

Key Milestones of NGO Development

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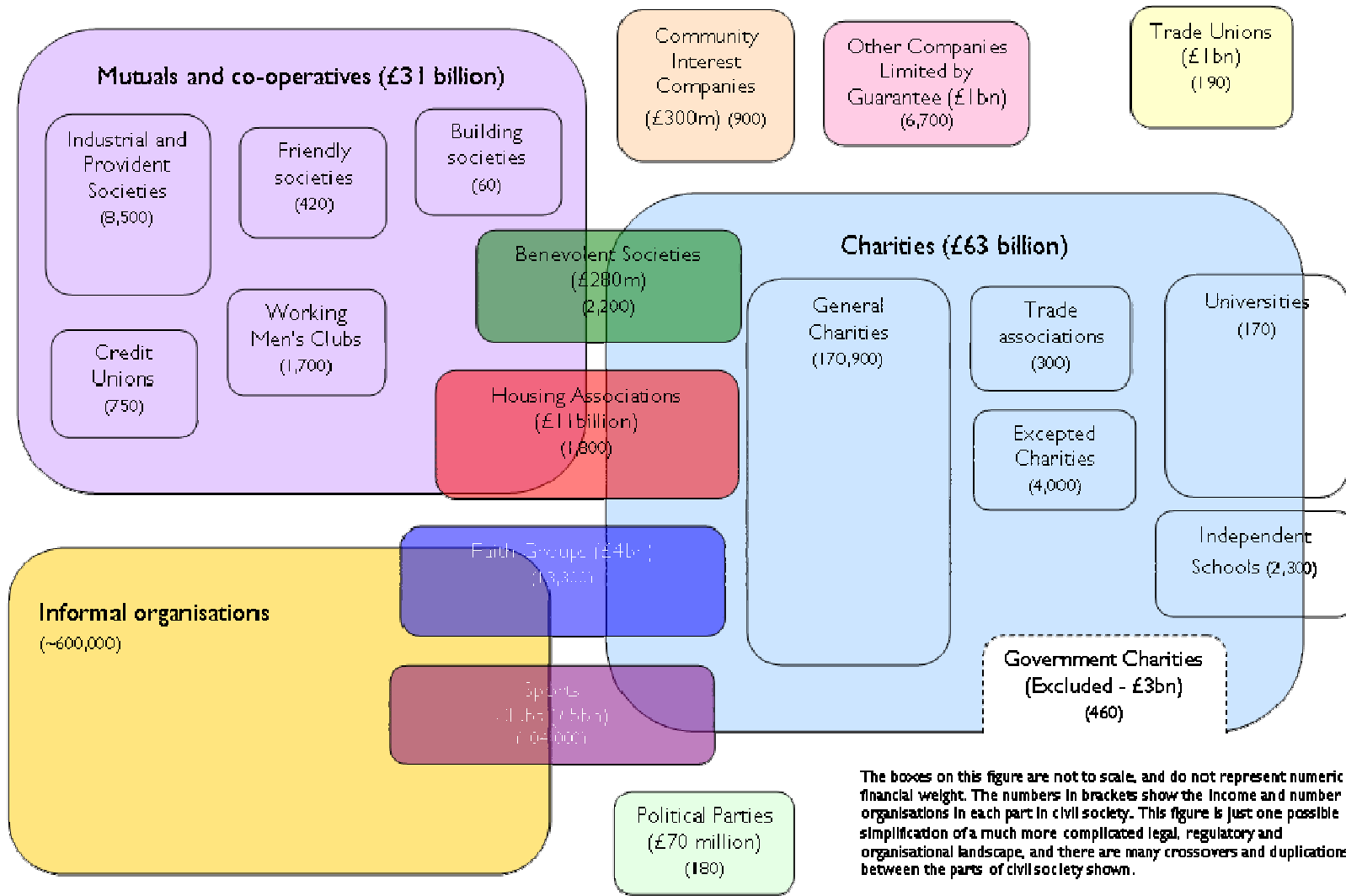
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NGO basis in civil society

