

An Assessment of Scottish Civil Society (2006)

A STRONG VALUE-DRIVEN BUT FRAGMENTED CIVIL SOCIETY IS
GAINING CONFIDENCE IN A POST-DEVOLUTION SCOTLAND

CIVICUS CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX REPORT FOR SCOTLAND

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Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)

CIVICUS Civil Society Index
An international action-research project coordinated by CIVICUS:
World Alliance for Citizen Participation



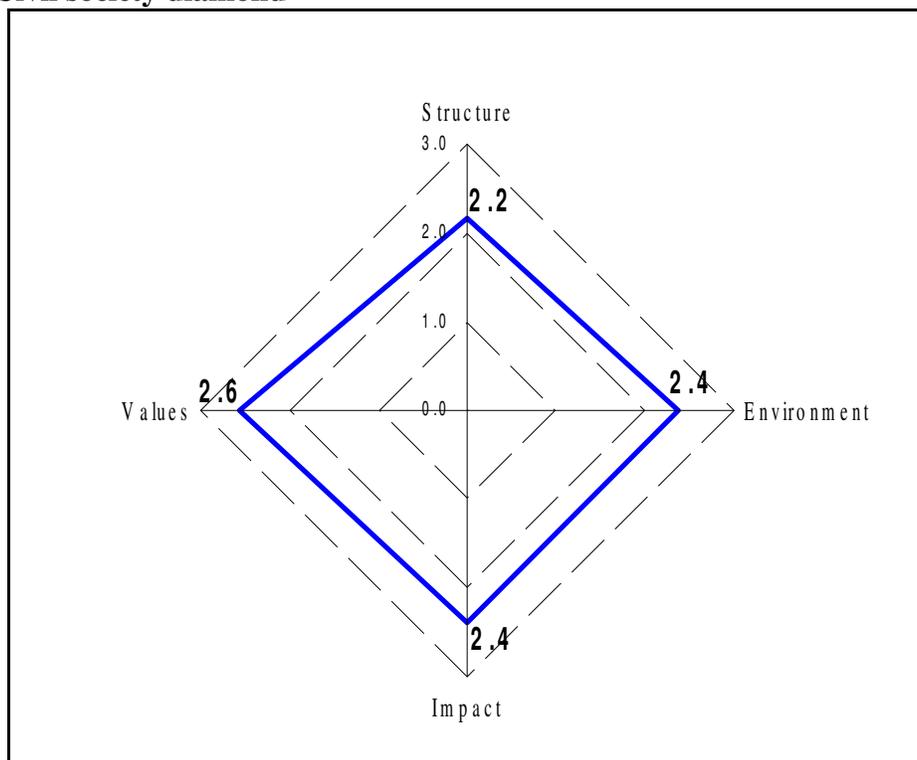
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) is a global initiative to develop a preliminary assessment of the state of civil society in different countries. In Scotland, it was led by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) with a National Advisory Group (NAG) drawn from people across a wide range of civil society sectors, such as the voluntary sector, charitable trusts and foundations, trade unions, professional associations, faith institutions, international NGOs, cooperatives and academia. The NAG defined civil society as “the act of associating to advance common interests and concerns, but not motivated by personal profit or statutory obligations.”

This project is part of a shared global initiative and is currently taking place in 50 countries around the world, each using a shared set of indicators to make the assessment. This initiative is coordinated by CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, which will produce a global report on civil society, drawing on each country’s assessment. However, within each country the project is entirely self-resourced and the national coordinating organization (NCO) has control over the methodology and can adapt it to their needs, as long as they retain the international comparative nature of this project.

In order to make this preliminary assessment, evidence was primarily collected from secondary sources available by late 2004. This was augmented by group work with the project’s NAG and a research project to collect perspectives from disenfranchised members of Scottish society in early 2005. The NAG used this information, prepared by SCVO, to make a preliminary assessment of civil society through two scoring workshops in February and June 2005, scoring civil society against 74 internationally shared indicators, developed by CIVICUS.

FIGURE 1: Civil society diamond



The Civil Society Diamond for Scotland (figure 1) is a graphical summary of the assessment. It aims to capture civil society from four perspectives; its structure – how well organised it is, its environment – the legal, regulatory, statutory and policy context within which it operates, its values – the range of values present within civil society and how constructive or divisive these may be, and finally its impact – what difference does it make to its beneficiaries and how effective is it at meeting their needs.

An ideal, strong and healthy civil society would be represented by a symmetrical diamond which would reach to the edge of the graph in all four directions. The Scottish diamond suggests that Scottish civil society is generally strong across all four dimensions, particularly around values. It appears to be a significantly stronger, larger and more symmetrical diamond than those for other European countries, such as Germany and the Czech Republic (available from www.civicius.org). Presented here is a summary of the key findings.

A values-led civil society

Civil society is very active in promoting the values of non-violence, peace, sustainability and broadmindedness in Scottish society. However, across the breadth of civil society, the values which drive different organisations and movements are diverse and not always shared.

Promoting equality & participation, with limitations

Civil society plays a crucial role in empowering people, and increasingly facilitating service-user involvement and participative governance; but there are still many ‘cliquey’ civil society organisations (CSOs), which are slow to sufficiently open up their governance to people from wider social backgrounds.

High-profile civil society coalitions

Scotland has traditional ‘islands’ of well-organised bits of civil society, which are now finding themselves increasingly connected with less-formal, high-profile and cross-cutting civil society coalitions. This took place within the recent anti-war and anti-poverty movements and responses to natural disasters.

A confident and aspirational civil society in Scotland

Scottish civil society has a strong support infrastructure, which is available from a variety of support organisations both from within civil society and from other sectors. Cooperation within civil society networks is strong and organised, particularly on shared issues of concern.

A benign operating environment, for now

Scottish civil society has considerable freedom to associate and enjoys high levels of public spiritedness and enthusiasm from citizens. However, it is a sector increasingly dependent on the state due to a government that is increasingly interested in using civil society as a public service delivery mechanism.

A loud and vocal civil society

Scotland has a very active and vocal civil society lobby, which has grown in strength since devolution. However, it is stronger at highlighting the moral and emotive arguments rather than the technical side, such as the complex legal, financial and economic arguments.

Meeting need, but whose priorities?

Scottish civil society is meeting a tremendous amount of need, particularly with the marginalised, but the needs are enormous, and civil society is often forced to work within public policy priorities.

In general, in contrast to a historically fragmented civil society in Scotland, there now appears to be a resurgence of interest in civil society-wide activities. Recently, huge public movements have been generated by Scottish civil society, exemplified by the anti-Iraq war marches, responses to natural disasters, such as the Asian Tsunami, and high profile civil society campaigns during Scotland's tenure of the G8 meetings in 2005. These initiatives may indicate a broad cross-sectoral foundation, on which civil society actors can build on in the future.

What are the particular benefits of the CSI in Scotland? The CSI findings could be used to set common goals for civil society. They should be taken as a way of raising informed debate, and in particular as a way of shining a new light on existing issues, rather than a rigorous assessment. This assessment is meant to be an iterative process. It is valuable for Scottish civil society to be self-reflective, not just doing, but also looking at what has been done, and sharing this good practice internationally.

Finally, it is hoped that this report will be widely read in Scotland and showcased at the CIVICUS World Assembly in June 2006. This major international event will bring over a thousand delegates from over a hundred countries to Glasgow annually for the next three years. SCVO is the lead local host organisation for this event, which will be an ideal place to share an understanding of Scotland's civil society with the world.