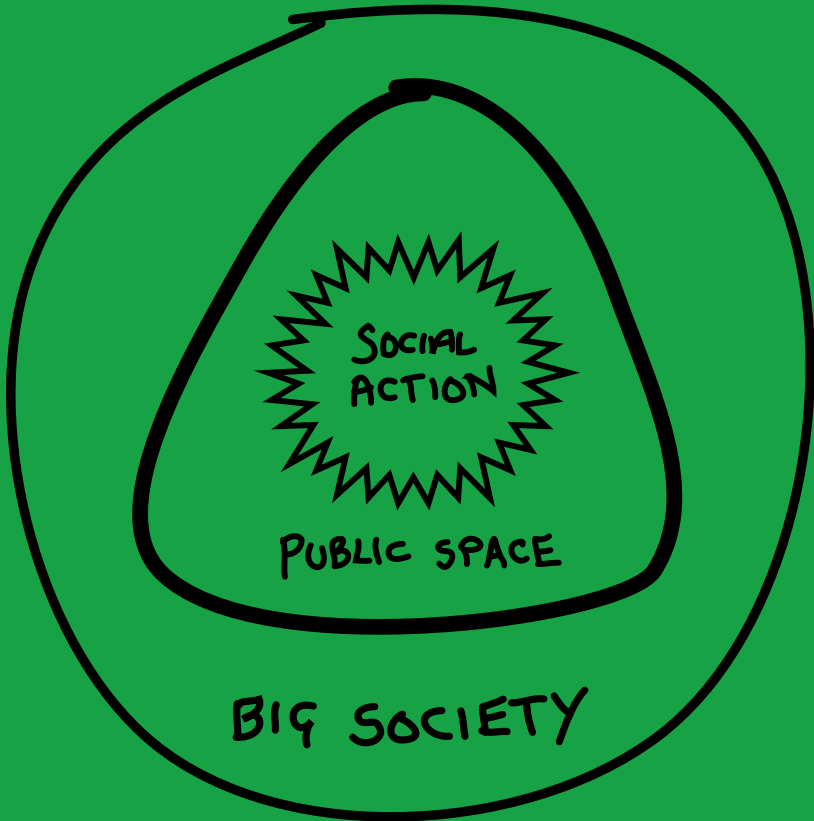




Centre for Local Economic Strategies



# ‘Big Society’: Social action and the role of public space

*Stuart MacDonald*

## About CLES

The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) is the leading membership based organisation in the UK dedicated to economic development, regeneration and local governance. Founded in 1986, CLES undertakes a range of activities including independent research, events and training, publications and consultancy. CLES also manages the monthly New Start online magazine through its new CLES Online service which provides comprehensive analysis and commentary on current policy and good practice. In all of CLES' work, the challenge of delivering local economic development alongside progressive environmental and social benefits is a common theme. For more information visit [www.cles.org.uk](http://www.cles.org.uk).

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# Executive summary

The role of citizens in society has been identified as the centre-piece of the government's agenda for reform. The 'Big Society' is a vision for greater personal, professional and civic responsibility where social problems are solved by the communities they affect and social action is prioritised over state intervention. Key to creating more sustainable places, is the reform of relationships between the public and the state.

*'We will use the state to help stimulate social action.... to help achieve our ambition of every adult citizen being a member of an active neighbourhood group. We will direct funding to those groups that strengthen communities... to help bring our country together.'*<sup>1</sup>

This publication, drawn on our wide experience of working with Groundwork since 2003, examines how public space provides a site of engagement in which social action can be fostered and Big Society nurtured. Public space is uniquely positioned to facilitate social action in several key ways:

- It acts as a site for the pursuit of social action as well as a site for discord, debate and discussion all of which can lead to the development of valuable citizenship skills;
- Several important skills can be fostered by public space development programmes, including; knowledge about local politics; an understanding of planning; partnership working; understanding of funding sources and meeting and interacting with others;
- Skill development and knowledge acquisition can lead to increased confidence and self-esteem, and subsequently higher levels of social action, such as formal volunteering, engaging with state organisations, representing the local community, devolved decision making and power sharing.
- The socially active will be more inclined to define the problems they face and tackle them in partnership with public bodies, thereby shaping the future of public service provision and moving towards the ideals of a Big Society.
- Organisations, such as Groundwork, not directly part of the local state are valuable, because they are able to act as catalysts to social action; raising local capacity, passing on skills, knowledge and

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1. Conservative Party (2010), 'The Conservative Manifesto 2010', [Online] Available at: [http://media.conservatives.s3.amazonaws.com/manifesto/cpmanifesto2010\\_lowres.pdf](http://media.conservatives.s3.amazonaws.com/manifesto/cpmanifesto2010_lowres.pdf) (Accessed September 2010).

understanding; motivating and sustaining interest and activity and supporting to address the problems they identify in society.

This paper highlights pathways to social action through sites of public space, the research finding is that these pathways differ with individuals, as does the extent to which social action is embraced, and because motivation will differ with individuals, what is required from organisations such as Groundwork to sustain social action and nurture Big Society will also differ.

