

Third Sector Research Centre

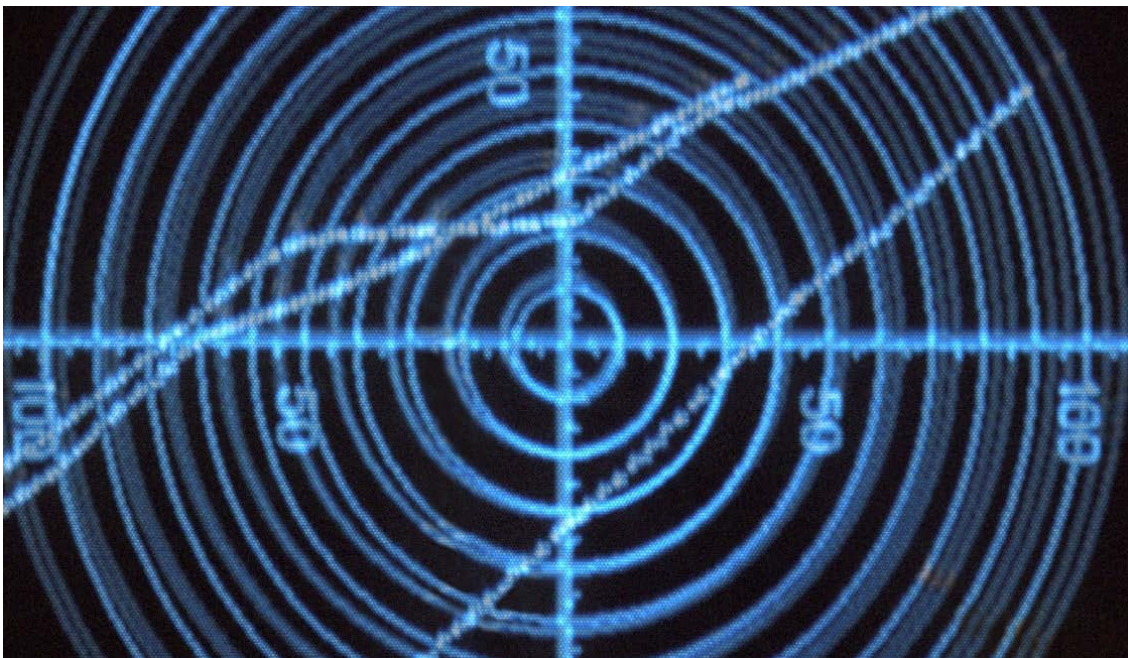
Still Below the Radar: A Celebration

Below the Radar Reference Group and Conference

Fifth Meeting

5 July 2013

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'Research can tell us what human beings are. It can tell us why we stumble and fall and how, miraculously, we can stand up'.

With apologies to Maya Angelou

1. Introduction: About the Day

Debbie Pippard, Barrow Cadbury Trust and Prof Pete Alcock, Director, Third Sector Research Centre

Professor Pete Alcock introduced the day noting that the morning session (a debate between Alex Massey of the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) and Matt Scott of the Community Sector Coalition) aimed to take forward a debate that had been emerging in the voluntary and community sector over the last couple of years, namely: how should/could the sector respond to austerity, the cuts, and changing demands on voluntary organisations.

The afternoon then 'showcased' two projects which had been undertaken by Third Sector Research Centre/'Below the Radar' research Associates:

- Rosie Anderson (University of Edinburgh) on the role of emotion and grass roots activists in anti-poverty policy formation. This drew on research being undertaken in Scotland, but had a wider UK and, indeed, international relevance.
- Phil Ware (TSRC) on the voice and influence of Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary Organisations in terms of influencing policy at the local, regional and national level

The final, formal, session then drew together two recent, independently funded, research projects undertaken by Jenny Phillimore and Angus McCabe, with colleagues, on the role of social networks in refugee and recent migrant communities (Nuffield Foundation) and in addressing poverty across ethnic groups (Joseph Rowntree Foundation). Participants were then encouraged to take part in a closing feedback exercise – and join the post event celebration of below the radar research, groups and activities.

It was also noted, for participant information, that the current funding from the Cabinet Office (Office for Civil Society), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Barrow Cadbury Trust came to an end in August 2013. Barrow Cadbury Trust were thanked for further financial support post August – and it was noted that the ESRC had agreed to provide 'bridge funding' up to March 2014 pending a full Research Centre funding proposal to the Research Council for 2014 onwards.

