

It's the Community, Stupid¹!

Colin Ball, at the SACOSS 2010 Conference: *Defining strength, delivering innovation, Adelaide, 6 August 2010*

There are many stories about, and quotes from, Oscar Wilde, the Irish poet and aesthete.



There he is, dressed for a typical English summer's day. One story about Wilde concerns his arrest, in 1895, at the Cadogan Hotel in London, on a charge of what was then politely called 'gross indecency'. I should confess, however, that it may be apocryphal as I have been unable to verify it. The story goes that on being approached in the hotel lobby, which was crowded at the time, by a policeman in plain clothes who held the warrant for the arrest, Wilde brushed him aside.

Annoyed, the policeman said: "Do you know who I am?" At which Wilde silenced the crowd by announcing: "There's a man here who doesn't know who he is!"

I say this as introduction to my first point, in the form of a question similar to that of the policeman: do we know who we are? People and organisations that are clear about who they are, or in other words, about what their identity is, are, typically, strong. Strength – the focus of today's proceedings – is, therefore, at least in part, defined by identity.

Like me, I'm sure that many of you will have been asked that question, or similar ones such as 'what do you do?' or 'what's your line of business, then?' Perhaps like me, you greet such a question with a tinge of dismay. It's a tough one. You wish you were a plumber or a farmer or anything that's easy to explain. If you work in a community organisation, your conversation with the person next to you on the 'plane in Seat 12b who has just asked you the question (she's just told you she has recently retired by the way) might go something like this:

"I work for an organisation in the community sector"

"What's that?"

"You mean the organisation?"

"No, I mean thewhat did you call it....the community sector?"

This is where it gets hard. You need to think a bit.

"UUmhhh....well it's sometimes called the third sector or the not-for-profit sector, or the voluntary sector, heard of any of those?"

"No, but do you mean charities?"

"Well, sort of, but, well, ah, um, not all the organisations in the sector would call themselves 'charities' you see....."

¹ The phrase *It's the economy, stupid* was coined by strategist James Carville during Bill Clinton's successful 1992 American Presidential Election campaign against George HW Bush

“Why not?”

“It’s a bit old-fashioned, it’s Victorian...”

“So charities are just in Melbourne, then?”

“No, I mean the Queen.....”

“Queen Elizabeth? What’s she got to do with it? She’s rich, she’s not a charity...”



I won’t go on, except to note that Queen Elizabeth – there she is, in casual attire – does come into it. It was during her time – I’m referring to Elizabeth the first – that the *Statute of Charitable Uses* came into law in 1601. That’s 409 years ago. Yet it still forms the basis of the laws under which many modern-day ‘charities’ operate both in the UK and in the countries it colonised, including Australia. It’s therefore an aspect of the way we define ourselves

Entitled ‘*An Acte to redresse the Misemployment of Landes, Goodes and Stockes of Money heretofore given to Charitable Uses*’, the preamble goes as follows :

The Statute of Charitable Uses 1601

“

Reliefe of aged impotent and poore people, some for Maintenance of sicke and maymed Souldiers and Marriners, Schooles of Learninge, Free Schooles and Schollers in Universities, some for Repaire of Bridges Portes Havens Causwaies Churches Seabankes and Highwaies, some for Educacion and prefermente of Orphans, some for or towards Reliefe Stocke or Maintenance of Howses of Correccion, some for Mariages of poore Maides, some for Supportacion Ayde and Helpe of younge tradesmen Handicraftesmen and persons decayed, and others for reliefe or redemption of Prisoners or Captives, and for aide or ease of any poore Inhabitanes concerninge paymente of Fifteenes,

”

setting out of Souldiers and other Taxes ...

Pity you didn’t have that in your pocket to give to the lady in seat 12b!

Now there is a great deal I could say about the nature of the law and the need for its reform. That’s a matter for another conference, although I will come back to it later. What I want to talk about is our identity, and how we can define our strength from it.

A community organisation is one form of voluntary organisation. Here is the way one source² defines a ‘voluntary organisation’.

² In C Ball and L Dunn, *Non-Governmental Organisations: Guidelines for Good Policy and Practice*, Commonwealth Foundation, London, 1995

Some defining characteristics of voluntary organisations

FORMATION: “Voluntary”: formed voluntarily (not required/established by law (if so, then it is a statutory (governmental) organisation): often therefore called ‘non-governmental organisation’ (NGO)

BENEFIT: “Not for profit”: not for personal private profit or gain

PURPOSE: “Not self-serving”: for the ‘common good’ or ‘good of others’

CONTROL AND ACCOUNTABILITY: “Independent”: controlled by those who formed it or those appointed by them to do so.

