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Reinvigorating the Public Sphere: The Role of Voluntary Associations

by

John Prince
B.A. (Hons) (Deakin University)

Submitted in fulfilment of requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University

June 2002
I certify that the thesis entitled

Reinvigorating the Public Sphere: The Role of Voluntary Associations

submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the key question: can voluntary associations enhance democracy? It tests critical claims made by Habermas and others that voluntary associations have the potential to reinvigorate a public sphere in a state of atrophy. The thesis outlines the major theoretical arguments pertaining to these areas and then presents the results of empirical work within voluntary organisations.

Specifically the thesis:

- Critically examines the concept of the public sphere, being a sphere between the state and civil society and investigates why theorists have advocated voluntary associations, claimed to be the core institutions of civil society, as sites where democratic ideals can be secured;

- Goes on to examine the concept of civil society and reviews the recent literature that has attempted to define and analyse the role of voluntary associations in contemporary society;

- Tests empirically the normative ideals that have been advocated on behalf of voluntary associations through the presentation of data obtained using qualitative methodology. The analysis of the data collected during interviews with key employees and members of six voluntary associations in Melbourne, Australia allows for a more informed knowledge regarding the key concepts and themes of the thesis.

The thesis ends by directly addressing the following points: whether or not the public sphere is in a state of atrophy; the particular nature of voluntary associations contemporary engagement in the public sphere; and whether voluntary associations can indeed, be sites where democracy can be enhanced and democratic ideals be secured. It is concluded that voluntary associations operate within Habermasian public spheres, counterspheres, and postmodern public spheres and that unitary notions of the public sphere, such as those Habermas proposes, do not adequately explain voluntary associations engagement in the public sphere. Accordingly, it is concluded that voluntary associations have the potential to invigorate public spheres, though not in ways that many theorists writing on the subject suggest.
Acknowledgements

In carrying this thesis with me for the last three years there are many people who have sustained me, given of their own time and made their own sacrifices to see it to completion. For the initial inspiration to pursue my academic career I thank Professor Boris Frankel, whose lectures and tutorials were my awakening to social theory and social change and ensured I never saw the world the same way again. For his energy, ideas, support and insightful comment, I am indebted to Dr Kevin Brown, my principal supervisor, who was always available and whose patience was never-ending. To Associate Professor Susan Kenny, my associate supervisor, there is thanks for the informal conversations, in the corridors and cafes at Deakin University, that proved valuable in shaping my understanding and spiralling me into new and challenging directions.

This thesis would not have been possible without the willing participation of the organisations and individuals whose voices are contained in the pages that follow. Each and everyone have made a contribution and their enthusiasm to share their perspective with me ensured I had a project to write about and made the process all the more enjoyable. Their commitment to bringing about change for some of the most marginalised people within our societies was inspirational and I sincerely thank them all for their openness and for giving me the opportunity to experience their endeavours.

In the process of writing this thesis Jehan, Taliah and Jasmine entered my life and have provided so much more than can ever be acknowledged - it has been a wonderful journey. Lastly, my own sister’s life and death have shaped, in so many ways, my own worldview and I am sure somewhere in this thesis there are faint echoes of her.
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Introduction

Democracy, let us admit it, has overcome the challenge of historical communism. But what means and what ideals does it have to confront those very problems out of which the communist challenge was born? ‘Now that there are no more barbarians,’ said the poet, ‘what will become of us without barbarians?’ (Bobbio 1991: 5)

So quick bright things come to confusion (Lysander – A Midsummer Night’s Dream)

The beginning of an inquiry

In the last decade we have seen the collapse of a number of totalitarian regimes and with it the emergence of new democracies. Yet, at the same time there appears to have also been a loss of momentum, vigour and optimism in older democracies (Berman 2001: 32) suggesting that Fukuyama’s (1992) well publicised claim that the events of 1989 marked the “end of history” and that “henceforth all would be plain, free-market sailing” were, as Hobsbawn (1991: 124) predicted, premature. Without “barbarians” (Bobbio 1991), in the form of communist regimes to measure liberal representative democracy by, theorists have, for a decade, been ‘taking stock’ and considering the condition of democracy on its own terms.

The tentative results of these inquiries have not so far been encouraging with many writers concluding that democracy is indeed in a state of malaise. For example, Giddens (1994: 1-21) claims globalisation, increased social-reflexivity and the transformation of day-to-day life in an increasing pluralist society are all challenges which liberal representative democracies are failing to meet. Alternatively, Wright (1995: 1) claims the last decade has seen an erosion of belief in the capacity of democratic institutions to intervene in shaping social and economic life and help solve the most pressing problems. Further, Wright suggests democratic ideals of active political involvement,
forging political consensus through dialogue and participation, responsiveness to changing needs, and effective forms of state politics are not being met. Related to the current ‘failings’ of liberal representative democracies to meet democratic ideals, Hirst (1994: 25) claims that participation in the public sphere is declining.

A decade ago, in attempting to come to terms with these challenges, scholars stressed economic, political or institutional factors whereas more recently societal and cultural factors are in vogue and Tocqueville has become the theorist of the decade (Berman 2001: 32). For the neo-Tocquevillians, reverting to his 160-year-old analysis of democracy in America provides them with their inspiration for the search for the means to democratise democracy. Accordingly, there has been a renewed interest in the concept of civil society and a rebirth in the examination of the role of voluntary associations1 in society.

While the accounts of contemporary democracy have been essentially pessimistic, the theorising of the role of voluntary associations have been optimistic. A review of recent literature focusing on voluntary associations reveals a number of writers suggesting that voluntary associations can potentially be the place where democracy can be democratised, active citizenship can be strengthened and the public sphere reinvigorated. For example, Cohen and Rogers (1995: 7-40) believe voluntary associations are the means to deepen and extend the democratic state. They claim that voluntary associations are characterised by organisational autonomy from both the state and the market and are more democratic than either. Accordingly, they are better suited to promoting general welfare than the

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1 There is a good deal of debate surrounding the terminology and definitions of voluntary associations and in Chapter Three (Voluntary Associations and the Public Sphere) these debates will be fully examined. However, at this point in the discussion it is important to note that while sometimes referred to as community, nongovernment, not for profit, and nonprofit organisations they are groups established by communities of people with common interests. They operate a wide range of projects and programs such as housing projects, disability programs, community health programs, self-help programs, environmental programs, and women’s services and include neighbourhood associations, parent-teacher associations, environmental groups, women’s associations, activist groups, recreational clubs and associations, service clubs and so forth.
present institutional arrangements. Importantly, Cohen and Rogers suggest that voluntary associations have four democratic enhancing functions being: they provide information to policy makers; redress political inequalities that exist when politics is materially based; can act as schools of democracy; and provide alternative governance to markets and public hierarchies that permits society to realise the important benefits of cooperation among citizens (1996: 7-40).

Putnam (1993: 83-99) in turn suggests voluntary associations are significant contributors to the effectiveness and stability of democratic governance and can lead to significant economic benefits as well. This is due to the internal effects on members who develop habits of cooperation, solidarity and public spiritedness. Furthermore, Putnam claims members of associations display more political sophistication, social trust, and more political participation. As well, members in civic organisations tend to be more cooperative and have a sense of shared responsibility for collective endeavours. The external effects, according to Putnam, include effective social collaboration and effective self-government (1993: 89).

Finally, Lyons' (1997) summary of the literature suggests claims regarding voluntary associations include the following: they are a crucial determinant to political participation; they are more efficient than government provision and can be more sensitive and responsive to the needs of client groups; they are crucial for the reproduction of social capital that underpins effective democratic political systems and strong economies; and they provide for a strong civil society that counterweights the tendencies towards domination of the state and market forces.

These claims certainly have importance since even if only some of them are valid then there seems good reason to place a degree of faith in these associations redressing the depressing picture of democracy outlined above. But, is this an oversimplified view of the current condition of liberal representative democracy and are the solutions really contained within these associations that have for so long been ignored?
At the same time as the abovementioned inquiries took place another body of literature was emerging in response to the English translation of Jurgen Habermas's (1989) seminal work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Despite originally being written in 1962, the book was addressing many of the contemporary concerns of the neo-Tocquevillians. The central tenet of the book is that the public sphere was/is in a state of atrophy and accordingly democracy is being undermined. The question Habermas poses in this work is a crucial one for democratic theory: what are the social conditions for rational-critical debate about public issues conducted by private persons willing to let arguments and not statuses determine decisions? For Habermas, the social conditions where rational-critical debate can be institutionalised passed with the demise of the eighteenth century bourgeois public sphere. However, in his later work *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas (1997) makes his own claims regarding the potential of voluntary associations, suggesting they are essential to a properly functioning, democratic public sphere. Defining the public sphere as a sphere between the realm of civil society and the state (Habermas 1989: xi), he emphasises the importance of voluntary associations on the basis that he claims they are the core institutions of civil society and being egalitarian with an open form of organisation have the essential features of the kind of communication that can institutionalise “problem-solving discourses on matters of general interest inside the framework of organized public spheres” (Habermas 1997: 367).

It is clear then that these different lines of inquiry have convergence in that they are both concerned with the perceived current malaise of democracy and both suggest that voluntary associations can redress the problem in significant ways. Unfortunately, there is very little in the literature to empirically verify the claims proposed and it is unclear therefore whether such claims are anything more than normative ideals. Without empirical testing, the many questions these claims raise are left unanswered. For example, can voluntary associations really be schools of democracy and can they redress political inequalities that exist when politics is materially based (Cohen and Rogers 1995)? Are they organisations that are independent of the state and the
market? Do voluntary associations have a high level of communicative democracy that allows for widespread consultation, cooperation and collaboration (Hirst 1994; Habermas 1989)? Do the members of voluntary associations have habits of cooperation, solidarity and public spiritedness, and do they display more political sophistication and social trust (Putnam 1993; 2000)? Are voluntary associations egalitarian with an open form of organisation (Habermas 1997)? Finally, can voluntary associations reinvigorate a public sphere in a state of atrophy and enhance democracy?

It is this final question that this thesis examines most closely, though many of the other questions are addressed in the process. The means for analysing these questions is to consider the 'facts on the ground' and to examine at close quarter the operations, activities and communicative structures of voluntary associations. This is done through qualitative interviews with employees, members and volunteers of six voluntary associations located in Melbourne, Victoria. Through this examination it is apparent that questions of the public sphere and the ability of voluntary associations to reinvigorate it exist at often high levels of complexity. Accordingly, in examining the range of issues to emerge the reader will consider the writings of theorists as diverse as John Locke and Robert Putnam, Jurgen Habermas and Michel Foucault, and Georg Hegel and Antonio Gramsci. Further, as the analysis develops over the subsequent chapters we will venture into eighteenth century bourgeois society coffee houses, mass media talk shows, liberal democratic forums, and cyberspace. Organisations as different as state bureaucracies and private corporations, humanitarian aid agencies and opportunity shops will be considered, and issues as diverse as neoliberal economics and Aids will be raised. Finally, a range of concepts including civil society, 'democratainment', and deliberative democracy will be examined.

The Structure of the Thesis

First, the public sphere, said to be in a state of atrophy, is defined as the space between civil society and the state, and second, voluntary associations are defined as the core institutions of civil society. In terms of the question can
voluntary associations reinvigorate the public sphere it is clear that a number of concepts must first be theorised and defined — being the public sphere, civil society and voluntary associations. This is no easy task since everywhere one looks in the literature there is confusion. Accordingly, the first three chapters of this thesis attempt to provide some theoretical clarification and introduce the wide-ranging debates around these concepts. This is important to the overall aim of the thesis since the presentation of the data from the interviews in the following three chapters (Chapters Four, Five and Six) only has significance once the theoretical foundations have been laid down. Accordingly, the thesis is structured in the following way.

Chapter One, (Unravelling the Public Sphere), outlines the theory relating to the concept of the public sphere, since before any investigation into the possibility of voluntary associations reinvigorating the public sphere can begin, the concept itself needs to be fully examined and understood and there is no consensus in the literature regarding the concept. For example, while some theorists (Hirst 1994; Habermas 1989) suggest it is in a state of atrophy and decay, others (Hartley 1996; Lumby 1999b; McNair 2000) claim it is more diverse and democratic than at any other stage in history. As do most examinations of the public sphere, the chapter begins with Habermas (1989) who gives the most detailed historical analysis of the concept and sets out some normative ideals for a fully functioning public sphere. The major tenets of Habermas’s position and subsequent criticisms are outlined and questions are raised regarding the historical reality of the Habermasian public sphere, the exclusionary nature of such a public sphere and the idealised character of the public sphere that Habermas proposes. In taking up these questions the chapter specifically considers feminist critiques that have aimed at widening the scope of Habermas’s position and highlights the concept of counter- or oppositional public spheres. This raises questions of inclusion/exclusion and identity and in reviewing postmodern theorists, who are severe in their criticism of Habermas and the normative ideals he proposes in his theory of the public sphere, the analysis turns to the possible existence of ‘postmodern public spheres’ and contrasts them with Habermas’s liberal public sphere. The notion of postmodern spheres is then taken up through an examination of the growing
debates around computer mediated communication (CMC). Here the concepts of cyberdemocracy, teledemocracy, virtual spheres and virtual communities are examined. Finally, the concept of deliberative democracy is examined since the advocates of deliberative democracy appeal to the Habermasian ideal of rational-critical debate. The implications of each theory, in terms of the recent and ongoing debates regarding voluntary associations and their potential to reinvigorate the public sphere, are considered. These debates generally have questions of democracy at their core.

The importance of Chapter Two, (The Concept of Civil Society) is two-fold. Firstly, the public sphere is at times equated with civil society and secondly, voluntary associations are said to be the core institutions of civil society. The fact that phrases involving the resurrection, re-emergence, rebirth, reconstruction or renaissance of civil society are frequently used in contemporary literature signifies on the one hand an association with an 'older' concept and on the other something significantly new (Cohen and Arato 1992: 29). Confusion reigns as the phrase is often invoked without being clearly defined and therefore the reader cannot be sure whether civil society has something to do with Friedman’s market politics, social movements such as Poland’s Solidarity, or the sort of 'political society' or public sphere so loved by Tocqueville and Habermas and existing in the cafes and coffee houses of eighteenth century Europe (Calhoun 1994: 309). Given that theorists are far from agreement regarding a definition of civil society - even to the point of debate regarding the inclusion or exclusion of the economy - it is critical to fully examine the concept before voluntary associations can be positioned as the core institutions. In examining the concept of civil society, this chapter is primarily concerned with defining civil society. However, the chapter firstly, takes a historical perspective and traces the genealogy of the concept from Locke to Gramsci. Secondly, it considers some of the reasons why the concept has undergone a revival and begins to clarify modern definitions, many of which have idealised the concept. Thirdly, it examines the link between civil society and voluntary associations. Fourthly, the chapter takes a critical view and considers some of the potential problems with the concept and how it has been applied. Finally, in an attempt
to narrow the focus, the chapter provides the definition of civil society to be used within this thesis and justifies the claim that voluntary associations have the potential to be the core institutions of civil society.

Chapter Three, (Voluntary Associations and the Public Sphere) examines the burgeoning literature of the last decade that theorises voluntary associations, advocates them as sites for democratic practice, and outlines their relationship with both the state and the market. The chapter attempts to define both associations and their relationship with other sectors - a task complicated by the fact that some of the claims made on behalf of voluntary associations have been flawed and contrary to the ‘facts on the ground’. The work of Robert Putman (1993; 2000) is then examined and critiqued, since it is his work that has provided much of the inspiration for the emerging literature. Putnam is primarily concerned with the decline of Tocquevillian America. Here the discussion highlights the concepts of trust and social capital. The chapter also examines the relationship of the ‘voluntary sector’ to both the state and the market since theorists are becoming increasingly concerned about the potential for both these sectors to appropriate voluntary associations. The chapter raises a number of questions: Can voluntary associations maintain some level of independence? Are their roles for advocacy and criticism undermined by partnership with the state and the market? What does such partnership mean in terms of their contribution to democratic ideals and a reinvigorated public sphere? That is, can voluntary associations, as they have been theorised, be the panacea (for democracy and the public sphere) that many claim?

Having set the theoretical foundations in these first three chapters, Chapter Four, (Voluntary Associations in Conflict?) is the first of three chapters which set out the data from the interviews conducted in this study. This chapter argues there were four major themes to emerge from the interview: the missions and purposes of the organisation; the pressures of funding (particularly securing government funding); the communities the organisations represent; and the ways the organisations engage in the public sphere. Across these themes the most consistent feature was the conflicting views expressed by the interviewees in each of the participating organisations. Accordingly, the
chapter asks: are voluntary associations conflict ridden and what does this mean in terms of the claims proposed in the earlier chapters? The chapter questions whether the levels of conflict identified in the participating voluntary associations should be unexpected within these formal organisations and whether such conflict should be immediately viewed as a negative aspect of the organisations functions - particularly if the processes for resolution are democratic.

In Chapter Five, (Voluntary Associations and Communication Rationality?) we return to some of the theorising of Habermas as the chapter builds on the data and arguments presented in the preceding chapter. Specifically, the chapter examines the nature of communication, as it occurs within the voluntary associations participating in the study. This allows for the examination of recent democratic political theory and theorists, who have located the recovery of the public sphere within arguments about deliberation and discourse – Habermas being the most prominent of these. The chapter highlights the degree to which rational-critical debate is taking place within the organisations and whether there is evidence of Habermas’s processual requirements for his theories of discourse ethics and communicative rationality. The chapter argues that when concrete cases of communication are considered and the way politics and democracy operate in voluntary associations are examined, the picture of voluntary associations is far more complex than that painted by many of the theories outlined in the first three chapters.

Chapter Six, (Diverse Voices in the Public Sphere(s)) attempts to empirically place voluntary associations’ practices within public sphere theory. The chapter highlights that voluntary associations are not free from influence and argues that in specific ways this limits their ability for effective engagement in the public sphere. Again, the data provides the substantive evidence for the claims made and presents the views of the participants and their organisational perspective. This chapter is divided into three sections and a preceding case study and looks at the kinds of activities the participating voluntary associations engage in within public sphere(s). The three sections highlight:
the ways that the associations attempted to employ the mass media to get their message to the broader community; how the associations are utilising new information technology and particularly the Internet to inform, educate, advocate and, in some cases, subvert various sections of the community; and finally looks at Gramscian attempts to build a counter-hegemony that can then be used (strategically) to influence the dominant ideologies.

Finally, the concluding chapter draws the themes together and contextualises them in the bodies of theory outlined in the first three chapters. Conclusions are made regarding voluntary associations ability to reinvigorate the public sphere. In terms of voluntary associations and their capacity to enhance democracy, future areas that research can/should focus on are outlined and new theoretical directions are proposed.
Chapter One – Unravelling the Public Sphere

Introduction

Public life in Australia is impaired to some extent by the almost entire absence of respect for the privacies of official life and for the persons of those in power (Alfred Deakin –Australian Prime Minister 1903-04)²

The public sphere is...what one might call the factory of politics – its site of production... the space in which politics is first made possible at all and communicable (Kluge 1981, cited in Livingstone and Lunt 1994: 16)

What is the public sphere and how may it be important to a discussion of the role of voluntary associations? What is this 'sphere' that some theorists (Habermas 1989; Hirst 1994; James 1999) suggest is in a state of atrophy and decay, while others (Hartley 1996; Lumbry 1999b; McNair 2000) claim it is more diverse and democratic than at any other stage in history? While the aim of this chapter is to outline the theory relating to the concept of the public sphere, clearly, before any investigation into the possibility of voluntary associations reinvigorating the public sphere can begin, the concept itself needs to be fully examined and understood. Accordingly, there are five sections to this chapter:

- As do most examinations of the public sphere, the first section draws on Jurgen Habermas’s (1989) significant work The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society – perhaps the most detailed historical analysis of the concept, that also sets out some normative ideals for a fully functioning public sphere. This section outlines the major tenets of Habermas’s position and subsequent criticisms raising questions regarding the

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² Deakin was instrumental in Australia becoming a Federation in 1901 and on three occasions was Prime Minister of Australia (1903-04, 1905-08 and 1909-10). The quote comes from his account of the federal story and was penned in 1900 (see Deakin 1995: 114).
historical reality of the Habermasian public sphere, the exclusionary nature of such a public sphere (particularly the exclusion of women) and the idealised character of the public sphere that Habermas proposes;

- The second section takes up these questions and specifically considers feminist critiques aimed at widening the scope of Habermas’s position and highlighting the concept of counter- or oppositional public spheres;

- A third section of the chapter will develop ideas of inclusion/exclusion and identity in reviewing postmodern theorists who are severe in their criticism of Habermas and the normative ideals he proposes in his theory of the public sphere. Here the attempt is made to describe the ‘postmodern public sphere’;

- The fourth section examines the growing debates around computer mediated communication (CMC). The section examines the concept of cyberdemocracy and identifies recent work in the area of teledemocracy, virtual spheres and virtual communities. While these concepts might also be located within a postmodern discourse, the literature itself is clearly marked off from the debates in the previous section and warrants an examination on its own terms;

- The final section will examine the concept of deliberative democracy and briefly outline the outcomes of recent deliberative democracy forums. The inclusion of this section is important as the Habermasian ideal of rational-critical debate is generally employed.

The implications of each theory, in terms of the recent and ongoing debates regarding voluntary associations and their potential to reinvigorate the public sphere, are considered. These debates generally have questions of democracy at their core.

Before going on to these five sections, it might be fruitful to consider the question of democracy in light of Fukuyama’s (1992; 1995) claim that history has ended and questions of ideology have been settled? Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, and with it the aspirations of communist regimes across the globe, theorists have begun to ‘take stock’ and examine the condition of liberal representative democracy in advanced capitalist societies. Most argue that it is in a state of malaise. This thesis will examine this question (and
others outlined in the ‘Introduction’) and specifically consider the role of voluntary associations, that are claimed to be the core institutions of civil society, and their potential to revitalise democracy.

Fung and Wright (2002) argue that as the size of polities has become larger and more heterogeneous the tasks of the state have become more complex and the institutional forms of liberal democracy developed in the nineteenth century – being representative democracy and techno-bureaucratic administration – are not well-suited to solving the unique problems of the twenty-first century. ‘Democracy’ has become too narrowly identified with territorially-based competitive elections of political leadership for legislative and executive offices and increasingly this mechanism of political representation is ineffective in achieving the central ideals of democratic politics. Wright (1995) has for a number of years, argued that these ideals are: facilitating active political involvement of the citizenry; forging political consensus through dialogue; devising and implementing public policies that ground a productive economy and healthy society; and in more radical egalitarian versions of the democratic ideal, assuring that all citizens have a share in the nation’s wealth. Thus, according to Fung and Wright (2002) a healthy public sphere is a necessary component of a healthy democracy.

According to Hirst (1994: 25) the public sphere is in a state of crisis as modern large-scale democracies and bureaucratic states have become remote, minimise participation, and are ineffective at providing the services citizens require. In the spirit of Habermas (1989), it is claimed the public sphere is ‘emptying out’ and is now dominated by publicity, public relations companies and personnel, and ‘spin doctors’ teaching political leaders ‘how to spin’ (Lumby 1999b). In something of a return to the “representative publicity”

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3 A most pertinent example of this is Washington’s response to the tide of anti-American sentiment moving across the world. The White House administration has employed top ‘brand manager’, Charlotte Beers (who has built brands for dog food and power drills), with the expressed aim to ‘sell’ the United States image abroad. Beers is attempting to sell the US and its ‘war on terrorism’ to an increasingly hostile world (Klein 2002b). On the other side of the Atlantic, McGugan (1998) claims that, once elected in May 1997, New Labour tried to ‘rebrand’ Britain as a young and ‘cool’ nation in an attempt to come to terms with Britain’s declining significance in the world.
(Habermas 1989: 8) of the middle ages where “the ruling nobility and its powers were displayed before the populace” (Dahlgren 1991: 3), in the early twenty-first century there appears too limited opportunity, or desire, for citizens to engage in discussion on the state’s power.

In liberal representative democracies where voting is voluntary, voter turnout has been in continual decline, while in Australia perceptions of politicians integrity and honesty is also in decline. Indeed, Australians are more angry and dissatisfied with politicians than ever before and have lost confidence in politicians and the political system alike (Young 2001: 171). Further, it appears that trust in all institutions is declining and in terms of debates regarding the health of the public sphere, respect for the honesty and ethics of politicians and journalists is decidedly low at eleven per cent and seven per cent respectively (The Age, 25th May, 1998). For Young (2001: 171), the decline is due to the corrosive damage of cynicism that now pervades the public sphere. Cynicism that borders on contempt (Mackay 1998: 39) and that now dominates talkback politics, television satire, sections of the print media (argument by abuse rather than logic) and “conversations wherever ordinary Australians talk about politics”.

The very notion of the public sphere has been utilised by many theorists with a degree of imprecision and importantly, not all theorists believe the public sphere is in a state of atrophy. It is clearly important to examine the diverse definitions and theories of the concept before any serious analysis of voluntary associations’ engagement in the public sphere takes place.

**Habermas and the bourgeois public sphere**

As a sphere between civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed, the liberal public sphere took shape in the specific historical circumstances of a developing market economy (Habermas 1989: xi)
Although the full text of *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962) was only translated into English somewhat recently as *The Structural Translation of the Public Sphere* (1989), Habermas's concept of the public sphere and its central features was already widely known outside the German-speaking world since the mid-1960s (Bryant 1995: 258). According to Calhoun (1992: 42) "the book's resonance with so many discourses suggests that the recovery and extension of a strong normative idea of publicness is very much on the current [1990s] agenda". The 'inquiry into a category of bourgeois society' (the subtitle to the work) is both an historical account and an outline of normative ideals regarding political participation and the democratisation of decision-making. Habermas defined the public sphere as a sphere between the private realm of the family (and civil society) and the public authority of the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest could be institutionally guaranteed (Habermas 1989: xi). According to Holub (1991: 3) the attraction for Habermas of the notion of a public sphere was its potential as a foundation for a critique of society based on democratic principles. Consequently, the fundamental question proposed by Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* concerns the nature of social conditions that allow for a rational-critical debate about public issues conducted by private persons willing to let arguments and not statuses determine decisions (Calhoun 1992: 1).

The public sphere was (and has remained) extremely important to Habermas, since he believed it had the potential to be a mode of social integration. That is, public discourse, which Habermas later developed into a 'theory of communicative action' (Habermas 1984; 1987), is as much a possible mode of coordination of human life as either state power or market economics (Calhoun 1992: 6). Indeed, Habermas (like Arendt 1958) maintains "an institutional arena of public discourse and civic participation is essential to counterbalance the dual pressures of state and market" (London 1995: 38). Clearly, money and power are non-discursive modes of coordination, with no openings for the identification of reason and will, and tending towards domination and reification. Accordingly, both the state and the economy are rivals of the democratic public sphere (Calhoun 1992: 6). Advocates of
voluntary associations believe they can be that institutional arena of public discourse and civic participation.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas attempts to develop an historically specific account of the modern category of publicness. In his ‘Introduction’ Habermas states that the bourgeois public sphere is typical of an epoch, cannot be transferred, or ideal-typically generalised to any number of historical situations (Habermas 1989: xvii). Therefore, the Enlightenment public sphere is as different from its Greek ancestor as it is from “its transformed contemporary descendent” (Calhoun 1992: 6). Habermas’s task is to trace such transformations and in doing so he highlights some critical issues relating to the modern state and its corresponding public sphere.

The seventeenth and eighteenth century notion of publicness emerged alongside the development of the modern state and on the basis of capitalist economic activity. Habermas suggests the bourgeois public sphere is to be defined as the public of private individuals who join together to debate issues bearing on state authority. Comparable with the Greek ‘polis’, public in the modern state was formed as a specific realm, however, in contrast to the Greek conception, individuals were understood to be formed primarily in the private realm (including the family) where freedom was to be defended against the domination of the state (Calhoun 1992: 7). This had not been the case in the middle ages “where the ruling nobility and its powers were merely displayed before the populace, with no opportunity for citizens to engage in discussion on the state’s exercise of power” (Dahlgren 1991: 3). Indeed, the middle ages were the height of “representative publicity” and lordship was represented “not for but ‘before’ the people” (Habermas 1989: 8). The idea of a return to representative publicity in advanced capitalist societies is further examined below.

It is important to note at the outset of Habermas’s argument that he is not suggesting the public sphere was bourgeois due to the class composition of its members but rather that the society was bourgeois and therefore produced a
certain form of public sphere. Thus, as the early capitalist economy developed there was a rise in national and territorial power states, which led to the idea of a society separate from the ruler or the state and of a private realm separate from the public. Civil society (which as a concept will be examined in detail in Chapter Two) then becomes a central notion in Habermas's bourgeois public sphere and in the seventeenth and eighteenth century civil society developed as the genuine domain of private autonomy opposed to the state. While the basis of civil society during this time was the capitalist market economy, it also included institutions of sociability only loosely related to the economy (Calhoun 1992: 7-8).

Two other developments during this time impacted greatly on the changing nature of the public sphere. The first was the "involvement of print media in the early extensions of market economies beyond local arenas" (Calhoun 1992: 8) leading to a traffic in news as merchants needed information regarding prices and demand. Secondly, the development of state bureaucracies as agents of permanent administration created a new sphere of public authority and according to Habermas "'public' in this narrower sense was synonymous with 'state-related' " (1989: 18).

The public sphere under these conditions included all participants (both agents of the state and private citizens) who might 'involve' themselves in the discussion of issues raised by the administration of the state. Once the state was constituted as an impersonal locus of authority it was then possible for the bourgeois public sphere to institutionalise an opposition between the state and society (Calhoun 1992: 8). However, as the sphere of private people came together as a public and engaged the public authorities in political confrontation "in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour", they did so in a way that was "peculiar and without historical precedent" (Habermas 1989: 27). This medium was the people's public use of reason and the practice of rational-critical discourse on public matters became institutionalised during this time. Thus, Habermas is arguing the bourgeois public sphere created a forum in which "the authority of the state could be
criticised and called upon to justify itself before an informed and reasoning public” (Thompson 1990: 109).

According to Habermas (1989: 28-56), the public sphere was initially constituted in the world of letters and the literary public sphere contributed to the political sphere through the development of institutional bases. In meeting places, journals, coffee houses, salons, and other webs of social relationships, the literary public sphere, dominated by aristocrats, was bridged with the political sphere. The literary public sphere also produced literary critique and thus institutionalised a form of rational-critical discourse that could be carried over into political discussion (Calhoun 1992: 11-13).

Due to the economic conditions, where the bourgeois public sphere emerged during a time where the laws of the market were seen as natural (laissez-faire), the sphere of social reproduction was “as much as possible a matter of private people left to themselves and so finally completed the privatisation of civil society” (Habermas 1989: 74). Civil society then was established as the private sphere emancipated from public authority and could be neutral in terms of power and domination with its discourse dedicated to discovering the right policies for its full development (Calhoun 1992: 16). Thus, while the public sphere constituted an institutional mechanism for rationalising political domination where states were held accountable to the citizenry, it also designated a specific kind of discursive interaction being an ideal of unrestricted rational discourse on public matters. Open and accessible to all, the discussion was to exclude private interests, inequalities were to be bracketed and participants were to deliberate as peers. Alternatively, Thompson (1990: 112) claims the bourgeois public sphere represented a forum that was founded on the principle of ‘publicness’ where “the personal opinions of private individuals could evolve into a public opinion through the rational-critical debate of a public of citizens which was open to all and free from domination”. Unfortunately, the full utopian ideal was never reached and ‘openness’ in particular was never achieved (Fraser 1992: 112-113).
Before moving to Habermas's analysis of the transformation, a note needs to be made regarding the concept of 'publicity' which today suggests something more to do with public relations than a reasoning public. Indeed, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the principal meaning of publicity related to openness and access and it was via publicity that the state was held accountable to society. Accordingly, the semantic change in the meaning reflects the structural transformation of the public sphere described by Habermas from reasoning, critical participation to consumerist manipulation (Peters 1993: 542-543). Further, Habermas claims the bourgeois public sphere, presupposed on the strict separation of the public from the private, whose principle was rational-critical discourse, had its very foundations transformed. Firstly, there was a blurring of the separation of state and society - private organisations began to assume increasingly public power and the state began to penetrate the private realm. Secondly, rational-critical debate gave way to the consumption of culture (Calhoun 1992: 16-17).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the contradictions of capitalist society began to expand. These are identified as the passage of competitive capitalism into monopoly or organised capitalism, the regulation of social conflicts by the state and the fragmentation of the rational public into an arena of competing interests (Eley 1992; see also Boyte 1992). As the size and composition of civil society changed, the inequalities that had always been present became greater and the bases of discussion and action. Accordingly, the notion of an objective general interest was replaced with one of fairly negotiated compromise among interests and consequently rational-critical debate was replaced by negotiation. Further, in the cultural sphere - with the development of mass culture - Habermas argues that rather than a sharing in culture there was a move to a joint consumption of culture. Also, rather than active participation in mutual critique (and production), rational-critical debate was replaced by consumption (Calhoun 1992: 21-23). Indeed, Eley suggests that: 
from the arts to the press and the mass entertainment industry, the process of commercialisation and rationalisation have increasingly targeted the individual consumer, while eliminating the mediating contexts of reception and rational discussion, particularly in the new age of electronic mass media (1992: 293).

For Habermas, the world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in name only with the form of participation fatally altered from that of the early bourgeois public sphere. Indeed, Habermas is highly critical of the role of the media in the 'pseudo-public sphere' and in moving from a culture-debating to a culture-consuming public "today newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere" (Habermas 1984: 49). As individuals experience radio, television, and film with an immediacy in a way not possible in printed word, rational-critical discourse becomes more difficult, if not impossible. Clearly, this opens the door for personalised politics and special interest groups and where the public relations industry can focus on engineering consent among the consumers of mass culture. Attempts are made to increase the prestige of the political party or special interest group through publicity work, without making the topics of their positions subject to genuine public debate. Publicity becomes only an occasion for the manipulation of popular opinion (group psychology rather than democratic practice) and as such, not only is the public sphere weakened but democracy too is undermined with little occasion for discursive will formation (Calhoun 1992: 23-29).

Habermas (1989) suggests party politics and the manipulation of the mass media has resulted in a 'refeudalization' of the public sphere where representation and appearances outweigh rational debate (Holub 1991: 6), and where "the rational-critical public is transformed into a mass, manipulated by persuasive authority" (Livingstone and Lunt 1994: 19). Finally, Thompson suggests that class biases in criteria of admission, the expansion of the interventionist state, new techniques of opinion management and a loss of institutional meeting places are the factors that Habermas claims have undermined the public sphere:
This *refeudalization of the public sphere* turns the...[public sphere]... into a theatre and turns politics into a managed show in which leaders and parties routinely seek the acclamatory assent of a depoliticized population (Thompson 1990: 113).

Habermas accepts the material conditions of the old public sphere have disappeared and therefore there is no returning to the old liberal public sphere however, as Livingstone and Lunt (1994: 20) identify, in *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume 2)* he continues to argue for the possibility of rational debate, thus suggesting the process of ref feudalization in the public sphere is incomplete. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* he attempts to find a way to ground hope for a bourgeois public sphere in the social institutions of advanced or organised capitalism - the ideal of the public sphere that calls for social integration to be based on rational-critical debate. That is, integration based on communication rather than domination, and communication where there is not simply a sharing of what “people already think or know but also a process of potential transformation in which reason is advanced by debate itself (Calhoun 1992: 29).

London (1995) suggests the concept of the public sphere discussed by Habermas includes several requirements for authenticity, which clearly leads to discussion as to whether, and how, voluntary associations can engage in the public sphere, as it exists today. The requirements are summarised as follows:

- open access, voluntary participation outside institutional roles,
- the generation of public judgment through assemblies of citizens who engage in political deliberation, the freedom to express opinions, and the freedom to discuss matters of the state and to criticise the way state power is organised (London 1995: 38)

Since its publication, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has aroused tremendous debate and a wide range of responses. The books and essays that appeared as direct replies to the work augmented, corrected or
rejected the Habermas account of the public sphere. Criticisms point to an apparent unsystematic treatment of the 'classical' bourgeois public sphere versus its post-transformation counterpart. For example, in accounting for the public sphere during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Habermas gives considerable attention to intellects, yet does not include them, or intellectual history, in accounting for the twentieth century public sphere, placing more emphasis on 'the typical television viewer'. Alternatively, his account of the bourgeois public sphere does not include less rational-critical branches of the press and therefore is overly optimistic and idealises the role of the media in early capitalism (Calhoun 1992: 33-35; Golding 1995: 26; Holub 1991: 3).

Those who accuse Habermas of neglect regarding the influence of culture on the formation of the bourgeois public sphere tend to minimise his discussion on the literary public sphere. While Kramer (1992) claims The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere points repeatedly to the importance of cultural factors in history, there is clearly some truth in suggesting that Habermas followed a Marxist framework in his analysis and associated the rise of the bourgeois public sphere with (narrow) economic factors. According to Zaret (1992) this led to errors of omissions and specifically he identifies the influence of religion, science and printing on the formation of the public sphere. His central claim is that the public use of critical, rational habits of thought developed as part of the larger civilisation (eg. religion, science, and printing) and was not contaminated by such forces. He thus concludes that:

arguments about the dangers to the public sphere posed by the commodification of cultural production in advanced capitalist society become less forceful in view of the fact that this sphere was in its origins and in its early development a representation of a larger civilisation in which capitalism was - along with printing, bible reading, and science - a dominant element (Zaret 1992: 231).
Subsequently, Zaret (1992) makes the assumption that there is little need for pessimism regarding the future of the public sphere, as it will continue to be shaped by the forces of capitalism, religion and science, as it has from its very inception.

While there is clearly an exclusionary aspect to Habermas’s original thesis which he himself has later acknowledged (Habermas 1992: 421-461), his suggestion that there will be an atrophy of the public sphere under the influence of mass media is questioned by theorists who claim the mass media (in the age of consumption) has actually made the public sphere more democratic (Sparks 1998: 111-112). These theorists ignore an important aspect of Habermas’s work. In suggesting that rational-critical debate is inadequate for a pluralist society such as our own, and embracing the gaggle of voices from all with access to the public sphere(s) they pay too little attention to the quality of the discourse. The quantity of participation (open and equal access) and the quality of the discourse were clearly the focus for Habermas and theorists of the public sphere must deal with his suggestion that there will be a ‘refeudalization’ of the public sphere with a return to representative publicity - that is theatre and spectacle where ‘we’ are the audience rather than participants (Peters 1993). The relationship between spectacle and participation is critical to the analysis of voluntary associations in the public sphere and the following sections of this chapter will highlight the associated relationships.

Importantly, Livingstone and Lunt (1994) claim that Habermas’s discussion of the public sphere has much to offer in terms of a critical examination of the relationship between media, power and the public. Questions relating to the criticism that Habermas is unduly pessimistic regarding modern mass media and its influence on the public sphere will be addressed in the third section of this chapter. However, the next section outlines the significant feminist critiques of Habermas’s idealised (masculine) bourgeois public sphere. Such critiques identify the gendered and exclusionary nature of the bourgeois public sphere and take issue with the strict opposition of ‘public’ versus ‘private’. They highlight the importance of giving necessary appreciation of difference
in a defence and reconstruction of a public sphere in which voluntary associations can engage in a way that enhances participatory discourse.

**Feminism and counter-public spheres**

Should we conclude that the very concept of the public sphere is a piece of bourgeois, masculinist ideology so thoroughly compromised that it can shed no genuinely critical light on the limits of actually existing democracy? (Fraser 1992: 117)

Lyotard (1984) claims that power cannot be, and is not centralised in any one social stratum but is dispersed across diverse institutions and discourses, including the mass media. Thus, Garnham (1990) criticises the idea that the mediated public sphere is an illusion that masks hegemonic domination. As stated earlier, Habermas himself acknowledges the existence of oppositional or counter spheres but for him they must come together in a harmonious way prior to, or in order for there to be, a confrontation between public and established power. As Livingstone and Lunt point out, Habermas’s notion of the public sphere argues for the traditional boundaries between groups to be weakened through the disinterested exchange of views leading to some kind of consensus (Livingstone and Lunt 1994: 24). However, they also suggest that disinterested exchange of views between groups in society may not lead to consensus. They call for an alternative model of the public sphere to be considered based on “oppositional, conflictual or radical democratic solutions in which diverse social groups discuss, negotiate and dispute” (Livingstone and Lunt 1994: 24-25). While apparently excluded from the bourgeois public sphere, the dissenting and critical voices form alternative forums for discussion and in this expanding oppositional public sphere the possibilities for public articulation of experience are increased and conflicts of interest are recognised and expected (Livingstone and Lunt 1994: 25).

Thus, the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere differs from the oppositional public sphere in that the former contains rational-critical debate involving the reasoned considerations of other positions to generate a genuine amendment of
original positions in light of new arguments, while the latter aims at negotiated compromise rather than consensus. Each side presents arguments that might carry rhetorical rather than rational weight and compromise is achieved as judged by the more persuasive side – neither side need concede the other argument but merely agree to a midway position. Habermas’s public sphere requires that power inequalities be transcended where the oppositional public sphere requires that such power inequalities be balanced (Livingstone and Lunt 1994: 26).

In terms of oppositional or counter spheres, it is perhaps feminism that has contributed most to the arguments. According to McLaughlin (1993: 600), feminists have engaged Habermas’s bourgeois public sphere on both its ‘ideal’ and ‘real’ terms. The ideal terms being a space characterised by freely discoursing individuals, status-bracketing, and collective identity and consensus and the real terms, being the historical account of competitive capitalism, material inequalities, political antagonisms, gender restrictions and class divisiveness. In their critique of Habermas’s internally coherent and homogenous public sphere, where private matters are excluded, feminists propose a multiplicity of public spheres where differences are recognised and appreciated.

Not surprisingly the feminist critique of Habermas’s concept has targeted his strict opposition of ‘public’ and ‘private’, a distinction that works to legitimate women’s exploitation and oppression (Young 1990; Ryan 1992; Benhabib 1992). However, Habermas’s concept of the public sphere is of importance to Fraser (1992) because firstly, there is clear distinction made between an institutionalised arena of discursive interaction that is conceptually distinct

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4 The public/private distinction is something that second wave feminists have actively sought to break down and in the last three decades have achieved a degree of success in bringing previously considered private matters to public attention (e.g. domestic violence, marital and/or date rape). Despite such success, Fraser (1992: 110-111) claims there is confusion in contemporary feminism where the concept of the public sphere has been utilized. This is due to the fact that feminists have used the concept to refer to everything outside the domestic or familial sphere. Accordingly, this leads to the conflation of the state, the official economy of paid employment, and arenas of public discourse into the concept of the public sphere. The fact that at both a theoretical and practical level, these are three analytically distinct objects hardly needs stating and such conflation unquestionably distorts analysis of gender issues and their relation to the state and the market.
from the state and can in principal be critical of the state. Secondly, the arena of discursive interaction is distinct from the official economy and is one of discursive relations as opposed to market relations. While Fraser is writing from a feminist perspective, her analysis is first and foremost a critique of democracy and therefore Habermas’s concept of the public sphere, in keeping the distinction between the apparatus of the state, economic markets and democratic associations, is most constructive for an analysis of democratic theory.

There is no doubt that Habermas’s development of his concept of the bourgeois public sphere was not as inclusionary as he outlined in his original thesis and he has acknowledged (Habermas 1992: 427-429) the importance of feminist critiques that have identified the key axis of exclusion as gender. In his original formulation of the bourgeois public sphere, rational-critical debate was promoted as a style that was ‘manly’ and thus to include women in the public sphere would have introduced non-rational debate and disorder, and further would have caused women to abandon their homes, children and husbands – femininity and publicity were seen as oxymorons (Landes 1988).

A second and related problem is that Habermas fails to examine other non-bourgeois, non-liberal, and competing public spheres. He does identify the plebeian public sphere in the Author’s Preface to the 1962 publication (Habermas 1989), but claims it was a derivative or variant of the bourgeois public sphere and remains oriented towards its intentions. In a revision of the history Habermas provides, Ryan (1992) points to the ways women accessed public life despite their exclusion from the official public sphere and in so doing identifies other competing publics.5 These (counter) publics were

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5 It is not only feminists that have questioned the historical accuracy of Habermas’s notion of a unitary public sphere and pointed to other non-bourgeois, non-male and unofficial public spheres. In examining the ‘black public sphere’, Jacobs (2000: 20) claims “if ever a case can be made for the existence of separate public spheres from the beginning, African-American history provides it” (emphasis in original). He further claims the history of the African-American public sphere and the black press is not an isolated or exceptional case and identifies plebian publics, women’s publics and “an entire set of public spheres which were organized more around ‘festive communication’ than rational discourse” (2000: 20). For more accounts of ‘the black public sphere’ see Black Public Sphere Collective (ed) (1995) and Doroski (1998).
nearly always in conflict with the dominant public sphere and sought ways to elaborate alternative styles of political behaviour and alternative norms of public speech. Consequently, the bourgeois public deliberately sought to obstruct these alternatives and a wider participation and thus the bourgeois public sphere became not only an unrealised utopian ideal but also a masculinist ideological notion that served to legitimate an emergent form of class rule. It was an institutional vehicle for a transformation in the nature of political domination from repressive to hegemonic - a site for consent (Fraser 1992: 116-117).

Fraser (1992) questions one of the central assumptions of Habermas's bourgeois public sphere: that a comprehensive single public sphere is preferable to a multiplicity of competing publics which is seen as a step away from greater democracy. Certainly, Habermas tends towards the claim that the bourgeois public sphere is the public arena and as stated earlier, despite his acknowledgement of at least the plebeian public sphere, he views the institutional confinement of public life to a single, overarching public sphere as desirable. It seems reasonable to conclude then that the idea of a "proliferation of a multiplicity of publics represents a departure from, rather than an advance towards, democracy" (Fraser 1992: 122).

In stratified societies such as Australia, where the basic institutional framework produces inequalities in the structural relations of dominance and subordination, Fraser suggests that full equality of participation in public debate is not possible. Indeed, her analysis suggests that social inequalities taint deliberations within the public arena in late capitalist societies. It is not possible to insulate special discursive arenas from the effects of social inequality since deliberative processes in public spheres operate to the advantage of dominant groups and to the disadvantage of subordinates. Accordingly, these effects are only intensified by a single, comprehensive public sphere (Fraser 1992: 118-122; McLaughlin 1993: 609). Therefore, Fraser attempts to address what form of public life increases the chances of equality of participation and what are the institutional arrangements that narrow the gap between dominant and subordinate groups.
Within a single sphere subordinated members have no place for deliberation among themselves regarding their own needs, objectives and strategies and no place to undertake communicative processes where they are not under the surveillance of the dominant group. They would therefore be less likely to articulate their thoughts and defend their interests, and certainly have less opportunity to expose the modes of deliberation that mask domination, where the less powerful are absorbed into the deceptive ‘we’ that reflects only the powerful (see Mainbridge 1990). As noted above (page 26), revisionist history points to the ways in which women have repeatedly found a voice in alternative publics and similar historiography records that members of other subordinated groups such as workers, gays and lesbians, and peoples of colour have done likewise. Within these counterpublics, members of subordinated groups circulate their counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs. Within these parallel discursive arenas, feminism provides an excellent example of the strategies used with women’s press, journals, bookstores, publishing companies, lecture series, video and film distribution networks, research centres, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals and local meeting places. As Fraser points out, within this feminist public sphere feminists have invented new terms for describing social reality such as ‘sexism’, ‘sexual harassment’, ‘date rape’ and ‘marital rape’. The new language has allowed feminists to “recast our needs and identities, thereby reducing, although not eliminating, the extent of our disadvantage in official public spheres” (1992: 123). The gay and lesbian lobby have achieved some of the same outcomes using some of the same strategies.6

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6 A critique of this position is found in McLaughlin (1993) who accuses Fraser of idealising these counterpublics and suggests she presupposes counterpublic activity manifests itself in resistant, emancipatory and altruistic political activity. She claims Fraser forgets that some counterpublics are far from virtuous and are characterised by conflicting interests and notions based on the repression of others (for example Neo-Nazis). Indeed, McLaughlin claims feminist discourse can also be embedded in hegemonic discourse. However, Fraser (1992: 124) does acknowledge that counterpublics are not always democratic or egalitarian and even those whose intentions are democratic and egalitarian are not above practising informal modes of exclusion and marginalisation. At a minimal argument level, we might agree with Fraser that where counterpublics emerge in response to exclusions within the dominant public sphere they at least help to expand discursive space.
Fraser (1992) believes that counterpublics mitigate against separatism due to their publicist orientation and this is an important point as it brings us back to Habermas and his conception of publicity. Discursive interaction by members of the public, counter or otherwise, is to promulgate a discourse to an ever-widening arena and as Habermas has noted, however limited a public might be in its empirical manifestation its members understand themselves as part of a potentially wider 'public at large'. Thus, Fraser claims counterpublics have a dual character being:

On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics (Fraser 1992: 124).

