Third Sector Research Centre

Below the Radar Reference Group

Third Meeting

6 October 2011

Key notes

1. Introduction

Jenny Phillimore and Angus McCabe thanked participants for attending and outlined the programme for the day. The main focus was on feedback from the two discussion papers circulated to Reference Group members in advance of the meeting: Family Trees: Graining Skills, Knowledge and Resources; Below the Radar and The Big Society One Year On, exploring the impact of policy change on community groups and activities.

In addition there were updates on:

- the Below the Radar work stream social networking activity (Razia Shariff)
- micro-mapping project (Andri Soteri-Proctor)
- Real Times longitudinal study (Rob Macmillan)

and discussion on the work priorities for Below the Radar over the coming year. The session started with two announcements on the launch of the Knowledge Portal and the findings of the Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project on the impact of grass roots arts activities in communities.

2. Announcements

Launch of the Knowledge Portal

Pete Lambert reported that **the Knowledge Portal is a new online database, bringing together research and information on the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors**.

The portal will help voluntary organisations, government departments, academics and others to access evidence on a broad range of topics related to the sector. A unique 'third sector' thesaurus has been designed to help people identify the most appropriate material to inform their work.

The portal has been created by TSRC in partnership with the British Library. It is funded by the Big Lottery Fund and will be launched at an event at the British Library on 14th October 2011.

What's in the portal?

The Portal aims to include material on every aspect of the sector, including areas such as commissioning, social and economic impact, equality, political analysis, social enterprise and much more.

Content will be drawn from a broad range of sources, including:

- Academic research collections;
- reports and research produced within the sector nationally, locally and internationally;
- government publications and consultations;
- abstracts for books and journal articles;
- guidance and training materials.

How will access be provided?

Wherever possible the Portal will provide fully downloadable content in PDF or other standard formats, hosted on our own secure server.

It will also guide users to additional content in the British Library's collections, articles in respected online journals, and useful documents from other online sources. Where electronic copies are not freely available, the portal will provide direct links to the British Library catalogue. These can be used to request inter-library loans or to order printed copies of journal articles from the British Library Document Supply Centre.

Adding new material

The Portal is constantly expanding and will regularly add up-to-date and topical material.

We want to make this resource as comprehensive as possible, so please let us know if you publish relevant material for inclusion. The Portal can help to maintain collections that are at risk due to funding cuts, and enable your research to reach a larger audience. We are also interested in pointing to other resources, such as charity and foundation archives, of use to the research community.

Governance

Development of the portal is advised by the Knowledge Portal Management Committee (KPMC), made up of partners and users from the sector, academia and policy. See [Terms of Reference](#).

For more information, contact:

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Follow @3rdsectorportal on twitter

Growing the Grass Roots: the role of grass roots arts activities in communities

Jenny Phillimore and Angus McCabe announced the Growing the Grassroots Conference on 18th October 2011. A summary of the event is provided below.

The Growing the Grassroots Conference was organised through a partnership between Voluntary Arts, the University of Exeter, The Third Sector Research Centre (University of Birmingham) and the University of Glamorgan. The event was sponsored by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and hosted by The English Folk Dance and Song Society at their home in Cecil Sharp House, London.

Opened by Ed Vaizey, MP (Minister for Culture, Communications and the Creative Industries), the purpose of the day was threefold, to:

- present the initial findings of a scoping study, undertaken by the above partners, into the role of grassroots/amateur arts groups in communities;
- explore the implications of the scoping study in more detail and gather participant experiences of the impact of amateur arts;
- celebrate the amateur arts through performances and presentations.

The presentation of key findings was given by Jenny Phillimore and Jane Milling (University of Exeter) and a full conference report, briefing and working paper giving more details of the findings of this scoping study will be available shortly.

For further information, please contact Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, j.a.phillimore@bham.ac.uk.

3. Family Trees: gaining skills, knowledge and resources below the radar

Jenny Phillimore and Angus McCabe (University of Birmingham)

Angus and Jenny introduced the aim of the 'Family Trees' project. These were to:

- develop a better understanding of how skills, knowledge and resources were gained and shared by community groups;
- test the extent to which using social network theory approaches and methods might contribute to those understandings.

The session started with a small group exercise.

The research to date had identified (at least) 30 areas of skill, knowledge and resources required to run even very small scale community based groups and activities. These are presented in the following table.

