

**The Shifting of Boundaries, Discourses and Relationships between the State
and Irish Language Voluntary Organisations**

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Abstract

The relationship that Irish language organisations have with the state is closely associated with resource exchange and role expectations. The expressed value of Irish language organisations is ‘Gaeilge a chur chun cinn’ (‘to put Irish to the forefront’) and is similar to an objective of the state in its early days, which had a concern with the dual focus of Irish language and national identity. The confluence of boundaries between the state and Irish language organisations has historical roots and is also based in the issue of national identity. This paper will explore that historical dimension, and will present data on the roles, relationships and resources of Irish language organisations.

The issue of national identity makes their relationship with the state interesting but problematic to assess from the perspective of current nonprofit theory because of a focus in such theory on welfare and service-providing organisations. Social origins theory, however, makes allowances for the embeddedness of Irish language organisations in Irish social structures.

Introduction

The role of Irish language organisations is closely linked to the relationship that they have with the state and the resources that they receive from that source. The relationship that Irish language organisations have with the state, therefore, is bound up with resource exchange and role expectations. The expressed value of Irish language organisations is ‘*Gaeilge a chur chun cinn*’ (‘to put Irish to the forefront’) and is similar to an objective of the state in its early days, which had a concern with the dual focus of Irish language and national identity (Ó Flatharta 1992). The recognition of the Irish language as the first official language of Ireland is the site where Irish language organisations and the state have come together in their sharing of, and agreement over, this common aim. The relationship between the state and Irish language organisations, therefore, will be analysed within a framework of three ‘r’s’, that is, roles, relationships and resources (Donnelly-Cox 1998; Donnelly-Cox, Donoghue and Hayes 2001).

As we will see below, Irish language organisations express what has been recognised as an important part of national identity and the notion of Irishness. These issues make their relationship with the state interesting but problematic to assess from the perspective of current nonprofit theory because of a focus in such theory on welfare and service-providing organisations. Social origins theory (Salamon and Anheier 1998), however, makes allowances for the embeddedness of Irish language organisations in Irish social structures. Irish language organisations are working in the realm of who ‘we’ are as a nation and there are overlaps, therefore, between Irish language organisations and the state. As we will now see, those overlaps have an

historical basis and what could be called in an intertwined relationship between the two parties exists.

Historical Background of Irish Language Organisations

Irish language organisations have a long and varied history in Ireland. The roots of their existence pre-date the foundation of the present-day state and are part of the movement for national identity and freedom, which led to the eventual independence of most of the island of Ireland from its coloniser, Britain. At the time of the foundation of the Irish Free State, as it was known at the time and contiguous with the boundaries of the present-day state of Ireland, several prominent individuals in the Irish language movement transferred to the state apparatus, mainly from *Conradh na Gaeilge* (the Gaelic League), the oldest Irish language organisation, still in existence today. In fact, in the Easter Rising of 1916, which eventually led to the War of Independence three years later, six of the seven signatories of the Proclamation of Independence who were subsequently executed, were members of *Conradh*. The exchange of actors between the two parties, that is, Irish language voluntary organisations and the state, established the characteristics of the relationship between the two and is one of the explanations of that relationship along with the issue of national identity. Thus, it could be argued that the Irish language movement¹ in those days had similar aims and personnel to the Irish state. In fact, the key aims of the Irish language movement and several prominent individuals in that movement became central aims of the state, marking a confluence of boundaries. Indeed, during the lifetime of the first Irish Government from 1922, a Ministry for Irish was established, and the state became very active in the promotion of its language policy. At the same time, the rift between it and *Conradh* began to widen, and many considered the work of that organisation to have been taken over by the state. As Ó Flatharta (1992) writes, '[a]fter all, had not the country its own native government which would, they believed, ensure that the aims of the League would be implemented' (1992: 3).

