally different ways. They have tended to have distinctive historical legacies, whose consequences have strongly

shaped their possibilities for development; and while often subject to reform, they have simply not experienced the dramatic extent of change evident in the English policy environment.

II The ideological dimension of mainstreaming in English third sector policy

If in general the third sector and ideology in England are portrayed as unnatural bedfellows, the process of mainstreaming the third sector in English public policy initially seems to be a particularly clear cut case of pragmatic, practical policy making moving beyond the constraints of ideological convention. We acknowledged the existence of a 'third way' narrative that seems to support this understanding. But we should also acknowledge other factors too, coming more from inside the sector's own infrastructure, which would appear to undergird this view. In the case of charities, there is the requirement to avoid Party Political associations - a long established principle still carried in law despite the recent wave of reform (Thomas and Kendall, 1996; Garton, 2009).

Moreover, most of the range of British third sector policy specialists who have collaborated in developing third sector infrastructure (see Kendall, 2009), whatever the explicit or implied ideological character of the individual actions they might take, certainly in general and overall have wanted to retain, and be seen to preserve, a certain distance from politics in several senses. 'Independence' has been repeatedly proclaimed as desirable (Smerdon, 2009), and amongst other things, this value also suggests the need to limit undue proximity to political actors and processes, with its potential dangers of ideological 'tainting'.

Furthermore, those horizontal bodies that are claiming to be representative, mindful of the diversity of political values and interests held by their organisational members and other supporters, may have wanted to avoid 'over-committing' politically and hence ideologically. In this way, they may pre-empt internal clashes over values which may be essentially contested (not expected to be resolvable through dialogue and debate), and tactically retain political room for manoeuvre in the future when circumstances change.

Third sector organisations have sometimes been portrayed as 'schizophrenic', to the extent they want to be seen to avoid publicly visibly contention – including political contention –while competing in private.⁴ To avoid conflict, we could even say that third sector horizontal bodies have been strategically elusive, preferring to 'play politics' (and therefore, necessarily sometimes encounter ideology) as necessary in only relatively low key, subtle and understated ways. Flowing from this is a tendency to resist identifying too closely and consistently either with stable positions reducible to discrete points on political spectra; with particular politicians or their agendas; or even with the specific components of the State that they temporarily control. For example, beyond the extremely general principles embodied in the Compact (see below), one of the most prominent and fast growing third sector umbrella organisations, NCVO, has tried to adopt flexible and evolving policy context-specific and issue-specific stances rather than general positions of principle in relation to questions such as: the right levels of involvement in public services; the appropriateness of redistributing power away from the central state; and the commercialisation of funding arrangements. More generally, horizontal third sector groups have sometimes had the option to treat poorly defined but potentially contentious

or divisive issues as vertical, thus shifting responsibility for taking clear positions onto other players within policy fields.

It is certainly true that there has been a ‘motherhood and apple pie’ flavour to much of the British debate amongst horizontal third sector actors (Kendall, 2003). Nevertheless, we can characterise this as a process with an irreducibly ideological dimension in at least three key respects. First, a Political Party, having formed a Government, has been one (of several) actors supporting the ‘mainstreaming’ of the third sector in public policy, and ideological motivations to this process should be made explicit. By claiming to support the third sector, New Labour’s much heralded pursuit of an agenda of ‘modernisation’ had an ideological double differentiation aspect: on the Left, from ‘old Labour’, which it could be rhetorically claimed was ‘statist’; but also in relation to the Right, from Conservative administrations (1979 – 1997), which New Labour’s architects claimed, with some credibility, had left the third sector at the periphery of its ideas, and revealed its lack of commitment thereto through its policy practices.

In the contest over ideas, New Labour could paint the Conservatives as continuing to cleave to a reactionary, ‘exhausted’ two sector model build around narrow neo-liberal (as opposed to broader, historically evolved British New Liberal) or market fundamentalist tenets with apparently little or space for a third sector.⁵

Box 1: Key ‘Compact’ Principles

- Voluntary action is an essential component of a democratic society.
- An independent and diverse voluntary and community sector is fundamental to the well-being of society.
- In the development and delivery of public policy and services, the Government and the voluntary and community sector have distinct but complementary roles.
- There is added value in working in partnership towards common aims and objectives. Meaningful consultation builds relationships, improves policy development and enhances the design and delivery of services and programmes.
- The Government and the VCS have different forms of accountability and are answerable to a different range of stakeholders, but common to both is the need for integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.
- VCS organisations are entitled to campaign within the law in order to advance their aims.
- The Government plays a significant role, among other things, as a funder of some VCS organisations. Funding can be an important element of the relationship between the Government and the VCS.
- Both Government and VCS acknowledge the importance of promoting equality of opportunity for all people regardless of race, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation or religion and or belief.

The national Compact (HM Government, 1998), since 2007 supported by a Compact Commissioner (Compact Commission, 2009) is now paralleled by local Compacts (covering almost all local government-third sector areas in England), and is reinforced by topic-specific codes of conduct:

- Volunteering
- Funding and (public sector contracting) procurement
- Consultation and policy appraisal
- Community groups
- Black & minority ethnic groups

Second, it is important to note the political work done by the 'Compact', its codes (see Box 1) and the assumptive worlds it has tried to perpetuate as an embodiment of the 'partnership' agenda consolidated through the Deakin-Michael initiatives, and which symbolically paved the way for a whole raft of subsequent horizontal initiatives. What were the ideational or ideological aspects of this project? It was widely welcomed at one level for conferring recognition and status on the sector and emphasising its voluntary action heritage – while simultaneously putting down markers concerning the importance of stability and predictability for its relations with the State, while coming in for heavy slating from some quarters on the grounds of lack of effect on implementation practices: a good deal of the criticism of the Compact in the years that followed has emphasised its aspirational character, 'softness' and lack of 'teeth' in implementation terms.

