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► **To cite this version:**

Hélène Balazard. THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IN THE UK, FROM LONDON CITIZENS TO THE BIG SOCIETY. The 6th European Consortium for Political Research General Conference, 2011, Reykjavik, Iceland. halshs-03350536

HAL Id: halshs-03350536

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03350536v1>

Submitted on 21 Sep 2021

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THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IN THE UK, FROM LONDON CITIZENS TO THE BIG SOCIETY

*Paper prepared for presentation at the 6th European Consortium for Political Research General Conference, Reykjavik,
25-27 August 2011*

1st Draft

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Abstract: London Citizens is a “Broad Based Community Organization” allying member institutions representing faith institutions, universities, schools, trade unions and community groups across London. Since 1996 it runs campaigns in different fields such as housing, jobs, poverty, safety, environment and immigration. London Citizens is recognized as a countervailing force in the city’s and country’s governance. The organization tries to professionalize its activity while staying grass root. But since the election of Obama, who famously started his political career as a community organizer in Chicago, the brand “community organizing” is highly fought for. In 2010, a key part of the Coalition’s vision for the Big Society is the training of community organizers. This paper will analyze the mechanism of this professionalization and its stakes. It will study the interaction between Citizens UK and the Big Society program. It will argue that not only the origin of community organizing as a profession but also the passion fueled toward it, have made it an ambiguous term.

Key words: Civil Society – Community organizing – Professionalization

“It needs to be done, and not enough folks are doing it”

Barack Obama, “Why Organize? Problems and promise in the inner city”, Illinois Issues, 1988

The democratic ideal is now unquestionable but the systems of government which refer to it arouse almost everywhere deep criticisms. In United Kingdom, authors underline the rise of abstention and the decline of collective forms of engagement (Faucher-King 2010, p. 1). Many projects try to better involve the inhabitants in decisions that affect their lives. However, they often find it particularly difficult to mobilize local inhabitants, especially the most disadvantaged. Participative projects are moreover generally limited to consultative mechanisms that do not grant the inhabitants any real power to act or make decisions.

In view of these limits, community organizing methods are presented as innovative means for the local organization of individuals and groups from a perspective of political and social change (Orr 2007; Pierson 2001; Warren 2001). Community organizations bring to the fore intermediaries between individuals on the one hand and the state and the market on the other. Supported by community organizers, inhabitants set their own political agenda and expect the economic and political elite of the territory in which they organize to be accountable. As a result, their capacity to exercise their democratic rights and to participate in political action would be strengthened.

London Citizens is a “Broad Based Community Organization” gathering, as on July 2011, 228 member institutions representing faith institutions, universities, schools, trade unions and community groups across London. Since 1996, it runs campaigns in different fields, such as housing, employment, poverty, safety, environment and immigration, and different scales, from the street to the entire country. These campaigns aiming social justice are above all a mean to “unlock the power of Civil Society¹”. Community organizers working methods can be traced back to Saul Alinsky’s views on organizing for mass power. This “radical pragmatist” American funded the Industrial Areas Foundation to which London Citizens is affiliated. Little by little the activity of organizers has been professionalised. In 2010, a professional Guild of Community Organizers was created and the first MA on community organizing was launched.

But since the election of Obama, who famously started his political career as a community organizer in Chicago, the brand “community organizing” is highly fought for. The rising interest toward this model of social action has been emphasized by the fact that a key part of the Big Society program of the Cameron’s government is the training of 5,000 community organizers.

This paper will analyze the mechanisms, stakes and paradox of this professionalization. In particular, the need for a community organization to prevent its activity from bureaucratization will be questioned. It will then study the interaction between London Citizens and the Big Society program. It will argue that through this professionalization, the aim is not only to sustain London Citizens activity but also to trademark their community organizing model.

This paper is mostly based on a field work² and media analysis conducted from 2007 to 2011 around London Citizens. Literature on community organizing and professionalization in social movement theory is mobilized. But the shift to more bureaucratic and professionalized movement organizations received significant attention mostly in the literature on feminist activism (Markowitz and Tice 2002, p. 945). The professionalization of community organizing *per se* has not received much attention.

1. TOWARD A NEW PROFESSION, COMMUNITY ORGANIZER AT LONDON CITIZENS

London Citizens is a non partisan community organization. It was funded in 1996 through the “The East London Community Organization” (TELCO). It then expanded to South and West London in 2005 and eventually to North London and Shoreditch in 2011. 10% of its budget rests on the membership dues, ranging from £700 to £2000 according to the size of the member institution. The other 90% are subsidies from philanthropic foundations. In order to be able to make the political elites accountable, London Citizens refuses any public money.

This section will examine the “goals, organization, ideology and dominant forms of practice” (Reisch et Wenocur 1986, p. 71) that shape community organizing as a profession in the framework of London Citizens. Then, it will question the inherent paradox of professionalizing a grass root and flexible activity.

¹ Cf. www.citizensuk.org.uk

² This research has been conducted in the framework of a PhD in political sciences started in October 2008. We would like to acknowledge the entire team of London Citizens who welcomed us and helped us in gathering all the necessary material. We also thank all the people that accepted to be interviewed.

a. What is a Community Organizer in London Citizens ?

First of all, let us roughly describe the role of an organizer. London Citizens is a registered charity and company. On its website³ we can read: “London Citizens is the largest alliance of community organizations in London. It is a powerful grass root charity working with local people for local people. Our goal is social, economic and environmental justice. We meet that goal by training people of all ages, faiths and backgrounds to take action together for change”. The employers are the trustees of London Citizens who are elected leaders from member institutions.

As stated in the job description, the main purpose of a London Citizens organizer is to “build, support and develop London Citizens as a broad based community organization of diverse mediating institutions and trained leaders capable of acting together in the public arena for the common good”. The process is the objective: to develop powerful citizens, through organization and action.

We can distinguish three interlinked functions of an organizer. Firstly, an organizer has to develop a broad based alliance that is democratically controlled by its constituency. This consists in recruiting new members, developing relationships between these members. This will be done by conducting at least fifteen to twenty one-to-ones with members or potential members. A one-to-one is an in-depth meeting between two individuals.

“[We are] being the person that as much as possible holds a network of community leaders together in a relationship where they wouldn’t normally be because they are too busy being a teacher or being a priest. (...) And the one-to-one is the way you can build up these relationships.” (Organizer A, 17.04.08)

Secondly, there is a strong focus on leadership development. An organizer will develop leaders from member institutions by offering them training and mentoring them in internal and external meetings and actions.

“The job of an organizer is to awaken in people a desire for leadership and to give them the tools to exercise their leadership.”(Organizer B, 24.04.08)

Thirdly, an organizer has to conduct campaigns to make political and economic elites accountable on issues that affect the lives of the member institutions. Through listening campaigns, one to one and meetings, he has to identify problems shared by members and the desired solutions to those problems. Then he has to identify the people and structures that can make those solutions possible; confronting and negotiating with those targets. In parallel, an organizer has to keep himself informed on every political and economical development, particularly in the sector of activity of its members (faith, education, trade unions, third sector).

“And another aim is to hold the politics to account on what is done now and what the people want and also the business men”. (Organizer C, 22.04.08)

Now that we have roughly described the role of an organizer, we should understand how it was shaped to analyze the mechanism of its professionalization.

