



**The National Positive Ageing Strategy:
Exploring the role of the Community and Voluntary Sector in
Ireland**

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to act as a ‘think piece’ that offers an informed opinion on potential roles for the Community and Voluntary sector in the formulation and implementation and review of the emerging National Positive Ageing Strategy (NPAS) in Ireland. Commissioned by Older & Bolder, ‘an alliance of non-governmental organisations that champions the rights of older people’ (Older & Bolder, 2011), the paper is particularly timely as the NPAS is currently at draft stage, and awaiting consultation with relevant stakeholders. While the paper draws on appropriate international research evidence, it does not represent the outcome of a systematic research process. Rather, it aims to provide the basis for a discussion between interested parties, perhaps to enable a respectful exchange of views, based on the common goal of producing the best possible National Positive Ageing Strategy for the Republic of Ireland. In light of this brief, the paper is the result of a collaborative process between the authors and member organisations of Older & Bolder and the NGO Liaison Group. The authors presented an initial draft paper on 23 June 2011 at a workshop attended by representatives of fifteen advocacy organisations (listed in Table 1). Based on discussions held at the workshop, the paper was subsequently revised in a way that reflects participants’ contributions and expert knowledge of age-sector organisations.

The paper has four key aims:

1. To articulate the purpose, values and vision of the Community and Voluntary sector in light of the NPAS;
2. To act as a discussion point for Community and Voluntary sector organisations in planning their work in relation to the NPAS;
3. To use relevant international examples to highlight the role of Community and Voluntary sector organisations in development, implementation and review of the NPAS; and

4. To provide a framework for Community and Voluntary sector organisations to identify a priority role in the NPAS.

Table 1

<p>Workshop Participants</p> <p>June 23, 2011</p> <p>Active Retirement Ireland</p> <p>Age Action Ireland</p> <p>Age & Opportunity</p> <p>Alzheimer Society of Ireland</p> <p>Atlantic Philanthropies</p> <p>Carers Association</p> <p>Disability Federation of Ireland</p> <p>Irish Centre for Social Gerontology</p> <p>Irish Hospice Foundation</p> <p>NGO liaison group for the National Positive Ageing Strategy</p> <p>Older & Bolder</p> <p>Older Women's Network</p> <p>Senior Help Line</p> <p>Society of St Vincent de Paul</p>
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Against this background, the paper seeks to make two key points. Firstly, in taking a bird's eye view of the role of the Community and Voluntary sector in relation to the state, the market and community it highlights the pivotal role that Community and Voluntary sector organisations play in maintaining the social contract. Arguments and conceptual ideas are drawn from internationally recognised work concerning the relationship between the third sector and the welfare state. Secondly, in terms of analysis, the paper offers a first attempt at identifying key priorities specific to the Irish context. The common purpose of Community and Voluntary sector organisations concerned with ageing and older people is in promoting positive ageing through a number of key principles: independence, participation, intergenerational solidarity and the promotion of a rights-based approach

throughout the life course. A common goal shared by the voluntary organisations who are members of the NGO Liaison Group is to produce a world class NPAS for Ireland.

What is the 'Third Sector'?

From the time of John Stuart Mill the role of 'co-operatives' in compensating for 'market failure,' and as a sign of the 'improvement of mankind' has been recognised (Mill, 1852: IV.7.21). In modern democracies and capitalist economies it is still acknowledged that neither the state nor the market can fully meet the legitimate needs and wants of citizens and consumers (O'Hara in Borzaga and Defourney, 2001: 149; Putnam, 2000). In recent decades, efforts have been made to quantify the extent to which the 'non-profit sector' provides services where the market fails or the state is deficient (Salamon and Anheiner, 1996: 1). Gaps in public or market provision of goods and services are often filled by families or communities. In some states, social norms and cultural practices mean that families and communities are expected to provide informal care or financial help. In so-called familial systems, the state plays a residual role in the form of poverty prevention or means-tested benefits and services (Saraceno, 2010). Where a community provides a service, or a group mobilises to campaign on a particular issue, these organisations fall within the 'third sector' (Buckingham, 2010). According to Leonard and Johansson (2007: 40), the third sector 'refers to all those organisations that are non-government and not-for-profit'. The category includes 'co-operatives, voluntary associations, non-governmental organisations, popular movements and nonprofit organisations' (Pestoff, 1992: 22). Increasingly, the important intermediary role of organisations of the third sector, which operate *across* public, private and community sectors, is recognised.