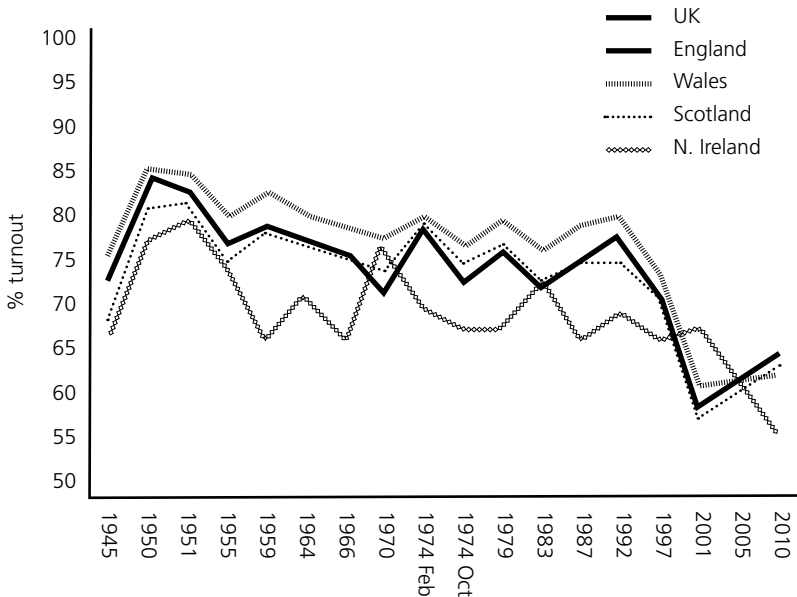
Public spaces provide an opportunity for more active interplay between the state, communities and citizens, and foster stronger democracy. In order to develop the Big Society, a range of important actors will be required to support community empowerment and cultivate local leadership, to create truly sustainable communities.

# Introduction: The declining role of the citizen

*'Government...must foster and support a new culture of voluntarism, philanthropy, social action' – David Cameron<sup>2</sup>*

The health of our democracy has been of concern for some time. Political participation has been in decline since the 1950's with the downward trend accelerating since the early 1990's (see figure 1). The recent parliamentary election (2010), which saw the formation of a coalition government for the first time since the Second World War, generated the first increase in voter turnout for nearly two decades.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1 – Changes in Political Participation 1945 - 2010<sup>4</sup>**



2. Big Society Speech, Monday 19 July 2010 [Online] Available at: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2010/07/big-society-speech-53572>, (Last accessed October 2010)

3. With the exception of Northern Ireland

4. House of Commons Research Papers 01/54 & 05/33, BBC.

It's widely recognised that Britain, as a nation, and 21<sup>st</sup> century society more generally, is increasingly passive. Robert Putnam's seminal book on American civic life, *Bowling Alone*<sup>5</sup>, and the writings of Anthony Giddens<sup>6</sup>, present a picture of civic disengagement. They posit that as citizens, we are now less likely to rally around a particular collective consciousness, including class and/or modes of behaviour. Instead, we are more likely to engage in a myriad of interests that are much more individualised or 'atomised', rather than reflecting a collective or group view. Furthermore, the work of David Marquand<sup>7</sup> suggests that public life has been denuded. For Marquand, it is no longer important for us to become involved in public life or public goods, as there is a perception that most things can be provided by, and bought through, the market.

Throughout the previous decade, citizens appear to have become less empowered and less able to influence the society around them, despite a strong focus on citizen's rights<sup>8</sup> and civil renewal under the previous Labour administration. The Civil Renewal Unit and the more recent Office of Civil Society took a practical approach to improving quality of life through involving local people in identifying and solving the problems that affect their communities. However, as the Citizenship Survey has evidenced, the policies of the previous decade have made little headway in empowering the citizenry.

In nurturing a 'Big Society' more needs to be done to engage the public in the issues around them. Over the previous decade the level of participation in volunteering has declined (see figures 2 and 3).

- The percentage of people engaged in informal volunteering has fallen, with regular informal volunteering (once a month) dropping from 37% to 29% between 2003 and 2009-10.
- The percentage of the population involved in formal volunteering, on at least a monthly basis, has also fallen, dropping from 29% in 2005 to 25% in 2009-10.

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5. Putnam, R (2000), *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, Simon & Schuster, New York.

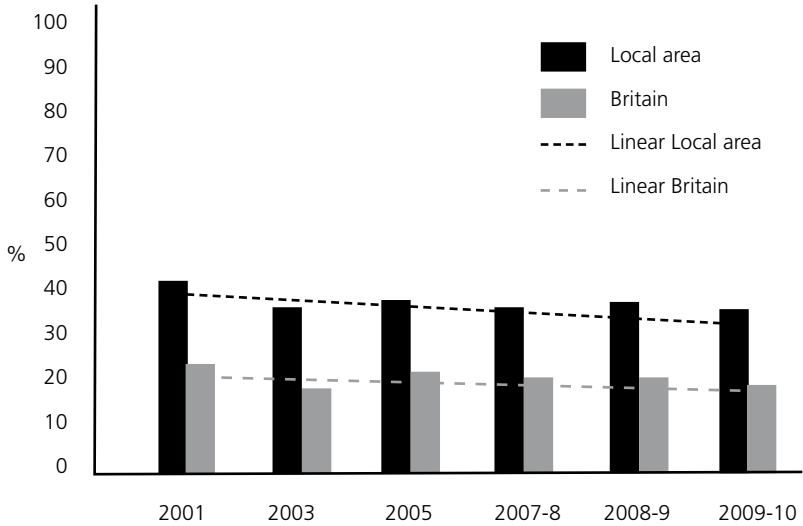
6. Giddens, A (1992), *Society, Action and Space: An Alternative Human Geography*, Routledge, London.