A period of relative inactivity for the Irish language organisations followed in the two decades after the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922, therefore. The state took up the mantle of the 'cause' because it now became the 'cause of Ireland', so to speak. The Irish language, as a key denoter of Irish identity, passed into state hands which assumed responsibility for attempting to convert the nation from English to Irish speaking. The Irish language became compulsory in order to pass state examinations; several national (primary) schools began to provide education solely through the Irish language; but Irish began increasingly to be associated with authoritarianism and discipline. More importantly, for those interested in the language, the conversion of the majority of the population to Irish speaking did not occur on any grand scale.

Eventually, the failure of these initiatives to result in large-scale conversion to Irish speaking began to re-galvanise Irish language activists. The state, also began to adopt another approach and one that demonstrates the intertwined nature of the state-

¹ I use the term movement here and at other times for this sub-sector of nonprofit organisations as there are times, either historically or in terms of the relationship with the state, when 'movement' is a more apt description than 'organisations' for the latter has a more formal connotation. Furthermore, the movement may itself have taken an organisational form at times but there were other individual actors involved who moved between organisations, individual action and the state apparatus and without concise historical data it is sometimes too difficult to definitively refer to 'organisations'. Later, however, I will adopt a more organisational focus when specific organisational issues are raised.

voluntary sector relationship. It could be argued, in nonprofit theory terms, that state failure (Weisbrod 1978) and contract failure (Hansmann 1981) were occurring but the interesting factor about this time in Irish language activity, is that the state itself played a part and cannot just be characterised as a 'failure'. In 1943, after a period of negotiation and discussion, an umbrella body for Irish language organisations (*Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge*) was established to organise and co-ordinate that area of activity and attempt to produce more effective results. The main instigator behind the establishment of this co-ordinating body was the state, or more appropriately Éamon De Valera, the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of the day, who, it has been argued, thought that *Conradh* had lost its effectiveness and needed to be superseded (Ó Flatharta 1992). Here, we have an interesting example of the state deciding that the voluntary sector was not strong enough and, therefore, established a so-called 'voluntary' actor to take up this slack or to achieve its own aims, or, in the words of Ó Flatharta, 'to gaelicise Ireland' (Ó Flatharta 1992:7). To add further fuel to these flames, however, it has been argued as well that De Valera also took this move to control other voluntary Irish language actors who had begun to be active in their criticism of state inaction in the language arena (Ó Flatharta 1992).

From the 1950s and even more apparently from the 1960s Irish language voluntary activity increased in a number of different areas, but most noticeably in education. So, for example, from this time summer colleges providing Irish language courses to second-level students were established and even an organisation for Irish-language teachers. It is worth noting, however, that the co-ordinating body of Irish language organisations, *Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge* (hereinafter referred to as the *Comhdháil*), played an important role in these organisations becoming established because it had noted the gaps in Irish language provision and was actively influencing the direction of state policy on the Irish language.

Recent research on Irish language organisations, data from which will be reported later on in this paper, indicates that amongst Irish language organisations still in operation today that link between activities and date of establishment can be seen. So, prior to the 1960s, therefore, Irish language organisations with a national focus and a range of activities tended to predominate. Through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, organisations with a domain focus (most especially that of education), were established. From the 1990s, a newer trend has begun to emerge and more recent organisations are less likely to be based in Dublin but in the regions and are concerned with a wider range of activities than just education provision.

One respondent to the research said about Irish language organisations over the years:

'Up until 1960 it was the aim of the State *'an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn'*. From 1960 it started to pull back and along came specialised groups like *Comhar na Múinteoirí*; special needs for specialised groups. But the voluntary groups ended up concentrating on areas that were too narrow. They failed to take into account the changes that were happening within the community and as a result re-institutionalisation started to occur. From 1980 there was tension between the State and the voluntary organisations.'