Yet, for the purposes of this paper, this line of criticism misses the basic point by neglecting the initiative's symbolic importance, and its implied 'mobilisation' value from an ideological perspective. We must stress that the *ideas* the Compact encapsulates were deliberately permissive rather than prescriptive precisely for political reasons. Its launch, and then perpetuation on a widening definitional basis (see below), can be read as reflecting the necessity or functionality of 'vagueness and elusiveness' in the political arena: mobilisation of support via inclusive framing of ideational claims was key (Freedon, 2003, pp. 56 – 57). Symbolically, this was deliberately 'big tent': it allowed its promoters to accommodate otherwise oppositional constituencies on the Left (including those sympathetic to, for example, Labourism, the co-operative tradition, and even the Guild Socialism of G.D.H. Cole, cf Leach, 2002); and by thematising the diversity of the sector and recognising change oriented campaigning (especially in the pursuant codes), it could appeal well beyond traditional constituencies to minority ethnic groups, for example, whose political presence was becoming more obvious.

At the same time, this agenda's essentially liberal underpinnings – resonating with Mill, Beveridge and so on - meant it could act as a consensual frame of reference. It could also played to diversity by accommodating socio-cultural 'types' of third sector organisations present in contemporary society whose supporters could read 'something for them' because of its inclusive, permissive formulation. That such accommodation has been seen as important is suggested by the way terminology has tended to evolve in recent years. 'Voluntary and community sector' replaced 'voluntary sector' as the

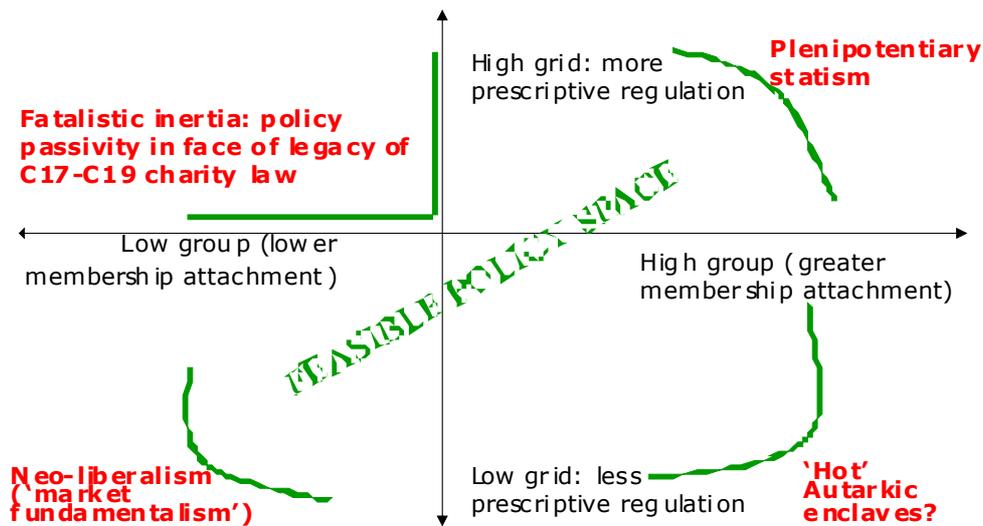
official label of choice in the later 1990s, before the yet more inclusive 'third sector' was introduced. The latter made explicit the inclusion of co-operatives and mutuals; and former, by openly recognising 'community groups' and emphasising small as well as medium sized and large organisations, was in fact connecting with the sense in which most of the British population are involved in the third sector (since research was revealing that volunteering through small groups is by far the most empirically significant manifestation of voluntary commitment.) In these senses, ideologically, the Compact and the agenda it epitomised were effectively politically 'de-contesting' the centrality of the third sector for a healthy democratic society (Freeden, 2003).

Third, although English third sector actors have for various reasons looked abroad less than their counterparts in other countries for policy lesson drawing purposes (Kendall, 2009), it is important not to acknowledge the significance of ideological developments overseas did have knock on effects. International events – especially the collapse of European communism, all in the context of the emergence of data on the scope, scale and contributions of the third sector in the democratic world, and the importance to it of a sympathetic State (Salamon and Anheier, 1997) - created a renewed awareness that space between market and state was a shared feature of liberal democracies. There was a new order of reflexivity regarding the significance of this part of the social fabric. This can be read as an aspect of enhanced ideological sensibility because it could reinforce the sense that 'plenipotentiary statist' ideas are inconsistent with a healthy civil society (Rosenblum and Post, 2002), reinforcing the homegrown ideological dynamic referred to earlier.

Figure one tries to capture the extent to which, in combination these three factors can be understood as performing an ideological 'demarcation' function, defining in a politically feasible territory that fits with third sector policy activism. The framework being deployed is an adapted version of the cultural theory approach of Mary Douglas, drawing on how it has been applied to the worlds of policy ideas by Thompson et al (1990) and Hood (1999). This suggests levels of 'grid' and 'group' – roughly, levels and degree of prescription in external regulation, and the extent to which collective group membership affiliations trump individual relationships - as fundamental social organising options. Perhaps most obviously, the processes we have described can be seen as tending to rule out - that is, rendering politically and ideologically infeasible - approaches which gravitate towards the bottom left hand corner, involving a neo-liberal unwillingness to invest in the third sector because of its collective orientation; and also the top right hand corner, where a high density of prescriptive rules combined with a lack of opportunity to develop identity through membership tend to disfavour autonomous voluntarism.