7. Marquand, D (2004), *The Decline of the Public: The Hollowing Out of Citizenship*, Polity Press, London.

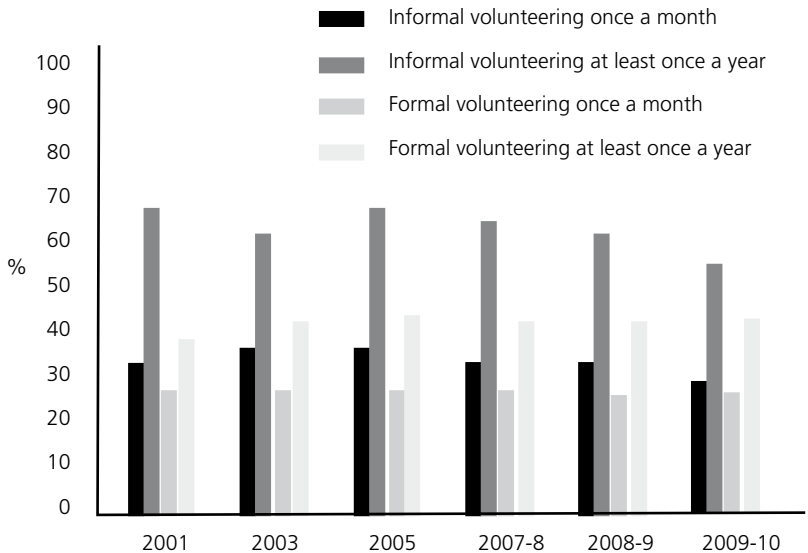
8. Bringing in the Freedom of Information Act, signing the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty, providing statutory trade union recognition, signing the Human Rights Act.



**Figure 2: Whether people feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area and Britain, 2001 to 2009-10<sup>9</sup>**



**Figure 3: Participation in informal and formal volunteering, 2001 to 2009-10**



9. Citizenship Survey: 2009-10 (April 2009 – March 2010), England

The Citizenship Survey has measured levels of participation in three broad strands of civic engagement<sup>10</sup>:

- **Civic participation** – which covers wider forms of engagement in democratic processes, such as contacting an elected representative, taking part in a public demonstration or protest, or signing a petition.
- **Civic consultation** – which refers to active engagement in consultation about local services or issues through activities such as attending a consultation group or completing a questionnaire about these services; and
- **Civic activism** – which refers to involvement either in direct decision-making about local services or issues, or in the actual provision of these services by taking on a role such as a local councillor, school governor or magistrate

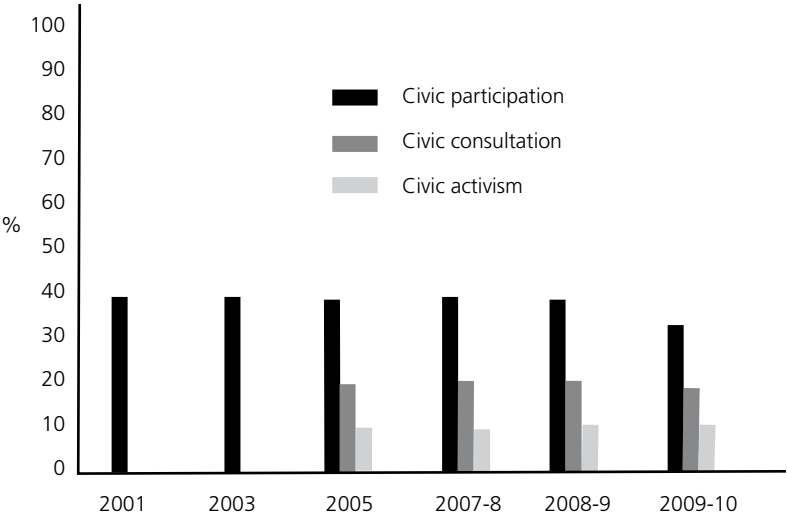
Policy approaches under new Labour sought to support and move individuals through these broad categories from Civic Participation to Civic Activism, however the Government has failed to address the obstacles to people getting involved in social action. Figure 4 outlines the decline in civic participation and civic consultation since 2007-08, with levels of civic activism static at around 10%.