From the perspective of state-voluntary relationships, the example of Irish language organisations indicates lack of clarity in boundaries and what I have referred to earlier as an ‘intertwining’. The resource issue is interesting to explore at this point because it underlines the close relationship that has existed between these two parties. From the establishment of the Free State in 1922 (as Ireland was known until it became a Republic in 1949) state concern with promoting and furthering the Irish language could be seen in setting up a Ministry of Irish during the first Government, which has continued in some departmental shape or form up to the present day. What is most interesting, however, is that, during the last 10-15 years, that Department has been given a wider brief than just Irish language matters, a development which, it could be argued, might indicate the declining importance of the Irish language overall. So, in 1956, the Department of the Gaeltacht was established. In the early 1990s, this Department became the Department of Gaeltacht, Heritage and the Islands, and then later that decade the Department of Arts, Culture, Gaeltacht and the Islands. Most recently, in 2002, that Department was broken up and the Gaeltacht has now come under the same Department as other voluntary organisations, that is, within the remit of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. We will return to that development later in the paper.

To recap a little, therefore, in 1956, the Department of the Gaeltacht was established to attempt to regenerate and sustain the regions, known as the *Gaeltachtaí*, where the Irish language was spoken and was the first and main language. The *Comhdháil*, itself, was instrumental in this development because it had campaigned for a state body to develop the economic and cultural life of the Gaeltacht areas. One year after that Department’s establishment, however, tensions began to appear between it and the *Comhdháil*. Although these would iron themselves out a little over time, by 1966 the *Comhdháil* had become a less prominent player in the state’s eyes, although it was still in receipt of state grants, which had been the case since its establishment. Furthermore, its offices had been moved a number of times, at the state’s behest, and these have been seen as a sign of that organisation’s lessening cultural and linguistic prominence. Underlining this decline in importance, the governance of the *Comhdháil* also changed, following a Department of the Gaeltacht directive, to comprise a board reflective of its member organisations. So, here we have another example of the state making a decision about the character of voluntary activity in the Irish language arena.

In 1975 another state agency, *Bord na Gaeilge*, was established to promote the Irish language throughout Ireland. Ó Flatharta (1992) writes that the thinking at the time could have been to replace the *Comhdháil* but this was never made explicit. Ten years after that time, the Minister for the Gaeltacht (and Irish language matters) spoke of the need to rationalise the work of Irish language organisations, which met significant opposition from the *Comhdháil* and its member organisations and never resulted in any major outcome. By the end of the century, *Treo 2000*, a policy document on the role of Irish language organisations, could also speak about what was required from Irish language organisations but this time the discussion was framed in terms of accountability from such organisations for receiving state funding.

What the above illustrates for our interest here is the lack of a clear boundary, or what could be called fuzziness between the state and Irish language voluntary organisations. Yet it is that exact fuzziness that makes this relationship of interest and

raises questions for nonprofit theory. To summarise briefly at this stage, the Irish language, on the establishment of the Free State, passed from the voluntary sector to the state and then the state adopted the role of telling the voluntary sector what to do. In response to its own ‘failure’ in achieving ‘*Gaeilge a chur chun cinn*’, the state instigated the establishment of the *Comhdháil* as an ‘independent’ organisation which could aid the state in fulfilling its view of the Irish language mandate. Changes of government over the years saw that organisation begin to lose some favour and with the establishment of a government Department, the *Comhdháil* became more distant from the state. Tensions began to appear and to be articulated but at the same time there were also tensions between the oldest Irish language organisation *Conradh* because it had not welcomed its loss of recognition as the main body for the Irish language in the country. Just as an aside, it is interesting to note that while the *Comhdháil* received state funding from its establishment in 1943, *Conradh* only began to get state aid from 1958.

A number of issues are thereby raised by this case. On the one hand, we have examples of state and contract failures (Weisbrod 1978, Hansmann 1981). We have the state valuing the independence of ‘voluntary’ organisations in conjunction with a dependence on such organisations to fulfill the state’s aims. At the same time, Irish language organisations have the same aims of the state and so there is a common objective. The establishment of both a government Department and a statutory agency for Irish language matters, however, sets up what could almost be called a buffer between the voluntary parties and the state and begins to bring some confusion to that relationship, certainly in terms of the roles that each is seeking to perform. *Bord na Gaeilge* no longer exists, but another state agency, this time with an all-island mandate, *Foras na Gaeilge*, was established following the Good Friday Agreement in the mid-1990s, and a confusion of roles and responsibilities between that agency and Irish language organisations was noted by respondents to the current research. We will return to these issues later but now will look at some data collected in recent research on Irish language organisations.

