

'Big Society' or 'Big Myth': solution or distraction



Mark Bramah
Assistant Chief Executive, APSE

Catherine Durose
Senior Research Fellow, Local
Governance Research Unit, De Montfort
University



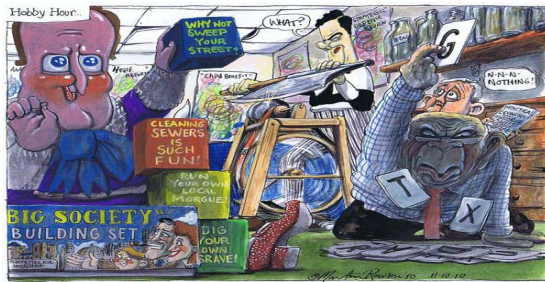
Local Governance Research Unit

Is this the image of the 'Big Society'?



Local Governance Research Unit

Or is this?



Local Governance Research Unit

From 'Big Government' to 'Big Society'?



Local Governance Research Unit

What is the 'Big Society'?



Public Sector Reform: 'what can the state do for you'?

- Promote localism and decentralisation: transfer of power, financial autonomy
- From a 'provider' to an 'enabler': diversity in provision, creation and expansion of co-ops, mutuals, social enterprises

Community Empowerment: 'what can we do for ourselves'?

- Active citizens involved in social action and public service delivery; not just 'having a say' but also 'doing'
- Encourage volunteering, train community organisers, support the creation of neighbourhood groups

Philanthropy: 'what can we do for others'

- Encourage charitable giving, reciprocity



Local Governance Research Unit

Towards the 'Big Society'



"We want to make sure people can take control and take responsibility in their street, their estate, their town. Solving problems and taking action for themselves. With neighbourhoods, people working together, as the basis for the Big Society"

Rt. Hon. Eric Pickles, Communities Secretary

- Emphasis not just on communities 'having a say' but also 'doing'



Local Governance Research Unit

Continuity, change... concerns



- Resourcing the 'Big Society'
- Interest in the 'Big Society'
- Fragmentation of public sector
- Impact on inequality



Local Governance Research Unit

Resourcing the 'Big Society'



- New Labour era for all its faults may look luxurious from the standpoint of 'radical localist austerity'
- With a priority of deficit reduction, is localism only shifting the blame for cuts?
- Achievement of the 'Big Society' may increase demands on the state in disadvantaged areas rather than reducing its role
- Community action takes time to develop and needs ongoing support from the state
- With little resourcing available at the local level, can the Big Society work?



Local Governance Research Unit

Interest in the 'Big Society'



- Is there an appetite for 'Big Society'?
- 'Big Society' seems targeted as particular communities
- Some communities are more ready than others for the Big Society
- Concerns about strategy, sustainability, capacity, lack of inclusivity



Local Governance Research Unit

Fragmentation of the public sector



- Public service provision to be divested to social enterprises, co-ops and mutuals
- But lack of resources for experimentation
- Questions about potential scale and sustainability of these divestments
- Potential for divestment disasters?
- Many of these proposed reforms of the public sector could become 'staging posts' to the marketisation of public services



Local Governance Research Unit

Impact on equality



- Coalition are 'intensely relaxed' about inequality
- Radical break from New Labour 'paranoia' about postcode lottery
- But also from targeted interventions in disadvantaged communities aiming to 'narrow the gap'
- Is a pertinent question, which communities win and which lose?
- Prospect of widening inequalities



Local Governance Research Unit

Leading the 'Big Society': the challenge for local government

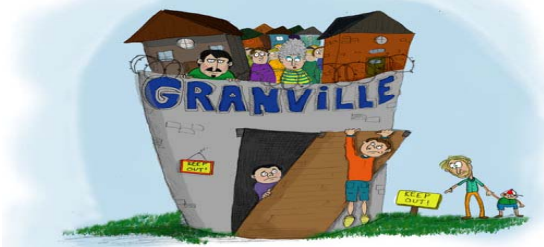


- Need to avoid defensive short-termist reaction from local government.
- Instead, a strategic response from local government is required
- Role for local government in place stewardship



Local Governance Research Unit

**This is no time to pull up
the drawbridge!**



Local Governance Research Unit

The 'Ensuring' Council



- Developing an alternative to the enabling or 'hollowed out' council
- Democratic – representative/participative
- Innovative, Efficient, Entrepreneurial
- Stewardship of locality – joining up
- Local economic benefits – LM3/economic multipliers
- The 'green council', the 'co-operative council', the 'entrepreneurial council'...
- How is it defined?



Local Governance Research Unit

**LOCAL SERVICES
LOCAL SOLUTIONS**



Contact details

**Mark Bramah, Assistant Chief Executive Dr.
Catherine Durose, De Montfort University**

Email: mbramah@apse.org.uk

cdurose@dmu.ac.uk



Association for Public Service Excellence
2nd floor Washbrook House, Lancasterian Office Centre, Talbot Road,
Old Trafford, Manchester M32 0FP.
telephone: 0161 772 1810
fax: 0161 772 1811
web: www.apse.org.uk
