

TSRC Working Paper 143

Ten Years Below the Radar:
Reflections on Voluntary and Community Action
2008-2018

Angus McCabe; Editor

Foreword; Professor Gary Craig

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Foreword

Gary Craig

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The voluntary and community sector (VCS) was described memorably in recent years as ‘a loose and baggy monster’. The size of this monster grew in fits and bursts until the early part of this century when public expenditure cuts began to take their toll as funding from local authorities, central government and even charitable foundations began to be squeezed. As social need has increased – by any measure – many charities have found themselves driven further and further into meeting the demands of local and central government to offer a replacement for their dwindling services. One subsector within the wider VCS, the Black and Minority Ethnic Sector has been far from free from this pressure, and this has had a significant effect because it was never adequately funded in the first place. It is only in the last twenty years that the BMEVCS began to assume any significant size and even then as many studies have indicated, including one by the author¹, it began disproportionately to suffer from cuts, particularly affecting those BME organisations which were Black-led. Successful Black-led organisations were subsumed into the work of larger White-led organisations, medium size ones lost funding and staff with funders often assuming that all needs, whether of Black or host populations, could and should be met by single all-purpose organisations. And smaller BME organisations...?

Ah, there’s the rub. Most BMEVCS organisations have tended to be in what has generally come to be referred to as ‘under the radar’, that is that they and their characteristics were largely unknown to policy and practice organisations. Attempts to map them foundered on the difficulties of locating them, of reluctance on the part of funders to support expensive research and, in some cases, quite inappropriate methodologies. Then along came the Third Sector Research Centre which, for the last ten years, has systematically attempted, with the aid of a range of researchers and a well-informed and wide-ranging advisory group, to do just that. This remains work in progress and no-one would claim that the outcomes of this programme of work are totally conclusive or have obviated the need for further investigation into this area. But at least we are beginning to get well under the radar and understand what makes the BMEVCS tick and what the shape of this particular part of the loose and baggy monster looks like. Challenging the attitudes of those who, like service providers in the mainstream who have argued that many client groups are hard-to-reach, this programme has demonstrated that the problem lies not with the groups themselves but with the unwillingness or inability of those with resources to take this group or subsector’s needs seriously and commit adequate resources to what might be a time-consuming and expensive but nevertheless necessary exercise. The issue is not that they are hard to reach but that the reaching out takes inappropriate forms, if it is attempted at all.

This monograph brings together, in summary form, some of the key insights from the major studies which have emerged within this programme of work over the last ten years and represents the most significant body of work providing a picture of the more marginalised parts of the VCS: hopefully it

¹ Craig, G. (2011) ‘Forward to the past: can the UK Black and minority ethnic third sector survive?’, *Voluntary Sector Review*, Vol. 2, No. 3: 367-390.

will become a game changer not only in telling us much that we did not know but in asserting the importance of this subsector and ways in which to engage with it and protect its vital work. There are key messages here for government, charitable funders, and for the VCS as a whole, much of which has tended to exacerbate rather than obviate the difficulties it has faced. I have alluded above solely to the experience of the BMEVCS but these comments apply much more widely: as the collection of papers demonstrates, there are other, equally significant, parts of the VCS which have been marginalised: those dealing with arts, with rural organising, with digital developments, and community action, for example, but it is not possible to deal with all of these in any kind of depth within a short foreword, and it is the case also that the largest selection of papers - almost half of those selected in fact, which probably represents the distribution of topics in the wider canon of TSRC 'Below the Radar' publications - deals with aspects of the BMEVCS, with faith-based groups, work with Romani, asylum-seeking and refugee groups, on superdiversity and with small BME community groups. The reader should nevertheless apply this broad analysis to all elements of the marginalised parts of the VCS.

As the editor notes, there are potentially depressing conclusions apparently to be drawn from the collection as a whole: the fight against overwhelming odds in terms of the deficit of funding compared with the levels of need which are manifest, which government both generates and to which it fails adequately to respond. But at the same time, it is impossible to overlook the incredible levels of commitment of activists, paid staff, trustees and volunteers in these organisations who have continued to undertake the key historical role of the VCS, of identifying new needs and, where government response has been lacking, of meeting it. Food poverty and the emergence of a network of foodbanks would be one obvious example here: these may be, as one cynical government Minister chose to interpret them, a wonderful and uplifting example of voluntarism, but they point to a much more significant underlying trend, the impact of austerity and the inability or unwillingness of the normal mechanisms of the state to respond effectively – whether by price control, benefit increases or increased funding - to needs identified by the VCS. Somehow, in the midst of all this destructive policy path, groups of volunteers have organised themselves, many indeed below the radar and in the most unexpected of places, to respond to this need.

In some cases, need has been known about for many years but the causes which are associated with them have been socially and politically unpopular. In this context, the growth of work with Romani organisations – Gypsy, Traveller and Roma groups – has been notable. On the back of some pathbreaking work by a few academics and a very few local authorities, the extent of need of this most precarious of groups has been not only mapped but responded to so that the growth of a cohesive Romani voice is beginning to emerge, ensuring that this group will no longer exist 'below the radar'.

In other cases, what is probably common knowledge at the level of the most marginalised groups is now increasingly being mainstreamed into the VCS as a whole, and indeed into the wider policy and practice arenas. Here I am thinking of the issue of superdiversity which has now become a focus for new and significant academic endeavour but might be regarded as the everyday experience of many BMEVCS organisations, including the smallest and most hidden from public scrutiny. Many such organisations have worked in the shadows in areas characterised by marginalisation and poverty but also by a widening pool of ethnic diversity. My own place of residence, York, is a good enough

example: in a city long regarded as a white Anglo-Saxon town, my recent research identified almost 100 different ethnicities where one in eight people is not of White British origin.²

This is a hugely valuable collection and the wider body of work by TSRC over the past ten years will, I suspect, come to be regarded as critical in changing our ways of thinking about what this level of organising and activity represents, and how to support it. Angus McCabe and his colleagues at TSRC are to be congratulated for their persistence and determination in ensuring that it has a significant public profile: we all have the responsibility of ensuring that government responds to the analysis developed from the programme.

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² Craig, G. (2016) *A racial justice forum for York?*, York: York Workshops.

Introduction

Angus McCabe

Over the past ten years the below the radar work-stream at the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC), University of Birmingham, has produced some 30 working and discussion papers exploring the experiences of small, informal and semi-formal, community groups and actions. Each of these papers has been single, or joint, authored and consisted of both detailed primary research as well as systematic literature reviews. As a collection of papers the work has attempted to capture the diversity of community action (from, for example, refugee and Black and Minority Ethnic groups, Gypsy, Traveller and Roma organisations, the voluntary arts and faith base social actions). If there has, however, been a unifying theme, this has been about equality and social justice.

The approach taken to this final below the radar working paper the approach taken has been slightly different. Whilst it again aims to reflect the diversity of community action – within that overarching framework of equality – this paper has invited authors not to undertake primary (or indeed secondary) research but to reflect back on the last decade, as well as look to the future, based on their own experiences and thoughts. As such, the collection is intended to stimulate debate on what has been, and is, happening in the field rather than being the definitive statement on below the radar activities. It draws on the work of academics who have previously published working papers with TSRC as well as practitioners who have contributed to the Centre's work through participation in reference groups or in conference and workshop activity.

The initial reflections focus on particular aspects of community action (the voluntary arts, refugee groups etc) and changing trends in terms of the use of social media and the impact of increasingly superdiverse communities. The final contributions (from Alison Gilchrist, Matt Scott and Mandy Wilson) offer broader reflections on community led change within the context of shifting debates on 'the voluntary and community sector'. The views expressed are those of the authors rather than any agenda suggested by TSRC.

In bringing these diverse contributions together a degree of depression was envisaged in the editing processes. Reflections would focus on austerity, the cuts and a reduced capacity, in many places, to sustain action. Inevitably, there are elements of that running throughout the pieces. Yes austerity, and its impact, is addressed. The effects of the cuts are acknowledged as are the agonised (or agonising?) reflections on what the voluntary and community sector is actually for.

But, in reality, it is a far from depressing collection. Rather what frequently shines through is the perseverance of activists and community groups – often struggling with adverse media coverage (for example on Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities) and changing, often increasingly hostile, public perceptions of marginalised communities.

To use a completely non-academic term, 'stuff happens' despite everything. Stuff not only continues to happen, but it often does so in unusual places and in unexpected ways. Long may below the radar 'stuff' happen.

So yes, do get depressed – maybe even angry at times. Do disagree with the authors – though please use disagreement to further reflect on what under-pins that disagreement. And, ultimately we hope you enjoy this collection and celebrate that 'stuff happens'.

Grassroots and Voluntary Arts: Looking back, imagining the future

Jane Milling, Robin Simpson and Hilary Ramsden.

The first overview of twenty-first century research and grey literature of international grassroots and voluntary arts practices, *The Role of Grassroots Arts Activities in Communities* (2011), was produced by the Third Sector Research Centre (TRSC) with the support of Voluntary Arts. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Connected Communities programme, *The Role of Grassroots Arts Activities* examined research available on the social, educational, economic and health effects that grassroots arts were having in communities. This study began to sketch in the qualitative evaluations of diverse grassroots arts participation across different communities as a complement to the large-scale statistic study of participation in the English grassroots arts sector, *Our Creative Talent* (2008) commissioned by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England. Talking to Robin Simpson, CEO of Voluntary Arts, *Our Creative Talent* established a baseline measurement for non-professional, self-organised cultural participation in the context of the 1998-2010 UK Public Service Agreements that set targets for broadening the reach and accessibility of cultural participation with a view to reducing social exclusion. Formally funded cultural activity was not able to meet these demanding targets, but grassroots arts were already involved. In both these reports, qualitative and quantitative, a dynamic emerged that has characterised much of the attention paid to grassroots arts over the last ten years, one where the grassroots and voluntary arts sector is particularly recognised where it works in parallel with, or can meet the needs of, subsidised cultural organisations.

The TRSC paper on the role of grassroots arts in communities has contributed to a growing interest in voluntary and grassroots arts among funders and policy makers. In the academic context, a series of policy-facing reports around cultural value have picked up some of the findings of the TRSC's work recognising the roles that grassroots participatory arts have to play in the wider cultural ecology. Both the Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value, *Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth* (2015) and the AHRC Cultural Value Project report, *Understanding the Value of Arts and Culture* (2016) echo John Holden's work at Demos around calls for a democratising of culture that acknowledges the amateur, voluntary and grassroots arts sector as an essential part of the provision and experience of arts in the cultural ecology today.