One way of defining our strength, therefore is to measure ourselves against those four yardsticks.

We are indisputably (well, more or less) in good shape as regards the first feature: “Formation”. Let me set it aside and look at “Benefit”, “Purpose” and “Control/Accountability” in a little more detail, and in particular “Purpose”.

Delving a little more into history will enlarge our understanding of our identity and thus our strength.

In Australia, as in many other countries, two main historical roots of our sector can be discerned: ‘public-serving’ groups formed for the benefit of others in need, generally termed, even to the present day, ‘charities’ or ‘Public Benevolent institutions’ (PBIs); and ‘member-serving’ communities and associations (referred to variously as ‘friendly societies’, or ‘mutuals’). We tend to forget them.

The ‘mutuals’ formed out of the common needs and interests of their members and were controlled by them, accountable to them, and for their benefit. The emergence of many of them in Australia in the 19th Century was due both to the lack of government welfare provisions and services, *and* the fear among people of having to turn to ‘charity’ in times of need, particularly financial need. So building societies, societies to meet burial costs, or to provide insurance, housing finance or credit were among the friendly societies formed. Mark Lyons³ notes that:

“... by the turn of the (19th) century a large minority of the (Australian) male population were members of friendly societies.....organised around the lodge system, with weekly meetings of the few dozen members who lived in a particular locality.....All applications for assistance were handled by the meeting, by people who knew the circumstances of the claimant....Friendly Societies ensured that their members would not have to experience the humiliation of calling on charity or the state for support. They showed that ordinary working people could manage their own affairs...”

By 1914, as many as 46% of the population of Australia were then covered by friendly societies⁴.

³ See *Non-profit organisations, social capital and social policy in Australia*, M Lyons, in *Social Capital and public policy in Australia*, Ed. I Winter, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, 2000

⁴ D Green and L Cromwell, *Mutual Aid or Welfare State?*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1984

The 19th century also saw the birth and subsequent growth of the ‘public-serving’ ‘charity’ bodies, known originally as ‘benevolent societies’, the first in Australia being the Benevolent Society of New South Wales (originally named the New South Wales Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and Benevolence), founded in 1813 by Edward Smith Hall.



Here he is, thinking deeply about what charitable philanthropists in his days used to call ‘the undeserving poor’:

The NSW Benevolent Society’s objectives were:

“To relieve the Poor, the Distressed, the Aged, the Infirm and thereby discountenance, as much as possible, Mendacity and Vagrancy, and to encourage industrious habits amongst indigent poor, as well as afford them religious instruction and consolation in their distresses⁵”

The society still exists and now describes its purposes as: “to create caring and inclusive communities and a just society”.

By the end of the 19th century, provision by the ‘mutuals’ was greater than that by the public-serving charities, although governments were beginning to provide support to the latter in the form of grants. While such grants were to sustain the ‘charities’ (and, as I will discuss, come to make some of them appendages of government well before the end of the 20th century), the ‘mutuals’ were eventually to fall into decline, a decline that began with the rise of mass entertainment in the 1920s and 1930s, resulting in declining attendance at lodge meetings, and was continued by increased government regulation after WWII and the steady amalgamation of small societies into larger and ones, thereby becoming more remote from their members.