³ Cf. www.citizensuk.org.uk

b. Genealogy of the model of London Citizens' Organizing

Community organizing as a professional activity has been firstly developed in the United States. The Alinsky's model strongly influenced the implementation of organizing in the UK. In order to understand the professionalization of community organizing through London Citizens in the UK, we have to look backward and travel over the Atlantic. First, we are going to clarify the different uses of the term "community organizing". It will help us to understand the difficulties that London Citizens is facing in defending its particular vision of community organizing.

i. What do we call community organizing?

Alinsky is often referred to as the father of "community organizing" (Fisher et Kling 1987, p. 38; Sirianni et Friedland 2001, p. 43). But the use of the term is linked to other practices such as social work (Austen et Beten 1977) where community organizing developed as a separate discipline (Trolander 1982, p. 350). They all have in common to seek to improve conditions of communities. It differs then, for example, on who the community organization is accountable to and, what is meant by "community", a geographical area or a community of interest as for Alinsky (1971, p. 120). It can describe practices with opposite goals. Alinsky's model would emphasize on making the elites accountable where other models would focus on service delivery.

Two major trends are easily distinguishable in community organizing: social action and community development (Fisher et Shrage 2007, p. 194). They can overlap and interact. Organizations change dominant strategies over time, not uncommonly from social action to community development.

The political and social action organizing aims at challenging social inequalities and oppressive power by offering an alternative politic, a critique of current conditions and power relations. Its main theoretician and practitioner was Alinsky who founded in 1940 the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). This structure now includes several community organizations in the U.S. and worldwide. A dozen similar networks have developed in the United States. These organizations can bring together individuals (as was ACORN) or diverse civil society groups pre-existing in a territory (religious congregations, associations, schools, trade unions ...), it is then called Broad Based Community Organizing (cf. PICO, IAF and Citizens UK). They are all independent from public funding. Supervised by community organizers, people shape their own political agenda and, through collective action, demand accountability to economic and political elites.

The community development organizations focus on improving communities through a variety of self-help or service programs in the fields of social work, housing, employment or safety. Local social work initiatives such as the settlement houses are often considered as the first community organizations (Austen et Beten 1977). Most of the time, such organisations are witnesses of the withdrawal of the state and/or the concretization of the self-management dream. They can emerge through the evolution of the action of an independent community organization from conflict into management. Different public policies sustain and encourage these types of third sector organizations (eg, The Social Security Act of 1935 and Empowerment Zone in the US, The new Deal for Communities or The Big Society Program in the UK). Community development organisations involve the inhabitants of a territory in the resolution of their problems and management of services such as housing and safety.

ii. *Alinsky's model of community organizing and its sources*

When he first organized, Alinsky was aware of previous form of community organizations such as the settlement houses initiatives. But this “radical community organizer” (Trolander 1982, p. 350) argued that his first experiment suggested “the direction in which the problems of social life in complex societies can be met with greater hope of success than previous philosophies of community organization” (Alinsky 1941, p. 808).

Among others, his work was inspired by the trade unionist John L. Lewis (Hoffman 2010, pp. 89-94) and by the sociologists of the Chicago school where he studied criminology from 1926 to 1932 (Engel 2002, p. 51). There, Shaw, inspired by Burgess's social survey, initiated the Chicago Area Project after realizing that traditional individualistic approaches to juvenile delinquency failed because they did not address the basic problem of social disorganization (Engel 2002, p. 59). In 1936, Alinsky, recommended by his former professor Burgess, was hired as an organizer in the project where he developed an effective pragmatic and practical political technology (Engel 2002, p. 63). His job description was following the organizing principle established by Burgess: (1) develop the program for the neighborhood as a whole; (2) stress the autonomy of the local people in planning and operating the program; (3) emphasize training and the development of local leadership; (4) maximize established neighborhood institutions and (5) activities are a device to create participation (Engel 2002, p. 60). Alinsky will then emancipate from this experiment and create, in 1939, the Back of The Yard Neighborhood Council (BYNC) that will not only fight crime but all sort of problems faced by this deprived area of Chicago. However, Engel (2002, p. 61) argue that Alinsky's basis of organizing has gone on being built on Burgess' principles.

Alinsky, by melding the principles of the social survey with those of union organizing, created a new form of community organization (Engel 2002, p. 61). But the organizations that followed the settlement houses' initiatives or Shaw's and Lewis' work can also be called under the name of “community organizing”.

iii. *From Alinsky to Jameson*

In the beginning of the 70s, Neil Jameson heard for the first time of Broad Based Community Organizing while he was a community worker. In 1979, he undertook a journey in the United States and discovered, on the ground, the Industrial Areas Foundation. He waited then ten years before having collected enough money and support for the creation of the Citizens Organizing Foundation (COF). In 1989, Jameson became the first full time organizer in the UK and began organizing in Bristol (Neil Jameson, 18.04.08). He is now executive director of Citizens UK, the new name of the COF. London Citizens was established in 1996 as the London branch of the COF and is now the main part of Citizens UK.

In the United States, Neil Jameson and the persons who surrounded him for the creation of the COF had been taught the theories and practices of Broad Based Organizing. They met with Ed Chambers, the director of the Industrial Areas Foundation. He eventually agreed to bring them expertise (Jamoul 2006, p. 71). COF became affiliated to the IAF. Each year, one organizer of the American federation comes to bring his support, criticisms and expertise.

The organizers of London Citizens adapted their methods and their strategies from the experience of the Industrial Areas Foundation. They are able to draw a part of their legitimacy from the experience of almost 70 years of Broad Based Organizing in United States. They still go on capitalizing of the American experience. They often reflect on the founders' book, Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* and Chambers' *Roots for radicals* and other books written by IAF community organizers such as Gecan's *Going Public*. This latter (2002, p. ix) defines an organizer by what it is not. “Not a facilitator. Not an adviser. Not a service provider or do-gooder. Not an ideologue. Not a political operative. Not a pundit. Not a progressive. Not an activist”. By this definition,

Gecan is clearly trying to define community organizing as a distinctive profession. We could add, that an IAF community organizer is not a trade unionist, nor a social worker.

But the organizers of London Citizens also try to become emancipated. These last years' events show the specific peculiarities of London Citizens. In May 2010, they organized an accountability assembly three days before the national elections where the three main candidates faced 2,500 citizens and had to respond to their agenda. This kind of national event does not have any equivalent in the United States. Jameson is now called by the current members of the IAF, the "British Alinsky". And the organizers now prefer to speak about the IAF as a partner rather than as an affiliate. Besides, London Citizens anchors its activity in a wider history. They recognize that community organizing is a brand that can qualify different historical movements not necessarily called that way.

"We definitely are very heavily influenced and very positively supported by that relationship with IAF, on the other hand, I don't think the IAF invented community organizing, I mean Saul Alinsky did come up with some very brilliant insight and methods but I think that organizer is a fundamentally human experience and that it comes with all different sort of facet and actually I think it is very important for organizer to recognise historically, you know brilliant examples of community organizing or mobilising, building power movements." (Organizer D, 22.04.08)

The organizers of London Citizens justify their model by telling that they revive the tradition of fighting for "social justice" proper to East London workers, religious and anti-slavery movements⁴.