Other policy-facing approaches that initially appear to be interested in the grassroots arts sector have sprung up around the idea of everyday creativity. 64 Million Artists report *Everyday Creativity: From Great Art and Culture for Everyone, to Great Art and Culture by, with and for Everyone* (ACE 2016) was commissioned by Arts Council England to reflect on the benefits to existing cultural organisations of providing more participatory opportunities for audiences, alongside some encouragement to link to existing grassroots organisations. The Calouste Gulbenkian Enquiry in the Civic Role of Arts Organisations *Rethinking Relationships* (2017), and *Towards Cultural Democracy* (2017) a review by Kings College, London largely arising out of the Get Creative project led by a consortium of cultural organisations including the BBC, call for the wider recognition of 'everyday' creativity and grassroots arts activity. However, while much of this research concludes that existing funded arts organisations can benefit through extending their outreach programmes and integrating

a wider diversity of participants alongside artists, there is little suggestion of a long-term way of integrated working with grassroots arts groups. Nor is this participation in everyday culture the new formulation of a politically-aware or socially-challenging grassroots activity, as Sophie Hope, Andrea Phillips and Stephen Pritchard have pointed out at different times, that characterised the more radical community arts activities of the late twentieth century.³ However, at the heart of what has changed in the public discourse is an increased sense of the importance of *active* participation in arts and culture-making, rather than cultural consumption, although some of these approaches are still primarily thinking of this participation as audience-building for existing professional and subsidised culture. A number of research projects are looking in more detail at sections of the grassroots sector on their own terms, for example the AHRC *Amateur Dramatics* project (2014-18), the *Creative Citizenship* project (2011-14) examining digitally-mediated grassroots associations and creativity, or the AHRC *Understanding Everyday Participation* project, which is calling for a more radical reconsideration of the role of locality and place and of grassroots cultural participation itself. The issue remains whether the self-organising grassroots arts groups, rather than those facilitated by artists, can be recognised as culturally significant and valuable in their own right, beyond their co-option into the agendas of subsidised cultural organisations.

In the grassroots arts sector itself, reduced budgets for local authorities from central government have meant funding for arts, educational and community arts practices from local government has declined by 17% since 2010. (Arts Council England 2016) While non-facilitated, voluntary arts organisations and participation have endured, they have been impacted by the cuts. As an anonymous respondent to an Arts Professional pulse survey outlined the unintended consequences of local government cuts for the voluntary sector have included:

*increased rents for community groups to book village halls and other venues for activities; closure of performing arts/music libraries in public libraries; VAT suddenly charged on room hire by local authorities (irrecoverable for small grassroots groups); closure of spaces which can be hired affordably by community groups for activities and events.*⁴

To counter-balance this reduction in funding, there has been some funding directed toward facilitating community grassroots activities, notably through the National Lottery Big Local scheme (offering up to £1million in 150 places), although none of this funding is earmarked for grassroots arts specifically, some of the more active schemes have coordinated across sectors, as Angus McCabe from the TSRC is currently evaluating. The Arts Council England's Creative People and Places (CPP) programme identified 21 consortia around the country where the aspiration was that large-scale spectacular audience development would integrate with and energise ongoing grassroots participation, in part because voluntary arts groups seem to offer a model of sustainable practice and

³ Sophie Hope, *Participating in the Wrong Way? Four Experiments*, Cultural Democracy Editions, 2011 <http://culturaldemocracyeditions.sophiehope.org.uk/> [Accessed 2 February 2018]; Andrea Phillips, 'In Service: art, value, merit and the making of publics' in Joanna Burton, Shannon Jackson and Dominic Willson (eds) *Public Servants: Art and the Crisis of the Common Good*, Cambridge: MIT, 2016.; Stephen Pritchard, 'Art, Activism and Politics in the Place where we live' blog <http://colouringinculture.org/home/> [Accessed 2 February 2018]

⁴ Arts Professional Pulse Survey Report, August 2017. <https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/pulse/survey-report/pulse-report-local-authority-arts-funding-what-should-be-done> [Accessed 2 February 2018]

participation. Whether this integration between funded cultural organisations and existing grassroots organisations is occurring in practice is less obvious, as Leila Jancovich's evaluation is revealing.

As Robin Simpson outlines, liaison between funded cultural organisations and grassroots arts organisations has been very varied; the most successful elements have been micro-commissioning and engaging with individual volunteers. Some CPP projects have tried to seed new voluntary initiatives, but this has proved more difficult to sustain, often involving bridging between previously independent and disconnected grassroots arts groups. Building such interrelationships takes time that short-term CPP projects do not have, and cannot replace the long-term support once offered by 'local authority arts development officers (where those posts have been lost)'.⁵ Indeed the idea of legacy, sustainability or 'trickle down' inherent in some of these attempts to integrate grassroots and voluntary arts groups is difficult to achieve if largescale socio-economic and infrastructural issues are not directly addressed. As Julian Dobson reflected on five years of Big Local activities, and past regeneration projects, the danger is that communities experience 'frenetic neglect' rather than 'the steady work of building the everyday infrastructure of society'.⁶

Looking towards the future for the grassroots and voluntary arts sector, the ongoing challenge remains the infrastructural support that underpins self-organised groups in terms of meeting space and support in kind from local authorities, as well as funded cultural organisations. In recognising the rich cultural life that is already happening at grassroots level, how are those volunteers who are catalysing their cultural environment being supported, and how might local funding and infrastructure be sustained to provide a more stable base for grassroots practices? Talking with Robin Simpson, part of Voluntary Arts future work is a series of Open Conversations around communities who experience disadvantage, and the question of what the cultural commons might mean in areas with little infrastructural support. Alongside questions of class and socio-economic division, the question of how to recognise and champion more racially inclusive cultural activities remains a significant issue. The Up for Arts project that Voluntary Arts runs with local radio is expanding in the coming years centred on recognising local capacity and diversity. Simpson envisages that the well-being agenda and growth in preventative community-level health targets will become increasingly pressing and that this may produce an increased recognition of the social and health benefits of grassroots arts participation, offering support for these practices from the sphere of health rather than arts funding. This is an interest that was emerging in the research identified by the TSRC report in 2011. In the uncertain context of Brexit, Voluntary Arts are part of a large-scale Creative Europe Bridging Project (2017-2020) with comparative partners from European countries, exploring the diverse experiences of national grassroots arts representative organisations, and ways to sustain connections between European grassroots arts groups who are already frequently international in their purview.

⁵ Robin Simpson, *The Role of Voluntary Arts Activity in Creative People and Places*, Voluntary Arts, 2016, p.14. <http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning/role-voluntary-arts-activity-creative-people-and-places> [Accessed 2 February 2018]

⁶ Julian Dobson, *New Seeds Beneath the Snow*, February 2018. ISBN 978-1-9998292-1-6 <https://localtrust.atavist.com/new-seeds#chapter-3442293> [Accessed 2 February 2018]

Looking forwards at the mirror? Reflections on community organisations and digital media

Kevin Harris

The late 1980s and 1990s were times of anticipation and prediction, regarding the potential for information technologies to contribute to the work of community activists, practitioners and organisations. Two umbrella groups — the Community Computing Network in the '80s, followed more informally by Communities Online — helped people in the community sector to understand what was emerging and to explore what it might mean. We all enjoy mocking forecasts made in the past, but it's worth noting that there were many accurate insights. Among the themes we certainly saw coming, for example, were the significance of self-publishing; the empowerment associated with the use of images rather than just text; and the potential for horizontal communication to disrupt hierarchies.

What was also noticeable in those days was how the movement was populated mostly by people who understood the technologies, and who showed sympathetic interest in social change; whereas many people with a community development background showed little interest and often unqualified resistance. I recall a leading practitioner bemoaning that “when someone's at a computer, they're not interacting with anyone else” — apparently unable to appreciate the implications for collective action of the convergence of computing and telecommunications.

This kind of disengagement often reflected 'either/or' mindsets, with people concluding from negative experiences that all digital technology is 'bad' for 'community'. It was common for people to privilege face-to-face as some kind of 'pure' form of human interaction, implying that online contact somehow represented an irreversible evolutionary decline of civilisation (I have had this argument put to me over the telephone, the irony unacknowledged). People would narrow-mindedly overlook the potential complementarity of different ways and channels of communicating, and the various nuances and benefits - for instance to many people with disabilities who were newly empowered.

At the same time, sociologists were trying to make sense of changes in social relationships as theorised through networks, in response to popular rhetoric about 'community lost' in the last decades of the 20th century. Barry Wellman⁷ and, later, Keith Hampton⁸, recorded a general weakening of dense overlapping ties and showed how the technologies of telephony and online help people to strengthen their personal social networks. Unsurprisingly, what was emerging was a sense of communities coalescing fluidly around individuals, and not necessarily around place. Many observers failed to recognise that this does not necessarily mean 'community' lost, nor place-based-community lost.

The explorations of the new communications frontier were often accompanied by claims that 'information is power!' This rhetoric was uncomfortably persistent and manifestly misleading. It has since been thoroughly disproven under the popular adoption of social media. While so many of us are choking with information of whatever kind we choose to allow into our daily lives, it's hard to see where there has been significant change in the locus or nature of power. And anyway if information

⁷ <http://groups.chass.utoronto.ca/netlab/publications/>

⁸ <https://www.mysocialnetwork.net/publications/>

is power, how come so many people in positions of power are so remarkably ill-informed? I think there's an important nuance to this point. Someone once said 'we don't have information overload, we have relationship underload'. When we talk about social media and power, perhaps we should be asking if transformation could evolve around *relationships* more than access to information. Does social media really help generate relationships that can genuinely change power structures?

In subsequent years, by comparison to the heady 80s and 90s, the technology has evolved less radically. Facebook is very similar to what it was originally and Twitter remains stuck in its own kind of pidgin geekspeak. Alongside these, we have a range of image-oriented platforms (such as Flickr, Instagram and Pinterest) coming and going in popularity. The main general development has been in the power of the smartphone and the consequent celebration of mobility, bringing location-based benefits and dis-benefits in its slipstream. After many promises in the 1990s, voice-based systems are finally playing a role. Meanwhile however, the speed of broadband experienced by most citizens has barely improved – unlike the rhetoric of the salespeople (which now commonly reaches 14 GigaHypes) and rural provision is a national disgrace.

In the same period, in the UK we have witnessed the dismantling of the formal structure of community development, with the demise of key support organisations such as CDF, CDX, Community Matters and Urban Forum. This raises questions about support for community development practitioners and how they network to share experience and learning. The infrastructure provided not just support and connections but numerous other benefits including professional coherence and policy influence. It would be far-fetched to claim that online networks have compensated adequately for the collapse of that infrastructure. Workers and activists lack information about the wider context of their practice and the lack of shared knowledge is expensive and damaging.