There has been some discussion as to how wide to spread the net in terms of the types of organisations to be included in the third sector. The most comprehensive attempt to understand the third sector is referred to as the *John Hopkins Project*, a US study undertaken at the turn of the millennium and spanning 46 countries, including Ireland (Donoghue, Anheier and

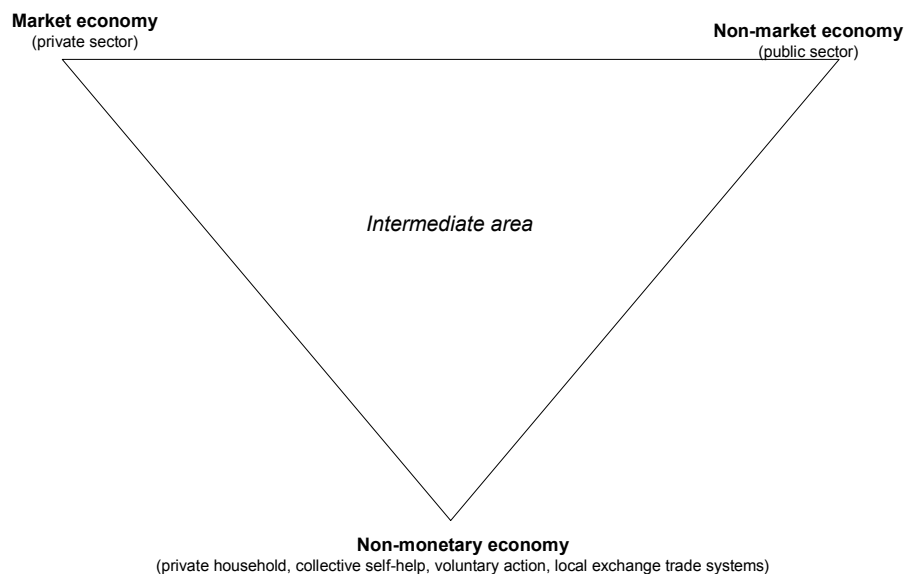
Salamon, 1999). The project, billed as ‘the largest systematic effort ever undertaken to analyze the scope, structure, financing, and impact of the nonprofit activity throughout the world’ (Center for Non Profit Research, 1998), has been critiqued by European researchers. Evers and Laville (2004: 11), for example, argue that the classifications used in the *John Hopkins* project, presented as universal, are in fact biased to fit an American context. They suggest that knowledge of the third sector must be ‘more sensitive to regional and national realities’.² For the purposes of this paper, the key defining characteristic of the third sector in Ireland is the dual role of many organisations. Community and Voluntary sector organisations often play practical roles in the lives of vulnerable or marginalised people, for example in relation to respite care, sheltered housing and end of life care. However, the same organisations also play a vital role in providing advocacy and leadership on issues of national importance. Organisations in the third sector recognise a tension created by being on the one hand a ‘partner’ with the government (e.g. receiving funding to deliver services) and on the other hand providing critical feedback on policy and other decisions. Significantly, the experience of the Community and Voluntary sector indicates that the terms of engagement between the state and the sector are unequal and that the Community and Voluntary sector as a whole is not recognised as an equal partner. In order to provide a conceptual framework capable of incorporating these dynamics, the paper employs an approach to understanding the third sector in a European context.

The European approach to understanding the third sector, reflected above all in the work of Adalbert Evers and colleagues (Evers, 1990; Evers and Laville, 2004), has ‘three essential parameters: the type of organisation involved, intermediary nature of the third sector, and a socio-political context that is as important as the economic dimension’ (Evers and Laville, 2004: 11). The line between state and civil society is re-drawn by these scholars to reflect better

² Findings from the John Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (CNP) project were published in 1998-2000, and so are now quite dated. The project included all nonprofits, not differentiating between sporting organisations, church and community organisations. Further details are available at: <http://ccss.jhu.edu/index.php?section=content&view=9&sub=3>.

the dynamic role and potential of third sector organisations as those that generate ‘collective wealth rather than a return on individual investment’ (Evers and Laville, 2004: 13). This perspective on the ‘third sector’ is particularly useful in the context of ‘welfare pluralism,’ when separation of state and civil society is not so clear, particularly if some third sector organisations have acted as intermediaries between state and citizens. Examples include provision of education or healthcare by religious orders, or the role of co-operatives and mutual societies in underpinning social security systems. The intersection of these three sectors has been classically depicted in the form of a ‘welfare triangle’ (Evers, 1990) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Welfare Triangle