This research paper aims to explore what ‘Big Society’ means for civic engagement, and how it can reverse the trends of declining participation in society. The paper goes on to explore the link between public space and social action and asks how organisations such as Groundwork can facilitate and nurture the development of a ‘Big Society’. It assesses the extent to which public space serves as a medium by which social action can be developed, exploring the requirement for a greater understanding of the individual pathways and routes to social action.

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10. Ibid

**Figure 4: Participation in civic participation, civic consultation and civic activism at least once in the last 12 months, 2001 to 2009-10**



# What is ‘Big Society’ and how can it foster greater social action?

The concept of social action stems from the Conservative government experience of the 1980’s. The government, looking for solutions to the problems of rising crime and rising public spending suggested that the responsibility for society’s problems did not lie within the government, but with the whole community.

‘Big Society’ has been defined through a number of key strands such as community development and capacity building and the role of the third sector as a deliverer of public services. What sets the ‘Big Society’ vision apart, however, is the government’s view on the role of the state in a new political settlement.

*‘The success of the Big Society will depend on the daily decisions of millions of people – on them giving their time, effort, even money, to causes around them. So government cannot remain neutral on that – it must foster and support a new culture of voluntarism, philanthropy, social action’<sup>11</sup>*

- **Social action** - According to David Cameron, ‘Big Society’ is a call for greater social action: for people to give up their time, effort and money to support local causes as part of a new culture of voluntarism and philanthropy. Alongside the concept of the ‘Big Society’ is the Conservative Party’s enthusiasm for a new era of mutualism. In particular, the Party proposes a new model of public service delivery in which services are provided by social enterprises led by frontline workers, owned by them and the communities they serve (e.g. the Conservatives would like to see parents setting up new schools in communities, and take over threatened local amenities such as parks and libraries).
- **Public service reform** - A second element of the ‘Big Society’ concept is that of the government’s aspiration to dismantle the “centralised bureaucracy”. For the Conservatives, state intervention has extended too far and public services need to be opened up to alternative deliverers, including: charities; social enterprises; communities; and private companies. The aim: to encourage “more competition, innovation, diversity and responsiveness to public need”.

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11. Big Society speech

- **Community empowerment** - The third key theme of the 'Big Society' agenda is community empowerment. In contrast to needs-based approaches to community development, in which outside organisations and initiatives identify the needs, problems and solutions for communities, community empowerment seeks to raise the communities' capacity to work together and take action on the social issues that affect them.

## **How can it increase social action?**

Building the Big Society<sup>12</sup> outlines how government plans to increase social action. This will be done by giving more power to communities, with policies of reforming the planning system to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live and the introduction of new powers to help communities save local facilities and services threatened with closure, giving communities the right to bid to take over local state-run services. It is also proposed train a new generation of community organisers and support the creation of neighbourhood groups across the UK, especially in the most deprived areas.

Government will seek to encourage people to take a more active role in their communities, adopting a range of measures to encourage volunteering and involvement in social action, including launching a national 'Big Society Day' and making regular community involvement a key element of civil service staff appraisals. A range of measures will be taken to encourage charitable giving and philanthropy and a National Citizen Service will be introduced to provide a programme for 16 year olds to give them a chance to develop the skills needed to be active and responsible citizens, mix with people from different backgrounds, and start getting involved in their communities.

Developing 'Big Society' will require imaginative partnership approaches and delivery models, with traditional partner and funder relationships likely to change beyond all recognition. A 'Big Society' will require 'Big Society' type organisations to support and facilitate social action. Government will support the creation and expansion of mutuals, co-operatives, community land banks, charities and social enterprises, and support these groups to have much greater involvement in the running of public services. These 'self help' type organisations, self reliant and individually responsible can help people to address their collective problems. They will give public sector workers a new right to form employee-owned co-operatives

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12. Building the Big Society [Online] Available at: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/407789/building-big-society.pdf> (Last accessed September 2010)

and bid to take over the services they deliver. This will empower millions of public sector workers to become their own boss and help them to deliver better services.

Funds from dormant bank accounts will be used to establish a Big Society Bank, which will provide new finance for neighbourhood groups, charities, social enterprises and other nongovernmental bodies.

## **Why do we need social action?**

One can argue that passivity and low levels of participation are a feature of modern society and why should this overly concern us. Indeed, it could be read as a symptom of good governance, in that lack of interest means a happy, contented populace. Similarly, some may form the view that governance and civic life should be left to elected representatives, or that ultimately, the momentum of choice and the market will diminish the need for active citizens.

To create cost-effective public services and socially just and healthy societies, it is imperative that social action is strengthened and routes and means to playing a role in society are kept open. Good policy clearly needs to be mediated through local needs, wants and desires and steered by strong democratic mandates.<sup>13</sup>

This is particularly important for those who are less well off and most excluded. For instance, work by Pattie et al<sup>14</sup> suggest that passivity is not universal but is most prevalent amongst the least well off. It is those with higher household incomes and a university education who dominate social action. However, it is in the most deprived communities in the country that the requirement for state intervention is highest and the demands on public services are the greatest. Yet it is these areas that the collective voice is the weakest – compounding economic poverty with a poverty of representation.