The closure of national and regional support organisations under the cover of 'austerity' can be seen as clearly consistent with the neo-liberal agenda. In this view, forms of social support have to be monetised like everything else, or we must do without. The resulting disarray and suffering is something that we are expected to resolve *within* that particular political paradigm. However, the neo-liberal paradigm itself is aligned strongly with several dominant components of the digital environment, most obviously Facebook and Google. This in turn reveals a curious weakness in community practice: while the academic literature on Facebook and neo-liberalism is extensive and potent,⁹ there seems to have been little if any debate within community development. In the 1980s, such political detachment would have seemed extraordinary. This of course is a transformation that reflects perfectly the intents of neo-liberalism, through which, conferred with notions of consumer choice and voice, people have 'become transformed into subjects of online consumption and orderly surveillance, rather than committed social and political campaigners'.¹⁰

Another associated transformation, perhaps more profound, can be observed. Much activity on social media involves sharing, rather than just broadcasting. The distinction gives rise to the concept

⁹ See Harris, K. & McCabe, A. (2017). *Community action and social media: a review of the literature*. Birmingham: Third Sector Research Centre (Working Paper 139), <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/working-papers/Working-Paper-139-Community-Action-and-Social-Media-Final-2.pdf>.

¹⁰ Roberts, J. M. (2014). *New media and public activism: neoliberalism, the state and radical protest in the public sphere*. Bristol: Policy Press. <https://is.gd/Xd452E>, p159.

of ‘connective action’ which is the result of technologically-enabled interpersonal networks that bring about action without the direction of formal organisations. While connective action does not necessarily conflict with *collective* action and should be seen as complementary, it seems to imply a reduced role for community agencies in *organising*, displacing the previous ‘centrality of the resource-rich organization’.¹¹ What seems to be emerging is that networked individuals now carry out community action roles - such as awareness-raising, stimulating and coordinating reactions, feeding traditional media, and provoking policy – more, and more efficiently, than organisations. But perhaps this takes place with less accountability, continuity and sustained impact? That too would be consistent with the neo-liberal outlook.

The contagion of neo-liberalism and the phenomenon of individualism do not necessarily mean that collective identity can no longer be expressed forcefully, as global movements like Occupy have shown clearly. But at the same time, it seems, collective identity may be expressed more often without coordination by organisations, or even groups. To retain pertinence in this unfolding future, community development will have to understand and adapt to these changes.

¹¹ Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), 739–768.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661>, p760.

Faith-based social engagement: What's changed, what's stayed the same? 2008 – 2018

Heather Buckingham

Faith has not – as some might have expected – gone away, either in the personal or public domains of contemporary Britain (Davie, 2015; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2016). 51% of British adults say they pray (ComRes Global, 2018) and whilst levels of religious affiliation have declined, some 50% of the population regard themselves as belonging to a religion (NatCen, 2017).

Migration has been a contributor to the changing representation of different denominations and faiths, and among the trends within this shifting religious landscape have been growth in more experiential expressions of Christianity, including Pentecostalism and more traditional liturgical worship in cathedrals (Davie, 2015). Perhaps most significantly for our purposes in this volume, it appears that while numbers attending weekly religious services or meetings have fallen (NatCen, 2017), during the period from 2008 to 2018, austerity has contributed to an unveiling of the many and significant ways in which faith groups are responding to social issues in communities. Indeed, if the number of faith-based charities is taken as an indicator of such activity, there seems to have been considerable growth, with this figure having increased from 23,832 in 2006 to 49,881 (a quarter of all charities registered in Britain) in 2016 (New Philanthropy Capital, 2014; 2016).

Most prominent in the public sphere in recent years have been foodbanks, owing in part to their rapid spread, as well as to the Trussell Trust's effective coordination and communication of data and stories, and the prominence afforded the issue by the All Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry into Hunger in Britain (APPG 2014). However, food banks are arguably the most visible tip of a much more extensive 'iceberg' when it comes to local faith-based social engagement, as research 'below the radar' of formally instituted charitable activity has shown.

Increased levels of homelessness, household debt, and financial insecurity linked to changing employment patterns and the administration of welfare benefits, are just some of the difficulties to which faith groups across the country are responding, both through professionally-staffed services, and through more informal, volunteer-led, or sometimes even improvised responses. Research conducted by TSRC in 2016 showed that whilst such responses were not necessarily new ones for faith groups, their involvement was increasingly in demand as local communities felt the impacts of austerity measures and the economic downturn (McCabe *et al.*, 2016). For example, one interviewee at a Hindu temple said:

"We've certainly seen a big increase in people coming here for food and we do get people coming in asking for money as well."

While another respondent from a Methodist church reported:

"On a weekly basis we have different people knocking on our doors saying: 'Can you help us, we don't have food.' We realised that there is need. This has not been there four years ago, and it is a new need that community members are presenting to us."

A number of factors account for the significant role that faith groups play in contributing to the wellbeing of people and communities at a grassroots level. Their sustained presence in communities from which many third sector organisations have withdrawn due to lack of funding is one such factor. This presence is often conceived of in terms of the buildings associated with faith groups, which in some cases serve a visual signpost to potential support as well as providing spaces that can be used for the benefit of the whole community. The recent Church in Action Survey conducted by Church Urban Fund and the Church of England found that the buildings of Church of England churches were being used to house a wide range of activities from night shelters to community cafes, lunch clubs, and fitness classes (Sefton and Buckingham, 2018). Undoubtedly, the buildings owned or rented by faith communities can provide a valuable resource for wider community benefit, but their usage for such purposes is rarely a matter of bricks and mortar alone.

For example, the Church in Action survey, based on responses from more than 1,000 Anglican clergy, found that 69% of churches ran a lunch club for older people, 59% ran a parent and toddler group, 32% ran a community café, 30% ran holiday or breakfast clubs for children, 8% ran debt advice or budgeting services, and 19% ran food banks. These are activities provided by churches for the benefit of the whole local community, not just those who are part of the congregation. In addition to these organized activities, churches were also providing a substantial amount of informal support, particularly in response to the growing issues of loneliness and mental health, with 94% and 83% of churches respectively providing support for people experiencing these problems (Sefton and Buckingham, 2018). People - the relationships they cultivate, and their ability and willingness to give of time, skills and resources - are a crucial aspect of faith communities' engagement, contributing to the relational fabric of communities, not just the physical spaces available within them (see for example, Conradson, 2003).

There is of course variation within and between faiths and denominations in terms of the resources at local faith groups' disposal, and the ways in which these are allocated, when it comes to grass roots social action. Since most faith groups rely substantially on personal giving to resource their work, this is often related to the financial circumstances of the community in which they are located, or of the individuals comprising the congregation. However, this is not always the case, as provisions are sometimes made – formally or informally – within faith traditions and denominations for the transfer of resources to contexts where they are most needed. In some cases, faith groups' resources are focused on maintaining their own buildings, staff (if applicable) and worship activities. The balance between supporting international causes and local ones also varies, as does the extent to which communities focus on responding to the needs of their own members or whether services provided are open to all.

There seems to have been growth in partnership working amongst faith groups over the past ten years. The Church in Action survey shows that for Anglican churches, the proportion reporting that they work in partnership with other churches has increased from 41% in 2014 to 62% in 2018, whilst the proportion reporting that they work in partnership with other faith groups – whilst much smaller – has doubled during this time (from 4% to 8%). In a plural society, such collaboration is likely to become increasingly important: it reflects what Cloke and Beaumont (2012) have termed 'post-

secular rapprochement', a coming together of people and groups who hold differing beliefs and philosophies, but share common goals or aspirations for their communities and for society.

Faith leaders who orient their ministries towards the local communities in which they are based are likely to face growing demands in the years to come, particularly in the most deprived communities. Increasingly, they are being asked to step into the gap, picking up the pieces amongst those that contemporary capitalism has worked against, rather than for, and developing practical solutions to support those left behind by a retreating welfare state (Bates, 2018). However, faith groups' social engagement is by no means limited to service provision, with many seeing challenging unjust social structures as integral to their purpose or mission (see for example Dinham, 2012; Bretherton, 2010; Sefton and Buckingham, 2018). Living in a way that responds to presenting human need, whilst also working for structural justice, inviting people into a community of faith, and nurturing them within it, is a demanding task. Yet research on faith-based responses to issues such as food poverty suggests that those involved are alive to the structural drivers of these issues and, whilst responding to urgent needs in real time, are often at the same time involved in the slower process of seeking policy change, whether in small ways or through more concerted efforts (McCabe et al. 2015, Buckingham and Jolley, 2015). Balancing the prophetic, the pastoral, and the practical, remains a challenge though, particularly in the context of austerity.

Finally, we must not lose sight of the importance of faith *per se* as a motivator for the engagement described above. Faith groups' community engagement is influenced not only by changing patterns of migration, socio-economic trends, religious participation, and demographic change, but also by shifts in theology, teaching, leadership and practice. Grace Davie (2015, p. 16) notes, for example, that:

'fewer people [in Britain] are now religious, but those who are take their religious lives more seriously – a shift with important implications for public as well as private life.'

In this context, understanding the specific beliefs, norms, and values being worked out through faith groups' social engagement is important if we are to gauge its sustainability, and better grasp the functions it fulfils - and those it does not fulfil. Indeed, some would criticise the use of the word 'faith' as an unhelpful shorthand for such a diverse collection of worldviews, masking differences within and between religions, as well as commonalities – of belief, priorities, and action - with secular groups. Building a detailed picture of this diversity as it plays out in local communities across the country is certainly important if we are to understand the resilience, potential, and vulnerabilities of our communities more fully, and – given that 84% of the global population belong to a religion – such learning would support more effective collaboration for the common good beyond the local too.

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Rural Community Organising: Going, going.....gone?

James Derounian

In 2014 I published [*Now you see it... ..now you don't: a review of rural community organising in England*](#), for the Third Sector Research Centre. According to Bracht *et al* (1999: 86) community organization is “a planned process to activate a community to use its own social structures and any available resources to accomplish community goals decided primarily by community representatives and generally consistent with local attitudes and values. Strategically planned interventions are organized by local groups or organizations to bring about intended social or health changes”.

Although I argued that the “trajectory of English rural policy has consistently promoted community-based approaches”, I would suggest that - since 2014 - “the austerity driven agenda of the current administration is, more explicitly, focused on the role of the citizen – and communities – in ‘rolling back the state’ and transfer of responsibility, services and assets from the state to citizen (Conservative Party: 2010)”. This highlights the contested nature of, and claims for, UK organizing. Is it enabling and empowering, or a means of off-loading responsibility on to communities and individuals with very different capabilities to respond?