Resources, relationships and roles of Irish language organisations

Forty-three organisations involved in the promotion of the Irish language in the Republic of Ireland were identified and sent a questionnaire seeking information on organisational characteristics, roles, resources and relationships, to which 25 organisations responded. Follow-up focus group interviews were subsequently held with respondents to explore the survey findings in depth; participants from 14 responding organisations attended. This paper reports on some of those findings but a larger report is currently in press.² Before we look at specific data on roles, resources and relationships it is probably worth noting that the 25 responding organisations corresponded in age to the historical trends outlined above. Of the responding organisations, and bearing in mind that we are only dealing with organisations that have survived to the present day, the average (median) age was 30. In addition, three broad age cohorts could be seen which demonstrated the lack of activity during the 1920s and 1930s and the focus on education from the 1960s. Of the respondents, eight organisations had been established prior to 1960, seven between 1960 and 1980 and ten from 1980.

² Details on the progress of this can be found through www.cnm.tcd.ie. The report should be published and launched by the end of this year.

Given the fuzziness in boundaries between the state and Irish language organisations, already referred to above, respondents were asked to indicate the legal status of their organisation. It should be noted at this stage that voluntary organisations in Ireland are characterised by a certain informality and the lack of regulation in the sector is a long-standing issue and one that is currently under review (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs 2003, Charities Regulation Study Group 2004). Although voluntary organisations can apply for charitable recognition (for tax exemption purposes) from the revenue Commissioners, this does not correspond to charitable status as would be found in our neighbour Britain, for example. Indeed, many organisations in Ireland with charity (CHY) numbers mistakenly believe that on being granted a CHY number they have charitable status and are registered charities. They are not, however, as this status does not currently exist. As we can see in the following table, more than half of all responding Irish language organisations stated that they did not have a separate legal personality although several (N=3) had CHY numbers. Furthermore, those organisations involved in education and the youngest organisations were more likely to have a legal personality than the older organisations. These data also demonstrate the relationship between these organisations and the state where possessing a separate legal personality might not have been regarded as that important because these organisations were more akin to the ‘voluntary’ side of the state with regard to the fulfilment of Irish language promotion, as the examples of *Conradh* and *Comhdháil* have indicated above. Indeed, in response to the questionnaire, *Conradh* indicated that it only had a CHY number, while *Comhdháil* responded that it had no formal legal status.

Table 1: Legal Status of Irish Language Organisations

Legal Personality	<1960	1960-1980	>1980	All
Yes	3	4	5	12
No	5	3	5	13
Total	8	7	10	25

When we examine the financial resources of Irish language organisations we can see the primacy of state funding.

Table 2: Sources of Income in Irish Language Organisations

Source	<1960	1960-1980	>1980	All
State	5	6	9	20
Fees, charges	5	5	7	17
Sales, leasing, advertising	4	3	5	12
Fundraising, donations, foundation support	4	3	1	8
Total	8	7	10	25

Of the 20 organisations in receipt of state funding, 18 received core funding from the state and 11 said they also received project funding. The high proportion of Irish language organisations receiving core income is another sign of their heavy dependence on state resources and a dependence which the state itself has indicated that it wants to lessen (*Treo 2000*).

Some isomorphism could also be seen in the data in that the older and middle aged organisations had much larger average incomes than smaller organisations. For example, older organisations had an average income of €290,146 each in 2002, middle aged organisations each had an average income of €86,835, while the youngest organisations (established after 1980) reported an average income each of €7,005. Furthermore, as the following table shows, a clear association between age and size can be seen with regard to human resources. Older organisations had more paid staff, more volunteers, larger boards and longer board service. They also demonstrated a more traditional gender divide on the boards.