Debbie Pippard, from Barrow Cadbury Trust, spoke on behalf of the Trust as a key funder of the Centre. She noted thanks for the work of the Centre overall in terms of developing the understanding of, and evidence base for, the voluntary and community sector overall – and particularly the research into small community based organisations which were a particular interest of the trust which had 'kept them on the radar' in difficult times. In particular, Debbie thanked members of the 'Below the Radar' Reference Group for their guidance and commitment over that past five, years. This contribution had been invaluable both in shaping below the radar research and in disseminating findings 'beyond the academy'. The work of Honorary Research Fellows and volunteers was also acknowledged. Their contribution had extended the range, depth and scope of the work of the 'below the radar' work stream and had played a major role in training the profile of this research.

Debbie wished the Centre well for the future – and expressed the hope that there would be continued Reference Group activity as well as ongoing contributions from Research Fellows, volunteers and the activists and practitioners who had been involved in the research to date.

2. Mitigate or Oppose? Navigating the Voluntary Sector's Response to Austerity.

Debate: Alex Massey, Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations with Matt Scott, Community Sector Coalition. Chair, Prof. Pete Alcock

Prof Pete Alcock introduced the debate by saying that, in the last couple of years, there had been much discussion on the changing role of the Third Sector in the light of, for example, Open Public Services, Welfare Reform and Localism agendas – and on how the sector could and should respond to austerity. The debate had often been rhetorical and reinforced already entrenched positions. The purpose of this debate, therefore, was to encourage more informed and considered discussion, reflection and actions.

Alex Massey (ACEVO) argued that:

- 'Opposition or mitigation' was a false dichotomy in the current climate. The role of the sector was to both point out weaknesses/faults in Government policy and the implications of these for the sector and communities (advocacy rather than outright/unthinking opposition) as well as mitigate the impact of austerity on communities
- There was no single voluntary and community sector response to austerity and policy change. However, the sector's diversity should be seen as a strength rather than a weakness. A core value of the sector include independence of spirit. Now was the time to express that independence of spirit – to survive and thrive
- The view that voluntary organisations could no longer campaign and advocate because they were in contractual arrangements with Central/Local Government was false. Many organisations reliant on the public purse are still campaigning. And some MPs are complaining about VCS campaigning - so we must be doing something right.
- However, austerity is here to stay for the foreseeable future. In this context mitigation would be to be increasingly important.
- Further, despite difficulties, voluntary organisations had:
- Expanded frontline work (in spite of broad dynamic of squeeze) e.g. food banks
 - Engaged in service redesign;
 - e.g. NHS reform
- If the sector was to survive and thrive it needed to 'exploit' its unique selling points and
 - Drive innovation to better meet needs
 - Use unique attributes – connection with SUs and communities
 - Deliver preventative services, leading to reduction in demand on public services

In response, **Matt Scott**, Community Sector Coalition argued that:

- His position was based on 25 years experience of working in the sector – and for the purposes of this debate he would be taking a 'glass half empty' point of view with regard to the sector's approach to austerity
- There were those that argued the sector could replace state services, but was this the case?
- It is important to be clear about the scale of the sector – most VCS groups are not charities and are not likely to be interested in competing for contracts to deliver state services

and yet the sector is misleadingly presented as being about service delivery and social enterprises

- Was the process of bidding for public service delivery contracts actually privatisation by the back door? Particularly as there was an uneven playing field in procurement processes that favoured larger private sector companies.
- Expecting ‘a sector’ response to austerity measures was problematic – given the diversity of the sector – but the concept of austerity needed to be questioned: there was still money – the issue was how and where that was spent.
- Discussions based on the concept of a unified sector ignored the structural inequalities within the sector itself: between the ‘have’s and the ‘have nots’. Under New Labour modernisation much of the money failed to ‘trickle down’ to grassroots groups (beyond those working in Area based Initiative funded communities) as the sector as resources became monopolised by a few charity brands
- Rhetorically the idea of ‘we are all in this together’ was attractive: but in reality there were growing divides between the ‘have’s and the have nots’.
- TSRC paper ‘Unity in Diversity’ talked about the flexibility and adaptability of the sector and rightly asks the questions: when does flexibility become self preservation and is what we do more important than what we are?
- The present situation is a real opportunity to reflect on the role and independence of voluntary and community organisations. This should not be based on the nostalgic desire to a return to ‘the good old days’ of expansion and ‘hyper mainstreaming’ as much/some of this expansion was based on following the money’ or spending money ineffectively rather than delivering on core values
- If the sector, as claimed, was ‘value based’ now was the time to clearly articulate those values ‘in action’. Perhaps to do this organisations needed to look beyond the parochialism of England and London in particular, for inspiration.

