Welfare Governance, counter publics and civil society: reflections on contrasting cases in Canada and Ireland

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Introduction

In Western welfare states there has been a convergence in policy towards active rather than passive welfare and a stress on an enabling role for the state. The extent of this trend varies from one state to another depending on the relative openness of the economy and on local political and institutional characteristics. Underpinned by international treaties and policed by international bodies such as the International Monetary Fund and the Commission of the European Union, nevertheless the trend is clear.

This convergence is a response to the growth of flexible labour markets, the free movement of capital and the outsourcing of jobs to other jurisdictions, linked to an ageing population. These reforms have generated a reconfiguration of welfare, from a concern for social protection from market forces and a concomitant focus on social citizenship (Marshall, 1950, 2006), towards labour market activation and participation (Surender, 2004; Lewis, 2004; Lister, 2004). Social protection has been replaced by labour market activation and welfare by a discourse of personal empowerment (Clarke, 2005).

Discussion of the impacts of these trends on the reconfiguration of the relationship between voluntary and nonprofit organizations and the state has tended to focus on the emergence and recognition of a policy space delineating a third sector as a single policy actor (Kendall, 2009; Casey et al, 2010; Acheson, 2010) on the one hand, and on the other on the implications of a "hollowing out" of the state as it has retreated from direct welfare provision and has sought to steer policies through a complex set of policy

networks and partnerships (Kooiman, 1993, 2003; Pierre, 2000; Clarke and Glendenning, 2002; Rhodes, 1997, 2007).

This literature tends to be uni-directional variously conceiving the trends as moving from welfare to workfare; from state to market; from the welfare state to the enabling, or social investment state and so on (Clarke, 2004; Lister, 2004). Similarly there is a rich literature on voluntary action focusing on the impact of these changes on the independence of voluntary organisations (Smerdon, 2009); on the regulatory regimes under which they operate (Carmel and Harlock, 2008); and a more long-standing concern, their cooptation into government agendas (Piven and Cloward, 1979, McCarthy et al, 1991). In general the effect is portrayed as a series of setbacks. The empirical literature on the influence exercised by nonprofit organizations on partnerships and other policy networks is guarded (Taylor, 2007; Larragy, 2006). In formal arrangements such organizations lack the power necessary to influence policy outcomes.

The narrative of threat and decline emerges from the "basic civil society hypothesis" – that there is a separate civil society sphere, which has unique importance for achieving a more civilised society (Dekker, 2009: 235). It is a tradition that has its roots in de Tocqueville and can be traced through Almond and Verba (1963) to Putnam (1993, 2000) and continues to have a considerable grip on public policy (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2008). But it is an idea that has been superseded, or perhaps challenged, by the growth in complexity in governance arrangements in contemporary welfare states (Dekker, 2009).

In government conflicted discourses on the purposes of policy and the means of implementation, on the meaning and nature of participation in governance structures, and on the rights and responsibilities of citizens jostle between policy fields and often also within them (Levitas, 1998; Barnes et al, 2007; Newman and Clarke, 2009). The sum of civil society organizations in turn embodies complexity and diversity. It is a "loose and baggy monster" which the creation of single "Third Sector" occupying a defined policy space can

never wholly capture (Kendall, 2009). All of which is to indicate that a narrative of set backs in the new world of welfare capitalism offers an inadequate way of understanding the processes that are actually at work. How do these two sources of complexity relate to one another? Is it possible to argue that spaces of discussion and contention open up within civil society in ways that influence or set constraints on the policy interpretations that are available to governments?

This paper constitutes a speculative attempt to address these questions by introducing the concept of agency. It asks what are the circumstances that enable organizations in civil society to engage in political acts of claims-making that challenge leading discourses on welfare, the nature of citizenship and policy orientations towards civil society. It proceeds by first discussing the relationship between civil society and the public sphere before mapping the reconstitution of citizenship in the post welfare state on to state sanctioned discourses on the functions of voluntary action within the policy space delineated by concepts of the third sector. This analytical framework helps ground activities constituting the public sphere in "actually existing democracy" (Fraser, 1990) and provides a jumping off point for analysing ways in which counter publics are created within civil society by active interventions in meaning construction and identity formation. Drawing on social movement scholarship, this paper argues that the dynamic is better understood in terms of the relationship between capacity to create counter publics in civil society (Fraser, 1997) and the operation of discursive and political opportunity structures (Tarrow, 1998; Koopmans et al, 2005).

Some implications of these unassigned roles determining public policy are discussed with reference to contrasting cases of the exercise of agency within immigrant serving organizations in Ontario, Canada, and the mobilization of older people to defend age related social benefits in the Republic of Ireland. In Canada except for in Quebec the Federal government retains responsibility for managing immigration and citizenship. The Provincial

governments have responsibility for health, welfare and education services. Half of all immigrants to Canada settle in the Province of Ontario. As a result of lobbying from the provincial government an agreement was reached with Federal government on the settlement of new migrants supported by a substantially increased budget for settlement services. These services, which are provided for new arrivals in their first three years in their new country, are funded directly by the Federal government and are mostly delivered by nonprofit organizations under contract. Once a new immigrant has Canadian citizenship (typically after three years) they are no longer eligible for Federal support of this kind. The contracts offered to the immigrant serving organizations are highly specific allowing very little flexibility and giving very little scope to the individual organizations involved to influence immigration policies and wider debates on the developing role of immigrants in Canadian cities in Ontario where typically between 30 and 50 per cent of the population is foreign born. The paper draws on interview evidence from the Chief Executive Officers of a number of these organizations in one Ontario city who have entered into a voluntary arrangement with each other, based on half day monthly meetings and operating under a set of informal rules rather than a formal structure that serves both to foster practical cooperation and as a civil society 'voice' locally on immigration issues carrying influence at Federal, Provincial and City levels of government. Operating outside formal governance structures, it has nevertheless established itself as an authoritative vehicle for opinion.