Furthermore, the decline in traditional vehicles for political engagement exacerbates the situation. The work of the Education and Training for Governance and Active Citizenship in Europe<sup>15</sup> identified four domains in which people engage in social action. These are politics, work, civil soci-

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13. McInroy, N and MacDonald, S (2004), Local Work - Working with complexity, Centre for Local Economic Strategies, [www.cles.org.uk](http://www.cles.org.uk).

14. Pattie et al (2003), "Civic Attitudes and Engagement in Modern Britain", Parliamentary Affairs, 56, pp 616-633.

15. Education and Training for Active Governance and Citizenship in Europe (ETGAGE) (April 2003), Analysis of Adult Learning & Design of Formal, Non-Formal & Informal Educational Intervention Strategies, University of Surrey, Surrey.

ety and the private domain. Skills and knowledge which citizens develop in one “domain” (political, work, civil society and private) can be, and frequently are, transferred into the other domains. However, this learning in civil society appears to be under resourced by comparison with similar learning for example in the workplace (e.g. trade union involvement).

# The role of public space in Big Society

*“Public spaces are spaces in which citizens gather to form themselves into, and represent themselves as a public”<sup>16</sup>*

Public space brings special qualities to debate around ‘Big Society’. Public space is a useful medium to examine social action because it is ‘everyday’, it inspires high levels of interest and is a crucial facet of a civic identity. Public spaces have long been seen as useful components of regeneration strategies as they assist in developing positive images of an area and can potentially serve to improve their attractiveness. Supported over the past decade through a desire to include and involve ‘the community’ and produce citizens who participate in developing and/or implementing measures that affect their local area.

Public space is important as it can serve as a useful, local, everyday resource; as a focus for community involvement and can assist in generating a localised sense of belonging. Community public space relates to social action in many ways, acting as a potential location where people can publicly interact and engage with each other. This is significant because one can view this interaction as a vital component of the public sphere of politics and citizenship. Public space, given this notion, is ideally seen as a location for democratic interaction. As Mitchell<sup>17</sup> (p116) says,

*“a public space represents the material location where the social interaction and political activities of all members of ‘the public’ occur”*

Invoking the notion that public spaces can be fora for social interaction, they can also be identified as ideal sites for debate. Richard Sennett argues in an urban context, in his seminal work *The Uses of Disorder* (1970)<sup>18</sup>, that public spaces should be developed to embrace the public sphere of the city and accommodate a wide range of city life where human contradictions, disagreements and ambiguities can be expressed and negotiated. Hence, sites of public protest, as well as celebration, communication, conversation and everyday social interaction are created, public space has traditionally (and ideally) been associated with social action. However, this notion of public space as an ideal site for citizenship and democratic interaction is rarely seen in practice.

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16. Light, A & Smith, J (1998), *The Production of Public Space*, Rowman & Littlefield, Oxford.

17. Mitchell, D (1995), “The End of Public Space? Peoples park, definition of the public and democracy”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85(1) 108-133.

18. Sennett, R (1970), *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life*, Faber & Faber, London.



As the urban social geographer, David Harvey<sup>19</sup>, indicates, more often than not it is the debates that surround public spaces as opposed to those about residing within the public space itself, that are prominent. Debate more often than not exists around the function, or around the development stages of public space, and little attention is paid to the democratic or societal function of the space.

It is these qualities of general public space - as a space for social action, as a medium by which debates about society can take place and as a site of debate and interaction - that make it a significant player in any 'Big Society'. Furthermore, it is those community public spaces, spaces with which local people can have a direct and everyday relationship with, that are focused upon in this research and policy paper.

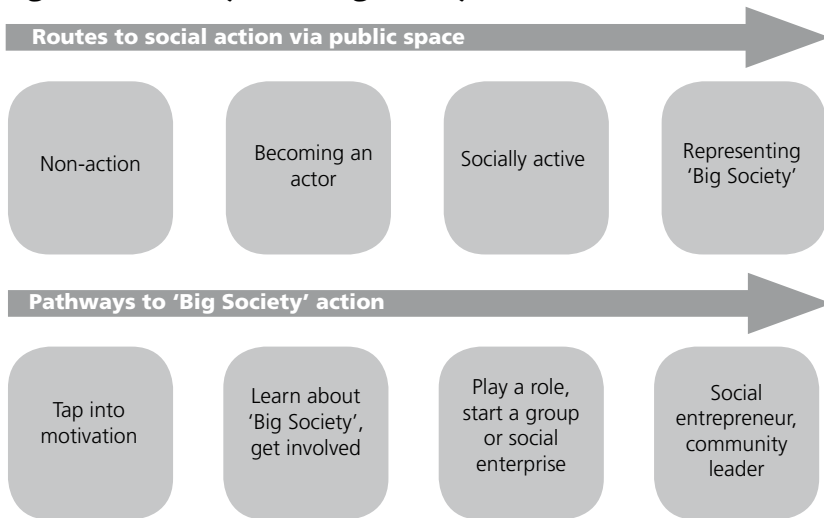
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19. David Harvey (2001), *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

# Routes to social action through public space

In considering the ways in which work in public space can assist the development of a 'Big Society' we suggest that routes to social action and pathways to a 'Big Society' should be viewed in a continuum, ranging from non action to 'Big Society' representation, which may include becoming a social entrepreneur, delivering services in a community or becoming a local leader.