In arguing that social inequalities taint deliberation, Fraser's discussion focuses on 'intrapublic relations', whereas her discussion on counterpublics focuses on 'interpublic relations' and there is clearly the need to consider contestation among competing publics and interpublic discursive interaction. She concludes by drawing on the work of Eley (1992: 289-339) who claims we should think of the public sphere as a structural setting where cultural and ideological contest, or negotiation, can take place among a variety of publics. Thus, it acknowledges the presence and activity of a variety of publics, situated in a single structural setting that advantages some and disadvantages others, and that in stratified societies discursive relations among the differentially empowered publics are as likely to take the form of contestation as that of deliberation (Fraser 1992: 125).

Finally, it should also be noted that Fraser (1992) is arguing for strong publics whose discourse encompasses not only opinion formation but also decision making and calls for a need to establish sites of direct or quasi-direct democracy. This clearly involves the continuation of the blurring of the line separating the state and (associational) civil society and she asks the question regarding what are the institutional arrangements that are most likely to ensure the accountability of democratic decision-making bodies (strong publics) to
their weaker publics. These arguments are not as well developed and Postone (1992) claims her analysis neglects to thematise the structuring and historical conditions of her two sorts of publics - the multiplicity of publics and the larger setting. Further, in overemphasising the social in her analysis she does not address the changing inter-relation of the state and the economy and how it affects the structure of these two sorts of publics. This has clear implications for the relations between the state, the economy and associational civil society. However, her arguments clearly provide an engaging and enterprising extension of Habermas’s original thesis, which despite its own shortcomings, Fraser believes provides an excellent preface to an analysis of the public sphere that now must distinguish between official government public spheres, counterpublic spheres, mass-mediated public spheres and the informal public spheres of everyday life.

In the next section of this chapter an analysis of postmodern theories of the public sphere will be outlined. These positions are strongly critical of both the Habermasian version of the public sphere with an objective of achieving consensus and the idea of an oppositional public sphere with the objective of negotiated compromise.

**The postmodern public sphere(s)**

...the public sphere is more real as fantasy, an ideal type, than a historical achievement; where it does exist is in the virtual sphere of the media, not the physical centre of town (Hartley 1996: 155)

Robbins (1993: xii) suggests in *The Phantom Public Sphere* that there is a multiplicity of distinct and overlapping public spheres, public discourses and scenes of evaluation - as opposed to a universal ideal of a single public. In his book *Popular Reality: Journalism, Modernity and Popular Culture*, Hartley (1996), argues that twentieth century social theorists who have lamented the passing of the bourgeois public sphere of rational-critical debate, and the rise of popular media entertainment have ‘missed the point’ in two important respects. Firstly, they have exaggerated the degree to which the Enlightenment
public sphere was an institutionally and pervasive reality, and secondly, failed to fully understand the role the popular media plays in "producing and distributing knowledge, visualising and teaching public issues in the midst of private consumption" (1996:155). Hartley's claim that the postmodern public sphere is part of a postmodern world where the image has conquered the word and the vox pop has conquered the opinion of experts, is engaging. According to Hartley (1996), the public sphere is an image saturated space which is at once both personal and abstract - personal in that the public sphere is inside the heads and homes of the citizenry, and abstract in that it also pervades the planet.

Lumby (1999b) suggests that the central claim of Hartley's book is that the popular media has created its own version of the voting public in the form of audiences and the interaction between media products and there audiences is where political, social, cultural and personal meaning is produced. Accordingly, Lumby's own argument (1999a; 1999b) is that the public sphere in now more democratic, diverse and inclusive than at any other stage of history. Further, that "the past few decades has seen an overwhelming democratisation of our media - a diversification not only of voices, but of the ways of speaking about personal, social and political life" (1999a: xiii). This is an argument supported by McNair (2000), in his recent contribution to the debate titled Journalism and Democracy: An Evaluation of the Political Public Sphere. Again seeking to challenge the view that the 'dumbing down' of the public sphere is adversely affecting the quality of democracy, McNair argues that the quantity of political information in mass circulation has expanded hugely in the late twentieth century, and that is has become steadily more rigorous and effective in its criticism of elites. Further, such information is more accessible to the public and more thorough in its coverage of the political process.

Although not quite a celebration of tabloid press and talk shows, Lumby's (1999b) book claims there is more to salute than lament in the content of these

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7 For a polemic regarding the relative merits of the Enlightenment public sphere versus postmodern accounts of the public sphere see Johnson and Villa (1994).
forms of media. However, if there is a tendency to idealise the bourgeois public sphere in Habermas, there is an equal tendency to idealise the postmodern public sphere in the analysis provided by Hartley, McNair and Lunby (also Wark 1997). Further, where Habermas's normative ideals may be inadequate for a pluralistic society, Hartley and Lunby's analysis is certainly limited by the lack of examination of the relation of the state and/or the market to the postmodern public sphere (Jones 1998).

Defending not only journalism, but also textual analysis then clearly the mass media provides Hartley (1996;1999) with many rich, stimulating and evocative scripts to read. Further, he claims that we have currently entered a period of 'democratainment' that is far from regrettable and suggests democratic concepts such as citizenship (advocating 'D-I-Y citizenship') need to be rethought in relation to media and that "democratic participation may continue in the era (and in the very form) of commercial, private, entertainment-oriented consumer communications" (1999: 28). Further, Hartley suggests that new social movements in the twentieth century have not emerged within the traditional political sphere with its Enlightenment ideals but have come out of the world of identity - that is:

> the political domain has moved beyond party and parliamentary politics, the power-discourse of conflict, government and bureaucracy towards a privatised, feminised, suburbanised, juvenated, sexualised and domestic domain of identity-discourse (Hartley 1999: 28)

Hartley (1998; 1999) is strong in his defence of the importance of readership as part of individual and community life and that casual, consumerist entertainment is textually significant to both and is the place where the interface between public and private, which is increasingly fluid, occurs. Further, people as readers and audiences are much less discriminating between different forms of media than are researchers - being multi-generic they are at once readers, audiences, publics and consumers. According to Hartley, it is not only the case that individuals do not become fact-seeking one minute when
watching or reading the news and fantasy-loving the next when consuming commercial entertainment, but that news is becoming more porous to other generic forms of entertainment and consumed less through daily newspapers and more through television. Hartley asserts that some groups including young people, women, ethnic minorities and indigenous people are rejecting news and other active forms of participation in the public sphere and accessing information through other media such as television, advertising, magazines, fiction and music. Thus, analysis of the media must move beyond news media - which is increasingly tending towards entertainment anyway with less differentiation between quality and tabloid media - to other factual and fictional forms across the whole ‘media sphere’. Finally, in Hartley’s world the ‘public’ is not ‘an aggregate’ of previously existing and fully formed individuals expressing some sort of relation to the state, but is a ‘textual position’ that can be ‘peopled’, where the media provides the ‘mediation’ or dialogue between citizens and various specialised groups in the community, including government, victims and advocates (Hartley 1999: 21).

Similar claims are asserted by Lumby (1999b: 2-6) who suggests the politicisation of many issues such as feminism, environmentalism, gay and lesbian rights and indigenous rights has coincided with the growth of the electronic mass media specifically in the last three decades and as such many of these new political movements were shaped by the mass media. Fraser (1992) of course does not agree and as previously stated claims journals, bookstores, publishing companies, lecture series, video and film distribution networks, research centres, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals and local meeting places have been more influential. Lumby claims that while there is political disillusionment with the major parties and institutions, politics is merely more diverse than it has ever been when the scope of issues taken up at grassroots level is considered. Thus, while the popular media, so vilified by Habermas, does not encourage rational-critical debate, it is not assumed that this leads to a less informed or politically inactive community and Lumby certainly disagrees with any suggestion the media is able to “coherently and consistently direct what people make of the information and the images they receive” (1999b: 3).
These arguments are not new and have been taking place in media studies for decades. Theories from the media 'effects' tradition have attempted to analyse what influence the mass media can have over the 'audience' which is largely seen as passive. The semiotics tradition has pointed to a more active recipient of media products with a diversity of readings of the media text and where the audience claims power in the producer-audience relationship (Ward 1995). Lumby's analysis is clearly pointing to an active audience which is not easily influenced or duped by the producers and owners of mass media. One suspects that neither the most popular of popular talk-back radio hosts, John Laws, nor the Australian Banking Association believed this to be true given the latter allegedly paid the former $1.2 million to change his 'on-air' views ('cash - for - comments') regarding banks and banking in Australia. Interestingly, Laws' early defence in the inquiry that followed was that he is not a journalist but an entertainer. Clearly a case where the blurring of information and entertainment, so central to both the Lumby and Hartley thesis, becomes a blur too far.

Echoing Hartley (1996), Lumby (1999b) claims that the interaction between the media and audiences is rarely acknowledged and the assertion that a talk show or a teenage girl's magazine is politically determined by the producers, rather than politically active, ensures that we fail to see these media forms as political forums. Thus, while 'guests' on Sally Jessy Raphael and Jerry Springer are "screaming, crying and pulling each other's hair at times, they are equally engaging in a public dialogue" (1999b: 9). The question of talk shows and their contribution to democracy is the theme of Livingstone and Lunt's (1994) book Talk on Television: Audience Participation and Public Debate. They claim that for some the mass media is the only institution which can provide a space for public debate, while for others, even if such a space were possible and even if the media could contribute to it positively, rather than undermining it, such talk shows are certainly not where it will happen. 'Real conversation' does not take place in these discussions and such programmes hardly constitute a community of citizens talking amongst themselves about issues of public concern (1994: 2-3).
‘The bottom line’ of both Lumby and Hartley’s work, is that the postmodern public sphere is not compatible with uniform, rational language neither in the political nor cultural sphere:

Rational, educated discourse doesn’t speak to everyone in a contemporary democracy - indeed, contemporary democracy is characterised by diverse voices and diverse kinds of speech (Lumby 1999b: 240).

The ‘diverse voices’ and ‘diverse kinds of speech’ to which Lumby (1999b) refers, is something that has recently been taken up by those advocating ‘cyberdeomcracy’ and computer mediated communication (CMC) as a means to extending and enhancing democracy - that is, the citizenry can now access information through other means. New information technology is providing new possibilities for more active participation by the citizenry. While these concepts might also be located within a postmodern discourse, there is an emerging literature that is clearly marked off from the debates in this section and accordingly, warrants an examination on its own. The next section examines these theoretical writings that draw attention to the potential contribution of such technology.

**Computer Mediated Communication and Cyberdemocracy**

...traditional political communication structures and the old media are failing democracy, and the implication is, somehow, that the new media, properly steered, can provide the solution (Bryan et al 1998: 2)

London (1995) claims electronically mediated communication provides a myriad of possibilities for the development of the public sphere. According to London, from Aristotle (legislation through reasoned dialogue and deliberation) to Rousseau (the formation of a general will through deliberation) and through to John Stuart Mill (government by discussion),
political thinkers have stressed the importance of public discourse and debate. However, with the advent of new technologies such as telephone, radio, television, and now the Internet, the nature of public discourse in the late twentieth century has been radically changed. In terms of this thesis and its consideration of how voluntary associations engage in the public sphere, London claims that voluntary associations, public spaces, local newspaper and neighbourhood assemblies may well be giving way to computer bulletin boards, satellite television and radio call-in programs. Those who advocate cyberdemocracy or 'teledemocracy', being 'democracy at a distance', certainly believe this to be the case.

The advocates of cyberdemocracy (for example London 1995 and Bryan et al 1998) often make reference to the Habermasian view of the public sphere and believe the new media – being computer mediated communication (CMC) – provide hope for a new arena of communication. That is, they believe the old public sphere, that as Habermas claimed is in a state of atrophy and crippled by commodification and fragmentation, can be replaced by a new one in which citizens freely engage in deliberation and public debate through computer mediated communication. Through CMC, theorists believe that the ills of Western democracies, identified at the beginning of this chapter, being voter apathy, substantial rates of citizen abstention from elections, and increasing citizen detachment from politics, can be addressed. A new public sphere, not colonised by the state and political parties, and not subjected to the logics of commercialisation and commodification, prevalent in Western liberal representative democracies, is emerging (Bryan et al 1998: 3-5). The public sphere can be greatly improved through electronically mediated political discourse, they argue, where civic participation can be enhanced and where citizens can be connected across boundaries of time and space. Links between citizens and government can increase transparency and allow unmediated communication between citizens and their leaders. Cyberdemocracy provides a way for improved political agenda setting and planning and can involve large numbers of people directly who can be informed and educated on public issues more quickly (London 1995).
Fishkin (1992, cited in Bryan et al 1998: 5) claims we already live in an age of electronic democracy due to the influence of media and particularly media polling, talk shows and focus groups. However, unlike the postmoderns, he does not equate these ‘forums’ with democracy and argues that we need to redesign electronic democracy in order to serve democratic ideals. Those writing in the area of cyberdemocracy, (for example London 1995; Hague and Loader 1999; Jordan 1999), appear to agree with Fishkin (and therefore Habermas) that the existing social infrastructure for the encouragement of public debate and political action has been eroded and that by altering the form of communication the content can be changed and more participation encouraged. Bryan et al (1998: 5) suggest that the media as we know it might very well be passing and that mass-broadcast (one-to-many television) is a medium of the past. They claim newspapers will be replaced by interactive bulletins that we will be able to read from the tops of our desks on the machine that will replace both our television and our personal computer. In the new public sphere, that “hails the rebirth of democratic life” (1998:5), technologies will allow social actors to find and forge common interests. People will access their information from an infinite, free virtual library rather than receiving half-digested ‘programming’, and the right to reply will be institutionalised through such interactive media.

Specifically, the claims (and hopes) made for cyberdemocracy (or teledemocracy) include:

- the fact that new media increase the speed and scale of information provision and that efficiency and ease of access give citizens more control over their information diet;

- citizen response political participation (access of information, deliberation, debate and voting) will be easier as new technology can be harnessed to measure citizens’ preferences in representative democracies. Accordingly, the perceived crisis of participation (citizen alienation, abstention and apathy) can be redressed;

- CMC can create new organisational possibilities through subject-specific discussion groups (reducing publishing and communication costs) and thus transform the conditions of collective political action;
the Internet allows for traditional political identities linked to territorial and sectional interests to be undermined, and new forms of politics can emerge free from state coercion;

- since the 'audience' and subjects of the information can immediately respond to it, and because passive reception of information will be replaced by active discovery, received wisdom will more likely be contested;

- CMC (it is argued) will bring about the removal of 'distorting' mediators, such as journalists, parliamentary representatives and even parties, from the process of political communication and decision-making – CMC is more direct with less scope for political censorship and secrecy (Bryan et al 1998: 6-7).\(^8\)

It is certainly not clear yet whether cyberdemocracy can reinvigorate the public sphere and allow reasoned dialogue and debate to take place. However, some recent examples suggest that new information technologies could lead to the strengthening of a certain kind of public sphere and highlight how associations are beginning to network across regions and internationally.

Firstly, it is commonly accepted that one of the primary reasons for the killing of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) was the electronically amplified public opposition (Kobrin 1998).\(^9\) Through online grassroots associations a campaign of opposition to the free trade treaty gained momentum within and across nations with unerring speed. Indeed, opposition to the treaty could only be galvanised once the leaked document was posted on the Internet. *Stopping the Juggernaut: Public Interest Versus the Multilateral Agreement* edited by Goodman and Ranald (2000) provides compelling evidence of the power of online grassroots associations to influence, indeed thwart the most powerful governments and multinational corporations in their quest for greater economic liberalism. Further, in June 2001 the World Bank

\(^8\) Similar claims are made by Hague and Loader (1999), though the terminology is different. Here the potential for reinvigorating democracy is located in ICTs – being information and communications technologies. As yet there is no agreed-to terminology across the literature.

\(^9\) The failure of the OECD to implement its Multilateral Agreement on Investment will be more fully examined in Chapter Six of this thesis.
cancelled its major conference in Barcelona on development economics due to growing concern over anti-globalisation protests – protests organised through the Internet (Tremlett 2001). According to Monnet (2001) the Web has allowed the anti-globalisation protesters to create a new and informal kind of International. The movement has its own press agency (indymedia.org) as well as a host of other sites such as protest.net. One such global pressure group is French based Attac – a group lobbying for the Tobin tax on foreign exchange speculation. According to Monnet, it is not only multinational corporations that are beginning to take notice of Attac but very few French MPs now refuse to meet Attac representatives. More recently these pressure groups have ‘networked’ through the Internet to set up the World Social Forum, attended by 60,000 participants, seeking opportunities for dialogue with global leaders and opinion-makers (Klein 2002a).

A more personal account of the potential of online communities involves Philcat (online name), who had been a member of a ‘pioneering corner of cyberspace’ being the Whole Earth ‘Lectronic Link (WELL) for some time – a virtual voluntary association or as Howard Rheingold, one of its origin members, describes it - “a medium-size conferencing community” (1993: 10). The members (WELL-beings) felt part of a community and through each other’s messages and postings learnt about each other and became friends without the need to meet. Thus, when Philcat announced his seven-year-old son had leukaemia, the announcement sent shockwaves throughout the whole virtual community. Love and support flowed and expertise mobilised whereby health professionals provided invaluable advice. By the time Philcat’s son had gone into remission the virtual community had become so concrete it may very well have been described as more real that virtual (Jordan 1999: 56-57).

It should also be noted that there have been a number of attempts at grassroots and local or regional authority levels, to introduce versions of ‘electronic democracy’. Most towns and municipalities in Australia have homepages on the World Wide Web and in the United States and at the European Union level civic networking projects have begun in more that two hundred towns and cities – for example in the Netherlands sixty towns have embraced CMC and
have civic networks of some kind (Bryan et al 1998: 1). The outcomes of these initiatives are not yet known but are generally viewed as positive ‘experiments’ in extending democracy.

These examples might have provided genial outcomes and suggest that cyberspace is exciting terrain where new public spheres can be developed and citizens can engage with each other. However, it is clear that many of the power structures of society are replicated in cyberspace. Indeed, one of the major concerns regarding cyberdemocracy is citizen access with much of the technology in the hands of relatively elite associations of white, male, professional people from advanced societies (Holderness 1998). The democratic initiatives that have been developed have clearly been developed within the context of deregulation and privatisation of the telecommunications industry at the global level. Thus, the argument that the growth of the privatised information infrastructure will lead to a widening of the gap between the information ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ has been compelling (Holderness 1998; Tsagarousianou 1998: 170-171). Only five per cent of the world’s population have access to the new technology with ninety-five per cent of cyberspace activity still related to the hold of capital on the human condition (Dervin and Schaefer 1999). It appears too, that electronic democracy projects might be oblivious of the social and economic inequalities among the citizenry – that is the differential of distribution of hardware and software skills necessary to participate in them. Clearly there will need to be a commitment to public provision of information infrastructure and public subsidy of information services to ensure the benefits of access to information will be distributed equitably and democratically. Further, most electronic democracy initiatives thus far have been in practice executive-initiated, top-down and based on giving more access to information, therefore reducing politics to a model of convincing through dissemination of information rather than of communication and discussion (Tsagarousianou 1998: 170-174).

London (1995) also identifies the potential risks of CMC. Firstly, there is the argument that plebiscitary democracy (e.g. tele-voting) is ‘din not democracy’. It leaves no room for reasoned dialogue and debate and amounts to no more
that a collection of opinions. This is especially the case when discussion is highly specific, technical and regionalised. Secondly, consulting the citizenry through such mechanisms atomises individuals and is greatly time-consuming and inefficient. Thirdly, experiments thus far have proved far from conclusive and achieved poor rates of participation (see also Hale et al 1999: 96-115). Finally, Dervin and Schaefer (1999) claim the kinds of communities being made in cyberspace are primarily likeminded people where Neo-Nazis find each other, as do anti-Nazis and radical feminists find each other, as do anti-feminists. Rarely does communicating across cyberspace occur naturally across these and other polarities.

Despite these critiques, it will be interesting to see how increases in the usage of new information technology, which is certainly taking place in voluntary associations (Brown et al 2000) will facilitate broader information and power sharing. There is clearly an opportunity for the exchange of views, knowledge and opinions. Further, organisations and associations that have polyvalent characteristics (Evers 1995), in that they have economic functions, such as service delivery, and undertake lobbying and advocacy roles, might find they are able to function effectively by utilising the communication technology and thus ensure the two functions are less conflict laden.

The new ‘developments’ and possibilities for democracy that CMC brings, are not the only attempts that are being made to ‘renew’ or revitalise democracy and in a number of Western liberal representative democracies discussion and debate has also emerged regarding the initiation of deliberative models of democracy. These will be examined and critiqued in the following section of this chapter.

**Deliberative democracy as rational-critical debate.**

Largely under the influence of Jurgen Habermas, the idea that democracy revolves around the transformation rather than simply the aggregation of preferences has become one of the major positions in democratic theory (Elster 1998: 1)
More recently, debates regarding the public sphere have begun to focus on 'deliberative democracy', which appears to show some consistency with Habermas's (1989) theorising regarding the nature of social conditions where rational-critical debate about public issues can be developed through a focus on argument rather than status. This relates to the dual characteristic of Habermas's argument being the quantity of participation (openness) and the quality of discussion and the idea that democracy revolves around the transformation rather than simply the aggregation of preferences. From the literature, explicit and implicit definitions of deliberative democracy differ widely though Elster (1998) believes all definitions agree that the notion includes collective decision-making with participation of all who will be affected by the decision-making or their representatives (thus democratic). Further, it includes decision-making by means of arguments offered by, and to, participants who are committed to the values of rationality and impartiality (thus deliberative). It is clear that deliberative democracy privileges the strength of the argument over the status of the arguer.

Giddens (1994: 113-115) asserts that one of the important points regarding deliberative democracy is that it does not assume the existence of a general will. There are clearly many questions to which there is no single answer and all solutions can be contested. In deliberative democracy a settlement can be reached where those involved might agree on norms and/or procedures that can guide the assessment of policy decisions. Alternatively, Benhabib (1996: 69) claims that where "decisions are in principle open to appropriate public processes of deliberation by free and equal citizens democratic institutions can gain and/or increase their legitimacy".

According to Issues Deliberation Australia (2002), twenty deliberative polls, whose aims are to measure opinion change rather than public opinion, have already taken place in America, Britain, Canada and Denmark, while in Australia only two such polls have occurred. These polls are modelled after the ancient Athenian democracy, and seek to examine what the public would think if given an opportunity to be informed and to deliberate with their peers
on topics of social and public policy. Such deliberation is seen to be Habermasian — that is rational-critical debate where the strength of the argument prevails, not the status of the arguer. In all cases, whatever the issue/topic, there have been dramatic and statistically significant changes in views. This was certainly the case in Australia where both polls have been run and organised by Issues Deliberation Australia, a nonprofit organisation established to facilitate public consultation, public debate, and the conduct and dissemination of high quality research on topical social issues impacting Australia. The first deliberative poll occurred between October 22-24, 1999 and over 300 delegates from around Australia took part in the special poll at Old Parliament House in Canberra to discuss the forthcoming Republic Referendum. Interestingly, called ‘an event’, the poll was similar to the 1997 Constitutional Convention. However, those attending were ‘ordinary’ men and women from different socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities and occupations rather than people appointed for their community standing. Those attending were randomly selected and “Australia Deliberates”, as it was called, set out to determine how attitudes to a republic might change after people are given the chance to examine the facts and discuss them away from negative campaigning. People attending the Deliberative Poll were first interviewed about six weeks prior to being invited to attend the deliberations and were then polled at the end of the weekend of discussions and questioning of experts from all sides of the debate. Support for the republican model in the referendum increased dramatically. The proportion of the participants supporting the republican model increased from 53% prior to the deliberations to 73% afterward. Further, knowledge among the participants of facts relating to the referendum on the republic also increased dramatically as a result of the weekend’s deliberations. For example, prior to the weekend, only 39% of participants were able to correctly identify the role of the Queen in relation to the appointment of the Governor-General. After the weekend, 85% of these same voters could do so (Greene 1999; Issues Deliberation Australia 2002).

The more recent poll took place on March 6th, 2001 and took as its issue reconciliation. Again, Issues Deliberation Australia (2002) reports that when Australians had the opportunity to discuss and question intensely the diverse
range of issues under the general topic of reconciliation, opinion shifted dramatically. For example, the perception of reconciliation as an important issue facing the nation rose dramatically from 31% prior to deliberations to 63% following deliberations. Further, perception of disadvantage of indigenous Australians in relation to other Australians rose dramatically from 52% prior to deliberation to 80% post-deliberation. Those in favour of deliberative polls argue they are a solution to the problem that citizens are often uninformed about key public issues. Conventional polls represent the public’s surface impressions of sound bites and headlines. The public, subject to what social scientists have called "rational ignorance" has little reason to confront the tradeoffs or invest time and effort into acquiring information.

Fung and Wright (2002) identify five ‘real world’ experiments across three continents in empowered deliberative democracy. While the five experiments differed in design, issue areas, scope and participatory particulars, they all aspired to deepen the ways in which ordinary citizens can effectively participate in, and influence, policies which directly affect their lives. The authors claim the experiments share six institutional design principles being:

- the experiments address a specific area of public problems;
- the experiments attempt to solve the problem through the processes of reasoned deliberation;
- such deliberation relies upon the bottom-up involvement of ordinary citizens and officials in the area;
- the experiments devolve decisions and implementation power to local action units;
- the action units are not autonomous but rather linked to each other and the state in order to allocate resources, solve common problems and diffuse innovations and learning;
- finally, the experiments colonize and transform existing state and corporate institutions in such a way that the administrative bureaucracies charged with solving the problems are restructured in these deliberative bodies.

The institutions designed with these principles in mind are accordingly expected to deliver the potential benefits of effective problem solving, equity,
and active citizenship.

The results of these experiments found that deliberative democracy is no panacea. Firstly, the democratic character of processes and outcomes may be vulnerable to serious problems of power and domination. Participants in deliberative democracy projects inevitably face each other from unequal positions of power (as Fraser 1992 and Mainbridge 1990 argue) which might stem from material differences and class backgrounds, from the knowledge and information gaps that separate the ‘expert’ from the ‘layperson’, or from personal capacities for deliberation and persuasion associated with educational and occupational advantages. How the more powerful use the tools at their disposal is clearly a pertinent question – for example can powerful participants improperly and unreasonably exclude issues that threaten their interests from the scope of deliberative action? Deliberative democracy projects have thus far seemed to demand intensive forms of political engagement and as such may aggravate status and wealth biases. Further, in terms of this thesis, deliberative democracy might disarm voluntary associations in that it requires them to ‘behave responsibly’ and discourages radicalism and militancy. Deliberation requires reasonableness and accordingly might suggest that deliberative processes require an abstinence from vigorous methods of challenging power (Fung and Wright 2002).

Powerful participants can also engage in ‘forum shopping’ strategies and use deliberative institutions only when it suits them. For example, in one of the experiments identified by Fung and Wright (2002), real estate development interests in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil bypassed the deliberative system in favour of more friendly planning agencies when neighbourhood opposition was anticipated. Alternatively, these deliberative institutions can also fall prey to ‘rent-seeking’ and capture by especially well informed and interested parties. Clearly the division of the body politic (or the Balkanisation of politics) into contending groups can, as Rousseau argued, weaken the body as a whole and lead to the ‘mischief of factions’ and certainly leave open the possibility of one faction dominating the rest.
London (1995: 44) claims criticisms of deliberative democracy tend to focus on the conformity component of group decisions (as opposed to genuine unanimity) and the fact that decisions are closed in direction shutting out alternative views and/or minority issues. Further, because consensus is near impossible, the mechanisms for aggregating group ideas undermine the very notion and purpose of deliberation. Finally, as with other forms of democracy, deliberative democracy requires public participation and there may not be the inclination to participate in a climate of civic and political disengagement – indeed deliberative democracy requires high levels of popular participation. We might conclude then that deliberative democracy might be unrealistic (indeed, only an ideal) in contemporary mass society and accordingly be another attempt (a la Habermas) for rational-critical debate that is simply too utopian to be meaningful for a plural society such as Australia.

Conclusion

And here a different question arises...whether, and to what extent, a public sphere dominated by mass media provides a realistic chance for members of civil society, in their competition with the political and economic invaders’ media power, to bring about changes in the spectrum of values, topics, and reasons channelled by external influences, to open it up in an innovative way, and to screen it critically (Habermas 1992: 455)

This chapter has attempted to introduce some of the diversity of writing regarding the public sphere and has specifically built on the ideas proposed by Habermas (1989) in his original work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Central to a discussion of the public sphere is the concept of democracy and those supporting Habermas’s normative ideal (including advocates of deliberative democracy) believe democracy needs to be reinvigorated. These theorists are concerned by the decline in civic and political engagement as indicated by voter apathy and increasing citizen detachment from politics and the fact that the citizenry have little direct role in politics. Further, they lament the fact that the mass media appears to be the
only institution that provides a space for public debate in modern society and is hardly going to be the space where democracy can be enhanced.

The postmodern theorists believe the mass media provides an abundance of opportunities for citizens to participate but clearly have a different view of both democracy and participation. Their view of dialogue and communication differs greatly from liberal theorists. Those advocating cyberdemocracy are less concerned with the mass media as a flawed institution of democracy as they believe the media as we know it might very well be ‘passing’ and they claim the new public sphere ‘hails the rebirth of democratic life’ where technologies will allow social actors to find and forge common interests. Finally, the feminist perspective has drawn our attention to issues of exclusion - both in terms of participation and the theoretical analysis and construction of the public sphere - in both Habermas’s normative ideal and other hegemonic forms of democracy. Clearly, what all of the above theorists have in common is a participatory conception of democracy and they are concerned that liberal representative democracy has now become elite democracy. That is, citizens’ participation in politics equates only with voting to choose among the bids for power by political elites and to accept leadership – a vote fewer people want to exercise. The participatory model of democracy maintains that what makes good leaders also makes good citizens, that is active participation in ruling and being ruled and in public will and opinion formation. These theorists hold that without public spaces for active participation and without the narrowing of the gap between rulers and ruled, to the point of its abolition, politics is democratic in name only (Cohen and Arato 1992: 4-6). Therefore, the intrinsic link between democracy and the public sphere becomes apparent.

It is clear that an analysis of public debate and discourse cannot assume that there is a single public sphere and therefore the question regarding voluntary associations and how they engage in the public sphere will need to consider which public sphere(s). Further, there is a question regarding the nature of communication and discourse and the possibilities, or even the desire, for reasoned dialogue in liberal representative democracies. Strict adherence to Habermas’s analysis certainly means new forms of communication and
discourse, that do provide wider opportunities for participation (by individuals and voluntary associations), are neglected. By the same token, the suggestion that new forms of speech and a diversity of voices equates to a more democratic public sphere, without corresponding analysis of the ‘quality’ of the discourse is clearly inadequate. Feminist analysis pointing to counter spheres being spaces of withdrawal and regroupment on the one hand and training grounds for agitational activities directed to wider publics on the other, have certainly advanced the debates.

This thesis examines to what extent the institutional core of civil society, being voluntary associations, can strengthen democracy, which is seen to be made possible by the associations’ engagement in the public sphere. It is important to note at the outset - and this will be highlighted in Chapter Three - that voluntary associations themselves are not a homogenous group of organisations and have different organisational forms, operating rationales, aims and objectives. However, an important area in any analysis of how communication takes place (in the public sphere or elsewhere) is the degree to which the communication is consensus-seeking or the exercise of power and rhetoric. Foucault (1988: 11) claims “power is always present” and while this chapter has offered little analysis of how discourse can be infected by power it will clearly be one of the questions the research will attempt to investigate (Chapter Four and Chapter Five). As Chapter Three identifies, voluntary associations are undergoing some degree of colonisation by both the state and the market (Brown et al 2000) and even if Foucault is overly pessimistic, there may again be a suspicion of idealism in Habermas who provides little detailed analysis of power relations in his theories of the public sphere, communicative action and discourse ethics (Flyvbjerg 1998a; 1998b).

At the outset of this chapter the public sphere was defined as a sphere between civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest can be institutionally guaranteed (Habermas 1989: xi). Further, voluntary associations have been identified by some theorists (including Habermas 1997) as the institutional core of civil society (Flyvbjerg 1998a). However, as with the concept of the public sphere, there is little
agreement regarding the concept of civil society and much of the recent literature has certainly provided rather idealised versions of the concept. Before examining the role of voluntary associations in the public sphere, an analysis is required of the concept of civil society and the interface between civil society and the public sphere. The aim of the next chapter is to provide such analysis.
Chapter Two – The Concept of Civil Society

Introduction

The theme of civil society has been reborn on a grand scale, and it can be said without much exaggeration that it has moved to occupy the centre-ground of contemporary political thought. This development was wholly unexpected and it has consequently filled some with the millenarian hope that the Age of Civil Society is nigh (Kecsk 1998: 65)

Throughout this chapter, the examination of the concept of civil society is understood in terms of an overarching question that theorists of civil society from Locke to Gramsci and onto the neo-Tocquevillians have sought to address: what knits society together and provides for social integration? Many theorists (for example Putnam 2000) are now claiming it is civil society that best knits society together. The importance of this to this thesis is that Habermas (1989) claims the public sphere can be defined as the sphere between civil society and the state, and accordingly, it is important to analyse the concept of the civil society. This is particularly so, given that Habermas’s interest in the public sphere and civil society pre-dates the ‘revival’ of the concept of civil society. Indeed, in his more recent work, Between Facts and Norms, Habermas (1997: 366-367) claims that the sphere of civil society has been rediscovered “in wholly new constellations”. Rather than the ‘bourgeois society’ of the liberal tradition, which Hogel conceptualised as the ‘system of needs’ - being a market system involving social labour and commodity exchange - and in contrast to the Marxist tradition, contemporary definitions of civil society no longer include the economy. According to Habermas, civil society currently has as its institutional core non-government, nonprofit voluntary associations and these associations secure the communications structures of the public sphere in the private realm of society – thus the separation of civil society and the state.
As Calhoun (1994: 309) claims, civil society is on the lips of politicians, business leaders and executives, and for Dekker and van den Broek (1998: 11) the phrase is currently “en vogue”, and used as both a slogan and a catchword. It has firstly, been used as a slogan in opposition to totalitarian regimes in East-Central Europe, and secondly, as a catchword by those theorists concerned with issues such as social fragmentation, political alienation, and the erosion of community life. While Dryzek (1996) argues that civil society as a concept is often used in inexact and different ways by different authors, Dekker and van den Broek claim that despite these different connotations “voluntary organisations and volunteering appear to be core elements of civil society everywhere” (1998: 11-12).

The fact that phrases involving the resurrection, re-emergence, rebirth, reconstruction or renaissance of civil society are frequently used in contemporary literature signifies on the one hand an association with an ‘older’ concept and on the other something significantly new (Cohen and Arato 1992: 29). Confusion reigns as the phrase is too often invoked without being clearly defined and therefore the reader cannot be sure whether civil society has something to do with Friedman’s market policies, social movements such as Poland’s Solidarity, or the sort of ‘political society’ or public sphere so loved by Tocqueville and Habermas and existing in the cafes and coffee houses of eighteenth century Europe (Calhoun 1994: 309).

Given that theorists are far from agreement regarding a definition of civil society - even to the point of debate regarding the inclusion or exclusion of the economy - it is critical to fully examine the concept before voluntary associations can be positioned as the core institutions. In examining the concept of civil society, this chapter will be divided into five sections, though primarily the chapter is concerned with defining civil society. The first section takes an historical perspective and traces the genealogy of the concept from Locke to Gramsci. The second section considers some of the reasons why the concept has undergone a revival and begins to clarify modern definitions, many of which have idealised the concept. The third section examines the link between civil society and voluntary associations, and the
fourth section takes a critical view and considers some of the potential problems with the concept and how it has been applied. The conclusion of the chapter will attempt to narrow the focus, provide the definition of civil society to be used within this thesis and justify the claim that voluntary associations have the potential to be the core institutions of civil society.

Problems of definition – From Locke to Gramsci

As a first approximation, civil society may be defined as all social interaction not encompassed by the state or the economy (Dryzek 1996: 480)

As an analytical concept, civil society and the sectoral models to which it is attached suffer from acute definitional fuzziness (Edwardes and Foley 1998: 126)

The proliferation and inexact nature of definitions surrounding the concept of civil society is not a modern phenomenon. According to Schmidt (1995), as early as the eighteenth century, definitions of civility and civil society differed wildly and a review of the literature examining the concept suggests that debates regarding civil society have mostly revolved around what is to be included and excluded in the concept. For example, does civil society include the realm of the family? Is civil society simply a realm or sphere that is ‘against’ or ‘other’ than the state – that is ‘society against the state’? Should the economy be included (Hegel) or excluded (Gramsci) from the concept of civil society? To further complicate matters both neo-Marxists and neo-liberals hold to the position that includes the economy in civil society. Is civil society differentiated from political society (Tocqueville versus Hegel)? To find a way through the labyrinth of definitions and provide the foundations for the modern revival of the concept, the historical roots must be traced.

The concept of civil society can go back as far as Aristotle’s Politics - though Keane (1998: 32) claims the birth and maturation of the concept occurred between 1750 and 1850. This analysis begins with the modern idea of civil
society and therefore John Locke and the social contract theorists who conformed faithfully to Aristotle. Writing in 1690, Locke (1980) in *Second Treatise of Government* defines civil society or political society by what it is not and according to Locke it is not ‘conjugal society’ that unites husband and wife, nor is it the system of absolute monarchy. Finally, civil society is different from the state ‘men’ are naturally in, being the state of freedom and equality. Thus, civil society was primarily set apart from the household or domestic society, the church or ecclesiastical society, and those societies inhabited by ‘savages’ who lived without laws, conveniences or commerce. That is, civil society was contrasted with a pre-political state of nature. Putting on the bonds of civil or political society and separating themselves from their natural freedom and liberty, men are able to form communities and enjoy a comfortable and peaceful life. Thus, for Locke, entry into civil or political society was conditional on leaving the ‘state of nature’ behind (Schmidt 1995: 900-903). According to Seligman (1992: 22), political or civil society was for Locke the arena where the insufficiencies of the state of nature could be resolved through the mutuality of consent and contract. Thus, civil society completes the freedom, rights and privileges enjoyed by men (not yet women) under the law of nature – that is, it is a more perfect form through which the freedom, equality and independence of nature can be realised.

Locke’s social contract theory provided a way for thinking about civil society and considered what sort of political order might be devised were men given the chance to start again – Locke here is reflecting on the oppressiveness of obedience to the rule of absolute monarchy. Locke’s political or civil society resonates with Hobbes’s ‘civitas’, and Rousseau’s ‘city’ or ‘republic’ and each has their antecedents to Aristotle’s *polis* or political community. However, Aristotle believed the *polis* was prior to other associations (household or village) and that man was by nature a *polis* dwelling man equipped with speech and reason and therefore inclined towards arguing about what might be just and right. Alternatively, Locke’s social contract theories suggested man might well be inclined to form political associations but the state man is in ‘by nature’ is certainly not a civil state (Schmidt 1995: 900-903).
Locke provides a convenient focus that identifies civil society with political society or the state. However, a number of theorists (Cohen and Arato 1992; Schmidt 1995) have identified some of the ambiguities in Locke's social contract theories. It is important to note that for Locke the “supporting struts of civil society” were those of an unproblematic and rationalised theology and he rooted natural law in Divine Revelation and human agents were Godly subjects. Accordingly, civil society was tied to some form of transcendental anchor where the universal basis for good could be found only in God. By the middle of the eighteenth century, society was no longer conceived in the hierarchic and holistic terms of medieval orders but of discrete individuals between whom new bonds had to be found. Accordingly, interpersonal relations were not to be based on a shared vision of cosmic order (as Locke had proposed) but on the principle of rational self-interest. There was a disengagement from a direct theological underpinning of what constituted the social good and human attributes now had to support a vision of the social good. Further, an ethically validated social space was no longer conceived in terms of Godly benevolence. Rather, the sources of natural benevolence were seen to be posited within the human world. The emergence of capitalist market relations posed a new set of problems for the conception of the social order and the freeing of labour and capital meant individuals acted out their private interests in the public realm. Thus, the public arena of exchange and interaction became the realm of civil society (Seligman 1992: 25-35).

Within this context the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers (Ferguson, Hume and Smith) added a new component to civil society (beyond its identification with the state and political society) and claimed the essential feature of civil or ‘civilised’ society was not its political organisation but material organisation – thus civil and economic society were being merged and the old Aristotelian exclusion of the economy was being reversed (Cohen and Arato 1992: 90). Economic society was added to civil society as these thinkers saw the emerging civil society as a realm of protection for individuals against feudal rule. As an alternative to feudalism, the world of commerce and business was a path towards freedom and progress where competition, mutual regard and a moral order were deemed a natural part of economic exchange. As people
began to live interdependent lives the coercive state and the Hobbesian state of nature would be transcended (Bruyn 1999: 25-26). It is important to note here that Seligman (1992: 25) argues it is to this eighteenth century idea of civil society that theorists are attempting to return today and particularly the synthesis of a number of oppositions that were increasingly being felt in the new social order of the eighteenth century. Such oppositions that theorists were attempting to synthesise then, and Seligman argues are now, are the public and the private, the individual and the social, and egoistic and altruistic sources of action (see also Edwardes and Foley 2001: 2).

It was this Scottish Enlightenment notion of civilised or economic society that Hegel brought together in his ‘great synthesis’. Clearly Hegel’s is not the first modern conception of civil society, but according to Cohen and Arato (1992: 89-91) “his is the first modern theory of civil society” and should be viewed “as the most important theoretical forerunner of several later approaches that have preserved their potential to provide more global, intellectual orientation even in our own time”.

Unlike Locke and the social contract theorists, who conceived civil society as a ‘natural condition’, Hegel claimed civil society was an historically produced sphere of ethical life and in his 1818 lectures he proposed a tripartite division of the family, civil society and the state. For Hegel, civil society was the rising commercial sphere where people were considered separate individuals whose interests were neither political nor universally moral but were civil and economic. Indeed, the foundation for his idea of civil society was individuality, as the expression of the particular (individual) will within the universal (social) framework. Civil society was based on individual self-interest – accordingly carrying a mass of conflicting and group interests – where the state was the final moral authority (Cohen and Arato 1992: 91-116; Seligman 1992: 44-52).

What for Hegel, comprised civil society? It not only included the domain of production and exchange or what Hegel called the ‘system of needs’ – that is a market system involving social labour and commodity exchange – but it also
included the system of civil law that makes exchange relationships possible and the public and private agencies (police and corporations) that carry out the supervisory and welfare functions a market society requires. Entrenched in the market, it included political and legal functions though it was a sphere of activities distinct from political society and the state. Indeed, for Hegel, civil society included everything outside the state and was certainly a creation of the modern world. Being the realm of the 'system of needs', civil society cannot be a pregiven and invariable substratum of life existing outside of space and time as needs multiply and diversify. However, being a realm distinct from, and outside of the state, then Hegel's account of civil society provides the short step to then dispense with the term 'civil' and speak simply of society (Cohen and Arato 1992: 91-116; Seligman 1992: 44-52; Schmidt 1995: 909-911; Kean 1998: 49-50; Bruyn 1999; Ehrenberg 1999).

It can be argued that the effect of this dispensing with the term 'civil' over the next one hundred and fifty years, is that while the concepts of the 'state' and 'society' received considerable attention, civil society was not theorised in any significant way. However, before moving onto recent theorising, and particularly giving attention to the recent revival of the concept, two notable contributions to any discussion of civil society need to be addressed. These are the contributions of Alexis de Tocqueville and Karl Marx, with Tocqueville's writing providing much of the inspiration for the recent literature examining the concept of civil society.

Tocqueville's study of early nineteenth century American democracy is instructive in terms of the relationship between the state and civil society and while recent analysis of civil society has suggested that a strong civil society reinforces a strong state, Tocqueville was less certain. Indeed, he was struck by America's flourishing civil society in part because the state at the time appeared to be weak (Encarnacion 2000; Whittington 2001). Where Hegel had conceptualised the notion of civil society as a sphere that arose between political society and domestic society, Tocqueville claimed it emerged in the space between the church and the state. Accordingly, for Tocqueville, where religious and political society involved relations either between individuals
and superior powers or between groups of associated individuals, civil society is the sphere in which individuals join together free from control of either the church or the state. It is true to say however, that in *Democracy in America* Tocqueville (1968) focuses mostly on the distinction between civil society and political society and religious society is at best neglected and at worst collapsed into civil society whereby ‘religious associations’ become one example of the broader concept of civil society (Schmidt 1995: 916-917).

The distinction between civil and political society was pushed even further by Tocqueville in that he distinguished political forms of association from more ‘civil’ associations. Political associations were those that were established, in part, in opposition to the state and therefore were aimed at preserving the ‘independence’ of the citizenry. The civil associations, that greatly impressed Tocqueville, were those that addressed the daily needs and daily life of the citizens and were therefore aimed at preserving civilisation itself. Tocqueville claimed that without these civil associations then the citizens of a democracy would descend into barbarism (Schmidt 1995: 916-917). Indeed, Tocqueville claimed that it was the sphere of voluntary associations, sustained by the distinctive set of customs, habits and social arrangements, that constituted democracy (Schmidt 1995: 927). It is clearly the link that Tocqueville (1968) makes between civil society and democracy that has had the greatest impact on recent proponents of civil society. Indeed a number of theorists have argued for, and re-emphasized the importance of civil society in ‘making democracy work’ (Putnam 1993). However, hasty embrace of Tocqueville’s celebration of civil associations can mean that the ambiguities in his definition of democracy are ignored (Schmidt 1995: 918) and Tocqueville’s own ambivalence regarding the relationship between civil society and democracy is neglected (Whittington 2001: 21-22). Both of these points shall be examined later in this chapter when the recent ‘revival’ of the concept of civil society is examined.

While writing only a few years after Tocqueville’s study of ‘democracy in America’ and plainly aware of Tocqueville’s theorising on civil society, Marx’s analysis of civil society began with a critique of Hegel. He insisted
that when Hegel made his distinction between the state and civil society he had ‘inverted’ their relationship by transforming ‘real subjects’ - civil society and the family - into ‘unreal elements’ of the mystical notion of the state (Marx 1978a: 42-44; Schmidt 1995: 925). Marx’s definition of civil society is perhaps the simplest of past and present definitions of civil society, and while critical of Hegel he certainly shared with Hegel the notion that civil society was an historically produced phenomenon – a particular historical form of the process of material production and certainly not a naturally given state of affairs. That is, he included economic relations in the realm of civil society and contrasted the concept with political society, which for Marx was synonymous with the state (Hoare and Smith 1971; McLellan 1980). For Marx, civil society was ‘bourgeois society’ and as such was an historically determined entity, characterised by the relations of production, class divisions and struggles, and protected (for a time) by corresponding political-legal mechanisms. Civil society constituted the sum total of the material conditions of life and the ideological superstructure (law, politics, art, religion, philosophy) rested on it, though the structure of civil society itself was determined by the political economy. Being dependent on the material relations of production, civil society certainly referred to a dimension of all previous societies and accordingly Marx (1978b: 163) declares in The German Ideology, that “civil society is the true source and theater of all history”. Of course, bourgeois civil society, a product of modern times, saw the emergence of the proletariat and the associated class antagonisms that existed did so within civil society. For Marx, the solutions to the antagonisms within civil society could not lie within political society, as political emancipation represented only the liberation of the ‘bourgeois man’ – the creature of civil society – rather that ‘human emancipation’. It was the wage labour/capital relationship that was the point of antagonism within modern civil society and it was the universal (proletariat) class with radical chains that would bring about human emancipation and the dissolution of all classes – from within civil society and if need be through violence (Marx 1978b; Keane 1998; Schmidt 1995).
For Marx, there is a fundamental problem in the fact that in modern society the political realm is abstracted from civil society and is posited as a realm of freedom in contrast to civil society. The realm of political society is communal in nature and imbues the individual with a public character. In contrast, civil society is the realm of the egoistic and isolated individual pursuing his interests in opposition to others. Thus, for Marx, modern life is characterised by the contradiction of an abstract citizen who is a communal being participating in public life through citizenship and a concrete (though passive) individual, a member of civil society, separated from other men and from community (Seligman 1992: 54-55). The problem Marx never tired of pointing out of course is that ‘the citizen’ of the political realm - in bourgeois society - is subservient to the ‘bourgeois man’, and finally “man as he really is, is seen only in the form of egoistic man, and man in his true nature only in the form of the abstract citizen” (emphasis in original) (Marx 1978a: 46). This thesis will return to Marxist notions (and critiques) of civil society later in the chapter but this historical perspective will be concluded by outlining Gramsci’s neo-Marxist perspective of civil society.