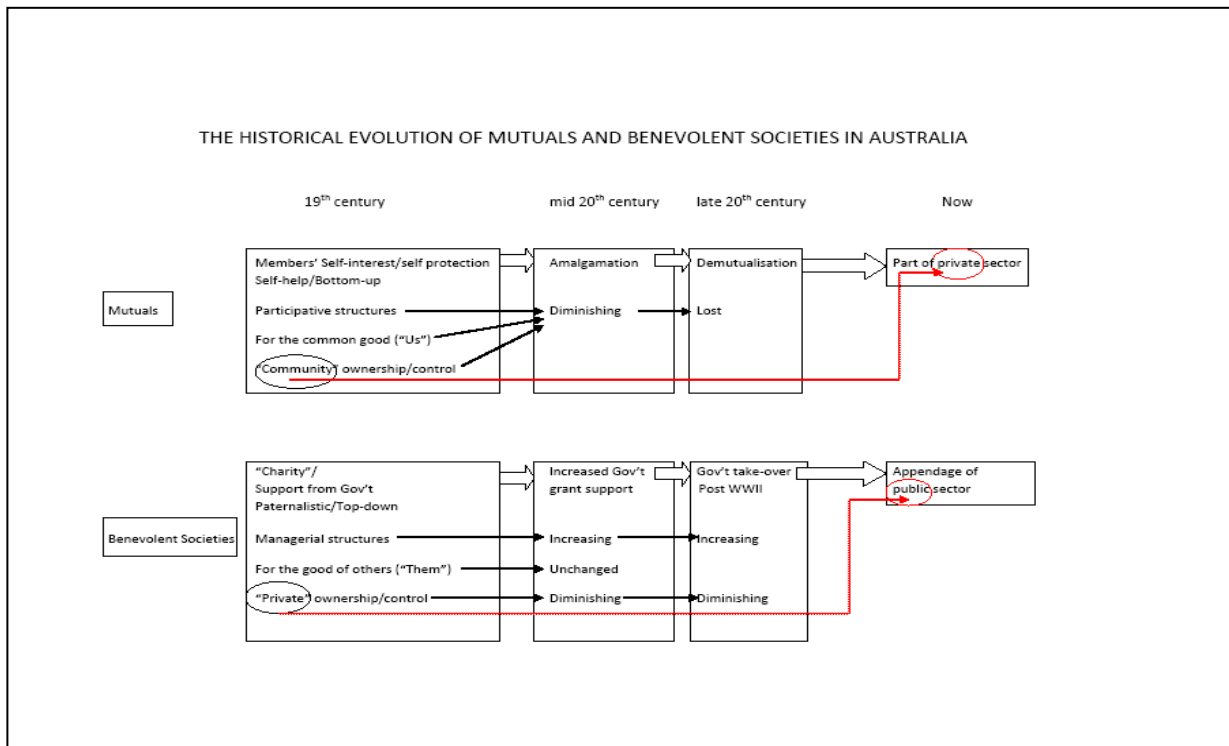
Those that were left of the mutuals for the most part then disappeared from the 1980s onwards as a result of the adoption of ‘neo-liberal’ economic policies, which led, among many other things, to the ‘de-mutualisation’ of finance-related societies, meaning their conversion into ‘for-profit’ businesses in the private sector, in which active communities of ‘members’ became passive minority shareholders. The Australian Mutual Provident Society, founded in 1849, demutualised in 1998. We now know it as AMP.

There are a number of lessons to be learned from this history. The purpose of the mutuals was mutual protection and for some communities of marginalised or threatened people a similar need – and thus purpose – still exists. In the 21st century we can describe this purpose as “empowerment” and I’ll come back to that in a moment.

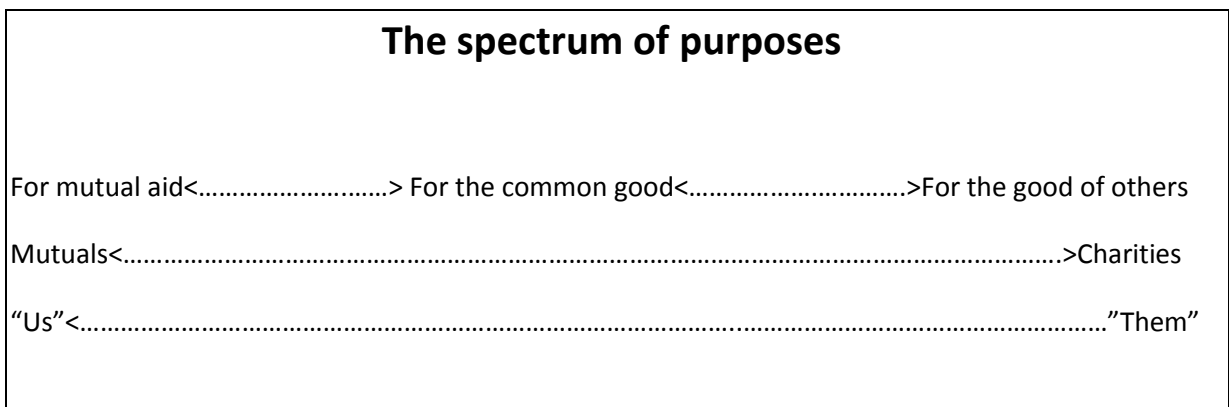
There are also lessons for the ‘charities’: just as many mutuals have ‘morphed’ over time, in their case from benefit-sharing into profit-taking bodies, so too have many charities, in their case from independence to dependence (on government) over time, especially after WWII. But many of them nonetheless remained unchanged in their practice of seeing the people they serve as passive beneficiaries rather than as empowered, actively participating people.

⁵ www.sl.nsw.gov.au/discover_collections/history_nation/religion/charity/benevolent

I have summarised the historical evolutions I have outlined in this flow chart. Note the red trend lines: for mutuals the journey has been from 'community sector' to 'private sector' whilst for the benevolents the journey has been from private to public control.