**Figure 5: Pathways to a 'Big Society'**



## **a) Public space has a key role in developing social actors**

Public space has an important role to play in developing motivations for action. Motivations can be developed through the community space itself - what takes place IN the space - as well as through debate and dialogue that SURROUNDS its development.

Public space as in any facet of public policy, be it social services, housing, education or health, can act as a potential vehicle for social action. Public space however offers greater potential to effect change, due the volume of people who use, engage or have a stake in a public space, its immediacy to peoples' everyday lives and the extent to which it is easily understood.

Public space has significant potential because it is immediate, it is visible; widely used and is an issue in which everybody can have an opinion. It requires no technical or specialist knowledge. Evidence from Groundwork indicates that it involves people who would otherwise be very unlikely to do so. In particular, young people, the elderly, disabled people and those who are long-term sick, all have public space as an accessible resource and a route to social action.

In our view, public space plays and can continue to play a significant role in developing the 'Big Society'. However, we would go further and assert that public space needs to be considered as a key vehicle for creating social actors and as a key route for moving citizens to higher levels of social action and community leadership.

### **b) Becoming a 'Big Society' actor**

Non-actors may travel from a position of non-participation to getting involved in social action and learning about 'Big Society' through participation in public space projects. This can act as the start of a learning process which can facilitate pathways to deeper levels of social engagement. Participants in Groundwork projects learn, in some way, about social action, albeit unwittingly in some instances.

For instance, a non-active resident may become involved in a project for a variety of motivations and, through participation, gain the knowledge and skills, necessary to enable him or her to understand and access opportunities to become more engaged in local community life. It may be a link to a group of people seeking to address the quality of the local school, health services or policing or perhaps provide a space to bring people together to address the needs for a particular local service through the formation of a social enterprise. For example who is going to maintain the improved public space?

### **c) Being socially active in the 'Big Society'**

It is the learning process associated with engagement that is key to progressing individuals to deeper levels of social action. Fostering interest in engaging requires motivations to be fired, but also the appropriate knowledge and skills need developing at the right time and in the right way for each individual. From becoming a 'Big Society' actor and learning about potential roles, individuals can progress to roles that can stimulate action from others, for example starting a community group to pick up on issues either not being addressed locally or being addressed insufficiently. Skills

and knowledge can empower people to take action and local people require support from external organisations such as Groundwork.

#### **d) Representing the ‘Big Society’**

A public space project may lead to a member of the community gaining the knowledge, skills and confidence to become more active, take a stand, attract others to action and provide a route to local leadership. Moving and supporting local people from being committed to social action to becoming animateurs, people who enliven or encourage something, should be an objective of projects which support the development of a ‘Big Society’ which needs local leaders, serial social entrepreneur’s to support the public service reform called for. Government’s aspiration is to dismantle the “centralised bureaucracy” and public services need to be opened up to alternative deliverers, including: charities; social enterprises; communities; and private companies, with the aim of encouraging “more innovation, diversity and responsiveness to public need”.

# Learning opportunities developed through working in public space

Our work with Groundwork trusts around the country has often indicated significant levels of learning among participants in projects driven by the (re)development of the public space. Engagement in such projects has been evidenced to result in increased opportunities with regards to:

- Volunteering;
- Local people airing their concerns;
- Engaging with the state;
- Holding elected and other state bodies to account for their actions;
- Seeking citizens' views prior to taking action;
- Sharing power with citizens/groups;
- Devolving decision making through the transfer of specific powers/responsibilities to citizens/groups.

These are all strong factors in the development of a 'Big Society' and illustrate the capacity for learning through social action led development of public space, providing routes for creating a 'Big Society'. In our experience of Groundwork community public space projects we have witnessed participants learning about local politics, planning, partnerships and funding. Moreover, in some instances, the participants have become quite skilled, further motivating them to become more active.

To pay more explicit attention to promoting social action and creating actors who can represent 'Big Society', it is evident that we need to better understand individuals routes and the types of learning and support that can be provided along the route to match motivations and stimulate progression to deeper levels of engagement. As was found in our research, skills do emerge, however many may develop without specific attention or explicit acknowledgement and recognition that this learning is taking place. The routes to social action and the typology defined in this research can help with this creating more active interplay between local organisations such as Groundwork and individuals whom may be motivated to get involved but don't know how.

Furthermore, whilst we have seen a degree of learning and knowledge acquisition amongst volunteers, in a spirit of community learning and mutuality, there is also a clear recognition that some learning has emerged

through debate, conflicting priorities and discord. This is an important recognition as it indicates that social action and routes to a 'Big Society' should not shy away from discord and debate, but rather view lack of cohesion and conflict as a strong motivating factor and the raw material from which social action can emerge. In planning and promoting social action, therefore, it is important that opportunities for debate and disagreement are embraced and built into the process.

