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Analysis of 100 Years of State Society Relationships

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Analysis of 100 years of Irish State: Society relationships. Present tensions are not new but are different.

Irish political culture has always been dominated by a political culture consistent with a relatively passive civil society to serve the interests of the political, economic and cultural elite and the status quo. This is grounded in a Catholic and corporate view of civil societies role as helper rather than as advocate. It reflects an underdeveloped appreciation of the role of public participation in the public sphere and the importance of freedom of expression and association, as underpinning representative democracy.

The global concept of civil society is deeply contested one, we define civil society as those associative spaces independent of state and market where society comes together to shape the type of world they want. Civil society actors can be distinguished from political society who pursue the world they want through electoral politics. While there is overlap civil society differs across political cultures, its modus operandi range from protest, advocacy, campaigning, community development, to various forms of service delivery and volunteering.

Aggregating civil society and its different tensions may obscure more than illuminate. Because the broad net of civil society (actors outside of the state and market and outside of political society and family, working in diverse ways) is wide, it is often more useful to a) differentiate civil society by what they want rather than what they do and b) to recognise that various strands of civil society can be in tension with each other in terms of what they want. We are interested here in those in civil society who work across a variety of methods to pursue social justice, and who value solidarity, equality, democracy, community and environmental sustainability. Crowley comments on the difficulty of defining civil society and sub sets therein. A traditionally defined subsector of Irish civil society 'the community and voluntary sector' (CVS), is different to what is also sometimes referred to as the progressive civil society or the social left. The boundaries of any discrete sub sector will be blurred.

Murphy (2023) attempted to map the numerous fragmented and often siloed sub sectors within that part of civil society that might align with such values and identified 5 civil society spheres; income inequality, production, work, and welfare spaces; local value led community action status equality, political representation, identity and voice, affective justice care and social reproduction; climate justice, ecology and environmental movements. International development and faith based organisations may be part of or represent additional spheres of this sub sector, as might individual citizens seeking to work in solidarity with others. O'Broin and Kirby (2009) argue that progressive civil society now needs to incubate a new social project for Irish society, one that leads to greater justice, equality and sustainability while Kirby and Murphy (2009) argue any such incubation effort is limited by a number of key absences that amount to a relatively weak public sphere in Ireland.

The analysis and time line below relates to progressive civil society. The article seeks to advance this incubation by reflecting on what can be learnt about points of tension between progressive civil society and the state and between progressive and regressive civil society. It first reflects on the concept of tensions, then unpacks dominant historical political ideologies as they relate to progressive civil society before focusing on the period post 2002 which appears to have marked a significant shift in the state's and societal ideological orientation to civil society.

Unpacking tensions

While there have been very impressive and impactful moments of agency, Irish civil society has been institutionally shaped by a populist state in the historical trajectory of Irish state/society/market relationships, and through a particular political culture and political economy or model of development. Ireland's particular culture of state and society relations has evolved alongside the internationalisation of its political economy, and while this has impacted, Ireland has always found it difficult to balance the functions and powers of representative democracy with other forms of democracy (associative, participative and deliberative). Tensions are inevitable. Overfocusing on these tensions and pressures can obscure how impactful social justice civil society has been. Civil society even in the context of pressures, has had remarkable impact shaping and often modernising society. In fact many points of tension can be usefully understood as elite reactions to an empowered civil society¹.

Irish political culture thrives on strategic ambivalence (wilful or otherwise, Hsu 2015) and it is difficult to decipher 'what happens' from 'threats about what may happen'. The relationship of 'anti-poverty'/empowerment' movements is always going to be tense in relation to groups whose power they challenge, (including others in civil society and political society, comprised of political parties and political elites and overlapping NGO's) as well as the state. In this context 'tensions' and 'threats' seem more like intrinsic pressures or features of what these movements set out to do rather than problems to be resolved. While some threats did lead to funding withdrawal, many similar threats never materialised². Nonetheless such threats can be chilling and inhibit or suppress advocacy (Harvey, 2014).

Stories of how organisations resisted threats are also important as points of learning, inspiration and conviction. So too stories about what these movements have achieved in the context of the political culture in which they operate are important. Any contrast between Ireland of the 1980's will highlight the small and large victories, improvements and advances won by that sub sector of civil society who worked and struggled through and resisted the inevitable tensions between those who favoured the status quo and those seeking transformative social change. While the analysis below focuses on tensions between social justice oriented civil society and the state, aiming to contribute to understanding what remains similar and what has changed, it tells only a partial and far too negative a story. We also need to listen to celebrate and learn from stories of struggle, determination and success.