Table 3: Age and Human Resources of Irish Language Organisations

	<1960	1960-1980	>1980	All
Average no. full-time staff	20.6	4.4	2.14	8.2
Average no. part-time staff	75.3	5.5	8.0	22.7
Average no. volunteers on staff	19.8	14.3	17.7	17.4
Average no. voluntary board members	19.6	8.7	10.1	12.6
Average no. women board members	8.5	3.8	5.1	5.7
Average no. men board members	11.1	4.9	5.0	6.9
Average age board members	45.5	49.0	47.1	47.5
Average length of service	5.8	3.1	3.4	7.1

Responding organisations were asked to identify key relationships that they had and, not surprisingly, the most important actors were state agencies (namely, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and *Foras na Gaeilge*) and several prominent older, larger Irish language organisations, including the *Comhdháil*, and *Conradh*. There were also two of the youngest organisations prominent in that relationship network.

In follow-up focus group interviews, these relationships with the state were explored. Older organisations were more negative overall than younger organisations about their relationship with the state, while younger organisations did not regard these relationships as important as those that they were building with regional (non-Irish language) actors.

What emerged in discussing *Foras na Gaeilge*, however, was the lack of clarity of roles and the fuzziness of statutory-voluntary boundaries:

‘[I]t depends maybe on the lack of understanding of which role *Foras na Gaeilge* should have and which role the organisations should have. Now, there is talk of partnership and co-operation but we haven’t seen it yet...It is very strange that the Irish language organisations are seen as a threat to an organisation like *Foras na Gaeilge* because when they do that we’re finished because they have eight times more money than we do...It is not possible for us to do the things that *Foras* could do.’ [Older Irish language organisation]

Another respondent said:

‘They...[*Foras na Gaeilge*]...have a very difficult role because they don’t know if they are connected to the state or to us, Irish language people, and they haven’t worked it out and I don’t know if they can work it out. But the fundamental question is, are they with us or against us?’ [Older Irish language organisation]

At the same time both older and middle organisations stressed the importance of their location in Dublin as proximity to power and to their need to influence the state:

‘Are you talking about sort of lobbying for the language? As I see it, if you’re not at the centre of the fair...so that we have the same rights as people working in whatever area we work in, you have to go and be in the middle of everything...As I see it, you have to be in the centre of the fair. We have to be involved in everything to do with that from the point of view of government policy.’ [Middle generation Irish language organisation]

Respondents to the survey were asked about the roles that Irish language organisations perform following on from other work in that area (Salamon, Hems and Chinnock 2001, Donoghue 2002a). On a scale of 1-5 where one was most important and five least, respondents were asked to rate the following roles. As can be seen, the service role was most important, followed by leadership and then community building.

Table 4: Roles of Irish Language Organisations

	<1960	1960-1980	>1980	All
Service	1.7	1.3	1.8	1.6
Leadership	1.8	2.2	2.9	2.2
Community Building	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.5
Innovation	2.8	4.2	3.0	3.3
Advocacy	3.3	3.3	4.3	3.7

Interestingly the main value of Irish language organisations, that is ‘*Gaeilge a chur chun cinn*’, was not reflected in their stated role preference, although as just seen above lobbying was recognised as an important activity. Yet, advocacy, or the promotion of the Irish language, was given the lowest ranking of all roles. When

explored in interview advocacy emerged as more important than would appear from the quantitative data. Indeed, respondents spoke about needing to put pressure on the state to get resources to achieve their aims.

‘The enthusiast, whatever the movement, has to go out and do the thing. The state will only do what they are pressurised into doing...there’s no point complaining...Partnership is what is needed, not a dictatorship. The best way is to show people that speaking the language is of some advantage to them.’ [Younger generation Irish language organisation]

Part of the low attribution of importance to the advocacy role may be due to translation because *abhcóideacht*, or the Irish word for advocacy, is not readily used by Irish language speakers. Another part of the explanation is that Irish language organisations might regard *abhcóideacht* as the remit of other kinds of voluntary organisations, and more associated with community development or campaigning organisations. Respondents from Irish language organisations did not necessarily regard themselves as fighting against the state, although they were clear about needing to influence the state, as one respondent mentioned above said about being at the ‘centre of the fair’, and as another said:

‘We have to entice people...I see advocacy as having two aims, one putting pressure on people, and two, enticing them, to bring people along with us rather than pressurise them...We’re not in the business of putting pressure on anybody.’ [Younger generation Irish language organisation]

To summarise at this stage, therefore, heavy dependency and interdependence can be seen in the data, as well as resource transfer, interesting role performance and expectations. All of these are characteristics of the relationship between Irish language organisations and the state. Can nonprofit theory, therefore, shed any light on the nature of this relationship?