TIME	ACCESS TO PREMISES/EQUIPMENT	GIFTS IN KIND
ACCESS TO PRO-BONO SUPPORT/ADVICE	MONEY	FUNDING (GRANTS/CONTRACTS ETC)
FUNDRAISING IDEAS/EVENTS	ACCESS TO COMMUNITY NETWORKS	ACCESS TO OTHER NETWORKS/GROUPS OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY
DELIVERING A SERVICE	VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT/ MANAGEMENT	IT/MEDIA
COMMUNICATION	NEGOTIATING	BUSINESS AND PROJECT PLANNING
RESEARCH	NEEDS ANALYSIS	LOBBYING
ADVOCACY	GOVERNANCE	POLICY
LEGAL	FORESIGHT	INNOVATION
ACCOUNTING/BOOKKEEPING	MANAGING MEETINGS	EVALUATION
REPORT WRITING	MARKETING	OTHER (PLEASE STATE)

Participants were then asked to:

- identify the skills they brought to their own community activity;
- how they had gained these skills and then, using the above table, to rank skills, knowledge and resources according to their importance (with 1 being the 'most' important).

The skills people brought to their community activity were extremely wide ranging: from painting and decorating to financial management, from singing and baking to fundraising and business planning, from organising children's games/activities to research skills and a knowledge of government policies and structures.

Participants reported gaining and developing these skills in a number of ways: from family and friends, from their workplace, through exchange visits with peers and practicing. Formal training and education was a factor, but reported less often than *'learning from experience/trial and error'*.

In terms of ranking skills, knowledge and resources, the findings are presented in the following table.

Ranking	Skills	Knowledge	Resources
1 (most important)	Communication x2 Managing meetings	Other (where to find things out) Other (knowledge about a particular topic or issue) Governance	Time Money Access to premises/equipment Other (human resources – e.g. people)
2	Needs analysis x2 Business and project planning Volunteer recruitment/management	Policy Governance Other (organisational development)	Time Access to community networks
3	Managing Meetings Evaluation Marketing Foresight Accountancy/book-keeping	Fundraising ideas or events x2	Access to premises/equipment Gifts in kind
4	Negotiating Legal IT/Media Lobbying Research	Innovation Accounting/book-keeping	Money Access to other networks/groups outside the community
5 (least important)	Business Planning Evaluation (reflection) Advocacy Delivering a service Report writing	Funding (grants/contracts)	Access to other networks/groups outside the community Access to pro-bono support/advice

The information generated through the exercise was then compared to the findings from the pilot 'Family Trees' case studies. These were summarized as:

- The complex 'network' of skills, knowledge and resources required to successfully run even a small community group are complex. They combine 'soft' skills such as negotiating and networking and negotiation with (often) highly technical knowledge: housing law, property/management regulations, safeguarding etc.

- Skills were often developed in the work-place and transferred to community activism (e.g. bookkeeping, running meetings etc. etc.).

- For participant's in the pilot phase of the research the key requirements for group development were a shared issue within the community and extensive community networks to build support. These were pre-requisites from which more technical knowledge might flow/be required.

- Skills could be shared within groups though in some instances each role was defined/self-defined by people 'doing what they knew best'.

- Previous studies of skills in the voluntary sector highlight fund-raising as a key gap. Participants in the Family Trees work identified marketing and communications as a key gap.

- As with participants in the Reference Group, interviewees identified a broad range of skills, knowledge and resources that people brought to community activity. These were more often gained and developed through informal peer learning (project visits, informal mentoring) than through formal training. From those interviewed (now 12 groups) only 2 identified formal training as instrumental to their learning – and in these instances training was mandatory (safeguarding and tenant management).

- Informal learning 'beyond the community' was important: the opportunity to learn from elsewhere. Agencies which could broker these networks were seen as particularly valuable.

- IT and social media were mentioned less frequently than might have been expected. Only one group actively used social media techniques (although all used the internet as a source of information) and for them this was a supplement to actual meetings 'where trust and relationships are developed'.

- All bar two of the groups interviewed were 'below the radar' in that they had no paid staff, tended to be highly focused on a locality or community of interest and had limited contacts beyond their immediate activities/locality. All had been successful and a key element of their success appeared to be continuity in the core membership/activists. Success (e.g. Securing funding for a new Village Hall, moving to asset/tenant management or running the community shop) had also taken time to build – between four and eight years. This finding has implications for the speed of asset transfer etc. envisaged in the Localism Bill.

It was noted that there was one substantial difference between the responses of participants in the Reference Group exercise on scoring the importance of different skills, knowledge and resources and those of research interviewees. The latter refused (or found it extremely difficult) to create/suggest a

'hierarchy' of skills and knowledge. For them the collective skills/knowledge of the group were critical and no-one brought resources that were more or less important.