Within the diversity of the social justice civil society sphere there are relationships with political society and institutional insider strategies have been used to various degrees at different times. The community and voluntary pillar entered social partnership in 2006. Some primarily civil society actors also had specific relationships with actors in political society. The environmental sector brought into late and post social partnership structures, their 2007-2012 and 2020 -2024 relationship with the Green Party in government contrasts with and is a source of tension with direct action and protest tactics (Extinction Rebellion). Decisions about insider /outsider strategies have been the focus on internal civil society tensions.

Tensions also emerge over the equality agenda and wider equality discourse with the emergence of recognition and representation politics perceived as taking public and political attention away from the politics of redistribution. The capacity of gains in the cultural sphere to address resource and

¹ For example the Right to Water, Claiming our Future, Equality and Human Rights Alliance, Extinction Rebellion, Spectacle of Hope and Defiance etc in the recent past, and historical housing, socialist and gender struggles when civil society coalesced behind progressive agendas including anti-imperialist struggles including opposing Reagan's visit in the 1980's, and more recent struggles around equality combined with environmental sustainability including Shell to Sea and Love Leitrim

² Including for example Minister Charlie McCreevy's threats to defund the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed or Minister Eoghan Murphy's threats to defund homeless organisations in the 2010's.

power inequalities is to the fore of this unease. This unease is captured when we contrast State support for civil and political rights with a lack of State action on socio-economic rights (IHREC, 2023). It is also observed in the discourse around the care referendum in which debates emerged about the willingness of the State to recognise care but a concurrent unwillingness to resource that care. At the same time, traditional politicised identities such as the working class no longer carry the same association for most people who prefer to be defined as 'ordinary' than 'working-class' (Savage et al., 2001). Yet, the need for a more intersectional equality movement has yet to gain leadership in the civil society sphere.

Dominant Political Ideologies

A key reason for reflecting on the long term trajectory is to make more explicit the context and ideologies that have framed civil society. For three quarters of the state's life, politics and political society was dominated by Fianna Fail who excelled at working alongside, and even seeing themselves as part of a civil society that understood this political culture. As civil society, from the 1960's onwards, began to step out of the shadow of political society we see a political dance between state and society. In many instances European or philanthropic funding stepped in to fund more progressive forms of civil society than Irish political society seemed willing to fund or consider. Membership of the EU and international developments exposed the state to more social democratic understandings of participative democracy teaching and for period an advocacy coalition supported a stronger community based participative framing of civil society.

However as a stronger civil society became independent and moved away from political society, newer measures were used to control civil society, shifting over time from earlier cruder cultural or social mores, and funding technologies shift to more managerialist technologies enabled in this century by marketisation (procurement and commissioning) as well as governance and legal controls. As Fine Gael have come to share power more with Fianna Fail we see an increasing political rhetoric about 'law and order' reflecting a different political nuance to FF, but one that also, in the interests of social order, seeks to suppress advocacy and to restrict civil society to service provision. Policy has focused on generating quasi-markets of sectoral services which are commissioned by the state and procured through marketisation processes, particularly procurement, from civil society. These policies have worked their way through the state in ways that have redrawn the boundaries of state influence over civil society. Legal frameworks increasingly unsettle civil society.

While some civil society actors, perhaps best exemplified by Society of St Vincent de Paul, maintain a charitable version of civil society that is normatively popular and politically untouchable – when contestation of state policy is smoothly managed within its leadership. Other civil society actors have had a more ambivalent relationship with the state and experienced a 'vindictive state' willing and able to punish and deflate civil society actors who 'stepped out of line', were 'too ideological' or got 'too big for their boots'. Four sub sectors are worth examining; feminist, disability, migrants and class, and the intersectional spaces in which they overlap.