Explaining the Relationship between Irish Language Organisations and the State

Theories on the nonprofit sector focus on the reasons for the sector’s existence, which is linked to the role it plays and implicitly, its relationships with the state and the market. Economic theories, for example, posit explanations for the existence of the nonprofit sector in terms of both state and market failure. Weisbrod (1978) writes that the voluntary sector exists to provide public goods which both the state and market fail to provide. According to Hansmann (1981), the voluntary sector exists because it is a more trustworthy supplier of services than either state or the market which may not deliver in cases of contract failure. Salamon, in critiquing both theories, says, however, that they make ‘involvement by these other sectors in the world of nonprofits appear suspect at best’ (Salamon 1987: 100) and he talks instead of third party government where nonprofit organisations carry out governmental purposes (Salamon 1987, 1995). More importantly, he notes, nonprofit organisations may not just be a residual response to state or market failure but may be a preferred mechanism for providing collective goods. It could be asked, given the history of Irish language organisations, preferred by whom. It might be suggested that the state has been a bit suspect at times in its activity regarding Irish language organisations and the intertwining of boundaries between the two parties has meant role specifics and allocation have not been clear.

Underlying these theories, however, is an assumption that nonprofit organisations are service-providing organisations and Salamon (1987, 1995) explicitly addresses the statutory-voluntary relationship within the context of welfare service delivery. In Ireland statutory-voluntary relationships have also been examined in the area of social services where a complementary relationship has been seen to exist, albeit one that is not without its own tensions and contradictions (O’Ferrall 2000, Donoghue 2002b, Boyle and Butler 2003). The White Paper, *Supporting Voluntary Activity* (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs 2000), assumed a voluntary-statutory relationship based on mutual interest, and in that light, Noel Ahern, Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, recently spoke of the state wanting ‘a vibrant, able and effective voluntary sector’ (Ahern 2004). An underlying assumption of the White Paper and of the Minister’s remarks is that many voluntary organisations are engaged in service delivery. In the Irish language arena, specifically, *Treo 2000* made reference to Irish language organisations as service providers.

What is interesting about Irish language organisations, however, is that although they themselves stress their service-providing role, their primary aim is the furtherance of Irish, or ‘*Gaeilge a chur chun cinn*’. As such, Irish language organisations are intrinsically bound up with national identity, national culture and ideas of nationhood. To begin to understand the relationship between the Irish state and Irish language voluntary organisations, it is necessary to recognise the discourse of nationhood and the state. It could be argued, therefore, that nonprofit theory, because it focuses either on an economic explanation for the existence of voluntary organisations, or on those voluntary organisations engaged in welfare provision, may not be sufficient for understanding voluntary organisations in the cultural arena. Furthermore, when voluntary organisations are concerned with *national* identity (rather than the identity of a sub-culture or ethnic minority), then a different kind of voluntary-statutory relationship ensues.

The history of the Irish language movement shows the kind of activity associated with organisations in the struggle for national independence and recognition. So, for example, in the early days of the movement there was a discourse constructed around cultural identity and nationhood. On the coming of independence, prominent independence and cultural promoters became part of the new government and, therefore, pillars in the newly-established nation-state. Irish language organisations consequently assumed a legitimate place where they could work hand in hand with the state, although at times their position was not quite visible and their autonomy not fully recognised.