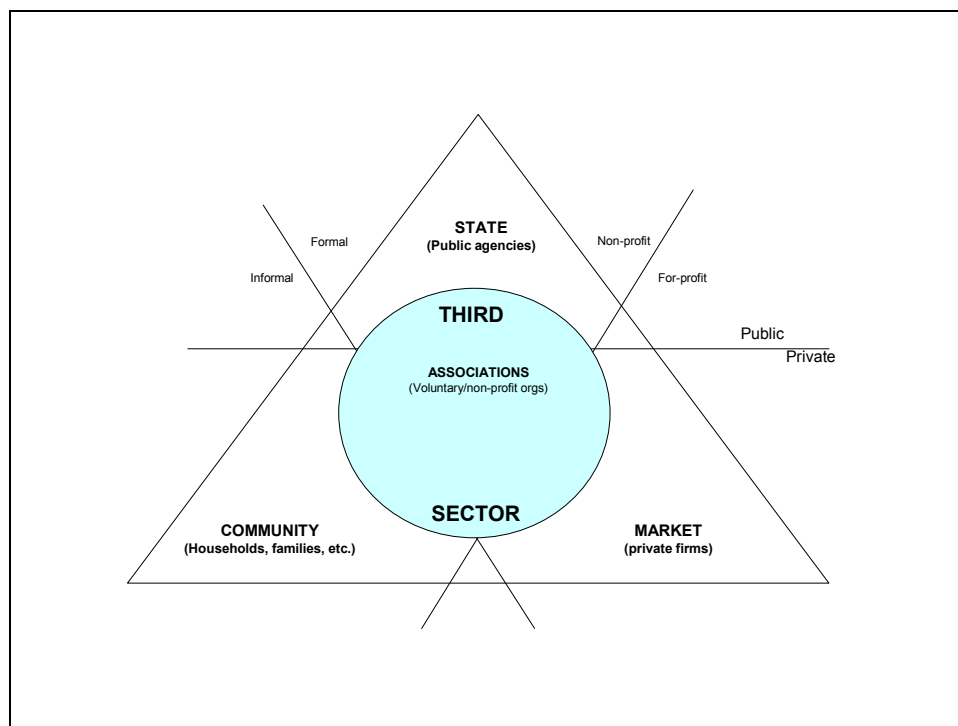


Source: Evers (1990)

Evers’s welfare triangle identifies the pivotal role of the third sector as intermediaries, acting ‘in a kind of tension field’ (Evers and Laville, 2004: 15). Third sector organisations are influenced by state-led policy and legal frameworks, market forces, political culture and values of citizens as well as

by social and cultural norms at the level of the family and the individual. Of particular note in an Irish context is the unequal relationship between state and third sector organisations. Before expanding on the tension field, it helps to visualise the exact position of the third sector *vis à vis* the state, private and community sectors. Pestoff (1992) has graphically depicted Evers's welfare triangle as the 'The Welfare Mix' (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The Welfare Mix



Adapted from Pestoff (1992: 25)

Pestoff's (1992) model illustrates the position of the third sector as a central actor in the welfare mix. Third sector organisations navigate between pillars of social and political life, never static, ever changing, adapting and transforming relations and contracts between state and citizen and between market and consumer. Notions like 'diversity' and 'hybridity' have been used to describe this role (Buckingham, 2010; Osborne, 2005). 'Diversity' concerns the fact that third-sector organisations engage in a wide range of activities from service delivery to advocacy. In an Irish context, this diversity is reflected in the fact that community organisations providing meals-on-wheels services in

conjunction with local partnership companies are as much part of the third sector as national level organisations making recommendations to government ministers and senior civil servants. While there are important distinctions between community organisations operating at local level and voluntary organisations working at national level, this diversity can be used by government as a means to assign Community and Voluntary sector organisations a residual role. This is particularly likely where the state has no legal obligation to consult the third sector when developing policy. The concept of 'hybridity' has been used by Buckingham (2010: 2) to describe 'the increasing involvement of third sector organisations in government contracts.' A contemporary example in Ireland is the emerging work of Third Age on the National Advocacy Programme, a programme that was initiated by the Health Service Executive.

In times of economic crisis, governments have sought to return to the 'third sector' to provide services, and meet demand most notably through social enterprise, most relevant in cases of market failure (O'Hara in Borzaga and Defourney, 2001: 151). Contemporary examples can be found in the Programme for Government in Ireland, in the form of a commitment to social enterprise, and through the concept of the *Big Society* as articulated by the Conservative-led coalition government in England (Buckingham, 2010).³ In this context, third sector organisations have been the subject of scrutiny on everything from accountability of management, to representation of membership, roles played in decision-making, advocacy and in quality of services delivered (Evers, 2005; Osborne, 2005; Keenan, 2008; Haugh and Rubery, 2011). While these studies are extremely relevant, the purpose of the current analysis is not to provide a detailed literature review, but rather to highlight the role of the third sector to the development of the NPAS in Ireland. As such, we now return to the 'tension field' as identified by Evers and Laville (2004).

³ The Big Society is promoted as 'a massive transfer of power from Whitehall to local communities' with the goals of 'opening up public services, empowering communities and encouraging social action.' For more information, see <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/big-society-overview>.

The Tension Field

Both Pestoff and Evers's notions of the 'third sector' take account of the tension that exists for third sector organisations in negotiating their advocacy and service delivery roles. At the heart of this tension is the tendency on the part of government officials to identify state and market as the primary pillars of society and the third sector as an 'auxiliary force' (Evers and Laville, 2004: 21). Evers and Laville (2004: 22) attribute this problem to a conflation of the third sector and civil society. While the former relates to a huge range of organisations, the latter maintains an important function in democratic politics. For organisations operating in the third sector, 'there is a fundamental tension between the tendency to treat the third sector as an alternative to state-based services and its importance as an expression of civil society' (Evers and Laville 2004: 22). In fact, the position of third sector organisations as neither state nor market leaves them well positioned to take on two distinct influential roles (Table 2). This is especially the case when planning for major changes such as demographic ageing. These roles, as intermediaries between state and citizen, and as leaders of innovation in designing policies, are particularly significant in the context of a recession. Most notably, the capacity of the sector to innovate through 'activist initiatives' has been formally recognised in the Developmental Welfare State (National Economic and Social Council, 2005).⁴

⁴ The Developmental Welfare State (DWS), an initiative of the National Economic and Social Council, is a blueprint for social policy development in Ireland. The DWS is based on the premise that the task of the social policy system should be to support each individual person to meet their full potential. Such a welfare system comprises three overlapping elements: tax and welfare transfers, the provision of services, and activist initiatives (National Economic and Social Council, 2005: ix-xviii).