"The privilege of working in East London is that if you look at the history of working people here this is exactly what they did one hundred years ago." (Neil Jameson, 18.04.08)

In 2006, Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, signed a letter congratulating the tenth anniversary of TELCO in which this historical affiliation is recognized. "There is a proud history of working people in East London opposing injustice and fighting for a better society. TELCO clearly stands in that tradition, and I am happy to recognise its achievements over the past ten years" (TELCO, 2006).

c. Toward community organizing as a career

i. Framing the practice of an organizer

In his book, the aim of Chambers⁵ (2003, p. 18) is to "distill the basic elements of the IAF's hard-won practical wisdom" after more than sixty years of experience. As for an example, Chambers (2003, p. 44) refers to the "one to one" as "the most radical thing we taught" and spends ten pages in his book to explain how should take place such a meeting. He then spends ten other pages presenting what IAF defines as an "action" – that is "a public meeting of leaders of a broad based organization with political, business, or other officials for the purpose of being recognized and getting them to act on specific proposals put forward by the organization" - and how it should be conducted (Chambers 2003, pp. 80-90). These elements are tools that define the practice of a community organizer. During the training organized by London Citizens to develop leaders, these tools are being taught according to a curriculum mostly designed by Chambers. But applying these tools is not enough to be a good organizer. Alinsky was complaining that his trainees "find it difficult to grasp the fact that no situation ever repeats itself, that no tactic can be

⁴ "In the 19th century, William Wilberforce would not have won the battle against slavery without Thomas Clarkson and hundreds of local people who organized with him. The early trade unions and friendly societies were built by community organizers and leaders such as Ben Tillet, Will Thorne and Eleanor Marx" (Jameson 2010).

⁵ Chambers, 73 in 2003, was the IAF director since the death of Alinsky in 1972.

precisely the same” (Alinsky 1971, p. 67). This new profession that Alinsky created is entirely new and hardly precisely framed. “There are no fixed chronological points or definite issues. The demands are always changing”. Therefore, former labor union organizers, a profession often thought of as similar, “turned out to be poor community organizers. Their experience was tied to a pattern of fixed points” (Alinsky 1971, p. 66).

Reflecting on the mainly bad experiences he had in recruiting new organizers, Alinsky (1971, pp. 72-80) lists in his book “the ideal elements of an organizer” : “curiosity”, “irreverence”, “imagination”, a “sense of humor”, a “bit of a blurred vision of a better world”, “an organized personality”, a “well integrated political schizoid”, “ego” and a “free and open mind, and political relativity”. But such a person was not easily recruited, especially in the third sector, where employment remains precarious. This is why Alinsky tried to focus, after several years of organizing, on the training of organizers.

ii. Recruiting and training community organizers

The IAF was created in 1940 in order to extend Alinsky’s work at the BYNC to other parts of the country. He began hiring and training organizers (Warren 2001, p. 43) and the IAF training institute was formed in 1969. But “the finding of potential organizers and their training” has been “the major problem” of Alinsky’s years of organizational experience (Alinsky 1971, p. 63). When he died in 1972, the IAF had only two professional organizers and a secretary on staff (Warren 2001, p. 46). Chambers, former organizer in several local organizations and director of the IAF training institute, took over as director of the IAF. He systematized the training of organizers, promoted the professionalization of the occupation by upgrading pay and set up a cabinet of senior organizer to provide collective supervision (Warren 2001, p. 47). It is through this new scheme that the first British organizers were trained and supported.

But the issue of recruiting good organizers is still important as Jameson testifies.

“Finding organizers, it’s the big thing, keeping the supply of very good organizers, keeping the organizers happy, keeping them staying with us, staying, getting better all the time.” (Neil Jameson, 18.04.08)

As Obama (1988) put it, “low salaries, the lack of quality training and ill-defined possibilities for advancement discourage the most talented (...) from viewing organizing as a legitimate career option. As long as our best and brightest youth see more opportunity in climbing the corporate ladder than in building the communities from which they came, organizing will remain decidedly handicapped”. One of the challenges of Citizens UK is to develop an attractive career opportunity for bright young people.

“There would be a career for people to do this kind of work which is very exciting, challenging work. Sort of creative, bright graduate would like to take on!” (Paul Regan⁶, 23.04.08)

Moreover, an organizer needs « some qualities that cannot be taught » (Alinsky 1971, p. 71). Organizers in London Citizens say that the limit of the number of organizer is the number of people who are good enough to be organizers. Besides its numerous required qualities, organizing is a very demanding job. “Work pursues an organizer into his or her home” (Alinsky 1971, p. 65).

“I found it very difficult and very tiring” (Organiser B, 08.04.10)

“It’s quite difficult to get the motivation. (...) That is quite hard work (...)The organizers feel extremely responsible, that’s quite difficult some time to switch it off.” (Organizer C, 22.04.08)

⁶ Trustee of London Citizens and Citizens UK.

Little by little, London Citizens institutionalizes different stages toward the recruitment of good organizers.

The Summer Academy is a one month paid work in the organization. It is open to every student. But in practice, the young leaders of a member institution are selected first. All are highly motivated to become organizers. Neil Jameson and his team use this opportunity to train these candidates and test their skills. However, this step passed with success, nothing is guaranteed for these candidates. They will have to show perseverance in their motivation. One of the lead organizer was very popular during his “Summer Academy” without being offered a job afterward. He then found a philanthropic foundation ready to pay him a two years’ salary to work in the organization.

Over the last three years, employed organizers went from ten to twenty five. We can consider that the recruitment issue has passed a further stage. There is an increasing number of candidates at each summer academy.

“In the early days, the main problem was not having enough organizers and people would try as organizers, not being able to do the job, in some cases not accepting they could do that job, so that’s been a breakthrough to find an all new generation of young organizers, that’s great. (...) It’s partly having some money and it’s been a quite imaginative recruitment process”. (Erik Adams⁷, 09.07.09)

Fundraising is a major issue for London Citizens to sustain its professional activity. Whether philanthropic foundations or members decide not to renew their funding at the end of the year, it may no longer exist in a few months. Between 2005 and 2011, the administrative and fundraising related employees went from one to three.

“In terms of the day to day life it’s much more structured, it couldn’t have survived the way it was where each one would just have picked part of the administrative function and certainly the fundraising part as well. So as time goes on, we get better and better at managing the organization”. (Business manager, 18.04.08)

iii. A Guild and a Master degree, community organizing rised as a recognised profession.

Further important stages in setting community organizing as a recognized career in the UK has been reached in 2010.

On the job description of an organizer we can read that the “development of the Organizer is a priority for Citizens UK and considerable time and resources invested into the apprenticeship of new Organizers and potential Organizers (...) Citizens UK is committed to developing the career of Organizer in the UK and so keen to appoint staff who see this job as a career and who may be prepared to move to 'Organize' with Citizens UK in another city/area in the UK in the future”. This will has been recently concretized by the establishment of a guild and the launch of a master degree.

In March 2010, Jameson announces in a tribune in the Guardian that “Citizens UK has launched Europe's first professional Guild for Community Organizers” (Jameson 2010). Paul Regan explains that the Guild aim at further establish the professionalization of community organizing.

“There will be a recognized professional guild for community organizers in this country. So, the foundation that we have been laying through the summer academy, will become more formalized. All people coming into the organization, as organizers, will become part of that guild.