The feminisation of the civil society and community sector is a key part of this story; it has been a key space outside of waged labour where civil society has politically organised. And as the sector became more professionalised, it has also become a key site of employment for women (Barry, 2008; Powell and Geoghegan, 2004). This gender dimension of staffing in the community sector is a significant factor for consideration when exploring the ways in which the sector is limited by access to influence and resources (McMinn, 2000). The successes of this feminised and feminist movement, from the founding of Cherish and the Irish Women's Liberation Movement, both in 1970, included the 1973 Commission on the Status of Women and the establishment of what is now known as National Women's Council, and along with defeats, progressive legislation abolishing illegitimacy in 1987, and introducing divorce

in the 1990's, and abortion over the last decade, and also significant social welfare, labour market and health reforms. These gendered conditions and concerns of civil society has been given little analysis in the changing structures, policy, financing of this sector. Yet the backlash to the equality agenda, specifically gender equality and socio-economic gains for women is part of a small, but growing ideology in Irish society. Buttressing this ideological backlash, is the growing economic insecurity in many communities; a housing crisis, cost of living crisis and declining public investment in care infrastructure at a community level means that women, and specifically women who rely mostly on public services, are disproportionately impacted. And this equality agenda backlash intersects with a growing anti-immigration ideology, which is targeting communities where community infrastructure is least developed or has been removed through previous austerity cuts and policy shifts.

Social justice civil society has also strongly developed in relation to disability advancing the principle 'nothing about us without us; and challenging the tendency for state and societal actors to offer 'sympathy' instead of solidarity or political action. The importance of the developments are contextualised by the degree to which incarceration or confinement marks early history for people with disabilities in Ireland – as part of an institutionalising approach characterised by early State provision of asylums, the Lunacy act (1871) was only recently repealed by 2015 Capacity Act]. The highlights for the social justice disability movements³ include the Forum of People with Disabilities (XXXX to XXXX), the fall of the first Disability Bill (2001) in 2002, the Disability Act (2005), the Disability Rights dimension of the 2009 UN Convention of Rights of People with Disabilities and the more recent Capacity Act 2015 and 2022. Inclusion Ireland (originally founded in 1961 as the 'National Association for the Mentally Handicapped of Ireland' is now over 60 years old and as a well-established "civil society" organisation. Other key milestones include the 1986 introduction by Department of Social Protection of a disability related income support, the Irish Deaf Society's promotion since 1981 of Irish Sign Language (ISL), and the establishment of the Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI), as CIL in 1992, and the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (1996) and the National Dementia Strategy (2014).

The migrant focused sphere of civil society includes organisations focused on economic migrants and employment rights, national and local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) focused on providing support and advocacy for refugees or asylum seekers, sometimes specialising in specific legal or focused social supports and groups focused on racism, ethnicity and interculturalism. New Communities Partnership (NCP) is an independent national network of 175 immigrant led groups comprising of 65 nationalities with offices in Dublin and Cork with outreach to other cities, while Pavee Point Travellers and Roma Centre, ITM and NTWFI, and others network more specific ethnic interests. The *National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism* (NCCRI) was closed by the state in December 2008 and its functions transferred to the Office of the Minister for Integration. The expertise gathered by the NCCRI, the bridge between authorities and the civil society, and the unique reporting system about racist incidents were lost (Lynch et al, 2017). A significant loss when we witness the current rise of racist rhetoric which the Irish European Anti Racism network, the Hope and Courage Collective and the Strategic Dialogue Institute now track. By far the largest economic migration oriented group is Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) is a national organisation working through a community development and strong advocacy model to promote justice, empowerment and equality for migrants and their families. Legal groups focused on asylum seekers and refugees including

³ There is currently no national funding mechanism for disability bodies or organisations to cover running costs where they are solely advocacy bodies (as opposed to offering services). There are 4 types of disability organisations: DPOs and emerging DPO umbrella organisations. • Voluntary disability service providers, of which many are charities, and which receive state funding. (There are also statutory disability service providers). Umbrella organisations that represent service provider organisations and other disability organisations. • Advocacy organisations that are not DPOs, DPOs are civil society (third sector) organisations of persons with disabilities as distinct from disability charities and other disability organisations for persons with disability.

advocacy and information in their work⁴. Social groups provide various services⁵. while a significant number of regional actors are also important sources of support⁶.

Community development programmes closely overlap the above and also intersect with class and socio-economic status, Kelleher and O'Neill (2015) systematically map the story of community development cuts, closures, cohesion and alignment such that over a decade the concept of community development was severely diminished, leaving a vacuum in many communities that repressive civil society seeks to fill, particularly in working class communities where access to public services is traditionally poor and where years of austerity have impacted significantly on public infrastructure. Austerity and alignment impacts were augmented by processes of procurement which diluted community development aspects of the Social Inclusion Community Action Programme, favouring individualised labour market interventions over community development. Local community development settings had traditionally provided a space for discussing personal issues that avoided the professional ideology of what Mills (1963) described as social pathologists. Instead, they allowed people to share personal troubles collectively and, according to Crowley (2013:153), the community space offered the platform from which to articulate these collective interests and the means to agitate for an effective public and policy response to these interests. Local Community Development Programme (LCDP) structures have curtailed this more authentic type of activism, which has subsequently been replaced with the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). SICAP is more service-driven and underpinned by a logic model that prioritises outputs rather than wider structural change. Administrative and reporting responsibilities in the Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) were excessive and time consuming (Kelleher and O'Neill, 2018). The move to tendering community services was highly criticised by the community and voluntary sector (Community Work Ireland, 2016). While there have been recent moves to invest in community development in such areas the reality is that the process of community development takes time, across generations, and cannot be delivered in one or two budgets.