Discussion and Questions

Is the growth of food banks evidence of the responsiveness and flexibility of the voluntary sector? Or is it just shameful that there are food banks in an advanced economy like the UK?

Current policy on Public Service, Welfare Reform and Localism talks about the transfer of responsibility from national Government to the local and community. But is this really about the transfer of risk in terms of managing contracts? What happens when the voluntary or private sector ‘fails’ in the delivery of public services? Who ‘picks up’ the bill? Who is finally responsible?

There is a lot of talk in policy about small community organisations ‘scaling up’ to deliver public services – and the role of larger national voluntaries in helping them ‘scale up’. I don’t see any evidence that is happening. Is there any? And do community groups want to ‘scale up’ anyway?

I remember the late 1970’s and the early years of the Thatcher Government. There was real fight within the voluntary sector and be believed that we could change things. That fight seems to have gone now along with that belief in change. Is this a symptom of an increasingly managerialist sector?

Can community groups 'scale up' anyway? The requirements in contracts and invitations to tender virtually exclude them financially. What more could Government do to encourage local contract bidding – thinking of Localism as Social Value?

Organising at a community level is often about social relationships, shared interests and groups working on their own priorities so why should community groups respond to Government agendas?

If voluntary and community groups are to respond effectively to policy change, do we need to improve their 'political literacy'?

Does the voluntary sector really have a distinct set of values, as claimed, or is this just marketing?

3. Workshop 1

Doing Emotion, Doing Policy: the emotional role of ‘grassroots’ community activists in anti-poverty policy making. Rosie Anderson, University of Edinburgh

This workshop examined different understandings of the emotional role played by activist or “grass-roots” participants for those involved in policy making. Drawing on findings from an ethnographic study of an interrelated cluster of anti-poverty policy making forums in Scotland it considered both what informants understand by “emotion” and its role in policy making from the point of view of informants themselves. In particular it focused on discussions and observations from the inception phase of this research project in which the nature of emotion was considered and some of the explicit and tacit “rules” about who may be “emotional”, when they may do that and how emotion is to be expressed socially.

The presentation looked at two key aspects of informants’ practice; the special expectations policy forum participants have of activists and community organisation representatives around behaviour and language associated with “the emotional”; and participants’ understandings of the relationship between emotion, authenticity and legitimate decision-making when making policy. It concluded by considering how this examination of grassroots emotionality could assist in conceptualising emotional practice and power in policy making and suggesting some key challenges for both researchers and practitioners.

Discussion and Questions

Following the presentation there was limited time for discussion. However, key questions were:

- For anyone who has been involved with community action – emotion is a key factor in driving action. Why has so little research been done on emotion as in the formation of policy? Does the idea that emotion plays into policy making undermine a professional/rational approach to policy?
- The importance and difficulties of ‘emotional labour’ were mentioned. But this research drew on the experiences of professionals in health and social care. Community activists ‘burn out’ so is research into emotional labour at the grassroots now important?
- Grassroots groups/activists may be invited to the policy table. But at the end of the day do they have any power? Can the policy maker just ignore their role – or just use their experience when it suits?
- Is it only certain activists – who know the ‘rules of the game’ – that get invited to the ‘policy table’. What happens to others who do not know ‘the rules of the game’?
- Is what is being described a sort of ‘learned emotional literacy’? What happens if people express ‘raw’ emotion in policy settings?
- Do ‘rational’ policy makers make bad policy decisions because they are persuaded by individual emotion and experience – rather than ‘hard’ evidence’? Or do they ‘ignore’ the emotional and personal experience in the light of ‘hard evidence’

For more information on this research, [click here](#).