What does this tell us about our strengths? I think it tells us that when we talk, as we often do, of something called the 'voluntary and community sector', as if it was a homogenous entity, we need to take care, because it is not. Purposes vary, from mutual support to the good of others, with what we call the 'common good somewhere between the two. In addition, I think this history tells that we can draw new strengths, if we are bold and imaginative enough, from the traditions of the mutuals: while they were overtly self-serving in purpose, they were participatory in nature and operations: they empowered people. So I think that when we talk about the purpose of what we do, we should recognise that purpose is best represented as a spectrum, like this :



And surely what this history also tells us that just as many mutuals lost their identity and became part of the private sector (not all of them of course – we still have trade and professional unions and sports, culture and recreational associations), many charities are in danger of losing their identity by becoming, or at least being seen as, not only appendages of government, through concentrating on government-funded welfare services delivery, but allowing their identity to become further blurred with that of the private sector by acquiescing and participating in the ‘marketisation’ of the provision of government welfare services.

But that’s another part of the story. Let me return instead to empowerment. Here there are lessons to learn not from history, but from geography and in particular from the experience of what’s often referred to as the ‘less developed’ or ‘developing’ world.

Going back to the lady in 12b, your response about ‘charity’ might well have gone on to pointing to the fact that in the sector the approach is not to do or minister unto disadvantaged and marginalised people but to.....yes, empower them to play their part.

To explain and understand what that E-word means, let us look not to history but to the so-called ‘developing’ or ‘less developed’ world.

The post- WWII years saw many developing countries achieve independence from their former colonial masters. The new governments of the countries inherited from their former masters, however, the belief that good government was big government and that ‘development’ would best be achieved from the top down, with government instigating large scale economic and industrial infrastructure projects, the benefits of which would somehow ‘trickle down’ even to the poorest of the poor. Centuries-old indigenous traditions and cultures of self-help and mutual aid, seeing development as something to be founded on people acting from the bottom up, which had decayed during the colonial period, were further eroded, even destroyed entirely, in the post-independence decades.

Nevertheless, these traditions live on: words and expressions for mutual self-help and collective effort for the common good exist in many cultures and languages. In Malay-speaking cultures it is referred to as ‘gotong royong’, meaning ‘joint bearing of burdens’; ‘koudmen’ is the Creole word, derived from the French ‘coup de main’ for ‘helping hand’) in the Caribbean. Then there is ‘ubuntu’ (‘the essence of being human’) in South Africa, recently described and explained like this by Archbishop Desmond Tutu⁶ :



⁶ While this is quoted on the www in several places, none cite the exact speech or book in which it appears

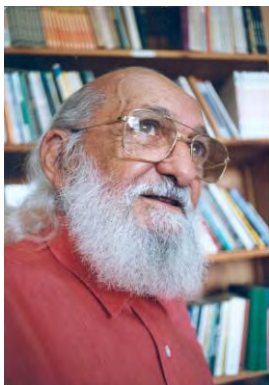
“Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation.

It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality - Ubuntu - you are known for your generosity.

We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity”.

Even by the late 1960s, the post-colonial ‘top down’ model of development was beginning to show signs of mal-functioning in the newly independent developing countries. Poverty, marginalisation and social exclusion were still a reality among the great mass of people. Partly influenced by growing numbers of protest movements and ‘peoples’ organisations, policy-makers and administrators began to look for strategies that would bring more ‘community participation’ into the development process.

By this time, the work of the radical liberation priest, Paolo Freire, among the poor and oppressed in South America, which laid stress on the centrality of people’s historical, experiential and indigenous knowledge and on their active participation in the processes of education and development, was beginning to be recognised. There was increasing pressure from social scientists, grassroots groups and community organisations not just to bring people themselves into development processes, through ‘bottom-up’ approaches, but *to put them at the very centre of development.*



Here he is, turning down an offer of sponsorship from a multi-national corporation manufacturing men’s razors.

Inspired in part by Freire, by the late 1970s, a number of social movements appeared in the developing countries. These included, to give just a few examples from Asia, initiatives such as the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in India, led by the amazing Ella Bhatt, the Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka, led by the great A T Ariyaratne, and the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, founded by the brilliant Muhammad Yunus, richly-deserved winner of the Nobel peace prize in 2006. Grameen promoted the cooperative/mutual aid concept of the ‘borrowers circle’ where loans to individuals are supported by community-based support networks in which individual borrowers are also responsible to other members of the circle, who collectively guarantee each individual loan repayment, as well as being individually responsible for these repayments to the bank. Doesn’t that sound a bit like the early mutuals in Australia? Sure it does!