The time line

A 100 years analysis shows that a strong civil society associated with anti-imperial independence building was then smothered by a nascent state which required civil society to work to serve the perceived interests of insiders of new state. Who these insiders are shifts depending on who is in power but up to 1970's Church, indigenous business and rural cultural leaders were dominant. The 1960's and 1970's marked a period of turbulent change when CVS contested state policy and asserted other interests. 1973 EEC membership and greater exposure to international actors led to a shift in

⁴ Including the Irish Refugee Council, Legal Aid Board Refugee Legal Service and Independent Law Centres based on the Immigrant Council of Ireland, and Free Legal Advice Centres, who offer free and confidential legal information and advice to the public.

⁵ Ranging from the UN and International Organization for Migration (IOM, established since 1951 as part of UN) who focus on voluntary return, family reunification, counter-trafficking and resettlement. The Irish Red Cross have most recently been involved in housing asylum seekers and refugees (including Ukrainian's and work to restoring family links. Spirasi provides support to survivors of torture who are asylum seekers, refugees, or other disadvantaged migrant groups. Crosscare Refugee Service (formerly Vincentian Refugee Centre) is an information, advocacy and referral organisation for people with Stamp 4 residency and the varied service and advocacy of the Jesuit Refugee Service

⁶ Including Cork based NASC in the South of the country, Doras, based in Limerick, Mayo Intercultural Action, Clare Immigrant Support Centre (CISC), the Immigrant Support Clinic are in Co Kilkenny and the Tralee International Resource Centre and Killarney Asylum Seekers Initiative in Co Kerry.

state-civil society relations, EU funding, recognising paltry local government capacity, invested in strong local community development programmes.

The 1958 reorientation of the political economy towards international investment was a significant development. After a significant period of industrial unrest over the period of global recession throughout the 1970's and early 1980s in 1986, the state adopted Irish style corporatism which lasted until 2008, and incorporated the more pluralist style CVS in 1996. This incorporation was always ambivalent in terms of support of state and other actors, and from time to time CVS were subject to attacks and accused of being 'the poverty industry'. There was also contestation within CVS about how to situate in relation to the state.

2002 marks a shift in ideology, to the dominant frame today, tensions are not new.

Harvey⁷ identifies 1997 as a key year when 'the state strikes back' first standing down a community development oriented policy unit in the Department of Social Welfare. The establishment of The Wheel in 1999 was a key moment in consolidating a political culture that was moving to a more service delivery sector. Here the focus was on good governance, training and dissemination of knowledge. Logic models associated with philanthropic funders reinforced shifts towards managerialism, and the philanthropy sector was also a willing participant in consolidating service providers, 'social innovation and enterprise', championing individual rather than collective leadership. overtime we see a commissioning model for service procurement and the hollowing out of community development. This move to tendering community services was highly criticised by the community and voluntary sector (Community Work Ireland, 2016). The tensions in this somewhat ambivalent relationship were mediated in the key milestone White Paper *A Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector*. Published in 2000 it encompasses the old preference for voluntary activity and the more ambitious preference to see the community and voluntary sector as an independent actor advancing participative democracy.

The shift is particularly evident as a shift in ideology when the Progressive Democrats enter government as a coalition partner of Fianna Fail, shifting what may have been a social democratic leaning centrist party, towards a more liberal and market leaning coalition. This shift was reflected in a significant cohesion process whereby community development was reshaped into a weaker form of local development aligned with local government. The 2007 Task force on Active Citizenship reinforced the dominant preference for volunteering and social innovation.

From 2002 a new period emerges when the always contested and ambivalent partnership between the state and CVS, evident in strong local community infrastructure and a relatively rich national equality institutional infrastructure, comes under attack. The first period of attack was largely ideological and involved the dismantling of the community development programme and alignment of a much weaker and narrower labour market focused local development programme within the structures of local government, enabling more political control of local activity.

