

Catholic Social Teaching & The Big Society

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Background to the Report

Project funded by the Plater Trust in 2011.

Aims:

- to analyse the influence of Catholic Social Thought on the Government Big Society Programme.
- to evaluate the Big Society programme from the perspective of Catholic Social Thought.
- To contribute to the renewal of Catholic Social Thought by an analysis of contemporary social, economic, and political developments in the UK.

Methods:

- Review and analysis of the primary and secondary literature.
- Semi-structured interviews with key informants from the government, the public sector, the voluntary sector, and the Churches.

The Context



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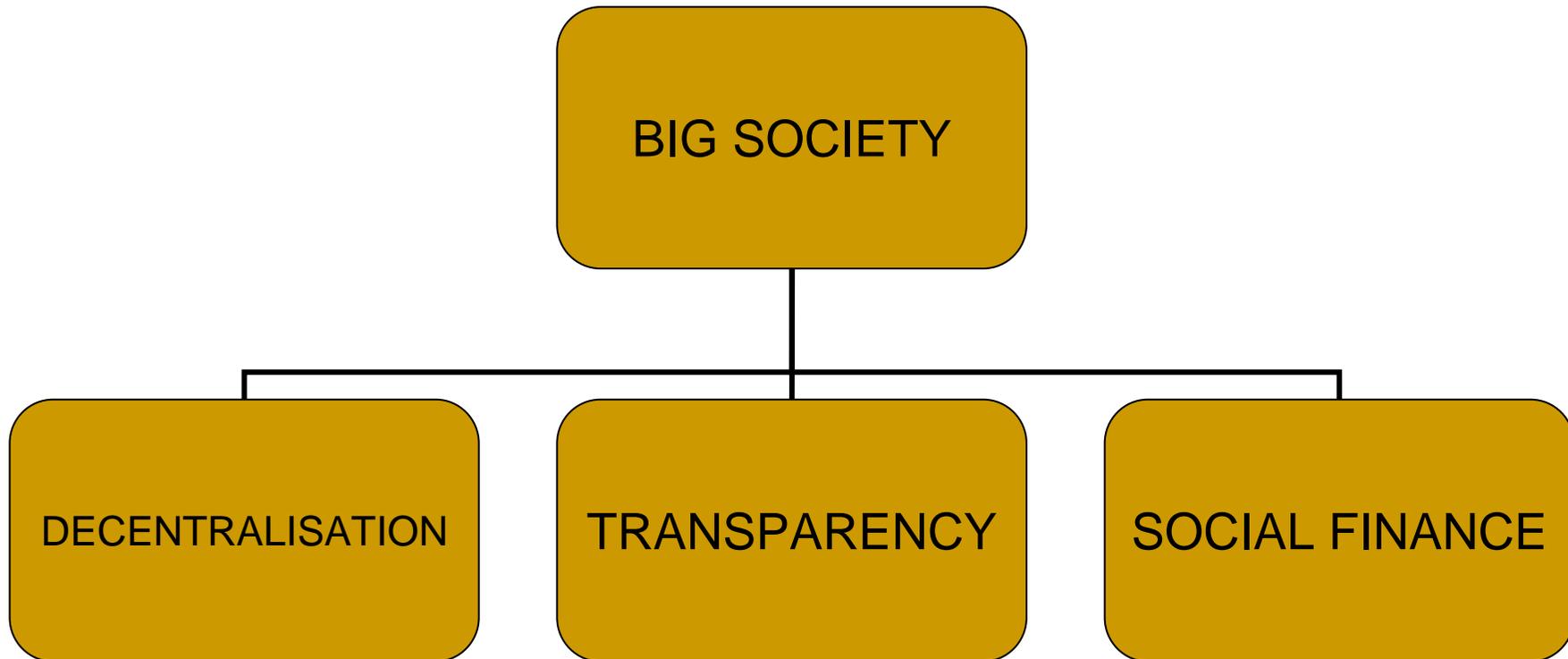
- Political, Economic and Social Transformations – from the 1970s.
- Thatcherism and Conservatism.
- New Labour.
- The struggle for the soul of the Conservative Party: David Davis vs. David Cameron.
- The financial crisis of 2008.
- The Coalition Government.

What are the aims of the Big Society programme?

These have been laid out speeches by the leaders and documents published by the Coalition:

- **Public sector reform** – what the public services of the state can do for us: not dependency but helping people to help themselves.
- **Community empowerment** – what we can do for ourselves: *community empowerment* - not just local councils but many other organizations beyond the state.
- **Philanthropic action** – what we can do for others: *Altruism* delivered by charities, social enterprises, volunteers and givers.

Three methods of realising the Big Society programme



The sources of the programme.

- *There is such a thing as society: Twelve principles of compassionate conservatism.* (2002)
- Analysis of British society: Centre for Social Justice and Breakdown Britain.
- The Red Tory: Philip Blond and *ResPublica*.
- Jesse Norman: the philosopher of compassionate conservatism.
- Lib Dem contribution: The Orange Book.
- Catholic Social Teaching: indirectly via IDS, Philip Blond.

The implementation of the programme.

- Government publications.
- Legislation.
- Policy initiatives.