# What role does Groundwork play in creating a ‘Big Society’?

One of the UK's leading environmental regeneration organisations, Groundwork has particular experience in enabling communities and promoting social action through the (re)development of public space. Groundwork's purpose is to build sustainable communities through joint environmental and social action.

Groundwork take a holistic approach and often public space is the site in which many projects and services are developed that benefit both people and the wider environment. Groundwork, work in partnership with organisations and local people make changes in order to create better neighbourhoods, build skills and job prospects, and to live and work in a greener way.

Groundwork UK and individual Groundwork Trusts around the country have been at the forefront of the creative redevelopment of community spaces. Groundwork and its partners have put considerable energies into working with and empowering the community to engage in social action. They do this by involving residents, businesses and other local organisations in practical public space projects that improve quality of life, bring about regeneration and lay the foundations for sustainable development. Groundwork defines a ‘sustainable community’ as one, which is vibrant, healthy and safe, which values the local and global environment and where individuals and enterprise prosper.

We would suggest that the role of Groundwork in creating ‘Big Society’ is broadly fourfold:

- **Firstly** - There is undoubtedly a need for organisations who work within the public sphere, delivering public goods such as new or improved community public space, but who are not directly part of the local state. Organisations, such as Groundwork, serve as important ‘neutral’ non-governmental agencies. They are able to build up trust with the local community; their roles are not compromised by other issues and they are focussed on a particular theme - namely the redevelopment or improvement of public spaces. This does not deny the important role for the Local Authority, but recognises the important contribution that non-governmental organisations can make to the ‘Big Society’ agenda.
- **Secondly** - Staff within organisations like Groundwork can pass on their understanding of planning, politics, partnership and funding

to local people and volunteers. In this role, agencies and their staff act as triggers or catalysts to deeper levels of social action, and more attention should be paid to the learning process for those engaging with Groundwork. Furthermore, from an initial intervention, this can serve to spin-off as members of the community and volunteers start to learn from each other and work together, thus, it is hoped, moving towards 'Big Society' which perpetuates itself and precludes the need for intervention in the future.

- **Thirdly** - Staff in Non-Governmental Organisations can motivate, encourage and sustain interest. It is evident that agencies can assist by drawing on the intuitive skills of local people, thereby maintaining their interest. As such they can be significant drivers or aids to social action. Furthermore, staff can play a significant role in mediating conflict and allowing various opinions and issues to be heard and resolved.
- **Fourthly** - Agencies such as Groundwork can signpost and direct. In particular they can assist people in acquiring further knowledge, developing new skills, link people to local activity, support people in contacting the right local officials and encouraging them to play a role in local society.



## Conclusions

The health of our democracy has been of concern for some time, citizens appear to have become less empowered and less able to influence the society around them, despite a strong focus on citizen's rights and civil renewal under the previous Labour administration.

Building 'Big Society' will be achieved by giving more power to communities, encouraging people to take a more active role in creating cost-effective public services and socially just and healthy societies. Big Society needs to ensure everyone can equally engage and be equally empowered to take action. It is in our most deprived communities that the requirement for intervention is highest and the demands on public services are the greatest, yet it is these areas that the collective voice is the weakest.

Groundwork has always operated through a wide range of delivery models, working in partnership with an extensive range of partners, from local authorities and Registered Social Landlords to utility companies (e.g. United Utilities) and private enterprise (ranging from Marks & Spencer's to local SMEs). Cuts in public funding and austerity measures will see the traditional delivery models challenged and an increasing focus on 'self help' organisations will require Groundwork to be more creative in delivering public space improvements. However Groundwork's connectedness to localities means that it will have a significant role to play in facilitating the strengthening of 'self help' organisations and shaping these new delivery models.

Groundwork has a long history of successfully engaging deprived communities, has a sophisticated and well-developed understanding of community development and 'self help' approaches, however lacks a detailed understanding of how its current activity contributes to learning and skills development that can support social action and a promote deeper levels of engagement.

Public space is a useful medium to examine social action because it is 'everyday', it provides a fora for social interaction, and can assist in generating a localised sense of belonging. Work through public space can provide routes to social action and pathways to a 'Big Society'.

However, we believe that much more explicit attention needs to be given to the social action components of public space development and that this needs to be understood in terms of individuals motivations and interests. By understanding the motivatory factors of individuals, better tailored support and learning opportunities can be provided to sustain interest and

desire, encourage deeper engagement in social action and create the social entrepreneurs and community leaders that can drive 'Big Society' forward.

## Appendix: Need to acknowledge a social typology for social action

In our view, it would appear that the process of becoming more active can be fraught. In case studies we have completed for Groundwork we have come across people who have progressed from non-action to representing society, but this by no means happens in all cases, in fact it happens only in a very few, but what we want to address and promote in this appendix is the acknowledgement of the individual routes and types of support required to develop 'Big Society' actors and ultimately representatives.

In this, we posit that there are certain motivatory factors, at the outset and support needs throughout the process, which can sustain interest and desire. In an attempt to unpack this motivation and assess how this relates to types of people and their requirements to maintain motivation, we have devised a typology of citizens moving to social action through public space, based on our experience of working with Groundwork since 2003.