Key findings in relation to English Rural Community Organising in 2014 were mirrored in the words of the North American Annenberg Institute for Social Reform (2011): “There are few models of rural organizing and little research to draw upon’. Rural Community Organising in England seems to be below, off or under the radar.” I believe this summary still applies in 2018. There seem to be a number of key reasons for this. First, rural local authorities are struggling to deliver statutory services, with diminishing resources – both in terms of finance and staffing. So support for discretionary work – such as community organizing – represents an obvious target for cuts. If it does not *need* to be provided then it does not have to be. This in turn leads to a second effect. As the St Matthew’s Gospel says “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.” In other words, as local councils struggle to provide, so they call on communities to step into the breach – to take over the local library; or provide a volunteer-run shop. But this *localism* plays into the hands of the haves, and those that can harness an abundance of ‘social capital’. Take my own edge-of-Cotswolds town of Winchcombe; with a population of about 6,000. It can draw on the skills, experience, knowledge, networks, connections and resources of a significant number of retired professionals, who understand ‘the system’ and are capable of organising and campaigning.

On the other hand, for almost 40 years, no UK Government of any political stripe has significantly reduced levels of rural poverty. In 2014/15 – according to [official figures](#) – the “percentage of households in rural areas in relative low income was...16 per cent”, including housing costs; and the “percentage of children in rural areas in absolute low income was...20 per cent after housing costs”. A string of surveys undertaken since the 1980s all indicated broadly similar levels of poverty; for example McLaughlin (1986) surveyed 750 households in 5 areas of rural England and found that an average of 25% were living in, or at the margins of, poverty. Similarly the *Rural Lifestyles* report (Cloe *et al*, 1994), covering 3,000 households, had – as a headline figure - 23% of their occupants living in, or close to, poverty. This evidence seems to reinforce the idea that “whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.” This also chimes with the findings from researchers looking at developing world community activism: for example, Botes and van Rensburg in their

memorably titled article - *Community participation in development: nine plagues and twelve commandments* (2000) in which they make the point that community-based action can actually disempower and reinforce inequalities ('domesticate') rather than enable.

If we look at one example of organizing, encouraged through the *Localism Act* 2011, we can begin to see how community action may reinforce inequalities rather than actually empower people.

According to the [UK Government](#) "Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area." However, when we look more closely at these community-generated plans we discover that "areas of below average affluence are less likely to enter into the neighbourhood planning process". Further, the Turley Associates 2014 research - *Neighbourhood Planning: Plan and Deliver* – went on to note that 39% of designated Neighbourhood Plan areas were located amongst the least deprived local authorities in England. The report also highlighted the fact that 75% of plans had been produced in the south of England, as opposed to just 25% in the north. This points to very different levels of community organising across the country.

Research into *User Experience of Neighbourhood Planning in England* (Parker *et al*, 2014) reinforces the picture that such voluntary action is easier for some communities than others. 72% of participants indicated that undertaking a Neighbourhood Plan had been more burdensome than expected. This is unsurprising given that plan preparation typically requires residents to commit several years to regular meetings, preparing, reading and commenting on drafts, taking part in consultations, dealing with planning professionals and local politicians; group work and negotiation, and making sense of jargonized and technically complex planning policies and language. The Intergenerational Foundation (2012) also argued that "[the Localism Act Hands Power to Older Generations](#)". Parish and Town councils lead on neighbourhood planning for their areas. However, local councillors are – on average - getting older (60 years), and are now 14 years older than the average UK adult (46). And only some 5% of councillors are under 35 years of age. The fact that over-65s make up 20% of the population, but 40% of local councillors, raises the prospect that the needs and aspirations of younger residents may be ignored, misunderstood or hidden. So community organising may well be unequal across generations as well as space. Thus proving to be fundamentally *unsustainable* – a central thread of the UK planning system and National Planning Policy Framework (Communities and Local Government, 2012).

I ended my 2014 review of community organising in England by concluding that "this remains a predominantly urban phenomenon. Even where formal community organising initiatives have been developed in mainly rural local authority areas, these have tended to be in larger population centres rather than smaller towns or 'deep rural' communities. In contrast, there has been a tradition, supported by Churches, Rural Community Councils and Town and Parish Councils of community development – albeit fragile in terms of funding, and unevenly distributed across England." Where I do see possibilities for supporting ultra-local rural community organising, is through the actions and vision of reinvigorated parish and town councils. These local authorities – invented in the 1890s - have the ability to levy a precept that is a local tax which can be used to fund community organizing and action. Whilst they have the power, they need the will and determination, to serve *all* residents: across the age range; black/white, gay-straight, differently-abled and so on.

A partnership between community representatives, the Transition Towns movement, development trusts (where they exist), parish council and principal authority could spread the workload, risks and multiply the resources to trigger local action. Such a team effort could also reduce the likelihood of more ‘capable’ communities continuing to monopolise self-help. These combinations may promote community ‘ownership’: it is, after all, the residents who stand to directly gain. Similarly, English town and parish councils would be fulfilling their mission to represent “the interests of the communities they serve and improving the quality of life and the local environment. Furthermore they influence other decision makers and can, in many cases, deliver services to meet local needs.” Higher-tier authorities, such as district or unitary councils, can put localism into practice through joint working. Such activity requires cooperation rather than coercion; and begs the overriding question: ‘to what extent do town and parish councils have the willingness and capacity to pick up services cut by first tier authorities? Similarly, as shown by evaluations of rural *Big Local* initiatives, such local councils may be willing - and have the wherewithal – to raise a precept to cover revenue costs, but lack the capital to take on physical ‘assets’ such as youth centres.

Similarly, I commend the well-established ‘hub and spokes’ model of rural community development and planning, whereby a ‘key settlement’ (larger village/town) and the surrounding villages that look to it – for shopping, entertainment, work and so on – are considered jointly and planned for as a whole. In such a way the goal of sustainability articulated in the NPPF can be practically delivered.

But there are cautions. As the interim report *Empowered Communities in the 2020s* (Institute for Voluntary Action Research and Local Trust, 2017: 10) argued, there is a risk that community organising is “used to teach people to cope with austerity or co-opt them into substituting for the state”. Further, community action “is not just going to happen. It needs to be a partnership between the local authority who need to release some control and the community who need there to be [someone] to support them”. The ‘scaffolding’ – of external agencies – is essential to support and match the community drive, commitment, and resources.

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A Reflection on a Decade of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Activism

Andrew Ryder

The last decade has been a hugely influential one for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in the UK, who have remained one of the most marginalised minorities in society¹. A unique facet though of this experience has been a willingness by community leaders to adapt and invest time and energy in more formalised advocacy and campaigning. A central feature of this progress has been the ability of civil society to facilitate new leadership roles for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women but also growing awareness and value of inclusive community development which is grassroots orientated and uses identity as a resource to shape innovation and advocacy. Alas, as will be made evident, central government since 2010 has failed to match and support the growing desire by Gypsies, Roma and Travellers for community empowerment

The formation of the Gypsy Council in 1966 is the starting point for formalised activism for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in the UK. The Gypsy Council though was in some respects an umbrella group for a number of local community leaders which fused extended family networks with forms of formal activism. The highpoint of the Gypsy Council was the influence of its protests and lobbying in helping to encourage a Labour Government to support in 1968 a statutory duty on local authorities to provide caravan sites for Gypsy and Traveller families¹. The Gypsy Council though avoided excessive bureaucracy and as a consequence failed to attract substantial funding and or develop a large staff. Perhaps the informality of the Gypsy Council meant it could remain true to its avowed principles of grassroots activism and not be hijacked by the demands that would stem from being harnessed to the agenda of a large donor (Acton *et al*, 2014). On the other hand generous funding and a large staff team might have enabled the Gypsy Council to have become an even more strategic and powerful actor in public discourse. Instead Gypsies, Roma and Travellers remained at the margins of UK race politics for much of the final quarter of the twentieth century.

It was the marginality of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society that enabled a Conservative Government in 1994 to (effortlessly) scrap the statutory duty to provide caravan sites and in effect privatise Traveller accommodation by encouraging Gypsies and Travellers to develop their own sites. The problem is that few local authorities were willing to assist families in their efforts to secure a home and the number of unauthorised developments and encampments grew apace as the shortage of sites was exacerbated by the repeal of the duty. The frustration caused by this short-sighted policy was pivotal in encouraging Gypsies and Travellers and their allies in the late 1990s to establish new organisations like Friends, Families and Travellers and the Traveller Movement (McCabe *et al*, 2014). Another important development has been the increase in the Roma population through migration from Central and Eastern Europe, which also witnessed the formation of the Roma Support Group (Ingmire and Stables, 2014). As well as national organisations being established some local support groups were also set up, most notably the London Gypsy Traveller Unit and Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group. These new organisations were faced with the same dilemma as the Gypsy Council, namely whether they should be informal grassroots based organisations or more constituted and formal in their approach. In the main these new organisations chose the latter course seeking funding from large funders in the charity sector like Comic Relief or even contracts with the service sector such as the NHS. They have consequently developed relatively large staff teams – some of these staff are focused on lobbying and advocacy with others engaged in welfare support and service delivery.

One of the main stories of the last decade has been how well these newer Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations have navigated the pitfalls and traps of modern day civil society. One of the key themes of discussion is whether such groups form part of a 'Gypsy industry' where outsiders seek to speak for the communities they work for rather than empower. In truth the community voice has been at times marginal in the work of these groups, but through trust formation and mentoring leading to community trustees and staff these organisations have sought to overcome such problems.

One of the great achievements of these organisations has been the means by which they have worked with, and provided platforms for, what could be described as 'organic intellectuals': skilled and knowledgeable community members without much formal education. In the last decade activism has prompted some community members who had barely any formal education to return to school and a number now have degrees, MAs and PhDs. Many are also excited at the future prospects of a new generation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller activists who have benefitted from higher levels of education than previous generations of community activists, and they will be well-placed to take more leading roles in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society.

In terms of knowledge production Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society has taken a growing interest in research. Many activists and community organisations became involved in research commissioned by local government in accommodation needs assessments (a statutory requirement as part of the then Labour Government's attempts in 2006 to address Traveller accommodation needs, by including in regional accommodation spatial strategies caravan pitch targets based on the aforementioned assessments. Activists became involved in varying degrees in research design, data collection and interpretation and this led in turn to a number of collaborative and participatory research projects where academic researchers have worked in partnership with community organisations (Ryder, 2017). This work has, in part, fed into a wider debate in Europe on the relationship between the researcher and the researched leading to new forms of critical Romani scholarship which emphasises the value of Roma communities being acknowledged as partners and important voices in the research process.

Another important development within Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society has been how it has, in a Freirian sense, been something of an outsider catalyst prompting important internal discussions about gender and sexuality. In some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities bonding forms of social capital and a strong sense of tradition have sometimes impacted negatively on views centred on gender and sexuality. However, community members from these subgroups have been prominent in using civil society as a platform to challenge such perceptions and carve out cultural adaptations which are minimising forms of internal community oppression and promote a more intersectional understanding of exclusion.