While theorists such as Keane (1998: 14-19) criticise Gramsci for analytically distinguishing the economy from both the state and civil society, there is no uniform usage of the concept in the totality of Gramsci’s writing. Early in his writing Gramsci follows the Hegelian version of civil society and contrasts it with the state – by which he means political society in the Marxist sense. At this point, economic relations are certainly in. However, by the time he is writing Prison Notebooks (1929-1935) he has made what Keane describes as “the unfortunate analytic separation of the non-state realm into economy and civil society” (1998: 16). For Cohen and Arato (1992: 143) this three-part conceptual framework is highly original and they claim Gramsci made such differentiation on the basis that it allowed for “a serious thematization of the generation of consent through cultural and social hegemony as an independent and, at times, decisive variable in the reproduction of the existing system”.

Gramsci believed that civil society was of tactical importance in that the grip of the property-owning class was most vulnerable within the cultural
institutions of civil society. Thus civil society, needing to be abolished, could only be abolished by means of civil society. Wedged between the state, with its legislation and coercion, and the class structured economy, civil society with its non-state, non-market institutions was the critical sphere in the struggle against the exploitative power of capitalist society. In *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci likens civil society to modern warfare and claims that firstly civil society (these ‘fortresses and earthworks’) protects the ‘outer ditch’ of state power and protects the ruling class from the shock waves of economic crises. However, Gramsci claims that the complexity of civil society allows for well-organised and cunning groups to penetrate the manifold structures of civil society and suggests that capturing civil society is a ‘war of position’ rather than a ‘war of manœuvre’ (Kcane 1998: 14-15).

Gramsci used these First World War military terms to demonstrate how in revolutionary struggle a new ‘attack’ on the state was needed, and especially in the West. Rather than a frontal attack on the state – a ‘war of manœuvre’ - that had gained consent by force, what was required in the West where the state gained consent by coercion, was a ‘war of position’ (trench warfare backed up by reserves of supplies, munitions and soldiers behind the lines) conducted on the terrain of civil society. For Gramsci there is a conceptual opposition between the state and civil society in that the state is a site of coercion, dictatorship and domination, while civil society is the site of consent, hegemony and direction. Thus, civil society is at once the terrain on which the dominant class organises its hegemony and opposition parties and movements organise, win allies and build their social power. It is important to note that Gramsci himself stresses that his distinction between civil society and the state is methodological. Accordingly, he means that the two levels must be analytically distinguished from one another though they are intertwined in practice (Forgacs 1988: 224). It is his ‘methodological’ distinction between civil society and the market that has drawn most criticism with Kcane (1998) arguing that the two are so embedded in each other that neither can survive or even exist without the other. However, Gramsci’s contribution to the debates and theory of civil society are significant and as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, most recent literature on civil
society has held to his three-fold distinction of state, economy and civil society, though perhaps for different reasons.

The revival of a concept

There can be little doubt that the idea of civil society has become over the past decade a much used, and perhaps overused, concept (Seligman 2000: 12)

As Cohen and Arato (1992: 29) point out, phrases involving the renaissance, re-emergence, rebirth and resurrection of civil society suggest the continuity of an emerging political paradigm, with essential trends of early modernity. However, they also suggest such terms are misleading in that they refer to something not only modern but new. Why and in what ways the concept might have been revived at this particular juncture in history will be examined in this section.

A crude chronology might claim that for most of the nineteenth century, liberal society was in the process of emancipating itself from an absolutist and paternalistic state and therefore the forces of capitalism were on the offensive. By the late-nineteenth century and through much of the twentieth century the destructive tendencies of the capitalist market economy had become a concern and it was the logic and goals of the modern state that were seen to express the interests of a heterogeneous set of social groups. This statist phase has for more than a decade and a half now been seen to have its limits by both the left and the right of the political spectrum and citizens' initiatives, associations and movements have increasingly oriented themselves to the defence and expansion of 'civil society', the forms and projects of which are certainly distinguished from the state (Cohen and Arato 1992: 29).

Indeed, according to Hems and Tonkiss (2000: 2) the revival of civil society has been in part a response to the crisis in state forms and modes of political power in various contexts. Firstly, there has been the rise of neo-liberalism that has seen significant welfare restructuring in liberal democracies.
Secondly, there has been the dramatic collapse of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. Thirdly, in both Latin America and Southern Africa there have been attempts to transform their political structures to more ‘democratic’ forms of government. Finally, there have been more general anxieties regarding the role (and possible decline) of nation-states everywhere in the context of globalization. Therefore, the questions regarding the revival of the concept of civil society go beyond simplistic explanations that suggest it is part of the struggles for civil and political society as countries in the East and South attempt to transform from authoritarian rule into advanced capitalist democracies. The revival is clearly more than a repeat of the democratic movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that created a duality between the state and civil society and which remains a basis for democratic and liberal institutions in the West. Rather than being a concept that is irrelevant to the West, a civil-society-perspective has been seen as a way out of the antinomies that are currently plaguing Western political and social thought (Cohen and Arato 1992:15). It is therefore a concept that has gained currency across a number of social and political contexts.

Seligman (2000: 12) claims that civil society was the slogan used in Eastern Europe during the 1980s as a “cudgel to batter the totalitarian state” and was then taken up in the United States in the 1990s by critics of the existing political order to justify their claims. However, Keane (1998) in explaining the resurgence of the concept, identifies three phases of its contemporary revival. The first phase of the contemporary renewal of the language of civil society (and the state) began in the second half of the 1960s with the work of the Civil Society School of Japanese Marxism. The theorists associated with this school took a neo-Gramscian position and used the term to highlight certain themes, and unhappy with relying on European social science, called for a new, less academic social science within the sphere of civil society. Further, they used the concept to deepen their analysis of the unique features of Japanese capitalism with its particular emphasis on premodern sentiments such as communalism, patriarchal family life and individuals’ respect for power. Japanese capitalism, they argued, was able to grow rapidly due to a weak civil society, in the sense of shared social networks that infuse
individuals with a strong sense of their individuality – that is Japanese capitalism (a form of capitalism without civil society) more easily realized its demands without recourse to requirements for improved living, working and environmental conditions. Given the perceived excessive power of the state in Japan and that the rights of the state are presumed to be primary, without a developed civil society the basic Marxist ideal of ‘social individuality’ could not be realized. The Gramscian position taken by the Japanese Marxists of creating a communist society without class divisions and therefore without the division of the state and civil society – indeed abolishing civil society by means of civil society – had little influence and is criticized heavily by Keane who has no sympathy with the Gramscian approach with its emphasis on the separation of non-state and non-market institutions from civil society (1998: 12-14).

Keane (1998) claims that phase two of the ‘revival’ began during the 1970s in the central-eastern half of Europe and unlike their earlier Japanese counterparts the central-eastern European advocates of civil society broke company with Marxism. Keane (as does Havel 1993) identifies this phase of the revival with the birth of public criticisms of despotic state power and a defence of civil society as a realm within which a new democratic political and social order could be achieved. Such defenders of civil society and the juxta-positioning of the state against society include the members of Solidarity in Poland and the signatories of Charter 77 in the former Czechoslovakia (Isaac 1996). These groups attempted to highlight the totalitarian character of Soviet-type systems – one-party systems that could only function by thwarting the old traditions of civil society and treating all individuals, groups and organizations as their property. Not only was civil society annihilated under these one-party systems but so too the divisions between political and social power, public and private law, and state sanctioned (dis)information and public debated opinion. Under these regimes, the language of civil society functioned as a moral and political utopia. Solidarity and Charta 77 understood well that state power could only survive if the potential for civil society could be forced underground and conversely that when civil society gained in confidence, the structural weakness of the state
could become evident and civil society would swell from below. These groups sought neither to form political parties nor to seize state power, nor to restore capitalism or see the ‘withering away of the state’. The ultimate goal of these groups was to cultivate a solidarity among a plurality of self-governing civil associations that could pressure the state from without while allowing the same groups to attend (peacefully) to their own non-state affairs (Keele 1998: 19-23; Isaac 1996).

Keane (1998: 23-25) concludes his analysis of the renaissance of civil society with phase three by which he suggests the term moves beyond the boundaries of Europe. As a concept that is contrasted (implicitly or explicitly) with the state, the language of civil society has, and is now, appearing in an extraordinary variety of contexts, with different meanings and purposes. For example, Prime Ministers and Presidents alike speak of civil society (see Blair 1998; Hargreaves 1998), and whether discussing citizens’ entitlements, the relationship of religion and politics, the ways in which the end of the Cold War has unleashed new global tensions, ecological risk (see Beck 1992), political apathy, or private issues, civil society is inevitably referred to. Indeed, in recent years there has been much reflection on the (possible) emergence of a ‘global’ civil society. Further, in sub-Saharan Africa associational life has been the centre of much of the focus that analyses how weak states can become stronger and more effective at producing the accumulation and better distribution of wealth. A healthy and vibrant associational life in this context is seen as a way for improving the legitimacy of the state. While it is important to note there is growing concern regarding the ‘importation’ and relevance of the term into these contexts (Orvis 2001), given its Western liberal political traditions, the next section will examine how the term has been defined and used in recent years in Western liberal democracies. Again, within the social and political science literature, there is little consensus regarding definition. Although Flyvbjerg (1998a: 210) is correct when he claims that most writers on civil society claim voluntary associations – associations outside the sphere of the state and the economy – are the institutional core of civil society. It is this claim that this chapter will now examine.
Civil Society and Voluntary Association

...a civil society exists when individuals and groups are free to form organizations that function independently and that can mediate between citizens and the state (Wendel 1994: 323)

...the term civil society is best understood to represent the so-called voluntary sector, or the realm of organization that is self-generating and self-supporting and that exists outside the state and the marketplace (Encarnacion 2000: 11)

Western (and mainly liberal) theorists of the concept of civil society have focused on the underlying problems with liberal representative democracies – some of which were identified in Chapter One, in terms of the atrophy of the public sphere – and suggested a robust civil society can be the solution. Such problems include concerns about the decline in civic and political engagement as indicated by voter apathy, increasing citizen detachment from politics and the fact that the citizenry has little direct role in politics. They also include the fact that political ideals are not being met – ideals of active citizenship where political consensus is forged through dialogue, where public policies ground a productive economy and healthy society, and in an egalitarian version of the democratic ideal, where all citizens have a share in the nation’s wealth (Fung and Wright 2002).

According to Giddens (1994: 1-21) globalisation, increased social-reflexivity and the transformation of day-to-day life in an increasing pluralist society are all challenges liberal representative democracies are failing to meet. As identified in the previous section, the last decade has seen an upsurge in democratic impulses in parts of the world where democratic institutions had either not existed or were crippled. However, the last decade has also seen an erosion of belief in the capacity of democratic institutions to intervene in shaping social and economic life and help solve the most pressing problems (Wright 1995: 1; Young 2001). Clearly, in liberal democracies there is large-
scale alienation from, or indifference to, political institutions (Giddens 1994: 109) and because government is often seen as part of the problem rather than the solution, deregulation, privatisation, reduction of social services, and reduction of state spending have been the focus (Wright 1995: 1). Indeed, the current status of democracy and therefore the challenges to be faced include: low levels of government accountability to citizens and low public influence on decision-making; the limited citizen participation in the formal institutions of democracy; weak and unrepresentative political parties; the excessive influence of exclusive, narrowly self-interested organisations in government and policy generally (particularly corporate business interests of employers and organised labour); the exclusion of large sectors of society (unorganised labour and welfare recipients) from effective political influence; and an imperfect and fragmented welfare state (Hirst 1995: 111; Giddens 1994: 113-115). These challenges, according to Hirst (1994: 5-6), are not likely to be met by the imposition of common rules and standard services on the increasingly diverse and pluralistic objectives of the members of modern society.

Hirst (1994: 3-5) suggests that dominant parties, that do have extensive capacities to intervene in society through the policies of the state, have few means of authoritatively determining and responding to the needs of citizens and only the threat of failing to be re-elected acts as an effective constraint on politicians. Indeed, Wright (1995: 2) suggests the major representation of democracy, being competitive elections of political leadership for legislative and executive office, is too narrow. While the abovementioned theorists are pointing to a retreat from political engagement, others, most notably Robert Putnam, have pointed to a retreat in civic engagement. Indeed, according to Putnam (1995; 2000) civic engagement in the United States (the findings were also correlated across thirty-five other countries) is in decline and the stores of social capital are greatly reduced. Turnout in national elections, attendance at public meetings, and attendance at political rallies is falling while churches, labour unions, parent-teacher associations, and fraternal organisations all have memberships in decline.
Thus, a cursory summary of liberal representative democracy as it currently stands might suggest a narrow, limited and inadequate form of democracy, a public sphere that lacks participation and engagement, low stores of social capital where trust, mutuality and norms of reciprocity are absent, a fragile and passive concept of citizenship, increasing economic inequalities at a time when the welfare state is under severe attack, and few means of determining citizens' needs. It is these challenges, that according to Western theorists (such as Putnam 2000) civil society can address and particularly where civil society has as its institutional core voluntary associations. Flyvbjerg (1998a: 211) argues that the “fundamental act of citizenship in a pluralist democracy is that of forming an association”. Further, Keane (1988:14) claims that associations have the task of maintaining and redefining the boundaries between civil society and the state through the expansion of social equality and liberty and the restructuring and democratising of state institutions.

These neo-Tocquevillians, focusing on civil society and the role of voluntary associations and using Tocqueville’s study of nineteenth century Jacksonian America as their inspiration, suggest such associations can potentially be the place where democracy can be democratised, active citizenship can be strengthened, the public sphere can be reinvigorated, and welfare programs suited to pluralist needs can be designed and delivered (see Giddens 1999; Habermas 1997; Putman 2000). In the spirit of Tocqueville (though as the next section highlights not always representing him accurately) they claim that associations can serve democracy by strengthening society’s capacity to check the powers of the state and can be ‘schools of democracy’ where values such as trust, tolerance and compromise can be developed, thereby promoting equality among the citizenry (Encarnacion 2000). For neo-Tocquevillians, civil society becomes the key variable for explaining the success or failure of democratic governments. They re-emphasize the importance of civil society in ‘making democracy work’ claiming that a robust civil society - that is dense networks of social interaction - increases political participation, makes for a ‘happy citizenry’, and helps secure government effectiveness (Whittington 2001).
If Alexis de Tocqueville’s study of American democracy in the 1830s has provided the theoretical inspiration for modern writers and theorists, then Putnam’s (1993) account of civic cultures in modern Italy has provided the empirical inspiration. While Putnam’s work will be examined in detail in Chapter Three, it is important to sketch broadly some of his claims here. For Putnam (1993: 83-99), voluntary associations are significant contributors to the effectiveness and stability of democratic governance and can lead to significant economic benefits as well. This is due to the internal effects on members who develop habits of cooperation, solidarity and public spiritedness. Furthermore, Putnam claims members of associations display more political sophistication, social trust, and more political participation. Also, members in civic organisations tend to be more cooperative and have a sense of shared responsibility for collective endeavours. The external effects include effective social collaboration and effective self-government. Indeed, Putnam’s study of communities throughout the regions of Italy provides practical examples of the potential benefits of voluntary associations to community life and the denser the networks in the community (i.e. the vibrancy of associational life) the more likely the citizens will be able to cooperate for mutual benefit. Since voluntary associations represent horizontal interaction they can sustain social trust and cooperation in a way that vertical networks cannot and therefore are essential to the production/reproduction of social capital. Social capital, in the tradition of Putnam’s definition, refers to the processes between people which establish networks, norms of generalised reciprocity, and generalised trust and facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit (Putnam 1993: 87-99).  

It is clear that Putnam (1993: 87-89) believes associations have the potential to strengthen citizenship which he claims in a civic community is marked by active participation in public affairs and entails equal rights and obligations for

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10 Both Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and James Coleman (1988) utilised the concept of social capital prior to Putnam popularising it. However, in Bourdieu and Coleman’s conception of social capital the analogy with financial capital is taken more seriously seeing it as instrumental in the flow of goods and services to individuals and groups. Alternatively, Putnam ties the concept to the production of collective goods such as civic engagement or a spirit of cooperation available to a community or nation at large (Edwards and Foley 2001: 8).
all, where the community is bound by reciprocity and cooperation, rather than by vertical relations of authority and dependency. However, citizenship in a civic community is more than simply active, public-spirited, and equal citizens, it also includes citizens who are helpful, respectful, and trustful towards one another. Civic communities are not conflict-free, they are simply more tolerant of their opponents. They also have greater stores of social capital that enable democracy to function more successfully. Putnam is not alone in suggesting that high levels of social capital and a dynamic civil society are essential to a functioning democracy. Eastis (1998: 66) claims the idea has unleashed a flood of commentary from social scientists and ‘pundits’.

Indeed, Hirst (1994) believes that voluntary associations have the potential to be the principal organising force in society providing public welfare and the primary means of democratic governance. Additionally, he claims that voluntary associations can ameliorate a process where citizen choice is combined with public welfare and because voluntary associations have the capacity for a high level of communicative democracy, they allow for widespread consultation, cooperation, and collaboration (1994: 6-40). Clearly, if voluntary associations can create high levels of communicative democracy then they may indeed have the potential to reinvigorate the public sphere.

For Cohen and Rogers (1995: 7-40), associational vibrancy is a means to deepening and extending the democratic state. Due to the fact that voluntary associations are characterised by various degrees of organisational autonomy from the state and the fact that they are claimed to be more democratic, they are better suited to promoting general welfare than the present institutional arrangements. Importantly, Cohen and Rogers suggest that voluntary associations have four democratic enhancing functions being that they: provide information to policy makers; redress political inequalities that exist when politics is materially based; can act as schools of democracy; provide alternative governance to markets and public hierarchies that permits society to realise the important benefits of cooperation among citizens.
In his article titled ‘The civil society argument’, Walzer (1992: 89-107) takes a rather different position in the civil society debate to the neo-Tocquevillians but certainly maintains associations as the core of civil society. Walzer claims the words ‘civil society’ name the space of uncoerced human association and the set of relational networks (formed for the sake of family, faith, interest and ideology) that fill the space. In suggesting that associational life is at risk in advanced capitalist societies and that the Hobbesian view of society (more nasty and brutish than it previously was) is becoming more persuasive, he asks the question: what is the preferred setting for the good life? In examining this question he highlights four rival ideologies. These are the political community (democratic state) where citizens are freely engaged, fully committed, decision-making members; the cooperative economy where all are producers, creative men and women making useful and beautiful objects for the sake of creativity itself – ‘man-the-maker’; the marketplace where we are all consumers rather than producers choosing among a maximum number of options; and the nation within which we are all loyal members bound to one another by ties of blood and history. However, Walzer proposes civil society as the ideal setting for the good life. Where the other four are predicated on a singular answer, civil society allows for the necessary pluralism – part denial and part inclusion of the other four – a ‘setting of settings’.

For Walzer (1992: 97-98) the good life can only be lived in civil society. This is not only the realm of fragmentation and struggle but also the realm of concrete and authentic solidarities, where men and women connect and become both communal and sociable. The picture Walzer paints is in complete contrast to Hobbesian society where people are freely associating and communicating with one another and forming and reforming groups for the sake of sociability itself rather than for particular formation based on family, tribe, nation, religion, commune, brotherhood, sisterhood, interest group or ideological movements. As social beings living within civil society, we are at once citizens, producers, consumers and members of the nation and therefore each of the four rival ideologies Walzer examines are clearly too singular and ultimately inadequate. The importance of Walzer’s argument is that in rejecting singular ideologies, he rejects the notion that the state, the
economy and civil society are three independent spheres and suggests each is interdependent on the other. Thus, he argues ‘for the state’ - a decentralised, democratic state that can create a democratic civil society that can sustain a democratic state. He also argues ‘for the economy’ but a more socialised economy with a greater diversity of market agents, communal as well as private and where multinational corporations are constrained through political agency — both the state and associational networks being indispensable political agents.

The difference between Walzer’s (1992) analysis of civil society and the neo-Tocquevillians is that he proposes a more complex relationship between civil society and the state and the economy. While it is not fully elucidated, he clearly has more to say than the neo-Tocquevillians, who in many ways are silent regarding the independence, interdependence or otherwise, of the three spheres. As will be outlined in the next chapter, any analysis of civil society, or voluntary associations, must include an examination of the relationships, such as they are and historically have been, that exist between the institutions of the state, the economy and civil society.

In concluding this section it is important to note that the arguments surrounding voluntary associations and their potential to ‘democratise democracy’, or provide the setting ‘for the good life’ will be more fully developed in Chapter Three. However, this section has attempted to make the point that for Western theorists, the concept of civil society has largely been developed as a solution to the perceived problems/challenges facing liberal democracy and holds voluntary associations (primarily outside the influence of the state and the economy) as the institutional core. The next section will examine some of the more recent critiques of the concept of civil society.

A critique of civil society

...had German civil society been weaker, the Nazis would never have been able to capture so many citizens for their cause or eviscerate their opponents so swiftly (Berman 1997: 402)
It would be easy to conclude from the above that civil society may be defined as all social interaction not encompassed by the state or the economy with high-minded aims, consisting only of noble causes and earnest and well-intentioned actors. Whether instrumental in bringing democracy to countries under authoritarian regimes or strengthening democracy in already existing democracies, civil society appears as a concept to be intrinsically good and easily imported to any country whatever the political climate in order to bring about positive aims and aspirations. Yet, any definition of civil society must surely encompass aspects of society that might not necessarily be working towards the greater good and civil society everywhere must include a diverse range of organisations – good, bad and bizarre – and a number of theorists have recently identified the potentially negative impacts of civil society.

In her analysis of the collapse of the Weimar Republic in Germany during the 1920s and 1930s, Berman (1997; 2001) identified the unusually rich associational life. Many Germans during this time had a passion for civil society with people belonging to the sorts of professions and cultural organisations that are thought to be the institutional core of pro-democratic civil society. Berman argues that such associations served to undermine the Weimar Republic and facilitate Hitler’s rise since many of these organisations became the training ground for eventual Nazi cadres. Not only did Germany’s vibrant civil society fail to solidify democracy and liberal values, it actually subverted them. Weak political institutions that had high demands placed upon them by many citizens’ organisations were unable to respond which led these organisations to then shift their allegiance to nationalist, populist groups and eventually to the Nazi party. According to Berman, the density of civil society facilitated the Nazis’ rapid creation of a dynamic political machine.

Further, in reference to recent events in Bosnia, Reiff (1999) claims that the former Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic might well have laid claim to being as great an exemplar of civil society as Vaclav Havel in that he too faithfully represented the aspirations of his people, the ordinary Serbs. Indeed, the idea that the capacity to engage in collective action is always
commendable is clearly not proven when recent events in Bosnia and Rwanda are considered and while Putnam (2000) laments the decline of participation in bowling leagues in the US, it might have been better had Timothy McVeigh 'bowled alone' rather than having been a member of such a bowling league where he socialised with his co-conspirators.

Hitler, Karadzic and McVeigh might all have made claim to acting in the public good and the tendency to consider civil society as inherently representing the public good, seen in much of the literature, is clearly questionable. For instance, when civil society actors speak for the public good or in the public interest they are speaking about a highly contested domain and not all interest groups (the pro-gun lobby and some environmental groups) are interested in balancing different visions of the public good. For example, those associations in favour of free trade believe reducing tariffs is in the public interest just as much as anti-globalisation protesters believe such reductions are not. Such struggles are clearly not between civil society (representing all that is good) on the one hand and unruly organisations on the other. All are part of civil society and struggles over the public interest take place within civil society. Neo-Nazi organisations are as much a part of civil society as anti-Nazi groups.

A related question and critique of the concept regards the implicit idea contained in much of the literature on civil society that a strong civil society ensures democracy. Berman's (1997) analysis provides a persuasive example where this was clearly not the case and while it might now seem impossible to imagine a new democracy evolving in the way Nazi Germany did, it is not unrealistic to expect that a vibrant civil society might have a negative effect on a new democracy by complicating and even freezing its consolidation (Encarnacion 2000). Indeed, recent examples can be cited (Brazil and Spain) and their importance lies in the fact that they appear to contradict the literature and occur at the very time utopian views of civil society were being put forward.
Beginning in the late-1970s, the vibrancy of Brazil's civil society was matched by few newly democratic nations – both in South America and Eastern Europe. Amongst entrepreneurs and the press, the creation of lawyers associations, church organisations, labour unions and women's groups, there was a virtual awakening of all components of civil society. The 'resurgence' of civil society in Brazil also meant that it had one of the largest NGO networks in the developing world engaged in advocacy tasks that included protection of the environment, women's issues, exposing corruption and the promotion of civil and human rights. How much these vibrant networks of associations contributed to Brazil's developing democracy is questionable, for while democracy survives and Brazil is more democratic than at any other time in its history, a comparative analysis of eleven southern European and South American countries claims Brazil's transition to democracy is the longest, the most constrained and the most difficult. In direct contradiction with the neo-Tocquevillians, the expansion of civil society in Brazil has not diminished the abusive powers of the state where unspeakable abuses still take place (Encarnacion 2000).

In further contradiction with the neo-Tocquevillians, associational vibrancy in Brazil did not correlate with society's support for democracy, since among Latin countries support for democracy in Brazil is lowest. Indeed, while Brazilians were joining their associations, they did not construct a viable party system and therefore Brazil has the largest and strongest network of civil society organisations in Latin America but one of the weakest, most fragmented and least-institutionalised party systems. Having begun in the early-1970s, the process of consolidation of the new democracy did not occur until the early-1990s and this was largely due to the proliferation of pressure groups within civil society who made the critical tasks in the institutionalisation of democracy more contentious and prolonged than in any other South American nation. In a similar vain, a thriving civil society has inhibited the ability of the government to implement economic policies and also contributed to the general public's apathy towards the political system since the expansion of civil society has been based to a large degree on the depreciation of political institutions (Encarnacion 2000).
The example of Spain, as the most successful new democracy to emerge in the last fifteen years, provides the alternative view in that when Spain undertook to democratise they had an impoverished civil society. This was due to a number of factors not the least of which was the repressive legacies of Franco’s forty-year authoritarian regime that had severely inhibited civil society’s capacity for initiative, individual responsibility, self-organisation and collective action. In 1978, just three years after the death of Franco and in the absence of associational vibrancy, Spain enacted a new democratic constitution. By 1982 it was being heralded as a model of democratic consolidation and certainly gives the ‘civil society advocates’ much cause for consideration (Encarnacion 2001). For the neo-Toquevillians, who argue that a democracy is not a real democracy unless it has an American-style civil society, such examples challenge many of the propositions on which their theories rest.

From these two examples Encarnacion (2000) concludes that while civil society can aid democracy it can just as easily harm or even destroy democracy. The impact of civil society on democracy is determined not only by the collective strength of the components of civil society but on the surrounding political and economic conditions which dictate how civil society responds to democracy. For Encarnacion, without political institutionalisation and socio-economic development, an expansive and mobilized civil society is likely to be an unpredictable actor producing potentially destabilizing effects (2000: 21). Clearly, the relationship between civil society and the state is not a zero-sum relationship and the examples of Brazil and Spain suggest that civil society groups might be more effective in shaping state policy if the state has effective powers for setting and enforcing policy. Thus, theorists such as Walzer (1992) argue that a strong and effective civil society needs a strong and effective state and vice versa.

A second component of the neo-Toquevillian view of civil society that needs to be examined is the notion that civic communities (with higher rates of associational membership) are more tolerant of their opponents and have
greater stores of social capital - that is established networks, norms of
generalised reciprocity, and generalised trust. Neo-Tocquevillians such as
Putnam (1993; 1995; 2000) believe that trust is the glue of society - or in
Uslaner's (2000: 569) words 'the chicken soup of social life' - and dictates
our willingness to get involved in our communities. Putman's (2000) work
makes the claim that more trusting societies are more civic societies and
therefore more civil and as indicated above he has now for almost half a
decade been lamenting the decline in civic engagement in the United States
and the associated decline in the levels of trust. That is, Putnam is lamenting
the atrophy of civil society and while he claims that declining levels of trust
are due to television use, others such as Uslaner (2000) claim it is the lack of
optimism regarding our future and economic inequality that has led to the
decline. The point to be made here, and developed in the next chapter, is that
the concept of trust and social capital are concepts that have more definitional
fuzziness than civil society itself and there is little evidence to support the
view that increased associational vibrancy will increase levels of trust and
therefore create more 'civil societies'.

A related question regarding civil society and trust concerns both Putnam's
(1993) and Fukuyama's (1995) claim that more trusting societies achieve
higher levels of economic growth. Indeed, enthusiasts of civil society suggest
it not only guarantees political virtue but economic success. An active civil
society can give input into policy issues, facilitate the growth of private
enterprise and help to ensure the state does not suffocate the economy. A
comparison of South Korea and Bangladesh provide evidence that iron laws
of causality cannot be established. South Korea had been one of the fastest
growing economies to emerge in the last fifty years, yet only in the 1980s did
the military regime allow for the emergence of a flourishing civil society. By
contrast, Bangladesh has had a vast network of NGOs, advocacy groups and
social service organisations operating at both local and national levels almost
since its declaration of independence. Despite this, it has remained one of the
poorest countries in the world with a per capita income of less than $350US
per annum (Davis and McGregor 2000).
The arguments regarding civil society and its independence as a sphere distinct from the state will be fully developed in the next chapter when the theoretical background to voluntary associations will be examined. Suffice to say here that civil society anywhere (or at any time) is rarely truly independent of the state, since many civil society groups receive funds from the state under different grant and funding regimes, and in the United States government is almost twice as significant a source of income to voluntary associations as is private giving (Salamon and Anheier 1997).

More recent analysis of the concept of civil society has criticised the rather narrow Tocquevillian definition of civil society, particularly when applied to contexts outside Western liberal democracies. For example, when attempts have been made to examine and strengthen civil society in the African continent, the concept has largely been seen as a Western imposition. Thus, while there is little agreement in Western literature on the subject of civil society, other than some type of sphere or space between the state and the family, Orvis (2001) claims that this ‘conventional view’ of civil society captures surprisingly little of African politics. That is, Western conceptions of civil society have insisted that civil society can, and is, producing democratic transition and thus, set impossibly high expectations for civil society. A more realistic analysis of civil society in Africa would need to focus on the broad array of collective activity and norms, whether democratic or not, that constitute actually existing African civil society. This would need to include an analysis of patron-client networks, ethnic associations and some ‘traditional’ authorities. However, theorists such as Orvis who attempt to redress the problematic of civil society when applied to societies outside of Western democracies, tend to theorise in the very form of those they are critiquing. His own analysis for example, suffers from a failure to recognise that Africa, as a very large continent with an enormous and diverse range of cultures and social and political history, is hardly going to be well-served by the concept of an ‘African civil society’.

The problem of ‘importation’ of the concept of civil society can be further highlighted when foreign aid to the Russian women’s movement is examined.
In the years immediately following the collapse of communism in Russia, millions of Western dollars have been invested in the hope that the gains of capitalism and democracy would be “a fairy Godmother to the Russian citizenry” (Henderson 2000: 65). That is, former socialist workers and Communist party members would be transformed into capitalist entrepreneurs and democratic citizens no longer constructing socialism but working to build a new, vibrant civil society utopia within the framework of a free market economy and democratic political system. Accordingly, and with Putnam’s claims regarding the importance of the vibrancy of associational life in mind, Western funders (government agencies and non-profit organisations) have funded thousands of projects and distributed grants to various civic organizations in Russia to fund specific activities in the hope of strengthening civil society (Henderson 2000).

It is clearly questionable whether the idea of aid to Russian NGOs is worthwhile and whether aid money can really create in five, ten or fifteen years, lasting structures that took several hundred years to evolve in the West. Further, while funding has helped women (Henderson’s research is specifically an analysis of the aid funding to Russian women’s NGOs) create networks and provided office infrastructure it has also created a Westernised civic elite. It is the unfunded groups that may be more conservative in their orientations and less Western in their values that represent a more authentic Russian civil society. While funding encourages a network of feminist activities to develop ties with each other and the international community, ties between Russian women and Russian feminists are underdeveloped. Thus, Henderson (2000) concludes that an international civil society might be developing but that this is at the expense of the development of a domestic civil society and questions whether a civil society based on training, workshops and office equipment (where most of the Western funding is being spent) will ever be more than ‘skin deep’.

It is clear from this short critique of the concept that care should be taken when utilising the concept of civil society and asserting the many claims made regarding its potential. The conclusion of the chapter will now attempt to
narrow the focus, provide the definition of civil society to be used within this thesis and justify the claim that voluntary associations can be the core institutions of civil society.

Conclusion

...since the early modern period the idea of civil society has been laden with hopes for its civilizing, democratizing and socially integrating influence (Herbert 2000: 53)

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the examination of the concept of civil society has been understood in terms of an overarching question being: what knits society together and provides for social integration? Civil society entered political philosophy and social theory as a way of describing the capacity of a political community to self-organise – that is, the capacity of society to organize itself without being organized by the state. Of course, there have been other institutions put forward as the cornerstone for best ‘knitting’ society together and, at least in Western democracies, the state, the economy and civil society have all taken their turn in being centre stage in the last fifty years. For the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, social organization was best constituted without interference from the state and therefore self-regulating markets (the economy) were included in the concept of civil society. Rousseau and Tocqueville believed social relations were best entered into by autonomous agents free from interference from both the state and the market (Calhoun 1994: 309-311). Gramsci clearly believed that civil society was a domain outside the spheres of both the state and the economy, while Keane (1998) claims that the economy and civil society are so embedded in each other that the separation of the non-state realm into the economy and civil society is analytically flawed. Therefore, from the literature we are left with no conclusive or authoritative definition of civil society and more than that we are left with an enormous imprecision of definitions. However, it appears that from the theorists outlined in this chapter we are essentially left with two interpretations of civil society: one being that the expression means a privately ordered, capitalist economy and therefore is taken to mean
everything outside of the state, as in classic liberalism—this conception includes the private economy. The second conception of the expression means the nexus of non-governmental or voluntary associations that are neither economic nor administrative (Fraser 1992: 89).

While Gellner's (1994) definition of civil society in *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals*, is widely quoted and centres voluntary associations within civil society, it does not specifically address the question regarding the inclusion of the economy. Gellner claims that civil society is:

that set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance the state and, while not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent it from dominating and atomizing the rest of society (1994: 5)

The question of the inclusion of the economy into the concept of civil society is addressed by Calhoun (1994: 309-311). He claims that capitalism historically played a vital role in the growth of civil society and offers some freedoms which are genuine. However, a free market economy claims freedom from interference from other actors, which surely must include both the state and intermediate organisations and therefore the free market economists themselves implicitly conceptualize the economy as a separate sphere. Further, if the economy is to be included in conceptualizations of civil society, then Calhoun claims we are left with the question: can capitalism support democracy? He suggests that in the interests of democracy it is essential to look beyond capitalism and retain the notion of civil society on the idea of a social realm neither dominated by state power nor simply a response to the systemic features of capitalism. Civil society is critical to the realm of the social and as a realm of intermediate organizations—partial social units—people find a collective voice, the possibility of differentiated, directly interpersonal relations, defenses of distinctive identities, and democracy against oligarchy. Thus, as suggested in Chapter One (page 26), we can argue for the separation of civil society and the public sphere from the state and the
economy on the basis that it is an arena of discursive relations rather than power (the state) and money (the economy).

Alternatively, Dekker and van den Broek (1998: 11-38) attempt to demarcate civil society from the “well-known triad” of community, state and market - three notions that they claim not only constitute distinct institutional clusters, but also furnish ideal-type models of social order. In doing so, they provide a compelling argument for ‘demarcating’ civil society from the market. To summarize their position they identify seven characteristics of both:

- The guiding principle of the market is competition while for civil society the guiding principle is voluntariness;
- In the market the dominant collective actors are business firms and political parties while in civil society they are associations;
- The prerequisite for participation in the market is purchasing power while in civil society it is commitment;
- In the sphere of the market the principle decision rule is supply and demand while in civil society it is debate;
- The medium of exchange in the market is money and votes, while in civil society it is arguments;
- The types of goods exchanged in the market are private goods while within the sphere of civil society the type of goods exchanged are mixed goods;
- Within the market the positive externalities are property and accountability while within civil society the positive externalities are social capital and public discourse.

Thus, Dekker and van den Broek (1998) suggest within this ideal-type a definition of civil society that has strong links to Habermas’s (1997) definition of civil society and his concept of the public sphere as outlined in *Between Facts and Norms*.

In the ‘Preface’ to *Between Facts and Norms*, Rehg (1997: ix) claims the book is “the culminating effort in a project that was first announced with the 1962 publication of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*”. For
Habermas (1997: 366-367) civil society no longer includes the economy and has as its institutional core non-government and non-economic connections, being voluntary associations. These associations he claims anchor the communication structures of the public sphere and civil society is therefore composed of:

those more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organizations and movements that, attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life spheres, distil and transmit such reactions in amplified form to the public sphere (1997: 367)

Very much in keeping with his earlier work, Habermas claims that the core of civil society comprises a network of associations that within a framework of organized public spheres institutionalises problem solving discourses on matters of general interest. Again, he reinforces that these associations do not represent the most conspicuous element of the public sphere dominated by the mass media and larger agencies but they do form an organisational substratum of the general public of citizens, emerging more or less from the private sphere (1997: 367). Further, he is attempting to defend the claim that:

under certain circumstances civil society can acquire influence in the public sphere, have an effect on the parliamentary complex (and the courts) through its own public opinions, and compel the political system to switch over to the official circulation of power (1997: 373)

For Habermas (1997: 373-379) such circumstances do not exist at present where the public spheres of Western democracies are power-ridden and mass media dominated. The groupings of civil society, while sensitive to problems send out signals that are too weak to redirect decision-making in the political system. Again, he makes the claim that the more the audience is widened through mass communication the more the roles of the actors (emphasis in the original) in the arenas are separated from the roles of the spectators in the gallery. The circumstances under which civil society can acquire influence in
the public sphere are circumstances that can lead to a strengthening of civil society and it is clear from Habermas’s claims in both *The Theory of Communicative Rationality* and *Between Facts and Norms* that such ‘strengthening’ occurs through the writing of constitutions and institutional development. Indeed, the reader of both these volumes can be left in no doubt that Habermas sees constitutions as the main device for uniting citizens in a plural society. However, as Putnam (1993: 17-18) points out in his study of civic traditions in Italy, two centuries of constitution writing around the world has hardly provided compelling evidence that institutional reforms change behavior. Thus, Habermas’s claims become more an hypothesis than a truism. Accordingly, one of the main critiques of Habermas’s later work is that it is not empirically valid and that there is a lack of agreement between his normative ideals and reality (Flyvbjerg 1998a: 215).

In attempting to provide some empirical clarity to the issues Habermas and others have raised, this thesis takes as its definition of civil society something between Gellner’s (1994) definition and Habermas’s definition. That is, civil society is that set of diverse institutions which are strong enough to counterbalance the state and the market (economy) and while not preventing either from fulfilling their roles, can nevertheless prevent them from dominating and atomizing the rest of society. Further, it accepts, though not uncritically, that the core institutions are those more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organizations and movements that, attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life spheres, distil and transmit such reactions in amplified form to the public sphere. The next chapter of this thesis will now examine some of the significant theorising that has been done in the area of voluntary associations and their possible contribution to ‘democratising’ democracy, strengthening civil society and reinvigorating the public sphere.
Chapter Three - Voluntary Associations and the Public Sphere

Introduction

The viability and vibrancy of liberal democracy depends in many morally important ways on the associational activities of its citizens (Gutman 1998: 18)

The salient aim of this thesis is to examine whether voluntary associations have the potential to reinvigorate the public sphere. Accordingly, the first two chapters have theorised the concepts of the public sphere and civil society, arguing that the public sphere is the space between civil society and the state and that for most theorists (and specifically Habermas) voluntary associations are the core institutions of civil society. These chapters have highlighted that much of the literature associated with these themes is attempting at worst, to address the perceived crisis of liberal representative democracy and at best, examine how meeting democratic ideals can be enhanced. Voluntary associations are often identified as a significant site for such democratic restoration.

This chapter aims to examine the literature, much of which has emerged in the last decade that theorises voluntary associations, advocates them as sites for democratic practice, and outlines their relationship with both the state and the market. The chapter is divided into four sections, the first being titled The ‘voluntary sector’ - size, scope, definitions and myths. Here the focus is on an examination of the difficulties theorists have encountered in attempting to define both associations and their relationship with other sectors. This is a task that is often complicated by the fact that some of the claims made on behalf of voluntary associations have been flawed and contrary to the ‘facts on the ground’. These claims include their democratic character, their flexible and innovative nature, their ability to enhance democracy, their independence, and that control of voluntary associations lies with the community. The second section, titled Voluntary associations and social capital, specifically examines the work of Putman (1993; 2000), who is primarily concerned with the decline
of Tocquevillian America. The discussion will highlight the concepts of trust and social capital and specifically focus on his two major works being *Making Democracy Work* (1993) and *Bowling Alone* (2000). This section will also examine some of the theorists that have aimed to emphasize the deficiencies in Putnam’s conceptualisations.

The third section, titled *Voluntary associations, the state and the market* will then outline first, how the state has begun to see the potential of voluntary associations as a panacea for its own crisis of capacity to ‘manage’ welfare. It will discuss whether voluntary associations ‘taking up’ what has been traditionally the role of the state to deliver welfare services and provisions, is an extension of civil society or an extension of the state. Second, the section, will analyse the claim that there are few truly independent organisations in civil society, and those that do exist are usually small, poor, and obscure organisations. Most organisations in this sector are linked to each other and to the major corporations by their funding, their invested assets, technical assistance, interlocking directories and peak organisations. As such they provide a protective layer for capitalism – indeed it is claimed that without the non-profit sector capitalism would collapse (Roelofs 1995). The argument will be further developed by looking at how voluntary associations have been ‘forced’ to professionalise and take on new managerial practices. The section will conclude with the question: do voluntary associations have to choose between being appropriated by the state or the market or is there another way – that is, can they maintain some level of independence?

The conclusion of the chapter will look at those theorists that claim voluntary associations can be sites of ‘unique opportunity’ if they stay ‘on the margins’ and be sites of resistance. This section argues that increasing the responsibility of voluntary associations should proceed with caution. Further, there are unique elements of voluntary associations, regardless of whether they exist to the degree and with the benefits that Putnam (2000) and those that follow claim, that need preserving. The argument will be examined that for voluntary associations, the ideas of participation and service, influence and freedom to do their own thing, can only be preserved if they are not overloaded with
responsibility for public services. By ‘overloading’ them, their roles for advocacy and criticism will also be undermined, which in terms of their contribution to democratic ideals and a reinvigorated public sphere, is critical. The conclusion will raise again the central questions of the thesis and specifically whether voluntary associations, as they have been theorised, can be the panacea (for democracy and the public sphere) that many claim.

The ‘voluntary sector’ – size, scope, definitions and myths.

Voluntary associations (and we might add civil society) have become a major focus for both the political left and right. The right (of centre) have embraced voluntary associations in their efforts to downsize the cost and influence of the public sector and particularly, ‘wind back’, what has been seen as an inefficient and anachronistic welfare state. Thus, the attraction of voluntary associations for the political right has been in the attempt to introduce neoliberal economic policies and move towards increased deregulation, privatisation and competition. For the left, and particularly libertarian thinkers, voluntary associations are a vehicle in attempts to deconstruct the powers of the state and replace them with intermediary institutions based on social voluntarism. For these thinkers, voluntary associations are often identified with social movements, communitarianism and activism. In both cases, those advocating on behalf of voluntary associations appear to assimilate the potential benefits of voluntary association with their own ideas and invest their own meanings and terms making of them whatever they will. We might conclude that voluntary associations and civil society are identified with everything from multiparty systems, the rights of citizenship, individual voluntarism and the spirit of community (Brown et al 2000; Seligman 2000: 12-13). How can it be that these institutions and organisations are claimed by both sides of the political spectrum to be pivotal to a functioning society where citizens’ needs are best met?

I would argue that this is largely due to imprecision in terms of defining the term ‘voluntary association’, the associated difficulty in defining the size and scope of the ‘voluntary sector’, and the extraordinary numbers of claims
(ranging from grand to nonsensical) made on their behalf. The fuzziness of
definition, is a significant factor that allows for them to be appropriated by
both the political left and right. Further, the fact that they are often claimed to
be institutions that are independent from the state and market means they are
‘available’ to either side of politics. In order to find a way through this
labyrinth of intellectual confusion, it is important to stress some of the claims
made by those advocating on behalf of voluntary associations and then to
define the term, before sketching the size and scope of the ‘voluntary sector’
in Australia.

It is clear from the previous two chapters that much of the literature around the
concepts of the public sphere, civil society and voluntary association has
focused on the perceived crisis (political and economic) of liberal
representative democracy and proposed voluntary associations as the panacea
for such crisis. Rather than restating the grounds for some of these claims
(identified in Chapter Two - pages 67-67), it is more beneficial to now
synthesize such claims. Accordingly, we might propose that five main claims,
relating to democracy and democratic practice, can be identified from the
literature. They are:

- Voluntary associations are a crucial determinant to political participation
  and securing democratic ideals;
- Voluntary associations are more efficient than government in providing
  public welfare and provision;
- Voluntary associations can be more sensitive and responsive to the needs
  of client groups;
- Voluntary associations are crucial for the reproduction of social capital
  that underpins effective democratic political systems and strong
economies;
- Voluntary associations provide for a strong civil society and robust public
  sphere that counterweights the tendencies towards domination of the state
  and market forces.

We can see from this how, as organisations, voluntary associations would
clearly be attractive to the aspirations of both the left and right. However,
while most theorists examining the roles of voluntary associations turn to questions of democracy, it is not true to say that these are the only claims put forward. Therefore, in an attempt to clear some of the theoretical confusion, which is critical before definitions can be secured, it is important to outline other claims and myths purported on behalf of voluntary associations – often exalting them above and beyond the other two sectors, being the state and the market. Marshall (1996: 48-52) is most instructive in outlining the ambiguities of voluntarism and voluntary association and in doing so highlights some of the important questions to be examined in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

First, Marshall (1996: 48-49) questions those who suggest that voluntary associations are closer to the community (that is, non-bureaucratic), better able to respond to minority values and serve the collective good. In terms of being closer to the community and less bureaucratic than say the state, Marshall claims that bureaucracy can be well-managed complexity, where the alternative may be chaos. Further, he claims that personal contact with clients is more a matter of resources than a character trait of a particular sector and client representation is not necessarily more prevalent in the voluntary sector than in the public sector where statutory agencies are taking quality of service and client participation more seriously. Marshall also claims that not all voluntary associations protect and respond to minority values, with some actively resisting the extension of their services to minority groups (a point highlighted in Chapter Five of this thesis). He suggests that mostly, the voluntary sector is not aimed at minority values but that most organisations serve universal values. In terms of voluntary associations serving the collective good, here Marshall claims that most services in the voluntary sector (as well as the private and public sectors) are provided on an individual basis. The only difference is the *impetus behind the provision* in the private sector is *private interest* while in the other sectors it is *collective interest* (emphasis in the original).

Second, Marshall (1996: 50-51) examines the claims that suggest the voluntary sector is controlled by the community, has a strong relationship with
moral values, and is creative, flexible and quick to respond. As Marshall points out, and as will be highlighted in later chapters of this thesis, control of voluntary agencies rarely rests with the 'community', since management committees and employees are often selected from like-minded individuals through selective recruitment procedures. In terms of the sector having a strong relationship with moral values, Marshall argues that there is no evidence to suggest that activity in self-help groups and community organisations is any less self-interested than action in the private sector. Finally, he also questions the flexibility, innovation and responsiveness of the sector, claiming they are not universal features of the sector, anymore than they are necessarily absent from other sectors. The reasons for this claim will be highlighted and expanded on in the third section of this chapter titled *Voluntary associations, the state and the market.*

It is clear from all of the claims made on behalf of voluntary associations, and Marshall’s (1996) work particularly draws attention to this, that the language used is often very slippery and imprecise. For example, at times there is talk of associations, organisations, institutions and sectors. Also, some of the claims imply it is certain values that mark voluntary associations off from other sectors, while others suggest it is the funding arrangements that separate them from other sectors. It appears from the literature highlighted so far that voluntary associations are service providers – but is this always the case? Clearly, one of the problems with much of the literature on voluntary associations is that they are often poorly defined, or not defined at all, and it is the problematic of definition that this section now examines.