One constraint on the role and reach of this informal arrangement is the extent to which the organizations that participate are willing and able to support the necessary commitments from their CEOs to make it work. Clearly, if it consistently took an oppositional stance to the thrust of Federal government policy, then the services of the organizations behind it might be under threat.

In contrast to this example of the creation of a public sphere by a creative stretching of organizational capacities within boundaries set by an overarching political consensus, in

Ireland in October 2008, a mass mobilization of pensioners on the streets of Dublin forced a reversal in government budget policy. The collapse in the Irish economy in 2007/2008 led to the first of what is becoming a series of cost-cutting budgets. In 2008 the government had targeted a number of age related social and health benefits, in particular a right to free health care for those aged 70 and over, seeking to introduce a means test. The mobilization forced a retreat from this policy to the extent that in the second round of cuts in October 2009, older people's benefits remained sacrosanct. Ireland has had a long history of governing through formal partnerships with civil society and business interests. Older people's organizations along with other interest groups in civil society have been involved in national partnership structures that oversaw the development of the economy during the years of rapid economic growth between 1995 and 2007. Structurally, this representative work was carried by three 'peak' organizations at national level, supporting a mass of pensioner clubs and societies, running into the thousands at local level. Until the events of 2008, this arrangement was largely politically ineffective. By then, pensioners were among the few social groups whose relative economic position had declined during the so-called "Celtic Tiger" years, despite the extent of organizing and the insider strategies of their peak organizations.

The street protests were organized by the Irish Senior Citizens' Parliament, a national representative body made up of about 315 member organizations with a combined individual member base of about 90,000 older people (Acheson and Harvey, 2008). Up until October 2008, the Parliament had relied on insider lobbying, presenting itself as an expert witness focusing on the process leading up to the annual budget negotiations. What prompted it to mobilize its base and take to the streets? How did the leadership construct the circumstances as an opportunity for mass action and why did it judge that insider strategies that it had relied on in the past had failed?

The paper argues that both these cases are instances of active meaning construction within civil society that in their very different ways created new "facts on the ground" that governments in their turn had to respond to. The Canadian example shows that a capacity and willingness to stretch the framework determined by governments for managing relations with civil society organizations are by no means confined to protests against austerity budgets, but can occur in the context of an otherwise consensual political climate. The point is thus a more general one about the exercise of agency within organizations and the implicit capacity of civil society in democratic states.

The Canadian evidence is drawn from interviews with five CEOs of immigrant serving organizations carried out in summer, 2009. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in full and subject to manual analysis. These data were supplemented by further set of scoping interviews in 2008 and 2009 with senior officials in the Federal, Ontario and city governments and with commentators on Federal government policy on immigration and on the voluntary sector respectively.

The Irish evidence is drawn from a detailed historical/analytical account of the development of voluntary action on ageing in Ireland (Acheson and Harvey, 2008), supplemented by content analysis from two national newspapers, the Irish Independent and the Irish Times for the month of October, 2008.

Civil society and citizenship and welfare reform

The literature on welfare reform delineates a trend away from "traditional welfarism" (Evers, 2009) in which social rights of citizens are underpinned by state financed and directly managed universal services towards a set of much more fluid arrangements that are themselves contradictory and contested (Surender, 2004; Lewis; 2004; Clarke, 2004; Newman, 2005). In this process there has been a widespread trend towards greater policy interest in the role of civil society in the production of welfare, accompanied in many

jurisdictions by the development of an explicit policy space in which elements in civil society have been constituted as a single object of policy (Kendall, 2009; Casey et al, 2010).

At the same time there has been a renewed interest in the concept of civil society, dating back to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the ending of a number of authoritorian regimes, particularly in South America, both in the late 1980s. More recently discussion of the concept of global civil society driven by the Johns Hopkins Comparative non-Profit Sector Project (Salamon et al, 2003) and the publication of the *Global Civil Society Yearbook* (Anheier, et al, 2001, cited in Munck, 2006) has given rise to a debate on what constitutes civil society and how it relates to normative judgements on what constitutes the good society (Edwards, 2004, 2009; Munck, 2006; Anheier, 2007; Dekker and Evers, 2009). Ceding the point that talk of civil society without a normative dimension is a dead end (Anheier, 2007), this debate has as a consequence to a large degree drawn on a tradition that conceives of civil society as the sphere of society where citizens debate the nature of the good and engage in political discussion on how to achieve it.

There has thus been a trend towards a synthesis of the three analytically distinct literatures on civil society, as a part of society, a kind of society and as a public sphere where debate on what constitutes the good society takes place (Edwards, 2004, 2009). To determine the extent of civil society, the literature has used structural operational definitions focusing on voluntarism, independence from government and so on (Salamon et al, 2003) but it has also drawn on the idea of coordinating mechanisms to distinguish it from the state and the economy, the difference between them being exactly summarized by Young (2000: 159) who writes that in the associations of civil society "people coordinate their actions by discussing and working things out, rather than by checking prices or looking up the rules". This view draws on Gramsciian and Habermasian traditions that emphasise the importance and role of civic debate on both social ends and means (Gramsci, 1971;

Habermas, 1989) and presents civil society as an idealised realm where coordination through discursive rationality is clearly distinguishable from the market and bureaucracy.