This typology drawn from our previous publication, 'From Community Garden to Westminster'<sup>20</sup> begins to dismantle the range of personalities who could potentially become involved in public space, as well as what is required, from both individuals and organisations, to ensure that deeper levels of social action are developed.

**The Narcissist** - The narcissist has admiration for themselves, and the work they do. The motivation for being a social actor may begin as a selfish one. They may initially see the route to 'Big Society' representative as one of personal gain. For example, their actions may result in a monetary gain in terms of house prices or a personal gain in terms of a window into a new career. They continue along the route for the reward it brings them; praise from those around them brings them self-fulfilment. These rewards sustain their interest in becoming more active, and the potential future reward drives them on. The narcissist tends to seek out pathways to deeper levels of engagement and relishes the opportunity to make links with more formal structures. In becoming an social actor, the narcissist collects knowledge and builds up skills and looks to ways of developing these further. The narcissist needs to learn how to work with others, how to make compromises and see the benefits of shared wins.

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20. McInroy, N & MacDonald, S (2005) From community garden to Westminster: Active citizenship and the role of public space, CLES, [www.cles.org.uk](http://www.cles.org.uk)

**The Altruist** - The altruist has an unselfish concern for the welfare of others; this is their motivation for being a social actor. The route to a 'Big Society' actor is one they enjoy and gain personal satisfaction from. The knowledge that their actions are helping others drives them on. Their motivation is sustained by the desire to help the community in which they live or work. Seeing the community benefit from their involvement, observing real change on the ground and hearing the real life stories of the people they help, all keep the altruist on the route to entering representative positions. In becoming a social actor, the altruist learns many skills, as they progress into higher levels of action they need to learn to be pragmatic and develop a single-mindedness.

**The Reluctant** - The reluctant may be unwilling or disinclined to become a social actor. They may, however, be motivated to become active by the ability to identify the problem and perhaps the solution, but not be able to identify enough people with a stronger motivation than themselves, to solve the problem. They may only be active because there is nobody else to do it. The reluctant, lacking in motivation, will lose interest easily and needs to see things change quickly to remain involved. If it looks like their efforts are not achieving anything, they are likely to drop out and become non-participants. The reluctant is likely to only get motivated if they can see or envisage a real difference. Like others, the reluctant needs to learn basic engagement skills but also needs to learn from the altruist. They may need to improve their self-esteem and believe that the 'what one puts in you get back' work ethic will be rewarded.

**The Hunter** - The hunter is a person who searches for change and does not give up easily on their search. Motivated by their initial desire the hunter will become active quite quickly, and stay active as long as the end goal is in sight and they are hungry to see it achieved. Keeping the hunter motivated requires quick and constant evidence that things are going right, the end goal always needs to remain in sight or the hunter's motivation may wane. The hunter needs to learn that goals are not everything. In reaching deeper levels of social action the importance of process needs to be established. If the original motivation can be channelled correctly and skills learnt to develop, the hunter can develop into a 'Big Society' representative.

**The Escapist** - The escapist is a person looking for a diversion from their daily life. They may be motivated by a desire to do something different, to take their minds off troubles in their lives or to just simply get out of the house. The escapist may be looking for friendship or company away from their home lives. To sustain the motivation of the escapist they must always have something to do. They may be well suited to larger challenges

that they can get stuck into. The escapist will work hard on the tasks given to them, but may need some variety to sustain interest over the long term. The escapist needs to learn that through action things do change. They need to learn that, although their motivation may not lead directly to a positive change, the activities they become involved in are resulting in a positive output.

**The Gardener** - The gardener enjoys the environmental aspect of public space redevelopment and may be keen to employ the skills they may already have in a public setting. The gardener may have a keen interest in the logistics of working on a large project having only previously worked in their own gardens. Developing the gardener's motivation through environmental activities may lead them into other areas of learning. Landscape planning and the politics of planning for example may become of interest to the gardener. The gardener needs to use their interest as a springboard to learn about the more complex nature of deeper levels of social action - for example knowledge about the benefits of partnership and the intricacies of funding may help them to develop.

**The Searcher** - The searcher is looking for something - but is not sure what it is they are looking for. The searcher wants to have a purpose and needs direction. They may pay a passing interest in a number of different activities. Unlike the Hunter or the Escapist, they are not as driven and are much more aimless. Sustaining the interest of the searcher involves offering them a variety of small tasks to get involved in, one of which may develop into an interest and something they can become more deeply involved in. The searcher needs to learn that even small achievements are worthwhile and needs to become more satisfied with incremental and piecemeal changes.

**The Curious** - The curious wants to know what is going on around them, they may want to be involved regardless of the activity. They are fundamentally nosey and are concerned that if they are not involved they are going to be missing out. Their interest and motivation may remain as long as others are still involved. They are not self-driven and are always going to be looking to others to maintain their interest. They are easily waylaid. The curious needs to learn that many activities are important even when they don't attract a crowd.





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