Table 2: Roles for Community and Voluntary sector in Tension Field

<i>MULTIPLE ROLES FOR COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR IN PLANNING FOR AN AGEING POPULATION</i>	<u>INTERMEDIARY ROLE</u>	<u>LEADERSHIP ROLE</u>
	Link between state and citizen	'Activist initiatives' in Developmental Welfare State
	Advocacy and service delivery	Promotion of intergenerational solidarity underpinning social contract

The significant role of the Community and Voluntary sector identified by Evers (1990) and Pestoff (1992) contrasts with governmental assignation of roles for the Community and Voluntary sector which could be added as a third category named 'auxiliary'. Under this approach government carefully controls consultation processes on major policy changes, such as the National Positive Ageing Strategy, and membership of influential decision-making bodies, such as the Community and Voluntary pillar of social partnership.

Role of Community and Voluntary sector in promoting social solidarity

It could be argued that the tension identified by Evers and Laville (2004) as a defining characteristic of the third sector is in fact an ever-present tension in the contemporary pluralist welfare mix. In democratic systems, there is a persisting tension between representation and policy outcome. The ways in which groups are represented by civil society organisations (or in electoral politics) on the one hand and policy designed for that group on the other is under-researched (Carney, 2010: Carney et al., 2011). The dynamic role of the third sector as a navigator between pillars of the welfare mix leads it to be associated with this tension. In fact, the tension correctly identified by Evers and Laville (2004) can be linked to the fundamentals of the social contract and, in particular, the role of the 'public spirit' essential to democracy. Evers and Laville (2004) identify that the idea of being public spirited, in light of the freedoms and equality enjoyed in a democratic system, is dependent on a certain level of social solidarity: 'This concept of solidarity laid the philosophical foundations of social law and legitimized the first compulsory

social insurance schemes of the twentieth century' (Evers and Laville, 2004). The idea of 'a debt that generations owed to one another' (Dubois, 1985 cited in Evers and Laville, 2004: 24) or 'intergenerational solidarity' underpins the social contract.

Role of Community and Voluntary sector in supporting the Social Contract

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to unpack the merits of different forms of democracy, it is worth noting that the level of public service and income support available to citizens is a product of the social contract. At its most fundamental, the social contract defines who is responsible for care, for earning, for decision-making and for service delivery. Different forms of democratic rule lead to differentiated roles for state, private and community sectors. Most pertinently, in social democratic states, such as Norway, Sweden and Denmark, third sector organisations tend to invest more of their resources in lobbying government to provide services: 'In Sweden, with its long and strong tradition of popular movements, voluntary organisations are important in strengthening democracy and citizenship' (Leonard and Johansson, 2007: 40). In liberal democratic states like Ireland, where the family provides most social support, third sector organisations are more likely to provide services.

Ireland: policy design for older people in a hybrid system of social protection

The Irish system of social protection has been identified as a 'hybrid' system where state, market and third sectors combine to provide services which the family cannot provide. According to the National Economic and Social Council (2005: 35), the term 'hybrid' 'usually refers to Ireland's mix of means-tested, insurance-based and universalist income supports and service arrangements'. 'Hybrid' also implies 'the constellation of actors necessarily and currently involved in providing services... from self-employed family doctors through not-for-profit church organisations to salaried public employees' (National Economic and Social Council, 2005: 35). As such, the third sector in Ireland is a particularly clear example of the kind of hybridity identified as a defining

characteristic of the sector earlier in the paper. The residual role for the state and the high level of family solidarity in Ireland has specific outcomes in terms of healthcare, income, participation and social security of older people. The system is *ad hoc* and residual (Timonen et al., 2006), and gaps do emerge. The hybrid has produced a two-tier healthcare system where private insurance is incentivised and free public care is contingent on means-testing. For example, people aged 70 and over lost an entitlement to free primary care in October 2008. Similarly, state pension payments are based on 'poverty prevention' rather than 'income replacement' (National Economic and Social Council, 2005: 57). As older people are outside the labour market, the focus on labour market activation measures excludes them from opportunities to increase their income.