Another highpoint of the last decade was the establishment in 2008 of Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month which received government funding (Acton and Ryder, 2012). The month has witnessed schools and community groups stage special events and learning activities to improve community relations and awareness of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history and culture and has witnessed groups like the Welsh based Romani Cultural & Arts Company pioneer the use of arts and culture as an instrument to challenge discrimination and nurture intercultural dialogue.

Despite the achievements, as noted above, of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society there is a sense that since 2010 it has been hemmed in and frustrated by government policies. The Coalition

Government under David Cameron ended its funding for Gypsy Roma and Traveller History Month and austerity measures witnessed huge cuts to local authority Traveller Education Services, agencies charged with liaison and guidance on raising educational participation and achievement. Moreover, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society has had to operate like other Black and Minority Ethnic groups in an ever more precarious funding environment due to austerity measures and the diminishing funds of the charity sector. Funding difficulties have led to some organisations closing, contracting or not expanding and has placed limitations on the chances of civil society to help disseminate and promote good practice. So much for the hyperbole and rhetoric of Cameron's 'Big Society' which was to see civil society afforded greater prominence – the opposite proved to be the case (Greenfields and Alexander, 2014). In addition, the Coalition and current Conservative Government have sought to weaken and unravel the previous Labour Government's policy framework on Gypsy and Traveller accommodation (discussed above). Attempts to persuade the Government not to undermine site delivery frameworks has remained a central part of the work of community groups.

This sense of frustration is set to increase with Brexit. Leaving the EU will probably end the UK's participation in the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, a framework policy in which member states have to devise national action plans to address Roma and Gypsy/Traveller exclusion (Richardson and Codona, 2018). The framework places a strong emphasis on community led local development and Government working in partnership with civil society but there has been disappointment at the extent to which meaningful partnerships have been formed and or progress made¹. The EU Roma Framework though could present a useful guide for the UK Government which could constitute a new starting point and change in direction (Ryder and Taba, 2018). In addition there are fears that by leaving the EU commitments to human rights and social justice will be diluted especially if the UK opts for a hard brexit which in all likelihood will lead to a 'race to the bottom' strategy where social protections are curtailed in order to enhance competitiveness. Clearly such scenarios will not bode well for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society but life will not only go on but there will be opportunities to further change the direction the UK takes, in that discussion Gypsy Roma and Traveller civil society will have an important role to take. As far as I am concerned that role should continue to be influenced by notions of empowerment, interculturalism and intersectionalism which have been at the fore in the work of community groups for the past decade.

¹ Endnote

Roma is the term generally used to describe the Romani communities of Central and Eastern Europe because a growing number see the term 'Gypsy' as pejorative, although they belong to the same ethnographic group as British Gypsies who prefer to continue to use this term. Irish Travellers descend from ancient Irish nomadic groups. Gypsies and Irish Travellers traditionally have close-knit family and economic networks, and nomadism – or the possibility of it – remains a strong cultural value in a way that it does not for the mainly sedentary East European Roma. In documentation and discussions, 'Roma' can encompass diverse groups such as Roma, Gypsies and Travellers.

¹ The Caravan Sites Act 1968 was a [private member's bill](#) proposed by [Eric Lubbock](#) MP of the [Liberal Party](#) (later Lord Avebury). The Act was effectively repealed by the [Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994](#)

¹ The European Commission asked all member states to produce a Roma Integration Strategy. The UK Government declined to do this but instead set up a Ministerial Working Group chaired by Eric

Pickles MP. That Group published a 'Progress Report' in April 2012, but has been notably silent since then. Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) made a Freedom of Information Act request to the, then, Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in November 2013 asking how many meetings of the Group had occurred since April 2012 and how many were currently scheduled to take place. The DCLG declined to provide this information claiming that Ministers needed 'free space' and that disclosing information about meetings could harm the 'frankness and candour of internal discussion'. FFT referred this to the Information Commissioner who directed DCLG to provide the information. The information was provided to FFT in 2014 revealed that no meetings of the so-called 'Working Group' have taken place since April 2012 and none are scheduled.

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Ten years of below the radar: from ethnicity to superdiversity - continuity and change in below the radar provision

Jenny Phillimore

Back in 2008 when the Third Sector Research Centre was launched I was fortunate enough to be asked to participate in a programme of work looking at the shape, role, function and motivations of what we termed “below the radar” organisations: small scale, generally unregistered organisations undertaking a range of civil society actions. I had come to the TSRC with a long-standing interest in migrant and refugee organisations and particularly their role in supporting the settlement of refugees into the UK. Within weeks of the TSRC’s establishment we were challenged by a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Network about the lack of an overt focus on BME organisations in the TSRC’s initial plans. We had intended, as the BTR workstream, to ensure that our work included a BME and Migrant and Refugee Community Organisations (MRCOs) focus and in our first working paper, (McCabe & Phillimore 2009) we set out our intention to explore the characteristics of diverse BTR organisations. In our next paper we reviewed the existing literature on BTR organisations and find that there was considerable debate about whether or not a distinctive BME/MRCO sector existed with some arguing that their characteristics and actions were little different from the mainstream sector (ie Deakin Commission 1995) and others highlighting a distinctive role in addressing racism and discrimination (McLeod et al. 2001) or in supporting acculturation (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005) and integration (Zetter et al., 2005) or promoting separatism (Cantle, 2005).

There were a number of claims made about the distinctiveness of BME/MRC organisations in terms of both their role and in the challenges they faced with most emphasis on organisations supporting specific ethnic groups. Interviews with BTR organisations followed. These suggested that BME/MRC organisations shared many of the features of other small-scale civil society organisations in that they were run by and for their constituent communities. They were fleet of foot – able to respond quickly to problems within their communities and the boundary between individual volunteer’s personal and BTR roles were frequently blurred. We concluded that the distinctiveness of BME/MRC organisations came from a specific knowledge set rather than a distinct way of working

While they share common ground in terms of being led by, and for, their constituents, driven by need, responding to gaps in mainstream provision, sharing common interests, acting holistically and flexibly, using resources sourced internally, a key factor is that they base their actions upon their own distinctive local, and specific, knowledges that can only result from lived experience. They also operate using social networks only available to those who share experience or geography. Perhaps the most important finding emerging from this study is the importance of local knowledge and networks. (Phillimore et al. 2010: 21)

The following year a further TSRC working paper (Mayblin and Soteri-Proctor 2011) delved deeper into the academic literature to examine the extent to which claims of a distinct BME/MRC sector were empirically supported. The outcome of the review was inconclusive with evidence identified both supporting and denying the claim, and tentative conclusions drawn about motivations, knowledges and experiences being distinct while ways of working sharing many features with BTR organisations more generally. The authors noted excessive focus on ethnicity and country of origin as organisations’ defining features and called for an examination of intersectionality in BTR sector activity.

These calls coincided with heightened interest in superdiversity following a seminal paper from Steven Vertovec (2008). This article described a shift from “old migration” wherein migrants arrived in large numbers from sending countries with whom host countries had a long-standing relationship (generally through colonial links or bi-lateral labour agreements) to form large and eventually well-established ethnic communities to migrants arriving from many more countries, most without any connection. Such migrants arrived in much smaller numbers and rarely formed a critical mass or community able to support the development of the kinds of ethnically specific organisation which had previously been the normative approach to representation and advocacy in the BME/MRC sector. Furthermore, Vertovec highlighted the “diversification of diversity” which meant that individuals often identified by a combination of characteristics such as gender, age, migration status, faith and levels of education, instead of, or as well as, ethnicity or country of origin. Vertovec asked how such superdiverse communities will be represented in the absence of the kind of critical mass associated with the more traditional BME type community organisations. This was exactly the question we encountered when working with a range of MRCOs in 2007/8 in a project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. These MRCOs identified problems accessing health services. Working with them we undertook 138 interviews, completed 189 questionnaires and ran eight focus groups examining the experiences of migrants from many backgrounds seeking to access health services (see Phillimore 2011). We found that services were geared to a multicultural approach focusing explicitly on the large, long-established minority groups and were not equipped to serve a superdiverse population. In later work we demonstrated that both the rapidly emergent diversity in many parts of the UK and the fragmentation of populations meant that medical professionals were ill-equipped to deal with the novelty and newness of their patients (Phillimore 2015). The approach adopted in previous decades to either establish ethnically specific community organisations, or to employ staff from specific ethnic communities (Phillimore 2016), was no longer feasible when neighbourhoods like Handsworth in Birmingham, had seen arrivals from over 160 different countries in a ten-year period (Phillimore et al. 2015).

Fast-forward to 2015 and we were privileged to win funds from the EU’s Welfare State Futures programme for understanding the practice and developing the concept of welfare bricolage (UPWEB) which enabled us to look closely at how residents living in superdiverse areas addressed their health concerns. The project was innovative in looking at the actions individuals took to address their concerns across the public, private and third sectors: looking at actions initially from the perspectives of residents from wide ranging backgrounds. We used a comparative/sequential approach to interrogate local welfare states across eight deprived and upwardly mobile superdiverse neighbourhoods in four different national welfare states (UK, Portugal, Germany and Sweden) each with different welfare, health and migration regimes. We adopted a maximum diversity sampling strategy meaning that we sought interviewees who were as different as possible from each other using characteristics such as length of residence, level of education, faith, age, migration status and gender as well as ethnicity or migration background in an attempt to capture the superdiversity of local populations and to identify any commonalities and differences across multiple and often intersecting characteristics.

Some 160 in-depth interviews with residents were followed by interviews with the providers they identified as being important to their health and well-being. It was clear from interviews with residents that civil society and particularly local BTR groups were critical in the tactics they adopted to address their health concerns. Such groups were especially important in Portugal and the UK

where austerity cuts combined with the failure to adapt services originally designed for white, male breadwinner-led households. Residents and providers described extremely complex social problems that often combined physical and mental health problems with extreme poverty, precarity and immigration difficulties (see Pemberton & Isakjee 2017; Bradby & Hamed 2017; Padilla et al. 2017). Such problems were described by the public sector as intractable: beyond the remit of state agencies which worked to specific fairly narrow agendas. BTR organisations focused not on ethnic groups but on local communities. They offered what might be described as “social glue” using their distinct knowledge of the local ecology of provision across state and third sectors to connect individuals with agencies and other BTR organisations who could begin to address the underlying social problems which often underpinned health concerns. They also operated as facilitators or mediators working to connect individuals with the public sector by helping the public sector to make sense of complex regulations around rights and entitlements.