The 1980s were marked in the developing world by ‘structural adjustment’. The billions of dollars that had by then been spent on large scale, top-down, government- run, economic and infrastructure development projects had failed to bring the desired results. The Structural

Adjustment Policies and associated financial conditionalities of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund required more export-orientated industrialisation, less government, economic liberalisation, privatisation, and deregulation.

As the resources available for government-led, top-down development consequently began to diminish, the 1980s witnessed the growth of development-orientated, people-centred community and voluntary organisations in a number of fields and at every level from local to global.

By the 1990s the focus shifted ever more firmly to what came to be called ‘human development’, ‘people-centred development’ or ‘participatory development’. There came to be fuller and more widespread recognition of the centrality of people’s participation in development. People were no longer seen as merely subjects and beneficiaries of it but actors in their own right, including in deciding what the actions should be. New voluntary and community organisations that saw themselves *of and by* the people and their communities rather than merely *for* them came into existence.

And they found unlikely allies in the shape of influential international agencies such as the OECD and the World Bank, which had been the lenders and enforcers of the top-down approach. They changed their tune. The OECD for example said⁷:

“Participatory development.....may be defined as a process by which people take an active and influential hand in shaping decisions that affect their lives”

So surely these are the lessons that the ‘developed’ world needs to learn from the ‘developing’ world: ‘development’ is about the involvement of the whole community; it is *by, of and for all the people, as compared to ‘welfare’ which is more exclusive; communities and their organisations are where the ‘bottom-up’ starts; communities and their organisations are the basis on which sustainable development (for all) can take place and sustainable prosperity (for all) created. ‘Development’ is social inclusion; ‘welfare’ is but a part of it.*

While all this was happening in the ‘developing’ world, what was going on in the developed one? The centrality of people’s empowerment and participation was being missed. The ‘welfare states’ that governments introduced following WWII were, well, top-down, professionalised and institutionalised where, as the Austrian-born priest-turned-philosopher Ivan Illich so bitinglly put it⁸:

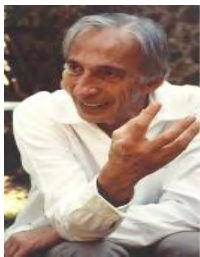
⁷ *Participatory Development and Good Governance*, Development Cooperation Guidelines series, OECD, Paris, 1995

⁸ In *Disabling Professions and Tools for Conviviality*, Calder and Boyars, London, 1973

The Welfare state

"....bodies of specialists....dominate the creation, adjudication and implementation of needs....(They) are a new kind of cartel. They are more deeply entrenched than a Byzantine bureaucracy, more international than a world church, more stable than any labour union, endowed with wider competencies than any shaman, and equipped with a tighter hold over those they claim as victims than any mafia.....In any area where a human need can be imagined, these new professionals – dominant, authoritative, monopolistic, legalised – have become exclusive experts of the public good...."

Wonderful stuff! The writings of Illich were, in the 1970s, and still today, huge influences on my own thinking. What he meant - here he is explaining - was that the new welfare states were disempowering and non-participatory.



My point here is that part of the strength of the community sector is that, in an age where neo-liberal economic policy rules, and **governments have 'marketised' and 'privatised' much welfare service** provision, turning people from clients of public professionals who think they know better to customers of, well, private professionals who, well, think they know better, we in the community sector know that there is another way, one in which **all** are empowered (not just those in need, as **in the case of the original 'mutuals'** but all those willing and able to be part of the solution rather than bystanders or part of the problem) to meet needs, seize and exploit opportunities. We would be all the stronger and more able to do these things if the state:

- acted less as a definer (not just of what to do but how to do it) and micro-manager and more of an enabler and facilitator;
- recognised that economic policy, and the stress it places on individualistic and competitive behaviour, needs to be balanced by an equal emphasis on 'community' policy that lays stress on cooperation and collective action for the common good: *It's the Community, Stupid!*

"So what does a community sector organisation actually do?" the lady in seat 12b asks you. You realise at this point that she and the gentleman sitting next to her strongly resemble people you know.



Here they are, pictured later in the limousine sent to pick them up off the 'plane:

"Well, contrary to what you believe," you say, boldly, spurred on by your recognition, "we have five main functions in society...."

"But there is no such thing as society⁹," the lady says.

You ignore her. "The five functions form a spectrum, from 'Care and welfare' at one end...."