⁷ Erik Adams is one of those who encouraged the creation of the COF. He funded Jameson’s first salary through the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

They will have to do a three years apprenticeship basically to become a fully accredited organizer, and a five years apprenticeship to become a lead organizer. So we are trying to professionalize much more. (...)To underpin that, we've decided to establish an academic link with the University of London from next year through Queen Mary College, Professor Wills.” (Paul Regan, 22.07.09)

In September 2010, Jane Wills, from the Department of Geography of the Queen Mary University, launched the first master's course in community organizing in the UK. This professor became involved with London Citizens in 2001 through the Living Wage campaign. She helped its development through her research action (Balazard 2011). Her university department is a member of London Citizens. Jameson⁸ explains that the Master degree aims at providing the student “the practical tools and political intelligence” so that they can consider “the development of civil society as a vocation”. As part of the degree, each student will make a five-month work placement as a community organizer with London Citizens. Jameson⁹ hopes “this course will help more people get involved in the organization” and precises that “it could well become a pool for recruiting”.

d. How to professionalise and stay grass root? Toward an auto organization of Civil Society

But one of the main challenges for this professionalized activity is to stay grass root. At the early age of IAF, when Alinsky’s project did not become reactionary, as for the NYBC, they did lose their grass root participatory character (Warren 2001, p. 46). There is a real issue in finding a form of professionalization that allows the perpetuation of London Citizens activity without alienating it. Indeed a very important quality of Broad Based Community Organizing rests in the multiple deep relationships between members, leaders and organizers.

“[Being fragile] is good, you keep in touch with people that way.” (Leader, 21.04.08)

In addition, the organization relies heavily on the voluntary people : the leaders to be. The dilemma between autonomy and bureaucratization, professionalization and volunteerism is ongoing in practice.

On one hand, to ensure its permanence, the organization attempts to secure funding, to streamline the work of employees and to establish a kind of bureaucracy. The literature shaping the curriculum of the leadership trainings represents a roughly standardized system of value. The democratic ideal is its core value and words such as “power” or “self interest” are the vehicle of what we call the pragmatist ideology of Broad Based Community Organizing. But these standardized values could never imply standardized skills. Among the organizers, Alinsky trained and failed with, “there were some who memorized the words and the related experiences and concepts. Listening to them was like listening to a tape playing back my presentation” (Alinsky 1971, p. 67). This impossibility of entirely standardizing the skills of a community organizer prevents London Citizens from becoming a professional bureaucracy.

Organizers believe that the organization could get a little more efficient in terms of communication between employees and in terms of clear separation of tasks. Indeed, the

⁸ Quoted in “New Masters gives graduates the 'Obama factor'” on the Queen Mary, University of London website <http://www.qmul.ac.uk/media/news/items/hss/27084.html> (accessed on 01.08.11).

⁹ Davis, Rowenna. 2010. « Obama factor prompts MA in community organizing ». The Independent. <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/postgraduate/postgraduate-study/obama-factor-prompts-ma-in-community-organizing-1971833.html> (Consulté août 2, 2011).

organizers are very often out of office. They often communicate with each other only very briefly. However, they would not see the organization become more “bureaucratic”.

“I feel that things are being done twice or not being done at all, because people are on meetings all the time and don’t meet with each other or communicate with each other quite enough but, you know, I don’t think there is a danger of bureaucratise basically.”(Organizer E, 29.04.08)

“It wasn’t really clear what I had to do but I was happy that I would learn and learn to define the job as I got into it and understood what was happening.” (Organizer F, 15.09.09)

On another hand, we argue that a key factor for innovation and success of the organization is its resistance to bureaucratization. All employees, without exception, the director and trustees actively participate in the preparation, including manual handlings, of meetings, actions and assemblies. There, they meet regularly with all the members. Administrators follow the training courses as well as the organizers and leaders. Moreover, each organizer, even if he is specialized in a particular campaign, is in charge of one borough of London. In “his territory”, he develops one to one relationships and is free to work in his own way. As a consequence, this prevents London Citizens from the creation of separate and specialized positions to carry out different tasks and from the increase in rules and formal processes that would lead to oligarchical bureaucracy. Furthermore, most of the times, organizers have to work with the business manager team for the fundraising development activity. In a way, this precarious status of the organiser prevent them from considering their job as permanent which could lead them to dominate their neighbourhoods. This is what happened to social workers in settlement houses (Trolander 1982, p. 361).

Besides, organizers’ main task is to develop the capacity and power of people from the member institution. Through this leadership development, members are encouraged to become trustee or organizer. In a sense, what we can call the “clients” or “mobilization targets” are designed to become “employers” or “employees”. This enables the organization to resist to any kind of oligarchical bureaucracy. Indeed, as stated in the job description, the activity of an organizer will be evaluated on their capacity of developing their members “as major power players in all strategic decisions”.

To sum up, organizers in London Citizens are a mix of what Staggenborg (1988) call movement “entrepreneur” and “professional movement activists”. The first ones are innovators entrepreneurs who create organization from scratch to assert a cause in which management is highly personalized and charismatic. Professional movement leaders tend to formalize the organizations they lead. Their commitment is at the head of a bureaucracy in which power and its exercise are governed by explicit rules. Further work, should aim at deepening the link between the grass root professionalization of community organizers and theory of social movement. It could, in particular, question the rule of inevitable oligarchisation of professionalized social movement.

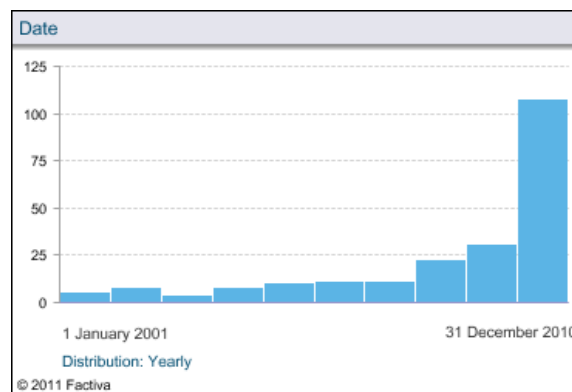
Regarding its objective to develop and promote community organizing as a career, Citizens UK has to attract funder and candidate. The mediatization of its activity is a necessary step toward the creation of a new profession in the UK. We argue that part of the originality and success of London Citizens is its resistance to bureaucratization that allows professional organizers to be connected to ordinary citizens.

2. SUCCESS AND COVETOUSNESS AROUND THE NEW PROFESSION

Reviewing the media, we can notice a clear rise of interest toward “community organizing” and “Saul Alinsky” in the UK’s media. We explain this evolution by, in 2008, the election of Barack Obama and the holding of a second mayoral accountability assembly by London Citizens, much more publicized than the first one in 2004; and above all, in 2010, the launch of the Big Society program by the government and the holding of an accountability assembly before the national election by Citizens UK.

The rise of interest toward this new activity is interlink with the development of London Citizens but it has also created interferences in the way it sought to develop community organizing as a professional activity. Now, London Citizens has no more the monopole of the term “community organizing” to label its career opportunity but the qualitative battle is still ongoing.

Figure 1 Occurrence of the terms "Community organizing" or "Saul Alinsky" in the UK's media



a. Publicisation of London Citizens' organizing

London Citizens is not without ambition regarding its role in society and governance. Its aim, as in the job description of an organizer, is to develop the organization “as the primary 'First Sector' civil society institution in London”. Through some winning campaigns and the holding of accountability assemblies before the elections, we argue that London Citizens is now recognized as a countervailing force in the city’s and country’s governance.

i. *Successes of London Citizens*

Since the holding of its first mayoral accountability assembly in 2004, where the main candidates responded to the agenda of a thousand of citizens, London Citizens can be considered as a key player in the London governance. Since the national accountability assembly organized three days before the last national election in 2010, Citizens UK, the umbrella body of London Citizens, has been recognized as a stakeholder in the national governance.

