

An Assessment of Welsh Civil Society (2005)

CIVICUS CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX REPORT FOR WALES

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CIVICUS Civil Society Index Short Assessment Tool (CSI-SAT)
An international action-research project coordinated by CIVICUS:
World Alliance for Citizen Participation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the Civil Society Index project in Wales. It seeks to provide an evidence base for informed discussion among people from different parts of civil society, public bodies, politicians and the private sector regarding the issues that are critical in building a healthy vibrant Welsh civil society. The report also aims to enable comparison of civil society in Wales with other countries. Civil society is seen as the space between the family and state and private sector organisations. As such it includes a large number of diverse organisations, including all voluntary organisations, professional bodies, trade unions, local informal and formal community and sports organisations and faith bodies.

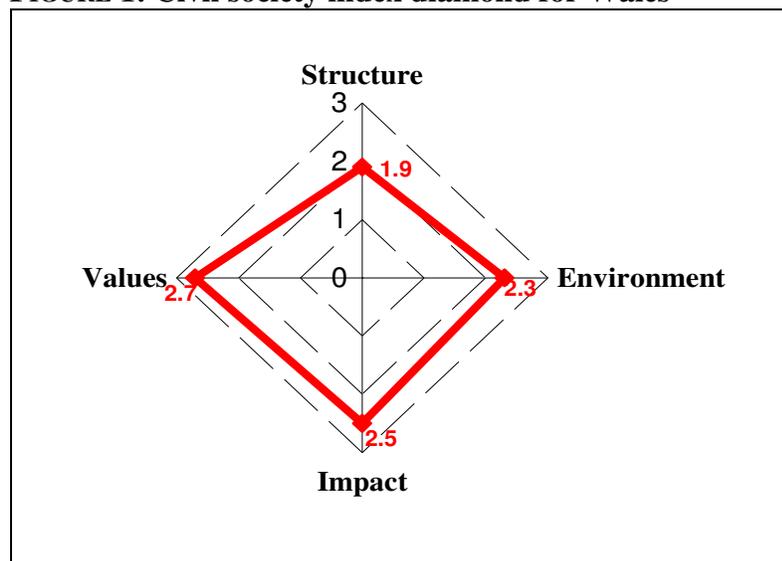
This report seeks to provide a comprehensive assessment of the current state of Welsh civil society, with a particular focus on its strengths and weaknesses. It is part of an international project coordinated by CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation in more than 50 countries around the world. It uses a tool, the Civil Society Index (CSI), which is a comprehensive participatory needs assessment and action-planning tool for civil society actors at the country level.

The CSI uses 74 indicators to score the strengths of civil society, which are grouped under four headings or dimensions: structure, environment, values and impact. The indicators are a mix of qualitative and quantitative ones, and are normalised to a score between 0 and 3. These are then averaged to give an overall score between 0 and 3 for the four key dimensions of civil society: structure, environment, values and impact - and represented using a diamond shape.

THE FINDINGS

The Civil Society Diamond for Wales is shown below (figure 1), and shows that, with scores between 1.9 and 2.7, civil society in Wales is relatively well developed, with a strong value base. It operates in a generally supportive environment, and has a high impact on society.

FIGURE 1: Civil society index diamond for Wales



Wales is, in general, a positive environment for civil society, with a good socio-economic context and, since devolution, healthy state-civil society relationships. Relationships with the private sector are less well developed.

Strong points include civil society's ability to meet perceived needs in society, empower citizens, hold the state and private sector accountable and influence public policy in the impact dimension. Civil society also showed high scores in indicators that measured attitudes and actions to promote non-violence, gender equity, poverty eradication, environmental sustainability and internal democracy. Not all parts of civil society are equally active in all areas, but it was felt that significant contributions were made by civil society organisations in all these areas.

Civil society was seen as fairly well organised, including a diversity of participants, but there were also significant areas with room for improvement. The depth of involvement of people in civil society and the proportion of income that is donated to charitable causes had particularly low scores. This was reflected in other scores, where civil society organisations feel that they lack financial and human resources to meet the needs they see in society.

CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions of the reports are:

- Civil society in Wales is generally healthy and diverse and has a positive impact on the lives of people living in Wales.
- Particular strengths include the values held by and practiced by many civil society organisations and changes in public attitudes and policy as a result of the work done by civil society organisations.
- There are some areas where improvements are possible, including the depth of involvement of people in civil society organisations, the links between different areas of civil society and relationships with some public bodies and the private sector in general.
- Opportunities exist for further cooperation and collaboration between organisations to improve civil society and increase its impact.

NEXT STEPS

There was a sense of expectation in the meeting of the project's Stakeholder Assessment Group (SAG) that there were links which could be made to make civil society stronger, that there were challenges that needed to be met, and that there is a basis for working together under a banner which is wider than the voluntary sector, trade union movement, or faith bodies. What was less clear was how to bring this about. The SAG did not include many decision-makers from different areas of civil society, so there was a reluctance to formulate strategic plans or promise to build alliances.

The findings of this study will be publicised as widely as possible. This will include a conference based on the findings of this report and ongoing dialogue with people from civil society, politicians, public and private sectors. This publication should also serve as a useful introduction for students of civil society and related themes.

In its English version, this publication will also serve as the basis for international comparisons within the framework of the Civil Society Index project as a whole, including a global CSI workshop. CIVICUS will then evaluate and refine the methodology employed on the basis of current experience and findings and plans to repeat the project in the future.