If the problem for the neo-Tocquevillians is to collapse the concept of civil society as part of society with the normative idea of the good society, confusing form with norm (Edwards, 2004, Dekker, 2009), there is an equal danger of viewing civil society and the public sphere as coterminous. In practice much activity in civil society takes place outside the public sphere, if that term is taken to designate "a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction "(Fraser, 1992: 110).

Strictly speaking, then, the public sphere only corresponds to that part of civil society through which citizens discursively engage with politics. "The public sphere ...relates to institutionalized public communication wherein individuals can campaign for juridical rights whilst its private sphere relates to the intimate space of personal relationships" (Roberts and Crossley, 2004: 13). The public sphere "mediates between society and the state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion" (Eley, 1992: 290). It is only in the public sphere that civil society institutions contain their transformative potential (Keane, 1998). In this way, differentiated institutions within the broad category of civil society can be either public or private (Cohen and Arato, 1992).

Young (2000: 160-162) further refines differentiation within civil society outside the public sphere into two: private and civic.

- Private association is self-regarding and limited to members and they tend to be inward looking and particularist. They may range from hobby clubs to spiritual renewal and more often than not concern enjoyment and suffering.

- Civic associations on the other hand are primarily directed outwards towards others and their activities serve not only their members but a wider community. In principle membership is inclusive.

Both these must be distinguished from the public sphere whose institutions are distinct in that they focus on claims about what the "social collective should do" (ibid: 162). For Young, political activity "consists in voicing issues for public debate about what ought to be done, what principles and priorities should guide social life, what policies should be adopted, how the powerful should be held accountable, and what responsibility citizenship carries" (ibid: 162-163).

Young argues that associations can migrate between these three levels and in some cases incorporate all three in differing aspects of their work. She emphasizes, however, that the public sphere in the Habermasian sense belongs only to what she terms political association in that it is there that the potential for enlarging and renewing democratic practice is to be found. In contrast, private associations can be fundamentally anti-democratic and exclusive.

In practical terms, the public sphere is not a single idealized realm of rational political engagement. Rather as Fraser (1990) suggests, in "actually existing democracy", the public sphere is fragmented into a series of counter publics, standing against hegemonic discourses around any number of specific issues. They occur when citizens assert claims about the nature and extent of citizenship itself and the rights to have grievances addressed on the basis of those asserted citizenship entitlements. Civic action moves into the public sphere when new publics form around a process of political claims making.

This conceptual framework suggests two questions: first how are the broader structural and discursive elements of contemporary trends in welfare reform changing the context in which counter publics can and do form; and second, what might be the mechanisms that are in play that influence whether any particular formation in civil society enters or leaves the public sphere.

Welfare reforms have been articulated around a number of competing welfare discourses (Levitas, 1998), with matching discourses on the role of the state and other social actors, including civil society in the production of welfare. Evers (2009) identifies, consumerism, empowerment and participation, and activation in a social investment state as three current approaches that stand in contrast to "traditional welfarism". Each of these can in turn be aligned with an orientation in policy towards civil society: consumerist, democratic life renewal and civil revivalist respectively (Kendall, 2009). To these three might be added a fourth, an austerity state discourse in which an invitation is extended to civil society to take a central role in new (and cheaper) forms of welfare production that combine elements of the other three in an intensified form, but with a marked emphasis on a civil revivalist orientation towards the third sector.

What is missing from this analysis is a discussion of accompanying reconfiguration of citizenship. Citizenship is the key concept that links the restructuring of welfare production to the possibilities of the active creation of counter publics and the enlargement of the public sphere. Civic action does not occur in a vacuum, but is conducted by citizens in contexts where the meaning of citizenship is constituted in leading discourses delineating whom is to access the benefits of belonging to a national community, how and on what terms (White, 2003). New narratives on citizenship have accompanied the reform of the welfare state in an attempt to reconstruct the ideal citizen in an image that fits the new order.

With the end of traditional welfarism, the configuration of citizenship has been changing from an enjoyment of rights through membership of a national community to an expectation of the exercise of responsibility and civic virtue expressed in the idea of active citizenship; from a right to work to equality of opportunity to compete in the labour market and from an enjoyment of collectively provided welfare goods to being "empowered" to purchase welfare from a state subsidized and regulated market. Increasing conditionality and the commodification of welfare is creating a new type of ideal citizen. This 'ideal citizen' becomes a template for approved civic action that is designed to shape civil society as one fit for the new welfare order. The change has been summarised in a variety of ways. The heroic citizen is one who is a "self interested actor, actively seeking information, incentives, choices and business-like services so that s/he can decide on the best course action for her/himself by him/herself" (Doheny, 2004: 59). Clarke (2005) refers to this ideal type as the consumer citizen and draws attention also to the activated, empowered and responsibilised citizen, whose citizenship is also conditional (Newman and Clarke, 2009). Citizenship tends no longer to be described in social terms, as a collective protection against risks, but is determined by the "behaviours, attitudes, choices and motivations of the individual", where the emphasis shifts "from collective responsibility of the welfare state to the individual responsibility of the individual citizen" (Valkenburg, 2007: 30, cited in Newman and Clarke, 2009: 167).