Across the system, the diversity of service providers is regulated by the state through a corporatist style of decision-making termed social partnership. Community and Voluntary sector organisations were signatories to a number of these agreements, most recently *Toward 2016* in 2006. It is worth noting, however, that only seventeen organisations are members of the community and voluntary pillar of social partnership, and pillar membership is on invitation by government. While social partnership has been less active since the onset of recession in 2008, the system of social protection existing in 2011 represents the product of social partnership negotiations dating back to the mid-1980s (see Carney et al., 2011). Partnership allows for a diversity of actors to be involved in provision of public goods and services, but can also result in piecemeal provision as it lacks the 'internal logic' of social democratic welfare states (National Economic and Social Council, 2005). Social democratic welfare states operate a form of social citizenship, based on rights, which itself is fortified by a political culture founded on the value of collective provision and equality. In such systems, benefits are universal and not primarily related to labour market participation (Timonen, 2003: 2). In the Republic of Ireland, a history of colonial rule has led to precedence for the Republican values of freedom and political rights. Freedom takes precedence over equality, and there is no state-based solidarity contract like that in social democratic states. Rather, the hybrid system is noted for its 'resilience and

capacity to adjust' – a characteristic which 'might not be forthcoming if it were a welfare state with more defined characteristics' (National Economic and Social Council, 2005: 35). However, the Irish system's major flaw arises when particular subsets of citizens are inadequately represented, as there is potential for those who need services to have too little say in what is provided.

The exclusion of older people from the labour market and, arguably, from society as one becomes more dependent, leaves elders particularly vulnerable in the hybrid welfare system. Without a principle of universal entitlement, access to services (such as long-term care) is always contingent on available resources: either one's own ability to pay, or the state's commitment to providing subvention from the prohibitive costs of privatised care. The role of third sector organisations in providing services, but also protecting the rights of groups who are less politically influential, must be given a legitimate status in the emerging NPAS. On that note, the following section provides an overview of Community and Voluntary sector organisations with a focus on ageing in the Republic of Ireland.

Ageing in the Republic of Ireland: Third Sector Organisations

Table 3 provides an overview of Community and Voluntary organisations operating in the Republic, revealing a diversity of organisations working in the ageing sector. It is worth noting that Table 3 lays no claim to be comprehensive. In particular, many organisations may not (yet) identify themselves with the ageing sector, but could have a key role to play in developing the NPAS. For example, children's organisations may have a stake in planning a NPAS on the basis of a commitment to intergenerational solidarity. Moreover, most organisations identified in Table 2 operate at the national level. There are many more community level organisations working, for example, through local development companies and family resource centres, that have a potentially valuable contribution to make to the NPAS. These local level organisations merit investigation at a later date.

Despite the lack of comprehensiveness, the information presented in Table 3 suggests a degree of coherence concerning the work of the organisations

listed. All of these organisations work together in some capacity. In fact, even a brief overview of their main activities suggests that together they represent a considerable force, working to the benefit of older people in the following areas: advocacy and representation; service delivery and leisure; care and carers.⁵ These areas of work broadly reflect the overarching themes of the NPAS: participation, security and health, drawing on the World Health Organization (WHO) Active Ageing Framework, with information and research as an additional concern. In some instances, organisations work on behalf of older people in diverse areas simultaneously. For example, some organisations advocate for older people in social partnership, while also providing practical services and home-help programmes. Some of the larger organisations have an aptitude for advocacy and research which can act as a catalyst for service development. Other organisations may be primarily concerned with providing positive experiences of old age through creating opportunities to participate in artistic and sporting activities or volunteer work. Others still have a particular capacity to engage older people in grass-roots political campaigns. Table 2 gives a sense of the breadth and diversity of work underway across the ageing sector. Such work challenges stereotypes and provides ‘spaces for change’ where older people can meet, be active and challenge the status quo (Cornwall and Gaventa 2000; Chong, 1991).

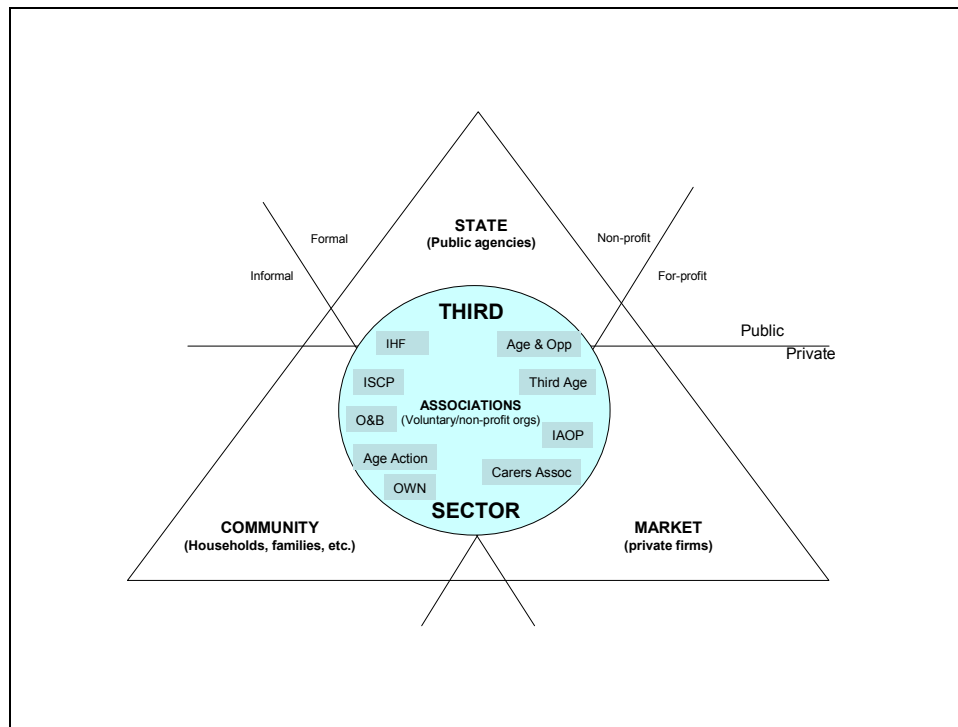
⁵ In fact, the full list of activities undertaken by Community and Voluntary sector organisations on behalf of older people is too long to include in its entirety. Roles include awareness-raising, advocacy, lobbying, service delivery, support to individual and affiliate members, research and policy analysis. Development and implementation of educational, cultural, social and political programmes with older people are also significant areas of work.