The second period of attack was under the guise of austerity but was also reflected a deeply ideological and managerial intent to regain central government and bureaucratic control of policy and to stifle advocacy and dissent of national agencies and CVS. From 2008 the 'Bonfire of the Quangos' decimated over 40 equality and inclusion oriented national agencies, with significant consequences for women's interests, race and class. The high profile closure of Combat Poverty Agency shocked many but it had been made irrelevant before closure. In 2010 the Equality Authority budget was reduced by 43% and the limping authority was eventually merged with the Irish Human Right Commission to form what is now known as Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in 2014. Harvey (2014) records significant losses of social documentation capacity over this period, a capacity that to this day has not

⁷ Harvey B (2009) Ireland and civil society, Reaching the limits of dissent in O Brion D and Kirby P Dissent Power and Democracy, Dublin A A Farmer p 25-34

been recovered. The environmental sector were belatedly brought into declining social partnership structures in 2009, and while environmental actors pursued other insider strategies with the Green Party as a junior but influential coalition actor (2007-2012 and 2020-2024) they also managed to maintain distinctive outsider strategies and tactics.

This shift from 'old' to 'newer' politics is associated with new forms of political institutions including constitutional conventions, citizens assemblies and local authority embedded public participation networks, these offered opportunity for new forms of relationships but also undermined older forms of relationships and in some respects may have been seen as a bypassing of civil society as a conduit to citizen participation. Nonetheless civil societies role in two popular referendums in 2015 and 2018 was celebrated.

The same period, and perhaps in part as a backlash to these modernising referendums, saw the pre-pandemic emergence of the far right mobilising in local communities often around accommodation of international protection applicants. The political culture for progressive civil society is now complicated by a far right/right agenda which includes weaponising 'NGO's as a part of resisting transformative change that advances equality. This was evident for example in 2024 care/family referendums which were heavily defeated. The ruling centre-right mainstream this agenda and contribute in their own discourse to a delegitimization of non-government organisations.

What is new

What is new over the last ten years is a combination of legislation, social media and far right tactics, electoral advances and new forms of anti-migrant political discourse as well as delegitimization of NGO's for social justice human rights and equality, a delegitimization that is amplified by the mainstream centre of Irish political life.

Legislative restrictions and marketisation

From the 2016 period a minority FG government embarked on a post- austerity period of reform. In this period charity regulation and standards in public office legislation, which had been introduced in 2009, was interpreted and implemented in a manner that was considered to impede the public advocacy role of social justice oriented civil society. This period of 'new politics' focused on state and political capacity while rolling out a process of marketisation (commissioning and procurement) effectively making quasi- markets of many sub-sectors of CVS. Overtime we see a commissioning model for service procurement and the hollowing out of community development (Murphy Irwin and Maher 2020). This was a form of technocratic control which required CVS to shift culture and values to be effective 'market actors'. Combined with a range of legislative reform to restrict and 'gag' advocacy the CVS is being corralled by the state marketisation techniques into a more passive service delivery role. Operational constraints are also imposed by the unequal distribution of resources and power at play and the control of funding in particular (Bassett, 2007). These constraints are also impacted by the 'alignment' process and devolution programme undertaken as part of *Putting People First* (2012) to integrate community development programmes into local authority structures through Local Development Companies (LDCs). This was the context in which 'business as usual' was interrupted by the March 2020 pandemic.

Far right presence

Echoing international developments in US and Europe pre pandemic there was evidence of isolated far right activity in communities and on social media as people tried to seed far right ideology in local communities. The pandemic accelerated the social media space in which anti-vac, ant-abortion, anti-migrant and climate change denial activists overlapped and reinforced each other.

The far right presence, also referred to as a shadow civil society, conservative civil society and right wing civil society, is an aspect of civil society resisting equality, socio-eco transformation and democracy and with a clear objective of progressing a project of the elite who benefit from the status quo. This presence signal a period of tension within civil society in that it challenges another civil society to have a project and to progress a project of the disempowered. If such an alternative does not exist the far right fills the vacuum and social justice civil society is relegated to contesting the framing of the far right rather than contesting the power holders and proactively framing its own narrative . .

Coarsening of political culture and intimidation

Post pandemic, the presence of the far right organisations domestically and through international alliances has emboldened a coarser political culture with a range of social media based repertoires including use of mobile phone to video record, tracking, and intimidating equality NGO's staff and volunteers to the degree that people feel threatened and unsafe. Political society and political leaders have also been exposed to such tactics. Legislative, policing and regulatory responses are needed including controls on the international social media corporate powers.