The Welcome Project in Handsworth provides an excellent example of BTR action taking a holistic approach to addressing complex problems. The project is essentially a lunch-club for asylum seekers and refugees run once a week by volunteers in a local church hall. Volunteers cook lunch from foodstuffs donated by other civil society organisations and then sit down to lunch with around 12-15 individuals. Many of the volunteers were previously recipients of the service or have had their own problems, including that of feeling isolated. Over lunch friendships are formed and volunteers learn about the range of problems faced by their “clients” frequently forming close bonds and developing an understanding of extremely complex situations. The project and/or volunteers then support individuals to address their problems connecting with local civil society organisations to seek resolution to issues such as homelessness and destitution. Amongst other actions individuals are helped to access services, childcare is offered to enable attendance at appointments and an allotment initiative was established to offer constructive activities (see Phillimore et al. 2017). Interventions are offered in an individualised way addressing diverse needs.

BTR organisations working with superdiverse communities have not replaced organisations that work with large ethnic groups. With the advent of superdiversity, and in the UK, ongoing austerity measures, new BTR organisations and actions have emerged organically to address complex needs that cross ethnic groups and require local knowledge and a focus on the individual. At the same time there is evidence that the “old” migrant type organisations are adapting to make their services available to a wider range of people from countries of origin that were not part of their initial focus. BTR organisations operating in superdiverse areas appear too to adopt a similar approach to that of the organisations we interviewed in our TSRC work nearly a decade ago. They use distinct knowledges both of community problems and the local ecology of care, combined with a flexible approach not constrained by mission statements or service level agreements, to meet complex needs. As ever the ability of such organisations to respond to need is constrained by the availability of resources: space, volunteers and funds. BTR organisations interviewed for the UPWEB study reported that lack of resources prevented them from meeting the scale of need. Furthermore, there continues to be what might be described as a postcode lottery when it comes to BTR service provision. The ability of BTR organisations to function relies on there being viable state services to whom they can refer people. Without investment in BTR organisations and statutory services it is inevitable that many individuals will lack the support they need to address problems which over time may become increasingly intractable.

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Black and Minority Ethnic Community Groups: Reflections on a Decade of Continuity and Change

Phil Ware

Background

Over the period 2012 to 2017 three separate pieces of research were undertaken with BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) community groups and strategic organisations engaged in providing support to them. The research was conducted on a semi-structured basis, recorded and transcribed with the aim of finding out the position of BME Below the Radar (BTR) groups in relation to voice and influence and community capacity building. Seventy interviews were carried out with groups and individuals in the West Midlands, the North West, the South West, the East Midlands and London, in both urban and rural/less diverse settlements. Two focus groups were also convened and the discussions recorded. Additionally extensive literature reviews were carried out, although there was limited material available on rural BME community group activity (Ware 2013, 2015 and 2018).

It was important to attempt to ascertain the position of BME community groups for three main reasons. Firstly the BME population in England and Wales rose from 74,500 in 1951 to 7.9 million in 2011, representing 14% of the total population (ONS 2012, p4). Secondly the BME population has itself become more ethnically diverse with migration not only from New Commonwealth countries but also from Africa and the Middle East and, post EU accession, from Eastern Europe. Lastly it was important to assess the position of the sector following the recession of 2008 and subsequent austerity measures.

In 2008 the position of the BME VCS could have been characterised as showing some improvement from the 1960s in relation to resources, influence and representation. Whilst it clearly had fewer resources than the 'mainstream' voluntary and community sector (VCSO, there was some recognition of BME community groups and the potential for them to have some influence on public policy. Funding was available to BME community groups through area based initiatives (ABIs) and local authority funding was by grant giving rather than contracting. In addition to community groups there were also larger organisations employing staff, and some strategic local, regional and national networks. There was also a national network of Race Equality Councils (RECs) and a Commission for Race Equality. The existence of these organisations did not mean that racism did not exist, but that there were organisations that could give communities an access point to raise issues of race equality and, in the case of the networks, had the potential to bring BME organisations together to act collectively.

Only a Whisper?

At the time of the first interviews in 2012, the recession and subsequent austerity measures were already having a substantial impact on the VCS as a whole. In particular, there had been considerable disinvestment for VCS infrastructure development and an increase in contracting as opposed to grant aid, which had a huge impact on small organisations that did not have the capacity or track record of sufficient turnover to bid successfully for contracts. Few, if any, BME community groups were have been in a position to bid for contracts due to their low annual turnover.

Whilst it was clear that the voluntary sector as a whole had been adversely affected following the 2008 recession, for the BME VCS the research identified several factors that additionally impacted on their ability to have a voice and influence on policy formulation and development. Firstly the

reduction in resources, and focus on contracting, meant that for groups to maintain a basic level of service there was no residual capacity for engagement in policy activity. Secondly groups felt that the Equalities Act 2010 had diluted the issue of race for BME groups; interviewees also said that the prevailing notion was that race had been 'done'. However the research identified that race was still an issue for BME communities particularly, but not only, in rural and less diverse areas of England. One interviewee said that 'Britishness does not include black communities'.

There was also found to be an uneasy relationship with the mainstream VCS, whereby the BME sector was not valued and the larger mainstream organisations were getting contracts to deliver services to BME communities, but were not able to deliver them appropriately and effectively. One participant in the research said that 'the voluntary sector is not immune from racism, so has ways of marginalising certain voices...' (Ware 2013). In rural areas BME groups felt themselves to be even more marginalised, one representative saying 'If you look around the third sector [in the South West] it's all designed for the majority.' (Ware 2015).

BME community groups have also been excluded from community capacity building initiatives since the recession and the demise of the area based ABIs. In Birmingham the analysis of a community capacity building project working largely with BME community groups found that the dependence on a succession of short term funding initiatives caused the eventual demise of the project in 2011 and the lack of a replacement programme for the member groups (Ware 2017).

Resilience

Throughout the research there have been examples of work that BME groups have undertaken despite the barriers that they have faced. Groups have continued their activity without funding. In some cases they have survived precisely because they were never dependent on external funding for their core activity. In other cases, they have adapted to the loss of funding for salaried posts by operating on a voluntary basis in the evenings and weekends. In the South West (when the local Race Equality Council had its funding withdrawn) a local network was set up to continue its work, obtaining premises on a low rent and using free support from local staff from other organisations and volunteers. In contrast, other race equality organisations have adapted to take on a wider equalities agenda as a response to the Equality Act – and as a means of survival.

Despite the lack of time and resources, groups were able to point to examples of policy changes particularly on health related matters. In some cases this was due to the presence of a local 'champion' within a statutory organisation, who was willing to facilitate the group to articulate their views on behalf of local BME communities. However, these examples did not mask the overall deterioration in voice and influence over the last decade.

Discussion

The BME community groups research programme has highlighted a number of concerns for BME communities for the foreseeable future. There is the perception that the situation has deteriorated for these communities at a time when there are further factors that may have an adverse impact. The aftermath of the pro Brexit vote has already exposed the fact that any thought that England is a country that has dealt with the issues of race and racism is far from the truth. The spike in race hate crime following the Brexit vote demonstrated that there was still ignorance about race issues and gave strength to those wishing to pursue a racist agenda, whether at a public or personal level. The experience of those groups interviewed since the referendum reflected this experience.

The research showed that the situation in rural areas resembled that of urban areas in England in the late 60s and early 70s. Namely, BME communities were just beginning to develop a critical mass sufficient to enable them to organise. The situation for rural BME communities, whilst varied across

the country, is that there are communities where there is now sufficient population to organise either in single community groups, or as a network of people from different backgrounds. It is likely that future population trends will see an increase in the rural BME population increase from its current 5% (including migrants from the eight EU Accession countries) and it would be important to ensure that BME groups are able to participate in community life with equal influence.

Capacity building initiatives had given community groups, particularly in regeneration areas, resources to develop their potential, but had been restricted by the requirements of funding regimes to achieve programme targets rather than community groups' aims. It is important to note that community capacity building has been the subject of considerable debate and been seen as operating a deficit model for communities, as defined by the guardians of power and resources (Craig 2005).

It was noticeable that there was no mention of new technology by the vast majority of those interviewed in the community capacity building research. Despite government commitments to improve connectivity, particularly in rural areas, and ensure that people are not disadvantaged through the lack of access to IT facilities, few groups had efficient operating systems and even fewer were using them to communicate with their members and to access up to date information and capacity building opportunities on line (Ware 2018).

Conclusion

The findings of the research carried out over the last seven years with BME community groups have demonstrated a diminution of the resources available to them to deliver their activities and to exert influence over public policy as it affects their communities. Policy changes, such as the Equality Act 2010, have also had a negative impact, as has the continuing, and largely unacknowledged, existence of racism. The 2016 Brexit vote has demonstrably exacerbated this situation. The position of BME community groups was found to be weaker but despite this it was clear that many groups were continuing to operate and deliver their activities, despite the barriers that they faced. In order to address the reduction in activity, voice and influence of BME community groups there is an urgent need to ensure that the BME VCS as a whole is better resourced and that policy/funding initiatives are genuinely inclusive for all communities.

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Adrian Randall

Summary

Twenty years after The Asylum and Immigration Act (1996) removed welfare entitlement from “in-country” asylum seekers destitution is an established tool in the state’s attempts to restrict immigration. The role of the third sector in supporting destitute migrants continues to grow. They have had to work ‘smarter and harder’ but cannot always provide the level of support that they would wish. Whilst they can measure positive outcomes securing a fair resolution for individual asylum seekers has become more difficult because of the lack of free legal advice. Meanwhile the state invents new sanctions and appears to ignore the collateral damage.

Background

Asylum Seekers in the UK can be supported and accommodated under a regime started in 1999¹. This replaced chaotic arrangements administered by local authorities from 1996 when the government withdrew welfare benefits from all in-country asylum seekers.

The 1999 Act envisaged single asylum seekers being supported and accommodated through the application and appeal process but departing voluntarily or being deported when they had exhausted their appeal rights and their support was terminated. People with children would be supported until they left the UK. The Act also made provision (Section 4) for a (less generous) support regime for some cases including people temporarily unable to return who agree to co-operate with their deportation or those who have submitted fresh evidence to try and reopen their case.

In practice deportations are difficult so that government seldom meets its targets but these together with voluntary returns account for 40% of refused asylum seekers. Those remaining at the end of this process are reluctant to access Section 4 support unless they are doing so on the grounds of fresh evidence since this protects them against deportation. Accessing Section 4 support whilst fresh evidence or a new claim is considered is regarded as a success by those supporting refused asylum seekers but our recent interviews revealed this is often a short relief for the refused destitute asylum seeker.

The government’s asylum outcome statistics¹ suggest that over the last 10 years an average of 7,300 applicants each year remain after they have exhausted their appeal rights. This is the group who are vulnerable to destitution because they cannot claim benefits or work legally. Since the earlier report the “hostile environment” announced by the then Home Secretary, Theresa May, against illegal immigrants has been supported by legislation and prevents refused asylum seekers from accessing decent privately rented housing even if they have the means and Health Service charges create additional risks and problems.