Government Publications

- Invitation to join the Government of Britain, The Conservative Manifesto 2010
- Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2010
- The Coalition: Our Programme for Government, Cabinet Office, (May 2010).
- The Coalition Agreement for Stability and Reform, Cabinet Office, (May 2010).
- Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: an essential guide, Department for Communities and Local Government, (2010).
- Policing in the 21st Century: Reconnecting the Police and the People, Home Office, (July 2010).
- Universal Credit: Welfare that Works, Department for Work and Pensions, (November 2010). Education: Students at the Heart of the System, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, (June 2011).
- Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS, Department of Health, (July 2010).
- Giving White Paper, Cabinet Office, (May 2011).
- Growing the Social Investment Market: A Vision and Strategy, Cabinet Office, (February 2011). Higher
- The Importance of Teaching: the Schools White Paper, Department for Education, (November 2010).
- Open Public Services White Paper, Cabinet Office, (July 2011).
- A Plain English Guide to the Localism Act, Department for Communities and Local Government, (November 2011).

Legislation.



Major Big Society Legislation

- Education Act 2011
- Health and Social Care Act 2012
- Localism Act 2011
- Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011
- Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012
- Welfare Reform Act 2012

Additional enabling and supporting Legislation

- Relationship to Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish devolution
- Academies Act 2010
- Charities Act 2011
- Dormant Bank & Building Society Accounts Act 2008 – allows Big Society Capital

Policy initiatives



Localism:

- Community 'right to bid' on assets of community value
- General power of competence for councils
- Business Rates discounts applied locally
- Directly elected Mayors
- Local councils to have choices for executive decision making
- Community right to challenge
- Veto of excessive council tax rises
- Regional Planning Strategies abolished
- Neighbourhood planning
- Community right to build
- Requirement to consult on certain applications
- Community infrastructure levy
- Abolish Infrastructure Planning Commission

Education:

- Extension of Academies Programme
- Free Schools
- Pupil premium (Lib Dem)
- Education Networks – Teaching Schools, enlarged National and Local Leaders of Education Network
- New College of Humanities - diversity in higher education provision
- “Pay as you earn” tuition fees
- National Scholarship Programme
- Access Agreements and a strengthened Office for Fair Access in Higher Education Sector

Big Society Policy Initiatives

Welfare:

- Universal credit
- Reduction of universal benefits (free bus passes, fuel tax, etc.)
- Workfare
- National Home Swap scheme for social housing
- The Work Programme

Charity and Social Enterprise

- Big Society Capital (Bank)
- Philanthropy UK website
- Social Action Fund
- Inheritance Tax incentives to give to charity
- National Citizen Service
- Community First Funding matched

Health:

- Creation of GP consortia for commissioning care
- Local Health Authorities into Trusts
- Local government to promote the joining up of all local NHS services, social care and health services
- Creation of world's biggest social enterprise sector

Policing

- Elected Police Commissioners

Freedom of Information

- Open Government and knowledge initiatives – schools, NHS, universities, local government, policing, welfare

Evaluation of the programme.

Based on our analysis of the literature and our interviews we offer the following tentative conclusions:

- The Big Society idea predates the financial crisis: it is not simply about ‘a cover for cuts’.
- Nevertheless, the financial crisis provided a unique context in which to implement a radical reform programme.
- The Big Society programme has had significant legislative and policy consequences: it is not mere rhetoric.
- It is too early to evaluate completely the social and political impacts of these policy initiatives: however there will be important impacts.
- These impacts may not necessarily achieve the original aims of the programme: unintended consequences.
- Coherence and perception: there is an underlying coherence but there is a perception among key informants of incoherence.

Questions arising from the project for Catholic Social Thought.

The Common Good.

What is (the Big) ‘Society’?

What is (the small) ‘State’?

What is the role of the Market?

Subsidiarity.

Solidarity.

The Common Good.



- What is the Big Society's vision of the Common Good?
- Can there be a vision of the Common Good in a society which is dominated by moral relativism and individualism?
- How do we define what is 'good' or 'Good'?
- Does multiculturalism negate the concept of the Common Good?
- Are there many 'goods' rather than a 'common good'?
- Where do the Christian Churches and other religious groups fit in?

What is (the Big) 'Society'?



- Who are the communities that are to be empowered?
- If society is 'broken', can (should) it be 'fixed'? If so, who is to 'fix' it?
- Does this mean imposing a particular moral vision on a multicultural and largely secular society?
- Should (can) the central government be morally neutral on issues such as family forms, sexual relationships, life-styles, etc.?
- Should it support heterosexual marriage as the optimal context in which to bring up children?
- What should be the role of the Churches and other religious groups here?

What is (the small) 'State'?



- What are the role and functions of the contemporary state?
- Should the state intervene to bring about positive outcomes in society and the economy?
- Is local government a part of the state and is it being marginalised by the Big Society programme?

What is the role of the Market?

- What institutions, values and principles should underlie the market?
- Can the market by itself replace the state in achieving positive ‘goods’ if not the ‘Common Good’?
- Are there different conceptions of the market?
- Is Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ programme simply a cover for ‘cuts’?

Subsidiarity

- Decisions should be taken at the level closest to the family: does the Big Society programme achieve this?
- Does it harm local government?
- How does the concept of subsidiarity relate to the market?

Solidarity



- Does the Big Society lead to a post-code lottery where poor sections of society will become even poorer?
- Or is it, on the contrary, an expression of the ‘preferential option for the poor’?
- Do the current reforms of the Welfare State infringe the principle of solidarity?
- Who will be the winners and losers?

Thank you for your attention!