Canadian State – Voluntary Sector Relations

Legacies, Public Administration Models, and Policy Issues

Michael J. Prince

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Opening questions

- In Canadian public administration and policy studies, what is the state of the art in thinking and talking about voluntary organizations, and of the relationship between the public sector – the state – and the voluntary sector?
- How adequate are these conceptions?
Outline

- Legacies of the voluntary sector
- Public administration models of state-voluntary sector relations
- Some observations
- Policy and administration issues
Charitable crises

- Doing something for the less fortunate
- Doing more with less
- Doing the same with less
- Doing less with less
- Doing more or less differently
Voluntary sector legacies

1. Social residualism
2. Democratic activism
3. Nostalgic voluntarism
4. Critiques of charity
Charities and non-profits are “natural” systems of support and care.

The first social safety net on many issues and still today for some.

Provider of first resort, last resort, and only resort.

Backup to failures in markets and breakdowns in family structures.
Democratic Activism

- Non-profits as *sites* for community involvement and public participation
- Local decision making by volunteer boards of directors and staff
- NGOs as political *actors* in municipal, provincial, federal policy development processes
- With funding cuts, have become *objects* of political struggles
Nostalgic Voluntarism

- Optimism about the real, potential or imagined capacities of the sector
- Romantic view of past experiences
- Downplays major changes in the economy, families and society generally
- Ignores negative effects for disadvantaged groups (stigma, social control, discrimination and exclusion)
Critiques of Charity

- Distracting attention away from other sectors to tackle major issues of inequalities and poverty
- Converting paid employment into voluntary work
- De-unionizing employment
- Limited capacity to deliver public services
- Dubious reliance on gambling funds
- Normalizes poverty
Public administration models of state-voluntary sector relations

- Neo-liberalism and the New Public Management
- Alternative Service Delivery and contractualism
- Governance-ism
Neo-liberalism & New Public Management

- State’s role: shedding, offloading, shifting services and programs
- Relationship to voluntary sector: ad hoc, piecemeal, loosely coupled
- Voluntary agencies as: a distinct sector, independent of government, yet instruments of public policy implementation, tools of service provision
Alternative Service Delivery and contractualism

- State’s role: outsourcing, purchasing, monitoring, and measuring
- Relationship to voluntary sector: formal, financial, hierarchical
- Voluntary agencies as: cost-effective service providers and program administrators
Governance-ism

- State’s role: networking, collaborating, managing relationships and facilitating policy communities

- Relationship to voluntary sector: horizontal, cooperative, structural

- Voluntary agencies as: governance partners, though junior partners
Governance-ism

- A form of “sector reductionism”
- The traditions, values and practices of the third sector are treated in terms of another sector, whether the business models of the corporate world or management systems of the public sector
- Elaborate reporting requirements; accreditation procedures; controls
Some Observations

- In various ways, each of these approaches tend to reduce the diversities and complexities of the third sector to a single dimension or a dominant idea.
- A contentious mix of governing practices and social beliefs operate in and around state-voluntary sector relations in contemporary Canada.
- Serious power differentials operate...
What is the professional role of public servants in all this, especially policy advisors and policy analysts?

What is their responsibility as moral agents?

Is it to identify and raise concerns with decision makers about possible serious harms to community? Is it to accept some personal responsibility for the outcomes and impacts of policy on the third sector?
Other questions....

- What are the ways of thinking about voluntary agencies and state-voluntary sector relationships apparent in your professional work and political community?
- Is there a policy consensus or shared understanding of the roles and relationships?