4. Workshop 2

Very Small, Very Quiet, A Whisper: Black and Minority Ethnic Voice and Influence. Phil Ware, Third Sector Research Centre

This workshop aimed to identify the current position of the Black and Minority Ethnic voluntary and community sector (BME VCS) in relation to voice and influence in terms of policy and practice. The current climate has presented challenges for third sector organisations generally, such as responding to the economic downturn, the introduction of austerity measures and the impact of changing funding mechanisms. Yet research into how BME CVS organisations are faring in this changed context is limited not only in the area of understanding direct service provision for BME communities but, particularly, around the capacity of the BME VCS to play a strategic advocacy role.

The workshop therefore aimed to address the following:

1. Whether there was a BME VCS and its characteristics.
2. The perceived voice and influence of the BME VCS within the third sector as a whole.
3. The resilience of the BME VCS in the face of the current challenges.



The slide features the TSRC logo at the top right, which includes the text 'TSRC' and 'Informing civil society' next to a colorful graphic. The main title is centered: 'Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Voluntary and Community Sector Voice and Influence – ‘Very Small, Very Quiet, a Whisper’'. Below the title is the name 'Phil Ware' and his title 'Honorary Research Fellow TSRC'. At the bottom, there are logos for 'Hosted by: UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM' and 'UNIVERSITY OF Southampton', and 'Funded by: Cabinet Office Office for Civil Society', 'BARROW CADBURY', and 'E-S-R-C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL'.

Discussion and Questions

The presentation and discussion focused on the following themes, findings and issues:

1. Findings reflected a wide range of views within the 'sector'.
2. On balance there probably is an identifiable BME VCS, but it reflects the super-diversity of communities within the areas researched. Leadership is unclear and under-resourced.
3. Due to limited resources there is a lack of effective voice beyond the individual and community level. Perception that the BME VCS has been disproportionately affected by social and economic policies, including the Single Equalities Act.
4. Organisations were using a range of strategies including demonstrating need, capacity building and education, politicisation, and partnership working.
5. Despite the above there are examples of resilience and success – local health campaigns, the survival of small community organisations and some more strategic campaigns e.g. the Steven Lawrence Campaign and Southall Black Sisters.

For more information on this research: [click here](#).

5. Presentation

Migration, Ethnicity, Social Networks and Poverty: feedback on two research project on the role of social networks in integration and poverty prevention

Alison Gilchrist, Independent Researcher and Jenny Phillimore, TSRC and Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS), University of Birmingham

This presentation drew on two research projects on the role of social networks in addressing poverty across diverse ethnic groups (Joseph Rowntree Foundation) and their role in the integration of new migrants (Nuffield Foundation).

Ethnicity, social networks, poverty and inclusion

TSRC Below the Radar conference
5th July 2013
Jenny Phillimore & Alison Gilchrist

Alison Gilchrist
alisongilchrist.co.uk

brap
making equality work for everyone

Local-Level.org.uk

PRAXIS
informing civil society

TSRC

JRF
JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION

6. What Next for 'Below the Radar'? Discussion, Feedback and Evaluation

The final session, informally, asked participants to reflect on their experience of 'below the radar' research over the past five years – and to look to the future.

Reflecting Back: Looking Forward

Over the past five years the 'Below the Radar' Reference Group has played an integral role in both shaping and disseminating the work-stream's research. At the current round of funding draws to a close, participants in the event were asked (using the 'ideas tree') to **reflect back** on what BTR (and TSRC more generally) could have done differently and the accessibility of research findings and to **look forward** in terms of future priorities and directions. The results are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Reflecting Back: Looking Forward – Participant Views

How useful has 'below the radar' been?	How accessible has 'below the radar' research been?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has been helpful to have actions/research and publications focusing on how we can link up and share our work • Always the first place to go for evidence • Very useful. What has been particularly useful has been the opportunity to meet researchers and be invigorated by sharing and ideas • 'BTR' is an important space that goes against the grain of a top down voluntary and community sector and in addressing inequality • Great research that connects with realities and important things • Evidence work and brings policy and practice together. Keep it up! • Important: highly respected and useful stuff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surprised how little you use Twitter and other social media • Make events more participatory. • Good access – but more analysis of political discourse please • Briefing papers good: but maybe a one page headline 'findings' (like Joseph Rowntree Foundation) would increase readership • Good materials: but is there evidence that the research has been accessed by or influenced policy makers? • Take events 'out' more often: people can be less confident in academic places/spaces.
What could 'below the radar'/TSRC have done differently?	'Below the radar'/TSRC priorities for the future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work to improve the political literacy of voluntary and community organisations • Stronger focus on influencing policy towards and within the sector • More involvement of grassroots groups/practitioners in reference group(s) • More action learning and emancipator research please. • Needed to spread the work further and use existing networks to do this. More local seminars would help and also support local activism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research how young people organise – and the role of women/mothers in 'below the radar' activity • Barriers to engaging with public service providers by under-represented/emerging communities • More action research with groups that really are under the radar • Research communities with diverse interests/complex identities • Build evidence of sector change (if it is changing) over time • Balance quality academic research with 'getting the message out' in ways that are accessible