Despite the extent of the debate about voluntary associations, there is little agreement surrounding the terminology and how they might be precisely defined. Sometimes referred to as voluntary organisations, community organisations, non-government, not for profit, and non-profit, they are groups established by communities of people with common interests. Given the range of possibilities within such terminology, we might expect the ‘voluntary sector’ to contain enormous internal heterogeneity (Kuhnle and Per Selle 1992: 7; Marshall 1996: 45).
Perhaps the most inclusive definition is that proposed by Giner and Sarasa (1996: 140), who claim voluntary associations lie either partially or completely in the private sphere of civil society and whose chief aim is to work for the benefit of others (or for the common good) without profit. Salamon and Anheier (1997:69) claim that voluntary associations have five characteristics being that they are formally organised, private, non-profit in their distribution, self-governing and voluntary. Brown et al (2000) in their study of voluntary associations, claim such organisations operate a wide range of projects and programs such as housing projects, disability programs, community health programs, self-help programs, environmental programs, women’s services and include neighbourhood associations, parent-teacher associations, environmental groups, women’s associations and so forth. However, voluntary associations can also be educational establishments, trade unions, professional bodies, arts organisations, campaigning movements, social clubs, self-help and mutual societies (Passey and Tonkiss 2000: 43). They can clearly be public-serving or member-serving organisations (Janoski and Wilson 1995; Salamon 1999). Some clarification is needed – that is, in what sense are voluntary associations formally organised, private, non-profit in their distribution, self-governing and voluntary:

- First, voluntary associations are ‘organised’ in that they are institutionalised rather than being ad hoc configurations which address certain issues and then disappear. Such institutionalisation of course means there is enormous variation in the formalization of voluntary associations;

- Second, voluntary associations are defined as private since they exist outside (or perhaps between) the state and the market. However, as the subsequent sections of this chapter will outline, there is some difficulty with this conceptualisation of voluntary associations since in practice the connection of voluntary associations with government is (and has been historically) strong;

- Third, while voluntary associations are defined as private (non-profit) they are increasingly under pressure from marketisation and commodification and being forced to bid for government grants has seen increasing pressure
on voluntary associations to professionalise. They no longer function in a way that is obviously different from business organisations;

- Fourth, while voluntary associations are defined as self-governing, the pressure to professionalise in order to increase financial resources has created new problems regarding responsibility, access and participation. If voluntary associations, as the spearhead of grass-roots democratisation become increasingly large and bureaucratic, they cannot remain sensitive to local or client interests and may end up reproducing the worst features of traditional top-down welfare bureaucracies;

- Finally, ‘voluntary’ in voluntary associations does not refer to work that is unpaid but rather refers to work in such an association being freely chosen. Thus, the creation of a voluntary association is normally a ‘voluntary’ decision to satisfy a particular need, independently of the state or the market. Further, the activities and programmes of voluntary associations are freely chosen by an open-ended and unconstrained decision-making process and membership and participation is voluntary - as is the freedom to exit (Brown et al 2000: 52-54).

Estimating the number of voluntary associations in Australia is no easy task and even where the definition is specific, such as is outlined above, reliable data is difficult to find. Lyons and Hocking (1998: 2) argue that this is due to the fact that in addition to the number of voluntary associations that employ people, there are hundreds of thousands of small organisations that are not measurable and as such are largely ‘invisible’. Brown et al estimated the ‘welfare voluntary sector’ in Australia to comprise 93,884 organisations in 1996 and that the ‘sector’ has undergone substantial growth over the proceeding twenty years. However, while the estimation looks reliable, it does not indicate the total numbers of voluntary associations in Australia, since they were looking only at organisations with a primary focus on welfare – that is service providers, mutual support and advocacy organisations. As such, churches, trade unions and sporting clubs were excluded other than where there was a self-managed or affiliated programme with a primary welfare focus (2000: 123-128). Lyons (2001: 17) has more recently contested Brown et al’s estimation and has claimed the voluntary sector in Australia in June
1996 constitutes 34,000 organisations employing people. This finding is based on employment surveys (generalised to a national level). However, he estimates that when the largely 'invisible' associations are taken into account, the voluntary sector comprises between 500,000 and 700,000 organisations and uses government statistics, auspice body lists and registers to make his estimations.

Thus, we can conclude that estimating the number of voluntary associations in Australia (even with a tight definition) is no easy task, but needless-to-say they are large in number and diverse in practice. Can these organisations, individually or collectively, really reinvigorate the public sphere in the way Habermas (1989) proposes? How is it possible to make this normative claim based on the confusion that exists within the literature? This thesis is an attempt to examine the 'facts on the ground' and provide empirical research that might inform some of the debates however, before moving to present the empirical evidence there is more analysis to be done in two important areas. The first relates to the work of Putnam (1993; 2000), who claims that our participation in associations has been on the decline for three decades. This analysis is critical to this thesis, since it seems unlikely that voluntary associations are going to reinvigorate the public sphere if membership in them is declining. Further, what do we make of Brown et al's (2000) findings that there has been substantial growth of voluntary associations in Australia? However, it is Putnam's claim that communities with high 'associational vibrancy' are healthier communities (socially, politically, and economically) that has gained significant attention and demands such claims be examined in this thesis. A second area of important analysis for this thesis (and one that is increasingly being examined in the literature) is to what degree are voluntary associations independent, interdependent or simply dependent on the state and the market? These inquiries are the subject of the next two sections of this chapter.
Voluntary associations and social capital

Let us find ways to ensure that by 2010 the level of civic engagement among Americans then coming of age in all parts of our society will match that of their grandparents when they were that same age, and that at the same time bridging social capital will be substantially greater than it was in their grandparents’ era (Putnam 2000: 404)

Let us find ways to ensure that by 2010 many more Americans will participate in the public life of our communities – running for office, attending public meetings, serving on committees, campaigning for elections, and even voting (Putnam 2000: 412)

Most prominent in the recent literature on voluntary associations has been the work of Robert Putnam and particularly his influential books *Making Democracy Work* (1993) and *Bowling Alone* (2000) which have been the genesis for a great deal of the research in the last decade. The first part of this section outlines in detail Putnam’s thesis, while the second part provides a critique of his work.

Bowling Alone: The Decline of Civic Participation?

As outlined in Chapter Two, Putnam has for more than a decade been concerned with analysis of associational life in both Italy and the United States. Some of the claims he made regarding voluntary associations were also outlined in the previous chapter and will be more fully developed and examined here. First, Putnam claims that associations represent horizontal interaction and can therefore sustain social trust and cooperation in a way that vertical networks cannot and therefore are essential to the production/reproduction of social capital. Accordingly, they are significant
contributors to the effectiveness and stability of democratic governance and just as importantly can provide economic benefits as well. Not only this, but associations have the potential to strengthen citizenship which in civic communities is characterised by active participation in public affairs and entails equal rights and obligations where the community is bound by reciprocity and cooperation rather than by vertical relations of authority and dependency. Further, citizenship in a civic community is not only active and public-spirited, it also includes equal citizens who are helpful, respectful, tolerant and trustful towards one another.

The internal effects on members of associations is that they develop habits of cooperation, solidarity and public spiritedness and generally display more political sophistication, social trust, and political participation. They also tend to be more cooperative and have a sense of shared responsibility for collective endeavours. The external effects include effective social collaboration and effective self-government. Indeed, Putnam’s early (1993) study of communities throughout the regions of Italy provides practical examples of the potential benefits of voluntary associations to community life in that the denser the networks in the community (i.e. the vibrancy of associational life) the more likely the citizens were to cooperate for mutual benefit. Therefore, Putnam reports that the northern regions of Italy were more economically, socially and politically developed than their southern counterparts. (1993: 83-99).

Given Putnam’s findings in Italy, it is not surprising that when he turned his attention to the United States and discovered that associational life was on the decline, he mounted a crusade to explain such decline and seek ways to turn it around, devising strategies to increase the stores of social capital. However, since the publication of Making Democracy Work, Putnam has attempted to refine his definition of social capital and his most recent publication Bowling Alone is the culmination of five years work examining the decline of civic engagement in America. Here, Putnam claims social capital refers to connections among individuals – “social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (2000: 19) – and that
social capital in this sense is closely related to civic virtue. However, Putnam claims that civic virtue is most powerful when it is embedded in dense networks of reciprocal social relations. For Putnam, social capital has both a private and public good, so that while some of the investment in social capital (for example being a member of the local Rotary Club) goes to ‘bystanders’ (Rotary’s Polio-Plus program), the person making the investment also reaps some benefit (friendship and business connections with other Rotarians). Further, while specific *reciprocity* (‘I’ll do this for you if you do that for me’) can be important in building stores of social capital, much more valuable is *generalised* reciprocity whereby a person may perform an act of generosity for a person without expecting them to reciprocate, but confident in the expectation that someone else will do something for them later. Putnam argues that a society characterized by generalised reciprocity (for example participating in voluntary associations) is more efficient than a distrustful society and such trustworthiness that characterises generalized reciprocity “lubricates social life” (2000: 20-21).

A further development in Putnam’s conceptualisation of social capital is the distinction he makes between two forms of social capital - being bridging and bonding. That is, there is a ‘dark side’ to social capital, and some forms of social capital are by choice, or necessity, inward looking. This form of social capital he calls bonding and the trust associated with such social capital might be analogous with Durkheim’s *mechanical solidarity* or Tonnies’ *gemeinschaft* communities that are socially homogenous and exclusive communities with unitary forms and authoritarian social structures. Indeed, Putnam himself claims that bonding, as a form of social capital, tends to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups and cites ethnic organisations, church-based women’s reading groups and fashionable country clubs as examples (2000: 22-23).

The trust associated with bridging social capital might be analogous to *organic solidarity* or *geselleschaft* communities where the ‘ties’ are weaker and networks are more outward looking with people from across diverse social cleavages represented. Here Putnam cites civil rights movements, youth
service groups and ecumenical religious organisations as examples of groups that are characterized by bridging social capital. According to Putnam, bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity than bonding and when seeking a job or political allies it is the weaker ties that link us to more distant acquaintances who move in different circles that are more beneficial than the strong ties that link us to relatives and intimate friends who might be very much like ourselves. Indeed, quoting Xavier de Souza Briggs, Putnam suggests that bonding social capital is best for ‘getting by’ while bridging social capital is best for ‘getting ahead’ or alternatively, he claims “(B)onding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40” (2000:23). The metaphors (‘glue’, ‘lubrication’, and WD-40) seem endless!

Unfortunately, nowhere does Putnam specifically examine the two forms of social capital, though he is clearly more concerned about the declining levels of bridging social capital - his proposals for reversing the decline represent such concerns. The decline in community engagement that Putnam (2000) is referring to is across a broad spectrum of social interactions. First, he identifies a decline in political participation in that while Americans are no less likely to talk about politics than their parents or grandparents at election time, they are much less likely to vote (a decline of twenty-five per cent), stand for public office (ten to fifteen per cent decline), attend public meetings (thirty-five per cent decline) and generally are less interested in politics (fifteen to twenty per cent decline). In terms of trust, Putnam’s findings suggest that three in four Americans do not trust government and he claims that such mistrust undermines the political confidence that is necessary to motivate and then sustain political involvement (2000: 31-47). Similar findings were identified in Chapter One here in Australia where trust in politicians is at an all time low (Young 2001).

Second, Putnam (2000) also argues that civic participation has also declined in the last third of the twentieth century. This is a reversal of the steady rise of Americans’ participation in civic associations in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century (excepting for the Depression years). While mailing list
memberships have continued to rise, representing an ‘association’ of members who never meet, active involvement in face-to-face organisations has nose-dived by ten to twenty per cent, with only occasional examples of organisations that go against this trend. Indeed, Putnam claims that active involvement in community organisations and voluntary associations “has collapsed at an astonishing rate” and that most Americans have “stopped doing committee work, stopped serving as officers and stopped going to meetings”. This Putnam claims, is all the more astonishing given the rapid increases in education, more skilling, more resources and the interests that once fostered civic engagement – Americans are not only dropping out in droves from political life but from organised community life more generally (2000: 63-64).

Third, in examining whether religious participation counterbalances the decline in social connectedness in the secular community, Putnam (2000) finds that the trends in religious life only reinforce his findings in the areas of political and civic participation. He claims that religion in America is today, as it has always been, the fount of community life and health, since faith-based organisations serve civic life directly through providing social support to their members and social services to the wider community. However, they also serve civic life indirectly by nurturing civic skills, inculcating moral values, encouraging altruism and fostering civic recruitment among church people. Thus, he is concerned that the flowering of religious participation in the first six decades of the twentieth century has now been reversed. As with secular involvement, the more intense the involvement in religious participation the greater the decline, and as with the decline in politics and society generally, Putnam tics such decline to generational succession. That is ‘younger’ generations – including the baby boomers – are less involved in religious and secular activities than were their predecessors. Putnam does find that more dynamic and demanding forms of faith have emerged to supplant more mundane forms and participation in them has surged. However, so far such faiths and new denominations have directed their community-building efforts inward rather than outward and therefore have limited their effect in building American stores of (bridging) social capital (2000: 65-79).
Putnam (2000) also addresses the questions of whether social capital has disappeared or simply moved to the work place, and whether Americans are ‘connecting’ in informal rather than in formal associations. In both cases his findings suggest to the negative. Americans now are less likely than their parents to connect with co-workers in formal associations and clearly increased job insecurity, increased mobility and ‘working from home’ are all factors that might inhibit social ties among workers. Further, ‘work’ clearly entails time and effort entailed in serving material ends, not social. In relation to informal associations and connections, Putnam finds that while Americans are connecting in a myriad of informal ways, this too has shown significant decline and Americans now spend less time in conversation over meals, have less dinner parties, visit each other less often, engage less often in leisure activities that encourage casual social interaction, know their neighbours less well and see old friends less often (2000: 80-115).

It should be noted that against the depressing picture Putnam (2000) puts forward in the early chapters of Bowling Alone, he does identify a number of counter trends to his findings, though he claims they hardly outweigh the many other ways that Americans are connecting less with their communities. These are the rise in youth volunteering, the growth of grassroots activity among evangelical conservatives, the growth of telecommunications and particularly the Internet, and the increase in self-help support groups. Such exceptions Putnam claims are reminders of the potential for civic renewal (2000: 180).

Putnam’s thesis is not merely to outline the trends in civic participation but to look for the potential reasons for the decline, to outline why such decline is concerning and then to elaborate a series of suggestions to secure some sort of civic renewal. In terms of “what killed civic engagement?” (2000: 277-284) Putnam claims the pressures of time and money, including the special pressures on two-career families, contributed measurably to the decrease in social and community involvement of Americans and estimates these factors at about ten per cent of the total decline. Suburbanisation, commuting and
sprawl he also calculates at about ten per cent of the overall decline. However, the major factors he claims are electronic entertainment – most notably television – and generational change, contributing approximately twenty-five per cent and fifty per cent respectively. Generational change Putnam claims is the “slow, steady, and ineluctable replacement of the long civic generation by their less involved children and grandchildren” (2000: 283).

The question of why the decline in civic engagement and social capital counts is something Putnam (2000: 287-349) dedicates five chapters to. Here he attempts to demonstrate the potential for communities that have good stores of social capital claiming: child welfare and education outcomes are greatly improved; crime rates are reduced and our environments are safer; economic prosperity is more likely; and democracy is enhanced (in the ways outlined earlier in this chapter and previous chapters) when communities are rich in their stores of social capital. In making these claims he relies on the work of scholars from other disciplines and acknowledges that he is mostly identifying correlations that he has at least made some attempts to ensure are not spurious.

Finally, Putnam (2000: 402-414) proposes a number of challenges that might replenish the diminished stocks of social capital in America. These include family friendly workplaces, less time travelling and more time connecting with neighbours, public spaces that are more congenial for casual socialising, and that Americans can become more tolerant and be more deeply engaged in one or another spiritual community of meaning. Further, he advocates less time “sitting alone in front of glowing screens and more time in active connection”, more participation in cultural activities, and more participation in public life. All of which underpins his claims that Americans need to participate again in voluntary associations for both their own, and their communities’ well-being. Indeed, Putnam claims not ‘joining’ associations correlates more strongly with poor health and well-being than smoking!

The importance of Putnam’s work for this thesis lies in the fact that he is firstly, concerned with the decline of democratic practice and ideals, and
secondly, sees the reversal of such decline being in the reinvigoration of associational life. In this respect, Putnam's work has some parallels with Habermas's theorising on the public sphere. Both are concerned with the atrophy of democracy and both see voluntary associations as the agents of change, suggesting shared concerns and hopes for better outcomes in both the American and European contexts. Interestingly, both theorists identify the growth of the mass media as one of the factors responsible for the respective declines in civic engagement (Putnam) and the public sphere (Habermas). However, in the same way that Habermas's theorising has been subjected to rigorous critiques questioning the historic accuracy of his thesis and the normative ideals, so too has Putnam's. It is to these critiques this section now turns.

Strike! Bowling Together – A Critique

The critiques of Putnam's work emerged immediately following the publication of Making Democracy Work (1993) and more contemporary critiques have been forthcoming in response to Bowling Alone (2000). It is clear from an examination of the vast amounts of books, journal articles and papers that have been published in response to his theses, that critiques of Putnam's work can be located around three main themes being: methodological critiques; conceptual critiques; and postmodern critiques.

Both of Putnam's works have had questions raised regarding the methodology used and the forms of data collection employed. Certainly Making Democracy Work, which Dekker and van den Broek (1998: 18) claim, is "the crescendo of a tradition of studies of the consequences of social participation for political democracy", had serious questions raised by those specifically examining the methodology. For example, Goldberg (1996) examined the statistical validity of Putnam's findings and produced results very different from those proposed by Putnam. Indeed, he claims that Putnam's proposal that "civic culture and social capital undergird the creation of effective democratic institutions which in turn contribute to social and economic well-being", is at best "not proved" (1996:7). This is claimed on the basis that while accepting there is much
variation between the two traditional Italies of the north and the south, there is an acute danger of confounding within-group and between-group variation. Accordingly, through a number of examples, Goldberg demonstrates that the correlations exhibited between variables within the north and south, do not sustain the very strong correlations exhibited between north and south. Thus, the very thesis Putnam proposes, that civic culture and social capital are in some way factors contributing to the advanced social and economic performance of the northern regions (versus the south) becomes questionable.

A second methodological critique is provided by Sabetti (1996: 19-44) who claims that "the flaws that disable Making Democracy Work" are: first, that the regional experiment was hardly the 'natural' experiment Putnam claims; second, patterns of civic culture do not explain the whole story of regional government performance; and third, institutions more modern than the mediaeval ones Putnam considers have shaped the civic society and constitute a south different from the one Putnam proposes. Indeed, Sabetti claims that even the sketches Putnam begins his inquiry with of Bologna and Bari, do not quite fit the "facts on the ground". While Sabetti suggests it might appear petty to point out "inaccurate and exaggerated small details" they assume importance because Putnam effectively employs them "to paint a picture that is not quite true" (1996: 20). Thus, they mislead the readers who have to rely on the author for a description of those cities and civic practices throughout Italy.

Further methodological criticisms have been raised in relation to Bowling Alone, though most reviews suggest the work is a significant contribution to debates regarding civil society and voluntary associations (Reeves 2001; Lloyd 2001). Certainly the rigor of Putnam's data is impressive using a wide and comprehensive range of surveys done by institutes, commercial polling companies and government agencies. However, it is interesting to note that not all theorists agree with Putnam that civic engagement is in decline – at least not to the degree that Putnam claims. In Civic Engagement in American Democracy, edited by Theda Skocpol and Morris Fiorina (1999), the authors claim civic life in America is relatively robust. Using historical records, data
from national membership organisations, and, to a lesser extent, survey research, the findings of this study suggest there is considerable decline in national membership organizations, from the PTA to fraternal associations while the number of national lobbies and advocacy organisations has increased, and some of these have achieved large memberships. Thus, there has been a shift toward groups that solicit money or try to add names to their membership list as against groups based in local chapters with active members. Therefore, the decline of civic life looks less pronounced when organisations are counted rather than gauging participation in terms of groups. Interestingly, the authors claim a feature of civic action is persistent inequality whereby people with more resources are more civically engaged. In attempting to answer the question of why does it matter, the authors note that even with some decline, civic activity in the United States remains considerably higher than in most European countries. Yet in many of these countries, voting rates are much higher and crime rates are much lower than in the United States. These comparisons pose a real challenge to Putnam’s (2000) claim that increasing civic engagement is a crucial means of increasing political participation or reducing various social problems.

The conceptual critiques have focused largely on Putnam’s theorising around the concept of social capital. Newton (2001: 233) claims Putnam’s definition runs three conceptually different aspects of social capital – norms, networks and consequences – together that should be separated. However, according to Margaret Levi (1996: 45-55), in Making Democracy Work, Putnam fails in his outline of the concept of social capital because he offers an incomplete theory of its origins, maintenance, transformation, and effects. There is a general romanticism in Making Democracy Work (and we might add in Bowling Alone) regarding the positive effects of civic engagement and Putnam’s image of community. Levi (1996) is doubtful whether associations are up to the task of producing better governance and suggests social trust is more likely to emerge in experiences and institutions outside such associations, rather than within them. Indeed, Levi believes that under certain circumstances state institutions can be the basis for generalised trust, claiming the absence of an effective state leads us to the Hobbesian world of nature, of the ‘war of all
against all’. Unfortunately, Levi does not outline what these “certain circumstances” are. Further, Levi (1996: 45-55) criticises Putnam’s tendency to assume that the capacity to engage in collective action is always commendable and cites Bosnia and Rwanda as examples where it was demonstrably a bad thing. Indeed, this thesis has already pointed out in Chapter Two that it might have been better had Timothy McVeigh ‘bowed alone’ rather than having been a member of a bowling league where he socialised with his co-conspirators (page 73). There can clearly be a dark side to social capital and Putnam’s (2000) differentiation of bridging and bonding social capital is an attempt to address this ‘dark side’. Again, he does not fully elucidate this form of social capital and instead, valorises bridging social capital.

Whether participation in voluntary associations can produce or reproduce social capital – that is, norms of reciprocity and trust – is also questionable and the reasons Putnam puts forward for the loss of trust in American communities needs to be examined. Uslaner (2000) suggests that membership in voluntary associations (or informal socializing) neither depends on trust nor creates trust and such a link Rosenblum calls “an airy ‘liberal expectancy’ that remains unexplained” (1998: 45). There is little research that provides convincing evidence that people change from ‘mistrusters’ to ‘trusters’ easily and according to Uslaner (2000) trust in other people is virtually more consistent over time than virtually all other attitudes. Using a wide variety of surveys, Uslaner claims that trust is not important for most forms of civic engagement and is more likely the precursor to civic engagement rather than its consequence claiming trusting people get involved in their communities. Directly engaging Putnam’s (2000) claim that television viewing is a primary reason for the decline in levels of trust, Uslaner points out that television viewing has levelled off in recent years but there has been no ‘rebound’ in levels of trust. The reason for the decline in trust, according to Uslaner’s analysis of the available data is due to growing levels of inequality and that Americans have become pessimistic in the outlook, increasingly worried about their futures. Keen (1999) makes similar claims finding that civic engagement and social capital in Australia has fluctuated with economic changes and
argues that an economic upturn may be all that is necessary to restore associational life and stimulate social capital formation. Uslaner (2000) highlights the link between economic performance and stores of social capital pointing out that Scandinavian countries are more egalitarian and are (according to the survey data) more trusting. For Uslaner the decline in generalised trust (bridging social capital) and the rise in particularised trust (bonding social capital) cannot be reversed until the trend towards greater economic inequality is reversed. This clearly correlates with Putnam’s finding that associational growth in America increased throughout the first six decades of the twentieth century other than during the Great Depression. However, he holds that the last three decades, despite a number of recessions in America, saw sustained economic growth without an increase in civic engagement. Thus, we might ask whether everyone benefited from the growth and is the decline in civic engagement amongst the most disadvantaged in society? Here he claims civic engagement is in decline across the broad spectrum of the socio-economic scale.

It should be noted that since Putnam’s (1993) early work, there have been other attempts to provide a well-validated measure of social capital for general use within civil society and Onyx and Bullen (1997) ask the question of whether there is such a thing as social capital and if so does the concept have an empirically meaningful reality? The researchers argue that their study provides evidence to the affirmative, that is, the results of the study “demonstrate both the validity of the underlying concept, as well as its complex structure”. The researchers also report the importance of three main factors, being community participation, proactivity (a sense of personal and collective efficacy with the active and willing engagement of citizens within a participative community), and trust and indeed claim they offer a “well validated measure of social capital for general use within the civil society” (1997: 1). However, Foley et al (2001: 279-280) are more cautious in their analysis of the empirical validity of the concept of social capital claiming that however conceived social capital “plays out differently in different social settings, depending on both informal and formal elements of social organization”. Further, they warn against analyses that lay too much weight on
‘civil society’, conceived as voluntary associations, for the production and reproduction of social capital:

...schools, the home and the workplace might all be expected to contribute more to building the sorts of skills and attitudes and commitments often ascribed to participation in the associational life of the community (Foley et al 2001: 279-280)

Finally, not all theorists agree with Putnam that social capital is in decline and Ladd (1996) claims that stores of social capital have remained relatively stable over time. Indeed, Paxton (1999), in analysing multiple indicators of social capital over a twenty-year period, claims that her results do not consistently support those of Putnam. Instead, she reports some decline in the general measure of social capital and decline in trust of individuals but no general decline in trust in institutions and no decline in associations.

A number of critiques are emerging in response to Putnam’s theses that we might classify as postmodern critiques. For example Wuthnow (1998) emphasises the conflicting interpretations of the changing patterns of civic engagement. In *Loose Connections: Joining Together in America’s Fragmented Communities*, Wuthnow uses a combination of in-depth interviews and national survey results in a study that shows striking variations in membership and activities by age and place and suggests a more general trend towards short-lived, and more sporadic, forms of civic participation. The changes in participation, according to Wuthnow’s study are due to some of the reasons Putnam (2000) identifies in *Bowling Alone*. For Wuthnow, the changes are due to more demanding jobs that often involve substantial commuting from home, suburban sprawl or “growing communities”, and busier schedules. Further, voluntary associations that need longer-term commitment with set hierarchical structures and a focus on a general idea of ‘service’ does not articulate well with many people’s lives. Wuthnow claims “successful civic organisations are ones that deliberately reconcile themselves to the porousness of their environment and capitalise on the loose connections of their participants” (1998: 208). No solutions are offered by Wuthnow but
his study clearly begs the question regarding whether voluntary associations that encourage loose connections and project-based participation can provide the opportunity for citizens to develop extensive experience and knowledge of local politics – that is, will they, with short-term and ‘loose’ participation be able to enhance the democratic ideals many theorists hope for? (Williams 2001; Clemens 2001).

While Putnam (2000) himself acknowledges that many of his conclusions and prescriptions are lacking in detail and definition, a serious lapse in his analysis is in the area of work and new information technology. For example, his analysis is based on a particular view of what constitutes “community” and while PTAs, Scout groups, churches and trade unions are suffering, he pays too little attention to the construction of sites of new social capital, particularly virtual networks and virtual communities created and maintained in cyberspace (Reeves 2001). It might be that one ‘community’ may languish while the other flourishes. Related to this, he fails to develop the distinction between strictly local social capital and forms of what might be called “like-minded social capital” transcending local and even national boundaries. Indeed, his analysis of community is geographically bounded – that is, it is about the people and neighbourhoods. For example, in the Social Capital Community Benchmark survey he constructed, there are eleven questions, including “how many of your neighbours’ first names do you know?” and “do you attend religious services?” Despite a chapter dedicated to work, there is no mention of it in the survey, and given that most people spend most of their waking hours there, this seems like a stunning omission (Reeve 2001).

Reeve (2001) claims the amount of time at work spent interacting with other people has increased rapidly over the past few decades, as employment shifts into the service sector and “knowledge” industries. While neighbours only share a postcode, workers certainly do know their co-workers and have much more in common with them. Indeed, Verba et al (1995: 320) argue that “workplaces provide most opportunities for the practice of civic skills”. Thus, while Putnam acutely observes the decline of old forms of community, he is clearly blind to the new ones. Work can certainly provide social capital
foundations, and Reeves (2001) identifies Douglas Coupland's Microserfs, a group of work-based friends, who he claims would score a resounding zero on all of Putnam's measures of civic involvement, who formed and successfully launched a new software firm. Reeve also believes *Bowling Alone* underestimates the power of informal friendship networks and claims young people in the US and UK are not less socially minded and cites youngsters text messaging the locations of the hottest clubs as an example. He claims that while harder to measure, friendship circles are more fluid than the membership of a particular organisation, but are important creators of social capital. While young people might not be 'joiners' this does not mean they are not engaged in some kind of community-building of their own. Reeve claims that while Putnam is right to say that society is better if built on strong social connections and communities, he is wrong to suggest that those communities need to be founded on a shared location, a place of worship or a PTA. Indeed, he claims there is little evidence that people are less community-minded, less associative, less concerned for the welfare of others, or less sociable, than before – they are more likely using different tools in different places to express their civic leanings.

Careful reading of Putnam and the critiques of his work, point to the fact that when he talks of civic engagement he is talking about a particular kind of civic engagement and does not analyse sufficiently the 'loose' connections citizens have, which might be just as important as the 'tight' connections he laments the loss of. He also fails to investigate how both bonding and bridging social capital might not only characterise individual organisations (for example neo-nazi groups versus PTA associations) but might be characteristics within particular organisations – a point highlighted in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis. Surely it is possible for the two forms of social capital to exist within as well as between voluntary associations. Further, Putnam's analysis has little to say regarding the relationship of voluntary associations to other 'sectors' – specifically the state and the market. The next section of this chapter will examine this very issue.
Voluntary associations, the state and the market

Civil society in principle refers to a space of association 'beyond' the state; in practice it increasingly is an object of policy (Passey and Tonkiss 2000: 49)

The relationship of civil society to the state and the market has been a major area of focus for a number of theorists over the last decade, and so too determining the relationship of the economic, political and social realms to civil society (Cohen and Arato 1992). Indeed, most recent studies of civil society in Western democracies appear to have the potential threat of the state and/or the market as the genesis of the research and there is great diversity in the conclusions. This section will outline some of the key arguments and themes around these issues with arguments arranged under the headings 'Voluntary associations in the age of neo-liberalism' and 'Voluntary associations as a protective layer for capitalism'.

Voluntary associations in an age of neo-liberalism

The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (a study of national voluntary sectors across all continents) reports: the voluntary sector in all countries is significant both economically and socially; there are variations between countries though the sector is largest in the United States; the sectors are highly diverse; and public and private sector monies are much more important to the sector than 'private giving' (Salamon and Anheier 1997). Indeed, in Australia, Brown et al (2000: 205) found that of the welfare organisations surveyed, sixty per cent were principally funded by government. This was mostly state funding with thirty-nine per cent of organisations funded through the state government, as against sixteen per cent funded by the Federal government and only eight per cent funded through local government. This raises important questions not least of which is the relationship of central and local authorities. Thus, for example in the United Kingdom, the battle between market-oriented central government and left-wing local authorities in the 1980s, meant that both local and central government funding to the sector
soared. The Conservative Government saw the potential of voluntary associations as agents while local government saw them as allies in opposing Thatcherism. Therefore, the central government was caught in a dilemma since while seeking to employ voluntary associations as agents for service delivery, it saw them also deployed to some effect by politically antagonistic local authorities. Further, the financial regime imposed by central government, coupled with a move from grants to contracts and tighter service agreements at the local level, led to fears among voluntary organisations that they might lose their autonomy (Taylor and Bassi 1998). However, as Leat points out, with this new development of a mixed economy of welfare provision, “voluntary organisations assume a new significance, in policy if not in practice” (1996: 63).

According to Brown et al (2000), in Australia, state influence, direction and control loom large, and at least where welfare is concerned contractualism is the current path being undertaken at both the state and federal level of funding. Emerging in the 1980s, this has largely been the result of the immense disappointment of the post-Second World War welfare state— a disappointment acknowledged by both the Left and Right of the political spectrum. As neo-liberal economics emerged as the dominant paradigm, the market system was seen as the best method for organising and resourcing welfare, offering a method for improving productivity, increasing efficiency, curtailing spiralling welfare expectations and ensuring flexible responses to welfare needs. Accordingly, policies and regulations were introduced to maximise competition within and between public utilities for contracts with the aim to reduce the size of the public service and allow governments to focus on their core functions. These included policy, resource allocation, standard setting, monitoring and evaluation; the devolution of service delivery functions to separate agencies, including ‘outsourcing’ activities to private contractors, that have some autonomy in the ways in which they deploy resources, and the establishment of contractual relationships between government purchasers and other government and private providers. Given the focus on the market mechanism, it is obvious the private sector, that is said to foster attitudes and values that promote hard work, competition, motivation,
self-reliance, flexibility, daring, innovation and success, offers the best management style for organisational practice. As a result, voluntary associations are more than ever orientating themselves towards new management principles (Brown et al 2000: 95-102).

While it is too early to say what the overall impact of these new ‘funding’ arrangements will be or has been, voluntary associations have always been in relationship with governments but the recent trends towards ‘marketisation’ and contractualism raise some important questions. For example, does collaborative partnership between civil society and the state require a central steer or local autonomy? Also, is a strong civil society compatible with strong central or local government? Further, what direction will the voluntary sector take under these new regimes (Skocpol 1999)? Though these questions are not specific to the thesis question they are questions that will be addressed in later chapters; needless to say at this point, in recent years theorists have been making their own predictions regarding the effects these new regimes will have on voluntary associations (Osbourne and Waterson 1994; Zimmerman 1994; Lewis 1996; Deakin 1996; Melville and Nyland 1997; Taylor and Bassi 1998).

For example, in the early 1990s, Wuthnow claimed the voluntary sector would be squeezed, grow, or be transformed. He argued that the contracting of welfare to voluntary associations does provide the potential threat that voluntary associations will become quasi-government and as such government agencies will take over the activities once performed by voluntary associations. Further, market principles means that a larger share of activities will be performed by paid professionals. However, he claims the counter argument suggests that the voluntary sector will continue at familiar, if not higher, levels of activity. In the area of welfare particularly, competitive pressures requires larger government budgets which cannot be sustained without deficit spending or increased taxation – neither have proven successful nor popular for the competitive position of capitalist societies in globalised markets. The solution favoured by government and industry alike is most likely a program of voluntary action (1991: 3-29).
In further examining the effects of the neo-liberal economic ideologies that have driven contracting out of services, Nowland-Foreman (1998) looks at the impact of the increasing use of contracting and the purchase of services from voluntary organisations – both in privatising (contracting out) previously government-provided services and in reining in (contracting in) more autonomous voluntary sector services previously supported by grants-in-aid. Given the idea that voluntary organisations are as much about participation as provision, Nowland-Foreman questions the effect of contracting on civil society. Claiming that there may well be efficiency gains with services standardised and quality improved, he raises a number of fundamental problems. First, although there are some increased opportunities for citizen involvement, overall there is pressure to sideline, if not undermine, opportunities for participation and leadership development. Second, there is a risk of reducing both the quality and quantity of participation facilitated by such organizations. Also stronger accounting to funders increases responsibility to local members and clients needs and services are likely to be eroded. It is clear too, that the organisations risk being no longer seen as autonomous and therefore reducing their political legitimacy. Finally, with the increasing emphasis on discrete and measurable service outputs, involvement in developmental tasks, prevention and advocacy are likely to suffer; trust and transparency and cooperation between organizations is likely to be more difficult and less common. As Nowland-Foreman acknowledges, voluntary organisations do not operate in isolation from the societies in which they operate and alone they are unlikely to be a panacea for citizen participation or for building stronger communities. They are just one of the building blocks in the process and there is a need to address the social, economic, and cultural boundaries to participation, the political processes and structures that enable participation and the personal skills and resources required. The organisations need nurturing and Nowland-Foreman concludes that contracting hardly appears to do that (see also Lewis 1999). Importantly, James (1997:8) suggests that contracting might mean the ability to provide direct services to clients might improve as funding sources become more reliable however, it might also mean that social network benefits and civil society benefits might
decrease. Voluntary associations may very easily inherit some of the distrust that people already feel towards government, clearly undermining their legitimacy.

Thus, theorists appear to have the dual threat of the state and the market in mind when theorising the future of the voluntary sector. While perhaps not so much the threat of the state, Boli (1991; 1992) questioned whether there is such a thing as a viable civil society in Sweden, since the organisations are so bound to, and dependent on, the state that their independence can be challenged. This for a sector that comprises some 200,000 organisations with more than 31 million members in a population of 8.3 million people (Boli 1991: 94-125). Despite the numbers of participants/members, James (1989: 9) earlier claimed that the Swedish non-profit sector was small and plays only a minor role as producer of private and social benefits. There has been further analysis of the Swedish civil society that has challenged the approach of Boli and James (notably Wijkström 1997; Lundstrum and Wijkström 1997; Wijkström 2000) however, the question regarding the independence of the civil society appears all the more relevant if there is a movement to transfer greater responsibilities to voluntary and non-profit organisations.

O’Connell (1996) raises these issues as a matter of concern and suggests that voluntary organisations that receive substantial and long-term government funding can become quasi-governmental entities. While not suggesting that these voluntary organisations cannot still be effective representatives of their clients and causes, the point is that “if government is a very substantial source of an organisation’s support, its ability to be relied upon as an independent force has to be in question” (1996: 222). O’Connell further claims the independent sector is small when compared to government. That is, non-profit expenditures are approximately fourteen per cent of government expenditures in the United States and only two per cent of government expenditures in Britain. As O’Connell points out, these small percentages can be spent in ways that make a difference far beyond their relative size. However, his concern is that if a large part of the non-profits expenditure is diverted to cover what the government no longer feels it can do, then these organisations lose
their capacity to be different from government. The small amount that non-profits represent must be reserved for unique extra purposes or O'Connell claims it may not be worth preserving at all. O'Connell clearly believes that voluntary associations and civil society allow for innovation, advocacy, criticism and where necessary reform and warns against processes that prevent them achieving this:

(V)oluntary organisations provide wonderful elements of spirit, participation, service, influence, and the freedom to do one's own thing, but if government overloads them with the basic responsibility for public services, undercuts their income, and limits their roles for advocacy and criticism, they fail society, and America will be at another point of national breakdown when people demand government to do it all (O'Connell 1996: 225).

Wolfe (1989, cited in Dekker and van den Broek 1998: 15) claims that in America the main tension is not so much between civil society and the state but between civil society and the market. He claims that Americans unduly feared the disruptive nature of the state while underrating that of the market not realising the things they took for granted could be as easily destroyed by economic calculation as by political authority. Alternatively, in Western Europe, “the market and the state are often perceived as equal threats to civil society, the intermediary or voluntary sector being seen as endangered by commercialisation as well as by bureaucratisation” (Dekker and van den Broek 1998: 15).

The point of defending civil society would only seem to have relevance if it can deliver some of the lofty claims many of its advocates have made. While research is ever-increasing it is not conclusive in support for the assertions regarding voluntary associations and the findings of Robert Putnam outlined above. For example, does civic activism really contribute to economic success? In the current climate of economic stagnation (and possible world recession) much has been made of this particular finding of Putnam's.
Fukuyama (1995) in *Trust* builds very much on the ideas of generalised trust claiming high trust societies tend to be economically more successful. There are theorists who claim Putnam may have overstated the contribution of civic engagement with Kenworthy (2001: 645-657) suggesting civic engagement has had little or nothing to do with national economic success in recent decades, using data from the 1991 World Values Survey to demonstrate the point. The arguments are detailed and technical and at this stage of voluntary association research Putnam's arguments for better economic performance are still being scrutinised. However, some work and theorising has been done regarding the contribution voluntary associations make to capitalism, and it is to this question we now turn.

**Voluntary associations as a protective layer for capitalism**

In terms of voluntary associations and their contribution to the market, Roelofs claims, "one reason capitalism doesn't collapse despite its many weaknesses and valiant opposition movements is because of the non-profit sector" (1995: 16). Indeed, Roelofs (1995) points out that while some see a myriad of organisations doing good work, the non-profit sector can also be viewed as a system of power, exercised in the interest of corporate power. In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels (1985) stated that in order to secure the continued existence of the bourgeoisie there is a section of the bourgeoisie that is interested in addressing social grievances and this section includes economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the social conditions of the working class, organisers of charity, temperance groups etc (Roelofs 1995: 16). Roelofs claims too few researchers have followed up on this critical question and the particular focus of her theorising, which provides for a good example of the Marxist argument, are foundations which she suggests serve as a protective layer for capitalism. The major claim is that the few truly independent organisations in civil society are usually small, poor, and obscure organisations and that most organisations in this sector are "linked to each other and to the major corporations by their funding, their invested assets, technical assistance, interlocking directories and peak organisations..." (1995: 17).
Roelofs' (1995) claims that the non-profit sector serves as a protective layer for capitalism for the following reasons: it facilitates the concentration and distribution of capital for the profit-making sector; non-profits provide goods and services that the market cannot; in the United States at least, advocacy and reform are largely monopolised by foundation-supported non-profits rather than political parties, unions and social movements; the non-governmental and non-partisan status of these organisations generates the idea of altruistic organisations which becomes useful in terms of their international activities; the large foundations have great influence regarding their planning and funding and influence in supplying ideas for political change; the foundations serve the purposes of the major players allowing them to dispose of vast fortunes, initiate social control through philanthropy, and improve public relations. Thus, Roelofs claims that these foundations, in terms of their funding, can determine the political and social agenda even steering organisations with more radical agendas to reasonable and pragmatic goals by pouring money into them. Indeed, both at home and internationally, Roelofs is claiming the non-profit sector has too great an influence and suggests that "(W)ith the eclipse of the communist governments, the US non-profit has not only funded individual nonprofits of all kinds, but has attempted to create an entire world in its own image" (1995: 25).

The influence of the non-profit sector and foundations in Australia, and specifically the argument that they provide a protective layer for capitalism, is an issue that will require more research into their activities. However, we can draw on examples from international research that demonstrate how American foundations are attempting to create civil societies 'abroad' in the image of American-style democracy by funding voluntary associations.

As identified in Chapter Two, funding from mainly American-based foundations has had a significant influence on the Russian Women's Movement and this has not been positive, with women's groups in Russia tending to reflect the orientation of the funder rather than the needs of the domestic population. Since the collapse of communism in Russia, foundations
and agencies such as Eurasia, Ford, Soros, MacArthur and Charles Stuart Moss have been active in assisting women’s groups. In funding the groups, Western funders highlighted the issues that they saw as central to continued stability in Russia’s civil society. These issues included sustainability, increased community outreach, and strengthened relationships with business and government. Therefore, while the foundations concentrated on the issue of sustainability for voluntary associations, they actually undermined the ability of women’s groups to continue their work. This was due to the fact that while the foundations encouraged the goal of sustainability, they often changed their own ideas of what constitutes a fundable project and thus caused the groups to try to secure various funding projects that have little or nothing to do with their original mission statement (Henderson 2000).

For example, since foreign funding became a presence in Russia in 1992, several different types of grant projects for women’s groups have been dominant and these have mostly been projects that produced concrete results (150 people trained, 500 journals published, 50 documents collected, etc). This ensures, at least on paper, that links are being forged. However, the foundations are constantly searching for new ways to foster civil society, and that often causes the voluntary associations to alter their missions and groups that received large amounts of money several years ago are now looking for new funding options now that projects that once were fundable are no longer ‘in style’. Accordingly, groups’ long-term stability is threatened as they attempt to meet Western foundations’ demands. Further, the foundations’ ‘assistance’ has created a “false activism” as the women’s groups provide the projects that the foundations want to see, regardless of whether there is an intrinsic need for them (Henderson 2000).

Another example of the influence of foundations is the work of the Kettering Foundation, a US foundation that works with non-government organisations in the Western hemisphere, East Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, attempting to strengthen democratic practice and democracy. As with the example of the funding to Russian women’s groups, the aims of the Kettering Foundation appear at first glance to be wholly positive, acknowledging that
social, political and economic reforms in the ‘newly emerging democracies’ will not endure unless citizens participate actively in the decision-making processes. With this aim in mind the foundation funded (in partnership) deliberative forums in eleven countries (five in South America, five in Eastern Europe, and one in the Middle East) across the globe to give the citizens some direct experience of deliberative democracy. While the findings seem to be encouraging in terms of finding “common ground and realistic solutions”, there are number of questions that arise (London 1997).

These questions relate to some of the critical analysis of ‘civil society’ outlined in Chapter Two. That is, how do concepts like civil society and deliberative democracy get ‘translated’ in these ‘non-Western’ countries? There also appears to be little account given to the political and social histories of the countries where the funds are being given and such funds appear to be attempting to secure only Western-style democracy. For countries emerging from authoritarian rule there is little scope under these funding arrangements to explore other forms of democracy and clearly such conditional funding provides (mostly) more stability at home in the funding country than serving the best needs of the recipient.

This section has presented only a small section of the recent literature generated in the area. It is by no means exhaustive and it attempts to merely draw together some of the debates as they currently exist. While the analyses of civil society, non-profits, voluntary associations, and social capital vary greatly, the common thread that appears to run through most of the work is an uneasiness, in Foucault’s words, regarding ‘the nature of the present’. Suspicions have risen regarding the ability of the state and the market to address the challenges currently facing liberal representative democracy, which in some respects increases the pressure on voluntary associations to be the ‘true and proper’ solution. Indeed, if the answers are not to be found within civil society then there appears to be little option but to recycle some older model and try it again hoping the current conditions in which it exists can bring about an improved outcome. In concluding this chapter, the question will again be raised regarding the future of voluntary associations.
Will they be appropriated (further) by the state and/or the market or is there another way?

**Conclusion: hybrids, margins or a unique opportunity?**

In this context, an increasingly formalized voluntary sector is subject to growing competition, tightening regulation, and more fragile claims on social trust – these institutional dilemmas represent... the ‘Achilles’ heel’ of voluntary association (Hems and Tonkiss 2000: 9)

The common element of all voluntary organisations is that they serve as mediators between the individual and the state, both holding society together and lubricating it for social change (Marshall 1996: 45)

This chapter has attempted to outline some of the lofty claims that have been made regarding voluntary associations and has highlighted Putnam’s (1993; 2000) major works, claiming these to be the major contributions to debates and research in the field of the voluntary sector. The chapter has then attempted to highlight that Putnam’s work neglects the complex relations that exist, and have always existed between the voluntary sector, the state and the market. It is clear from the research thus far, that voluntary associations are at a juncture with influences from both the state and the market impacting on their missions and operations in a number of ways.

O’Connell (1996) argues that increasing the responsibility of civil society and voluntary associations in particular, should proceed with caution. He argues that there are unique elements of voluntary associations, regardless of whether they exist to the degree and with the benefits that Putnam (1993; 2000) and those that follow claim, that need preserving. The ideas of participation and service, influence and freedom to do their own thing, can only be preserved if they are not overloaded with responsibility for public services. Their roles for
advocacy and criticism will also be undermined, which in terms of their contribution to the abovementioned democratic ideals and reinvigorated public sphere, is critical.

The threat of the state does appear to be complemented by a threat of the market to voluntary associations. The work of Roelefs (1995) and Dekker and van den Broek (1998) provide a warning. Indeed, since anything that enhances the market's ability to generate more profit is invariably appropriated by the market, the more relevant question in light of the current environment might be on what terms an independent civil society can survive let alone become more influential?