Table 3: Age Sector Organisations in Ireland

NAME OF ORGANISATION	STATED PURPOSE
Active Retirement Ireland (ARI)	"Purpose is to enable older people enjoy a full and active life and advocate for them."
Age Action Ireland	"A charity which promotes positive ageing, and better policies and services for older people."
Age and Opportunity	"Age & Opportunity is the national not-for-profit organisation that promotes opportunities for greater participation by older people in society through partnerships and collaborative programmes."
Ageing Well Network (AWN)	"The network is an independent group of leaders, heads of organisations and strategic thinkers who share a <i>Vision of "an Ireland that is one of the best countries in the world in which to grow old"</i> .
Alone	"ALONE works with vulnerable older people, providing long term housing, a befriending service and supports in the community."
Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI)	"A national voluntary organisation with an extensive national network of branches, regional offices and services that aims to provide people with all forms of dementia, their families and carers with the necessary support to maximise their quality of life."
Carers' Association	"The Carers' Association is Ireland's national voluntary organisation for and of family carers in the home. Family carers provide high levels of care to a range of people including frail older people, people with severe disabilities, the terminally ill and children with special needs."
Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI)	"(DFI) works to ensure that Irish society is fully inclusive of people with disabilities and disabling conditions so that they can exercise fully their civil, social and human rights. In pursuit of this vision DFI acts as an advocate for the voluntary disability sector and supports organisations to further enable people with disabilities."
Friends of the Elderly	"Friends of the Elderly is passionate about enhancing the quality of life of older people. We provide direct services including residential care homes, nursing homes and dementia care homes. Our day clubs, home support, home visiting, telephone friendship and grant-giving services help older people live independently at home."
Irish Association of Older People	"The Association provides a forum for older people to act as a social force. Through its information service, newsletter and conferences it affords an opportunity for debate and action. It networks at European and national level with statutory and voluntary associations... Activists within the Association participate in partnership for a..., engage in the process of seeking a new vision for older people, firmly established on the principles of respect, dignity and choice."
Irish Hospice Foundation (IHF)	"The Irish Hospice Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation that promotes the hospice philosophy and supports the development of hospice and palliative care."
Irish Senior Citizens Parliament (ISCP)	"The Irish Senior Citizens' Parliament is a non-partisan political organisation working to promote the views of older people in policy development and decision-making. The Parliament is run by older volunteers who are elected annually at the Annual Parliament Meeting."
Older and Bolder	"Older & Bolder is an alliance of non-governmental organisations that champions the rights of all older people, and seeks to combat ageism. The alliance speaks with a collective voice on key issues for older people and provides campaign opportunities for collective action by older people"
Older Women's Network (OWN)	"OWN is a unique membership organisation. Our mission is to bring women together, to advocate for and influence policy through information, education, capacity and confidence building to empower, encourage and support older women"
St. Vincent de Paul (SVP)	"The Society has extensive experience of working with a diverse range of people who experience poverty and exclusion. Through a network of over 9,500 volunteers, it is strongly committed to working for social justice and advocates the creation of a more just and caring society."
Third Age Foundation/Senior Help Line (Third Age)	"Third Age is an organisation which promotes and celebrates the contribution of older people to Irish life... over 800 volunteers give their time and expertise variously throughout Ireland as active listeners, tutors, advocates, befrienders, nutritionists. This work impacts positively on thousands of people of all ages."

Source: Missions are quoted directly from organisations' websites.

This overview of the sector highlights not only the breadth of community activity by and for older people in Ireland, but also the pivotal role that community organisations play in terms of both service provision and in lobbying on behalf of older people. The development and implementation of the National Positive Ageing Strategy has been a campaign goal of Older & Bolder since 2007. Returning to Pestoff's (1992) version of the welfare mix, Figure 3 identifies a selection of the Community and Voluntary sector organisations listed in Table 3, positioned within the third sector of the welfare mix in the Republic of Ireland. The Figure illustrates that the organisations listed in Table 3 already occupy an influential place in the provision of services and representation of older people's interests in the Republic of Ireland. The work of Community and Voluntary sector organisations enhances the experience of growing older in Ireland. Without these efforts, the experience of ageing in Ireland could become confined to narrow roles limited by structural barriers, such as the age ceiling on labour market participation, and minimum standards in market-led health care provision.