The outline of findings stimulated a debate on three issues:

- All the groups involved in the research were successful: could there also be useful learning from groups that had failed or were struggling (and how could these be identified)? If people moved on from a 'failed' group, what (new) skills, knowledge and resources had they gained from that experience?

- In some groups a single activity (running the community shop) had become (or taken over as) their sole area of activity. Others could be described as 'multiple activists' involved in a range of activities. Could differences be identified in terms of transferring skills?

- Participants suggested that research interviewees might have been reluctant to 'score' skills, knowledge and resources because they were closely associated with the people that brought those skills etc. Was there a way of testing this out – e.g. is it the case that the collective skills of a group are 'equally important' or is there a hierarchy but some distance from a group is required to reflect on/identify this?

These discussions were picked up in the final plenary session on 'where next'.

4. Using Social Networking Below the Radar

Razia Shariff: Knowledge Exchange Team

Razia reported that the Knowledge Exchange Team at TSRC were working with the Below the Radar work stream to develop social media events and promote on line discussion and activity. The project is called 'Beyond the Radar 11' and is co-funded by the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

'Beyond the Radar' began with a one-day event on 8th July 2011, held by the Third Sector Research Centre and the Barrow Cadbury Trust at the CLG offices, to explore how 'below the radar' community activity can maximise its impact. A full report on the day is available here.

A civicrowd site has been established as a platform to host an online space to continue the conversation, to champion ideas and support the ideas of others. The site is: http://btr11.civicrowd.com/ with video clips, resources and online discussions.

Ways to get involved

- If you have an idea for action or an opinion you want people to know about, submit an idea now.

- Join us for further online discussions – we have had two already. The first was held with Guardian Voluntary Sector Network, the next was held on Wednesday 19 October, 7-9pm on motivators for community activism.

- Join the conversation on twitter using #btr11.

- See TSRC's research on below the radar groups. This research has been used to inform this project and continues to be informed by it.

Next steps

We intend to hold online discussions for 6 months to further the conversation. We are currently in discussion with Globelnet21 and the Big Lottery Foundation to host some online webinars and develop our social media engagement.

Details of further discussions will follow. Do get in touch if you would like to host a discussion or suggest a web space.

TSRC will be producing a further two reports one an academic discussion paper evaluating the use of social media as a tool for knowledge exchange during the project, and the other an evaluation of the project overall.

5. Micro-Mapping: Little Big Societies

Andri Soteri-Proctor: Third Sector Research Centre

Whilst acknowledging the contentious issues expressed in previous below radar reference groups on whether below-radar third sector activities ought to be mapped, Andri introduced TSRC's piloted Street-Level mapping project. By offering a different and complementary way to find below-radar community activities that does not totally rely on secondary sources, Andri talked about findings based on 58 varieties of social activity that were found in two small locations (in 11 streets of England). In particular, she highlighted the different ways in which groups generate resources (such as financial and human capital) to do the work that they do both within their own communities and outside of these, as well as generating resources to support those beyond their own user groups. In addition, reflecting the methodological emphases on finding third sector activities in 'third sector' shared space, Andri highlighted the opportunities arising for those groups who operate in and draw on resources available in shared space, including what she refers to as 'Community-Building Bricoleurs'; that is, people (paid and unpaid) who can draw on and blend resources from a variety of sources to support several groups.

A full report of the micro-mapping research will be available shortly.

6. Below the Radar in Context

Prof. Pete Alcock: Director TSRC

Pete Alcock briefly introduced where the Below the Radar work stream sat with other TSRC Research. This work was informing Theory and Policy and the Real Times longitudinal study work streams and the University of Southampton was involved in developing community activism and concepts of a civic core and mapping the Big Society.

Pete also drew participants' attention to the launch of the Knowledge Portal and the report on the first three years of TSRC which was launched at the same event in London at the British Library.

7. A Dynamic Civil Society? Studying the third sector in depth over time

Rob Macmillan, University of Birmingham

Rob gave a presentation on 'Real Times', TSRC's qualitative longitudinal research programme, with a specific focus on themes of relevance for the 'Below the Radar' work stream. After a brief outline of the overall context for the study, its rationale and purpose, and main research questions, Rob summarised the 'big picture' emerging from the study so far. This is dominated by cuts for many of the study's core case studies, with attendant redundancy programmes, internal restructuring and ongoing uncertainty about the future. However, some case studies are relatively immune from the changing political and economic context.

Rob briefly described the four main case studies of particular interest for the 'Below the radar' work stream – two 'hubs' and two villages:

- 'Mulberry' - a community centre in a deprived urban area in the North;
- 'Pine' - a resource centre serving a multi-cultural community in the Midlands;
- 'Larch' - a relatively deprived village in the North;
- 'Sycamore' - a relatively affluent village in the South West.