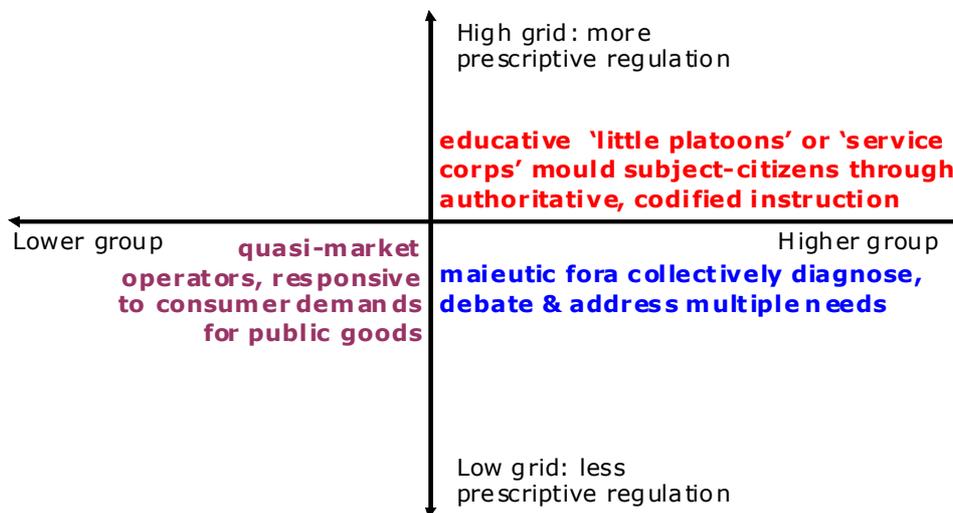
However, we can also note that in principle, the existence of the Compact rules out a 'do nothing approach', since by definition it seeks to reject fatalistic acquiescence in the face of unreformed, debilitating rules (top left hand corner); and the commitment to equality of opportunity and seems to disallow the bottom right extreme too. An autarkic world where all-consuming, 'hot' group commitment in combination with a marked lack of shared rules or regulatory standards with external society could involve excessive 'bonding' as opposed to 'bridging' social capital. A retreat into narrow sect-like community organisation organised excessively narrowly around place, interest or ascriptive features seems to be disfavoured by the equality of opportunity provisions, and the supporting codes.

Figure 1: Politically **infeasible** options and the resultant feasible third sector policy space (England, 1997 -)



Using the cultural theory framework suggests, then, a way to differentiate the feasible from the infeasible ‘ideational space’ for approaches to the third sector that emerged in the late 1990s. It builds on the point that ‘mainstreaming’ has been associated not with the transcendence of ideology, as some ‘third way’ commentators seem to have suggested, but rather as involved a re-focusing of the ideationally possible as a response to perceptions of historical opportunity, political development, electoral conditions and so on.

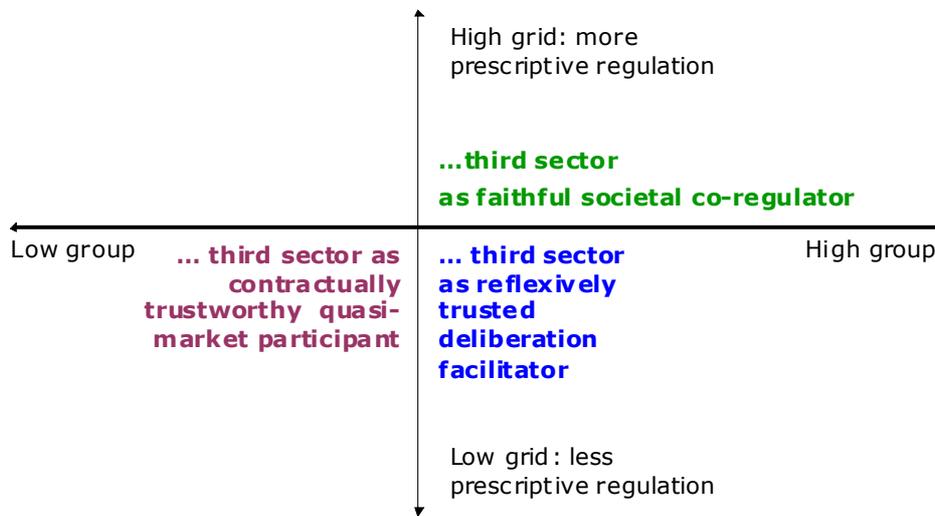
Figure 2: imageries of the third sector



It should be noted that what we have defined is ‘space’ - not the convergence on a single ideological or political position. As figures 2 and 3, this ‘space’ can logically accommodate a range of styles of and priorities over state-third sector relations, connected with a range of imageries concerning the third sector’s well-rehearsed ‘functions’ and contributions - as those matter in complex societies under necessarily uncertain conditions (cf. Kendall, 2003; HM Treasury, 2005; HM Treasury and the Cabinet Office, 2007). But it is possible to be more specific in concretely identifying a substantive centre of gravity or focal points for such ideas, post Compact? If not, can we at least

suggest that key actors can be situated as having connections with or affinities for particular positions (or distinctive packages of such positions)?