Evers (1995) argues that the voluntary sector appears as a dimension of the public space in civil societies and in an intermediate area rather than a clear-cut sector. The public space being a triangular tension field consisting of the state, the market and the informal sector. Therefore, Evers accepts that voluntary associations inevitably will have different and competing influences that cross and have to be balanced, and intermediation for voluntary associations provides three structural and constant tension lines. These, Evers claims, take their course “along the borderlines of the intermediary area towards the realms of markets, state and the informal sector” (1995: 167). These tension lines are between instrumental and democratic values, universalistic principles and logics versus the plurality of freely-organised interests, and the relationship between formal organisations as representatives of formal rules and professionalism and the informal worlds of family, personal relationships, neighbourhoods, communities and social networks. Being in this intermediary area means that many organisations have to act under multiple influences from different areas and under conditions of parallel dependence from both public and private, and market and community support. This means that some organisations are transformed from self-help and community initiatives to well organised voluntary organisations, while others on the margins of the complex state apparatus acquire semi-independence as negotiators and channels between different worlds and points of view (1995: 171). Thus, Evers argues that voluntary associations have polyvalent
characteristics, in that “they have an economic function, such as delivering goods and services to members or others, and simultaneously they exert lobbying functions and channel interests towards the respective points of decision-making” (1995: 171). By integrating separated rationales and functional orientations, voluntary associations are often hybrid in character and this can occur when they rely simultaneously on market, state and community-based support. Such a conceptualisation clearly provides a way out, conceptually at least, of the pessimistic views of voluntary associations being appropriated. Whether, in practice hybridity means voluntary associations can exert pressure on the state or the market, is yet to be seen.

While highlighting the continued growth of grassroots energies, Salamon (1999) claims voluntary associations, as part of the non-profit sector, face crises of fiscal integrity, economic role, organisational effectiveness, and public legitimacy. Salamon calls for a sectorial renewal in order for voluntary associations to ‘hold the centre’ and proposes a partnership model of state – voluntary association relations. However, Wolch claims such a partnership model means voluntary associations only help to “legitimise the emerging distribution of power and resources by softening impacts rather than challenging the processes producing such outcomes” (1999: 27-28). Others have argued that partnership with the state and the market, at a time when there are low levels of trust in both, is dangerous (for example Taylor 1996; Gaskin and Fenton 1997). Public trust and support might very well be tied to the independence of voluntary associations and partnership with government and business blurs the distinction and puts into question “the idea of civil society as a means of imagining an independent and critical space of association” (Passey and Tonkiss 2000: 50).

Wolch (1999) claims that rather than holding the centre and entering into partnerships with the state a better strategy might be to advance to the margins and transform the sector into a site/space of resistance. This means they will not be burdened with rising demands for service-reduced public funding, and mandates to monitor clients and enforce sanctions (including benefit terminations and evictions) on behalf of their partner the state. Further, they
will reduce the risk of scapegoating, as under the partnership model they are
now seen as responsible for the services they provide that were once provided
by the state.

It is clear that there is a need for more research into voluntary associations and
their place in civil society that moves beyond descriptions of various civil
societies’ across the globe (e.g. Salamon and Anheier 1997). Before debates
regarding the possibility of voluntary associations enhancing democracy can
be truly engaged, “more detailed information about the effects of the nature of
voluntary associations in which people are involved is called for” and further
how “the purposes of a given voluntary association... relate to its contribution
to social capital and public discourse” (Dekker and van den Broek 1998: 35-
36). As a result the debates around concepts such as citizenship, the public
sphere, democracy, social capital, and community, will occur in an
environment of increased knowledge, and therefore less speculation, regarding
the potential or otherwise of civil society and voluntary associations.

The questions this thesis attempts to analyse relate to voluntary associations
and the potential for them to reinvigorate the public sphere. Therefore, from
the above analysis there are serious questions regarding the advocacy roles
and the nature of the public discourse that associations enter into if they rely
heavily on the state for their funding and embrace market ideologies. How do
voluntary associations ‘negotiate’ their way through the competing demands
of both the state and the market? Are voluntary associations as democratic as
many of the theorists claim and therefore sites for the production and
reproduction of social capital and can they really be schools of democracy?
Indeed, should we trust voluntary associations and in what ways? If they are
no longer independent, when voluntary associations enter the public sphere on
whose behalf do they speak? According to Foley et al (2001: 280) research in
the area of civil society and voluntary associations needs to move beyond the
broad and contested generalities of civil society to consider “concrete, context-
dependent processes by which organisations and informal social ties alike
reproduce inequality or transcend it, promote inclusive and cooperative
relations, or build boundaries and reinforce hostility”. This thesis is one such
attempt at this research and seeks to examine some of the abovementioned questions through the presentation of data collected during interviews with employees and volunteers at six voluntary associations in Melbourne, Victoria.
Chapter Four – Voluntary Associations in Conflict?

Key to transcripts

[ ] Background information
...
(...) Material edited out

Introduction

Thus, in addition to the voice of the actors and of myself, there is space for the voice of the reader in deciding the meaning of the case and in answering the categorical question of any case study: “What is this case a case of?” I encourage the reader to occupy that space (Flyvbjerg 1998b:8)

The previous three chapters have outlined and examined the literature concerning the public sphere, civil society, the role of voluntary associations and their place within civil society and the public sphere. This has set the theoretical foundations for the key question of thesis: can voluntary associations reinvigorate the public sphere? Accepting the lack of agreement as to whether the public sphere even needs reinvigorating, the difficulty in securing a definition of civil society and the debates regarding what constitutes voluntary associations, the following three chapters attempt, through the presentation of the data, to empirically examine some of the key tensions and questions in the literature. Such empirical research is clearly one of the deficits identified in the literature (Dekker and van den Broek 1998)\textsuperscript{11}. These chapters examine the question of the contribution voluntary associations can/do make to the public sphere from the position of the

\textsuperscript{11} It should be noted that while there is a need for greater empirical research examining voluntary associations, in recent years there has been a growing number of studies that have specifically investigated the concept of social capital and how it might be produced/reproduced within associations (for example Foley et al 2001).
voluntary associations themselves. How do voluntary associations engage in the public sphere? Why do they engage in the public sphere? What does the public sphere mean to voluntary associations? Does rational-critical debate exist either in their internal or external communication? Are they potential sites for Habermas's normative ideals?

This chapter introduces data which highlights the complex nature of questions regarding the potential of voluntary associations to guarantee a robust civil society and public sphere when members' and employees' perspectives are introduced. Importantly, this chapter highlights that a strong feature of the data is conflict and that this conflict is at the core of some of the organisations' most important policies and practices. This poses an immediate question: is the conflict that exists within these associations resolvable within a Habermasian perspective or is it too strong? If the latter is the case and such conflict is indeed unresolvable (within a Habermasian perspective) then we may need to consider the possibility that voluntary associations are in some way 'dysfunctional'. This chapter will outline the four areas of the organisations' operations where conflict was most salient and address the question of whether conflict in voluntary associations immediately undermines Habermas (1989; 1997) and Putnam's (1993; 2000) normative ideals.

Having argued that the organisations are internally conflict-ridden, Chapter Five specifically outlines the discursive practices of the organisations and then questions whether they are consistent in any way with Habermas's theories of discourse ethics and communicative rationality. That is, were the communicative practices of voluntary associations egalitarian, reciprocal, power-neutral and transparent, as Habermas claims they must be to achieve consensus through rational-critical debate. The chapter argues there is little evidence of rational-critical debate. The organisations practise selectivity of members and employees, and have discourses that are both hierarchical and
authoritarian. Communication was mostly characterised by the maintenance of interests and boundaries were drawn where exclusion was practised. The chapter concludes that when concrete cases of communication are considered, and politics and democracy as they are practised in voluntary associations are examined, Habermas’s theories and ideals are no longer tenable. Are we to conclude then, that voluntary associations cannot reinvigorate the public sphere?

Chapter Six takes up this question and attempts to empirically place voluntary associations’ practices within public sphere theory. The chapter argues that voluntary associations continue to be active in the public sphere and continue to have some success in placing certain issues firmly on the public agenda. It is clear from the data, that voluntary associations have no unitary notion of the public sphere and engage in many public spheres, in a multiplicity of creative ways (though not free from influence), often utilising whatever means are available to them. Accordingly, the chapter concludes that the public sphere(s) is firstly, not necessarily in need of reinvigoration, and secondly, voluntary associations are active – in ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ ways – in the public sphere in significant ways.

Given the aims of the research, and for reasons fully elaborated in the Methodology (Appendix 1), qualitative, unstructured, in-depth interviews were undertaken in six voluntary associations in the state of Victoria from September 2000 – December 2001. Largely depending on the size of the organisation between three and eight interviews were conducted in each organisation. Each interview lasted from between 45-90 minutes each and all interviews were audio-taped. Anonymity for both the organisation and the subjects was assured, as was confidentiality of the data, and consequently pseudonyms have been used for all organisations and participants, as clearly some of the information disclosed was potentially sensitive (Appendix 2). Predominantly, the interviews were carried out on the premises of the
organisation and often in the office of the employee, however a number of interviewees (mostly volunteers and clients, though not exclusively) elected to be interviewed at a more ‘neutral’ setting (cafe) or in their own homes. In preparation for analysis of the data, the taped interviews were transcribed and cross-referenced for common themes and interviewees were invited to review the transcripts, though all declined. Narrative labels taken from participants’ experiences have been used to organise the transcript data into relevant themes or topics and provide examples of the participants’ perspectives (Appendix 3).

The aim of Chapters Four, Five and Six is to directly address questions such as: from these interviews, can we, in any way, conclude that some of the claims made by the theorists examined in the first three chapters are justified? That is, did the interviews highlight the potential for voluntary associations to be schools of democracy and redress political inequalities that exist when politics is materially based (Cohen and Rogers 1995)? Did the interviews provide evidence that voluntary associations have a high level of communicative democracy that allows for widespread consultation, cooperation and collaboration (Habermas 1989; Hirst 1994)? Have the employees and members developed habits of cooperation, solidarity and public spiritedness, and do they display more political sophistication and social trust (Putnam 1993; 2000)?

One of the problems with the work of Habermas, Putnam and others is that while they see the need for trust, debate and dialogic democracy, they do not document the nature of these concepts to allow for empirical research. Therefore, how are we to measure the existence or not of these concepts within the practices and policies of voluntary associations? Unfortunately, there is little in the literature that allows for a concrete case to be put forward that outlines how a voluntary association would behave if it were in practice
meeting any of these ideals. However, as a minimal case, we might expect to find evidence that organisations:

- have some degree of unity of purpose;
- express democratic principles;
- are close to the groups they represent;
- articulate — at least with some level of consistency — the needs of the groups they represent;
- express principles of collaboration, consultation and cooperation?

This chapter will argue that four major themes emerged from the interviews. These themes appear to be most salient to the majority of interviewees (see Appendix 4) and are related to:

- the missions and purposes of the organisation;
- the pressures of funding (particularly securing government funding);
- the communities the organisations represent;
- the ways the organisations engage in the public sphere.

Across these themes the most consistent feature was the conflicting views expressed by the interviewees in each of the participating organisations. Indeed, we might ask: are voluntary associations conflict-ridden? While the four major themes emerged from the data, it is clear that they correspond to some of the most important functions of any organisation, whether public or private, being: core aims and goals; economic efficiency; client/customer needs; and public relations. In the literature that specifically examines organisational behaviour and practice, managing conflict across these issues has been highlighted as a critical function of any organisation (whether public, private or non-profit) and ‘successful’ organisations are identified as those

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12 This minimal case is essentially a Weberian ideal type in that it is proposed as a pure standard against which the data can be compared. As Weber (1949) noted, it is not expected that all characteristics will always be present in the real world but particular situations can be better understood by comparison with ideal types. It is a hypothetical construction, formed from real phenomena, that can have explanatory value (Abercrombie et al 1988: 117; Neuman 1994: 416).
which best manage such conflict (Donnellon and Kolb 1994). According to Morrill (2000), the history of research on organisational conflict is dominated by two questions. The first being: how can conflict be suppressed by organisations? This question implicitly defines conflict as dysfunctional to organisations in that it poses a threat to productivity, individual well-being, and, under some conditions, legitimate authority. The second question asks: how can conflict be used productively by organisations? This question, by contrast, implies that conflict is a largely untapped organisational resource that when properly managed can increase organisational and individual performance, as well as preventing harmful effects of unchecked authority or solidarity (e.g., group think). Therefore, it is important to note at the outset of this chapter that the conflict identified in the participating voluntary associations might not be unexpected within these formal organisations. Additionally, such conflict should not be immediately viewed as a negative aspect of the organisations' functions if the processes for resolution of conflict are deemed to be more important than the conflict itself. The conclusion of this chapter will return to some of these issues as they relate to the participating organisations.

Before presenting the data/themes, three portraits immediately follow in order to provide examples of the backgrounds of those who participated and the organisations with whom they were associated, and to give a cursory overview of the types of issues raised.

1. Save the World

The national head office of Save the World is located amongst some of Melbourne's most affluent suburbs and once in the visitors' car park, and walking through the sliding doors that welcome, there is the sense that you

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13 There has been a good deal of attention paid to managing conflict within literature examining corporate practice and behaviour. See De Dreu and van de Vliert (1997) for a detailed analysis.
could be visiting any highly professional corporate organisation. However, the pictures in the spacious foyer let the visitors know they are visiting an organisation whose goal it is to alleviate poverty in developing countries around the world. A Zimbabwean mother nursing her hungry child, a boy soldier from a Northern African country and a man who looks old beyond his years who has lost half his leg from a land-mine in Cambodia, are stark images contrasted with those of professional people working in professional environments raising over $125 million per year. There is nothing in the reception area to immediately alert you to the fact that this is a Christian organisation, though close scrutiny of the literature placed on the coffee table states this as fact. Save the World could be described as the definitive mega-voluntary association. While its head office is in Melbourne it also has offices in all other states and territories and employs over 300 people (plus over 1000 active volunteers) across Australia. As stated, it has an annual revenue of $125 million and receives 25 per cent of its funds directly from the Federal Government’s overseas aid budget. Operating in more than 90 countries, it is part of a global partnership providing both emergency relief and development.

In Australia, it is seen as a fundraising agency and as an example of its corporate character, all staff have undergone training using Covey’s text, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Alongside this ‘secular’ text, as a Christian organisation, the Bible was also of considerable importance, in that most departments began the day with the staff reflecting on a selected passage. Indeed, most of the employees and volunteers are self-stated Christians and claim their work at Save the World was driven by a vocational ‘calling’. Given the seemingly homogenous nature of the values espoused by the participants interviewed, it might strike the reader as surprising that Susan

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14 Covey’s (1990) text has been widely embraced by many private corporations in an effort to improve the performance of staff. This is done through regular training programs run by consultants, who are themselves trained to implement ‘the habits’. These programs come at considerable cost, though Save the World were not willing to disclose how much they had paid to have their staff trained.
(Donor Relations Manager) claimed that "we don’t all sing off the same sheet of music here".

2. HIV/Aids Centre

Arriving at the HIV/Aids Centre offered a very different experience to most of the organisations visited. Located in the heart of Melbourne’s gay district, the organisation attempts to be inconspicuous from the outside for fear of its premises being subjected to anti-gay vandalism. Thus, it is not easy to find, though once inside first impressions suggest that this is a moderately sized voluntary association given there are two receptionists taking incoming calls and the offices clearly extend over two levels. The literature in the reception area is extensive and mostly is education focussed. Melbourne’s gay press (for example Brother/Sister) is available to be taken and it is obvious that much of the material is directed towards gay males (for example brochures cautioning against unprotected anal sex). One of the interviewees provided a single example of the issues that existed within the organisation.

Damien (HIV Services Coordinator) was born and raised in Melbourne’s south-eastern suburbs and now lives with his male partner of ten years in what is known as Melbourne’s ‘gay area’. He has been ‘out’ since his late teens and at thirty-five has seen a number of his close friends die from HIV/Aids related illness, remembering well a time when he was almost monthly taking time off from his professional position within a large multi-national organisation to attend the funerals of those he knew who had passed away. This was at the height of what was being called an epidemic and it was during this time he began his work as a volunteer providing palliative care for gay men dying from ‘the virus’. He acknowledges that he was scared himself that he might ‘be positive’ and that he changed his own lifestyle for a while but found the volunteering too “in your face” and emotionally draining so gave it up after a couple of years. Deciding to do a post-graduate degree, he gave up
his full-time professional work and alongside part-time study worked part-time at the HIV/Aids Centre hoping to “make a difference”. Within the broad range of services and provisions the organisation provided, Damien’s role was specifically to provide services to HIV positive gay men and the biggest problem for him, according to his own account, was the fact that he was not ‘positive’ himself. Also, the ‘gay culture’ of the organisation added stress to the job and at the time of being interviewed Damien claimed working in an organisation of predominantly gay men meant “the days were full of bitching”. The excess of internal politics and the ‘welfare mentality’ of many of his clients had left Damien disillusioned with the organisation and he claimed that he was looking to get out, especially “now the epidemic is under control and we are not seeing the deaths to the degree we were a few years ago”. Three months after being interviewed Damien left both the HIV/Aids Centre and his studies and resumed his professional career.

3. Green Valley Opportunity Shop

The Green Valley Op Shop sits in a small shopping mall in Melbourne’s northern suburbs and Monera has been volunteering there for over four years. It is a busy shop and much like most ‘op shops’ it is chaotic with boxes of ‘merchandise’ arriving almost daily. Monera volunteers there because she wants “to do something for others” but she is increasingly dissatisfied with her Thursday afternoon shift as she is always rostered ‘out the back’ going through the clothes and separating the good from the bad. Recently she has had a fight with the manager over the issue and knows it is because the others working the cash register are taking money for themselves and do not want to be caught by her. Still it is a place of comfort for her and is the only non-domestic work she does. She has had some feelings of isolation since arriving in Australia from Egypt in 1976 and she has met a number of friends through the shop. These friends are of increasing importance to her now her children are grown up and the sense of contributing to something is what keeps her
there. There is all kinds of talk in the shop; it’s not rational-critical debate but it is political, cultural and social and means everything to the volunteers and customers alike. The Green Valley Op Shop, of all the organisations visited, seems most like the coffee houses and salons Habermas salutes in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Accordingly, might a possible finding be that organisational size is a marker of incorporation and regulation, which then acts to prevent Habermas’s vision?

**We don’t all sing off the same sheet of music**

The first theme to be examined is that which emerged as the participants expressed the importance of the work the organisation attempted to do and specifically the organisation’s missions and purposes. This was most often expressed in reference to organisational mission statements and the stated aims and objectives that existed within strategic planning documents. Given that all the organisations had mission statements (including the Green Valley Op Shop), it is important to provide some background to the emergence of mission statements in organisational practice.

Most private, public and non-profit organisations now have a mission statement, and as a relatively recent phenomena, emerging only in the last two decades, mission statements are said to be an attempt to give a definitive statement about the organisation and its goals (O’Gorman and Doran 1999). They are also an attempt to give the organisation internal and external coherence. Within the literature on mission statements’ there is some consistency that the development of such statements is critical to the survival and growth of any business and Fahrm (1993) claims, they are the cultural ‘glue’ which enables the organisation to function as a collective unity. The literature also indicates that mission statements emerged as part of organisational strategic plans that were developed to secure business funding
from banks and other financial institutions. O'Gorman and Doran (1999) claim that the literature on mission statements points to six benefits being:

- developing a unity of purpose within the organization;
- providing a guide to behaviours and decisions;
- motivating staff;
- communicating the corporate image;
- reducing culpability when charged with "unethical" behavior;
- and enhancing performance.

Further, they identify studies that have provided evidence that mission statements and other types of statements setting out the philosophy of the organisation lead to higher levels of performance, which in the private sector at least, means higher growth. However, O'Gorman and Doran (1999) also identify literature where the validity of mission statements have been questioned and claim that those who oppose mission statements do so on the grounds that they tend to be empty public relations initiatives and that organisations with a good business mission do not need to compress their aims into a statement. Ackoff has observed that most mission statements “consist largely of pious platitudes” (1987: 30).

Specifically within voluntary associations, mission statements have been developed as either a ‘rallying cry’ to motivate staff or as part of the corporatising of the organisation – or both. As stated, all the participating organisations had mission statements and core values however, the interviewees were far from consistent in their articulation of the meaning of these statements and values. The pertinent example of this occurred at Rahab (a drug and alcohol service), where the senior coordinator described the new directions and values of the organisation as “visionary”, while one of the team of psychologists described it as “fucked”. Alternatively, having a mission statement was identified, in most cases, as important to give the organisation a unity of purpose and did provide some motivation for staff. In the larger organisations (for example Save the World and the HIV/Aids Centre) the
mission statement certainly had the dual purpose of suggesting unity of purpose and communicating corporate image, although some of those interviewed claimed the mission statement was indeed something akin to an ‘empty public relations initiative’ or simply ‘pious platitudes’:

When we first got ourselves a mission statement we had retreats and stuff so the staff could fully understand what we meant by it... it sounds good but I don’t think it made much difference to what went on inside the organisation...hey but everyone could repeat the mission statement parrot style (Graham – Save the World)\(^{15}\)

It was certainly true that most of the interviewees at Save the World knew what the mission statement was:

Empowering people to transform their worlds... how could I forget [sighs]. We had training programs, book marks and all sorts of things to remind the staff of what the mission statement was...there was a time there where it was everywhere (Susan)

I would be surprised if there was a single person working in this organisation who did not know it [the mission statement] was empowering people to transform their worlds. Actually, it got that bad that at one staff meeting someone had wrote a song and the first five lines were [sings the line] empowering people to transform their worlds [laughs] (David)

\(^{15}\) Appendix 3 provides a detailed account of the participants that identified each of the themes presented in the next three chapters. The data as a whole represents the major themes that structured the interviews. While every attempt has been made to maintain balance and consistency some organisations are represented by relatively more data than others. This final mix represents the particular nature of the organisations and the dynamics of each of the interviews.
There was similar knowledge of the mission statement expressed during interviews at other organisations, though the participants were not always as precise as those at Save the World when articulating them:

The official mission of this organisation is something like...to prevent the spread...and care for those with the HIV virus (Simon – peer support officer – HIV/Aids Centre)

We are pretty serious about our mission statement...minimise the spread of the HIV virus and address the needs of people living with HIV/Aids (Alan – President – HIV/Aids Centre)

We’ve just got ourselves a mission statement and it’s very grand...make the world a better place for HIV positive women and children (Sally – Coordinator – Living Women)

You can see [points to a banner with the mission statement on it] that we have a mission statement that says we are about hope, community and compassion. I don’t think it makes any difference to what we do or the way we do it but it is important for the customers to see our values (Betty – Green Valley Op Shop)

It is clear from the above that the mission statements employed by the associations were ambitious in their objectives and in this sense might simply be grand statements and pious platitudes, with little effect on the organisation’s practices and behaviour. Alternatively, given that most participants could identify their organisation’s mission statement we might expect that they are giving the organisation unity of purpose and providing ‘cultural glue’ (Fahman 1993) within the organisation. However, while the participants could often recite the mission statement verbatim, they were not
consistent in expressing what the statement actually meant for the organisation:

It's true that we have all been socialised into the mission statement but I think it means different things to different people. For me it's about giving people in their communities the power to affect change themselves but for others here they try to draw in donors... like we can empower people here to transform their worlds through the process of giving (David – Save the World)

I can tell you what the mission statement is but I think it's awful... it's full of paternalism and meaningless unless you are serious about actually doing what you say (Graham – Save the World)

We have got a mission statement but what it is I am not sure... I think it's only important to have it to make the annual report look good... and you know, when we are going for funding... I'm not sure anyone takes it seriously (Paul – HIV/AIDS Centre)

These sentiments, perhaps, highlight the importance of the mission statement representing an achievable objective if it is to be viewed as anything other than a pious platitude and have any chance of being a statement that does provide a unity of purpose. Indeed, we might ask: why did the organisations adopt such ambitious mission statements? Again the participants are instructive, and appeared to indicate that the mission statement was mostly about public relations:

We had to get ourselves a mission statement because we are putting together a strategic plan that can be used to secure funding from the public and private sector. It's grand yes, but it
looks professional and we have to become more professional if we are going to get more funding (Sally – Living Women)

Our mission statement has to be reflective of the professional nature of our organisation...we are dealing with the State Government and we need to look good (Anne – Rehab)

It seems clear from this that the mission statement had not been adopted to provide unity of purpose or cultural glue, but more likely the organisations had adopted mission statements in an attempt to improve their public image. While this may seem inconsequential with participants seemingly not taking the mission statements seriously, it became apparent as the interviews progressed that they often measured the organisations’ mission and purposes against these statements – though not in any uniform way. Thus, the mission statement, rather than providing a unity of purpose, appeared to be opening up the space for divisions within the organisation to be articulated. For example, Save the World states it is a Christian humanitarian aid agency that aims to ‘empower people to transform their worlds’, though most of the participants interviewed felt the organisation was primarily a fund-raising agency and that the critical factor in any one year was whether they had increased their revenue from the previous year, not whether they had met the ideals of the mission statement:

there is enormous pressure on us to meet the budgets we set in terms of the funds we are going to raise and you get to the point where you are almost hoping... if you know what I mean... for a disaster somewhere that we can run a campaign on to get more money in... mission statements don’t mean that much then (David – Save the World)
We are a fundraising agency primarily but there is debate inside and outside about other roles... for example advocacy but the fundraisers usually win (Graham – Save the World).

What is our mission and purpose? Well that's an interesting question because you'll get a different answer depending on who you talk to because we don't all sing off the same sheet of music here (Susan – Save the World).

Similarly, there were contradictions within a number of the other organisations regarding the mission and purposes of the organisation:

We are a very fractured organisation where everyone has an individual vision. We deal mainly with the gay community (...) the broader community has to be dealt with... but we are not proactively going to the broader community only to the gay community... the broader community probably think we are not a gay organisation but like the Anti-Cancer Council and we don’t want the broader community to know that funds for health are used for activism (Simon – Peer Support Officer - HIV/AIDS Centre)

There are differences in this organisation and they are pretty evident...gay men are not a homogenous group and a mission statement will not bond them together... anyway it's good that within the organisational goals there is space for individuals to vent their concerns about things as important as strategic directions. We cannot please all our constituents but sometimes people feel good just being able to voice their concerns (Alan – President - HIV/AIDS Centre)
It seems to be a very fractured organisation and everyone has a
different vision consequently we are in perpetual review...
actually we are in the longest review in history (Jason -
Education officer - HIV/AIDS Centre)

We have attempted to relaunch the organisation and
professionalisation is important... we need to do more managing
than responding... we need to become a professional peak body
but there are some women [members] who are disenchaunted with
the organisation (...) we are no longer about service delivery and
need to take on an advocacy role (Sally - Living Women)

Without professionalism we would be floundering as an
organisation and we need to be seen as a professional, dynamic
group of women. There is a question now within the
organisation of elitism versus complaining from the service
‘junkies’ who complain about what they didn’t get such as
cooking and cleaning services... they have a full-on welfare
mentality (Clare - Living Women)

These participants highlight two common themes within the associations: the
importance of strategic planning/plans and securing funding. These plans,
with their mission statements are concrete sources of conflict within the
organisations and increasingly put strain on the staff and volunteers. For
example, the interviews at Living Women provided an authoritative example
where the perceived need to professionalise had seen the organisation develop
a strategic plan and an ‘official’ mission statement. However, the need to
professionalise had also forced the organisation to make constitutional
changes, the most major being the change from an organisation “run by
women with HIV/AIDS” (Women Like Us brochure) to an organisation that
now has non-HIV positive women elected to the board of management - at
present, of the eleven board members four were non-positive women. The reasons for the new strategic direction seemed to be driven by the combination of funding pressure and the fact that the needs of HIV positive women had changed with new treatments that could be accessed by those with the virus. This had opened up significant divisions in the organisation and highlighted competing demands. The change in direction had essentially created two client groups – women who were not consumed by “living HIV positive” and those who were still “demanding” welfare services. Therefore, the voice of Living Women in the public sphere was not a representation of all members (or the original mission statement) and some were clearly making their misgivings about the ‘voice’ and direction of the organisation known.

It is clear from the data that where mission statements had been adopted they had not provided the unity of purpose or collective unity that some writers suggest (O’Gorman and Doran 1999). Even where the organisations have strongly embraced a mission statement and where staff have been involved in the development and adoption of it, there is a good deal of ambiguity (and ambivalence) regarding the interpretation of the statement. In some of the organisations the adoption of a mission statement had opened up the space for conflicting views regarding the organisation’s aims and objectives. However, it is clear that a mission statement could be an integral part of the processes that Habermas speaks of, in achieving consensus through rational-critical debate. Accepting that organisations will have tension lines, a mission statement could provide the foundation stone on which consensus could be achieved – solid ground beneath the organisation’s feet. From the interviews, however, there was little evidence of this being an existing reality and in fact, in most cases the mission statement provided a fault line from which a number of fractures in the organisation emerged. Some of these fractures will be highlighted in the next section.
No way... the government never takes umbrage at what we do

As identified in Chapter Three, the state in Australia has been exerting increasing influence on the non-profit sector and voluntary associations since the early 1980s when neo-liberal economics once again emerged as the dominant paradigm. Under this paradigm, policies and regulations were introduced to maximise competition within and between public utilities for contracts, with the aim to reduce the size of the public service and allow governments to focus on their core functions. Accordingly, voluntary associations have found themselves competing with each other for contracts with governments that have devolved service delivery functions to separate agencies. Further, given the focus on the market mechanism, where attitudes and values that promote hard work, competition, motivation, self-reliance, flexibility, daring, innovation and success are said to be fostered, voluntary associations are more than ever orientating themselves towards new management principles (Brown et al 2000: 95-102).

This raises questions which many of the interviewees focused on. For example, does the contracting of welfare to voluntary associations threaten the independence of voluntary associations and mean that in the end they become quasi-government? Also, given that voluntary organisations are as much about participation as provision, might contracting with government increase the pressure to sideline opportunities for participation? Further, is there a risk of reducing both the quality and quantity of participation facilitated by such organisations? Might stronger accounting to funders increase responsibility to local members and lead to clients' needs and services being eroded? Do organisations risk being no longer seen as autonomous and accordingly reduce their political legitimacy? With the increasing emphasis on discrete and measurable service outputs, might non-involvement in developmental tasks, prevention and advocacy suffer? Might trust and transparency and cooperation between organisations become more difficult and less common? It is worth
again revisiting O'Connell’s warning regarding voluntary associations and their potential over-reliance on government funding:

(V)oluntary organisations provide wonderful elements of spirit, participation, service, influence, and the freedom to do one’s own thing, but if government overloads them with the basic responsibility for public services, undercuts their income, and limits their roles for advocacy and criticism, they fail society, and America will be at another point of national breakdown when people demand government to do it all (O'Connell 1996: 225).

During the course of the interviews all participants made specific reference to the importance of funding, and more importantly, the source of such funding. However, there was significant difference across the organisations regarding the importance of government funding and within organisations regarding the ‘acceptable’ amount of government funding and influence exerted by governments on the organisation as a result of such funding. Thus, where there were high levels of funding, in terms of the percentage of the organisation’s annual revenue, there were conflicting views from the participants (within a given organisation) as to whether such funding was in the organisation’s best interest. That is, some participants were concerned that high levels of funding did turn the organisation into a quasi-government organisation and did place limits of the organisations’ autonomy. Others claimed there was no problem with high levels of government funding and claimed the organisation was not compromised by such funding. Overall however, it was clear from the interviews, that were it possible, all organisations would prefer to secure their funding from sources other than the government in order to gain more independence.
Where the level of government funding was high, the relationship between the organisation and the government appeared to be complex and there was certainly a lack of consensus within the organisation regarding the funding regime. At the HIV/AIDS Centre approximately ninety-five per cent of the funding was from the State Government and some of those interviewed were in no doubt regarding the effect of such funding on the organisation:

We are quasi-government really because we are providing services that if we did not provide they would have to. They can reduce our funding but they can never withdraw it completely... it is hardly a civilised way for a government to operate if they don't fund people living with AIDS and everyone would know it (Paul - HIV/AIDS Centre).

Thus, as Paul indicated in the interview, while such high levels of funding on the one hand make the organisation vulnerable, on the other hand, at $3 million it is unlikely that all funding would be withdrawn and therefore the pressure is to secure the same funding levels each year other than funding per se. There had been no increase in funding for the previous three financial years and, being the largest organisation providing services and provision to HIV/AIDS sufferers, they were not under the same pressures as smaller organisations in terms of securing government tenders to provide such services. However, the sorts of pressures felt were highlighted during a number of the interviews:

A classic example of the problems with relying on the government for funding is this issue of increased rates of new infections in younger gay men. They [the government] have implied that increased rates means we are not doing enough... like not doing our job... and have suggested they could direct
funding elsewhere. Where they would direct it God only knows
but if infection rates are going up we need more not less (Daniel)

Alternatively:

We are absolutely not quasi-government and the reason being
that unlike some organisations we do not and are not required to
have a Department [from Human Services Victoria] person on
the board (Daniel)

Interestingly, at Save the World, while the percentage of government funding
is smaller (25 per cent of annual revenue) the actual amount, at almost $30
million, is much greater than for HIV/Aids Centre (approximately $3 million).
Nevertheless, during the interviews with participants from this organisation,
there was consistent concern regarding the need to maintain autonomy from
government and not seen to be, or become, quasi-government. Without
exception, those interviewed at Save the World were aware of the
organisational policy that government funding should not exceed 25 per cent
of annual revenue; however, there was some disagreement with this level of
government funding. Some participants agreeing that 25 per cent was an
appropriate balance between private and public funding; other participants
arguing for higher levels of government funding:

We draw our support from the community, they see us as
professional and as fundraisers and they definitely don’t see us as
government... I would think it’s important to keep it that way and
25 per cent is enough... I would not be advocating moving that
up any higher (Susan)
It's a good policy though I think we should move it to thirty per cent but definitely no higher... we do not want to be vulnerable to government influence in either policy or practice (Simon)

At both Living Women and Rehab, all funding for the organisation was government funding, and the funding was directed through the Department of Human Services. At Rehab, the funding was the result of competitive tendering and at the time of the interviews, the organisation was coming to the end of their three year contract and in the process of tendering again. While those interviewed did not express overt concern regarding being seen as quasi-government, there were conflicting views regarding the effects of such funding:

It is the most salient issue within the organisation at present and has been destabilising us for months but we are more professional as a result of having to be accountable and the outcomes are much improved (Anne – Coordinator)

Alternatively:

We don't know what we are here for anymore...I mean what are we supposed to be doing...we are in drug and alcohol services but not the way we want to be but the way the government wants us to be...and we don't have clients we have consumers and we get them to fill out Consumer Satisfaction Surveys...and I'm not joking...and if we don't win in the next round of tenders... well we will do what those who were unsuccessful did three years ago...we'll shut up shop (Rita – therapist)

At Living Women, government funding was the primary funding means and provided for a single part-time employee and office space. As an organisation
that began as a support group, the organisation was attempting to professionalise and rather than being managed by Human Services was wanting to manage them. However, the organisation was also looking to secure funding from other sources:

We are looking to increase our funding by 25 per cent and engage Human Services more...we could just rollover and get the same amount but this means no dialogue... we need more funding for more services (Sally)

We do need more government funding but it’s a minefield... more funding means more accountability and what happens to the advocacy work (Clare)

The ability of the organisation to remain autonomous, while receiving government funding, was both salient and contentious. Across the interviews there was a good deal of divergence of views and it was not easy to make conclusions from the interviews regarding the impact of government funding on, for example, advocacy work. Certainly some of those interviewed at Save the World were concerned that high levels of government funding would reduce the organisation’s ability to run campaigns against the government:

I mean we don’t want to be thinking about what impact running a postcard campaign against the government’s meagre overseas aid budget will have on their funding to us, so we keep it [the funding] to a minimum (Andrew – Save the World).

However, it was at the HIV/Aids Centre that conflicting views were most in evidence. There were two schools of thought regarding whether the organisation’s dependence on government funding had any impact on the
organisation's ability to advocate and/or lobby the government. Examples were cited to support either case:

No way... the government never takes umbrage at what we do. The continuing care unit at the Alfred was an aggressive campaign. Pre-election we really got to both parties... it was a hot HIV issue driven by the HIV people in the organisation and we hounded the buggers. We got exactly what we wanted—the continuing care unit and continued funding (Damien – HIV/Aids Centre).

Alternatively:

Yeah... we have to be really careful what we do when you can get Marie Tehan [former State Minister for Health] coming in and telling us we can't run our 'two boys kissing campaign'. We lost $40,000 of government funding over that (Paul – HIV/Aids Centre).

Paul went on to say that part of the Health Minister's rationale was that people would think it was a government campaign and clearly he thought the lines of separation between the government and the organisation were too blurred. Clearly then, this is not only an example of the lack of consensus within the organisation, but provides evidence for the view that while organisations might lose legitimacy by becoming quasi-government, so too might governments lose legitimacy by being too closely identified with certain activists/groups.

At both Rehab and Living Women, there was a reluctance to advocate against government policy and both organisations had decided to not engage in the very public debate regarding safe injecting rooms for heroin addicts, on the
basis that such engagement in the public sphere (on that issue) might have an effect on their future funding.

It is important to note that government funding provides real dilemmas for voluntary organisations in terms of their ability to remain independent from the state and forge their own policies and practices. Further, the interviews highlighted that such dilemmas were not only affecting the organisation’s ability to do the kind of work, and provide the kinds of services, they might otherwise choose, but divisions were emerging in the organisation that were not easily bridged. More will be said about this in the conclusion to this chapter and in subsequent chapters. The next section examines the divisions and conflicts that existed within the organisations in terms of the ‘community’ the organisations aimed to represent but it is important to note that some of these divisions had, in part, their genesis in the differing interpretations placed on the mission statements and/or the pressures placed on the organisation as a consequence of attempting to secure government funding - or the result of securing such funding.

Who do we represent? Good question!

In this section, data will be presented that highlights the degree to which conflicting views existed regarding who the organisation(s) represents. For example, at Save the World a number of the interviewees claimed ‘the community’ they represent was “those marginalised in developing countries” (Adam - a volunteer), while others suggested they “represented the wider Australian community first and foremost” (Jenny - call centre operator). At the HIV/Aids Centre there was similar disagreement regarding whom the organisation represented, with one interviewee claiming it was “anybody who is HIV positive” (Damien) while another suggested “HIV positive gay men” (Jason). Even at the Green Valley Op Shop there was a divergence of views where Monera suggested the ‘Op Shop’ provided a service to “poorer
members of the community” while June claimed it was service to “older women with time on their hands and trendy folk looking for cheap junk”. How is it that organisations, with what seem to be at first glance systematic objectives, present in practice such unsystematic views? In this instance, it is instructive to look briefly, in turn, at three of the participating organisations to emphasize the issues.

During the course of the interviews at Save the World, the interviewees made a number of claims regarding who the organisation spoke, and acted, for. All participants were able to articulate that the organisation was a ‘Christian, humanitarian aid organisation’ but clearly some of the participants thought the organisation was more ‘Christian’ than humanitarian, while others suggested it was/should be more humanitarian than Christian:

We are first and foremost a Christian organisation, I mean our founder Dr Bob Pearce... well he was in Korea after the war as a missionary and you could not exist in this place for five minutes without realising we are ‘churchy’. So we are humanitarian but not in the sense of doing our work for humanitarian reasons alone... we do it because we think that’s what God requires... it is a Christian act we do and if you want to call it humanitarian as well... (Andrew)

I am a Christian and that makes Save the World a pretty good place for me to work but I believe we do what we do because we are humanitarians first and Christians second (Susan)

Nevertheless, all participants freely disclosed their religious standpoint and as highlighted in the portrait at the beginning of this chapter the organisation, internally, takes the Christian aspect of its work very seriously. This tension, along with the debates regarding the mission statement – empowering people
to transform their worlds – leaves space for even wider debates about ‘which’ community the organisation represents:

We represent, or empower if we take ourselves seriously, people on all sides of the world so we represent the community here in Australia who are empowered through the act of giving, or volunteering, and we empower and represent the developing world (Jenny)

I don’t know if we do it very well but we are about people destitute and hungry, people living in communities that do not have the basic necessities of life and that should be it but there’s talk of the community here in Australia and talk of the Christian community – that is secondary as far as I am concerned (Adam)

From the interviews at Save the World, there was no coherent voice regarding representation and in terms of this representation in the public sphere, it is clear that some participants believed the organisation needed to represent the silent voice of those living in poorer communities around the world, while others believed the organisation needed to be more vocal about its Christian emphasis and join the voices of other Christian groups within Australia:

As an organisation we represent Christians everywhere who have a heart for the poor (Graham)

According to Alan, the President of the HIV/Aids Centre, the organisation attempts to minimise the spread and address the needs of people living with HIV/Aids. Therefore, he claims the ‘community’ the organisation represents “is anyone who is HIV positive”. However, he acknowledges that “in real terms we have many stakeholders” and that only recently the organisation had “recast services to include women and the non-gay community”. He further
claimed that there were a number of communities to be represented and that some of these included the people the organisation are accountable to in terms of direction, the families of gay men, ex-prisoners, and people injecting drugs. Alan acknowledged it was difficult to balance these ‘competing demands’. During the interviews, with paid and non-paid employees of the organisation, it became apparent that the participants did not believe these demands were being balanced satisfactorily:

Well, I know that we say we represent a pretty broad community but anything outside of gay men is tokenism...for example lesbian health...and the focus is not only gay men but there are people clinging to HIV and it becomes their reason for existence and in terms of the internal politics they really are formidable political opponents and would love to get rid of me (Simon)

It's pretty bloody hard to represent the wider community when ninety-five per cent of the organisation are gay men and I might add a particular type of gay men (Daniel)

Despite these strong views, it was clear that the organisation was clearly achieving more than providing services and provisions for HIV positive gay males. The organisation provided education, treatment, counselling and a medical clinic, and while tensions were identified across those four areas all were operational and being accessed beyond the gay male community. Thus according to John, the executive director:

There are tensions between the four areas, for example, education believes in reducing the number of HIV infections while care and support believe we need to minimise the effects of those living with HIV/AIDS and these tensions can be pretty hot
at times but that’s any organisation with not enough money to meet the needs of all their clients

Here, John gave the clearest indication regarding the degree of inconsistency regarding the communities the organisation aimed to represent. That is, with the best of intentions and a wide agenda (address the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS) different departments within the organisation were competing for funds, which at the operational level of the organisation meant that, at times, the organisation had to make choices:

We can’t meet everyone’s vision for the organisation and do it all... we do have to make choices sometimes and I think we make the right one when we prioritise gay men...they are most at risk (Simon)

Finally, at Rehab, while there were many contrasting views about who the organisation should represent, under competitive tendering there was little scope to explore them. Most of those interviewed were of the view that the requirements of the contract with the State Government meant the organisation had to deliver on the terms and conditions of the contract and that these were tight:

Who do we represent? Read the tender or the contract... we do exactly what we need to do to get the tender next time round and meet the outcomes if we can...you know... episodes of care and all that...we represent the statistics as they come out at the end of each quarter or whatever (Rita – therapist)

It is clear from the data that there is a divergence of views regarding who the organisation seeks to represent. There was conflict in the organisations and across the interviews and again, as the earlier sections highlighted, it is not
easy to see where consensus might be achieved given funding pressures and some of the ideological differences that exist in these organisations. It is important to state at this point that theorists such as Habermas do not deny the existence of conflict, but set forth normative ideals to achieve consensus that at this point look merely utopian given the empirical data presented thus far. The final section of this chapter will now look at the pertinent question of how the interviewees perceived the organisation’s ability to engage in the public sphere and in what ways they believed the organisation should engage in the public sphere.

**The public sphere...if only there were time**

The fundamental question this thesis is attempting to analyse is: can voluntary associations reinvigorate the public sphere? In Chapter One, the concept of the public sphere was theorised and questions were raised as to whether the public sphere was in a state of atrophy (as Habermas claims), and whether there might not be counter and/or multiple public spheres. These questions will be fully examined in Chapter Six, but this section will set some of the background for these future discussions by presenting some of the data where participants discussed ‘the public sphere’. It is included here since there was also little consensus regarding how, and in what ways, the organisation could contribute to the public sphere. The data from all organisations point to both optimistic and pessimistic views regarding the ability of the organisation to influence public debate and access the mass media - which Habermas claims dominates the public sphere and is partially to blame for the atrophy of the public sphere.

The first point to be made is that while many of the participants expressed the importance of engaging in public debate and the public sphere they did so in terms of the advocacy function of the organisation:
Yes, we are in the public sphere, we have a high profile and we believe advocacy is an important part of what we do (Jason – HIV/AIDS Centre)

There’s no time here for advocacy and given our funding position we have to be careful about being too public (Anne – Rehab)

Interestingly, at Save the World, many of the participants from across a range of roles in the organisation talked about the public sphere in terms of their advocacy and community education functions. While these are important functions of the organisation, Save the World has an extremely high profile in the mass media and most of the community recognition of the organisation would be from the mass media advertising for their campaigns and fundraising programs – the annual budget for mass media advertising at Save the World running into millions of dollars. The data seemed to implicitly suggest that for Save the World there were two public spheres – the one of the mass media and the ‘more serious’ public sphere of discourse and debate:

We are right in there I guess...campaigns against Canberra, being part of reconciliation and Sorry Day, third world debt relief and so on...but I guess we are seen in the sense that we run ads on television, in newspapers and have TV Specials...oh I suppose the association of celebrities might be part of what we do in the public arena too (David – Save the World)

Many of the same sentiments were expressed at other organisations too, for example at Living Women, advocacy was seen as part of being in the public sphere while seeking corporate funding and engaging high profile women as ambassadors was not. Therefore, with advocacy seen as the primary indicator of being in the public sphere, the interviewees expressed diverging views
regarding the ability to engage in the public sphere or not. As already noted, at Rehab there was a reluctance to engage in public debate due to the conditions of the contract the organisation held with the State Government and in terms of the possible effect such public advocacy might have on securing future contracts. With a high percentage of drug and alcohol services being provided under government competitive tendering, it might be assumed that public debate on a high profile issue such as safe injecting rooms for heroin addicts has been diminished by the exclusion of organisations such as Rehab. At the HIV/AIDS Centre, it has already been indicated that there was no agreement regarding the organisation’s engagement in the public sphere:

We have to be careful what we say otherwise Human Services will be down on us (Paul)

No way does it influence the decisions we make... we have the interest of positive people first (Damien)

However, the President of the organisation suggested that the main issue with engaging in the public sphere, which he clearly viewed as including the mass media, was that most Australian-based media outlets had lost interest in the local issues and in fact were increasingly disengaging with the organisation:

You would think increased rates of infection here in Melbourne would be a big issue and the local papers ran it pretty hard but where they would normally come to us for our comments - let's face it we are the big daddy of HIV/AIDS service providers - not only did they not come to us but we couldn’t even get a letter in the ‘letters to the editor page’ of The Age [Melbourne broadsheet newspaper] (Alan)
And later in the interview:

The hardest thing about being in the public arena is not government funding and the pressures it puts on us but how do you engage people when the issue is not so crucial anymore...people think the emergency is over and in a way it is... people have moved on and if you look in the media the main coverage of anything to do with HIV is generally from overseas (Alan)

For Simon, the answer to the issue of people losing interest in the HIV/AIDS issue (at least in Australia) was for the organisation to implement a “proper marketing and public relations department that can get us out there”.

Finally, it should be noted that those interviewed at the Green Valley Op Shop made little or no reference to the ‘public sphere’ but in many ways the shop ‘fits’ Habermas’s ideal in very significant ways:

Oh, we get lots of the local community coming in here and not always to buy [laughs]...they might be lonely I suppose but we have a chat and the kettle goes on and we talk about anything and everything (June)

When asked about what specifically gets talked about, she responded:

I don’t know really but we talk about all sorts...the latest Federal Election...oh and we have been talking about the refugees and aboriginals... yes we talk about politics and it gets a bit heated but we talk about our families a lot because we all have grandchildren (June)
Thus, it seems that matters of public interest are being discussed in the ‘Op Shop’ (as well as private matters) in ways that are not wholly incompatible with Habermas’s descriptions of the bourgeois public sphere. Beyond this, the interviews demonstrate that each of the organisations had their own pressures that influenced their ability, or willingness, to engage in the public sphere. Funding pressures, sources of funding, organisational ideologies and a particular understanding of the public sphere were some of the factors that had an effect on the organisation’s engagement in the public sphere. For many of the interviewees, the mass media was synonymous with the public sphere, while for others the public sphere was a more rational sphere of advocacy and public debate, others indicated that there was not a single public sphere and that the organisation needed to be engaged in at least two distinct spheres. While many of these issues will be developed in Chapter Six, at this stage the data is suggestive that voluntary associations have no uniform understanding of the public sphere and each organisation with its own history, background, ideology, culture, values and objectives seeks to engage, or not, in its own unique way.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter questions were raised regarding the possibility that voluntary associations could provide the social conditions that allow for rational-critical debate about public issues, conducted by private persons willing to let arguments and not statuses determine decisions – that is, can they reinvigorate the public sphere? Indeed, was there any evidence that voluntary associations can be schools of democracy, redress political inequalities, provide alternative governance to markets and public hierarchies and provide information to policy makers? Further, can they enhance democratic ideals of active political involvement and forge political consensus through dialogue and participation? These are the claims made by Habermas, Putnam and others (identified in the first three chapters of this thesis)
regarding voluntary associations and their possible role in revitalising democracy, civil society, and active participation.