An interesting theme which appears to cut across these in different ways is the value and price of space, and the different interests that come into play around space. For example, a group might be able to meet or use a space whilst paying only a nominal charge or a peppercorn rent. However, those responsible for the space may have to consider introducing or increasing charges to ensure it pays its way or contributes to other activities.

Rob discussed this in more depth in relation to case study 'Larch' which examines community activities in a relatively deprived village. He described the case when the research first started in Spring 2010, and invited reference group participants to consider playing 'what happened next?' from TV's "A Question of Sport": what happened in the case study over the next 12 months? Participants discussed this in groups and fed back their suggestions. Finally the presentation described some of the main the changes over the subsequent year – a mixed picture of some activities struggling or closing down, and others continuing to thrive. Real Times will be able to continue charting these dynamics over time, and be able to explore the processes and factors behind changes in community activities.

To view Rob's presentation, click here.

8. All Change: Surviving Below the Radar in a Big Society

Over late 2009 and early 2010 the Below the Radar work stream at the Third Sector Research Centre undertook a range of interviews with national network groups, practitioners and academics to explore the role and nature of small community groups (Phillimore and McCabe: 2010). These sessions also explored the contexts in which 'below the radar' groups became established and their perceived role in the delivery of Government policy. Following the general election in May 2010, further work involving workshops, focus groups and seminars explored the impact of the change in administration on community groups and activities. At this point, prior to the publication of the *Localism Bill* and the *Open Public Services White Paper*, the conclusion was that, whilst the emergency budget of June 2010, and subsequent Spending Review in October, raised concerns over funding for the voluntary sector as a whole and community groups in particular, it was 'too early to tell' what the full impact of change might be.

The 'All Change' discussion paper, which had been circulated to Reference Group members in advance, draws on a second round of interviews and focus group activity between February and May 2011 to essentially explore *'Big Society one year on'*: how has policy towards 'community' changed? What have been the early impacts of change? How have below the radar groups and community sector network organisations responded?

The two key findings were summarised as

- There has been no one response to the Big Society agenda and policy change over the last year. Rather it is possible to identify five differing standpoints. Those that see the current policy environment of localism, right to challenge etc. as an opportunity: pragmatists who may be sceptical about the policy agenda but *'will take the opportunities as and when they arise'*. A bi-polar response of being both for and against current agendas – depending on which hat someone was wearing at a particular time (paid worker or community activist). Those that see the rhetoric of Big Society as irrelevant to what is actually happening on the ground – and opponents.

- Cuts were having an impact: particularly on those groups that had secured some limited funding under New Labour area based and related funding initiatives. However, for a number of 'below the radar' groups there was what was described as a 'multiplier effect': the loss of small grants, accompanied by a lack of access to affordable meeting spaces: the loss of pro-bono advice and support: increased pressures on activists time – particularly for those in increasingly insecure jobs. These impacts are illustrated in the following case study.

Case Study: Crumley Pensioners Group

Crumley Pensioners is a long established group which meets weekly at the local library. Its activities include social events and invited speakers. Members come from a variety of surrounding villages. Public transport links are poor and they have received a grant for community transport to carry people to their meetings. The group has been highlighted in the local press as important in tackling the isolation felt by older people in rural communities.

Crumley Pensioners recently lost their community transport grant of £500 per annum. They approached the Rural Community Council's Development Worker who informed them that the RCC no longer had the capacity to support them in applying for other funding due to reductions in its own budget. They had previously received 'pro bono' advice from the Local Authority but were told that this was no longer available due to re-structuring

The library is also threatened with closure. As part of its survival strategy it is exploring income generation and has told the group they will need to pay a commercial rate (£1,000 a year) for the room they previously used on a grace and favour basis.

The group is currently considering its own future. Whilst members want to maintain weekly meetings their view is that it is not feasible for members to cover their own travel costs as well as pay for the rental of space at the library.

There was limited time for discussion. Participants were therefore asked to contribute their thoughts to key questions the research had raised (see table overleaf) and highlight any concerns or comments they had on the draft discussion paper:

Concern was expressed not only about the cuts but also the way what money that might be available would be distributed. Rather than Local Authorities and other contractors entering into multiple arrangements with small community based groups, they would offer one large contract for a single provider. This excluded all but the largest voluntaries (and may encourage increased private sector involvement). Two examples were contracts to run older people's projects being transferred from the local level to a single large contractor and the allocation of Employment Programme contracts.