Table one shows how these new forms of citizenship map onto discourses on welfare production and orientations towards third sector organizations in policy.

Table one

Welfare discourses, third sector policy orientation and citizenship

Included		
Welfare discourses	**Orientation of policy towards third sector**	**Conception of citizenship**
Consumerism	Consumerist	Consumer citizen
The activating social investment state	Civil revivalist	Responsible citizen
Empowerment and participation	Democratic life renewal	Empowered stakeholder citizen (accepting leading discourses)
The austerity state	Under-articulated and implicit but with a strong civil revivalist emphasis	Responsible and active citizen
Excluded		
Traditional welfarism	Social democratic – complementary and gap filling afforded a low priority	Citizen with social rights
Small state	Non interventionist/liberal	Public citizens free to determine the basis on which they engage with each other and the state

The exercise of citizenship is at least implicitly structured by leading welfare discourses and policy orientations towards the third sector. In this framework we might expect to find counter publics forming either around challenges to the boundaries of the empowered stakeholder citizen or the boundary between included citizen discourses and the excluded claim of social rights, particularly where this claim confronts discourses on responsibility.

How is the emergence of claims making structured? The concept of political opportunity structure developed from the related resource mobilization social movement

literature and sought to emphasize the way that mobilization was seldom the result of underlying strains or social structures in a straightforward way but was mediated by opportunities and constraints in the political environment (McAdam, 2003; Tarrow, 1998). Political opportunities will determine the extent to which the makers of claims can be facilitated or blocked from access to power structures. In addition, the circumstances must be framed as propitious, the issues must be framed and presented as appropriate for action among people who understand themselves to be affected by the issue and those individuals must see themselves as the kind of people to take action (Benford and Snow, 2000). Framing becomes possible, however, in the context of discursive opportunity structures which "determine which collective identities and substantive demands have a high likelihood to gain *visibility* in the mass media, to *resonate* with the claims of other collective actors, and to achieve *legitimacy* in public discourse" (Koopmans et al, 2005: 19).

Discursive opportunities are established in contemporary governance structures through processes and practices that have the practical effect of placing limits on what is considered appropriate, commonsensical, or possible both by policy actors and citizens in the context of leading discourses on welfare production and citizen roles (Newman, 2005; Carmel, 2005). Claims making becomes visible where there are contradictions or where such discourses lose resonance and legitimacy. The process of mobilization then, relies on the active intervention of civil society actors who collectively make sense of their circumstances as demanding action and political engagement. Where there are appropriate political and discursive opportunities these can create new "facts on the ground" that can change not just the ways that policies and procedures are viewed, but which can force change in the direction of policy.

Canada and Ireland: two cases of weak third sector policy

The core issue is the extent to which government policies and programmes around the leading discourses of welfare production specify orientations towards third sector roles

and appropriate citizen behaviour that close down political and discursive opportunities for claims making in welfare fields. I propose examining these processes empirically by contrasting case studies in two jurisdictions and two policy fields. The policy fields are immigration and the welfare of an ageing population, both of which have a very high political salience in many Western democratic jurisdictions.

In Canada, where immigration rates are the highest in the world (Banting et al, 2007), it will nevertheless be argued that opportunities for civil society actors to engage with the politics of immigration are constrained both by the way immigration and citizenship are constructed in policy, and by the policy orientation towards the third sector role in this field. Although there is considerable variation among cities in the province of Ontario, in the city studied direct collective action by immigrants themselves was rather invisible, but that leading third sector agencies under contract to the Federal government to deliver welfare services to new immigrants had successfully created a public space where civil society actors were able to engage in the politics of immigration at city, province and federal levels.

In Ireland the claims of older people for the retention of universal health care benefits dramatically clashed around competing narratives of social citizenship and responsible citizenship, forcing a government policy retreat. In contrast to the Canadian case, in Ireland events were driven by mass action among pensioners; civil society organizations were forced to respond to events, but were nevertheless able to effectively channel the anger and construct a coherent narrative that together changed the politics of ageing in Ireland into something altogether new. Taken together both cases suggest some dimensions of the political and discursive opportunity structures that are opening up in an age of austerity budgets, third sector service delivery and responsible citizenship.

The politics of immigration and immigrant serving organizations in an Ontario city: a "pretty pernicious takeover"?

Context

The developing role of voluntary organizations in the immigration field in Canada needs to be interpreted against the background of immigration policy and the degree of coherence in government policy towards the third sector. As is the case in Ireland, Canada has a weak sense of the Third Sector as a distinct policy field (Phillips, 2009) with a consequent poor strategic vision of the role of the sector in governance arrangements. As a consequence, the treatment of the sector in specific policy fields tends to be driven by issues within those fields and by administrative drivers such as accountability and risk aversion. Two factors in the immigration policy environment are crucial to understanding the impact of the political and discursive opportunity structures on how voluntary sector players in the field are both structured and how they exercise agency.

Canada has the highest per capital rate of immigration in the world (Banting et al, 2007). The majority of immigrants now come from Asia and the Indian sub-continent as well as from Africa, replacing historical patterns of migration from Europe. In 2001, over 55% of immigrants in the preceding ten years were born in Asia, a further 7.7% from Africa and 10.9% from the Caribbean and Central and South America. As a result the proportion of the population who are visible minorities has increased more rapidly than the population as a whole, estimated as likely to be more than 20% of the population by 2017 (Statistics Canada, 2010). Over half of all immigrants to Canada settle in Ontario, a large proportion in the greater Toronto area, where more than half the population is born outside Canada, but they also head to other cities. In the city studied, which I will call Mapleville, immigrants

will account for 27% of the population and visible minorities 28% by 2017 (Statistics Canada, 2010).