One of its most successful campaigns is fighting for a Living Wage. It was launched in 2001. In 2003 TELCO persuaded five NHS Hospital Trusts to pay their cleaners and ancillary staff a Living Wage; in 2004 two global banks, Barclays and HSBC. During the first mayoral accountability assembly in 2004, London Citizens invited each candidate to be a champion of the

Living Wage Campaign. On March 31st 2005, Mayor Livingstone and the Greater London Authority fulfilled their commitment and announced the 'official' Living Wage figure for all in work in London as £6.70 an hour minimum while the Minimum Wage figure was £4.85. Since then, each year the GLA announce the new Living Wage figure. Also, the GLA accepted to pay all its employees this Living Wage. In 2006, the Living Wage employer award was created. To be awarded, an organization must ensure that all staff including contracted out support staff are paid at least the Living Wage hourly rate, eligible for at least 20 days paid holiday per annum plus bank holidays, eligible for at least 10 days full sick pay per annum and allowed free access to a trade union. The number of Living Wage employer grows each year and London Citizens is mostly known for this campaign.

This campaign has demonstrated the capacity of the organization to challenge the market, enforce corporate responsibility and empower low paid migrant workers (Wills 2009, p. 171).

ii. *Mediatization of community organizing through London Citizens*

The political effects depend on the ability of a movement to produce a cultural impact and, more specifically, to alter the state of public opinion in a favorable way to his cause. The mass media in modern societies is one of the main vehicles through which social issues are constructed and expressed in public space (Chabanet et Giugni 2010, p. 156).

In the UK, even before Obama's election, community organizing through London Citizens was becoming known by academics for "strengthening the public sphere and reviving local democracy" (Pierson 2001) and by journalists for proposing a "genuinely consultative model of local politics" which "a Brown government would do well to learn from"¹⁰.

The media is a major channel through which movements recruit members, boost morale of adherents, and convey their importance and messages to the public (Morris and Staggenborg 2004, p. 186). But the organization is difficult to decrypt and thus to advertise. It's an alliance "that is not a political party, not an advocacy organisation, not a social provider, not a single-issue campaign group, not a social movement, not even a community group in the conventional sense" (Jamoul et Wills 2008, p. 2040). The fundamental difficulty lies in the fact that people notice the organization through its interventions in the public arena. But the campaigns are not good at summarizing the organization activity.

"When we generated lot's of press through the strangers into citizens¹¹ campaign, the way I handled that was to generate debate about the issue. But the story was always about the campaign, it wasn't about London Citizens. And the same is true at the mayoral accountability assembly. We had lots of press because they were interested in what the mayor had to say and that got reported very well. But nobody seems to be particularly interested in the media in London citizens as an organization". (Organizer B, 24.04.08)

Moreover, news gathering procedures are highly centralized, and media organizations look for authoritative sources of information. Movements which are ambivalent about leadership because they value democracy, which is the case of London Citizens, have an extremely difficult time conveying their own frames through the mass media. In contrast, professionalized movement organizations with centralized structures typically have an advantage in dealing with media organizations (Morris and Staggenborg 2004, p. 187). Even if London Citizens had a centralized

¹⁰ Bright M., 2007, 'Citizen's advice'. *New Statesman*, 6 Octobre 2007.

¹¹ This campaign launched in 2006 aims at creating a pathway into citizenship for long term illegal migrant workers.

structure of employed organizers, the aim of this structure is to stay behind the scenes, as organizers have to develop leaderships among their members.

To address this lack of visibility, the strategy of the association is to develop special relationships with specific journalists, who have the time and inclination to understand what lies behind the name and campaigns of the organization. Also, organizers will sometimes propose their own press releases, with stories from their members. But it will depend on their own capacity and knowledge in media communication. There has never been an employee devoted full time to the media coverage development¹².

Nevertheless, the political context of the last two years helped its mediatisation.

“I suppose our general experience with the media until last year could be summed up as ignored and misunderstood. Ignored because, we only came to the attention to the media when we did something throughout our campaigns in which case we were then perceived to be an issue based organization. And misunderstood because they didn’t know what community organizing really was. But I think it was transformed with the environment like Barack Obama’s election and the fact that we suddenly have become the flavour of the moment; why this happened? Because September 2008, with the collapse of the markets combine with the parliamentary expenses scandals. So it has happened when both the state and the market are being discredited and what happened when the state and the market enter to crisis is that they looked to civil society. (...) We’re in the guardian at the moment every couple of day!” (Organiser B, 08.04.10)

In November 2009, London Citizens took the initiative of organizing a citizens’ response to the economic crisis. It organized an assembly with 2000 of its member citizens to confront political and economic elites right in the middle of the City of London, the UK capital’s financial district. The event was widely reviewed by standard newspapers as well as financial media. This marked the strengthening of a relationship with some of The Guardian’s journalists who are going to regularly cover London Citizens activity without dismissing its nature.

“A Guardian journalist called Allegra Stratton really became interested in this. She saw the event and she really shared her contacts with us and start writing about us, she’s very respected and then more people started writing so it built up the mind of the journalists which we had never had relationships within 18 years of CO. No interests from the journalists, it was too boring religious people and no celebrities and disconnected”. (Maurice Glasman¹³, 06.05.10)

The American presidential campaign of 2008 helped publicized Alinsky’s methods of community organizing. Indeed, Barack Obama was a community organizer back in the 80’s in Chicago and Hillary Rodham Clinton wrote her undergraduate thesis at Wellesley College on the life and ideas of Saul Alinsky¹⁴. Barack Obama has consistently attributed his political success to his experience on the streets of Chicago as a community organizer¹⁵.

These facts had wide media coverage in the UK. This has been partly fed by advocates of London Citizens. They used the visibility and passion for Obama to publicize the hardly understandable activity that organizing is. In the press releases concerning the events of London Citizens, the organization is presented as “a powerful broad-based alliance of civic organizations which have won significant victories for ordinary people. Behind it is Citizens UK (formerly COF), which has trained more than 2,000 community leaders in the methods of community organizing once practiced by Barack Obama on the streets of Chicago”. On the Queen Mary University of London website, professor Wills declares on the subject of the MA in Community

¹² Moreover, we can notice that the development of ICT in LC is very new.

