Home Away from Home: The Role of Civil Society Within the Irish Diaspora - NGOs and the preservation of migrant identities within a globalised world.

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Much of the debate surrounding the Third Sector focuses on its size, shape, functions and evolution within or across regions. (Salamon and Anheier, 1996; Gidron, Katz, Hasenfeld, 2002) This paper will address how the Third Sector functions within a particular section of the community, defined here loosely as the Irish Diaspora. The main argument of the paper is that the complex myriad of NGOs within Irish Diaspora communities, from sporting and cultural bodies through to quasi-political lobby groupings, illustrates the power of the Third Sector in preserving and nurturing a workable sense of identity for migrants and refugees within a globalised world. These NGOs are thus the means by which the Diaspora can feel at home whilst living away from home.

The paper will illustrate the ways in which these NGOs construct, manage, service and challenge notions of community identity within the Diaspora and will assess the extent to which the Irish diaspora is immune from the type of globalised socio-cultural dilution where 'being rootless, displaced between worlds, living between a lost past and a fluid present, are perhaps the most fitting metaphors for the journeying modern consciousness.' (Rapport and Dawson: 1998, 23)

As Appadurai (1996) and others have noted, (Bauman, 2000; Castells, 1998; Urry, 2000; Scholte, 2000) mobility itself has become a leitmotif for modern living within a globalised world where politico-cultural iconography is understood as a fluid rather than a solid entity. As Scholte puts it: 'A Chinese family living in Mexico deposits its wealth in euros at a Saudi-owned bank located in Switzerland: where are their attachments?' (Scholte, 2000, 180-1) Within this context, identities are malleable, flexible, fluid, can fracture, disappear and reform. Thus, social space is considered to behave like a fluid. ((Mol and Law, 1994: 643: Urry, 2000, 31)

As several scholars have noted, (Augé, 1995; Dawson & Johnson, 2001; Malkki, 1995:) Diaspora communities, (unlike refugees), have become rather romantic groupings who symbolise the fluidity and mobility of political and cultural identities. Occupying what Brah (1996, 209) refers to, as a 'diaspora space', located somewhere between the local and the global.

More specifically, this paper will explore how the NGO community within the Irish Diaspora constructs and plays out these notions of community and identity and whether this is strengthening or weakening in response to trends in globalisation.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section lays out the conceptual framework, arguing that social capital and civic activism are vibrant within Irish Diaspora communities and that its legion of cultural and sporting NGOs have been facilitated and strengthened by trends in globalisation, rather than weakened by it. It will be argued that

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1 It is understood that 'globalisation' is used in many contexts and given many different meanings. Scholte makes this point bluntly: 'In spite of a deluge of publications on the subject, our analyses of globalization tend to remain conceptually inexact, empirically thin, historically and culturally illiterate, normatively shallow and politically naïve.' (Scholte, 2000: 1) The term is used throughout this paper in its widest sense, to refer to the 'intensification of transnational spaces, events, problems, conflicts and biographies'. (Beck 2000, 87)
while certain aspects of globalisation (urbanisation, employment mobility/insecurity, cultural homogenisation etc) can lead to increased individualism and community dislocation, in the case of Diaspora communities, trends in globalisation have served to strengthen rather than weaken group cohesion and the sense of shared cultural heritage/identity.

The second section will detail the nature, history and extent of the Third Sector within the Irish Diaspora across several regions. While the main focus here will be on the United States, the data will also include reference to NGOs in Canada and Australia.

The third section of the paper will explore what the case of the Third Sector within the Irish Diaspora tells us more generally about other migrant populations and in particular whether global trends in technology, in the workplace and in people's lifestyles are empowering or hampering social capital and the growth of community organisations within such populations.

Running throughout these three sections will be an examination of the nature of the NGO community within the Irish Diaspora in the context of Robert Putnam's thesis on the decline of social capital in the United States. (Putnam, 2000) It will be argued here that these NGOs within Irish Diaspora communities in the United States buck the trend he has identified, as Irish Americans are falling over one another to 'Bowl Together' in sporting organisations and in cultural pursuits.

The paper will engage with the debates on globalisation and social capital by using the Third Sector within Irish Diaspora communities as a case study to illuminate the wider academic debate on the nature and impacts of globalisation within the context of Third Sector organisations. In this sense, the paper will be of interest to an international audience beyond its particular empirical focus on the Irish Diaspora.

It will be argued that globalisation does not inevitably lead to a rise of individualism or a watered down sense of community. On the contrary, trends in globalisation such as the internet, satellite television and cheaper air travel, have strengthened the Irish Diaspora's sense of self, increased the cultural and spatial mobility of populations, and facilitated a growth of Irish Diaspora NGOs providing many of them with a global reach.

The final section of the paper will argue that the evidence provided about the Third Sector within Irish Diaspora communities has a more general application within migrant and refugee populations, where social cohesion, associationalism and social capital are healthy, vibrant and are prospering within the global age.