The rapid change in numbers and origins of immigrants in Canada dates from the mid 1980s when policy shifted to increase numbers and to look further afield than the traditional European sources. In 2008 approximately 250,000 entered the country under the points system with a further estimated 260,000 entering on temporary work permits, many of whom will stay. The increase in the temporary permits has been driven by recent changes in Federal government policy which has put a greater stress on the immediate labour needs of employers and has consequently relaxed the regulations in this area (Aliweiwi and Laforest, 2009).

A significant feature of the structure of the voluntary sector directly addressing immigrant issues in anglophone Canada is the relative invisibility in the public sphere of most groups embedded in immigrant communities. Figures produced by Imagine Canada suggest that about 6% of the 45,460 voluntary organizations in Ontario have as their principal beneficiary group, "specific ethnicity, culture or immigrants", or about 2,720 organizations (Scott et.al., 2006: 8). The category includes immigrants with first nation and minority ethnic groups among people born in Canada, but it nevertheless suggests a substantial level of organizing among recent immigrants. In contrast, the membership directory of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants had 266 members in April 2010 (OCASI, 2010). Similarly in Mapleville, a city of about 800,000, none of the interviewees in the study, either in voluntary organisations or in the city government were able to give a clear account of the identity or numbers of these associations, although some were willing to suggest that there were "a lot". In contrast, in Mapleville there are nine, high profile, immigrant serving organizations, five of them with a long history, but the others attaining their current status in the last ten years. They are the only organizations in Mapleville that are currently members of OCASI, the Provincial representative body.

The contrast is based on the structure of government policy and funding. Under the Canadian constitution, the Federal government retains policy for immigration and citizenship and related settlement services, with a special agreement with the Francophone Province of Quebec. Provincial governments have responsibility for education, health and social services. After many years of pressure from the provincial government for equivalent levels of immigration support funding that was the case in Quebec, the Canada Ontario Immigration Agreement was signed in November 2005. The Federal government agreed to $920m in new immigration funding over the next five years (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). In Ontario the funds are administered directly by the Federal government, which maintains a network of offices that support the delivery of immigration services under contract by voluntary organizations. The nine organizations studied in Mapleville are those that receive funding to deliver services in the city under this programme.

Although multiculturalism remains formally Canadian government policy, it has become a progressively less salient feature of Federal government activity since the mid 1990s. A substantial programme of funding followed its promulgation as policy in the early 1970s most of which went on multiculturalism project grants (Bloemraad, 2006). By the mid 1990s, this programme had effectively disappeared and with it the main source of money for culturally specific grassroots associations in immigrant communities. At the same time multiculturalism policy was relegated to a minor function within the Federal Department of Heritage with a small budget. A double shift in funding of voluntary associations in the immigration field thus took place. The funds both shifted decisively from multiculturalism to settlement services and from a grant to a tightly specified contract culture, subject to close audit oversight.

This changed both the political and discursive opportunity structure. Claims making on the basis of cultural recognition became more difficult as policymaking on the basis of multiculturalism retreated, both politically and discursively and the grassroots associations

lost capacity. The newly resourced immigrant serving organizations have been constrained by the funding regime that does not recognize the legitimacy of advocacy activities, tightly specifying how they should spend federal money, in a process one of the interviewees in the study described as a "pretty pernicious takeover".

Creative stretching of organizational remits

The Mapleville associations have addressed this problem through the creation of an informally organized joint network that has not been constituted as a separate organization and has no resources of its own other than the time of the chief executives of its nine member organizations. It nevertheless has its own identity that is used to address policy issues based on the work of its members and it is represented on citywide fora. Meetings are held with Federal government ministers and officials in its name.

The network has been meeting monthly for 25 years, but its value became particularly apparent as the funding regime changed in the 1990s. Cooperation meant that member organizations refused to indulge in competitive bidding for contracts and enabled them to specialize in different aspects of immigrant services. One interviewee commented: "It makes for much better coordination, but at the end of the day we end up being far more influential and effective. And I flag the influential part particularly…We share a lot of power and a lot of information and I have no qualms nurturing leadership in the other organizations because if they're strong, I'm strong" (Interviewee 'A').

A second interviewee (interviewee 'B') emphasized the restrictions placed on advocacy work and the vulnerability individual organizations experience in taking stances critical of government. She cited the example of the Canadian Arab Federation that had recently lost $2m in funding "because the chairperson has said something derogatory about the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration", and added: "we have all started to be afraid". The value of the network was clear. "When I want to say something critical of government I

never say it in (my organization's) name. I say it as (network name). It is a coalition – you would cut the funding of nine organizations? Then there would be uproar".

One important effect has been to amplify the voice of immigrant communities in an environment where their own associations get little political recognition. Two of the larger network member organizations have a community development function that they fund from their own resources that enables them to act as a bridge to public debate and to politicians, helping new communities articulate their needs "in a manner that's going to be understood and accepted here" and taking these issues into the network's agenda when appropriate.