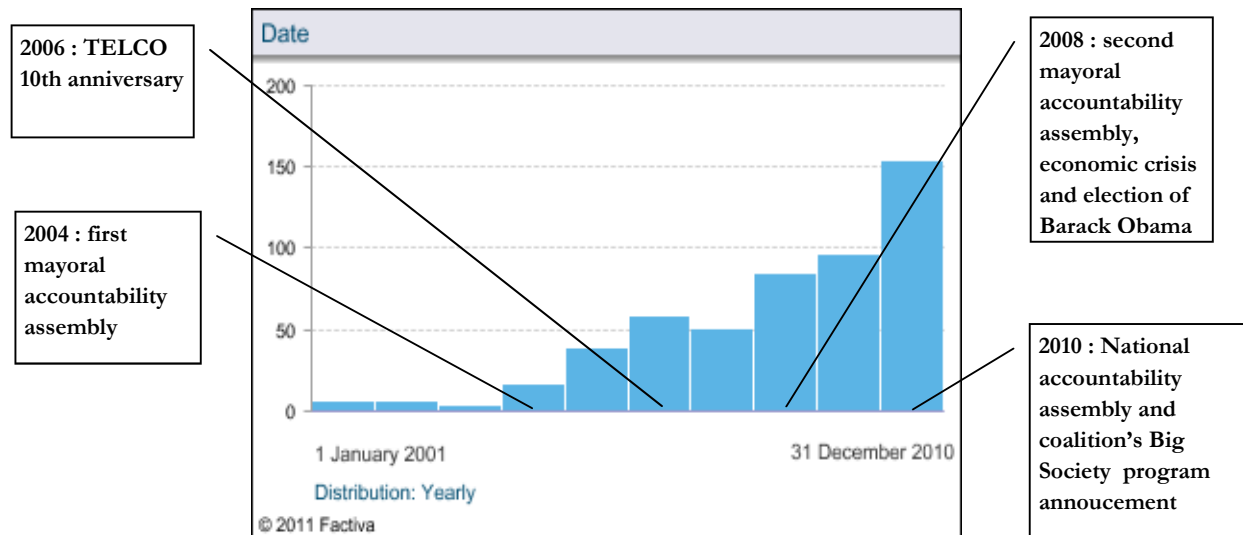
¹³ Maurice Glasman is an academic involved as a leader in London Citizens

¹⁴ Senter, Bob, et John McCormick. 2007. « Barack Obama: Portrait of a pragmatist ». *Chicago Tribune*. www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0703300121mar30-archive,0,5213128.story (Consulté novembre 1, 2008).

¹⁵ Elgot, Jessica. 2011. « Inspired by Obama’s organizing ». *The Jewish Chronicle*. <http://www.thejc.com/news/social-action/46694/inspired-obamas-organizing> (Consulté août 2, 2011).

Organizing : "Just like Obama did in Chicago's projects in the 1980s, (...) our students will learn how broad based power alliances like London Citizens, organizing the interests of communities, get a place at the decision-making table and ensure their voice is heard". As a consequence, "Obama factor prompts MA in community organizing" as stated by The Independent¹⁶.

Figure 2 Occurrence of the term "London Citizens" in the UK's media



Paul Mason¹⁷ was one of the first influential journalists to not only be aware of the real nature of London Citizens activity but also advocating it. He explains how the Obama election has catalyzed his colleagues' recognition of community organizing as an important issue for the future of politics.

"I'm a reporter, my main job is to report business. I do have a reason to report on them because they campaign on Living Wage. Corporate Social Responsibility was coming in fast in the early 2000 and I wanted to talk to people who knew about CSR (...) I saw this campaign and I thought it was really exciting. I went to film them, Barclays came to me and said we accept the Living Wage. We had that as an exclusive story. And I spent a long conversation with Neil who explained to me the whole Alinsky thing and then I tried to explain this to my colleagues and they were deeply bored by it until five years later when Barack Obama came in and then everyone wanted to know who is Saul Alinsky. (...) I say to them ok so come with me in east London to look at what they are doing and I will explain to you why this is important because it's gonna change labour party, it's changed the conservative party" (Paul Mason, 28.04.10).

b. Influence of the community organizing model in partisan politic

Representatives of political parties and of local authorities are showing an increasingly keen interest in these methods of mobilization. Whereas it's a fade or a true questioning of democracy, it has impacted the activities of Citizens UK.

¹⁶ Davis, Rowenna. 2010. «Obama factor prompts MA in community organizing». The Independent. <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/postgraduate/postgraduate-study/obama-factor-prompts-ma-in-community-organizing-1971833.html> (Consulté août 2, 2011).

¹⁷ Paul Mason is economics editor of BBC's Newsnight.

i. Labour Party, coming back to its roots.

In 2010, the Labour candidate, Gordon Brown lost the national election. The polls had predicted it. But three days before the election, he made a much noticed speech at the Citizens UK's national accountability assembly which aroused many compliments. It is known¹⁸ to have saved Labour 25 seats. Maurice Glasman is an academic involved as a leader in London Citizens. His university department at the London Metropolitan University is a member of the organization. He has been instrumental in making Brown come to that event¹⁹. On the Election Day, he explains:

"This speech gets a complete transformation of his position; he's now talking about the Living Wage, talking about the interest cap (...). Those people in the labour that knew nothing about it before, they now want to have local town hall meeting all over the country, they're becoming to see community organizing as an extremely interesting engagement with elite politics" (Maurice Glasman, 06.05.10)

Following this, there has been a passion inside Labour around community organizing and Citizens UK.

The two brothers Milibands were running for internal election to become leader of the party. On one side, Ed Milibands, as stated on the Guardian²⁰, "wants the party to be "like London Citizens", the UK's largest community organizing group, and will launch a campaign (...) to get all constituency Labour parties to join its campaign for a "living wage" of £7.60 an hour, instead of the current £5.83 minimum wage. "We've got to show as a political party in parliament but also outside that we can achieve things."". On the other side, David Milibands, the elder brother, launched the Movement for Change²¹ (M4C) and employed three Citizens UK's organizer to train 1,000 activists in the principles of community organizing.

Labour revealed to be interested not only in the campaigns of London Citizens but also in the process of community organizing. It appeals to its roots. It is seen as a potential mean to reconnect with grass root memberships. This growing interest has helped making community organizing recognized as a profession in clarifying its goals and publicizing it. It could have blurred its non-partisan nature. But community organizing has also rose interest among the conservatives.

ii. Conservative and the Big Society

On the other side of the political spectrum, conservatives have also developed an interest in community organizing. Boris Johnson, the elected mayor of London, has endorsed most of London Citizens' campaigns in 2008 and is now in a collaborative relationship with the organization. As soon as 2006, David Cameron, the leader of the Conservative Party, signed a letter congratulating the tenth anniversary of TELCO: "We all have a shared responsibility for

¹⁸ Stratton, Allegra. 2010. «Ed Miliband rehearses "good society" guru's lines in conference speech». *The Guardian*.

¹⁹ Maurice Glasman was offered a peerage by Ed Milliband in January 2011.

²⁰ Stratton, Allegra, et Patrick Wintour. 2010. "Ed Miliband: 'We're brothers, not clones. I'm different from David'", *The Guardian*. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/may/21/ed-miliband-interview>

²¹ "M4C is a London Citizens-style community organizing organization focused on allowing the Labour Party to connect with voters at a local level in places where the party doesn't have local councilors". Cf. <http://debeauvoircouncillors.blogspot.com/2011/05/de-beauvoir-welcomes-david-miliband.html>

our shared future (...). Organizations such as TELCO, which seek to give people a voice, help to strengthen the fabric of civil society. In doing so they encourage a spirit of social responsibility”.

Since then, Cameron’s interest toward the community organizing model has grown while he prepared and launched his Big Society program. Announced in a speech in November 2009 the vision of “the Big Society” was launched by Cameron on March the 27th in 2010. The program is presented as an “alternative to Labour's failed big government”. Its main focus is “on empowering and enabling individuals, families and communities to take control of their lives²²”. Among the announcements made that day is “the establishment of "National Centres for Community Organizing", which would fund the training of 5,000 community organizers”. The model is then presented as borrowed from Saul Alinsky. Derbyshire from the *NewStatesman* reports²³ that “Cameron even mentioned London Citizens, the network of community organizations, reference to which now seems to be de rigueur in speeches by politicians of all stripes”. On the morning of this speech, Cameron even came to visit London Citizens’ office. A few weeks later, at the assembly organized by Citizens UK three days before the election, Cameron said to the crowd : “I talk about Big Society — you *are* the Big Society!”.