Figure 3: Irish Ageing Organisations in the Welfare Mix

Source: Adapted from Pestoff (1992). See Table 3 for full names of organisations.

Given the dynamic role of the third sector identified in the welfare mix, there is a strong argument for identifying key roles for Community and Voluntary organisations in the NPAS. A recent report on progress made by the National Children's Strategy found that lack of integration of Community and Voluntary sector organisations in strategies of national importance has been problematic (Children's Rights Alliance, 2011: 5). This experience implies that a clearly defined role for the third sector in the national strategy, from inception, would increase the likelihood of the goals of the NPAS being implemented. The influential position of community organisations as providers of important links between citizen and state is also evidenced in the role of Community and Voluntary sector organisations as advocates for older people. This dual role as lobbyist and service provider should be clearly outlined in the NPAS.

To summarise, the bounty and diversity of Community and Voluntary sector organisations listed in Table 3 is a reflection of the hybrid nature of the Irish system of social protection. It is beyond the scope of this paper to outline in

detail the complex relations between third sector organisations and the pillars of state, public and private sectors. The more formalised role of the Community and Voluntary pillar of social partnership, which has been described in detail elsewhere, makes Ireland unique from an international perspective (Carney et al., 2011). Viewed in this way, it becomes apparent that Community and Voluntary sector organisations are integral to the welfare mix in Ireland. This phenomenon deserves more focused research to be fully recognised. However, for the purposes of this paper acknowledging the work of Community and Voluntary organisations in the welfare mix, suggests the necessity of developing the NPAS with a central and clearly articulated role for the third sector. At the very least, a statutory sector which genuinely understands the role of the Community and Voluntary sector is an important means of bringing the voice of senior citizens to the table. However, this is just one side of the equation. If the NPAS is genuinely to represent the interests of those affected by ageing, how those voices are heard and responded to is an equally valid concern. The remainder of the paper outlines possible roles for the sector in influencing the drafting, planning and implementation of the NPAS.

The National Positive Ageing Strategy

The long-anticipated National Positive Ageing Strategy represents the first strategy document of its kind in the Republic that relates to the specific opportunities and challenges associated with population ageing. Ireland has considerable recent experience of formulating national strategies for other citizen groups. In this context, certain lessons drawn from experience of the National Children's Strategy and the National Disability Strategy may also be applicable to the NPAS.

Capacity of C&V Sector to innovate

A key finding of a recent study of the Life Cycle approach to policy-making was that Community and Voluntary sector organisations work effectively as a collective on important issues (Carney et al., 2011). Of particular note is the study's finding that participant organisations (referred to as Civil Society

Organisations) form coalitions when possible and/or necessary (Carney et al., 2011). Much as the creativity of the Community and Voluntary sector was identified in the Developmental Welfare State (National Economic and Social Council, 2005), Carney et al. (2011) confirmed in their study high levels of adaptability and innovation amongst Community and Voluntary sector organisations. Of particular note, they found evidence of innovation and creativity in the Community and Voluntary sector that is particularly useful in a recession and/or at times of crisis. Given the scale of the task facing those leading national policy planning for an ageing population, it seems prudent to factor this unique skillset of the Community and Voluntary sector into the NPAS. Of note however is the view of some organisations that the NPAS is being drafted without meaningful consultation with the NGO Liaison Group. Some Community and Voluntary sector organisations have reported frustration with the *ad hoc* approach to consultation adopted by some government departments. Serious thought must be given to the creation of meaningful and inclusive structures through which state and third sector can engage in policy development. The development of practical methods for increasing the number of opportunities that Community and Voluntary sector groups and their members have to participate in policy development would certainly contribute to the 'generation of collective wealth' (Evers and Laville, 2004: 13).

International Standards

Recent research into the ways in which some citizen groups are represented by third sector organisations across the life cycle demonstrates the importance of national strategies in establishing a clear link between international standards (such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and policy outcomes for citizen groups at the national level (Carney et al., 2011: 66). The shift to UN commitments is particularly significant in residual welfare states as it opens the door for a set of entitlements on the basis of citizenship rather than some other qualification criteria. A shift to a rights-based framework might allow older people to age with confidence, without fear, for example, of the potentially catastrophic costs of long-term

care (Timonen et al., 2006). The focus on children's rights taken by Community and Voluntary sector organisations in the children's sector are at least partly responsible for this significant change in orientation of government policy on the value of a free, safe and secure childhood (Carney et al., 2011). Opportunities for promoting a rights-based approach arise periodically. In the immediate future, all of Ireland's human rights records will be reviewed in 2011 under the auspices of the Universal Periodic Review and the UN Human Rights Council. A longer-term goal has been set by the United Nations to develop a UN Convention on the rights of older people, though the process is expected to take between three and ten years to complete.