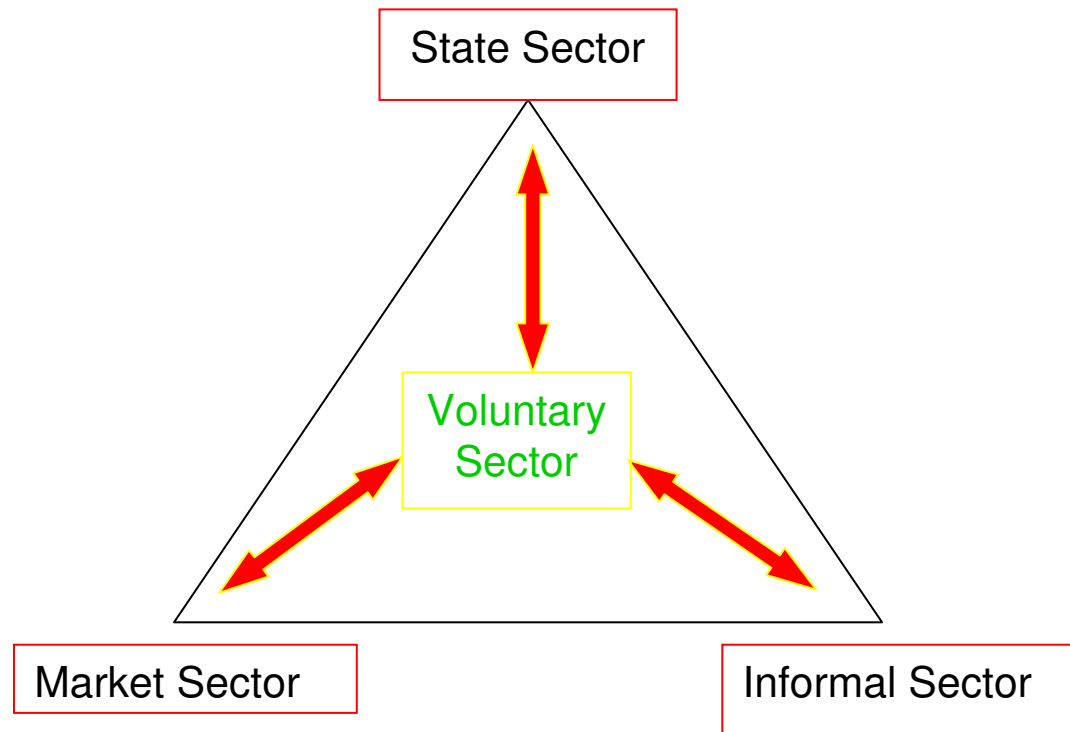
- The basis of NGO development is linked into the idea of social action and associational life
- One strand of organisations began in the form of charities with the aim of assisting vulnerable groups, these were often linked to the church in the medieval era (Charity legislation in England began in 1601)
- A different strand originated in self-organising communities at the local level
- Further areas of civil society have more recently been focused on delivery of social services
- Finally there is a strand focused on advocacy for beneficiaries

A 'Map' of Civil Society



Within Civil Society we can track the 'core': general charities

Deakin's Triangle of the voluntary sector



Models of civil society- Associational Life

- Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out in 1840, *"In democratic countries knowledge of how to combine is the mother of all forms of knowledge; on its progress depends that of all the others."*
- This is based on the *action* of people voluntarily coming together, independently of government or commercial interests
- This emphasises peoples relationships with each other; trust and reciprocity; civility

Models of civil society- Public Sphere

- This is focused on the *space* of civil society
- An arena for debate and deliberation
- Emphasis placed on people discussing social issues, problems and solutions
- The idea that communities come together in public discussion and that this gives a collective identity

Models of civil society- the Good Society

- An ideal for society as a whole
- A more civil, as well as a more cohesive society
- Emphasis placed on the core objective of improving broader society

Relations between civil society & government

- Civil society groups have been involved with government for at least 200 years

Relations are focused on inter-related questions:

- Participation in decision-making
- Delivery of services & provision of care

Participatory Democracy

- Free association provides a healthy democracy and impacts directly on the health of our political institutions "civil associations, therefore facilitate political association".
- Robert Putnam (in *Bowling Alone*) argued that fewer people in America are coming together in free civil association and that this is directly reflected in the engagement of citizens in the political process.
- In European countries there has been a steady growth in the direct participation of civil society organisations and citizens in setting priorities for government
- Participatory democracy is seen as a fundamental underpinning for representative democracy

Service Delivery

- Increasing numbers of services are delivered by civil society, eg. France and Germany
- Tradition of the *social economy* follows mutual ownership & cooperative models
- NGOs can reach closer to the local communities and ensure that services are effective
- Services are transformed by partnership with community, this adds wider value than government
- Importance to maintain independence even in receipt of government funding

Early example of NGO relations with government

- The Coram Family - or the Foundling Hospital in the 1750s.
- Government grant to look after orphans but it attached conditions which required the trustees to change their normal practice of selection and instead required them to accept all children.
- Eventually the hospital decided to cease the grant as they preferred to have greater autonomy.
- Importance of diverse funding!

Participation of civil society in Europe

- Growth in interest from the European institutions in the participation of citizens and civil society
- European Transparency Initiative led to Code of Conduct for Interest Representatives
- Consultation around the European Constitution and Treaty led to Plan D / Debate Europe
- European Parliament AGORA in 2007/08, deliberation by civil society groups
- Lisbon Treaty sets out article to require participation of civil society
- Council of Europe Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation

Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation – Key priorities

- Series of recommendations aimed at national NGOs and national public authorities
- Provides clear guidelines on participation of civil society across Europe that may also be used at EU and international level governance
- Considers 2 axes for the process: 1. Levels of Participation; 2. Steps in the Political Decision-Making cycle
- Offers guiding principles and practical useful tools in each part of the process

Wider International Partnerships

- Particular links to Commonwealth countries eg. Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Nigeria, Zimbabwe
- USA – Independent Sector
- Connections on civil society in Japan and China
- International networks – CIVICUS, Affinity Group for National Associations

**Further research is available
from our website:**

www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

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