Irish language organisations established a very close relationship with the state which was predicated on a unity of purpose and a sense of shared values. It could be argued, therefore, that all of these factors have contributed to the legitimacy of Irish language organisations. Serving to emphasise this legitimacy has been a state-funding line which is also connected to expectations about the roles that both the state and such organisations perform. While Irish language organisations themselves have highlighted the importance of service provision, it is their ability to lobby for services that appears more important, historically. Firstly, their main aim is ‘*Gaeilge a chur chun cinn*’ which would imply an advocacy function. Secondly, there have been a number of significant achievements by Irish language organisations over the years *viz.*

the Irish language radio station, *Raidio na Gaeltachta*, the Irish language television station, TG4, and the all-Irish schools, the *Gaelscoileanna*. While these achievements have resulted in increased service provision in the Irish language, the activity that gave rise to those outcomes is of most significance. In other words, Irish language organisations have been very successful as lobbying actors for promoting the causes of Irish language speakers. In service provision, their activities probably complement the state's, for example in education provision, and in this their relationship with the state, as supporting or subsidiary, might not be dissimilar from other service providers such as in social services or health. A complementary relationship, therefore, where the two different actors enhance each other's qualities, very much along the lines of the concept of partnership, or in Salamon's words 'third party government' (Salamon 1995: 36), would appear to exist in the area of service delivery.

We are not dealing solely with welfare or service-providing organisations in this instance, however. National identity, as a collective good, is not provided but promoted by Irish language organisations, which is why it could be argued that service provision is not the primary role of these organisations. Irish language organisations are not welfare organisations, nor are they social service organisations, although they may be involved in education provision. They engage in education or service delivery with another aim in mind, that is '*Gaeilge a chur chun cinn*'. It is in their advocacy activities, which may result in enhanced service provision, or complementary service provision, that the relationship between Irish language organisations and the state demonstrates its closeness and also its tensions, and it is here, furthermore, that role expectations are important. *Treo 2000* as a government document was prescriptive, therefore, about Irish language organisations because it was implicitly treating Irish language organisations as state organisations, while at the same time explicitly claiming that they were non-state. For example, *Treo 2000* made recommendations about the role of the *Comhdháil*, although the document was quite clear about this organisation's independence as a non-state organisation. In so doing, *Treo 2000* was demonstrating the lack of a state philosophy of voluntary action, which can also be seen, as O'Ferrall (2000) has argued, in the case of the voluntary hospitals. In other words, voluntary actors are regarded as necessary by the state as an aid to the state's achieving certain goals but the framing of the state's relationship with voluntary organisations and a philosophy of how to work together have not been clearly articulated.

Irish language organisations, it could be argued therefore, are not solely community development organisations, nor are they only engaged in community building in specific geographic locales or locales of interest. Their broader concern is the development of society and of ideas of nationhood. What is of interest, therefore, about Irish language organisations is their rootedness in ideas of national identity and the fact that, as promoters of the Irish language, they are closely allied with notions of being Irish, or perhaps even 'truly Irish'. The interests of Irish language organisations and the state's have coincided and a close relationship was created with the Irish state once the 'community' of Ireland was established on gaining independence from Britain. In fact, such was the closeness of the relationship with the state that, at times, it has been, and is still, difficult to see where Irish language organisations end and the state begins. This fuzziness of boundaries is not, of course, peculiar to Irish language organisations and we can find other such examples in long-established voluntary organisations in Ireland such as the voluntary hospitals and secondary schools where

necessary services are provided by such organisations and a long relationship of intertwining with the state is in place. It could be suggested, similarly, that older more established traditional Irish language organisations demonstrate an interdependent relationship with the state based on service provision, funding and meeting Irish language objectives. Interdependence theory (Salamon, Sokolowski and Anheier 2000), for example, might be applied given the strong sector-state relationship that was seen to exist in the data presented herein. Yet we also need to explain the circumstances under which such a relationship emerged and, as we have seen, the intertwining of role expectations, performance, relationship expression and resource provision can be important. Seibel (1990) has argued that nonprofit organisations are not only providers of goods and services but they are embedded in prevailing social and economic structures. Social origins theory (Salamon and Anheier 1998) is therefore more appropriate for explaining the embeddedness of Irish language organisations in history and society in Ireland.