Focus on migration

Over 2023/4 these groups have picketed, protested and sabotaged accommodation of international protection applicants, with familiar tropes amplified any new forms of aggressive use of social media 'Ireland is full', 'X say no'. In July 2024 there as a significant escalation of far right protest in the UK, including in Belfast where Southern based .activists are present in violent protests. Some observe that civil and political society in NI have come out more strongly to condemn the violence in Belfast than (with some exceptions) similar southern actors.

NGO weaponisation

The liberal concept of NGO's, QANGOS and GONGOS⁸⁸⁸ was used in new public management discourse and over time filtered through to Irish political discourse often as a language of 'delegitimization', witness the Bonfire of the Quangos in 2008, and a mantra of distrust government-funded organisations during the pandemic and throughout social media during the 2024 referendum. A feature of recent coarser political discourse, social media tropes and electoral/political dialogue has been a weaponisation of non-government organisations sometimes following a US anti-government logic that perceives the NGO as working towards government agendas. The NGO delegitimization while from a new source, fits well with old tensions between the dominant actors in Irish politics and that part of civil society advancing social justice.

Electoral strategy

Some of these far right activists contested in the local and European authority seats, and while overall they had little impact, they were notable individual successes and we may expect more concerted efforts in the next general election. Of particular concern in the May 2024 election context was the success of Independent Ireland, and the growing emergence of an anti-NGO (non-government organisation) narrative seeded by the far right and right and entering national political discourse

⁸⁸⁸ NGO's, non-government organisations QANGOS quasi- autonomous non-government organisations and GONGOS government owned non-government organisations

(helped by the agency of independent senators and TDs). To some degree eagerly received and amplified by the centre right parties who have always wanted a passive civil society that served and is easily controlled by the political elite.

Strategies for progressive civil society

Despite tensions between state and civil society, social and cultural change to date has been underpinned by a form of deliberate democracy; the success of repeal and the same sex marriage referenda were driven by civil society. There were other forms of organisation in the face of changing structures and tensions such as Communities against Cuts, Claiming the Future and Equality and Rights Alliance. More recently, there is some sense that elites and political society are beginning to understand the nature of the vacuum in communities that the far right are manipulating. Years of austerity, alignment and cohesion have worked and local and national civil society for social justice needs to be supported. The recent re-emergence of the Community Development Pilot Programme in the Department of Rural and Community Development and the positive focus on autonomous community development organisations holds out for some potential of a shift in state – civil society relations.

By late 2024 there is considerable momentum as progressive civil society prepares to strike back with numerous reflection points and collaborative efforts across diverse actors as they try to make sense of the world they find themselves in. The momentum includes new forms of hyper localised and informal forms of association across all forms of civil society reflecting a shift in power from more vertical to more horizontal and even diagonal forms of power and networking, some enabled by social media. In this context new forms of coalition building and alliance building are emerging. As Klein (2014) observes successful ways forward have to be intergenerational, benefiting from the memory and institutional knowledge of older activists and combining this with the muscle and mobilisation capacity and social media orientation of the younger generations, giving new meaning to solidarity. This is the context progressive Civil Society has to find ways to assert and affirm its crucial role in enabling equality, human rights and democracy (Timms and Heineman 2022).

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Chronological Timeline

Key milestones in Irish social justice

civil society, tensions with state and society

TEXT COLOUR KEY key tense 'moments'

State striking society

State reacting to society

Society in momentum

Regressive civil society (inequality)

Timeline by decade

State and internal civil society and internal society tensions

Narrative

Late 19th century

- Movement building and contribution to anti-colonial narrative.
- British state was hostile to Irish civil society.

- Emerging pre independence civil society was against the British imperial state. Cultural, sport, language and gender movements agitated for political change in relation to sovereignty, women's suffrage and land reform.
- Nationalist-inspired artistic, cultural, language, labour, feminist and sporting groups blossomed late 19th century.
- Innovative rural co-operatives (consumer and producer), and Inghinidhe na hÉireann (IÉ) 1900...1914, Cumann na mBan.

Early 20th century

- Civil society active in both pro and anti-state building.

- 'Soviets' and other forms of economic models.
- Tradition of industrial and agricultural 'self help' ethos establishing civil society.
- Church dominated civil society oppressed other forms of civil society.
- Nation building and innovative political reform oriented experimentation.
- New culture of state control in political and cultural spheres.