Figure 3: ...and corresponding justifications for trusting the third sector



The answer in relation to the third sector prior to the years in the middle of this decade seems to be: not readily, especially prior to the middle of the decade. This has been partly because of the persistence of many established representative organisations' traditional reluctance to take readily identifiable ideological positions for all the reasons discussed above; but it has also been because of the need to consolidate existing gains ('manning the barricades' again neo-liberalism, plenipotentiary statism, autarky and fatalism). Defending and disseminating Compact principles and the follow-through to those in institutional terms seems to have been a demanding and costly business. While these values might now appear as 'common sense' within the mainstream, they have nevertheless required time consuming defence in four directions.

First, simply in order to persuade the mainstream political Right to commit to these ideas in anticipation of the likelihood of a change of Government in the future.⁶ Second, to shore up the consensus against dissenting voices, overwhelmingly geared towards the market fundamentalist political Right, but more recently the social libertarian Left too.⁷ Third, trying to generalise the a third sector friendly policy stance as symbolised from its 'voluntary and community sector' origins to be explicitly inclusive of co-operatives, mutuals and social enterprise under the wider 'third sector' formulation seems to have been a non-trivial process of dialogue, debate and 'construction' with the relevant representative groups (HM Treasury and Cabinet Office, 2007b; cf 6 and Leat, 1995). Fourth, actors were preoccupied with seeking to embed these general claims in the complex machinery of the state and within the variegated landscape of third sector itself. Overcoming resistance to change and habitual inertia to change might not appear to be an ideological matter. However, since the 'tool kit' of policy implementation with which actors were being asked to deal was primarily 'soft', persuasion and argument rather than overt coercion or fiat were especially important here, so that political debates about the limits of the market and the state without support from the third sector will tend to have come into play, with at least some implicit ideological dimension.

III The ideological dimension: crystallisation at the end of the decade?

The considerations discussed thus far all point to the continuation of a 'mushy consensus', in which finding ideological and ideational common ground or only loosely defined conceptual space was the name of the game; and when specific ideological differences might have surfaced, there have been a range of powerful incentives and pressures to distract from them, dismiss them or even suppress them. However, it will be suggested in this section in the second part of the decade, the process seems to have evolved from such a vague spatial 'holding pattern' towards something much more ideologically charged.

In the discourse, this extent to which the middle of the decade has represented something of a turning point has been suggested from two, very different, perspectives. First, a recent enquiry by Parliament's well respected Public Administration select committee, while plausibly reviewing the difficulties encountered in trying to develop third sector commissioning policy up to 2007 as primarily a story of technocratic implementation failure, also exposes aspects of ideological contestation. The diagnosis of the policy problem in the final report is in terms of a 'rhetoric reality gap', and the solution is presented as 'culture change...with the right mix of skills and specialist knowledge' (Public Accounts Select Committee, 2008a). But the divergent views expressed by those giving oral evidence from within the third sector, the state and the trade unions suggest the persistence of a basic lack of agreement on what the favoured 'skills' and 'knowledge' and cultural destinations should look like, at least in part because of ideological differences (Public Administration Select Committee, 2008b)

Elsewhere, Carmel and Harlock (2008), drawing on a wide ranging review of policy documentation using a critical discourse analysis have argued that 2005 was a turning point wherein the *status quo ante* become supplicant to isomorphic marketising pressures in the rush to bind the sector in as a deliverer of public services via quasi-markets. This is portrayed as generated explicitly through the joint discursive efforts of what are construed as key depoliticising State institutions: in particular, the narratives of the Treasury, the Home Office, and the National Audit Office are thematised (in particular, drawing upon HM Treasury, 2002, 2005 and 2006; Home Office, 2005; and National Audit Office, 2005). This is an agenda presumably either assumed to be actively embraced by the Government (see Leggett, 2005; Driver and Martell, 2006)); or passively accepted by it (on how the assumptions of such a fatalistic 'model' compares to alternative formulations in a voluntary sector context, see Kendall, 2003, pp. 224 – 230).

It seems clear these writers are on target in identifying such a moment of transition; correctly point to the salience of market constructs to the debate; and are right to highlight the significance of these powerful Departments' and agency's policy statements. Moreover, their work on critically 'decoding' the meaning of their agendas and recommendations provide a provocative and original perspective. However, there are weaknesses here too. These authors' have not attended to the possible relevance of any of the countervailing institutions within the ideological and institutional space we have identified, as carriers of relevant policy legacies and defenders of alternative policy-relevant values and interests: they effectively proceed as if an extreme neo-liberal policy agenda has simply swept aside all alternatives in its wake. Yet it surely important to take more seriously the role of other third sector

policy actors in shaping the policy space. Moreover, it is far from clear that we can reduce third sector policy specialist organisations either within the state or in the third sector itself to passive transmitters of business values. Closer attention to detail suggests that some policies have been rejected as, in our terms, too consumerist⁸. And in terms of key actors, the Treasury, taken as playing a leading role on this agenda, in fact seems to have predominantly combined a pro-market bias with a command and control tendency - rather than simply promulgating a crude commercialism.

What, then, might be a more nuanced way to draw out the contentious ideological aspects of this process? One option could be to try to ascertain whether we can detect at least some affinities or agenda fit with differing positions within the politically feasible space we have portrayed. After all, having ruled out the four extreme positions leaves plenty of room for differences of substance, as well as style within this boundaries. While this is admittedly difficult to do in the case of many horizontal third sector organisations for all the reasons discussed earlier, we can at least begin to make some headway for three reasons.