The Future of Irish Language Organisations

The framework of the three r's, chosen as a guide for examining the relationship between the state and Irish language organisations, is important because it can also demonstrate the significance of that relationship for organisational development and survival, particularly when Irish language organisations are so dependent on the state for funding. From the perspective of the organisation, the significance of this investigation of the state-voluntary relationship lies in the questions it raises for the future survival of these organisations. Central to the ability of these organisations to attract resources for their maintenance and survival is the issue of legitimacy. Building relationships with resource providers is underpinned by legitimacy which is also provided by that relationship. So, for example, an organisation is regarded as legitimate to enter into a relationship with and to provide resources to and, in so doing, the organisation gains further legitimacy. Voluntary organisations in the Irish health area have acknowledged in previous research, that state funding gave them a legitimacy in the eyes of other funders (Donoghue 2002b). Irish research on organisational development and legitimacy points to the association between different kinds of legitimacy and different stages or phases of organisational growth. Drawing on the concept of isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), therefore, Donnelly-Cox and O'Regan (1999) suggest that an organisational trajectory towards greater institutionalisation implies a move from moral to administrative legitimacy.

In the population of organisations under investigation in this paper, such a suggestion raises interesting issues for their future survival. It could be argued that a secure and long-lasting source of government funding implies a level of administrative legitimacy where the imperative of funding Irish language organisations, because they are associated with national identity and culture, is understood and not questioned. Legitimacy is important to consider in this context because it could be argued that the state itself is withdrawing slightly from its close and cosy relationship with Irish language organisations. For instance, *Treo 2000* argued that Irish language organisations needed to move away from a dependence on state funding. Furthermore, the current government Department (the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs) is not solely concerned with Irish language matters, but includes other voluntary organisations under its remit. While this latter could represent an opportunity as well as a threat to Irish language organisations, neither was recognised fully by respondents in interview. Historically, the main relationship

that these organisations have had has been with the state and there has been little interaction with other voluntary actors. In addition, there has also been little recognition by the state of the similarity between Irish language organisations and other voluntary organisations (Ó Murchú 2003).

Ireland is changing and is becoming more multicultural. A situation could now be envisaged where Irish language organisations may have to, if not compete with, at the very least be aware of the changing external environment and the existence of other organisations concerned with a multicultural identity. Irish language organisations were asked about this in interview and spoke about potential links with other non-Irish language groups but still asserted the primacy of their Constitutional status as a symbol of their importance to the 'people of Ireland'. In this sub-sector of nonprofit organisations, the issue of sustaining legitimacy in the external environment in order to survive deserves further exploration and investigation.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the relationship between the state and Irish language organisations. It has shown that the history of that relationship is one of interweaving and intertwining where the boundaries between the two parties have not always been clear. Some interdependence can be seen where the state has relied on Irish language organisations to achieve its aims, which are akin to those of the Irish language organisations. The state, however, has also interfered with the independence of such actors, and the crossing of boundaries as well as the closeness and cosiness of the relationship have led to a situation where the state can make recommendations about these voluntary actors while at the same time asserting their autonomy and independence.

The data presented from recent research demonstrate the strong financial dependence on the state and some interesting perspectives on role performance, all of which take place in the context of the close relationship with the state. In looking to nonprofit theory, however, it is not easy to find an explanation for the relationship because of a concern in those quarters with service- and welfare-providing organisations. Irish language organisations are concerned with national identity, which is why historically they have been so closely intertwined with the state. Social origins theory, therefore, is more appropriate because it makes space for some understanding of the balance of power between the two parties.

Taking stock of historical trajectories, changing and developing relationships with the state, role expectations and perceptions, and resource provision which builds legitimacy, helps in understanding the landscape of the Irish language voluntary sector. Playing a major part in securing resources is legitimacy, which is vital for the continued survival of the organisation. Irish language organisations present an interesting case of legitimacy because it could be argued that they gain administrative legitimacy through state support but their continued legitimacy may not be assured among the public into the future because of societal change. The need for Irish language organisations may not be as well recognised as other institutionalised organisations (such as voluntary hospitals and schools, which are also heavily dependent upon state funding). Irish language organisations, therefore, may have to face the challenge of re-articulating the need for their existence in order to make a case for legitimacy.

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