It has further enabled them to raise taboo issues in immigration policy, notably the impact of race. Immigration policy in Canada is focused on pathways to citizenship; once that is attained, it is assumed that the new Canadian citizens will have adequate protections in law to make their own way and there is no public policy space to debate the extent to which immigration experiences are being increasingly shaped by racial discrimination. Each of the network organizations have brought their own experience to the table to jointly strategise a social inclusion policy for the city that will directly acknowledge the race problem and seek ways to address it.

The network represents a set of shared organizational strategies to overcome a very restrictive and narrow policy environment, both in terms of the appropriate roles of third sector organisations in governance where it receives little formal recognition, and in immigration policy where the role is conceptualised mostly terms of settlement services. It operates wholly in the public sphere but in a way that is designed to protect individual member organizations from censure and possible loss of funding.

Its effectiveness is derived from the long-term commitment of the chief executives of the nine member organizations to sustaining it and using it as the vehicle to facilitate public claims making on immigration issues and it has taken time for it to achieve the weight it

carries in public debate. It represents a model of public engagement that depends on consistency and commitment over a considerable period. It also depends on a shared belief in the Canadian approach to immigration and citizenship that are not in themselves being questioned. But what happens when a crisis marks a decisive break with a consensual political and discursive opportunity structure that nevertheless permits little substantive challenge on fundamental issues of citizen entitlements? Here the events surrounding the budget in Ireland in October 2008 offer a telling illustration.

Age Rage in Ireland

Voluntary Action and older people in Ireland

Many local and small associations, largely focused on recreational and social activities dominate voluntary action among older people in Ireland. There is no reliable map of these associations. Evidence from a postal survey of these known to the Health Services Executive in 2006 suggests that over half have incomes of less than ¢5,000 a year (Acheson and Harvey, 2008). Most appear to be recently formed, with 58% formed since 1990 and80% since 1980 (ibid). Involvement in policy-making was rather limited and mostly passive. Only 15% reported being represented on policy-making bodies, whilst a further 48% reporting being consulted by government agencies informally either regularly or occasionally. Fewer than half the associations were members of a national federation.

There is no single national federal structure. Both Age Action Ireland and the Irish Senior Citizens' Parliament aspire to be the national representative body for older people and they tend now to share an equal status. Both these date from the early 1990s. Age Action Ireland emerged from a private initiative and is modelled on the UK charity, Age Concern (now Age UK) combining a federal membership structure, advocacy and service provision. The Parliament was established as a direct outcome of the 1993 European Year of

Older People and Solidarity between Generations. At the time of the budget protests, it had 460 affiliated organizations representing about 100,000 people (Ingle, 2008).

The voluntary sector and governance in Ireland

As a response to economic and political problems in the 1980s, the system of government was substantially changed to include a wide variety of interests in formal partnership arrangements at local and at national levels (Adshead and Quinn, 1998; Walshe, 2001). At the same time and in response to the same pressures, new voluntary organizations became active in the fields of unemployment, social welfare and community development (Larragy, 2006). These new organizations were brought into the formal national partnership arrangements in October 1996, changing their status from external critics to critical participants (Larragy, 2006: 376). The National Partnership, which also includes employers, trades unions and farming interests has developed a series of national partnership agreements that operate in parallel to the programmes fore government introduced after each general election but not necessarily coinciding in time. The current programme, *Toward 2016*, includes commitments to improve the situation of older people, including pensions, long term care services, housing and health care. These commitments were in turn reflected in the current government's programme for government, introduced after the last general election in 2007.

Both Age Action Ireland and the Irish Association of Older People were members of the community platform which constituted the community pillar of the National Partnership Council until 2000, when the community platform withdrew from the partnership in protest at the lack of progress on issues prominent on the platform's agenda (Larragy, 2006; Acheson and Harvey, 2008). Age Action Ireland and the Senior Citizens' Parliament have retained places on the reconstituted community pillar thereafter.

Older people's organizations have also been represented on the National Economic and Social Forum in their own right. The Forum brings together the social partners and members of the Irish Parliament (TDs) to consider and make recommendations on policy options and has paid particular attention to policy on older people. Close insider contact between the principal national older people's organizations and partnerships and policy communities centred on the Department of Health and Children have resulted in a largely shared analysis of the issues in public policy and ageing and the strategic solutions (Acheson and Harvey, 2008).

Notwithstanding this policy architecture and shared perspective, two factors should be borne in mind in the light of the events of October 2008, described below. The first is that as Larragy (2006) points out, the community pillar's presence on the national partnership had no noticeable impact on the levels of poverty and inequality. Whilst the remarkable economic growth of the Celtic Tiger years, left everybody better off, levels of inequality remained stubbornly high and are among the highest in Europe. Further the position of older people saw a relative decline in incomes over the period since 1995, with the relative value of pensions falling (Acheson and Harvey, 2008). Murray (2004) characterised the situation of older people as difficult, citing poor housing, widespread discrimination, insufficient support for carers, unaffordability of nursing care and insufficient incomes (Acheson and Harvey, 2008: 43).

Second, although basic social welfare benefits are now at a similar level to many other European countries, Ireland stands out for the small proportion of GDP spent on health care compared to European norms. It has by far the lowest relative social expenditure on older people among the 15 member states of the European Union before the 2004 enlargement (Acheson and Harvey, 2008). Access to universal state funded health care only dates from the 1970 Health Act and doctor and hospital visits and the cost of drugs are subject to a fairly stringent means test, with only 30% of the population qualifying. Before 2001,

medical cards were available only to those whose incomes were at levels set by state social security payments. There is a substantial insurance-based private health sector. Although the medical card scheme dates back to the 1970 Act, it was only in 2001 that the government extended the entitlement to free health care to everybody over the age of 70, irrespective of income.