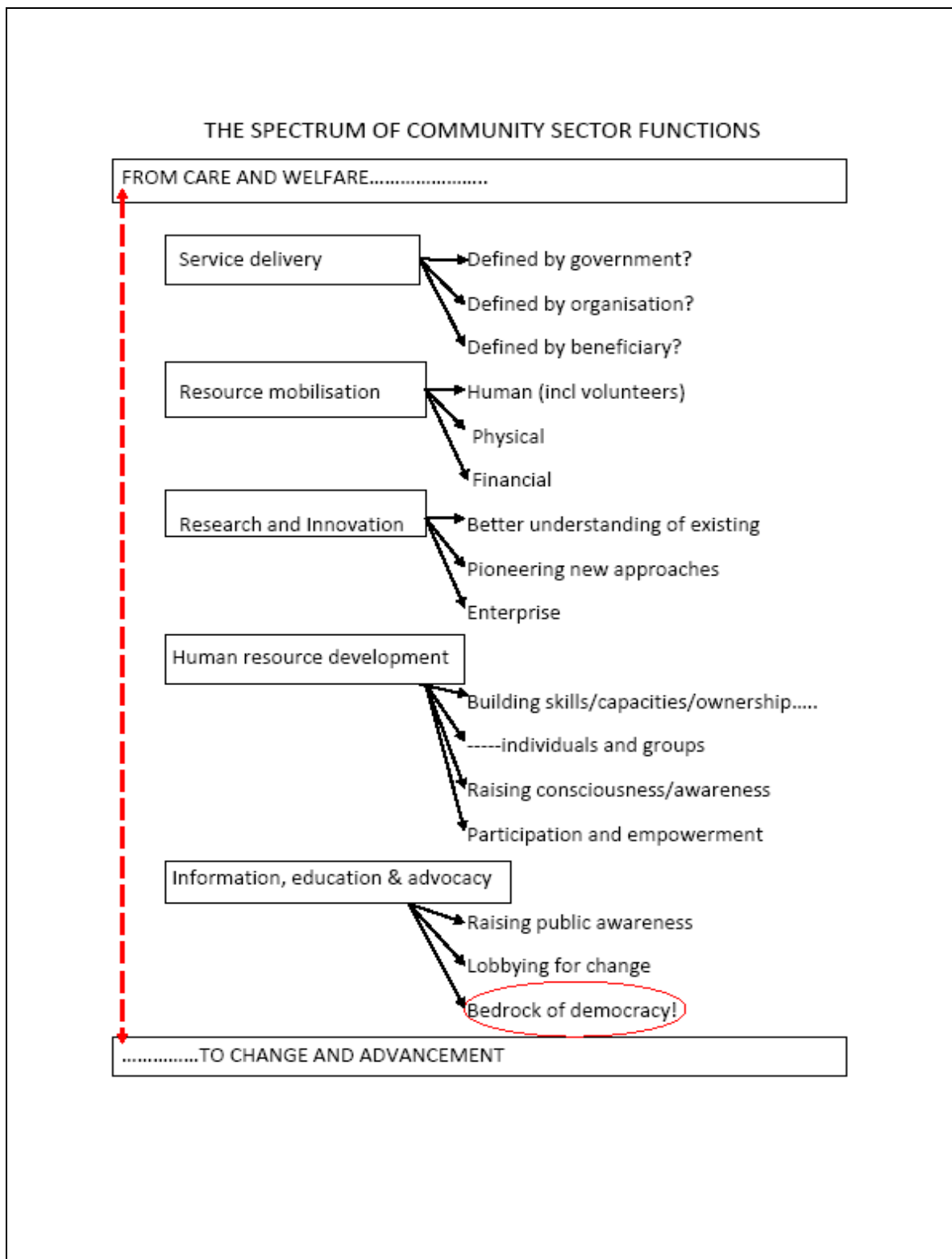
"Ah yes, for the 'undeserving poor', that's good" she remarks.

"Not exactly," you say, irritated, but you continue, ".....to 'Change and advancement' at the other end of the spectrum....."

This chart shows the spectrum and the five functions¹⁰:

⁹ She said this in an interview with *Women's Own* magazine, London, 31 October 1987 edition

¹⁰ Updated from C Ball and L Dunn, *Non-Governmental Organisations: Guidelines for Good Policy and Practice*, Commonwealth Foundation, London, 1995



The chart represents another way of defining our strengths. I would submit to you that a strong community sector organisation carries out *all* of the functions. That is not to say that it gives equal weight and importance to each function but rather, at the very least, knows that the five functions are all important parts of the totality that I have called 'development'.

My subject is strengths rather than weaknesses but let me ask a few questions:

Has the delivery of increasingly government-defined and -financed welfare services become too significant a function? What effects has it had on the Purposes and Control/Accountabilities of our organisations?

In turn, what effects have such effects brought about in our ability to mobilise human resources? Has the dreaded Work for the Dole had a deleterious effect on people's willingness to Work for the Community, for example? Here it is worth noting that the 2010 Report of the Productivity Commission, released in draft form early in the year, counted 4.6 million volunteers and put an estimated value of \$15 billions on their work.