While a full analysis of these questions cannot be made from the data presented thus far, this chapter has attempted to identify some crucial issues and modes of operation within the participating organisations that certainly affect the ability of voluntary associations to deliver on the claims made on their behalf. The chapter has argued that in some of the most fundamental practices of the organisations there is systemic conflict. Thus, where mission statements had been adopted they had failed to provide a unity of purpose for the organisation and its employees, with the data pointing to a good deal of ambiguity and ambivalence to both the existence and interpretation of the statement. Conflicting views regarding the organisation's aims and objectives appeared to rest on understandings (and perhaps misunderstandings) of the sentiments of the mission statement. There was little evidence to suggest mission statements were a foundation on which consensus could be forged and in fact, the mission statement provided the fault line from which a number of the fractures in the organisation emerged.

The role of government funding provided a second example highlighting conflict within the organisations. A key dilemma identified by the participants was the organisation's ability to remain independent from the state and forge its own policies and practices and the interviews highlighted that this was not only affecting the organisation's ability to do the kind of work they might otherwise choose (indeed work more in line with their organisational goals) but divisions were emerging in the organisations that were not easily bridged. A third theme identified from the data was the significant divergence of views related to the groups and individuals the organisations were seeking to represent. These views were overtly expressed with a passion that suggests achieving consensus across such rifts and ideological differences would be challenging at best, and impossible, at worst. The final theme identified that
each of the organisations had their own pressures that influenced their ability or willingness to engage in the public sphere. Funding pressures, sources of funding, organisational ideologies and a particular understanding of the public sphere were some of the factors that had an effect on the organisations engagement in the public sphere and the participants again presented a less than consistent and coherent view. Each of the organisation’s participation in the public sphere appeared to depend on a number of factors such as its history, ideology, organisational culture and objectives. They were engaging in the public sphere in ways that a number of the participants did not favour.

Further, the introduction to the chapter highlighted that there is little in the literature that allows for a concrete case to be put forward that outlines how a voluntary association would behave if it were in practice meeting any of the ideals theorists propose. Therefore, a minimal case was proposed suggesting that we might expect to find evidence for associations that:

- have some degree of unity of purpose;
- express democratic ideals;
- are close to the groups they represent;
- articulate the needs of the groups they represent;
- express principles of collaboration, consultation and cooperation.

In light of the findings provided in this chapter, it is clear that the data thus far does not support this minimal case. The organisations essentially did not have a unity of purpose and were far from agreement regarding the groups they represent. Accordingly, it would not seem unreasonable to assume that they would not articulate with any level of consistency the needs of such groups. However, from data presented in this chapter it cannot yet be concluded the organisations do not express democratic principles and even where there are conflicting views, the organisations might express principles of collaboration, consultation and cooperation in an effort to overcome such conflict. That is, rational-critical debate may yet be evidenced in these associations and resolve
conflict to a point of consensus. This being the case, then there may yet be reason to hold to Habermas's normative ideals and the view outlined earlier in the chapter (page 128) that conflict can be an untapped organisational resource, that when properly managed can increase organisational and individual performance (Morrell 2000).

Clearly, Habermas does not deny the existence of conflict and this chapter is in no way arguing that the divergence of views expressed is unique or unexpected. Indeed, Paton (1996: 29-44) claims that voluntary associations are more likely to have internal conflicts due to the fact that they are organisations with 'value issues'. A value issue is defined as:

(A)n organisational conflict which reflects emergent or unresolved tensions concerning the implications of a commitment central to the identity or mission of an organisation, or between two such commitments, where such tensions are perceived to have a clear ethical dimension (Paton 1996: 31)

According to Paton (1996: 31-32), the importance of value issues for organisations is that they often lead to organisational conflict and they differ from other conflicts within organisations as they have distinctive characteristics being: the appeal to higher values; have far-reaching significance for the organisation; considerable personal significance; and have a limited scope for compromise. As already identified, managing conflict is a critical part of any organisation's practises (De Dreu and van de Vliert 1997) and managing value issues clearly needs to be a part of voluntary association practices. How then are these value issues and conflicts to be managed? Can consensus be achieved or is Paton (1996) correct when he claims value issues offer little scope for compromise? Might it not still be possible that consensus can be achieved through rational-critical debate?
This leads to a number of other pertinent questions: Did the data provide any evidence supporting the existence of rational-critical debate leading to consensus? Did the data point to any other ways in which the conflicts within the organisations were resolved? Where resolution of conflicts occurred, how democratic and participatory was such resolution? Certainly if resolution and consensus could be achieved on the abovementioned themes, there is good reason to place faith in Habermas’s normative ideals, given the significance of such themes to the organisation’s missions and purposes. It might then be concluded that voluntary associations have the potential to reinvigorate the public sphere. In the next chapter, some of these questions will be addressed.
Chapter Five – Communicative Rationality in Voluntary Associations?

Introduction

If nonpublic life is not characterized in some ways by principles of egalitarian reciprocity, then how can we expect public life to be so characterized? (Charney 1998: 106)

The previous chapter concluded that there was a good deal of conflict across four major aspects of the participating organisations: mission statements had not provided a unity of purpose for the organisation; government funding was not only affecting the organisation’s ability to do the kind of work they might otherwise choose, but was creating divisions within the organisations; there was a significant divergence of views related to who the organisations seek to represent; and finally, the organisations had their own pressures that influenced their ability or willingness to engage in the public sphere. While these conflicts might not be surprising, it is suggestive that such conflict could be an impediment to organisational effectiveness. The important question to be raised from the previous chapter is whether the organisational purposes are being systematically subverted by internal conflict and if so whether the evidence undermines Habermas’s normative ideals – that is, is democracy and the public sphere undermined? Clearly, conflict within organisations does not prima facie weaken Habermas’s position for a public sphere of rational-critical debate where the force of better argument, and not status, prevails. Indeed, there is good reason to hold to Habermas’s ideals if such conflict can be resolved through rational-critical debate and consensus can be achieved. However, the previous chapter introduced a minimal case that claimed within the associations we would need to find at least some evidence of unity of purpose, expressions of democratic ideals, an understanding of the needs of the groups the organisations represent and principles of collaboration, consultation and cooperation. At this stage the evidence for the existence of
this minimal case at the very least has a question against it. While we have seen little evidence of unity of purpose or consistency in the articulation of the needs (or even the groups) that the organisations represent, we now need to consider whether there might yet be evidence of collaboration, cooperation and consultation being routinely pursued and democratic principles being expressed. If so, then we might conclude a version of the minimal case may still be tenable and Habermas's normative ideals still have some purchase.

This chapter builds on the data and arguments presented thus far and specifically examines the nature of communication, as it occurs within the voluntary associations participating in the study. This allows for the examination of recent democratic political theory, and theorists, who have located the recovery of the public sphere within arguments about deliberation and discourse – Habermas being the most prominent of these. The chapter will argue that the data suggests there is little rational-critical debate taking place within the organisations and that there is only modest empirical evidence for Habermas's discourse ethics and communicative rationality, or Putnam's horizontal reciprocity. The organisations appeared to practice selectivity of members and employees and their discourses were both hierarchical and authoritarian. Further, the internal reasoning of the organisations often relied on 'faith-based' reasoning, appealing to theist or other types of ideologies that could not be taken forward into the 'secular' public sphere. As such, in terms of the organisation's practices, decisions were rarely based upon the ability to offer reasons that were acceptable to all (internally or externally) or a radical questioning of its own justificatory procedures. Communication was characterised by the maintenance of interests and boundaries were drawn where exclusion was practised. It was evident from the interviews that communication within the organisations was infected with power. The chapter concludes that, at least in these contexts, it is meaningless to operate with a concept of communication where power is absent, as Habermas does. When concrete cases of communication are considered and the way politics and
democracy operate in voluntary associations are examined, we can no longer hold that Habermas’s normative ideals are tenable. Does this mean therefore that voluntary associations cannot reinvigorate the public sphere? If non-public life is not characterized in some ways by principles of egalitarian reciprocity, can we then expect public life to be so characterized? These final two questions are the focus of examination in Chapter Six.

A Brief Return to Habermas and Communicative Rationality

Before presenting the data to support these conclusions, it is important in this introductory section to briefly highlight Habermas’s theories of communicative rationality and discourse ethics. As identified in Chapter One, democratic theorists, in the tradition of Tocqueville have highlighted the importance of voluntary associations in civil society for the generation of the various norms associated with collective decision-making. Further, Chapter One emphasized and examined the theories proposed by those advocating deliberative democracy who make claims to the importance of a free public sphere, independent from the apparatus of both the state and the economy, where citizens can freely debate, deliberate and engage in collective will formation. Habermas is a part of the deliberative democratic position which emphasizes a public sphere in the Arendtian tradition and associations in civil society. That is, a public sphere that is not in a common public space, as in the Greek polis or in the Rousseauian general assembly, attended by all citizens seeking general will formation – both of which are clearly unrealistic under the conditions of modernity where the public sphere is both complex and large. Deliberative democrats appear to locate the public sphere within the manifold forms of associational life within civil society (Carney 1998: 97). Indeed, Benhabib claims that the fiction of mass assembly can be dispensed with since “(I)t is through the interlocking net of these multiple forms of associations, networks and organizations that an anonymous ‘public conversation’ results” (1996: 75).
However, for deliberative democrats, the ‘public conversation’ that results cannot be seen as simply a gaggle of voices. Rather, most claim that such a public sphere should instead be characterised by rational-critical debate that can be a consensus building force in the tradition of Habermas and his theory of communicative rationality. Habermas believes that the project of modernity is an “incomplete project rather than a misguided and discredited one” (Outhwaite 1996: 16) and one of the problematics of modernity, according to Habermas, is the focus on subjectivity. Accordingly, his own work, particularly his theory of communicative action and discourse ethics (Habermas 1984; 1987; 1997) has attempted to shift the focus of philosophy, science and democracy to an intersubjective approach. Thus, he embraces modernity and its ideals because he claims that without a universally constituted philosophy, science and democracy, there is only danger in the form of contextualism, relativism and nihilism (Flyvbjerg 1998a: 212).

Thus, Habermas attempts in his theory of communicative action to clarify “the presuppositions of the rationality of processes of reaching understanding, which may be presumed to be universal because they are unavoidable” (Habermas 1987: 196) and develops his intersubjective approach to modernity using the concept of ‘communicative rationality’. While he sees the concept as being threatened by modern society, he argues that the core of communicative rationality, being the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, is the central experience of human life. He believes that human social life is based upon processes for establishing reciprocal understanding and, as such, human beings are defined as democratic beings. ‘Argumentative speech’ or argumentation, for Habermas, insures “that all concerned in principle take part, freely and equally, in a cooperative search for truth, where nothing coerces anyone except the force of the better argument” (Habermas 1990: 198). In other words, in the ideal speech situation and communicative rationality, the only
'force' that is functioning is the 'force of the better argument'. This means that validity (consensus without force) and truth are ensured where participants in a particular discourse have regard for the processual requirements of 'discourse ethics'. These requirements are: that all subjects affected by what is being discussed, with the competence to speak and act, be allowed to take part in the discourse; that all subjects have equal opportunity and possibility to question and introduce any assertion; that subjects are willing and able to sympathise with each other's claims; that power differentials be neutralised so as not to affect the securing of consensus; and that subjects desist from strategic action and be transparent in explaining their goals and intentions (Habermas 1990: 56-68; Carney 1998: 97-111; Flyvbjerg 1998a: 213).

For Benhabib (1996: 78) the deliberative model of democracy presupposes a discourse theory of ethics that encompasses two elements of Habermas's ideal speech situation. These are the inclusion of all subjects affected by the discourse and "that each subject has the same symmetrical rights to various speech acts, to initiate new topics, to ask for reflection about the presuppositions of the conversation, and so on". These two elements Benhabib calls the principles of universal moral respect and egalitarian reciprocity, respectively. The question then for deliberative democrats who place the reinvigorating of the public sphere in the hands of the associations that make up civil society is: do these associations come close to fulfilling these ideals? This is one of the questions that this chapter attempts to address.

Flyvbjerg (1998a: 213) claims, the model proposed by Habermas (and more generally deliberative democrats) requires that citizenship be defined in terms of taking part in public debate, where participation becomes discursive participation and detached participation (emphasis in the original). Further, Flyvbjerg points out that Habermas is both a 'top-down' moralist as concerns processes - the rules for correct processes are normatively given in advance -
and a ‘bottom-up’ situationalist in that the participants of a given communicative process determine what is right and true. Accordingly, for Habermas, the empirical agents of communicative rationality and change in the public sphere are new social movements and the associations and networks within civil society (1998a: 214). Unfortunately for readers of Habermas, he is much more elaborate in outlining his theories of communicative rationality and discourse ethics than he is in telling the reader how we may get to such ideal speech situations. He has therefore, been criticised for being both utopian and idealistic and Rorty (1989: 68) claims communicative rationality, in Habermas’s thinking assumes a “healing and unifying power which will do the work once done by God”.

Of course, Habermas’s view that human beings are inherently democratic beings is not shared by all and writers from Machiavelli to Nietzsche to Foucault have often held different assumptions (liars, deceivers, tribal and fickle) of what it is to be human. Foucault criticises Habermas on the grounds that it is foolish to operate with a concept of communication in which there is an absence of power – power is always present and communication is more often non-rational in attempting to secure the maintenance of interests. Further, communication is more characterised by rhetoric, the use of dependency relations between participants and hidden control, than communicative rationality (Foucault 1988:18; Flyvbjerg 1998a: 216). However, Flyvbjerg (1998a: 216) claims that whether ‘the Habermas or Foucault position’ is correct is not of ultimate importance. Both must remain open, for what is critical is that the question must be examined by concrete examination of the case at hand and the researcher must consider how communication takes place and how politics and democracy operate:

Is communication characterized by consensus-seeking and absence of power? Or is communication the exercise of power and rhetoric? How do consensus seeking and rhetoric, freedom
from domination and exercise of power, eventually come together in individual acts of communication? (Flyvbjerg 1998a: 216)

It is to these questions that this chapter now turns and the data presented here clearly has implications for the empirical grounding of a theory of deliberative politics and democracy. In relation to this, four major themes emerged from the data which characterise the nature of communication within the participating organisations. Again narrative labels are used and the first section titled *We probably do discriminate*, highlights that communication within the associations was generally not democratic and often exclusionary. The second section titled *When I speak no-one listens*, suggests communication appears more often to be hierarchical than reciprocal. The third section titled *I do have the power*, highlights that certain participants were aware of the power they had within the communicative structures of the organisation, while others felt totally disempowered. The fourth section titled *We are a fairly open organisation but...*, provides evidence that suggests communication in the associations was often characterised by the utilisation of tactics and strategies in attempts to ensure desired outcomes. The conclusion of the chapter examines how these four major themes relate to Habermas’s processual requirements for communication that is consensus seeking and draws some conclusions regarding the empirical reality of his normative assumptions.

**We probably do discriminate**

As part of his theories of communicative rationality and discourse ethics, Habermas supports a normative ideal of parity of participation in communication. However, as earlier chapters highlighted, he is not alone in making egalitarian claims regarding participation in voluntary associations. In the very act of associating, Gutman (1998: 4) claims we engage, in an
egalitarian way, in solidarity, cooperation, dialogue, deliberation, negotiation, competition, and creativity. Clearly, in real life situations, and particularly within organisations with high levels of competition, cooperation seems unlikely. Further, voluntary associations are claimed to promote democracy and Giddens (1999: 75-79) claims they can be part of the process of ‘democratising democracy’, while Hirst (1994: 6-40) suggests voluntary associations have the capacity for a high level of communicative democracy that would allow for widespread consultation, cooperation, and collaboration (1994: 6-40) – again implicitly claiming some kind of parity of participation. Cohen and Rogers (1995: 7-40) state the democratic function of voluntary associations even more strongly when claiming, as organisations, they can deepen and extend the democratic state since they are generally more democratic (it is assumed they mean ‘more democratic’ than private and public organisations), can act as schools of democracy and provide alternative governance to hierarchical states and markets. All of which they claim permits society to realise the benefits of cooperation among citizens.

It is not clear from the literature on what basis these theorists make these claims – there is generally little or no empirical evidence provided. While they may not be claiming democracy and parity of participation work directly together, throughout their writing some kind of egalitarian sentiment is clearly there, and for Habermas it is overt. The importance of this present study lies in the fact that such ideals can be appropriately tested and the participants provided evidence whereby the claims of these theorists can be examined against actual communicative processes within the organisations. Was there any evidence of inclusionary practices where all those affected by directions and decisions the organisation was taking had the opportunity to participate? Were the organisations ‘more democratic’ and less hierarchical?

All the organisations were hierarchical in structure and it appeared that size and the degree of professionalisation were two important influencing factors
on the degree of hierarchy. For example, Sally’s comments were indicative of a general sentiment amongst the subjects:

We want to professionalise and grow and as we do we will have to put in place structures. We have a board of management and they make the decisions in terms of the overall goals for the organisation. On a day to day level, I as coordinator and Clare [the Chairperson] make the decisions and part of what we have to do is control the voice of the members, some of whom are just whining (Sally – coordinator – Living Women)

For larger organisations such as Save the World and the HIV/AIDS Centre there were many levels of organisational hierarchy beginning with the board of management, then senior management, a high number of middle managers, through to more ‘junior staff’ and employees, and then volunteers. These distinctions were not just operational but carried with them what was perceived as an appropriate level of influence. That is, volunteers felt there was little opportunity to influence organisational goals or practices while board members and senior managers were seen to be the elite decision-makers of the organisation:

...as a volunteer I don’t feel that I have any influence in the ways things are run and that is a bit annoying because we know better...well not always but mostly I would say...what is going on...I mean we answer the phones every day of people who are either wanting to make a donation or more importantly complaining about something or other. Those up the top...well I don’t know how aware of this stuff they are (Adam – volunteer – Save the World)
Alternatively, senior managers also spoke the language of hierarchy when talking about decision-making in the organisation:

Look, we would love to have everyone involved in policy direction and at times we have tried but it becomes a never-ending process and to be honest we mostly get people bitching about what we do and very little constructive criticism. We are the guys who have to be accountable and so we are the guys who have to make the decisions in the end. Having said that, it's good to get feedback from people working lower down the organisation when we are doing reviews...then their feedback is good and it looks like we are a flat organisation... but we make the decisions (John - executive director - HIV/Aids Centre)

In smaller organisations such as The Residence, Living Women and the Green Valley Op Shop there were still expressions of hierarchy, though the number of levels was clearly less and not as defined as in the larger organisations:

You can imagine that when people come here they are pretty affected by their addiction and while we might love to have them set their own agenda it's not possible...the full-time workers are the decision-makers and the decisions we make are generally calculated to meet the requirements of the board (Lucy - counsellor - The Residence)

We are all volunteers but Gloria is the manager and she tells us what to do...sometimes I tell her what to do but she does not listen...she's the boss and she is the one who says go here, do this, don't do this (Moncra - volunteer - Green Valley Op Shop)
Nowhere was there evidence of participants feeling they were part of an egalitarian organisation in terms of structure, but questions of hierarchy were more complex than simply where participants were placed within the ‘official’ organisational structure, as determined by their job description. For example, there were some participants who did feel their influence was beyond their position in the organisation, while others felt that their position should give them greater access to the decision-making process:

I am only 23 and a woman in an organisation run by older men mostly and I am not in management or anything but I am one of a favoured group of people and Grant [middle-manager] asks me for advice and I have been on a couple of committees that have brought change. The thing is I have no idea why they selected me instead of someone else and there are definitely people working alongside me whose faces don’t fit and they never get asked to do anything (Marie – customer service – Save the World)

You’re joking [answering a question regarding his ability to influence]... I hold a senior position in the place but they would not listen to me. I am seen to be part of a particular group that to be honest they would prefer to get rid of... we are completely alienated in the organisation... remember this is a ruthless place (Simon – HIV/AIDS Centre)

These expressions of hierarchy, and even the discontent some of the participants felt regarding it, might not in and of themselves be problematic and within the larger context of organisational practice – that is, beyond third sector organisations – might be viewed as normal and part of the many functions that organisations need to manage. However, while these sentiments might be consistent and exist in all organisations, the evidence seems to contradict theorists such as Habermas (1989), Putnam (2000), Cohen and
Rogers (1995), and others who mark voluntary associations off as a special case. Whether the characteristics of voluntary associations match those of public and private organisations is not the important question of this thesis, what is pertinent is that the organisations in this study displayed high levels of hierarchy and there was little evidence to suggest they were in any way egalitarian and inclusive in ways that countered this argument.

This was further evidenced when participants raised questions of who the organisation should employ with two of the organisations looking for exemption from anti-discrimination legislation. As previously stated, Save the World is a faith-based organisation and employees are mostly Christian with a large percentage being what could be described as ‘born again’ Christians. Daily prayer and Bible readings occur within departments with employees rostered on to lead these small devotions. Each week (generally a Wednesday), all staff join together for ‘CD’ — corporate devotions — which are organised and run by the staff. During these devotions staff may hear a field report from a recently returned colleague or a ‘statement’ from the Chief Executive. This raises the question of how an organisation, with high levels of professionalism, maintains the heavy Christian bias in terms of recruitment, given the existence of anti-discriminatory legislation, which it is required to meet:

Well you find clever ways of asking questions... so you ask someone in the interview how they would feel about having to lead the departmental devotion, though you probably wouldn’t call it a devotional. If they respond with something like they would share what they had read in their own devotional that day... well if they can do the job it’s a good fit (Simon – Save the World).
We probably do discriminate... it depends on what the position is... a non-Christian just would not get the CEO job here and you can’t have a non-Christian going talking to churches about our work (Jenny – Save the World).

The issue of the Christian ethos of the organisation also had some impact on the ‘conversation’ and communication the organisation had with its supporters and there was a significant tension for Save the World between its—in Rawl’s (1993: 220) terms—non-public (irrational) reasoning and its public (rational) reasoning.¹⁶ The interviewees were split regarding the degree to which the organisation should express its Christian culture beyond its walls. This was often a source of internal conflict between those who believed the organisation should be more overtly Christian in values and practice and those who believed the organisation already ‘alienated non-Christians in the wider community’. All believed boundaries needed to be drawn:

God help us if they [supporters] ever have a good look at some of the publications that read like church newsletters... but the thing is we are Christian and we should say we are... we rarely employ non-Christians and we need to be taking God’s Word to the broader community (Graham – Save the World)

We have a very different conversation inside these four walls about what we do and I think it’s a great thing we are either all Christians or sympathetic to the Christian world-view but we can’t go out there with this stuff and we have to find a way to communicate that speaks to the broader community who might

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¹⁶ In Political Liberalism Rawls (1993) makes the distinction between public and non-public reasoning. By non-public reasoning Rawls is referring to the various forms of reasoning that characterise associations within civil society and comprise the many reasons of civil society, belonging to the background culture. Public reason is a normative ideal that applies to citizens when they engage in political advocacy in public forums (1993: 215-220).
not be Christian sympathisers... I mean there are a few heathens out there [laughs] (David – Save the World)

There were similar expressions of bias in recruitment at many of the other organisations but most interestingly at the HIV/AIDS Centre - an organisation that had run campaigns against the discrimination of gay men and lesbian women in the workplace – these biases were most overt:

There is definitely a bias towards gay men and whenever someone new arrives the first question is 'are they gay'? ...I wouldn’t like to be straight and working here (Brian – HIV/AIDS Centre)

There is a difference between selecting for a position and selecting for a team. I need to be able to select for a team and when I lose a gay male counsellor—and we don’t have one at the moment—I need to be able to recruit a gay male counsellor. You feel like saying bugger the legislation it’s what our clients want and that’s what they are going to get (John – HIV/AIDS Centre).

It is clear that each of the participating organisations can be described in some way as ‘faith-based’, each having their own core values, which are their ‘creed’. There is a high importance placed on this ‘creed’ that can only be maintained by drawing boundaries and there is certainly evidence that the public reasoning of voluntary associations is different from their non-public reasoning. These questions will be examined further in subsequent sections of this chapter. Yet there is little in the data to support the suggested ideal in the literature that voluntary associations are in some way more democratic and egalitarian than other types of organisation – indeed we might conclude from the data that voluntary associations are simply neither egalitarian nor
democratic. But does this limit the ability of voluntary associations to reinvigorate the public sphere?

When I speak no-one listens

The last section highlighted the fact that the organisations in this study do not practice inclusiveness where organisational practices and communication are concerned and while this chapter has separated out the values of egalitarianism and reciprocity they are clearly linked. There is good reason to embrace Benhabib’s (1996: 78) principles of universal moral respect and egalitarian reciprocity which she claims encompasses the inclusion of all subjects affected by the discourse and “that each subject has the same symmetrical rights to various speech acts, to initiate new topics, to ask for reflection about the presuppositions of the conversation, and so on”. We might conclude that without some level of egalitarianism within organisations, then reciprocity is by definition unachievable – since many affected by the discourse are already placed outside the discourse. That is, they have no rights to the various speech acts, are unable to initiate anything, and by not being privy to the conversations are not able to “ask for reflection about the presuppositions of the conversation”.

However, in order to further examine the nature of conversation and communication within voluntary associations, this section, as an interim measure, accepts the degree of exclusion within the organisations and examines whether there is reciprocity within the communication of those included in the discourses of the organisations. If, for those included in the various discourses, we find that the principle of reciprocity exists, then we (might) need argue only for more inclusiveness in voluntary associations to achieve Habermas’s ideals. Conversely, if the principle of reciprocity does not exist, even for those privy to the discourse, then we might be two steps away from Habermas’s ideals, rather than one. Of course, it is possible that
inclusiveness and egalitarianism brings with it reciprocity, though this clearly cannot be assumed. Thus, what evidence is there from the participants for reciprocity? Interestingly, while they did not refer to the concept of reciprocity by name, most of the participants that felt some level of inclusion in organisational discourse did make statements relating to their opportunity to speak, to be heard and to introduce new topics and ideas for discussion.

Conversations and communication within organisations can take place in many different forms and while many of the participants referred to organisational decisions being made behind the closed doors of meeting rooms it is clear organisational conversations occur in many other places. These include offices in face-to-face conversations, in corridors and in tearooms – that is, in informal settings where it is difficult to measure the effect of such conversations:

I have never been in on any of the important meetings but if I catch the manager making his cup of tea I make a beeline for him and get in his ear... and I reckon he listens because some of my suggestions seem to get up but not only that, we generally have a good conversation and he generally lets me in on a few things... actually we have some good debates in that tearoom and I'm not even that keen on coffee [laughs] (Sara – The Residence)

I don't think the meetings are the best place for finding out what is going on in this organisation... personally I like to chat with people at their desks and hear what they have to say (John – executive director – HIV/Aids Centre)

This might suggest that there is a level of inclusiveness not accounted for in the earlier section however, a caveat needs to be placed on this since the majority of participants did not refer to this type of conversation in any
significant way. Most participants, who by definition of their job description were involved in the decision-making processes of the organisation, indicated that it was in meeting rooms where the key decisions were made and where the type of communication the organisation engaged in might best be examined. These were the meetings of the board, management, committees and sub-committees and was the ‘true’ arena for the exchange of ideas:

...if you want to be involved in the cut and thrust of this organisation you need to get through that door [pointing to a nearby meeting room] on a Monday morning and you’ll need plenty of balls... mind you it’s invitation only (Simon – HIV/Aids Centre)

Simon is unmistakably highlighting, that within the meeting rooms of the HIV/Aids Centre there is a certain dialogue taking place that is not for the faint-hearted and this was evidenced elsewhere in the data:

We have regular meetings and they inevitably get heated which is probably due to the fact that we all feel passionate about what we do... trying to alleviate poverty on a global scale is no easy task and that’s the backdrop to all the decisions we make (Susan – Save the World)

Meetings are generally a bun fight, with everyone trying to get their own agenda up and point scoring over their counterparts (Anne – Rchab)

When participants talked about their experiences in the meetings that they attended there were a number of issues raised that pointed to the nature of the communication within the organisations. Firstly, the participants indicated a
lack of input into the agenda that was set down for the meetings and that those who set the agenda often then dominated the discussions:

I set the agenda for the meetings that I chair and I keep a pretty tight rein on that...if everyone attending the meeting got their hands on the agenda it would be as long as your arm. Having set the agenda I keep control of the discussions too and make sure we keep moving (David – Save the World)

Most of the meetings I get to attend Anne [coordinator] runs and there is no structure to them other than she runs them and lets people speak when she wants them to and shuts them up when she can (Rita – Rehab)

Secondly, many of the participants felt that they were often silenced during discussions and that their lack of knowledge meant that they were unable to participate:

The problem is that you get invited to some meeting or other because they want the views of someone on the front line but most of the time you can’t really participate because they have the bigger picture that you don’t have and when you talk they just ignore it or demean it so you stop talking (Graham – Save the World)

The meetings here are pretty good and if you are confident you’ll get a say but I don’t really know what’s going on overall, like at the board level so its a bit pointless (Jason – HIV/Aids Centre)
In some of the smaller organisations the silencing of voices was more subtle and at Living Women, as indicated earlier, this had taken the form of reshaping the board:

We have needed to get more women on the board who are not HIV positive as you have to get things done and these women [HIV positive women] can really slow things down...there was too much talk and not enough action (Sally – Living Women)

A third issue raised by a small number of female participants was the fact that where males were present at meetings, and particularly if a male was chairing the meetings, they felt they had less opportunity to participate than their male counterparts:

The men love it... the chance to carry on at a meeting. They [the meetings] will descend into chaos at some point as they [the men] get carried away with some silly joke...often sexist I might add and our opinions [women members of the meeting] are just not given the same credibility as theirs (Marie – Save the World)

Given the data, and the views of the participants, it would be difficult to deduce that somewhere in these voluntary associations the principle of reciprocity holds and a more sound conclusion would be that communication within these organisations is characterised by hierarchy and asymmetrical rights to various speech acts. The initiation of new topics is much more complex than simply all subjects having an equal and fair opportunity to do so and there appears to be little reflection about presuppositions of the conversations that take place. Accordingly, within voluntary associations, the previous section and this section, suggests that neither egalitarianism nor reciprocity, respectively, prevail in their day-to-day practices. What does this
mean for voluntary associations and what then are the characteristics of communication within associations?

I do have the power

Within each of the organisations there were obvious examples of those who claimed power and those who felt disempowered and this was not always a function of their organisational responsibilities. That is, there were cases where power was a function of the hierarchical structure of the organisation, while there were other examples of where hierarchy was subverted by other more powerful influences in the organisation. For example, at the HIV/AIDS Centre, John as chief executive officer, felt there was power invested in him as a result of his position, while Simon, who held the position of peer support officer, felt he had little power within the organisation by not being part of a 'powerful' group within the organisation that he believed had an unfair amount of influence on policy and practice:

As the executive director of the organisation I am assigned the role to lead the organisation and the buck pretty much stops with me... I have to make the decisions and I do have the power to make some unilateral decisions on a day-to-day level (John – HIV/AIDS Centre)

There are people in this organisation clinging to HIV... it's their reason for existence and they are formidable political opponents who would like to get rid of me (Simon – HIV/AIDS Centre)

Across the interviews similar viewpoints were given in that there were parts of the organisation that seemed to be more powerful and as a result exert more influence over strategic planning than might otherwise be expected, and as
stated, the examples given often related to some of the value issues the organisation faced. This seemed to be because such issues were generally discussed in a much more passionate way that (perhaps) made them more salient to the interviewees when they themselves were providing examples:

...in this organisation the marketing department have the final say... so we want a more educational view put forward... you know less of the starving kids in the arms of their mothers that elicit a response but reinforce stereotypes... I'm betting there are more people [in the organisation] fed up with these pictures than support them but the marketers have the power because they are seen to be bringing in the money and as long as they keep bringing it in nothing will change (Andrew – Save the World)

Indeed, those working in the marketing at Save the World also appeared to be aware of the 'power' they had to exert influence:

Obviously if we were not marketing... I know that sounds crude... but you know... the experiences of developing countries and the disasters that occur, money would still come in but not the amounts that make much of our work possible. I mean many of the people who complain about what we do would not have a job here if we did not do what we do... there would simply be no funds for education officers (David – Save the World)

This sense of power, or lack of power, that the participants felt was not something that was background to the work they did within the organisation and Paton (1996: 32-33) seems correct when he claims that value issues carry with them personal significance:
There are things that need changing in this organisation and I know we can work better if they are changed but I have no power to change them and I am rapidly losing the will to fight... you can only hit your head against a brick wall for so long... I guess I have lost the passion (Damien – HIV/Aids Centre)

There is nothing I can say that means anything here... we [therapists] are not taken seriously when we try to recommend things to make things better... it’s like thanks for your input but... (Rita – Rchab)

Interestingly, not long after these two participants were interviewed both had left their respective organisations.

While there is little within the data giving concrete examples of specific communication (in meetings or face-to-face communication) that is specifically ‘contaminated with power’ the data suggests that where issues were discussed there were inevitably winners and losers – that is, certain members of the organisation felt disempowered and excluded:

You know I sit in meetings every Monday and we are all managers within the same division but we do not all have the same influence and there is a tight group that generally sit closest to Allan [divisional director] and they talk more, get more input, never get cut off and generally make the decisions... then there are the rest of us... only two or three... and our attendance is tokenism really. On the small items you don’t worry but when we get onto the important stuff... well then you get fed up (Marie – Save the World)
While the participants did not specify communication where power differentials were exercised, they did allude to organisational practices where power was present and the above examples suggest power was present and at times in profound ways. Where value issues are concerned, the arguments were said to be passionate arguments – where there was certainly no appeal to ‘the force of the better argument’ evidenced – and came at a personal cost to a number of the participants. Indeed, the data suggests that the participants were well aware of their own ability to influence the organisational goals and practices, allowing for the conclusion that power was exercised in the organisations. Can we therefore conclude that any ideal of power neutrality in voluntary associations, and particularly in the communicative practices of these associations, is unrealistic? Perhaps not based solely on this data alone and there might be a need for more empirical work to be done but given the findings of the first two sections – that is, that communication in voluntary associations is hierarchical and non-reciprocal – then we might at least make claims regarding voluntary associations’ ability to meet Habermas’s communicative ideals. The final section further considers the data and highlights that within voluntary associations members, as employees, clients or volunteers, employ strategies and tactics that both support and undermine Habermas’s ideal for transparent and open communication.

**We are a fairly open organisation but...**

Interestingly, given the previous three sections of this chapter, one of the salient themes to emerge from the interviews, was that many of the participants believed they worked in open and reasonably transparent organisations. However, there were examples where participants also alluded to a politics of strategy and tactics that often meant they were purposefully engaged in undermining and subverting others both inside and outside the organisation. For Habermas, if participants are to meet the processual requirements of his theory of discourse ethics, they must desist from such
strategic action and engage in communication where their goals and intentions are openly explained. That is, their communication must be transparent.

Interviews in each of the organisations provided examples of internal communication that was both open and transparent and closed and tactical and it is very difficult from the data to determine which is the prevailing feature of these organisations:

There is nothing on my desk or anywhere that I would not like my staff to see and if they ask there is no question I would not answer...and when I hear about things that are going on I have no problem sharing it with the team (Anne – Rehab)

However, later in the interview Anne claimed that it was “not necessary for everyone to know everything” claiming there was information (such as the chances of success in the next round of tenders) that was ‘sensitive’ and would ‘freak staff out’ if it became general knowledge. It was not clear from the interview how then communication was not, by definition, strategic and how, as coordinator of Rehab, Anne maintained the open and sharing policy she had earlier claimed. There were other similar examples of inconsistency:

We like to make sure everyone knows what’s going on and then there is no misunderstanding and it seems to keep moral up...we are a fairly open organisation but actually there are some things that stay within the board and senior management...big things (Neil – The Residence)

The best thing about Corporate Devos is that you get to hear what’s going on in the organisation...the CEO gives an overview of budgets and strategic plans etc...I don’t know if other organisations would be sharing that with all its employees. Mind
you when they were thinking about the need for redundancies that was all cloak and dagger stuff and there was lots of whispering in the corridors during those days (David – Save the World)

Perhaps the best example of the contradictions that exist in the organisations, between communication that is open or tactical, comes from the participants interviewed at the HIV/AIDS Centre:

Whether formally or informally, everyone seems to know what’s going on and we all know where everyone else stands...so in meetings when someone puts their case forward we know why they are speaking that way or what they want the outcome to be...it’s rare that someone surprises you and they are generally defending their turf (John – HIV/AIDS Centre)

I find it very easy to know what’s going on... you know who will spill the beans and even though they try there are no secrets in here... any meeting I don’t attend I can tell you five minutes after it is finished what went on and who said what [laughs] (Simon – HIV/AIDS Centre)

In terms of external communication, it was the participants that worked for organisations receiving government funding that talked most freely about the nature of the communication they had with the funding agency. Again, there was contradiction in terms of whether such communication was open and transparent or strategic. At both Save the World and Rehab, there appeared to be little scope for ‘subversion’ of the terms of reference set out under the government funding regime. At Save the World, the Federal Government funded the organisation (from the overseas aid budget) to carry out specific projects, which were then audited:
It’s not simple as we are always working in partnership with others but we have to deliver on what is set down in the project application...but for example in Indonesia we are working with Save the World Indonesia and the office there has its own pressures so we find ways to get the funding and keep everyone happy...you have to be strategic because ultimately we are answerable to the [Federal] government on the issues they fund but we have to be sensitive to the staff working on the ground (Andrew – Save the World)

At Rehab, the organisation funding comes in the form of a state government tender and the terms of reference are, according to the coordinator, tight. There seemed to be little scope for operating outside of these terms of reference though the interviews seemed to suggest there were still ways in which the organisation at least attempted to do work ‘outside’ of the parameters specified in the tender:

Once we won the tender we knew that we had to deliver and we are scrutinised so there is no way we can operate outside of the requirements...we have to meet the performance indicators (Anne – Rehab)

...well we play the game, give them [both the government and the management] what they want but I do my own thing and fill out the paper work giving them what they require but it bears no resemblance to what I actually do with my clients (Rita – Rehab)

Again, the HIV/AIDS Centre provided the most poignant example of the contradictory character of communication with its most significant external
funder, being the State Government (through the Department of Human Services) who provided over ninety per cent of the organisations funding:

Human Services pays us to do service delivery and there are performance indicators that we have to meet...but we lie about what we do and they know we lie but they don’t care (Simon – HIV/Aids Centre)

A major theme to emerge from the data then is that communication within voluntary associations can be open and transparent and strategic and tactical at the same time. There was a general acknowledgement that there were certain aspects of the organisations’ goals and operations that were withheld from either staff or funding bodies but such attempts at secrecy were often subverted, as were attempts by outside influences to control the organisations’ aims and objectives. It might be concluded from the data that there was an acceptance by all stakeholders and partners that strategies and tactics are employed at many levels of the associations and that in many ways such acceptance led to more openness about the nature of these strategies and tactics. Certainly, communication within the associations, and between the associations and external institutions was more strategic than open but there was little or no expectation that it could be any other way. In a sense, the participants seemed to suggest that the communication was always strategic and everyone was open about that!

Conclusion

The conclusion to this chapter will first make further comment on the evidence found regarding the characteristics and nature of the communication within the participating associations. Second, it will then draw some conclusions regarding both the evidence for the existence of the minimal case and the processual requirements of Habermas’s discourse ethics. Finally, it
will raise important questions (examined in Chapter Six) regarding voluntary associations and their potential to reinvigorate the public sphere if the evidence thus far is suggestive that they are not likely to meet Habermas's normative ideals or support the minimal case.

The data presented in this chapter has essentially confirmed the findings of Chapter Four - that is, that voluntary associations are characterised by conflict. However, the data also provides evidence suggesting that communication in voluntary associations is neither egalitarian nor reciprocal, is infected with power and mostly instrumental (strategic and tactical).

First, care should be taken not to assume that the fact that communication in voluntary associations is neither egalitarian nor reciprocal is in some way negative and means that voluntary associations are ineffective as a result. Second, and most important, while the participants point to an absence of egalitarianism and reciprocity, it should not be assumed that this holds significant negative influence for them or impedes their capacity to do their work. For most participants, despite their often overt views on their inclusion/exclusion and rights to various speech acts, there was no expectation (perhaps because they had not read Habermas!) of the principles of egalitarianism and reciprocity holding within the organisation. Indeed, if anything there were expressions that such principles would hinder the organisation meeting its objectives, and these were not just from board members and senior management:

The idea that we can all get involved in all aspects of the organisation is not reasonable...most of what goes on is on a tight deadline and there is not the time to consult everyone...I reckon it would hold us back if we had to consult everyone all the time (Adam - volunteer - Save the World)
We don’t have endless time, decisions have to be made but it’s a nice idea (John – executive director – HIV/Aids Centre)

One of the critical characteristics of Habermas’s theory of discourse ethics is the neutrality of power within the mode of communicative rationality. This is often assumed as a possibility for deliberative democrats. For example, Giddens (1994: 16) claims that what is required is a public arena in which controversial issues can be resolved, or at least handled, through dialogue rather than through established forms of power. This he calls dialogic democracy. What is proposed is often a form of communication in which power differentials can be bracketed or are absent – though there is little in the literature to inform the reader how this might occur other than an appeal to some universal ideal. As Flyvbjerg (1998a: 223) points out, ‘democracy’ is defined by Habermas through and in his theory of discourse ethics as establishing more democratic institutions, while for thinkers such as Foucault the focus is on how institutions can be utilized more democratically. Foucault, an antagonist of Habermas, works on different assumptions to Enlightenment rationality that drives much of Habermas’s thinking – the major assumption being that since no-one has yet demonstrated the existence of universals, in either philosophy or social science, there is little point continuing to operate within a framework of universals. We should be aware and accept that different groups invariably have different world views, work within different paradigms, and have different interests where there is no general principle by which all differences can be resolved – including the ‘force of the better argument’. For thinkers who are more sceptical of human behaviour than Habermas’s notion that we are in some way inherently democratic, there is little point operating with a concept of communication where power is absent. For Foucault, communication is always infected power and more likely characterised by non-rational rhetoric and the maintenance of interests (Flyvbjerg 1998a: 216-222).
It should be noted that the interviewees rarely referred to the concept of power directly and specifically in relation to what might be called 'communicative practices'. However, the fact that they did often refer to the amount of influence they felt they had over organisational practices gives some indication that power existed within the organisations and was a function of the organisation. There were a number of examples of how power was exercised in the organisation and accordingly allows for conclusions to be drawn regarding Habermas's normative appeal to power neutrality. The most prominent examples in the data of where power is exercised is where 'value issues' are concerned. The importance of this is that the data suggests that discussions around value issues, as they existed in each of the organisations, was the place where communication appeared to be most passionate, tribal, dissident, un-democratic and non-rational – that is, it was around these issues that communication appeared as rhetoric and contaminated by power. As a result, this makes the possibility of communicative practice without power unlikely in voluntary associations.

Just as important, was the fact that these value issues were often what marked each of the organisations off from the other and so important were the issues it was often these issues that drove these civil society groups into the public sphere – the appeal to higher values rather than a shared democratic vision. Thus, while Save the World was active in the public sphere, it was a drive 'to do God's work' that took the organisation there and in advocating for the Federal Government to increase the overseas aid budget, they did not necessarily have any ultimate vision of a more general appeal for improved human rights for all.

From the literature, it is not clear in what ways voluntary associations differ from other organisations in the private and public sector or why claims are made that members and employees of voluntary associations might learn and enhance democratic ideals in ways employees of other types of organisation
are not able. This chapter has highlighted the fact that ideals and principles such as egalitarian reciprocity, where participation is governed by norms of equality and symmetry; where there are equal rights to interrogate and question topics of conversation; and where there are no prima facie rules restricting the identity of the participants or the agenda, are not going to be fulfilled by the associations comprising civil society. Thus, we might conclude that this empirical evidence suggests the claims made by deliberative democrats who appeal to the universal communicative presuppositions of argumentative speech, are doubtful (Charney 1998).

It is clear too from the data that relations within voluntary associations are more complex than perhaps Habermas's appeal to the fact that human beings are inherently democratic. Indeed, the data appears to support Flyvbjerg's claim that:

people know how to be, at the same time, tribal and democratic, dissidents and patriots, experts at judging how far a democratic constitution can be bent and used in non-democratic ways for personal and groups advantage (1998a: 217).

The participants in this study certainly demonstrated a range of attributes and characteristics and the associations themselves were revealed (through the participants giving an organisational perspective) to hold both democratic views and undemocratic practices. Also, there was little in the data to suggest there were in any way universal commonalities shared by each of the associations, other than the fact that they all had value issues that were a source of organisational conflict. Thus, how might we now measure the associations against the minimal case proposed in Chapter Four? That is did we find evidence of organisations that:

- have some degree of unity of purpose;
- express democratic principles;
• are close to the groups they represent;
• articulate – at least with some level of consistency – the needs of the
groups they represent;
• express principles of collaboration, consultation and cooperation?

The data does not suggest evidence in support of the minimal case\textsuperscript{17}. Indeed, the evidence appears to directly contradict the processual requirements that Habermas proposes in his theory of discourse ethics and communicative rationality – that is, that communication must be egalitarian, reciprocal, power neutral and transparent. Therefore, it might be reasonable to conclude these claims are unrealistic and utopian, when actual existing communication in voluntary associations is considered. Does this mean therefore, that voluntary associations are not able to reinvigorate the public sphere? Indeed, if they do not meet Habermas’s ideals might they be partly responsible for his claim that the public sphere is in a state of atrophy? What are we therefore to conclude in regard to voluntary associations and the public sphere? Might in fact the public sphere be better served by voluntary associations – given the characteristics outlined above – staying out?

Of course, Habermas’s claims that voluntary associations can be the agents of change in the public sphere could still hold, even if we conclude that they are not able to achieve such change in the way Habermas proposes. As Flyvbjerg (1998a: 224) points out, Foucault takes a different view to Habermas and in prescribing neither process nor outcome (both of which Habermas prescribes) recommends a focus on conflict and power relations as the most effective point of departure for the fight against domination – a fight that is central to civil society both internally and externally. By internally, Foucault means in the relationship between different groups (for example groups of different

\textsuperscript{17} This minimal case, referred to earlier as a Weberian ideal type has now served its purpose and has proved successful in enabling this thesis to investigate certain realities. As a hypothetical construction, formed from real phenomena, it has had certain explanatory value and allowed for the argument to now move on.
gender and ethnicity) within civil society and by externally, he means the relationship of civil society to the spheres of government and business where Flyvbjerg claims “the fight against domination can be said to be constitutive of civil society” (1998a: 224).

Others who have criticised Habermas and his concept of the public sphere have also highlighted the importance of conflict and the maintenance of interests and Eley (1992: 307), in his contribution to Habermas and the Public Sphere, demonstrates that historically the very formation of the public sphere took place “from the field of conflict, contested meanings, and exclusion” rather than exclusively through rational discourse and consensus. As highlighted in Chapter One of this thesis where the theory of the public sphere was examined, feminists were long excluded from the public sphere, and got their issues on the public agenda more through power struggles and conflicts, that are characteristic of activism and social change, than through rational-critical debate and consensus. Ryan (1992), also in Habermas and the Public Sphere, makes this point even more strongly, claiming the standards of communicative rationality were a chimera even in the halcyon days of the bourgeois public sphere so celebrated by Habermas. For Ryan the goal of publicness (in the Habermas (1989) sense of publicness) is best served when it is allowed “to navigate through wider and wilder territory” (1992: 286) that is permeated with conflict. Thus, given that contemporary civil society is clearly characterised by plurality (as the organisations making up this study and others have demonstrated), should we not expect a move towards more conflict – than existed in the bourgeois public sphere – rather than less. Surely, conflict is an inevitable part of civil society and Flyvbjerg (1998a: 229) might be correct to claim that conflict is an inevitable part of the concept of civil society. Further, he claims that civil society might not need to be ‘civilised’ and strong civil societies might well be those that guarantee the existence of conflict. Finally he claims:
(A) strong understanding of civil society, and of democracy, must therefore be based on thought that places conflict and power at its centre, as Foucault does and Habermas does not... that forms of public life that are practical, committed and ready for conflict provide a superior paradigm of civic citizen virtue than do forms of public life that are discursive, detached and consensus-dependent (1998: 229-230)

Accordingly, when Charmey (1998: 106) asks “if nonpublic life is not characterized in some ways by principles of egalitarian reciprocity, then how can we expect public life to be so characterized?”, we might answer ‘we do not, nor do we find it preferable’! Further, we might claim that voluntary associations that are conflict-ridden, power-infected and whose discursive practices and processes are not characterised by egalitarian reciprocity are well equipped for power politics and a politics of activism as a means for first, gaining access to the public sphere and second, making it more robust.