First, as Carmel and Harlock (2008) themselves point out, with the passage of time, the consolidation of a critical mass of evaluative evidence from audit and monitoring bodies on policy implementation practices necessarily generates feedback into the world of ideas: this food for thought and reflection has necessitated responses from those claiming expertise in this sphere. Second, motivated by a sense of frustration concerning what has emerged thus far (based partly on recent formal evaluative reports, but also impressions on the rate of change formed informally in earlier years), at least some members of the specialist third sector policy community, which not rejecting Compact principles, have simultaneously been willing to take more clear cut and ideologically differentiable positions than has traditionally been the case.

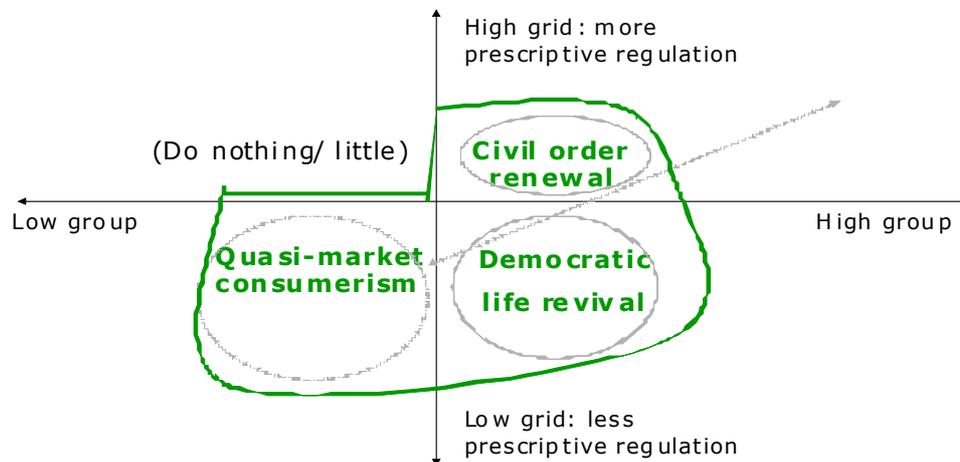
Third, concerns about the ideological direction of travel implicit or explicit in the way policies and practices have tended to unfold in recent years have generated reactions from generalist politicians too – most significantly, including Ministers heading up powerful Departments. Where the specialist community shades into the polity, the rhetorical utterances, venue choices and also the concrete policy resource commitments of certain political figures can be examined and potentially ‘decoded’ in an attempt to detect whether underlying differences of emphasis, and ultimately priorities and values, may be coming into play.

We will suggest that such contrasts were crystallising in and around the state especially from around the middle of the decade, and have involved normative claims making about how the sector can and should relate to markets on one hand, and the state and democracy on the other. Here, ideational alliances seem to be discernable with some of the aforementioned third sector specialists. That is, because despite the dangers of ‘over identification’ with ideological positions we have catalogued, a minority of such bodies have apparently felt willing to develop quite public associations with ideologically motivated political actors.

If ideological differentiation was unfolding, how can this terrain be characterised? We can again use the basic distinctions of cultural theory as a point of departure for identifying the alternatives for actively organising policy. Three ‘constellations’, or ‘camps’ with contrasting orientations (coalitions being too rigid a term) can be differentiated in the context of the current Government’s discourse and

practices, corresponding to the abstract ideational positions suggested in figures 2 and 3: a 'consumerist' orientation, embracing quasi-market solutions; a 'civil revivalist' stance, with a premium on hierarchical order; and a 'democratic life renewal' tendency, most closely connected with support for more fluid and open policy interactions (Kendall, 2009; see figure 4).

Figure 4: New Labour's competing policy emphases



First, the 'consumerist' approach, within New Labour particularly associated with the 'modernising' politician Alan Milburn, sometimes portrayed as an über-Blairite 'outrider', and, exceptionally, visibly promoted from within the sector by the Association for Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO, 2003; Milburn, 2004, 2008). This has pictured the sector primarily as a source of 'superior performance' comfortable with the challenges of commercialisation, strengthened by lessons drawn from business in quasi-market contexts, and as a primary route for the enhancement of user choice. Accordingly, this position has tended to favour consumer choice over citizenship-related activities, implicitly bracketing the intrinsic or existential significance of voluntarism as a quantitatively different way of forming social relations. The local level collective relationships that matter so much to those of a more communitarian disposition (rightwards, in the figure) are given incidental rather than sustained attention, as are the sector's broad political and educative roles (see Deakin, 1995; Kendall and Taylor, 2009). In political and electoral terms, this has fitted with New Labour's drive to improve public services for voters understood essentially as increasingly demanding consumers - and only in passing acknowledges features of the sector which do not allow it to be portrayed as part of a 'consumer society'. Rather, the idea has been to use the sector to extend the 'reality' of such a society to socially excluded constituencies.