1930s 1940s 1950s

- FF embracing and smothering civil society.

- Community self-help - conservative.
- The Irish Countrywomen's Association, Irish Housewives Association and Muintir na Tire.
- Most questioning of ideology was through political society.
- Trade union movement a source of conflict as unemployed workers movement in the 1950's was powerful but weakened by splits influenced by Church (McQuaid)
- Advent of independence marked the decline of civil society activism.
- Civil society organisations active in the new state remained very dependent on the state, both ideologically and materially.

1960s and early 1970s

- Women's liberation movement important counter force including 1971 Contraceptive Train.
- New forms of union activism (new ICTU) and new institutional engagement with state actors (NESC etc).

- Campaigning and movement building era (inspired by international civil rights movement).
- Dublin Housing Action Committee, Women's Liberation Movement, Anti-nuclear movement, Living City Group, Save the West Campaign and Civil Rights Movement in the Gaeltacht. Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement.
- Mobilisation of movements to counter areas neglected by the state in both ROI and NI.
- Period can be considered a new era of contestation between civil society and state.
- 1970: Cherish (now One Family) founded.

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1973

- Emergence of anti-poverty and politicised Community Development.
- Ambivalent period of state-civil society relationships, innovation and resistance from power holder incl some civil society.

- New forms of grass-root community development in context of recession.
- EEC membership and 1st Combat Poverty programme invested in innovative new programmes.
- Emergence of Simon Communities with significant impact.
- EU membership and exposure to new thinking on poverty.

1980s

- Political society (Haughey) call ESRI 'creeping Jesus'/attack CRMS. The status of illegitimacy was abolished in 1987.
- 1983 referendum and masterminds of the right.
- 1986 Divorce Referendum defeated.

- Significant industrial unrest.
- 1980s Women's Community Education.
- 1984-1988: EU Poverty 2. 1986: Combat Poverty Agency and National social partnership.
- Emergence of key national networks and new style of campaigning organisations, including an infrastructure to represent the Traveller Community, Pavee Point (now Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre), Irish Traveller Movement and National Traveller Women's Forum Ireland.
- 1989: Irish Refugee Council established.
- Older style continuity volunteering, health and social service NGOs.
- Shift to Irish style corporatism which privileges elite interest groups working for stable economy, insider win-wins Business, Labour, Agriculture.
- Most civil society 'outsiders' and more pluralist or radical in orientation.

1990s

- Strong investment in Community Development funded by EEC/EU and bypassing representative political structures.
- Development of equality infrastructure.
- Extension of partnership to C+V Pillar.
- 1995 Divorce Referendum narrowly passes.
- 1992 - attacks by FF Minister Charlie McCreevy on Poverty Industry in response to INOU 'Dirty Dozen' Mac the knife Mc Creevy.

- CDP expanded to over 200. Family Resource Centres 100. 15 Regional Support Agencies.
- 1990-1995: EU Poverty 3.
- 1994: Equality infrastructure. 1997: NAPS. 1993: NESF. 1996: CVP in NESC and Social Partnership.
- 1996: Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities.
- CVP and Community Platform - issues of equitable access/influence
- State resourcing of national networks through CPA.
- Debates about partnership within about the sector - ambivalent period with some disquiet about c-option and some temporary Social Partnership exits.
- 1999: The Wheel founded to foster social entrepreneurship and serving Irish community and voluntary organisations, charities, and social enterprises.
- Emerging disquiet in political system and attacks on 'poverty industry' and 'representiveness' of CVP in partnership.

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2000s

- Key policy statement affirming civil society and democracy - settlement of tense debate about civil society/state relation, tensions reflected in title.

2002

- 2001: Citizen Traveller contested by state.
- 2001: Amnesty International 'Are they Racist' Posters sharply critiqued by FF.
- 2002: Successful campaign to reject Disability Bill.

2004-2005

- Cohesion Process Begins.
- Period of intense state/civil society tensions with resistance to policy direction, confusion and panic.
- Centre for Effective Services contested as a mechanism for managerialism.
- 2005: Shell to Sea protest heavily policed and resisted by state.
- 2005: Community Work Co-op (CWC) funding ceased - state accused of political vetting.
- 2006: Closure of Centre for Public Inquiry.