The next chapter (the last of the three data chapters) will outline some of the ways the voluntary associations that participated in this study engage in the public sphere. It will develop some of these themes and highlight the ways conflict and power are exercised in the public sphere. Further, it will draw conclusions about the ways some of the activities of voluntary associations certainly work to enhance the public sphere and highlight the ways voluntary associations’ contributions to the public sphere are undermined by both internal and external influences.
Chapter Six – Diverse Voices in the Public Sphere(s)

Introduction

This chapter asks: given that many of the ideals theorists propose for voluntary associations look at best unrealistic and at worst utopian, might it still be possible for voluntary associations to reinvigorate the public sphere? To do this it is necessary to return to some of the key tenets of public sphere theory presented in Chapter One, particularly the questions: is the public sphere in a state of atrophy and does it need reinvigorating? This chapter attempts to empirically place voluntary associations’ practices within public sphere theory and argues that voluntary associations continue to be active in the public sphere and continue to have some ‘success’ in placing certain issues firmly on the public agenda. However, this chapter will also highlight that voluntary associations are not free from influence (for example colonisation by the state and the market) and argues that in specific ways this limits their ability for effective engagement in the public sphere. The chapter concludes that the voluntary associations participating in this study understand that there is no unitary notion of the public sphere and engage in many public spheres, in a multiplicity of creative ways, often utilising whatever means are available to them. Again, the data provides the substantive evidence for these claims and presents the views of the participants and their organisational perspective. Therefore, while the data have indicated that voluntary associations do not operate in ways consistent with Habermas and his unitary notion of the public sphere, a more tenable explanation can be found by moving on from it to a consideration of multiple public spheres and counterspheres that theorists such as Fraser (1992) and Hartley (1996) propose.

This chapter is divided into three sections and a preceding case study and looks at the kinds of activities the participating voluntary associations engage in within public sphere(s). The three sections correspond to three salient areas
of focus as they emerged from the data. The first section (...the big bang: Public image and democratisation) highlights the ways that the associations attempted to employ the mass media to get their message to the broader community. The second section (The Internet? We love it!) looks at how the associations are utilising new information technology and particularly the Internet to inform, educate, advocate and in some cases subvert various sections of the community. These first two sections emphasize the importance of those theorists, such as Lumby (1999b) and Hartley (1996) (the postmoderns) and London (1995) and Jordan (1999) (the cyberdemocrats), identified in Chapter One, who doubt the ever-existing reality of Habermas’s liberal public sphere and propose public sphere(s) that are more democratic and diverse than at any other stage in history. The third section, (It’s all about consciousness-raising and solidarity) looks at Gramscian attempts to build a counter-hegemony that can then be used (strategically) to influence the dominant ideologies. This is very much consistent with the feminist approach proposed by Fraser (1992: 123) where strategies and sites used to influence include journals, bookstores, publishing companies, lecture series, video and film distribution networks, research centres, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals and local meeting places – sites used by a number of associations in this study. Further, the section provides examples of how the organisations built coalitions with other organisations, often with conflicting values, to build a forceful alliance concentrating on certain, often single, issues.

However, before presenting the data and arguments in these sections, what follows is an example of one of the most ‘successful’ campaigns run by voluntary associations in the public sphere. This example, or case study, draws attention to the possibilities that exist for voluntary associations to engage in the public sphere and emphasizes certain characteristics of both the associations’ strategies and tactics, and the public sphere itself.
The Multilateral Agreement on Investment – 1998

In 1996, the Director-General of the World Trade Organisation claimed, "(W)e are writing the constitution of a single global economy, the question is where – not whether – work on trade and investment should take place" (Goodman and Ramal 2000: ix). By 1997 the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) was 'on the table' and backed by 29 of the world's richest states, and by their business organisations, was part of a globalised effort to institutionalise corporate power. Negotiations had been under way for three years and there was an emerging consensus amongst the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) elites that the MAI would herald a new era for the global economy. Not surprisingly, the details of the MAI had been withheld until the negotiating parties were ready to approve the document and while the agreement was known to be wide-ranging, the OECD governments claimed wider participation was not required and a deadline of April 1998 was set for the approval of the agreement (Goodman 2000: 33).

In October 1997, the network of non-government organisations (NGOs) – voluntary associations – withdrew from the discussions due to the stubbornness of the OECD officials and launched an unprecedented international campaign against the agreement and took on the most influential forces driving the processes of economic globalisation. Within months, this club of the world's most powerful states, had to admit defeat and the MAI was shelved. The Economist (1998) reported the NGOs had denounced the MAI "as a multinationals charter that would leave governments powerless to protect...the planet" and that politicians from around the globe had been scarred into retreat. We might ask, in such an atrophied public sphere as Habermas describes, where voluntary associations and the anti-MAI campaign had been marginalised, how was it possible for these organisations to influence the outcome of such a major international economic negotiation?
How had these grassroots organisations achieved this success in confronting a major concentration of power?

Goodman (2000: 33-52) claims there are five aspects that influenced the outcome of the MAI, and these give some indication of the condition of the public sphere and how voluntary associations can, and have, engaged in the public sphere:

- First, Goodman claims that the MAI was truly constitutional, in that it was a top-down agreement that affected all levels of government – that is, a Habermasian constitution. Given the broad scope of the agreement, the anti-MAI campaigners were able to argue that it would affect a broad and diverse range of concerns that allowed for the mobilisation of a powerful cross-sectional alliance. Concerns were raised about environmental rights, labour rights, indigenous rights and human rights;

- Second, the forum was weakly legitimised and was vulnerable to accusations that the agreement was self-serving, since it had failed to recruit all stakeholders to the negotiation table, particularly a broad range of NGOs;

- Third, new information technology, and particularly the Internet (through the creation of newsgroups and websites), allowed the anti-MAI campaigners to construct a network that could not be constrained. The campaigners were able to form alliances beyond the OECD, as well as within it, and sidestep the pro-MAI consensus;

- Fourth, the NGOs forged powerful associations between local and national concerns against the forms of proposed international deregulation that was to take place once the MAI was implemented. In so doing, the campaigners mobilised sub-national opinion in the name of globally defined aspirations and as a result outflanked the MAI negotiators – the campaign could neither be labelled elitist globalism nor xenophobic nationalism;

- Finally, the campaign was clearly a reaction against the push by OECD countries towards a globalised neo-liberalism and was built on disaffection
with neo-liberalism that allowed for alliances between OECD NGOs and NGOs in the non-OECD world (Goodman 2000: 34-35).

While a number of these aspects point to the nature of the MAI allowing for certain converges that allowed for a wide-ranging campaign to be launched, it is the third aspect — network politics — that gives an indication of how the coalition of NGOs managed to maintain a coordinated approach ‘in the public sphere’ they had been marginalised from. The anti-MAI campaigners were faced with an enormous OECD consensus in favour of the agreement, including governments and mainstream political parties. Accordingly, the campaigners had to bypass the formal political processes and build on a process of network politics using computerised cross-national alliance building. However, the dangers of such networking are clearly, how to maintain a plurality of viewpoints centred on a commitment to an ‘official’ NGO statement against the agreement. Further, how could the campaign avoid alienating certain NGOs if it took a strong central position — or worse, might such a position suggest there was an organisation dealing with the issue and thus encourage passivity and ‘free-riding’? Also, how might the campaign avoid being hijacked by groups that did not support the NGO campaign position and that the NGOs might not want to be identified with, such as right-wing nationalists? Further, given the nature of computer-mediated communication (CMC) whereby no individual or organisation need be voiceless, how can such a campaign maintain any level of coherence? These are questions Goodman (2000: 44) claims such campaigns will inevitably have to face, and highlight a tension between an openness of network politics and the particular dangers of political pluralism.

With regard to CMC, it is clear that relatively broad access to the Web and the non-hierarchical nature of email means that a campaign such as the anti-MAI might struggle to achieve any kind of consensus and unity. Radical openness can be abused and interactive newsgroups generated through the email, could
easily have become a distraction to the campaign. Websites, which are not interactive, can be a useful entrance point for newsgroups and be used to link up vast arrays of NGOs; however, they might undermine the coherence of the campaign. During the height of the anti-MAI campaign (January – April 1998) there were over 50 dedicated websites, though not all were promoting the same views as the ‘main’ campaign – in fact many of them were giving unreliable interpretations and conflicting views. Despite this, the international campaign could not have been created as quickly or have been as effective had it not been for CMC technology since the mainstream media were not giving any significant coverage to the MAI. In Australia, there was virtually no coverage prior to January 1998 and had it not been for the alternative of CMC the agreement would most likely have been ‘signed, sealed and delivered’ before the anti-MAI campaign had got off the ground (Goodman 2000: 44; Kobrin 1998).

Coherence was largely maintained during the campaign by the fact that many of the newsgroups and forums had different degrees of moderation, and while the Internet campaigning was a strategic and important facet of the campaign, it was not the only activity the NGOs engaged in. Paper dissemination was important and reports and papers were published by the NGOs, and while party-politics were in many ways by-passed, this is not to say they were altogether ignored. In fact, once the Federal Government in Australia became aware of the broad concerns that existed about the MAI - concerns that became apparent largely as a result of the anti-MAI petition generated both through the Internet and more conventional approaches - it allowed a Senate Joint Standing Committee inquiry into the draft treaty (Scott 1998: 561). While most campaigners had little faith in the inquiry or the impact of such an inquiry on government decision-making, it did provide a useful focus and its hearings and reports provided much-needed positive publicity for the campaign and legitimised lobbying both within and outside the levels of government. Many of the NGOs provided submissions to the inquiry, which
were again a useful point of focus for the issues and the campaign more generally. Save the World was one of the many NGOs to make a submission. As a result, the NGOs began to set the agenda for the campaign through networking that enabled close coordination of the activities and across types of NGOs. The Internet certainly played its part in this and led one senior diplomat involved in the negotiations to comment that the first successful Internet campaign run by NGOs had been very effective (Goodman 2000: 47).

In November 1998, six months after the shelving of the MAI, Renato Ruggiero, The Director-General of the World Trade Organisation took a direct hit on the streets of London from a protester armed with a custard pie to which he responded: “When they have no more rational arguments (emphasis added), the fringe elements have to use cake”, to which the BBC responded: “To those who wish to dominate the world, the world replies ‘let them eat humble pie’” (Goodman and Ranald 2000: ix).

What are the lessons to be learnt from this campaign and what does the campaign say regarding the ability of voluntary associations to reinvigorate the public sphere? First, the campaign relied on a great deal of cooperation between voluntary associations, and relied heavily on the use of CMC to achieve a position of consensus and maintain a coordinated approach to the campaign. Second, at times the campaign located itself within the postmodern public sphere, that is the sphere of cyberspace and provided a good deal of support for those who argue for ‘cyberdemocracy’ (Bryan et al 1998: 3-5). Within this public sphere there was both rational and irrational debate regarding the MAI agreement. Third, the campaign was not located in the postmodern public sphere alone. Submissions made to governments, and particularly in Australia, the Federal Government’s Senate Joint Standing Committee, were rationally argued proposals where the aim was for the ‘force of the better argument’ to prevail. As voluntary associations made their submissions and lobbied governments it was not only the force of
argumentation that was seen to be important but also the force of consensus from a diverse range of organisations representing diverse interests. This very much supports the notion of voluntary associations engaging within a more liberal, and traditional conceptualisation of the public sphere in a more liberal and traditional way. Finally, the campaign had an implicit consciousness of the power relations involved and used strategies and tactics to undermine such relations with whatever means were available to them.

This suggests that political action has changed a great deal in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century and that voluntary associations (at least during this campaign) can put aside their different values to fight the most imposing of global powers – a point developed in the ‘Conclusion’ of this thesis. Further, it suggests that talk of either a liberal public sphere, counter-public spheres, or postmodern public spheres is inadequate at this point in time – this campaign suggests that voluntary associations are operating within all three ‘spheres’ at the same time though not with complete freedom. The data clearly supports this view as the next three sections highlight.

‘...the big bang’: Public image and democrainment

To summarize Habermas’s (1989) concept of the public sphere from Chapter One, there are several requirements for authenticity which include: open access; voluntary participation outside institutional roles; the generation of public judgment through assemblies of citizens who engage in political deliberation; the freedom to express opinions; and the freedom to discuss matters of the state and to criticise the way state power is organised (London 1995: 38). However, Habermas argues that since the end of the nineteenth century when the contradictions of capitalist society began to expand, the notion of an objective general interest has been replaced with one of fairly negotiated compromise among interests and consequently rational-critical
debate has been replaced by negotiation. Further, with the development of mass culture, Habermas argues that rather than a sharing in culture there was a move to a joint consumption of culture and rather than active participation in mutual critique, rational-critical debate was replaced by consumption (Calhoun 1992: 21-23).

For Habermas, this world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in name only with the form of participation fatally altered from that of the early bourgeois public sphere. Accordingly, Habermas is highly critical of the role of the media in the ‘pseudo-public sphere’ and in moving from a culture-debating to a culture-consuming public where “today newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere” (Habermas 1984: 49). As individuals experience radio, television, and film with immediacy in a way not possible in printed word, rational-critical discourse becomes more difficult, if not impossible. Today, personalised politics, special interest groups and public relations companies focusing on engineering consent among consumers of mass culture dominate the public sphere. He argues, that attempts are made to increase the prestige of political parties and special interest groups through publicity work, without making the topics of their positions subject to genuine public debate. Thus, publicity becomes only an occasion for the manipulation of popular opinion (group psychology rather than democratic practice) and weakens both the public sphere and democracy, with little occasion for discursive will formation (Calhoun 1992: 23-29).

There is no doubt that the interviewees working in the voluntary associations participating in this study were aware that “today newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere” (Habermas 1984: 49) and that they needed to have a presence in these media. For most of the associations, there was a high importance placed on ‘publicity’ both in terms of increasing their public profile and in advocating on certain issues through
this form of media. For example, Sally at Living Women claimed that “it is important to be seen and so we pushed for Susan Paxton [HIV positive women] to be a torch-bearer for the Olympics [in Australia]”. This had led a number of the organisations to think of creative ways in which they could ‘position’ their organisation within the mass media or get the mass media to give some kind of coverage to the issues they wanted to get up on the public agenda. A number of the organisations had planned specific ‘media events’ and many of them had been working on securing high profile individuals to ‘front’ either the organisation or a particular cause. For example, at Save the World, celebrities (both national and international) had been very much part of the organisation’s public image since Irish rocker Bob Geldof focused the world’s eyes on Ethiopia during the 1985 famine. According to David, this presented one of the most important and interesting debates in the organisation in any one-year:

Using celebrities is interesting because you have to get it right...I mean you can turn off just as many people as you are trying to turn on if you choose the wrong person. The big challenge here is who to front the youth program and everyone [internally in the organisation] has their favourites... [pauses] but what we want for that program [fundraising program aimed at the youth market] is someone really cool, which of course we are not!

The utilisation of celebrities was seen to be important at both large and small associations and they were seen to be important to front both the organisation and campaigns. There was the sense that the right ‘personality’ could increase the credibility of organisational practices and values:

We are wanting Annie Falon the actress from Prisoner [Australian drama] as our patron though we are only just ready
and stable enough to have that kind of patron... you just have to go for it (Sally – Living Women)

We have not really needed to get ourselves a patron since Jonathon [pseudonym] our former president had a high profile and is standing for election for the next state parliament. He is also high profile with Liberty [civil liberties group] but he is the serious side of the gay community and it would be good to have someone like Kylie [Minogue] as patron as well [laughs] (Simon – HIV/Aids Centre)

Both these quotes highlight some of the very propositions Lumby (1999b) and Hartley (1997) offer for their concept of the postmodern public sphere and particularly the blurring between information and entertainment. Lumby’s argument that the public sphere in now more democratic, diverse and inclusive than at any other stage of history seems to hold some truth in that voluntary associations are now part of what she describes as a democratisation of our media – “a diversification not only of voices, but of the ways of speaking about personal, social and political life” (1999b: xiii) that can take place through mediums such as the tabloid press and even talk shows – and we might add celebrities.

Justin Forsyth, head of Oxfam in the UK argues that celebrities are opening up new lines of communication and reaching an audience which organisations such as his own would otherwise not reach – that is people who do not listen to institutions but respond to people. Indeed the power of celebrities is highlighted in that high profile rock musician Bono (campaigning on behalf of a coalition of NGOs for debt relief for developing countries) now has better access to the Republican administration in the United States than the British treasury (Denny 2002). However, it should be noted that not all campaigners and activists are convinced that voluntary associations have the right strategy
by appealing to celebrities to endorse their campaigns. One of the dangers is that the celebrity becomes the 'story' rather than the issue. Further, the former head of Christain Aid (a British based charity) Andrew Simms believes voluntary associations are engaged in a 'celebrity arms race' where the stakes are constantly on the rise for bigger names to front campaigns. This essentially squeezes out smaller charities that cannot compete with the larger ones and less glamorous issues get squeezed out by fashionable issues of the day. Finally, he suggests there may be a backlash for voluntary associations who do use celebrities as a cynical public begins to dismiss celebrities along with politicians and journalists (Denny 2002). This seems unlikely at this point in time as the public appear to be intoxicated by celebrity status and Hartley (1999) again has something to offer here in his theorising.

Hartley (1999) believes we have entered a period of 'democratainment' and as highlighted in Chapter One believes that “democratic participation may continue in the era (and in the very form) of commercial, private, entertainment-oriented consumer communications”. Further, he claims the political domain is now outside party and parliamentary politics (including government and bureaucracy) and the power-discourse of conflict, and is contained in the “privatised, feminised, suburbanised, juvenile, sexualised and domestic domain of identity-discourse” (Hartley 1999: 28).

The voluntary associations participating in this study appear to have embraced such a view and their strategies and practices are now focused towards such an understanding of the public sphere:

You cannot rely just on serious analysis of the issues at hand and whether we like it or not people identify with some of the celebrities we use. These are people that watch soapies, sometimes see the news as a soapie, cry when their favourite character dies in Home and Away [Australian television] and are
miffed with politicians and experts. So how do we get to them? Once they are signed up we can educate them on the issues but to sign them up we might have to use Mel Gibson (...) that's not to say Mel Gibson does not talk seriously about injustice (...) mind you Neil Finn [rock musician] holding a starving child is not the best image of what's going on in Africa (David – Save the World)

There is an acknowledgement here of some of the critical questions Hartley (1999) raises, in that David is making claims about the way people consume news and get their information. They are not fact-seeking one minute when watching or reading the news and fantasy-loving the next when consuming commercial entertainment. David appears to be claiming, as does Hartley, that the line between news and entertainment has blurred.

The blurring of the line between news and media is something Habermas finds intolerable in terms of his ideals for the public sphere. However, the mass media as it exists today is viewed by those working in voluntary associations as an opportunity. There were few comments that denigrated this form of communication, though there was an awareness of the power the media had to 'manipulate stories' and the fact that the media had become increasingly corporatised:

Look we all know there are problems with the media, who owns it, how stories are run and I don't think anyone believes in an objective media running news and public interest stories...it's big business... but you have to be in it if you want to be anything other than anonymous (Jason – HIV/Aids Centre)

We've had it both ways...the media have been very generous to us at times though we work hard for the coverage we get. Like
when we are trying to run an appeal and have good footage for serious news programs they will put our telephone number up at the end of the news service. Then the next month they are running a story like 'the money you donate to Save the World is being wasted' and we are getting under the pump (Graham – Save the World)

Example 1: Celebrity Access

Live Aid – 1985
In 1985, the imminent death of 30 million people in Ethiopia, had one-fifth of the world’s population tuned to their television screens to watch musicians from around the world perform live on stages across the globe to raise funds – and subsequently aid – for starving people in the horn of Africa. Celebrity access gave British rock musician Bob Geldof the ear of the most powerful politicians and leaders in the world and what had been, up until this point, a 'silent tragedy' was now firmly placed on the political agenda. Global leaders such as Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbechov, Margaret Thatcher and even the Pope were forced to listen, and more importantly respond, to a former punk rocker from working class Dublin. Politicians were seen to be impotent on the issue versus the influence of celebrities that could now access a globalised mass media to take their message instantaneously, to seemingly the entire world. The critical factor in the phenomena that became known as Live Aid, was the footage of the malnourished peoples of Ethiopia that was not only used throughout the massive fund-raising campaign, but was the very footage that confronted Geldof (and millions of others in Britain) in the privacy of his own lounge-room and motivated him to act. This footage was shot by a freelance journalist employed by a humanitarian aid agency – a voluntary association – that had been acting to bring emergency supplies into Ethiopia and was being frustrated by the Mengistu regime governing Ethiopia at the time (Geldof 1986).

From the initial appeal that was played out largely through the mass media, voluntary associations launched their own campaigns and raised large sums of money through these appeals. Importantly, the money and emergency relief raised through Live Aid was distributed by these voluntary agencies on the ground in Ethiopia, since they were seen to have a better infrastructure than the government agencies. Voluntary associations working in developing countries have never forgotten the importance of celebrity access as they have continued to ‘match’ celebrities with their campaigns.
By the same token, a number of the participants indicated their frustration regarding the ways that certain media outlets essentially controlled the ability of the organisation to either get their message into the public domain or contribute to an already existing debate:

We don’t understand why *The Age* [Melbourne broadsheet newspaper] no longer wants to talk to us about infection rates or even run our letters in the ‘letters to the editor’ page. That’s one side... the other is that the *Herald Sun* loves to run pics that reinforce community stereotypes about gay men...we have to battle for the publicity now (John – HIV/AIDS Centre)

The debate through the media about safe-injecting rooms seems balanced in one respect...it looked like everyone got their say but it was a shambles really as the real issues were never given their proper place...it’s not a debate we would have wanted to be involved in (Rita – Rehab)

From the interviews, it is clear that voluntary associations view the mass media as an essential part of communicating their message to the broader community. However, as Chapter Four highlighted, voluntary associations access to the mass media is not only influenced by the resources they have and media outlets themselves. Associations that receive government funding are also conscious of the fact that exposure through the mass media not only gives them exposure to a mass audience but also government representatives. There were instances where associations actively campaigned against government policies through the mass media, regardless of the impact such campaigning might have on the funding levels. Alternatively, there were also examples (outlined in Chapter Four) where the government had purposefully stopped public awareness campaigns from going ahead – such as ‘the two boys
kissing' campaign that the HIV/AIDS Centre were wanting to launch (page 147).

For some of these associations, participation in the mass media was a critical part of their practice, and for a large organisation such as Save the World, a good deal of time and money is invested in 'placing' the organisation in the 'mass media sphere'. The resources that an organisation can commit to actively engage in this sphere, is clearly one of the major influences. For example, at Save the World, the national office has journalists, publicists, and a media department of six (at the time of the interviews) employees all of whom generate stories and media releases, and 'court' both the commercial and independent media networks and outlets. At smaller organisations, with much more limited resources, the possibilities (and probabilities) of gaining access to this sphere was much more constrained:

Because we are essentially an international organisation with people on the ground in the countries in crisis let's say, we often get the stories first or have reliable information about what's going on, but then we have an advertising agency with camera crews and journalists available and in this building we have excellent recourses that we can call on...people working as serious journalists, people talking to celebrities' agents etc. With all of that we can be very proactive in terms of getting into the mass media (Andrew – Save the World)

There are stories to be told, and issues relating to women with HIV/AIDS but we just don't have the resources to get them into the media and we rely totally on the goodwill of the media or extraordinary stories that the media will run but which often don't represent all HIV positive women and might even skew public perception (Sally – Living Women)
While acknowledging the importance of the mass media sphere and recognizing news and information can be part of an entertainment-oriented world, the associations did not fully trust this media form and indicated that they cannot be assured of full access. Therefore, they also work within other spheres of communication that might compensate for the limitations of the mass media sphere. The next section examines one of these spheres and considers how voluntary associations utilise another part of what Hartley (1999) calls the post-modern public sphere, being the Internet and CMC.

The Internet...we love it!

All the voluntary associations participating (excepting the Green Valley Op Shop) in the study had set up Websites and employees had access to email. Without exception, the participants identified the importance of the Internet to their operations and believed it was now a critical part of their ability to engage in the public domain. Already in this chapter, the importance of the Internet to voluntary associations has been highlighted in the case study of the MA1 agreement. One of the participating associations was part of the coalition of NGOs that campaigned against the agreement and had actively used the Internet in the campaign. At the time of interviewing (late 2000), all of the associations that had websites felt they were inadequate and needed to be upgraded and as at March 2002, each of the organisations have made significant changes to these sites. The major themes to come out of the interviews relating to the Internet were that:

- it was a medium that could be used to subvert and influence government;
- it broke down some of the hierarchical boundaries within the organisation and outside the organisation;
- and that the potential was yet to be realised – thus supporting many of the arguments put forward by those advocating ‘cyberdemocracy’.
The advocates of cyberdemocracy and computer mediated communication (Bryan et al 1998; Jordan 1999) believe the Habermasan public sphere can be replaced by a new one of freely engaged citizens in deliberation and public debate through computer mediated communication. This is a public sphere not colonised by the state and political parties and not subjected to the logics of commercialisation and commodification prevalent in Western liberal representative democracies (Bryan et al at 1998: 3-5). Further, the importance of this public sphere is that citizens can be connected across boundaries of time and space where links between citizens and government can increase transparency and allow unmediated communication between citizens and their leaders. Cyberdemocracy provides a way for improved political agenda setting and planning and can involve large numbers of people directly who can be informed and educated on public issues more quickly (London 1995).

In Chapter One the arguments put forward by cyberdemocrats were highlighted. However, it is important to summarise them here before the participants’ responses are presented:

- CMC increases the speed and scale of information provision and gives citizens more control over their information diet;
- Citizen response political participation (access of information, deliberation, debate and voting) will be easier as new technology is harnessed to measure citizens’ preferences in representative democracies;
- CMC can create new organisational possibilities through subject-specific discussion groups and transform the conditions of collective political action;
- The Internet allows for traditional political identities linked to territorial and sectional interests to be undermined, and new forms of politics can emerge free from state coercion;
- The ‘audience’ and subjects of information can immediately respond to it, and passive reception of information will be replaced by active discovery;
- CMC will bring about the removal of ‘distorting’ mediators, such as journalists, parliamentary representatives and even parties, from the process of
political communication and decision-making – that is, CMC is more direct with less scope for political censorship and secrecy (Bryan et al 1998: 6-7).

The associations were beginning to actively use the Internet, and more specifically email, in ways that support the arguments of the ‘cyberdemocrats’. A number of the organisations had already used CMC in specific campaigns in ways that they perceived could subvert government influence and certainly believed that such technology could be part of a new kind of politics that is free from state coercion. Further, they believed that the technology had the potential to greatly increase the speed with which the organisations could respond to certain issues and generate a response to such issues – a response incidentally that was often an international response. For example, at Living Women, Sally claimed that one of the potentials for CMC lay in the speed that petitions could be generated:

We can’t imagine now how slow getting a good petition going was before the Internet. You can have a thousand signatures [through the Internet] in a day if you have the network of people to initially contact and I don’t suppose you need more than a handful of people if they all forward it [the petition] on. These signatures are not only from local communities, they are from across the globe very often.

Four of the participating organisations had utilised the Internet and email to generate support of issues and campaigns in the twelve months prior to the interviews taking place:

The good thing about the Internet is that we can pull together support quickly when an issue comes up...we have a network across the state and we can generate plenty of support. If something comes up like the increase in infection rates [HIV
infections] we can have a good response going in a couple of
days and when we finally get our act together we might have
hundreds of people that we can contact and that can become a
forceful lobby (John – HIV/Aids Centre)

Later in the interview, John further claimed two more benefits of such
technology, that again support the assertions of those advocating
cyberdemocracy, being that the CMC allowed the organisation to generate
citizens’ responses in ways that could not be tied back to the organisation and
that the citizens’ responses could essentially be directed (and/or filtered) by
the organisation:

What we need to do better is have a large network of people we
can email and yes provide them with information so they are
more informed but we can...actually we have already... give them
the information they need to write to their politician in a
coordinated way. The politicians don’t always know that we are
generating the campaign and we can make sure that people are
making the right kinds of statements.

These were sentiments shared by participants from other associations, though
mostly they were talking about the potential to utilise the technology rather
than actual existing realities:

There is a lot more work for us to do and while the technology
has been available we have been slow to harness it. What you
would like to have is a massive network of supporters that you
could contact as soon as an emergency hits... schools, community
groups, individuals... when there is a flood in Bangladesh... they
are getting up to date information on the situation that educates
them on what’s going on and gives them the chance to respond
either with a donation or in some other way (...) Who knows, maybe one day we will have so many people on our email list that it will be in access of those buying the daily paper and www.savetheworld.com is the website...actually the place for information on the third world (Simon – Save the World)

Example 2 - Campaigning

Continuing Care Unit - 1999
When the State government in Victoria, decided to close the facility at Fairfield hospital for HIV/Aids sufferers, there was a great deal of uncertainty regarding where palliative care would now be provided. Seizing on the forthcoming state elections, the HIV/Aids Centre ran a focused and multi-faceted campaign to pressure both the main political parties into promising, that if elected they would relocate the Continuing Care Unit for HIV/Aids sufferers to the Alfred Hospital. This campaign was targeted at both the campaigning parties and the media and was orchestrated out of the HIV/Aids Centre’s offices. Nowhere during the lead-up to the election were prospective candidates able to campaign without the presence of protest from ‘the Centre’ - particularly in electorates with large gay male populations or those electorates close to the Alfred hospital. Further, a number of ‘media stunts’ were initiated in order to ‘steal’ the news from the candidates themselves. This campaign also utilised information technology and set up an ‘email tree’ to get information out and encouraged those receiving the emails to write to their local papers, state members of parliament and daily newspapers. Key paragraphs were sent through email for inclusion in these letters and as a result of the response to the emails both parties were under the impression that there was a state-wide outcry about the loss of the continuing care unit (CCU). By the time Election Day arrived, both parties had promised to fund the CCU, which is now up and running at the Alfred Hospital.

The importance of this campaign is that the voluntary association in question developed a strategy for engaging in the public sphere in both a strategic and aggressive way. The organisation sought to actively confront their future funders on the streets of Melbourne, with some confidence that such a campaign would not jeopardise their funding – which as already stated accounted for over 90% of the funds the organisation received.
Computer mediated communication is also said to break down hierarchical boundaries and a number of the participants made mention of this. There was the sense that new information technology allowed for new forms of communication and made organisational information more accessible. It was not clear from the interviews in what specific ways this occurred internally in the organisations, though Marie at Save the World alluded to the possibilities:

It is interesting in that I think there is a much better circulation of information with the email. For example, when we were all sending internal memos I don’t think they were being forwarded on and distributed as widely as emails are now...it’s just easier to go to your address book and hit the forward button (Marie – Save the World)

Certainly, the interviewees provided more specific examples of how such technology was being, and could be, effectively used to communicate with other institutions externally. This was of considerable importance for those organisations that had been less likely to cooperate and collaborate with other organisations that they might be competing with for government tenders:

It’s true that we don’t have as much contact with other organisations doing what we do if they are competing for the same tender but through the Internet we can still get together on specific issues if we want. Personally, I email my colleagues in other organisations to talk to them about what they do even though I know they [the organisational hierarchy] would not like it (Rita – Rehab)

I don’t know why but since the introduction of new technology we are [gestures quotation marks] talking with organisations regularly that we had very limited contact with previously. The
MAI, reconciliation, aid budgets, on all of these we are part of a network of organisations...definitely in ways were weren’t previous to the Internet (Simon – Save the World)

It clearly should not be assumed that CMC is the sole reason for what might be described as a new spirit of cooperation. Perhaps without such technology, organisations that no longer collaborated in the way they had due to the pressures of competitive tendering, would have found other ways to strategically cooperate with their peers. Simon, at Save the World, might be describing ‘a spirit of cooperation’ that would have emerged anyway without the Internet and email, where organisational differences were set aside for ‘the greater good’. What is clear though is that such technology has been harnessed in ways that have given organisations, that have been under new and increasing influences from both the state and the market, the means to bypass, in some way, such influences and maintain a degree of flexibility.

There was evidence from the interviews to support Fishkin’s (1992, cited in Bryan et al 1998: 5) claim that we are moving now to an age of electronic democracy and Bryan et al (1998: 5) who suggest that the media as we know it might very well be passing and that mass-broadcast (one-to-many television) is a medium of the past. Further, Bryan et al claim newspapers will be replaced by interactive bulletins that we will be able to read from the tops of our desks on the machine that will replace our television – a vision shared by Simon at Save the World. In this new public sphere, that, according to Bryant et al (1998: 5), “hails the rebirth of democratic life”, technologies will allow social actors to find and forge common interests. People will, they argue, access their information from an infinite, free virtual library rather than receiving half-digested ‘programming’ and the right to reply will be institutionalised through such interactive media. Thus, we might ask whether cyberdemocracy can reinvigorate the public sphere and even allow for reasoned dialogue and debate to take place? Recent examples such as the
campaign against the MAI (and others highlighted in Chapter One) suggest that new information technologies could lead to the strengthening of a certain kind of public sphere and this section has highlighted how associations are beginning to network across organisational differences, communities, regions and even internationally.

'It's all about consciousness-raising and solidarity'

Within a single public sphere such as Habermas proposes, it is clear that subordinated members would have little opportunity for deliberation among themselves regarding their own needs, objectives and strategies and certainly no place to undertake communicative processes where they were not under the surveillance of the dominant group. As noted in Chapter One, revisionist history has highlighted the ways in which women have repeatedly found a voice in alternative publics and members of other subordinated groups such as workers, gays and lesbians, and peoples of colour have also done the same. These spheres Fraser (1992) has referred to as counterpublics and are spheres where members of subordinated groups can circulate their counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs. The strategies used by these groups (and particularly feminist groups) include journals, bookstores, publishing companies, lecture series, video and film distribution networks, research centres, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals and local meeting places.

While Fraser (1992: 124) acknowledges that counterpublics are not always democratic or egalitarian and even those whose intentions are to be democratic and egalitarian are not above practising informal modes of exclusion and marginalisation, where they emerge in response to exclusions within the dominant public sphere they at least help to expand discursive space. Further, she claims that such counterpublics can mitigate against separatism as a result of their publicist orientation and claims they can be
spaces of withdrawal and regroupment on the one hand and bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics, on the other (Fraser 1992: 124).

The data can be seen to lend support to the existence of the counter-spheres of the kind that Fraser (1992) refers to. Each of the associations represented members of society that were in some way marginalised, discriminated against or excluded – gay men and lesbian women, HIV positive men and women, the homeless, persons with a drug addiction, and the poorest members of communities and countries around the globe. As the previous two sections highlighted, taking these issues into ‘the public sphere’ included strategies for gaining access to the public sphere through the mass media and by utilising new information technology. However, as the interviews highlighted, the associations were also initiating strategies such as those Fraser (1992) outlines and were participating in counterpublics that did represent ‘spaces of withdrawal and regroupment’ and acted as ‘bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics’.

For example, a number of the associations were utilising strategies that involved publication of research in journals, were holding internal training programs and lecture series, had produced videos and films, formed partnerships with academic programs, and had held conferences, conventions, and festivals. These were critical parts of the organisations’ aims and practices and often were directed towards volunteers and supporters:

It’s very important to us to be moving people along in terms of getting them to really understand the complexity of community development. One of the most important things we do each year is hold volunteer conferences and conventions and we have about 1500 volunteers attend these conferences, which are held in every state. We deal with important issues such as outlining the
organisation's strategic plans, the programs we want to run for that year and get into serious issues like sustainable development and globalisation. We get people in to run the workshops and they are completely participatory (Graham – Save the World)

Nearly every night of the week we have some seminar, training or speaker going on here and we get reasonable attendance for them from volunteers and the gay male community (John – HIV/Aids Centre)

Sally, at Living Women, highlighted this more pertinently in that when she explained the strategies implemented at this organisation, they echoed Fraser's (1992) theorising:

We recently sent six women to a conference in South Australia to give a voice but to empower the women themselves and we will be sending one of our members to an international conference later this year (...) we are also working with universities to produce serious research for publication on the issues of HIV positive women and we are continually producing reports and brochures, often in partnership with others, that aim to educate

In each of the organisations, including the Green Valley Op Shop, there were brochures, reports and publications available, either for free or for sale, for those visiting the organisation. These often highlighted issues of discrimination and generally had been launched with the intention of gaining publicity:

We are launching a number of publications this year, including a book for sale through mainstream bookshops that tells the story of six HIV positive women (Clare – Living Women)
There is always something, a report, booklet or the like being produced here and we have to fight discriminatory practice with serious research that demonstrates just how bad it is. Before we go out into the public domain we have to know what we are on about and focus our approach (Jasey – HIV/Aids Centre)

Example 3: Consciousness-raising

Youth Leadership Conventions
Since 1994, Save the World has been holding annually, Youth Leadership Conventions (YLCs) in each state attended by young people between the ages of 15 to 18. These young people are invited to the conventions and are invited according to the leadership roles they already hold in their schools and churches. The YLCs run from Friday night to Sunday lunch time and are aimed at empowering young people to be long-term advocates in their local communities and give them the skills and knowledge to be able to represent Save the World.

In 2002, over 1200 young people attended these conventions Australia-wide and were educated on the role Save the World seeks to have bringing change in countries where communities are suffering from abject poverty, dislocation and dispossession. While attending workshops run by community development workers, the young people also got the chance to hear from field workers working in Kosovo, East Timor and Afghanistan. Further, one of the participants at each of the state conferences was a Cambodian girl who having stepped on a landmine had had to have her leg amputated as a result of the injuries caused. She now travels the world advocating for the abolition of landmines.

Many of the participants from the earlier conferences who are now in their mid-twenties have maintained their contact with Save the World and having ‘connected with the cause’ some years earlier are active participants in their communities, both fund-raising and campaigning on behalf of Save the World. If the aim of the conferences is to build long-term advocates then it seems the organisation is having some success through a strategy of withdrawal and regroupment and using YLCs as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics.
It is clear then that there is evidence that the associations at times, retreat into something that sounds and looks a lot like Fraser's (1992) counterspheres. Of course, the participants view these strategies as part of their organisational practice rather than as 'withdrawal and regroupment' but certainly perceived their organisations to be (amongst other things) 'bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics'. There is no way of knowing from the data whether such counterspheres are democratic or egalitarian but were certainly places where the organisations were articulating their oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs. It is also clear from the data that having withdrawn into counterspheres the associations then build networks with others before entering into the larger public sphere.

The associations were increasingly networking with other associations through the availability of new information technology. However, this was by no means the only time that the participants discussed networking with other associations and when discussing advocacy issues and matters relating to the initiation of public campaigns, the term 'networking' was utilised with a high degree of consistency. While theorists have argued that voluntary associations are increasingly threatened by 'colonisation' of both the state and the market, the associations themselves are claiming that they have not only the power to resist such influences, but through strategic networking, they themselves can exert their own influence:

The power we have is in networking with other organisations and I don't particularly believe that we can do very much on our own. We are forming alliances with other organisations that are working with gay men and they are not just organisations working with HIV positive gay men. It's all about a collective voice and if any organisation wants to make a difference they better be outward looking (Jason – HIV/Aids Centre)
There are plenty of organisations that we are networking with... for example, we get on really well with John [pseudonym] at the HIV/Aids Centre and we work with Straight Arrows, AidsCare, Positive Counselling and a host of other organisations. We can pool our resources and be stronger accordingly (Sally – Living Women)

The importance of networking was not only about networking with similar organisations within the local community, but there was evidence that the associations believed it was increasingly important to be networking on a global scale:

As an international organisation we have to be working with our counterparts around the globe but it’s not just about that. We are coordinating our plans, strategies and campaigns with a whole host of organisations and I believe there is a strong global civil society that is emerging and it can now clearly challenge some of the major powers and players in the world. If it’s global and effects particularly the developing world, then we are in (David – Save the World)

I don’t think there is any way now that community organisations can resist turning some of their activities to more global issues. We are providing alcohol and drug rehab services for local people but that puts us in touch with people all over the world working in similar fields (Rita – Rehab)

It is clear from the data that the Internet has certainly facilitated this enthusiasm for matters global and for networking on a global scale and it will be interesting to see how such networking develops in the future but there was
a clear indication from the interviews that the associations believed that inequalities and injustice could be redressed through such networking:

... and there is a growing sentiment across a range of issues and organisations that there are serious losers under the present 'new world order' and even though the organisations look like a bit of a patch work... you know gay groups and church groups and farmers and environmentalists... well maybe because we are so different we look formidable (Damien – HIV/AIDS Centre)

We’ve seen what international networking has done for indigenous groups and it’s going to be happening more and more... they’ve given up campaigning the Federal government and are now launching international campaigns with some cooperation from indigenous groups around the world (Graham – Save the World)

Here Graham is referring to increasing use of the Internet by Indigenous groups who are finding that through contacts made with Indigenous groups around the world, they have more in common with one another globally than with the non-Indigenous peoples with whom they share a geographic landscape. Such technology is now allowing Indigenous users to position themselves outside colonial nation-states and build much stronger (global) coalitions (Smith and Ward 2000)\(^8\)

In terms of networking it should be noted that the participating associations did not speak only of networking with other voluntary associations but also with the institutions of the state and also some of the major corporations. Thus, while there were sentiments expressed of a growing global civil society

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that acted against the state and the market, the organisations also seemed to acknowledge the importance of not acting in isolation from the state and the market:

We are aiming to get more involved with the corporate sector and not just in terms of professionalising the organisation. We are wanting them to provide some support to us and we are looking for good matches with responsible companies (Sally – Living Women)

...yes the corporate sector is important to us and we are working with some of the biggest organisations in the world...for example BHP and Nike. They give us gifts in kind and of course we are hoping that we can influence them to become more responsible. Mind you not everyone in here is happy about it...others are simply terrific supporters of our work and some of the pharmaceutical companies are terrific (David – Save the World)

The question of voluntary associations engaging with corporate companies, and vice versa, has been the subject of increasing research (Phillips 1999). However, there was certainly evidence that these associations, while recognising the issues involved, are more than willing to work with, as well as against some of the major players in the corporate world.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted some of the specific ways that voluntary associations engage in the public sphere. The ways they do this tends to lend weight to those who argue that the public sphere is characterised by postmodern structures. Yet, they are also practising strategies that could be more accommodated by theories of countershapes and rational public
spheres. At the same time as running campaigns against players in the state and the market, they are also strategically engaging with some of the institutions of the state and the market.

Those theorists (Dekker and van den Broek 1998) that have been concerned that voluntary associations' ability to engage in the public sphere is threatened by both the state and the market are surely correct when they claim that these two spheres have the ability to influence. However, the associations are not passive under influence but instead are extremely active in resisting and then even attempting to exert their own influence on the state and the market. They are aware of the dangers to their organisational goals from these other spheres and importantly look beyond their own immediate concerns to the ways the state and the market are exerting undue power and influence more broadly. The associations studied here are always looking for alternative ways to act and utilise a number of strategies and methods. As the previous two chapters argued, they tend to be conflict-ridden and neither egalitarian nor democratic. Therefore, we might offer the tentative conclusion that they may be better seen as 'schools of creativity and initiative' than 'schools of democracy'. Potentially, they use whatever resources and means are available to them and while they are at times locked out from certain aspects of the public sphere, they are always looking for new ways to engage. It is clear, associations and their members are active citizens in a globalised world and are acting in local and global ways. How then do we make sense of this evidence and answer the question of this thesis regarding voluntary associations' ability to reinvigorate the public sphere? This will now be examined fully in the conclusion to this thesis.
Conclusion – Voluntary Associations Invigorating Public Spheres

I’m pleased, of course, by the strange fact that a book that I started to write more than thirty years ago is still able to stimulate serious academic discussion (Habermas 1992:462)

In the social sciences, the study of public communication and democracy is coming increasingly to be framed through the twin concepts of civil society and public sphere (emphasis in original). (Jacobs 2000: 2)

Introduction

This thesis has attempted to answer a fundamental question: can voluntary associations reinvigorate the public sphere? In the search for an answer the thesis has examined the writings of theorists as diverse as John Locke and Robert Putnam, Jurgen Habermas and Michel Foucault, and Antonio Gramsci and Georg Hegel. In an effort to come to terms with the array of issues and possibilities that have emerged from the thesis question, we have ventured into eighteenth century bourgeois society coffee houses, mass media talk shows, liberal democratic forums, and cyberspace. Organisations as different as state bureaucracies and private corporations, humanitarian aid agencies and Op shops have been visited and issues as wide as neoliberal economics and Aids have been considered. Finally, concepts as wide-ranging as civil society and ‘democratainment’ have been examined. Having carried out such examination, what are we now to conclude?

The thesis began with Habermas’s (1989) historical and normative account of the development and subsequent transformation of the bourgeois public sphere – a transformation Habermas laments since it has lead to an atrophy of
the public sphere. Central to the concerns that Habermas holds regarding a public sphere in a state of decline is the associated loss of democratic vitality whereby the public sphere dominated by publicity, public relations companies and spin-doctors is a public sphere in name only. For Habermas, democracy is now characterised by the decline in civic and political engagement as indicated by voter apathy and increasing citizen detachment from politics and the fact that the citizenry have little direct role in politics. This he believes is due to the fact that the mass media appears to be the only institution that provides a space for public debate in modern society and is hardly going to be the space where democracy can be enhanced.

In critiquing Habermas's conceptualisation of the public sphere the thesis then considered the theoretical underpinnings of feminist writings highlighting the concept of counter- or oppositional public spheres. These are said to be spaces of withdrawal and regroupment and training bases for agitational activities directed to wider publics. This widened considerably the concept of the public sphere beyond the unitary (liberal) notion that Habermas proposed and highlighted some of the historical inaccuracies of his original account. The notion of counterspheres also provided an excellent point of departure in the debate to then discuss postmodern theorising of the public sphere. Here the public sphere is conceptualised as more democratic and diverse than at any other stage in history and the mass media are seen as forums of participation and speech acts that signify a public sphere in a state of regeneration rather than atrophy. Indeed, rather than questioning the historical accuracy of Habermas's liberal public sphere, those advocating postmodern notions of the public sphere deny its ever-existing reality. Finally, the inquiry highlighted the recent developments in the area of cyberspace and computer mediated communication and experiments in deliberative democracy. The former building on the idea of postmodern public spheres while the latter holds to Habermas's normative ideal of rational-critical debate by private persons about public matters where the force of the better argument prevails.
The thesis has accepted (though not uncritically) Habermas's definition of the public sphere, in terms of a sphere between civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest can be institutionally guaranteed. Accordingly, the examination moved to analyse the concept of civil society. Here, it was highlighted that while the concept has a long tradition dating as far back as Aristotle, it has undergone a renaissance in recent years with modern conceptualisations building on the theorising of Alexis de Tocqueville. The neo-Tocquevillians stress the importance of civil society in terms of the public good and suggest that a strong civil society can reap significant benefits - being social, political and economic. This proposition was questioned and examples were highlighted where a strong civil society has not lead to beneficial outcomes for individuals, institutions or nations. One of the major issues to arise out of this analysis is that overarching definitions of civil society are hard to secure with writers such as Hegel (and more recently Kean) claiming it is sphere that includes the economy and is against the state, while writers such as Gramsci make the analytical separation of civil society from both the state and the economy. In the last decade most writers, and particularly the neo-Tocquevillians have maintained this Gramscian separation (though sometimes for different reasons) and have further claimed that voluntary associations are the institutional core of civil society. It became important then to outline the definition of civil society to be utilised in the thesis. As such, civil society was defined as that set of institutions which are strong enough to counterbalance the state and the market (economy), and while not preventing either from fulfilling their roles can prevent them from dominating and atomising the rest of society. Further, civil society has as its core institutions those more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organisations and movements, that attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life spheres, distil and transmit such reactions in amplified form to the public sphere.
The examination then turned to voluntary associations. Before an analysis could be mounted into their ability to reinvigorate the public sphere, the significant literature that has emerged alongside that of civil society needed to be outlined and critiqued. Importantly, it was noted that the size and scope of the 'voluntary sector' in Australia is difficult to gauge and it became clear in the arguments exposition that there is a high degree of diversity in terms of the organisations that comprise the sector and their aims and objectives. The thesis accepted as a definition that voluntary associations are most often formally organised, private, non-profit in their distribution, self-governing and voluntary (that is, activities and programmes are freely chosen and membership is voluntary).