In 2010 British Red Cross¹ reported that 60% of those using their destitution services had been destitute for more than a year and 28% had been street homeless at some stage. Our research in 2014¹ echoed these findings showing life on the margins: from our small sample of destitute migrant 57% had spent time in detention or prison whilst on average they had been living in the UK for 8 years but had no right to remain.

First Report

Our earlier report, [Challenging the destitution policy](#) (2015) described the development of voluntary sector organisations whose primary purpose was to support destitute refused asylum seekers: we looked at two cities in the North of England and a city in the Midlands.

We found organisations run by professional voluntary sector workers who had become experts in the issues although 60% of the human effort came from volunteers. These organisations were not filling a welfare gap but challenging the “destitution policy” which is designed to force refused asylum seekers to return to their country of origin and to deter others from choosing the UK. Many of the organisations and individuals had connection with faith groups and these organisations relied heavily on individual donations to fund the material support that they offered. The housing solutions utilised were varied ranging from carefully rotated night shelters run by volunteers in church halls to cross subsidy using Housing Benefit and individual hosting.

Many of the organisations gave unconditional support to any destitute migrant whilst others needed to know that there was a prospect of resolution before they would commit to ongoing support. This meant that the value of support and length of time over which people were supported was quite varied between the organisations.

We recently interviewed eight of the same organisations by telephone.

Need

There was general agreement that demand (the need) had increased - by 60% in one city but much less elsewhere. The large Midland city referenced EU citizens and visa overstayers as a part of the increase whilst the Northern cities with less diverse populations explained that those in need were all refused asylum seekers. All the organisations providing material support observed that there were also more active organisations providing support, typically but not exclusively faith groups.

Case resolution

All the organisations had become more aware of the individual case issues and all volunteered that they were pleased with their success in helping people to move on – get Home Office or Social Services support - or get leave to remain. This perhaps answered the query in our earlier report that no-one had evidenced the efficacy of the support enterprise in terms of long term life chances. Securing move-on for one individual frees up a resource / bedspace to help another as well.

One organisation has newly employed a legal adviser who helps to identify those with a prospect of success and helps them to achieve that. Another is now seeking OISC (Office of Immigration Services Commissioner) validation to give immigration advice. The organisations interviewed said that although in their experience more asylum decisions are right first time (or at appeal) it is more difficult now to resolve other cases because of a lack of legal assistance and these are often cases that failed in the first place because of inadequate legal support.

Rationing

60% of the organisations who are focussed on material support reported that they have had to introduce rationing – stopping new referrals or reducing the level of support given. These

organisations had already enhanced their support by setting up food donations or Fair Share arrangements with local stores and by preparing hot food for service users.

All organisations offering accommodation now restrict places to those who have a prospect of resolving their immigration status and also have rules about how long they can remain accommodated.

Fundraising and volunteering

Commentaries on fund raising were mixed but all the organisations reported that project funding was more difficult because there was more demand on the large trusts that the Asylum Seeker and Refugee (ASR) sector relied on. This increased demand was seen as a reflection of reduced government funding in other areas of social need causing more, and different, voluntary organisation to turn to these trusts but also increased activity in the ASR and broader sector generally.

Two organisations have used professional fundraisers both to prepare conventional bids, but also to enhance individual donations and to organise events. The outcomes were financially and reputationally beneficial. A partnership bid has secured some longer term funding for a number of organisations.

Two organisations spoke of the importance and benefit of securing a long term relationship with local 'patrons'. This was evidenced by continuous funding for some core activities.

The organisations in the North of England have closer ties to the geographical communities in which they are based. They have good local branding which makes community funding more viable. They also deliver programmes of awareness raising with local community groups and this serves to increase understanding, reduce hostility and resentment amongst the local community, increase volunteering and raise funds.

Volunteers were always the most important part of local fundraising – organising events and taking part as sponsees.

NACCOM (The No Accommodation Network) has recently been awarded substantial monies from the Guardian Christmas Appeal and this will have positive consequences for these third sector organisations and their service users.

Service Development

Housing services have been developed in a number of ways but in particular by providing refugee housing and using this to subsidise provision for destitute refused asylum seekers. Two organisations in the North have gained exemption from the normal Housing Allowance restrictions because they are supporting vulnerable refugees in these schemes. The housing used comes from a variety of sources – gifted, loaned for free, leased at less than market rent from private landlords, leased at peppercorn rents from social landlords, purchased outright using a gift and purchased using a non-commercial loan from a charitable trust.

Three organisations studied who provide accommodation currently house 156 refugees and 63 refused asylum seekers.

Hosting has also developed in the Midlands and the North. As a proportion of total bedspaces it is small but significant. The oldest scheme (in the Midlands) has provided 7,900 nights of

accommodation since opening 7 years ago: equivalent to 3 continuous bed spaces over the period representing 10% of the city's capacity.

Two organisations mentioned that they have given advice about voluntary return to clients facing long waits (to meet residence rules) and after repeated refusals. They have been careful to approach it without creating any pressure and no-one has yet taken that step.

Recommendations - New problems and old solutions

Respondents highlighted a growing problem of destitution amongst people given the right to remain. This is seen as a consequence of an expensive over-heated housing market, reductions in advice and other services for homeless people and a complete absence of support by the Home Office housing contractors. Many new refugees simply cannot find their way around the systems they need to negotiate particularly when local authority services strenuously try to avoid footfall.

Two organisations highlighted the difficulty created by the Home Office giving short periods of leave to remain and charging large sums to apply for extensions. People who do not find work will usually not be able to raise the money and will slide into illegality. They argue that these fees should be waived for people with limited means who were first given leave as Refugees, Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave.

All respondents argued that there should be end to end support for asylum seekers. They explain that the "hostile environment" will not of itself make people return to their country of origin.

Notwithstanding the improved decision making all respondents have many examples of cases being inappropriately refused and hugely difficult to resolve. They suggest that investment to continue the improvement in decision making and to ensure legal assistance to applicants at critical points can be very efficacious for all parties: reducing workloads, resolving cases and allowing applicants to become productive citizens.

Refugee and asylum seeker organisations in Scotland since 2012: reflections and future directions

Teresa Piacentini

Revisiting the past

In June 2017, I attended an event organised by Karibu an association in Scotland of French, English and Swahili speaking African asylum seeker and refugee women held in the historic Glasgow Women's Library to celebrate Refugee Festival Scotland. It was a fitting location for this event, promoted in Swahili as '*Wanawake Uhusiano Chama*' (Women's Connection Party), a celebration of the lives of African refugee women who have settled in the city, or 'New Scots', to borrow the language of the Scottish Government. Since its informal beginnings 2001, Karibu has grown from an informal friendship and solidarity group to become a force for mobilisation and advocacy work, a strong opponent of deportation and destitution of asylum seekers and refugees in the city. Thrown together by dispersal policy, its members met through chance encounters in the high-rise flats, local shops and at local church drop-ins. After hard fought struggles for funding and support, the association was able to employ a member of staff, rent city-centre premises and focus on income-generation and reskilling activities. Its long-term goal was always to develop its social enterprise portfolio to create training, work opportunities for its members, and firmly establish itself culturally, socially and economically in the city.

I first came to know Karibu in 2000 through my work as a community interpreter, and later as a researcher in Glasgow. Although I had been in touch with many individual members over the years, seeing the women again in 2017, after a period of 5 years, I was struck by the number of familiar faces. Many of the women behind its development were still involved, working hard at providing and maintaining the social and emotional safety net that had been so vital for members when they had just arrived in the Glasgow. Many women had moved forward in their lives; with refugee status they were able to retrain, find jobs, go back to education, build lives, have children, and be reunited with family. They told me about how well they were doing, how they were finally 'settling in'.

However, the association had undergone a number of changes too. Due to funding cuts, they no longer had their paid employee and so once again were reliant on asylum seeker and refugee volunteers, the former extremely vulnerable, the latter increasingly time poor. They were unable to sustain office premises and had gone 'back to basics', holding association meetings in each others homes although they were still able to provide a monthly drop-in in a community space. This was 'austerity in action', funding cuts to informal community associations in third sector groups necessarily demanded a rethink of how services were delivered or services disappear. Key here is that Karibu members did not want to give up what they had started. These women were proud of their achievements in spite of government policy, because their successes in settling in and rebuilding happened in a political climate that has put many obstacles to 'integration' into place.

In previous work (Piacentini 2012) I have advocated the importance of moving beyond refugeeness in relation to understanding the practices of asylum seeker and refugee associations, to avoid imposing a fictive unity on people and practices of community. Adopting a life cycle approach to community mobilisation has to be, I argued, central to this shift away from the notion of a 'refugee community

organisation' as something fixed in time and place. The example of Karibu is illustrative of this. Since reconnecting with Karibu, I was curious to find out what had happened to other African associations in the city of Glasgow. As predicted in 2012, refugee status determination has directly affected the sustainability of asylum seeker and refugee associations in different ways: it has meant some have disbanded completely, others have re-imagined themselves as social-cultural groups, still organising around issues but providing more informal support to each other in much the way that friends and extended family provide support networks. More recent asylum seekers, dispersed to Glasgow have developed new associations, organising around co-national interests that extend beyond immigration status. In some respects, we are witnessing a return to the kinds of associations that were characteristic of the race relations model in the 1980s alongside associations that organise around shared issues and causes (Sivanandan 1990, Werbner 1991). The reception of asylum seekers in Scotland has also evolved with an increasingly complex and tiered system of reception and resettlement in place. In 2007 and again in 2015 quota resettlement programmes have meant the arrival of more ethnically homogenous and much smaller populations of refugees across Scotland, which raises interesting questions about how migration trajectory, immigration status and place interplay to shapes the possibilities and need for community associations.

A political and urban context in flux

A number of factors influence the trajectory of already existing associations and the emergence of new ones. Firstly the funding context. Austerity, combined with regressive and restrictive immigration policy, is hitting hard. In Glasgow, the funding available from the early-mid 2000s to third sector organisations like the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) to support community development work for asylum seeker and refugee groups began to disappear from the late 2000s onwards. In practical terms, this has meant that the support services offered by organisations like the SRC have been pared back, with refugee-led groups increasingly competing against each other for money and wider organisational and training support.

The political context has also changed with migration becoming the dominant story. In the UK, we have watched as hundreds of thousands of refugees risk their lives on the 'migrant trail' on foot across the Balkan route and over water on the Mediterranean crossings. At the same time, the UK government passed the new Immigration Act 2016, arguably it's most restrictive and punitive set of immigration laws and policies to date. Brexit has happened, won arguably on a ticket of emboldened xenophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric that has spread across Europe and the Atlantic, making the unpalatable palatable and the intolerable tolerated.