The description of a 'multiplier effect' was inaccurate as it implied one impact followed on from another. In fact events (as illustrated in the case study) happened almost simultaneously and could be better described as a compound impact.

LEARNING AND SUPPORT

AT THE MOMENT, THERE'S NO PARTICULAR POLITICAL RECOGNITION, I THINK, OF THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTING IN CITIZENSHIP LEARNING, IN A BROAD SENSE. (POLICY INTERVIEW)

1. Not necessarily my experience
2. Centralist ideology? People develop, learn and share, with encouragement

LOSING "CORPORATE MEMORY"

I JUST HAVE THE SENSE THAT WE ARE MISSING SO MUCH RICHNESS AND EXPERIENCE, EXPERTISE AND WISDOM BY NOT BOTHERING TO LOOK BACK AND TAKE FORWARD THE NUGGETS OF WISDOM RATHER THAN REINVENTING. (POLICY INTERVIEW)

1. Absolutely
2. Necessity is the mother of invention – associational behaviour is human nature
3. Re-learning is an important part of development

OPEN PUBLIC SERVICES

COMMUNITY GROUPS WILL NOT BE IN A POSITION TO MANAGE LOCAL SERVICES AND WILL BE '*PRIVATISATION BY THE BACK DOOR'.* (UMBRELLA ORGANISATION INTERVIEW)

1. So, private is always bad?
2. Do community groups want to change local services?

COMPETITION AND EQUALITY

IF IT BECOMES A LAND GRAB OR A MONEY HUNT OR SOME SORT OF BEAUTY CONTEST ABOUT WHO DOES SOMETHING BETTER OR SO ON, THEN IT ACTUALLY POISONS SOME OF THE GOODWILL AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY OR SOCIAL CAPITAL AND TRUST THAT KINDS OF NEEDS TO MAKE THINGS GROW REALLY. (FUNDER INTERVIEW)

1. It was ever thus...
Active and vocal communities demanding good services are vital – get organised

2. Could be - though might necessitate greater mutuality and collaboration

9. Next Steps

It was reported that four projects were in the development stages with Below the Radar Research and Practice Fellows:

- Gypsy and Traveller Tenants and Resident's Associations (Andrew Ryder)
- Policy Formation and Emotion in Anti-Poverty Policy and Strategy (Rosie Anderson)
- Changing Identities in Refugee and Migrant Organisations (Teresa Piacentini)
- Complexity Theory in Practice at the Community Level (Eileen Conn)

Reference Group members also encouraged:

- The further development of the Family Trees' project to work with groups that had not been successful or were struggling. What could be learned from these groups? What skills did people that left these groups take into their other community activity? What were the factors that facilitated networking within and between communities?
- Building on the micro-mapping work as a way of understanding complex networks 'below the radar' and develop a better understanding of small/below the radar groups in times of austerity.
- Continue to 'monitor' the impact of policy changes/budget reduction strategies on community groups.
- Consideration should be given to research into what was happening to and with community groups in deprived white working class neighbourhoods where the far right had been making in-roads prior to the 2010 election.
- Consideration should be given to research into change in the wider BME community and community groups as well as specifically looking at refugee and migrant groups.

Thanks again to the Reference Group for its commitment and contribution to the Below the Radar work stream and informing its development and focus.

BELOW THE RADAR REFERENCE GROUP

ATTENDANCE: 6 OCTOBER 2011

Attending

Andri Soteri-Proctor	TSRC
Angus McCabe	TSRC
Caithin McMullin	Urban Forum
Chris Ford	University of Newcastle
Debbie Pippard	Barrow Cadbury Trust
Gary Craig	University of Durham
Jenny Phillimore	TSRC
Mandy Wilson	Independent
Neil Smith	Office for Civil Society
Pete Alcock	TSRC
Pauline Roche	BRAP
Razia Shariff	Knowledge Exchange Team
Rob Macmillan	TSRC
Robin Simpson	Voluntary Arts
Sarah Golden	Community Development Foundation

Apologies

Azim El Hassan	HACT
David Tyler	Community Matters
James Derounian	University of Gloucestershire
Jane Winter	Faith Based Regeneration Network
Janice Marks	Federation for Community Development Learning
Margaret Harris	University of Aston/IVAR
Mike Perry	Plunkett Foundation
Nick Beddow	CDX
Nick Ockenden	Volunteering England
Rachel Newton	Urban Forum
Randi Baden	Federation for Community Development Learning
Sioned Churchill	Trust for London
Sophie Marsden	Locality
Tony Chapman	University of Teesside