The 2008 budget

The budget in Ireland in October 2008 was introduced in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the international banking system and within weeks of the Irish government guaranteeing loans from Irish banks in the first of what became a coordinated move by governments across Europe and North America. Tax revenues had collapsed and the government was facing a current account deficit of ¢9.4bn.

In the week prior to the budget newspapers were emphasising the need for national sacrifice and the "baleful reality of a small open economy" where "the only people who can save us are ourselves" (Irish Independent, 9th October: p27). The same opinion piece carried the headline: "Brian[1] won't be doing job if cuts don't hurt". A similar view was carried in the Irish Times (Irish Times, 11th, October, 2008). On the day before the budget, the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Brian Cowan insisted that the government would not shy away from making unpopular decisions and implementing short-term sacrifices. On the same day, the plans to target free medical care for people aged 70 and over received their first press airing; the only hint had been carried by the Irish Times the previous week as an idea "being floated by observers" (Irish Times, 4th October, 2008, p7). The Minister of Finance acknowledged that the government must protect the most vulnerable, but "it is essential that we ask people to face up to the fact that social benefits need to be targeted at those most in need of them" (Irish Independent, 14th October: p11).

[1] Brian Lenihan was (and remains) Ireland's Minister for Finance

This discourse of sacrifice was accompanied by little public indication of where trouble might come from. Little lobbying activity by voluntary associations reached the press. In the two weeks before the budget there were only two instances. A press release from St. Vincent de Paul elicited the headline: "Don't hit poor through indirect tax rises, begs charity" (Irish Independent, 3rd, October: p18). There was a large colour display advertisement from the charity, Autism Awareness, pleading: "Don't cut back on his services in this budget" (Irish Independent, 9th October: p9). It is evident that press coverage was not a strategy that appealed to voluntary sector lobbyists in this period.

The budget was presented to parliament on 15th October. It confirmed the end of automatic entitlement to free health care for those aged 70 or over with the view of saving ¢100m a year. The Minister for Finance called for patriotism and was reported as making it clear that he was unsympathetic with arguments made by sectional interests. The Minister for Health was reported as saying that the stark choice was to continue with the non-means test medical card scheme or sacrifice funding for home care packages and supports such as home helps (Irish Independent, 15th, October: p1).

By the following day, the decision and the lack of clarity over its impact were being portrayed as a "debacle" (Irish Independent, 16th, October: p1). There had been a flood of angry calls to radio chat shows immediately following the budget speech. Elderly lobby groups were reported as receiving a flood of calls (Irish Independent, 16th October: p15). An Age Action Ireland spokesman was reported as saying: "People are very frightened about the future". The Leader of the Opposition accused the government of a "brutal attack" and that the government party should "hide its head in shame".

A significant problem was the lack of clarity over what the income threshold for medical cards would now be and how many would thus be affected. Two days after the budget the government announced a three-tier system. Full medical cards would now only be available for people whose incomes were no more than the state contributory pension. Others would

get access to free general practitioner services while others would qualify for an annual payment towards their medical expenses. Only 15 per cent of those who would now be means-tested would lose state support altogether, about 20,000 people.

By the time of this announcement newspapers reported that phone lines to constituency offices and radio phone ins were in "meltdown" and reported a growing "tsunami of anger" over what had "transmogrified into an evil measure to wrestle medical cards from little old ladies" that had mobilized a formidable army of septuagenerians (Irish Independent, 18th October: p19). Groups in civil society were now starting to mobilise. The Chief Executive of Nursing Homes Ireland, a federation of voluntary and private sector homes, was reported as saying that the proposed changes had caused "unprecedented distress among older people" and was "simply not acceptable". Age Action Ireland announced a public meeting for 21st October in Dublin city centre to discuss the budget proposals to which Ministers, and TDs (members of Parliament) would be invited to hear the concerns of older people. The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament announced a public demonstration outside the Parliament building on 22nd October, the date of the vote on the proposals.

The government had a small majority with a nervous junior coalition partner and the support of a few independent TDs. Its political vulnerability was underscored by the resignation over the issue by a backbench TD, a threat to do likewise by others and a refusal to support the measure among a few independents. Faced with this pressure by the 20th October, the government had retreated and announced that the scheme in the budget would not now go ahead and that the decision would be re-examined. It now proposed retaining the principle of the means test but that it would be much less stringent and differing significantly from the means test for those under the age of 70, with the result that only five percent of those to be means-tested over that age would lose their entitlements. The Taoiseach was reported as stating: "the automatic right to a medical card for the over 70s is gone" (Irish Independent, 20th, October: p1).

The campaign retained it focus on the principle of universality however, demanding the proposal be abandoned completely. Age Action Ireland noted that it was disturbing to persist in the face of growing public disquiet and asked whether the savings that the free medical card had created in other parts of the health service had been factored into the government's thinking. An organization whose style was to engage with government in reasoned debate informed by evidence envisaged that the public meeting it was proposing would facilitate an exchange of views and enable Ministers to hear first hand the concerns of older people.