Monitoring and Implementation

A clear monitoring and implementation role has been identified for the non-governmental sector in the National Disability Strategy (NDS) which includes provision for biannual stakeholder meetings (Carney et al., 2011). It is not possible to evaluate the outcome of this process at this stage. However, given the synergy between ageing and disability, a similar approach for the NPAS could be more easily adopted than a new set of mechanisms. The key is to ensure that the monitoring process for the National Positive Ageing Strategy is transparent and publicly accountable. Carney and colleagues' study of the role of Community and Voluntary sector organisations in developing policy across the life cycle recommended taking a life course approach (Carney et al., 2011). This approach may help to counteract the tendency of Irish policy-making towards fragmentation.

Having a national strategy to implement appears to be a significant attribute. Indeed, disability activists identified the implementation of the NDS and the Carers' Strategy as key national priorities for their constituents (Carney et al., 2011: 50). However, participants in the Life Cycle study (Carney et al., 2011) also recognised that the Carers' Strategy had been 'shelved' by the Fianna Fáil-Green government (2008-2011). The research concluded that while national strategies are important, they are only part of a broader policy background, which must include a legal framework, political champions and accountable policy-makers. That research also recognised 'leadership by Civil

Society Organisations' in the disability sector as having provided 'a solid foundation for the national strategies, legislation and agreements for monitoring and review of progress' (Carney et al., 2011: 71). Similar leadership roles can be taken by Community and Voluntary organisations in the age sector if a coherent and committed approach to bringing the voice of older people to the policy table is taken.

Community and Voluntary sector organisations are particularly well placed to monitor progress on national strategies. If appropriate mechanisms are in place to ensure accountability, the NPAS is more likely to be a strategy that is successfully implemented rather than one that is merely published. If the NPAS is to stand the test of time, it must be informed by the strong history of voluntary provision and leadership in Ireland, with significant roles identified for community sector organisations well into the future.

Intergenerational Solidarity

Another integral element of policy planning for the extended life course is a realisation that intergenerational solidarity underpins the social contract. A successful NPAS will build on the familial solidarity common in Irish culture, translating it into political support for re-distribution of resources in line with the changing contours of the demography of the Republic. In this context, ageing is increasingly recognised as a process that affects all citizens across the life course. Community and Voluntary organisations are playing a leading role in promoting this intergenerational approach to population ageing at national and international level. The European Union has designated 2012 as the *European Year of Active Ageing – promoting solidarity between generations*, primarily on foot of submissions from the community sector (European Commission, 2009: 1). At the national level, Community and Voluntary sector organisations are taking various initiatives to promote solidarity between generations; and NGOs have already conveyed to the Office for Older People, via the NGO Liaison Group, a clear message that values of social solidarity and intergenerational solidarity need to underpin the NPAS.

A core principle of the NPAS must be that intergenerational solidarity underpins any adjustments to the welfare state, either as a response to rising life expectancy or in reaction to the current recession. Experiences of pluralist political cultures like the United States suggest that associating intergenerational relationships with solidarity rather than conflict is important (Binstock, 2010). In societal terms, notions of solidarity can act as a counter-balance to media and public policy stereotyping of ageing as a 'demographic time bomb'. More significantly, solidarity between generations underpins the social contract, and has done since the first compulsory social insurance schemes in the early 20th century. In the Irish context, the concept of solidarity has a specific role in the welfare mix. Of particular note is the important role of the family in providing health and social care. If the NPAS is to stand the test of time, it must be based on solidarity between current and future generations. A strategy that is mindful of the national context, in particular the role of the Community and Voluntary sector in linking citizen and state, is more likely to be accepted by all sectors of society. Such a strategy is also more likely to attract the support of elected politicians, who can act as political champions. Similarly, policy-makers and Community and Voluntary organisations working on children's rights and/or implementing the National Disability Strategy are likely to support a NPAS based on the principle of intergenerational solidarity.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper has focused on the role of the Community and Voluntary sector in formulating, implementing and reviewing the National Positive Ageing Strategy. It has sought to illustrate the welfare mix in Ireland with particular reference to older people. The paper identified how the configuration of welfare in the Republic raises particular challenges for third sector organisations operating within the tension field identified by Evers and Laville (2004). It also identifies the significance of intergenerational solidarity in shaping a national ageing strategy that will be positive for all citizens, now and into the future. As the paper is designed to be a 'think piece' rather than a polished thesis, it does not make recommendations. Internationally, relatively little progress has yet been made in articulating the unique and pioneering role that the third sector can play in leading state and market adaptations to

demographic ageing. However, this paper has highlighted a particular role for Community and Voluntary sector organisations, not just as service providers, but also as advocates for higher standards and greater equality for older people. If Ireland is to adapt successfully to the challenges of an ageing society, an essential role of third sector organisations must be clearly delineated in the NPAS. This paper has made a contribution to articulating more clearly the common purpose of a diverse and vibrant sector which works tirelessly to promote a positive ageing experience for all Irish citizens.

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