A consumerist leaning was also been implicit in Gordon Brown's Treasury's decision to interpret 'capacity building' as first and foremost relating to fostering choice in public service delivery - a visible and central thrust of the *Futurebuilders* programme arguably reinforced by recent reshaping of its organisational structure (Brindle, 2008). Yet, the Brownite Treasury's position also has exhibited a strong command and control flavour conspicuous by its absence in the ACEVO narrative or in Milburn's rhetoric. And, to repeat, most of the actors who have traditionally constituted the third sector policy community would also want to attend more than incidentally to contributions other than the enhancement of consumerism - or would even reject it. That is, they have wanted to put greater

stress on social roles other than consumption, have worried about commercialisation, and have sought to take positions in relation to the state which see it more than simply an obstacle to the opening up of quasi-markets for third sector participation.

If such actors have shared the belief that the consumerist world view is insufficient, this does not mean they are singing from the same ideational hymn sheet, however, as figures 2 and 3 already showed. Rejecting a consumerist or 'choicist' world view and emphasising the significance of group identification and community commitments leaves open the possibility of tending instead to adhere to a relatively hierarchical (non-market) based alternative, one part of the Treasury approach; or of exhibiting a policy bias towards a less rule-bound, more 'hotly' democratic (non-market dominated) approach (Thompson et al, 1990; Hood, 1999). We will consider these in turn.

In a New Labour third sector context, the hierarchical bias can be linked to what we referred above as a 'civil renewal' orientation – or more evocatively, civil order renewal. Conceptually, this has sought to support the sector especially as a vehicle for elaborating traditional citizenship, and has been at ease with the extension of the scope and scale of rules and targets from above to this end. Such an approach pictures the State and the third sector as allies coordinating in a relatively regimented style at national and local levels alike, and involves a preference for organisation which enhance policy boundedness, predictability and stability.

Who has championed these ideas? We noted the co-existence of a consumerist with a command and control agenda at the Treasury. Certainly under Gordon Brown, in line with the latter, the Treasury developed a range of policy measures which fit the civil order renewal mould. These commitments included the adoption of national targets for volunteering and expenditure on the sector (see Zimmeck, 2009) and the detailed elaboration of national rules for public service purchasing at all levels policed from the centre. More abstractly but perhaps revealingly, Brownites' expressed interest in a policy of youth community service, and the perceived advantages of 'orderly' associations, such as cadet forces and uniformed brigades, are suggestive (Stevenson, 2006; Davis Smith, 2008; Ellis Paine, 2009; The Guardian, 24 April 2009).

So we seem to have witnessed a mixture of consumerist and civil order renewal 'biases' in place at the Treasury, at least under Brown's decade long leadership there before assuming the premiership in 2007.⁹ In addition, David Blunkett has operated as a key figure aligned in this direction in the New Labour Government. This has been despite his well publicised track record of more fluid and open ended initiatives when in local government in the 1980s and his repeated presentation of the ideational basis of his politics as lying within a locally oriented 'civic politics' tradition (Blunkett, 2003). Prime facie, his claimed adherence to the latter seems to portray him as more oriented towards what we refer to below as the democratic life renewal approach. Yet concrete policy actions and choices over how to respond to 'cultural' pressures inside government, as well as purely rhetorical claims - are relevant in diagnosing actor's ideological orientations (Freedon, 1996). If such decisions are considered in scope, what we are calling here a civil order renewal bias seems to emerge as dominant in this case. Influenced by the leadership of a prominent national volunteering and training group, Community Service Volunteers, as well as by individuals with a strong track record in (often muscular) community organising, overall a relatively regimented, top down approach was consistently

made to mesh with inherited Departmental responsibilities and agendas, as well as in tracing out new lines of policy.¹⁰ Most recently, his apparent willingness to consider compulsion in relation to a proposed review of youth community service options, and his emphasis on strengthening the Compact through further concentration of power at central government level, seem to symbolically confirm a relatively dirigiste position (Blunkett, 2008; Stratton, 2009).

Finally, 'democratic life renewal' is a different position again which seems to have taken a distinctive shape under New Labour, with a more open-ended and reflexive style. This emphasises group action as predominantly bound up with local empowerment, where this is understood as built around collective communication and deliberative processes. Voluntary action here in principle is espoused as precisely avoiding compulsion; and limiting the imposition of well defined a priori rules or centralising fiat. Its promoters are more comfortable with delegation and reflexive agenda-shaping debate, a position which seems to resonate with the priorities of some actors in the 'community sector' policy sub-community (Kendall and Taylor, 2009). Within New Labour in recent years, David Miliband and more recently Ed Miliband (David's brother) seem to have been notable Ministerial standard bearers for such an approach, with Hazel Blears also a relevant player at this level.

Table 1: Competing strands of New Labour thinking?

Quasi market consumerist	Civic order renewers	Democratic life revivalists
Principled emphasis on third sector as 'delivering' service providers, helping to develop services primarily through demonstration and innovation effects	Recognition of multiple roles steered decisively through authoritative structures	Fluid on roles, more room for argumentation and contestation within service delivery contexts, and outside them
Third sector as essentially a quasi-market, or market, participant	Grateful 'partner' – third sector strengthens deferential citizen-consumer?	Ally with appropriately democratic State – third sector strengthens challenging citizen?
Responsive to pre-determined needs, preferences emerging in 'consumer society'	High status consultee in shaping of insulated political-technocratic decisions	Co-designer of societal needs and preferences, in necessarily slow and involved process
Contracting and trust hand in hand, parcelled and professionally packaged. Contracts should <i>replace</i> grants	Advice from sector makes bureaucratic system run better, more trustworthy and better implementer; or faith in state-funded third sector as co-regulator Implicit: space for grants to support these roles	Trust mainly through open ended deliberative processes Suspicious of isomorphic 'contract culture'; space for grants explicit?
Social capital – <i>a la</i> Coleman: contractarian rational choice instrumentality, with third sector supplying 'appropriable organisations'	Social capital – Etzioni	Social capital – new institutional Putnam (mark 1, Italy), with shades of Habermas