In the event the meeting was overwhelmed by the degree of public anger. So many people turned up that the venue had to changed from a hotel room to a large nearby church where about 1,500 older people were reported as having heckled and booed (Irish Independent, 22nd October, 2008). The Minister for older people was forced to abandon her speech. Press interest in the issue remained high. On 21st and the 22nd October, the Irish Times carried nine news stories and opinion pieces on each day, reducing to six on the 23rd October and the following day, the date of the street protests and the vote, there were six stories. On the same dates the Irish Independent coverage included front-page banner headlines and two full pages of further stories and comments inside.

On the day of the vote in parliament on the modified measures, the mass demonstration to demand the reinstatement of the right to free medical treatment announced by the Irish Senior Citizens' Parliament attracted an estimated 15,000 people. Both the Irish Independent and the Irish Times called the event unprecedented, the largest protest of its kind in years. The protesters believed they could change the vote. Inside the Dail, while government TDs dared not face the crowd, they nevertheless carried the measure by a margin of seven votes.

The aftermath

A core issue was the interpretation of the relationship between citizenship and rights to access universal social benefits. The appeal to patriotism by the Minister for Finance in his budget speech was deeply resented and the implicit call for the exercise of responsible citizenship clearly rejected. Writers of letters to the newspapers used words like "disgust" and "outcry" and "don't talk to me about patriotic duties", strongly expressing the view that government ministers having presided over the collapse of the economy had a nerve to appeal to patriotism; photographs of those present at the protest, show a number of people wrapped in the Irish flag and others brandishing copies of the Irish Declaration of Independence from 1916. There appeared to be a strong consensus among older people that their citizenship entitled them to free medical care. The opposing argument that universal benefits are a poor use of resources because they are not targeted and that the proper purpose of tax funded welfare is the protection of people who through carelessness or ill-fortune could not protect themselves were aired in both the national newspapers analysed, but got little traction in the general population.

The protest against the proposal to end universal access to free medical care for those aged over 70 was driven by anger among older people few of whom would have been active in local associations and where they were, these were largely focused on recreational issues. The political pressure initially came from the thousands of calls to phone-in programmes on local and national radio and an avalanche of calls, letters and emails to the constituency offices of TDs. The role of civil society organizations appears to have been to shape this anger into a plausible narrative around universality and citizen entitlement and, in the case of the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament to provide the organisational base for the mass demonstration. In this sense they were forced to respond to events as much as the parliamentarians. But once engaged they articulated a clear narrative of citizenship rights that in effect has achieved the status of a non-negotiable bottom line that at the same time

changed the relationship between civil society and government, breaking the mould of consensual and partnership governance and changed the nature of welfare discourse. It was a singular triumph for mass action from an unlikely source, whose effectiveness seems to have been related to its unlikeliness

Discussion and Conclusions

Although very different, the two cases described in this paper illustrate how political and discursive opportunity structures shape the emergence of counter publics in two central contemporary issues in welfare governance – the management of immigration and the extent of social entitlements of older people. The relationships discussed are set out in Table two.

Table two

Third sector policy orientation and counter public formation: immigration in Canada and older people's welfare in Ireland

Policy Field	Jurisdiction	Third sector policy orientation	Counter public formation	Treatment of citizenship
Immigration	Canada	Weak; tight regulation through charity law and public procurement	Poor access to policy networks among grassroots associations; Race as an unacknowledged factor in policy discourse	Underlying consensus, focused on planned access to formal political rights
Welfare of older people	Ireland	Weak: structured engagement through partnership arrangements	Access to universal health benefits	Rejection of responsible citizenship discourse

Both the jurisdictions share some similarities in that they share weakly defined and developed policies towards the third sector as a single policy actor, in contrast to other

jurisdictions, particularly the UK (Acheson and Harvey, 2008; Kendall, 2009; Phillips, 2009; Casey et al, 2010). They both nevertheless afford a crucial role to third sector organizations, although in contrasting ways.

In Canada a weak conception of the third sector's role in governance is accompanied by a high reliance on voluntary agencies for the delivery of immigrant services tightly regulated by a public procurement regime that does not acknowledge a legitimate role in policy making. Official immigration discourse in Canada is focused on the planned access to formal political rights through gaining Canadian citizenship, elevating the right to vote over any perceived need to engage directly with immigrant communities through participative governance. Focused on political rights and service delivery designed to assist migrants gain those rights, the political and discursive opportunity structures are rather inimical to claims making based on racial and cultural categories that receive no recognition in official discourse.

This weak empowerment and participation discourse in the face of a felt need in immigrant communities to be heard has opened up a seam of contention where the substantive issue is the need to change immigration discourse to acknowledge the increasingly racialized experience of being an immigrant. The threats in the political opportunity structure have forced civil society actors to creatively stretch their capabilities in order to access the public sphere in ways that at the same time protect their vital interests.

In contrast in Ireland a similarly weak formal set of policies towards the third sector's role has been accompanied by a pragmatic accommodation to sector's interests in a highly developed participative governance structure. Nevertheless these structures proved to be wholly inadequate to the budgetary crisis that engulfed the state in 2008. The extreme nature of the crisis catapulted the issue of citizen entitlements into the public domain in a way that accepted ways of relating civil society to government were unable to accommodate.

The public rejection of the responsible citizenship discourse that government Ministers had explicitly appealed to served to transform the basis of the relationship. By structuring public anger into an explicit claim for social citizenship, the civil society organizations were thereby, and wholly surprisingly, placed in a position where they could set the terms of future engagement.

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