In accordance with much of the literature focusing on civil society, it was identified here that those writers that have sought to theorise voluntary associations have done so in many of the same utopian and idealistic ways. However, the prevailing theme throughout the examination of the concepts (public sphere, civil society and voluntary associations) is democracy. It was identified that both implicitly and explicitly, voluntary associations are claimed to be sites for enhancing democracy and securing democratic ideals. The work of Putnam (1993; 2000) was cited as the focus for many of the claims made and it was suggested that it was his studies that had provided the inspiration for much of the theoretical and empirical work that has emerged in the last decade.

Having examined the available literature, this thesis has suggested that the claims made on behalf of voluntary associations relating to democracy and democratic practice can be condensed into five main propositions. They are:

- voluntary associations are a crucial determinant to political participation and securing democratic ideals;
- voluntary associations are more efficient than government in providing public welfare and provision;
• voluntary associations can be more sensitive and responsive to the needs of client groups;
• voluntary associations are crucial for the reproduction of social capital that underpins effective democratic political systems and strong economies;
• voluntary associations provide for a strong civil society and robust public sphere that counterweights the tendencies towards domination of the state and market forces.

However, the examination of the literature also highlighted that many of these claims had not been tested empirically (with the possible exception of questions to do with social capital in voluntary associations) and therefore the aim of the thesis has been to provide empirical research that might go some way towards informing the debates. It has been of particular importance to question some of the assumptions behind such claims and to examine the ‘facts on the ground’.

• Are these associations really more democratic than public and private institutions?
• Are they independent of the state and the market – either in terms of their funding regimes or ideologies?
• Is their communication characterised by egalitarian reciprocity?
• Can voluntary associations be the agents of social change in the public sphere as Habermas claims?
• Can voluntary associations provide the social conditions that allow for rational-critical debate about public issues, conducted by private persons willing to let arguments not statuses determine decisions?
• Can voluntary associations ‘deliver’ on the normative claims made by Habermas in his theory of communicative rationality and discourse ethics?
• That is, is the communication within and between voluntary associations characterised by egalitarian reciprocity, power neutrality and transparency?
• Most importantly, can voluntary associations reinvigorate the public sphere?

Through the interviews conducted and the data collected within six voluntary associations in Melbourne it is now possible to draw some conclusions regarding these questions. However, it is clear that when members and employees perspectives are included, a good deal of complexity is introduced to the debates.

Conflict, Communication and Custard Pies

It is now time to make some conclusions regarding the characteristics of the associations participating in this study? Can they be schools of democracy and what contribution do they make to the public sphere?

It is clear that when Marshall (1996) identifies the diversity of the voluntary sector he is focusing on the aims, objectives and activities and the associations represented in this study support his claims. The six participating organisations had a broad range of missions and purposes and varied greatly in terms of size and funding. Their locations were spread across the suburbs and city of Melbourne, and their premises ranged from multi-level offices to small one-room offices. The number of paid employees ranged between 300 Australia-wide to one, and in the case of the Green Valley Op Shop there were no paid employees and the organisation ran on volunteer services only. Even where we might claim organisations were comparable in terms of the services they provided, there was little else in common. For example, the HIV/Aids Centre was a larger organisation providing services to predominantly gay men, while Living Women was a small organisation catering for HIV positive women. Alternatively, Rehab was a drug and alcohol service provider funded under government tender, while The Residence provided similar services
under very different conditions and location with no government funding at all.

Despite this diversity, the data suggests commonalities and this thesis supports Paton's (1996) claims that voluntary associations are organisations with value issues in that they have commitments that are central to the identity or mission of the organisation. The findings of organisational conflict have been highlighted and such conflict has been identified as being located around some of the most fundamental activities and programmes of the organisations. Tensions within the organisations were often perceived to have an ethical dimension and involved the organisations' aims and objectives, funding regimes, the communities the organisation set out to be representing and the kind of engagement the organisation should be pursuing in the public domain. There is no implication in this thesis that suggests that conflict is surprising. Even a cursory perusal of the literature that examines organisational behaviour in the public and private sector indicates that conflict management is a significant part of organisational practice – suggesting conflict exists in all organisations. Yet it is clear that conflict in voluntary associations does have the distinctive characteristics that Paton (1996) claims are associated with value issues. There was certainly an appeal to higher values, whether religious values as in the case of Save the World or secular values as in the case of the HIV/AIDS Centre. Further, we can conclude from the data that the conflict associated with value issues was certainly having far-reaching effects on the organisations (for example in employment policy) and carried considerable personal significance, whereby employees had decided to leave the organisation as a result of an unresolvable tension. This appears to support the final characteristic of value issues identified by Paton, being that there is limited scope for compromise.

To the extent that we can generalise from the data in the thesis it appears then that voluntary associations are likely to be conflict ridden, that conflict as it
exists is related to the most fundamental practices and missions and that the conflict is essentially unsolvable. This might immediately suggest that their ability to meet the claims and ideals outlined above will be limited at best and impossible at worst. Indeed, because conflict in voluntary associations carries these unique characteristics they may well be less likely to meet these ideals than private and public sector organisations. When Receve (2001) suggests that the workplace is an important site for the production and reproduction of social capital, we might conclude that this is more likely to happen in workplaces where conflict is more prone to be resolvable than unresolvable. Voluntary associations, with their value issues, might be sites where there are higher levels of bonding social capital between the various factions than bridging social capital with generalised reciprocity. Of course, these associations might still have high levels of bridging social capital in terms of their external trust, but as already noted, not all voluntary associations are outward looking (for example self-help groups and neo-Nazi groups). This is clearly an area where more research is required and will be further referred to below.

It is not obvious from the data how, for example, at Save the World, the differences between those who believe the organisation is Christian first and humanitarian second and those who believe the organisation is a humanitarian organisation first and Christian second, can be resolved. Importantly though, Paton (1996) claims that value issues have limited scope for compromise, suggesting that compromise is not impossible. Thus, it might be possible that if voluntary associations are characterised by democratic practices and have high levels of collaboration, cooperation and communication, such compromise might yet be reached in desirable ways. Further, if Habermas's processual requirements for his theory of discourse ethics and communicative rationality are existing realities in voluntary associations then there is promise that compromise over value issues can be reached. This would bode well for claims that these associations can reinvigorate the public sphere. In this way,
conflict would become an organisational resource rather than a threat to productivity.

It is clear from the findings of Chapter Five that we can conclude that communication within the voluntary associations studied here is not characterised in a way that represents Habermas’s theory of discourse ethics or communicative rationality. That is, communication was not characterised by egalitarian reciprocity, neutrality of power and transparency. Mostly, the organisations appeared to practice selectivity of members and employees and their discourses were both hierarchical and authoritarian. Further, as already indicated the internal reasoning of the organisations’ often relied on ‘faith-based’ reasoning, appealing to theist or other types of ideologies that could not be taken forward into the ‘secular’ public sphere and rarely was this reasoning consistent across the interviews. In fact, when making decisions, the organisations most often did not base these decisions upon the ability to offer reasons that were acceptable to all (internally or externally) nor did they question their own justificatory procedures. Communication was most often characterised by the maintenance of interests and there is no doubt from the data that exclusion was practised. In addition, such exclusion often emerged from communication within the organisations where there were power differentials and we might conclude with Foucault, then, that to operate with a conception of communication where power is absent is folly, since this can never be the case.

This conclusion is a direct challenge not only to Habermas. Giddens (1994: 16) claims that in the twenty-first century the type of democracy required to best meet citizens’ needs is dialogic democracy. That is, a public arena in which controversial issues can be resolved or handled through dialogue rather than through established forms of power. What is proposed is often a form of communication in which power differentials can be bracketed or are absent. Further, deliberative democrats also propose communication where arguments
and statuses determine outcomes, suggesting power neutrality that allows for the force of the better argument. Of course, where these theorists are proposing normative ideals - universals - Foucault deals in realpolitik arguing that since no one has yet demonstrated the existence of universals, in either philosophy or social science, there is little point continuing to operate within a framework of universals. This thesis supports Foucault’s theorising that we need to have an awareness and acceptance that different groups invariably have different worldviews and work within different paradigms and that this can occur within any single voluntary association. As a result, they will have different interests where there is no general principle by which all differences can be resolved – including the ‘force of the better argument’. For thinkers who are more sceptical of human behaviour than Habermas’s notion that we are in some way inherently democratic, there is no point operating with a concept of communication where power is absent. For Foucault, communication is always infected with power and more likely characterised by non-rational rhetoric and the maintenance of interests (Flyvbjerg 1998: 216-222). This was certainly a finding of this thesis.

Where then does this leave us in regard to voluntary associations and their contribution to building a robust civil society and democracy? How can we continue to foster hope that they can be agents of social change in the public sphere? Interestingly, Flyvbjerg (1998: 224) claims that Foucault recommends a focus on conflict and power relations as the most effective point of departure for the fight against domination – a fight that is central to civil society both internally and externally. By internally, Foucault means the relationship between different groups within civil society and by externally, he means the relationship of civil society to the spheres of government and business where Flyvbjerg claims “the fight against domination can be said to be constitutive of civil society” (1998: 224).
Others who have criticised Habermas and his concept of the public sphere have also highlighted the importance of conflict and the maintenance of interests. Eley (1992: 307) has attempted to demonstrate that historically the public sphere emerged “from the field of conflict, contested meanings, and exclusion” rather than exclusively through rational discourse and consensus. Indeed, as highlighted in Chapter One, feminists were long excluded from the public sphere and got their issues on the public agenda more through power struggles and conflicts, that are characteristic of activism and social change, than through rational-critical debate and consensus. Ryan (1992), makes the point that the standards of communicative rationality were a fantasy even in the ‘untroubled’ days of the bourgeois public sphere. For Ryan the goal of publicness is best served when it is permeated with conflict. Thus, given that contemporary civil society is clearly characterised by plurality (as the organisations making up this study and others have demonstrated), should we not expect a move towards more conflict rather than less? Conflict is surely an inevitable part of civil society and rather than being ‘civilised’, strong civil societies might well be those that guarantee the existence of conflict:

(A) strong understanding of civil society, and of democracy, must therefore be based on thought that places conflict and power at its centre, as Foucault does and Habermas does not...that forms of public life that are practical, committed and ready for conflict provide a superior paradigm of civic citizen virtue than do forms of public life that are discursive, detached and consensus-dependent (Flyvbjerg 1998: 229-230)

Thus, we might conclude that voluntary associations that are conflict-ridden, power-infected and whose discursive practices and processes are not characterised by egalitarian reciprocity are better equipped for power politics and a politics of activism as a means for first, gaining access to the public sphere and second, making it more robust.
The Need for Reinvigoration?

Before this is further analysed we need to assess one of the implicit assumptions in the thesis question: can voluntary associations reinvigorate the public sphere? Here it is assumed that Habermas is right and the public sphere is in a state of atrophy and needs reinvigorating. In Chapter One a number of theorists were introduced who contend this assumption and argue that the public sphere is neither in a state of atrophy nor needs reinvigorating. Given the data and findings of this thesis, is there support for either case?

What do we make of a public sphere where the most powerful coalition of political and business elites can be defeated? The Multilateral Agreement on Investment provides a telling example of the current workings of the public sphere whereby a coalition of voluntary associations managed to remove the MAI from the negotiating table and put it firmly back on the shelf. As demonstrated in Chapter Six, this was achieved through a combination of networking through the Internet, the writing of rational-critical parliamentary submissions and the throwing of custard pies. All of which suggests that the current status of the public sphere is more complex than an atrophied sphere of mass media and public relations companies. Clearly, the data supports the view that theorising the public sphere must now include consideration of many public spheres, since in all cases the participating associations were active in multi-dimensional ways and in multiple forums.

The MAI may have provided unique circumstances under which the NGOs and their supporters could prevail and it might yet be that the trade agreement is still implemented as the World Trade Organisation and the OECD countries find new ways to by-pass the significant opposition to it. However, this is not the only ‘victory’ to which we can turn to highlight the successes of voluntary associations in the public sphere and other examples have been provided in
earlier chapters. The provision of the Continuing Care Unit for HIV/AIDS sufferers was a significant victory for campaigners at the HIV/AIDS Centre. Save the World, have continued to bring the plight of 'forgotten' communities around the world to the public's attention in Australia (for example Romanian orphans). At Living Women, the recent publication of a book telling the stories of six women living with HIV/AIDS is selling well in mainstream bookstores. All three of these organisations are running workshops, training programmes and providing community education for their members and the broader community alike. These are not insignificant contributions that voluntary associations are making to the public sphere and at first glance this suggests that voluntary associations are invigorating a public sphere hardly in need of re-invigoration. However, the picture is more complicated than even these examples highlight.

One of the deficits in the public sphere literature is that there are few examinations that look at the public sphere in full. This thesis concludes that when theorists speak of the public sphere there is an immediate problem with the analysis, since it is clear there are many public spheres. This is not to say that the thesis supports the postmodern view only, since most often the focus for these theorists is the mass media. Nor does the thesis support the feminist view alone, that there exists counterspheres of spaces of withdrawal and regroupment. Neither does the thesis deny the existence of a more rational sphere something akin to some of Habermas's ideals. Indeed, the major finding of this thesis is that there is evidence of voluntary associations being active in rational (liberal) public spheres, counterspheres, computer mediated spheres, and mass media spheres. It appeared that the associations were continually attempting to increase their presence in each and every one of these spheres at any given moment in time.

Thus, there was a high importance placed on 'publicity' both in terms of increasing the organisations' public profile and for advocating on certain
issues and the mass media was targeted as a place for doing this. This involved initiating letters to local and metropolitan press from their members and supporters, media "stunts" that might gain publicity through novel approaches to campaigning, and the utilisation of celebrities to front the organisation or a particular campaign they might be running. In this respect, the organisations appear to have embraced Hartley's (1999) proposition that individuals do not become fact-seeking one minute when watching the news and fantasy-loving the next when consuming commercial entertainment. The approaches of the associations to the mass media indicates an acceptance that news is becoming more porous with other forms of entertainment. Of course, the associations were well aware that while the mass media was of considerable importance they did not have unlimited access to or total trust for this media form. They recognised that the mass media is commodified and has its limitations. Further, the press and television networks can just as easily run a campaign against them as it can for them. For this reason, they do not limit their activity to this public sphere alone.

The associations were now deliberately utilising the Internet as part of their activities and were generally convinced that computer mediated communication (CMC) provided telling potential for them to: subvert and influence government; break down some of their own organisational hierarchies and structures; increase the speed and scale of information provision to members, increase participation by members; and link political identities across territories and sectional interests. Many of the associations had already used CMC in their campaigns and, importantly, believed it had provided a new kind of politics, free from state coercion. They had already begun to network across organisational differences, communities, regions and internationally. However, it is too early to say whether this signifies a movement to electronic democracy and the rebirth of democratic life as Bryan et al (1998: 5) claim. There is no indication from the data that mass-broadcasting (one-to-many television) and newspapers are media of the past,
being replaced by interactive bulletins that we will read from the tops of our
desks on the machine that will replace our television and computer. Again,
thorists in the area of cyberdemocracy are too one-dimensional in their
approach. People might access their information from an infinite, free virtual
library, but rather than this being instead of receiving half-digested
‘programming’ it is more likely to be as well as receiving such programming.
Therefore, voluntary associations will do well to continue their ‘pursuit’ of
representation in the mass media.

There is no doubt that associations were also at times ‘retreating’ into
something that sounds and looks a lot like Fraser’s (1992) counterspheres.
They were using strategies that highlighted organisational practice of
‘withdrawal and regroupment’ and certainly the organisations were ‘bases and
training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics’.
These strategies included publication of research in journals, holding internal
training programs and lecture series, producing videos and films, forming
partnerships with academic programs and holding conferences, conventions,
and festivals. The training programs and conferences were generally well
attended by both members and the wider community and involved serious
debate around a number of issues currently facing the organisation. It is clear
that such initiatives were aimed at empowering participants who were in turn
then ready for advocacy and lobbying work. It is questionable whether the
work that goes in the electronic spheres of cyberspace and the mass media
could achieve any level of success without such strategies being part of the
organisations’ activities.

In light of this, we might conclude that the many public spheres that voluntary
associations operate in are far from being in a state of atrophy. Rather they
appear healthy, vibrant, dynamic and are well nourished through the activities
of voluntary associations. Of course, the context is not static and this thesis
has highlighted that voluntary associations are in many respects under threat
from colonisation by both the state and the market. Government funding under new regimes of contracting appears to have more terms and conditions attached to it. New management principles are frequently being applied to voluntary associations. As they turn to engagement and funding from the corporate sector do they risk appropriation and cooptation into these respective sectors? This thesis has already drawn attention to the many issues associated with these directions and examples have been given where associations have been silenced as a result of direct or indirect influence from government funders. The next section will take up these issues and look forward to future possibilities and risks.

**Passive Appropriation or Active Resistance?**

The reason that theorists such as Dekker and van den Broek (1998) identify the dual threats of the state and the market is due to the fact that successive governments in Australia (State and Federal) and overseas in Western democracies have embraced neoliberal economics. These policies have included resource allocation, standards setting, monitoring and evaluation; the devolution of service delivery functions to separate agencies, including ‘outsourcing’ activities to private contractors, that have some autonomy in the ways in which they deploy resources, and the establishment of contractual relationships between government purchasers and other government and private providers. Indeed, such policies have impacted voluntary associations in terms of both privatising (contracting out) previously government-provided services and in reining in (contracting in) more autonomous voluntary sector services previously supported by grants-in-aid.

Threats identified with such policies have included the fact that contracting of welfare to voluntary associations does provide the possibility that voluntary associations will become quasi-government and, as such, government agencies will take over the activities once performed by voluntary
associations. Further, market principles mean that a larger share of activities will be performed by paid professionals (Wuthnow 1991: 3-29). Other threats have included: pressure to sideline, if not undermine, opportunities for participation and leadership development; risk of reducing both the quality and quantity of participation facilitated by such organizations; stronger accounting to funders which increases responsibility to local members whereby client needs and services are likely to be eroded; the increasing emphasis on discrete and measurable service outputs mean involvement in developmental tasks, prevention and advocacy are likely to suffer; and trust and transparency and cooperation between organisations is likely to be more difficult and less common (Nowland-Foreman 1998). Therefore, as James (1997:8) suggests, contracting might mean that social network benefits and civil society benefits might decrease.

These theorists are painting a pessimistic picture which essentially is arguing with Putnam (2000) that voluntary associations can provide social, economic and political benefits if they are left, in Putnam’s terms, to ‘bowl alone’. There is no doubt that the thesis has found evidence to support some of the concerns of Nowland-Foreman (1998) and Wuthnow (1991). Of the participating associations, most showed concern regarding the levels of funding that were received from government sources. The Residence was the only association that actively refused state funding (with most of the organisation’s funding coming from private giving and bequests), while Save the World had a policy of state funding not exceeding more than a quarter of its annual income. Other organisations (for example Rehab and HIV/Aids Centre) did not have the privilege of choice and were totally dependent on state funds. It is true that these organisations did express concerns regarding the influence such funding allowed the state to exert on them and advocacy was at times undermined. For example, both Rehab and Living Women chose to stay out of the debate surrounding safe-injecting rooms for heroin addicts.
Due to the lack of empirical work done in this area most theorists tend to assume that these outcomes are inevitable and unavoidable. However, this study has identified that while, on the one hand, the organisations have to be careful and speak in ways that do not offend the funding agency, on the other hand, they are actively seeking new ways to subvert such influence. Further, at times when the issue is important enough they will take the risk and campaign anyway, as the HIV/AIDS Centre did to secure the Continuing Care Unit. Likewise, Save the World has run very public campaigns against the Australian Government's meagre overseas aid budget, while receiving all of its state funding from this budget allocation. Clearly, there was more risk for the HIV/AIDS Centre, who receive ninety per cent of the funding from the state, than for Save the World who would survive very well without their government funding. However, both were prepared to run hard against government policy.

As already stated, the organisations are increasingly using the Internet to subvert and influence government and it would be a significant misjudgement to assume that voluntary associations are passive under these new funding and market regimes. The evidence from this study suggests that the associations at times actively resist the influence of the state and while the funding arrangements suggest a power differential between funder and recipient, the associations are seeking ways to exert their own influence. For example, while the HIV/AIDS Centre feels vulnerable with all but a small percentage of their funds coming from the state, they are confident that the state will never withdraw all the funds since this would mean the state itself would have to provide the services. As the major service provider for gay men with HIV/AIDS, the organisation has some power and while they work on behalf of Human Services Victoria they hardly look (or sound) quasi-government. Consequently, this thesis does not support the proposition put forward by O'Connell (1996) that if government is a substantial source of an organisation's support, its ability to be relied upon as an independent force
has to be in question. There does seem to be some truth however when O'Connell claims that voluntary associations provide "wonderful elements of spirit, participation, service, influence and the freedom to do one's own thing" and even if government does overload them it is doubtful that they will fail society (1996: 225). There is no certainty in O'Connell's claim that the unique elements of voluntary associations will not be preserved if they are overloaded. The evidence suggests that the associations are more active and resistant to such pressure.

It was argued in Chapter Three that Salamon (1999) claims, in response to crises of fiscal integrity, economic role, organisational effectiveness, and public legitimacy, that voluntary associations should 'hold the centre' and enter a partnership model of state—voluntary association relations. Such a partnership, Wolch claims, will only help to "legitimise the emerging distribution of power and resources by softening impacts rather than challenging the processes producing such outcomes" (1999: 27-28). Others (Taylor 1996; Gaskin and Fenton 1997) have argued that partnership with the state and the market, at a time when there are low levels of trust in both, is dangerous. Public trust and support might very well be tied to the independence of voluntary associations and partnership with government and business blurs the distinction and puts into question "the idea of civil society as a means of imagining an independent and critical space of association" (Passey and Tonkiss 2000: 50). Rather than holding the centre and entering into partnerships with the state, Wolch (1999) claims that a better strategy might be to advance to the margins and transform the sector into a site/space of resistance. This means they will not be burdened with rising demands for service with reduced public funding, and mandates to monitor clients and enforce sanctions (including benefit terminations and evictions) on behalf of their partner the state. Further, voluntary associations will reduce the risk of scape-goating, as under the partnership model they are now seen as responsible for the services they provide that were once provided by the state.
The influence of the state and the market is something Evers (1995) draws attention to and is informative in suggesting that the voluntary sector, rather than being a clear-cut sector, appears as a dimension of the public space in civil societies and in an intermediate area. The public space is a triangular tension field consisting of the state, the market and the informal sector and voluntary associations will have different and competing influences that cross and have to be balanced. Intermediation for voluntary associations provides three structural and constant tension lines which take their course "along the borderlines of the intermediary area towards the realms of markets, state and the informal sector" (1995: 167). These tension lines are between instrumental and democratic values, universalistic principles and logics versus the plurality of freely-organised interests, and the relationship between formal organisations as representatives of formal rules and professionalism and the informal worlds of family, personal relationships, neighbourhoods, communities and social networks. Being in this intermediary area means that voluntary associations have to act under multiple influences from different areas and under conditions of parallel dependence from both public and private, and market and community support. This means that some organisations are transformed from self-help and community initiatives to well organised voluntary organisations, while others on the margins of the complex state apparatus acquire semi-independence as negotiators and channels between different worlds and points of view (1995: 171). Thus, Evers argues that voluntary associations have polyvalent characteristics, in that "they have an economic function, such as delivering goods and services to members or others, and simultaneously they exert lobbying functions and channel interests towards the respective points of decision-making" (1995: 171). By integrating separated rationales and functional orientations, voluntary associations are often hybrid in character and this can occur when they rely simultaneously on market, state and community-based support. Such a conceptualisation clearly provides a way out of the pessimistic views
of voluntary associations being appropriated by the state and the market. However, this thesis has provided some practical evidence that suggests voluntary associations are indeed hybrid and are very good at integrating separate rationales – that is, they can exert their own pressure on the state and/or the market. Here there is an opportunity for more research to investigate the ways voluntary associations balance these polyvalent characteristics, where they have to deliver goods and services to members or others (economic function), and simultaneously lobby and channel interests towards the respective points of decision-making.

Talk of crises (Salamon 1999) appears to be as premature as the utopian ideals put forward by Putnam (2000) and Habermas (1989; 1997). There is clearly more empirical research needed before conclusions can be drawn but the evidence of this study suggests something more akin to Evers (1996) theorising. The participating associations can be contextualised in the intermediate space between the state and the market and implicit in much of the theorising of civil society and voluntary associations outlined in Chapter Two and Chapter Three is this assumption. Whether voluntary associations have ever been truly independent is questionable and it appears to be more sensible (at least in contemporary society) to view them in an intermediate space.

It is in this space that they play out the three tension lines between instrumental and democratic values, universalistic principles and the plurality of freely-organised interests, and the relationship between formal organisations and the informal world. We can see that the data has highlighted these tensions and that, for example, under funding pressures the associations were negotiating their ways through this difficult terrain. This leads them to apply, at times, instrumental values rather than democratic values as they resist the pressures applied by the funding agencies. At other times they are more likely to apply universalistic principles in an effort to campaign or
lobby, while in certain of their economic functions they are required to professionalise and formalise. Importantly, the evidence suggests that the organisations are never fully engaged in either side of these tensions but merely that the emphasis moves from one side to the other according to the conditions under which the organisations have to work. This means that more research is required that demonstrates more fully where voluntary associations are currently placed within these tension fields and more analysis is needed of how voluntary associations have previously negotiated their way through the borderlines of the intermediary area.

Is Civic Engagement Really Dead?

Finally, a further comment is required on Putnam's (2000) claim that civic engagement has diminished in the final third of the twentieth century. Putnam’s thesis does not simply outline the trends but looks for the potential reasons for the decline in civic, political, religious and informal participation (dinner parties and friendship networks). He asks “what killed civic engagement?” (2000: 277-284) and claims it was the pressures of time and money, including the special pressures on two-career families, suburbanisation, commuting and sprawl, electronic entertainment – most notably television – and generational change. Generational change Putnam defines as the “slow, steady, and ineluctable replacement of the long civic generation by their less involved children and grandchildren” (2000: 283). In terms of replenishing the diminished stocks of social capital, Putnam (2000: 402-414) proposes a number of challenges which include family friendly workplaces; less time travelling and more time connecting with neighbours; public spaces that are more congenial for casual socialising; and that Americans can become more tolerant and be more deeply engaged in one or another spiritual community of meaning. Further, he advocates less time “sitting alone in front of glowing screens and more time in active connection”, more participation in cultural activities and more participation in public life,
all of which underpins his claims that Americans need to participate again in voluntary associations for both their own, and their communities’ well-being. As highlighted in Chapter Three (page 99), Putnam claims not ‘joining’ associations correlates more strongly with poor health and well being than smoking!

Putnam’s findings have been questioned with other theorists (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999) arguing against his proposition that civic engagement has declined. However, even if we grant some degree of validity and reliability to Putnam’s findings, the challenges he proposes (hoping that by 2010 they can be reality) seem completely out of sync. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, contemporary life for many individuals does not permit the freedom for these ‘old-time’ methods of associating and rather than nostalgic notions such as ‘bowling together’ we need to have far more research identifying how individuals might be engaging in new ways. That is, research that builds on the work of Wuthnow (1998), who suggests striking variations in membership and activities by age and place. Wuthnow claims that there is a general trend towards short-lived, and more sporadic, forms of civic participation. This is due to some of the very reasons that Putnam (2000) identifies being more demanding jobs that often involve substantial commuting from home, suburban sprawl or “growing communities”, and busier schedules. Wuthnow claims that voluntary associations that need longer-term commitment with set hierarchical structures and a focus on a general idea of ‘service’ do not articulate well with many people’s lives. Wuthnow argues that “successful civic organisations are ones that deliberately reconcile themselves to the porousness of their environment and capitalise on the loose connections of their participants” (1998: 208). Wuthnow’s study begs the question regarding whether voluntary associations that encourage loose connections and project-based participation can provide the opportunity for citizens to develop extensive experience and knowledge of local politics – that is, will they, with
short-term and 'loose' participation be able to enhance the democratic ideals many theorists hope for?

This thesis argues that the participating voluntary associations are encouraging the kind of participation that Wuthnow (1998) advocates. This can be seen in the campaigning they have undertaken through the Internet and email. There is no need for immediate geographic location of members. Information can be given to associated members who need only respond with, for example, a short-term commitment to write to their local member of parliament. Further, members of associations might well be more inclined to 'visit' associations through their webpages than enter the physical environment of a building or office. That is, they become 'virtual' visitors rather than face-to-face visitors. There is no reason to assume that these 'virtual' visits are any less meaningful than attending a members meeting, though more research would certainly inform this debate.

This leads the thesis to conclude that Putnam's (2000) analysis is based on a particular view of what constitutes 'community'. Indeed, his analysis is geographically bounded in that it is about people and neighbourhoods and in the current environment this is inadequate. While PTAs, Scout groups, churches and trade unions are suffering, he pays little attention to the construction of sites of new social capital, particularly virtual networks and virtual communities created and maintained in cyberspace (Reeves 2001). Of course, it could be that one 'community' may languish while another flourishes. Thus, he fails to develop the distinction between strictly local social capital and forms of what might be called "like-minded social capital" that transcend local and even national boundaries.

It is clear that Bowling Alone underestimates the power of informal friendship networks and Reeve (2000) claims that young people in the US and UK are not less socially minded, citing youngsters text messaging the locations of the
hottest clubs as an example. Further, friendship circles are more fluid than the membership of a particular organisation, and while these associations are obviously not easy to measure, they might still be important creators of social capital. Young people may not be ‘joiners’ but this does not mean they are not engaged in some kind of community building of their own. Thus, Reeve claims that Putnam is right to say that society is better if built on strong social connections and communities, but he is wrong to suggest that those communities need to be founded on a shared location, a place of worship or a PTA. Indeed, Reeve claims that there is little evidence to suggest that people are less community-minded, less associative, less concerned for the welfare of others, or less sociable, than before — they are simply using different tools in different places to express their civic leanings. More research would be useful in identifying exactly what these tools are and how they are being used. What is clear is that the evidence from this thesis suggests associations may well have moved beyond seeking long-term commitments alone from participants and members and no longer rely on traditional notions of community, particularly, face-to-face community building for their support or campaigning.

This section then paints a picture of uncertainty regarding voluntary associations and the public sphere. It is not absolutely clear what form of engagement voluntary associations will take or the nature of the public sphere(s) in the future. However, the pessimistic stance seems somewhat premature and/or overstated particularly if we simply consider the fact that voluntary associations have survived difficult changes in the past and there is no reason to believe they will not do so in the future.

The Conversation Continues...

This thesis has attempted to study the nature of public communication through the concepts of the public sphere and civil society and most particularly
through the web of associations that have been claimed are the core institutions of civil society. It has worked on the assumption that a vibrant civil society is supposed to prevent the state and the market from dominating and atomising the rest of society, allowing groups and communities to resist subordination and demand inclusion. It has bound the normative ideals of democracy to the arena of the public sphere. Most importantly, the central conclusion of this thesis is that the model of civil society emerging from the data is one of a multiplicity of public spheres, communities and associations nested within one another and oriented (in differing degrees) to a larger public sphere.

This thesis argues that a multiplicity of public spheres is in fact preferable to the ideals Habermas proposes, where there is a move towards consensus and rational agreement, since some group would inevitably be excluded from such discourse, as universals are reached. The findings of this thesis support the research of Jacobs (2000) into the ‘black public sphere’, and claims the value of civil society, appears to be that the multiple publics keep conversations going and open up ongoing conversations to new narratives and new points of difference. Therefore, it is not necessary for participants to reach agreement about all matters of common concern and in an increasingly globalised and plural society this may in fact be impossible. What will become essential then, will be that the conversation continues. The associations in this study provide optimism that they will ensure, even under the difficult influences coming from both the state and the market, that conversations continue.

There is no doubt that civil society and the dominant public sphere are places where there is exclusion, inequality and symbolic disadvantage and I would argue that for subordinated groups the best site of resistance is in Fraser’s (1992) counterspheres since this is the place that subordinated groups in the past have had some success. In these alternative publics they are able to invent new and oppositional interpretations of their identities, needs and interests.
The participating associations were all active in some way in counterpublics and these smaller spaces were sites in which new experiences could be crafted and invented (as with the members of the HIV/AIDS Centre and Living Women), new meanings could be discussed and new forms of political engagement were tried out. It is important to note the work of Fraser (1992) and Jacobs (2000) who draw attention to the existing historical reality of these counterspheres for two of the most marginalised groups (women and people of colour). Both groups were active in counterspheres prior to Habermas's bourgeois public sphere, through its transformation, during the age of the mass media dominated public sphere and even today as we head towards new forms of media and domination. Thus, this thesis concludes that neither domination by the state nor the market will necessarily or automatically prevent voluntary associations from continuing to be active in certain public spheres. They may at times withdraw and regroup as they have in the past, but there is no reason to assume that they will not re-emerge with new narratives and conversations to invigorate the public sphere.

It is also clear that these oppositional spheres alone will not in and of themselves shape public agenda setting and voluntary associations will do well to continue to 'invent' ways of accessing the mass media. It appears from this study that the ability to do this depends largely on the size of the organisation and the type of funding it receives. However, there are examples where, with limited resources, voluntary associations have succeeded in gaining access to a wider audience through practical strategies that often appear as irrational in the sense that they are acting outside the 'normal' boundaries. While it is acknowledged that the mass media is organised in structurally predictable ways that provide only partial access, this thesis has identified that associations can package their activities in ways which are more likely to gain access – even with limited resources.
In addition to the mass media, the thesis has drawn attention to the ways that voluntary associations are making use of computer mediated communication and this looks likely to have increasing influence on their activities. This will be particularly important for smaller organisations as the technology facilitates a widening of their networking and activities in terms of participation and audience. The advantage of such technology for enhancing democracy in civil society and the public sphere appears to lie more in facilitating networking and campaigning within and between groups in civil society than for digital democracy or electronic polling.

It seems too, from the evidence provided that we will continue to see conflict within civil society organisations and that civil society will continue to be the field of conflict, contested meanings, and exclusion rather than a sphere of rational discourse and consensus. Historically, the public sphere and civil society have always been about conflict and the maintenance of interests. Individuals and groups will get their issues on the public agenda more through power struggles and conflicts, that are characteristic of activism and social change, than through rational-critical debate and consensus. Further, the goal of publicness (in the Habermas (1989) sense of publicness) will be best served when it is allowed to navigate through “wider and wilder territory” (Ryan 1992: 286) that is permeated with conflict. It seems that conflict is an inevitable part of civil society and rather than be “civilised” a strong civil society might well be one that guarantees the existence of conflict.

 Accordingly, this thesis recommends five strategies for future research into voluntary associations and the public sphere. First, research needs to conceptualise the public sphere in its fullness and no longer restrict itself to particular versions of the concept. It must acknowledge multiple spheres. Second, more empirical work is required that can inform debates on the operations, motivations and activities of voluntary associations. This requires more qualitative and quantitative data that identify the ‘facts on the ground’
and in so doing question the normative claims of Putnam, Habermas and
others. Third, more investigation is needed into the 'darker' aspects of civil
society and social capital. For example, in what ways do neo-Nazi groups
differ from those organisations in civil society that are said to acting in the
public good? Fourth, research is needed that investigates the ways voluntary
associations balance polyvalent characteristics, where they have to deliver
goods and services to members or others (economic function), and
simultaneously lobby and channel interests towards the respective points of
decision-making. Further, how voluntary associations have previously, and
currently, negotiate their way through the borderlines of an intermediary area
between the state, the market and the informal sector needs clarification.
Finally, more research is required that informs the debates that suggest as
individuals we are engaging in new ways that involve loose connections rather
than the tight face-to-face connections that Putnam advocates. Then we will
better understand what strategies voluntary associations might need to employ
to engage their communities.

This thesis began with the question: can voluntary associations reinvigorate
the public sphere? I would conclude that voluntary associations have, do and
will continue to invigorate public spheres. Of course, this is not under ideal
conditions where all are included and not always in democratic ways, but they
are there in creative and innovative ways keeping the conversation going.

Lest public officials forget this, whether in Melbourne, Barcelona or Buenos
Aires, they should not be surprised to find a member of a voluntary
association around the next corner armed with a constitution in one hand and a
custard pie in the other.
Appendices
Appendix 1

Methodology

As a community of scholars our goal must always be to promote discourse about our interpretations, not to advance them as authoritative pronouncements (Wuthnow 1987: 17)

Many previous studies that have investigated aspects of voluntary associations, and the voluntary sector more generally, have relied on quantitative data from which they draw their conclusions. There has been very little research that has attempted to provide an ‘organisational voice’ from within the associations themselves and in particular there are too few analyses that are informed by the perspectives of members, employees and volunteers of voluntary associations. With this in mind careful consideration was given to the most appropriate method of data collection that might address the thesis question: can voluntary associations reinvigorate the public sphere?

Mindful that researchers should have utilised quantitative methods for reasons that are compatible with the aims of their studies, it was important to consider the strengths and limitations of such methods and particularly survey instruments. While surveys provide high amounts of data standardisation (at relatively low cost and in a short period of time) which make them amenable to statistical analysis, they have been criticised as being inappropriate for the study of most social phenomena. This is due to the fact that the data only indirectly applies to inter-individual phenomena such as interaction, social organisation and dynamic processes (Smith, 1981: 184-186). Since one of the primary aims of this study was to elicit the views and perspectives of those associated with the organisations and that dynamic processes, such as communication within the organisations and interaction between individuals, were being investigated, it was concluded that surveys would limit the
opportunity for participants to express their own perspectives in detail. The study particularly wanted to avoid standardisation, such as quantitative methods introduce, which could have the effect of covering over the complexity of topics arising from the research question. Thus, in operationalising particular issues and concepts there was an ongoing concern that designing questions that would at least be minimally appropriate to all respondents, what is most appropriate to many may be missed.

Minichello et al (1990) claim that where the researcher wants to gain access to, and an understanding of, activities and events that cannot be directly observed then in-depth interviewing is the most suitable methodology. Clearly, this study wanted to gain access to, understand how, members of associations themselves perceive the operations and activities of the organisation to which they belonged. Further, given the strength of the in-depth interview is that, in an atmosphere where people can talk freely, such methods allow the researcher to elicit and understand the interviewees perspectives on their lives, experiences, and situations, it seemed the most appropriate form of data collection for this study (Taylor and Bogdan 1984:77; Neuman 1994; 358). Critical to the research question was the ability of the participants to express these experiences and perspectives in their own words and present them in their natural form and not reduce them to a standardised format (Neuman 1994: 358).

However, in-depth interviewing is no social research panacca and Taylor and Bogdan (1984) also claim that there are limitations that include the fact that interview data consists solely of verbal statements and as such, interviews can be subject to fabrications, deceptions, exaggerations and distortions and that there can be discrepancy between what people say and what they actually do. Furthermore, people say and do different things in different situations and in the interview ‘situation’ it may be important not to assume that what the person says is what they say or believe in other situations (1984: 81-82).
Becker and Geer (1970: 134) also draw attention to the fact that information the interviewees are unwilling or unable to talk about needs to be accounted for, as does the question of whether the interviewer really understands what is being said. Thus, in order to address these limitations, selecting and approaching informants, the location of the interviews, the types of questions to be asked, how to probe for further information and the form of recording and documenting of the interviews, were essential considerations prior to the interviews being conducted.

The organisations were chosen based on the definition used in this thesis for voluntary association – that is, they were formal, private, non-profit, formally organised and voluntary. Further, each of the associations had a (broadly) welfare component in terms of wanting to address certain needs of a particular group. Purposive sampling (Neuman 1994: 198-199) was employed in order to gain a small sample of organisations which could represent the structuring themes of secular versus faith-based organisations and type of funding regime. That is, the study targeted organisations that had a Christian ethos as well as organisations that were not espousing a faith or had initially emerged from religious values and commitments. This reflects the early stage of the research design which followed Charmey (1998) in focussing on the difference between faith-based and secular organisations. This has proved to be a useful distinction though it has not proved to be conceptually dominant. Further, given the emphasis in the literature on the influence of both the state and the market, it was seen to be important to recruit organisations that were fully funded by the state, partly funded by the state and by the private sector, and organisations that had purposefully eschewed state funds.

The ways in which the individuals were chosen was through initial contact via a telephone call with the coordinator/manager of the organisation, who then either initiated a global email to the employees and members of the organisation or spoke personally to them inviting them to participate in the
study. The individual participants then contacted me directly and subsequent to this a process of snowball sampling (Neuman 1994: 199-200) was followed within organisations. When the research reached a point at which further interviews within the target organisation elicited only repeat data the organisation was deemed ‘studied’ for the purposes of this project.

The aim of the interviews was to get accounts from a range of informants who occupy different positions within the organisations and who have the capacity to speak from their organisational roles, and therefore provide an organisational perspective. Accordingly, those interviewed (a detailed overview of the sample – organisations and participants - is provided in Appendix 2) were from a broad cross section within of the organisations and included board members, chief executives, middle management, educators, marketers, activists, clients and volunteers. Having initially contacted the organisations by telephone, organisational consent forms were completed and subjects then volunteered to be interviewed and completed their own consent forms. However, crucial to the process of collecting satisfactory data was the development of the interview guide (Appendix 4) to ensure that all participants were given the opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings and perspectives on a range of similar issues. The broad interview plan was used to guide each interview, in order to stimulate thought and discussion on topics, without dictating a rigid interview format.

Thus, given the aims of the research, qualitative, unstructured, in-depth interviews were undertaken in six voluntary associations in the state of Victoria from September 2000 – December 2001. Largely depending on the size of the organisation between three and ten interviews were conducted in each organisation. Each interview lasted from between 45-90 minutes each and all interviews were audio-taped. Anonymity for both the organisation and the subjects was assured, as was confidentiality of the data, and consequently pseudonyms have been used for all organisations and participants, as clearly
some of the information disclosed was potentially sensitive. The location of the interviews was the choice of the participants and most chose to be interviewed on the premises of the organisation and often in the office of the employee. However, a number of interviewees (mostly volunteers and clients, though not exclusively) elected to be interviewed at a more 'neutral' setting (cafe) or in their own homes.

In preparation for analysis of the data, the taped interviews were transcribed and cross-referenced for common themes identified by the researcher (Minichiello et al 1990; Glesne and Peshkin 1992). Interviewees were invited to review the transcripts, though all declined. Narrative labels taken from participants' experiences have been used to organise the transcript data into relevant themes or topics and provide examples of the participants' perspectives (Appendix 3).

Finally, Myrdal (1970) reminds us that all social researchers, in whatever they try to accomplish, are influenced by tradition, their environment and their personality. Emphasising the point, Becker asserts “our problem is to make sure that, whatever point of view we take, our research meets the standards of good scientific work, that our unavoidable sympathies do not render our results invalid” (1970: 23). Every effort has been made to ensure this study meets these ideals and has provided a reliable contribution to knowledge for those interested in the role of voluntary associations in contemporary society.
Appendix 2

Sample Overview

1. Green Valley Opportunity Shop
Located in a small shopping mall in Melbourne’s northern suburbs and is run by a group (6) of volunteers all of whom are women aged between 48 and 80 years of age. The shop is one of many in Melbourne ‘owned’ by one of the larger religious charities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monera</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. HIV/AIDS Centre
The major service provider in Victoria for people living with HIV/AIDS and is located in the heart of Melbourne’s ‘gay district’. The organisation has thirty permanent employees and according to Jason (community education officer) “relies on thousands of volunteers”. Most of the organisation’s $3 million funding comes from the State Government (over 80 per cent) and the primary aim of the organisation is to “prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and address the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS” (Alan – President). Most of the employees are gay males.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>President and Board Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damien</td>
<td>HIV Services Coordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Living Women

A small organisation, with two paid employees and a small group of volunteers, who aim to provide services for women and children living with HIV/AIDS. Nearly all of the funding the organisation receives (almost $75,000) is from the State Government and the organisation recently had to decide whether to fold, amalgamate or recruit non-HIV positive women to the board in order to engage the wider community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>Chairwomen and Board Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Rehab

A drug and alcohol service provider, located in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Funding is provided through a State Government tender and the organisation is part of a larger consortium of service providers throughout the east and south-east of Melbourne. Since ‘winning’ the government tender the organisation has become more focused on episodes of care, numbers of re-episodes and there are no longer youth services provided.
Participant | Position
---|---
Anne | Coordinator
Rita | Therapist
Janelle | Therapist
Wayne | Client

5. The Residence
A small residential ‘home’ for recovering heroin addicts that eschews government funding and relies on private (bequests and trusts) funding to survive. At the time of the interviews there was little funding pressure and the organisation appeared to be relatively autonomous with its own board of management. The organisation, though willing to participate were extremely sensitive about confidentiality being assured and anonymity of the organisation being protected.

Participant | Position
---|---
Lucy | Counsellor
Neil | House Manager
Sara | Resident

6. Save the World
A large Christian, humanitarian aid agency located in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. The organisation has its head office in Melbourne with smaller offices in every other state and territory in Australia. There are over three hundred people employed Australia-wide and over 1000 volunteers also working in local communities. Most of the organisation’s funds (over $100 million) come from private giving with the Federal Government contributing $30 million from its overseas aid budget.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Donor Relations (Manager)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>Call Centre Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Marketing/Communication (Victoria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>Customer Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Call Centre Operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>Community Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Government/International Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3

Themes Overview

Key

Green Valley Opportunity Shop: 1 = Monica, 2 = Betty, 3 = June.
HIV/AIDS Centre: 4 = Alan, 5 = John, 6 = Damien, 7 = Simon, 8 = Jason, 9 = Paul, 10 = Daniel, 11 = Brian.
Living Women: 12 = Sally, 13 = Clare, 14 = Erin, 15 = Mary.
Rehab: 16 = Anne, 17 = Rita, 18 = Janelle, 19 = Wayne.
The Residence: 20 = Lucy, 21 = Neil, 22 = Sara.
Save the World: 23 = Susan, 24 = Simon, 25 = David, 26 = Marie, 27 = Jenny, 28 = Graham, 29 = Andrew, 30 = Adam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Identified by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Associations in Conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission and Purposes – We don’t all sing off the same sheet of music</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government funding – The government never takes umbrage at what we do</td>
<td>4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation – Who do we represent? Good Question</td>
<td>1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Public Sphere – If only there were time</td>
<td>3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, 28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3 (continued)

2. Communication in Voluntary Associations

Egalitarian communication – We probably do discriminate
Reciprocal communication – When I speak no-one listens
Power neutrality – I do have power
Transparency – We are a fairly open organisation

3. Diverse Voices in Public Spheres

Public image – the big bang
Counterspheres – The Internet... We love it!
Solidarity – It's all about consciousness-raising

1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30
2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29
4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26, 30
1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 27, 29, 30

5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30
4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30
1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 25, 28, 29, 30
Appendix 4

Interview Guide

Assure of confidentiality

Introduction

Purpose of the study: welfare orgs and their advocacy objectives; interview is part of the preliminary development of the project.

Organisational details

Established in 19...; national; mission statement; aims of the organisation; organisational structure; number of employees; volunteers; funding - govt versus nongovernment;

What does the organisation do?

Marketing, fundraising, communication, education, advocacy, lobbying; how do these relate and which has priority?

Communication

How do you communicate with your constituents? Who are your constituents? How much communication with other community organisations? Political? What are the aims of such communication? Where does it take place? How does the organisation view the media? How do your constituents communicate with you? Are there opportunities for them to communicate with you? Contact with the state? Contact with business sector?

Obstacles to organisational goals

What are they? Does govt-funding affect the nature of your advocacy? Professionalisation? Auditing by govt of funds disbursed? Internal obstacles? Compulsory competitive tendering? Is there any competition from for profit organisations for your services?

New information technology

How has it impacted on your organisation? Does your organisation exist in cyberspace? How does the organisation currently utilise it? Is the development of communication through the ‘net’ an important goal? What would I find if I accessed your site? Has it enabled you to ‘go global’ and network with other organisations?

Close and thank:

Reassure of confidentiality and check for future contact.
References


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