2007-2011

- Charities Act.
- SIPO legislation.
- 2007 Report of the Task Force on Active Citizenship (pro-volunteering).
- 2008: National Committee on Racism and Interculturalism closed.
- 2008 - 2017: Economic recession and national insolvency.
- Bonfire of the Quangos - 40 closed.
- Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) closed.
- Equality Authority budget down 43%.

- Animated debate and consultation feeding into the White Paper, *A Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector*, 2000.
- Neoliberal managerial regime begins Shift from the previous 'settlement.'
- 2001: Immigrant Council of Ireland established.
- Fianna Fáil (FF) Progressive Democrats (PD) Coalition (2002-2007). Ideological shift.
- Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRAGA, 'Craggy').
- Community Development Programme brought into Craggy from DSP.
- Entry of key philanthropic funders using 'logic models' to shift from advocacy and participatory democratic spaces to managerialist service provision.
- Warning to CDPs to desist from public campaigning and advocacy.
- Community Development funding cut by 17 %.
- Regional Support Agencies closed.
- LEADER Companies merged with 94 Area Based Partnerships, reduced to 52 'Local Development Companies.'
- Quango Pobal brought under central government control.
- CDP support role disbanded.
- Disability Act 2005 and 2006 welcome for Disability Rights dimension of the UN Convention of Rights of People with Disabilities, long campaign for adoption.
- Fianna Fáil (FF) and Green coalition.
- New Centre of Effective Services (CES).
- Sense that state used real economic crisis as 'screen' to pursue ideological agenda and close down national equality and gender infrastructure with particular orientation to take out difficult voices.

Chronological Timeline

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2010s

- 2008-2010: Bonfire of the Quangos.
- 40 national equality focused organisations closed down.

- **Environmental sector in late/post social partnership structures.**
- Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund) to €64 billion Bank Bail Out.
- "Alignment Process."
- 19 CDP closed without warning in 2010.

2010-2014

- Cohesion and Alignment process effectively ended the Community Development Programme and aligned local civil society into local government.
- 2000s: HSE silencing disability organisations through SLAs (the Advocacy Initiative, Are We Paying for That (Harvey 2014).
- Failure to support sustainability of autonomous social justice civil society (Claiming our Future, Equality Rights Alliance, Spectacle of Hope and Defiance, Right2Change Closures as points of tension.
- 2015: Lobbying legislation.
- Severe cuts to One Parent Family Payment.

- May 2011: the LCDP was transferred to the DECLG - integrated and aligned Local Development Companies (LDCs) with local authority structures.

2011-2016

- Austerity resisted by but also devastated CVS.
- 2015: Dublin City Inner City Partnership controversially closed by state.

- Fine Gael and Labour Party in Coalition Government.
- Austerity, disproportionate impact on the CVS and equality infrastructure.

2016-2020

- 'New politics' era - CCs and CAs.
- Threats to homeless organisations FG (Eoghan Murphy).
- 2015 and 2018: Marriage Equality and Repeal referendums - strong civil society.
- 2016: Irish Travellers recognised as an Ethnic Group.

- Fine Gael minority government supported by Fianna Fail and Independents.
- Period of largely state, political and government focused institutional reforms to remedy governance deficits.
- Limited reinvestment in CVS infrastructure, still undercapacity relative to pre-austerity period.

2018

- 2018: RAPID disadvantaged communities state funding discontinued.
- EU directives used to advance 'Corporatisation' of civil society by marketisation of state funding (commissioning and procurement).
- Emergence of far-right in local communities.

- Beginning of new political era where far right in silos are visible in communities and on social media (MAGA Trump, USA).
- Pandemic - seen as validation of strong society - but service oriented (GAA, V de P, Tidy Towns, FRC's).

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2020s

- 2021: Justice for the Undocumented and MRCI win 11 year campaign for regularisation scheme.
- 2022: NWC No Woman Left Behind rally contested by government.

- Overlapping of anti-vac, ant-abortion, anti migrant and climate change denial.
- Develop of social media culture.

2022-2024

- Contestation of accommodation centres for international protection applicants arson, intimidation - context of state failure to engage with civil society.
- The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Act 2022.
- 2024: Green Paper on Disability shelved.

- Emergence of new style anti-NGO voluntary soup runs (2010s) and Apollo House occupation.

2024

- Wheel, ICCL, TASC, Values Lab, EAPN and academics all contesting status quo.
- Re-emergence of community development in DRCD.
- Ireland is full, Eastwall says no, Coolock says no, riots in Dublin (2023) and Belfast (2024).

- CVS resistance to emerging anti NGO narratives.
- Attempt to reframe positive civil society narrative.