According to the dedicated website on the Big Society²⁴, the program recognizes “that active local people can be better than state services at finding innovative solutions to local problems”. But further understanding of the program will underline its difference with the London Citizens’ organizing. It’s not only the shaping but also the delivering of these solutions that is aimed. Indeed the overall focus of the Big Society program is on “making it as easy as possible for civil society organizations to help shape and deliver our public services”. Big society’s community organizers “will be there to facilitate local action and give support to groups looking to come together to tackle problems”.

This vision of a Big Society bred debates around how civil society should be implied in the governance. Some months before the election, in February 2010, a Labour personality, James Purnell, resigned as an MP and became involved with London Citizens. He declared in *The Times*²⁵: “we should be clear that we do need a reciprocal society. That won’t be achieved just by talking about it, as David Cameron does. It will be achieved through organization — the founding skill of the Labour movement. I don’t mean often lame community building by local and national governments. I mean the kind of community organization pioneered in Chicago by Saul Alinsky and in Britain by London Citizens”. His statement refers to the distinctions encountered in the different use of the term “community organizing”, social action or community development. On one hand, community organizing is a way to develop a powerful civil society that can make power holder accountable. On the other, it is a way for civil society to develop and run self help program.

²² Cf. The Big Society Speech of David Cameron (November 10th 2009)

http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2009/11/David_Cameron_The_Big_Society.aspx

²³ Derbyshire, Jonathan. 2010. « David Cameron’s big idea ». *New Statesman*. <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2010/03/cameron-blond-big-society> (Consulté février 7, 2011).

²⁴ Cf. <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/big-society-frequently-asked-questions-faqs> Office of Civil Society

²⁵ Purnell, James. 2010. « Power to the people - and trust them too ». *The Times*. http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributor (Consulté mars 10, 2010).

c. The Big Society and contradictions of community organizing

Until 2011, London Citizens was considered, provided it succeeded in publicizing precisely what it was doing, as the only community organizing force in the UK. However, in the first part of this paper we have seen how community organizing could refer to different kind of practices. We are now going to analyze how this confusion in what community organizing mean has been introduced in the UK.

i. “You are the Big Society”

In March 2010, Jameson officially welcomed the Big Society idea of David Cameron, “provided it is recognized that mature engagement and social renewal must lead to a new concordat between the people and their elected representatives” (Jameson 2010).

After his election, David Cameron and his deputy minister Nick Clegg, made a bid to recruit the organizations that would train the community organizers of the Big Society program.

Debates occurred inside Citizens UK on whether they should propose a bid. As often, in light of pressures to professionalize and institutionalize, fears of accommodation and co-optation of organizational agendas surfaced (Markovitz and Tice 2002, p. 942). This is even truer when an organization’s aim is to democratically represent and develop its members. The risk of losing independence, time and credibility were underlined.

It has eventually been decided to make an offer. Jameson explained this decision to a journalist of the Third Sector Online²⁶ : “Our principle for the past 22 years has been never to apply for government money, but this contract looked like it was written for us²⁷ so we abandoned that principle and bid for it”. This bid was seen as recognition of their work being valuable to society. It was considered as a potential endowment that will help them secure some funding and develop community organizing across UK. Jameson also promoted his organization’s expertise²⁸. More specifically, Citizens UK decided to make a bid because they wanted to protect the craft and vocation of being a community organizer. They were aware that if they did not bid then someone else would and the delicate process of recruitment, apprenticeship, and mentoring that had gone on in Citizens UK for the last 22 years would be threatened²⁹.

Whereas “the big society manifesto cites their work, and the tender – widely believed to have been written for them – refers to their methods of organizing³⁰”, Citizens UK eventually lost the

²⁶ Wiggins, Kaye. 2011. «Locality wins £15m community organizers program». Third Sector Online. <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/channels/Management/Article/1055870/Locality-wins-15m-community-organizers-program/> (Consulté mars 1, 2011).

²⁷ Cf. Citizens UK website : “David Cameron launched The Big Society Manifesto on the day he visited our office in March 2010 and CITIZENS UK was mentioned in the document as the organization a new Conservative Government would like to work with to train 5,000 Community Organizers. The bid specifically requested experience; track record; Alinsky; and a sustainability strategy to ensure the one year training and bursaries were not wasted” <http://www.citizensuk.org/2011/02/statement-responding-to-ocs-decision-over-community-organizing-tender/>.

²⁸ “The next government will need architects, builders and informed citizens if its aspirations for a redistribution of power to a strong and active civil society are to be realized. Our religious and educational institutions, community associations and trade union branches have deep roots and committed leadership. They look forward to and welcome the chance of working with a new government that takes seriously and respects the talent, energy and creativity that organized citizens can bring to public life” (Jameson 2010).

²⁹ Cf. Citizens UK website : <http://www.citizensuk.org/2011/02/statement-responding-to-ocs-decision-over-community-organizing-tender/>.

³⁰ Bunting, Madeleine. 2011. «How Cameron fell out of love with his citizen organizers». *The Guardian*. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/14/citizens-uk-big-society-coalition> (Consulté mars 1, 2011).

bid. This defeat can be understood if we come back to our analysis of the different conception of community organizing. As Madeleine Bunting³¹ from The Guardian puts it, “it's not hard to see why civil servants might balk at handing them a training budget. Neil Jameson, the founder and director, says things like, "we teach people to take power", and agrees "that radical edge antagonizes some people"”. But then, the fact that they made an offer, whereas it was a result of naivety or high pressure to institutionalize, risks undermining the credibility of their patient work to establish an independent powerful grass root organization.

ii. *A newcomer in community organizing*

In February 2011, it was announced that Locality and Re:generate won the bid and were awarded a £15m contract to deliver the government’s community organizers program. Locality is the result of the merger of the Development Trusts Association (established 1992) and Bassac (established 1920) both long-standing independent networks of grass root community-led organization³². Re:generate Community Trust has worked in the UK for 22 years. It provides training and support to individuals, multi agency teams, community and voluntary sector organizations to deliver a dynamic and empowering process designed to tackle the root causes of poverty and disadvantage. As stated on their website³³, their work and process have been influenced by the philosophy, methods and approaches developed by educators and community activists such as Paulo Freire and Saul Alinsky in the Americas.

The trainee community organizers’ job description³⁴ details the purpose of the job : to help residents, groups, associations, and businesses to develop their collective power to act together for the common good, through using ‘Root Solution Listening Matters’, a dialogue and action-based program that supports transformational change in individuals, groups, organizations and institutions.

This looks roughly like the purpose of the London Citizens organizer. The IAF’s tool of the “one to one” is replaced by the ‘Root Solution Listening Matters’ of Re:generate. But the differences lay in the fact that, as precised by the Cabinet Office³⁵, the program is designed to help communities take advantage of big society initiatives such as the right to buy, enabling groups to take over public assets for community use, and the right to bid, which will allow them to try to take over the running of some public services. This definition is nearer to the one of community organising as community development rather than as independent social and political action.