Until relatively recently, this had been weakly institutionalised in policy compared to the consumerist and civil order revival approaches, especially in terms of national-level resource commitments. Yet D. Miliband's utterances when at the government department responsible for local government were widely reported inside and outside the third sector as countervailing this existing balance, and being potentially supportive of just such deliberative, localist models.¹¹ In evidence to the Public Administration Committee in 2008, implicitly framing the existing emphasis towards consumerist and civil order renewal oriented approaches as problematic, E. Miliband (when responsible in Cabinet for the third sector) chose to highlight the commitment of significant new central government funds via the OTS-led 'grassroots grants' programme for 'very small volunteer-led community groups'. Indeed, 'campaigning and building stronger communities through small local organisations' was even explicitly referred to as 'equally important' as any public service role; and strong disapproval of the legacy of policy targetry in a third sector context were also asserted (Public Administration Select Committee, 2008b, pp. 66 – 83).

Table one makes an attempt to round off this discussion and connect it more explicitly to the academic discourse. In an over stylised but hopefully didactically useful way, it tentatively seeks to comparing and contrast some of the elements that seen to be encapsulated in each of the three New Labour discourse and practice orientations we have been discussing.

IV Conclusion

It is hoped this paper makes a useful attempt to begin to explore the relationship between the third sector and ideology in England. It has tried to take a fresh look at the complex and difficult issue of how the third sector and ideology relate to one another. It sought to neither suggest that ideology accounts for all developments, not to suggest that it accounts for none, but to show how it could be an important factor in helping us understand the restlessness of third sector policy processing in England.

With this in mind, we have suggested existing analytic accounts have been either insufficiently attentive to conflict, or failed to factor in relevant historical and contemporary counter-currents to neo-liberal market ideology. In relation to the former, the Public Administration Select Committee (2008a), by implying that a trajectory of essentially consensual cultural change is possible, confused the existence of a feasible policy space with the existence of agreement on the ultimate policy destination. On the latter, with Carmel and Harlock (2008), the problem is one of excessive reductionism, resulting in a misleadingly unidirectional account by oversimplifying the agendas of agencies of the state and underplaying the role of specialist third sector institutions.

In the face of these lacunae, the paper has tried to develop an analysis which recognises efforts to build, defend and develop ideology in the sphere of horizontal third sector institutions as important, and partly consensual and partly conflictual, with the balance struck between these elements shifting over time. This was done by suggesting that the main focus for the contention of ideas that seems to have crystallised mid decade has been played out within the boundaries of political and policy feasibility in place as the legacy of a prior, relatively consensual mainstreaming phase.

At the same time, it is important to stress two questions which the paper has *not* tried to address, let alone resolve. First, it is not arguing that attending to ideology and the third sector requires us to

privilege either conflict or collaboration. Rather, it has suggested that both have been important if developments over the past decade or so are considered, suggesting that their relative significance has shifted as policy has evolved - with differences crystallising only quite recently. This has been catalysed by the availability of new evaluative evidence, and by the new found willingness of at least some players to be seen to tie ideological colours to their masts. Second, it has confined itself to a specific, albeit strategically important, aspect of third sector-government relations in England: the process of designing and implementing cross cutting or horizontal policies. Given the complexity and variety of third sector-state relations in England, it seems important to emphasise that the trajectories of policy development at other levels and in other policy community contexts is likely to be linked to the global trends highlighted here, but also to be contingent upon influences and actions specific to the circumstances that prevail there (Kendall, 2003). Further empirical research at the level of the policy field and sub-field would be needed to understand such diverse processes and build up a fuller picture.

Endnotes

¹ Following the TSEP study (Kendall, 2009), theoretically 'horizontal' refers to concepts/beliefs or policies/practices/actions which are not confined to within *vertical policy fields*, but which are ... held to be relevant/applied as a matter of 'generic' policy. Policy development in relation to these processes typically involves *specialist third sector-specific policy actors* within and outside the State, forming relatively loosely coupled policy networks and/or a more formally institutionalised and recognised 'policy communities' The result can be the creation and perpetuation of a policy space jointly recognised by these actors as constituting the subject matter of third sector policy (using some collective noun) which is not reducible to the policy contents of a particular vertical field.

² Freedon (2003, p. 32 and 51 - 55) argues that ideology must be understood in its historical and policy context, and refers to both competition and collaboration in shaping ideas. Ideology involves

'a set of ideas, beliefs, opinions and values that are shaped by logical and cultural constraints whichexhibit a recurring pattern; are held by significant groups; compete over the control of political language [and] also compete over providing and controlling plans for public policy ... with the aim of justifying, contesting or changing the social and political arrangements and processes of a political community...as a wide ranging structural arrangement, an ideology attributes decontested meanings to a range of mutually defining political concepts'

³ The evidence base for this paper coincides largely with that assembled for the TSEP study, thus including a review of secondary sources (a wide range of policy documents, and academic literature relating to third sector policy) with primary data gathered in interviews. Between January 2003 and January 2005, the author held meetings with 35 actors within the policy community as delineated in Kendall (2009), face to face or by telephone. Further material was collected between 2006 and 2009 through more informal means, including meetings and conversations with some of the key stakeholders interviewed in the formal study.