If such value was included in national accounts, it would represent, at a conservative estimate, about 1% of the country's GDP. While this may sound small, it is nonetheless very significant. But the report also noted two trends: more Australians are volunteering but for fewer average hours; and that what the report called "most areas" have seen a decline in volunteering, with the exception of culture and recreational organisations. This would appear to indicate that 'self-interest' 'good-for-me' volunteering is growing, while 'common good' volunteering is declining. We should be concerned about that.

Other questions relate to the other functions. Are we as innovative as we could be? Jan has talked about that yesterday and I think there are many positive things to note: the very existence of innovations such as Community Sector Banking, Foresters Community Finance and Social Ventures Australia for example. And in my own work, including research work I carried out for Jobs Australia¹¹ recently I have come across many fantastic examples of innovation by community organisations.

I have already raised the key question about the human resource development function: are we giving enough attention to the empowerment of our communities so that all can play their part?

I could go on and on about every function, but I want to devote the penultimate part of my remarks to the last one: Information, Education and Advocacy. Just keep in mind what's highlighted in red at the bottom of the chart: *Bedrock of democracy!*

It's probably remiss of me not to have explicitly mentioned what is of course our greatest strength, well expressed in this Maori proverb:

¹¹ Published as *Forces at Work*, Jobs Australia, 2008

Ui mai koe ki ahau he aha te mea nui o te ao, Māku e kī atu he tangata, he tangata, he tangata!

"Ask me what is the greatest thing in the world, I will reply: It is people, it is people, it is people!"

People are not just actors in their own development, and that of the community. To explain why this is the case, here are a couple more characters to bring into my account:

First, the 19th century French political scientist, Alexis de Tocqueville. Here he is, in the first-class lounge at Paris airport, waiting to leave on a trip to America.



De Tocqueville was concerned about individualistic behaviour and what he saw in America made him believe that through associating with one another for mutually beneficial purposes, both in public and private, Americans were able not only to overcome their selfish individual desires, but create both an active political society and a vibrant civil society. He wrote¹²:

"The most democratic country in the world now is that in which men have in our time carried to the highest perfection the art of pursuing in common the objects of common desires and have applied this new technique to the greatest number of purposes. Is that just an accident, or is there really some necessary connection between associations and equality?..... Feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and the understanding developed only by the reciprocal action of men one upon another".

Hmm....things have changed a bit since then! But over 100 years later, an American, Robert Putnam, made a study of associations in Italy and observed¹³:

"We can summarise our discoveries... rather simply. Some regions of Italy have many choral societies and soccer teams and bird-watching clubs and Rotary clubs. Most citizens in those regions read eagerly about community affairs in the daily press. They are engaged by public issues, but not by personalistic or patron-client politics. Inhabitants trust one another to act fairly and to obey the law. Leaders in these regions are relatively honest. They believe in popular government, and they are predisposed to compromise with their political adversaries. Both citizens and leaders here find equality congenial. Social and political networks are organised horizontally, not hierarchically. The community values solidarity, civic engagement, cooperation, and honesty. Government works. Small wonder that people in these regions are content!"

What de Tocqueville and Putnam are saying, in their different ways, is that doing things, individually and together with others, is not just a good and desirable thing in its own right (for "the common good"), but has other benefits, not least for the health of democracy. Indeed it is a bedrock of democracy, in my view. Without strong community organisations, acting as forums for political discourse, democracy is weakened. Or to use yet other words: *they have political functions*; they are a means by which people can actively participate in political discussion and decision-making. Forging new forms of participatory democracy is a natural outcome of participatory forms of community

¹² In *Democracy in America*, New York, 1851

¹³ In *Making Democracy Work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*, 1993

development. Empowerment creates enfranchisement in the fullest sense of the word. Politics becomes a matter in which all people participate.

I referred to 'charitable law' earlier on: its nature diminishes and indeed severely restricts charities from engaging in political activities yet perversely favours them over other forms of incorporation when it comes to tax breaks and concessions. But we can't blame it all on the law, and in any case the need is bigger than permitting community and voluntary organisations to engage in advocacy on particular concerns and issues. The problem is that democracy as we know it today is in poor shape *as a whole*: people everywhere, as international surveys and research have shown¹⁴, are fed up with, disillusioned by and feel remote from, the processes and institutions of democracy as we know them today. It's time the community sector placed greater emphasis on its political role. It has the strength to do so and given the right and the space to do so it can do so! New initiatives such as *GetUp!* are showing the way at the policy end. A 20-year-old initiative that started in Porto Alegre, Brazil shows the way at the level of practice: Participatory Budgeting.