Surprised not to have won the bid, Citizens UK wished Locality well and said that they expected to work with them where it is deemed to be mutually beneficial³⁶. On the trainee’s job description³⁷, it is written that during the second six months of the one year contract, they will specialize in different fields such as “community enterprise development, Alinsky style citizen organizing or the “Root Solution - Listening Matters” process”. Moreover, some organizations which are in the Locality network are also members of London Citizens. Further work could

³¹ *Ibid*

³² Cf. Community Organizers Program Manager’s blog.

<http://jesssteele.wordpress.com/2011/02/27/community-organisers-programme-manager%E2%80%99s-blog/>

³³ Cf. <http://www.regeneratetrust.org/>

³⁴ Cf. <http://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Trainee-CO-Job-Description.pdf>

³⁵ Wiggins, Kaye. 2011. «Locality wins £15m community organizers program». *Third Sector Online*. <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/channels/Management/Article/1055870/Locality-wins-15m-community-organizers-program/> (Consulté mars 1, 2011).

³⁶ Cf. Citizens UK website <http://www.citizensuk.org/2011/02/statement-responding-to-ocs-decision-over-community-organizing-tender/>.

³⁷ Cf. <http://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Trainee-CO-Job-Description.pdf>

explore how will be handled this cooperation and how is going to be shaped the community organizer career in the UK. Will the government program foster a new kind of profession, and in this case what would be the relationship with the Citizens UK professional Guild, or will it simply be a fade?

iii. Publicising Broad Based Community Organizing versus Community Development

In a way, the Big Society bid has brought in the UK the confusion that surrounds community organizing in the US. This label has become highly fought for and Obama can be thanked or blamed for it. London Citizens don't have any more the monopoly of its use. At the same time, his work is not based on a trend or on a 4 years government funding so it should overcome this "crisis". But in a time of spending cuts, the third sector is also touched and London Citizens couldn't go on without the money to pay its growing staff.

In order to foster and sustain the process of professionalization undertaken for more than twenty years, Citizens UK try now to put forward a more precise name of its activity. We explained before that the IAF and other network in the United States were doing broad based community organizing. One of the main aims is to ally diverse (broad) civil society (based) organizations around common good issues.

Jameson declared³⁸ in April 2011: "Obviously the stuff we do is broad-based community organizing which is arms-length from what the other folk are doing, which is really community development work by another name."

Citizens UK, even if their credibility can be questioned as they responded to the bid, argue now that the government program is not aiming at permanent powerful citizens' alliance. They try to show that Locality and Re:generate are using a very different model that could be rank as "community development". Indeed, settlement houses in the UK are a significant part of Locality history. Even if they declare that they are partly inspired by Alinsky, they don't stick to his IAF model. Alinsky's writings are currently used in social work curriculum in United States and Canada. As we have argued, the different conceptions of community organizing are overlapping. Besides, the "Alinsky" brand has become related to the "Obama" one and is more and more used to publicize any grass root activity or government policy.

As for now, the trademark battle around community organizing is going on through the disputed ownership of the brand "Institute of Community Organising"³⁹. Having on their side journalists, universities, a guild of nearly thirty organizers and track records, Citizens UK is stronger than three years ago. But the fight for funding and recognition of the career it seeks to develop is also harder since the brand community organizing has been taken over by the national political agenda. Now several third sector organizations recognize themselves in doing this kind of grass root activity. And we could argue that the Big Society program was essentially an

³⁸ Tania Mason, « Citizens UK beats Locality to trademark application for "Institute for Community Organizing" », Civil Society, avril 5, 2011, http://www.civilsociety.co.uk/governance/news/content/8754/citizens_uk_beats_locality_to_trademark_application_for_institute_for_community_organizing.

³⁹ *Ibid*

instrumentalization of the recognition of community organising in order to hide the ongoing social services cutback programs.

CONCLUSION

Citizens UK, and its main branch, London Citizens, are developing a new profession in the UK. It has recently set up a guild of community organizers and launched a master degree in community organizing. This is the formalization of 22 years of activity in the UK framed by the work of Alinsky, Chambers and the IAF in the US.

But the professional brand “community organizer” has become highly fought for. Ironically, while Citizens UK was succeeding in making people understand what community organizing was, its meaning was being confused by the government’s Big Society program. This is the paradox of mediatization and trend in an open society. But it is also linked to the intellectual origin of the concept which, from the beginning, had different uses.

In the UK, community organizing is now promoted by Cameron’s government as a technique to enable civil society to organize itself in order to balance the disengagement of public authorities with regard to security, housing and economic development. This conception differs from the organizing model developed by Citizens UK which aims at developing a powerful civil society that can make power holders accountable. But the organization was set as an example in the Big Society program and even decided to answer its bid to train “community organisers”. As a consequence, its political position as an independent countervailing force has been blurred.

This confusion bred debates around how civil society should be implied in the governance. Community organizing is generally attached to the notion of empowerment which is also known to have the same kind of ambiguous uses (Bacqué 2006; Balazard et Genestier 2009). In both cases the overall aims of community organizing are to fight inequality, poverty and individualism. The local level is emphasized and advantages inherent in cooperative endeavors are promoted (Austen et Beten 1977, p. 168). Ordinary citizens are encouraged to take an active role in the life of the “polis”. But this role depends on what is the broader vision of democracy. Who should be accountable for social justice? The answers differ according on how the power analysis is made. On one side, Jameson⁴⁰, executive director of Citizens UK, argues that inequalities are linked to global capitalism and that you have to organize from the local to the global to be powerful enough to tackle multinational elites. On another side, local communities seem to be valued as the accountability level for social justice. David Cameron⁴¹ want the Big Society “to take responsibility, to work, to stand by the mother of your child, to achieve, to engage with your local community, to keep your neighbourhood clean, to respect other people and their property”. This debate, “democracy versus social control”, was the same which opposed Alinsky and social workers converted to community organizing in the 1960’s (Tobin 1988, p. 455).

In order to have its professional activity recognized and to sustain sufficient funding, Citizens UK is under pressure. It has been attracted to be part of the Big Society program. Their successes and growing recognition has even been used by the government to advertise and nurture this program.

⁴⁰ “The global market has transformed all sorts of things particularly in politics. Everything I mean goes back to globalisation, it’s significant, we can’t ignore it, it’s not gonna stop so we have to organize to control and contain it the best as we can” (Neil Jameson, 18.04.08). His vision embraces the ideology of Broad Based Community Organizing. In his book, Chambers (2003, p. 14) denounces the fact that “democracy is dominated by the interests of a few wealthy and powerful institutions”. This description of “the world as it is” is the starting point of Alinsky’s style organizing.

⁴¹ Cf. The Big Society Speech of David Cameron (November 10th 2009)

http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2009/11/David_Cameron_The_Big_Society.aspx

In the end, Citizens UK wasn't chosen to be the official training centre for the government's community organisers. In a way this will allow them to focus on their initial objective: being an independent "broad based community organization" that hold people in power accountable rather than work in partnership with them.

Besides, we have argued that their successes and their recognition as an important player in the London governance were in particular drawn by this resistance to institutionalization. Indeed, parties and government are accused of being disconnected from ordinary citizens. London Citizens facilitates the participation of these citizens. The inherent resistance to standardization of the skills and activities of a community organizer help to prevent the organization from becoming a professional bureaucracy. London Citizens would lose this quality if the focus was more on the national campaigns and institutionalization than on the leadership development and grass root actions.

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