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- ⁴ This language was used by informants in the social housing field when research on third sector impacts was being conducted in the mid 1990s, but reference to the Janus-faced character of third sector's relationships are commonplace in informal conversation.
- ⁵ This is actually a crude over-simplification if the historical record is noted: but also if the rich tapestry of traditions and ideologies which have fed into the Labour movement is accounted for, and the modification of the beliefs of leading figures over time is understood (Brenton, 1985; Leach, 2002). However, it is fully consistent with Freedon (1996, 2003)'s compelling emphasis on the importance of rhetorical simplification in creating and sustaining an ideological position: that is to say, the standards and priorities of ideological architects differ from those of historical analysts with their contrasting goals and constituencies!
- ⁶ Nationally, the Conservative Party is now situated within this mainstream: it seemed to commit first publicly to the Compact in 2003, and has since gone further (Kendall and Deakin, 2008); this marks a u-turn from its position when in power (Department for National Heritage, 1995; see also O'Hara, 2006).
- ⁷ In delineating a mainstream consensus, we have been referring to the existence of a dominant, sympathetic orientation towards Compact and allied principles. This does not mean that significant political 'outliers' or 'objectors' cannot be found, recently and closer to the moment of policy genesis. On the Right, see Institute of Directors, 2006; Whelan, 1999; Centre for Policy Studies, 2006. On the Left, see Kelly, 2008 on the National Coalition of Independent Action (NCIA), and the organisation's website. However, it is unclear whether the critical stance of the NCIA with its language of 'corporate takeover' of the third sector, is implicating the Compact as a matter of principle, as a primarily a response to 'failed' implementation practices; or as related to perception of what we will refer to below as revealed policy biases away from democratic life approaches, and towards civil order/renewal quasi-market consumerist ones. It now claims 400 members, including some well respected academic commentators
- ⁸ For example, in the central year of the decade, examples include a lack of policy action in response to the idea of supplementing the Compact with a market accreditation-style *Compact Plus* arrangement; and the rejection of a quasi-market style vouchers scheme in relation to youth volunteering (see Home Office, 2005; Russell Commission, 2005).
- ⁹ The agreement by the Treasury to commit, from 2008 onwards, to significant funding measures that may be more aligned to what we refer as the democratic life revival approach - in particular, the launch of the 'grassroots grants' scheme and other schemes categorised as catalysts for 'community action' (OTS, 2009) is interesting. This seems to indicate a recent new departure on the Treasury's part in terms of financial commitment, the way for which was cleared intellectually in a discussion paper (HM Treasury, 2005, especially chapter 4). The emergence of such funding initiatives at this moment is probably consistent with the exertion of political muscle by the Milibands (see below), acting in concert with sympathetic senior officials in the newly formed OTS; representatives of the 'community sector'; and their allies at the Department for local government (now known as Communities and Local Government), including Hazel Blears at Ministerial level.

However, at the time of writing is it too early to say whether the nature and style of their design and implementation will signify a significant departure from the established consumerist-civil order renewal composite style which has tended to dominate at the Treasury for most of New Labour's period in office (see also Taylor and Kendall, 2009).

¹⁰ As Education Secretary (1997 – 2001), a flagship policy was to strengthen citizenship-oriented voluntarism amongst young people by means of a tightly codified national curriculum – noteworthy in our context especially as a radically centralising policy instrument inherited from the previous administration which he chose to retain and elaborate (Blunkett, 2001). While at the Home Office (2001 – 2004) Blunkett accepted narrow quantitative third sector national targets in discussions with the Treasury (Zimmeck, 2009). He also signed off what was seen by many as a relatively top-down design for the Change Up plans, a central plank of the Government's investment in third sector infrastructure (Kendall, 2005), and which were only to be modified into the less dirigiste *Capacitybuilders* (National Audit Office, 2009) after his departure from office following scandals in his personal life. He also established the Civil Renewal Unit under his personal tutelage - within the central State, supported by a key communitarian thinker in the traditional Etzioni mould (Tam, 1998) - as a preferred route for policy development.

¹¹ In a 2006 speech in particular, D. Miliband acknowledged the full panoply of sector roles, but used this speech primarily to emphasise the sector's contribution as agenda shaper, linking volunteering to participation understood in relatively inclusive terms. The third sector was here presented as a 'supplier of power' to individuals and communities (Miliband, 2006).

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About the Centre

The third sector provides support and services to millions of people. Whether providing front-line services, making policy or campaigning for change, good quality research is vital for organisations to achieve the best possible impact. The third sector research centre exists to develop the evidence base on, for and with the third sector in the UK. Working closely with practitioners, policy-makers and other academics, TSRC is undertaking and reviewing research, and making this research widely available. The Centre works in collaboration with the third sector, ensuring its research reflects the realities of those working within it, and helping to build the sector's capacity to use and conduct research.

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Theory and Policy

It is essential that the Centre's research is informed by a strong theoretical and conceptual analysis of the sector and the policy environment within which it is situated. Theoretical analysis of the sector is not well developed in the UK, in part because of the applied focus of much existing research. TSRC will contribute to ensuring that difficult theoretical issues are articulated and explored. Critical understanding of the policy environment is also essential, for it determines much of what happens within the sector. TSRC is co-funded by the Office of the Third Sector which is responsible for developing and delivering policy in England. The Centre's research will help inform this policy development, but will also make that policy process itself the subject of critical review. We need to know 'what works', but we also need to understand who decides 'what matters'.

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