More than 200 municipalities and public institutions around the world are now estimated to have initiated participatory budgeting. It is a process of democratic deliberation and decision-making, in which people decide how to allocate the public budget through a series of local assemblies and meetings. It has several basic features .

Features of Participatory Budgeting (PB)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Through local assemblies and meetings, community members identify spending priorities and elect 'budget delegates' to represent their neighbourhoods• 'Budget delegates' transform community priorities into concrete project proposals<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public officials facilitate and provide technical assistance• Community members vote on which projects to fund• The municipal authority then implements the projects

The World Bank¹⁵ estimates that the number of people involved in some way with each annual exercise totals around 8% of the city's population – ie some 100,000 people, a figure which reflects "the effectiveness and credibility of the process".

Among many positive institutional effects, the World Bank has identified that the PB marks a move from a "protest-based culture of the 1980s to a more 'civil' and less disruptive form of conflict resolution through dialogue and negotiation"; and that there has been a marked (and positive) change in the attitude of technical/ professional staff of the municipal authority, termed "a jump from techno-bureaucracy to techno-democracy...."

I want to conclude with a third way of defining the strengths of organisations in the community sector and the sector as a whole. Firstly I used 'defining characteristics'. Secondly I used an analysis

¹⁴ See B Knight, H Chigudu & R Tandon, *Reviving Democracy*, Earthscan/Commonwealth Foundation, London 2002

¹⁵ The World Bank, *Social Development Notes: Case Study No 2*, Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Network, The World Bank, Washington DC, 2003

derived from the spectrum of five functions. Now, thirdly, let me look at the matter from a slightly different perspective: that of what I term ‘Ten strategies for community strengthening’.

Ten strategies that will strengthen community organisations		
Strategy	Meaning	Examples/ Notes on ‘why’
Community re-investment	Putting generated resources back into the wider community rather than taking them out.	Establishing and managing Community Trusts and Foundations to finance innovations, sector networking and the wider community
Community asset-building	Doing what many families endeavour to do: build up their assets during their lives. This is about creating future security and sustainability for organisations and the sector.	Through property ownership, creating community ‘super’ funds and ‘social/ethical investment funds
Community mobilisation	Mobilising the human and other resources that exist in the community and in the other sectors (government; private) of society.	Brokering and linking corporation-community linkages; establishing funds for social investment etc
Community partnerships	The three sectors working together as a partnership, within which community organisations are the catalyst, the broker and the leader.	Needed for such projects as recycling of waste, business incubator development; social housing etc
Community ‘social enterprises’	Aiming not only to create jobs but to create profit that is then re-invested either in growing the enterprise, or through community re-investment, or community asset-building.	A social enterprise established by a community organisation owns and operates Australia’s biggest computer repair business [PP19]
Community ‘barrier-breaking’	Working, as many organisations do, with disadvantaged, and often highly disadvantaged people who face what are often termed ‘multiple disadvantages’ or ‘multiple barriers’ demands nothing less than constant creativity and innovation.	Breaking out of the ‘silo’ mentality that is fostered by too much ‘top-down’ policy-making and regulation. Breaking down ‘us’ and ‘them’ distinctions
Community-connecting	Reaching out and going out to where disadvantaged and marginalised people are, rather than expecting or requiring them to come to where the services and provisions happen to be.	As above. Plus “Empowerment”
Community politicking	Realising that community organisations are not merely products of democracy but	More pro-active policy innovation and campaigning by organisations and the sector as

	foundations of it.	a whole
Community uniting	Community organisations seeing themselves as the glue which makes the cultural, religious, ethnic and other diversities that characterise many communities a source of strength rather than of weakness.	A growing need in an increasingly fragmented heterogeneous society
Community future-building	Shaping the future rather than being shaped by the present; being pro-active rather than reactive.	Again, breaking out of the 'reactive' mentality that is fostered by too much 'top-down' policy-making and regulation

In conclusion.....to do these things we need to:

- recognise and cherish our heterogeneity of purposes (mutual aid<>common good<>good of others) and.....
-pursue the range of functions (care/welfare<...>change/advancement) and
-work cooperatively as a sector, not as disparate organisations and
-be prepared to say NO, or at least YES, IF..... when we need to

Colin Ball

Consultant, Writer and Researcher

1/41 Griffith Street

New Farm

Queensland 4005

Tel: 07 3254 0024 Email: colinsusanball@bigpond.com Web: www.colinball.com.au

Forthcoming books: Dupuytren's Contracture (October 2010); It's the Community, Stupid (tba)

sacoss/6august2010/cb