And Finally....Evaluation

Participants were asked to provide feedback using the 'evaluation ladder. Of 17 responses:

- 11 scored the day as 'excellent'
- 6 scored the day as 'good'
- No-one scored the day as either 'fair' or 'poor'

Comments Included:

Score	Comments
Excellent	<p>Stimulating and friendly. Thanks.</p> <p>Great: stimulating, open critical and participative</p> <p>Very stimulating – but not quite enough time for discussion</p> <p>It has been helpful to me to have sessions and debates that made me reflect and analyse</p> <p>Very thought provoking, thanks. Good variety of topics</p> <p>Great – lots to think about – which should be the outcomes of research</p> <p>Excellent: please continue this brilliant work</p> <p>Most enjoyable: stimulating and thought provoking</p> <p>Very good day: I'd have loved to go to both workshops</p> <p>Very stimulating and inspiring!</p>
Good	<p>The workshop on 'emotion' was too short. There was so much I wanted to discuss</p> <p>Stimulating inputs and discussion. Main room not good</p> <p>Mostly really interesting – but too much presentation and not enough discussion</p> <p>It has been really useful to explore structural issues around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divide between power/money/political input of the large voluntary organisations and small community/community based groups • Voice of the BME voluntary and community sector • Poverty, BME and refugee communities <p>The content of the day was interesting – and was well organised within its own terms and I realise it was partly about presenting research. But there was a lot of being 'talked at' and not enough inter-active discussion...but thank you.</p>
Fair	
Poor	

Attendance

Name	Group/Organisation
Asif Afridi	B:rap
Pete Alcock	Third Sector Research Centre
Rosie Anderson	University of Edinburgh
Surrinder Bains	John Taylor Hospice CIC
Shindo Barquer	West Midlands Police
Elena Blackmore	PIRC
Nicola Bonser	West Midlands Police
Eileen Conn	Peckham Vision
Melinda Connelly	BBC Children in Need
James Derounian	University of Gloucestershire
Chris Ford	Independent
Jayne Francis	MEL
Nick Garratt	Sandwell MBC
Karen Garry	Merida Associates
Alison Gilchrist	Community Development Consultant
Sarah Golden	Community Development Foundation
Kate Gordon	Chinese Community Centre Birmingham
Kevin Harris	Local Level
Peter Horner	NAVCA
Tricia Jones	TSRC/HACT
Naomi Landau	Third Sector Research Centre
Janice Marks	Federation for Community Development Learning
Alex Massey	ACEVO
Angus McCabe	Third Sector Research Centre
John McPhail	Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
Steve Miller	FbRN
Suzi Miller	FCDL
Luiza Morris-Warren	Northamptonshire County Council
David Mullins	University of Birmingham
Catherine Negus	Community Action Southwark
Graham Parker	Relate
Jenny Phillimore	Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) University of Birmingham

Name	Group/Organisation
Debbie Pippard	Barrow Cadbury Trust
Terry Potter	Newman University
Lorna Prescott	Dudley CVS
Neena Samota	BTEG
Matt Scott	Community Sector Coalition
Patience Seebohm	Independent Researcher
Mani Sehmbi	Sandwell MBC
Razia Shariff	Third Sector Research Centre
Robin Simpson	Voluntary Arts
Cheryl Turner	NIACE
Dan Vale	Lakely Chase Foundation
Phil Ware	Third Sector Research centre
Mandy Wilson	Mandy Wilson Ltd
Val Woodward	Independent

Reference Group: Apologies received from

Nick Beddow, Our Life

Sioned Churchill, Trust for London

Gary Craig, University of Durham

Kevin Curley, Independent

Mike Perry, Plunkett Foundation

Nick Ockenden, NCVO/Volunteering England

Joy Warmington, B:rap