Finally we can look at the changing urban context. Since 2014, Glasgow's city landscape and skylines have also changed. Many of the high-rise flats that dominated the dispersal neighbourhoods where the Congolese, Ivoirians and Cameroonians developed their new communities, built up their associations and set down markers of settlement have been demolished, along with those neighbourhood level places of encounter that were so critical for the development of social connections and networks have gone. With the demolition programme has come decanting and relocation, mostly to areas of tenement living and low-level social housing across the city. We are now getting a sense of what demolition and decanting might mean for spaces of encounter for the development of practices of community. There are new stories of settling in, shaped by this decanting process, tales once more of newness, of not fitting in, of visibility, of refugeeness and in some cases a longing for those high rise flats "*where it all began*". Refocusing on the effects of the

urban landscape in shaping moments of meaningful encounter, not solely to build associations but to interact more broadly in a specific community context is instructive in understanding how space and place shape opportunities to practice collective belonging.

New arrivals, same old refugeeeness?

The ways in which we imagine and conceptualise stories of settlement, belonging and identity are deeply rooted in the distinctive social, spatial, cultural and political patternings of different urban environments. Since 2015, Scotland has now been proactively welcoming Syrians through the high profile Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPR), which is modelled on the Gateway Protection Programme (GPP). This is not Scotland's first foray into quota resettlement in recent years. In 2007, seventy-seven refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo were resettled in Motherwell, a large town in North Lanarkshire, located seventeen miles south east of Glasgow through GPP. These quota resettlement programmes come with a built in twelve-month support programme, the right to work and access education. Looking first at the development of community associations in Motherwell, one of the most striking differences with their dispersed counterparts in Glasgow has been the limited engagement in association life as a way of settling in and the performance of cultural identity and belonging. In Motherwell, there has been a resistance to identify as a 'community' and to the establishment of a refugee association, which refugees believed, would impede integration (Sim and Laughlin 2014, Piacentini, forthcoming).

In January 2018, Scotland proudly celebrated welcoming 2,000 Syrians being resettled in every local authority in Scotland, many being dispersed to rural areas with very little ethnic diversity and low BME populations. This newness and novelty (Phillimore 2015) brings with it challenges relating to infrastructure, language support, access to religious institutions, and employment opportunities, all of which can impede settling in experiences and heighten their visibility and thus 'refugeeness'. The cross-Scotland dispersal of Syrians arguably provides fewer opportunities to mobilise in a physical locality in the form of a refugee association. Nonetheless, there are practices of virtual community building using social media platforms like Facebook and of community building with Scottish volunteers and charities who support the welcome and reception of Syrians in their communities. Patterns of associational practices of asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland since 2000 reveal something important about the intersections of migration trajectory and place: how these combine to produce quite particular outcomes for communities for new populations seeking to settle, how this shapes opportunity for community building, and how it can function to produce and reproduce refugeeeness. Quota resettlement programmes, with in-built integration programmes are presented as facilitators of settlement. However their implementation, both in numbers and location can reproduce hierarchies of otherness and reinforce refugeeeness. Their focus on welcome and reception mean that whilst short-term immediate needs might be met, there is less focus on what happens a few years down the line. Quota resettlement programmes often framed as those more deserving of refuge can appear to be about which refugees who are 'easier to manage', coming in their predetermined and lower numbers and more ethnically homogenous composition; receiving communities can effectively do more for them. In contrast, asylum seekers arriving and being dispersed come to be framed as the more desiring and less deserving, can appear more chaotic and are forced to develop different community practices to help them survive daily life and experience some form of settlement. Excluded from work and education, they are more likely to mobilise into associations that coalesce around questions of national identity and shared troubles and issues.

There is a difficult conversation to be had around how policy, media and public responses contribute to these hierarchies and framings of not just who might belong but also what that belonging might look like and how it might be experienced beyond initial welcome and reception.

Can this picture look different in the future?

I think we can answer yes. In December 2017, the Scottish Government launched a consultation on electoral reform, which would mean extending the right to vote to everyone legally resident in Scotland. In effect, this would mean anyone granted asylum or a visa to live in Scotland would be able to vote in the country's regional parliament and local council elections – including refugees and non-EU or non-Commonwealth citizens. Moreover, in January 2018, it launched its second New Scots¹ integration strategy demonstrating real commitment to supporting the settling in of refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland focusing on building social connections, equitable access of services, and inclusive approaches to the development of policy, strategic planning and legislation. These are significant actions and arguably, in the current political context, this represents a transformative moment. So yes, here lies some hope. If the first question is how to move away from refugeeeness, the second question should be what are we moving towards; and perhaps it is within these latest political acts that we might begin to look to find some answers.

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Making connections – what’s new about networks?

Alison Gilchrist

Introduction

This think piece aims to provide an overview of developments in the conceptual framework relating to networks and networking practice. It is based on personal observations and recent research perspectives rather than an exhaustive review of the literature but nonetheless attempts to signpost readers in the direction of interesting new ideas and to alert practitioners and policymakers to some practical considerations.

The significance of informal interactions and interpersonal networks as key features of community life has been understood for decades. The earliest research in sociology and ethnography identified patterns of relationships, co-operation and communication that were seen as characteristic of most societies, especially at local levels and within the informal spheres of the voluntary and civil sectors. The usual connotation of ‘community’ as a ‘warm’ and fuzzy concept must however be tempered by acknowledging that most communities harbour rivalries and internal schisms between different factions and interest groups. These are sometimes organised around different social identities but may also reflect inequalities of various kinds, as well as mutual antipathies.

The informal and serendipitous nature of networks has gained prominence while evidence has accumulated to add to our awareness that ‘it’s not what you know, but who you know’ in opening up opportunities, accessing resources and maintaining ‘liveable lives’ (Anderson et al, 2015). My doctoral research, published as ‘The well-connected community’ (Gilchrist, 2004, first edition), represented an early attempt to validate and make visible the networking skills and strategies used by people who work effectively with communities. Since then, there has been widespread recognition that lateral, often boundary-spanning, connections brokered and nurtured by intermediaries and community connectors are essential features of network governance models, partnership working and different forms of community organising.

Networks in social policy

Loose networks, based on trust and shared norms, that *bond* groups together and *bridge* across sectoral and community boundaries enable valuable and fairly reliable exchanges and interactions that do not require costly or time-consuming organisational structures. Community and interpersonal networks are central to the concept of social capital (Putnam, 2000). This became a key policy concept under New Labour, seeking to develop greater community engagement and reduce social exclusion. Subsequent administrations, governing since 2010, have similarly embraced themes of localism, social action and self-help, originally bundled together under the ill-fated Big Society wrapper and with more emphasis on volunteering and collective responsibility to sustain public services and local assets.

In the past ten years or so, there has been rising concern that society is becoming more fragmented, resulting in social isolation and mounting tensions between diverse groups. Both policy and research have sought ways of addressing these issues by overcoming barriers or borders between different sections of the community, such as linking generations, tackling gang culture or improving inter-ethnic relations. For example, government funds are available for initiatives that alleviate loneliness

include befriending schemes and these offer opportunities for ‘social prescribing’ via GPs. Once again cohesion and safeguarding strategies have been re-discovered to encourage better community-level integration and to support young people at risk of being drawn into terrorist or drug-dealing networks (Jones, 2015).

Outcomes and impact

Recent years have seen an explicit acknowledgement of the value of relationships for individuals’ well-being as well as for the wider society. A relatively new term, community capital, has been coined and developed through research to underscore the collective nature of this asset (Knapp, 2014). In their evaluation of the Big Lunch initiatives, the Centre for Economics and Business Research demonstrated the ‘implicit value’ of sharing between neighbours (cebr, 2017). Their review focused on the costs to society of ‘*disconnectedness*’ and calculated an estimated figure of £32 billion for the UK economy as a whole. The report further suggests that there was an individual gain of £522 accrued through people’s involvement in community activity. In recent years the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has focused on the role played by social networks in alleviating isolation, mitigating poverty and tackling social exclusion (McCabe *et al*, 2013; Finney *et al*, 2015), though this approach has also received criticism as offering merely panacea or placebo (Matthews and Besemer, 2015) rather than tackling the root causes of these problems.

A growing body of empirical evidence indicates positive but weak correlations between the quality and diversity of individual’s networks and their levels of reported health, prosperity and life satisfaction (Halpern, 2010; Li, 2007). Collective dividends are reported for ‘well-connected communities’ in terms of community resilience, active citizenship and economic engagement (Morris, 2017). Funders, including the Big Local programme, have designed networking into their ‘offer’, allocating time and resources to encourage residents from the targeted areas to meet and share experiences thus enhancing cross-community learning and peer support. Similarly, the training provided for community organisers programme places great emphasis on the organisers’ role in facilitating and maintaining community networks for social change, building on the work of Holley (2012) and Plastrik *et al* (2014).

While networks tend to be favourably viewed as vehicles for mobilising and sharing information, recent insights into the downsides of these webs of mutual influence and peer-to-peer communication have led to more understanding of the damaging aspects of peer pressure, the prevalence of algorithmic or unconscious biases and processes that create ‘echo chambers’ of opinion and can become socially exclusive and politically opaque cliques. There has been increased interest in neighbourhood effects and peer influences, including concerns about the spread of risky behaviour, low aspirations and constraints on social mixing, (Cheshire 2007).

Network ties can be detrimental as well as delivering community benefits in terms of resilience, collective efficacy and improved integration. These may not always function at local level and often reflect intersecting dimensions of social identities, ethnic traditions and disparate interests (Laurence, 2014; Demireva and Heath, 2015).

Practices – skills, strategies - conditions and values

For this reason, it is vital to understand how networks can be deliberately nurtured to encourage mutually respectful relations and useful boundary-spanning connections, especially those that challenge discrimination and power differentials. This facet of working with communities, colleagues or members of the public has received increasing recognition under the rubric of ‘networking’,

although the practice has sometimes been disparaged as overly transactional and self-interested. Creating common ground for collaboration and effective communication across borders is increasingly regarded as involving a valuable set of capabilities, dubbed 'transkillery' (Fam et al, 2015)! It involves appreciating different perspectives and synthesising a range of ideas and interests. The relational processes that foster the 'softer' aspects of human relationships – hope, solidarity, empathy, love even – have regained attention in recent studies of organisation and management, with a diminishing emphasis on formal hierarchical structures, bureaucratic procedures and transactional mechanisms. Informal modes of organising and communicating are better understood as complementing or occasionally circumventing formal procedures (Gilchrist, 2016). They rely however on social dimensions such as trust in order to be effective and credible in getting things done, making decisions or co-ordinating activities. The interest in co-production and network governance as a model for joint working between service providers and community members recognises the intangible value of the connections between participants and practitioners (Boyle et al, 2011). There is therefore the need to invest in and nurture these by taking time to establish good relations, build rapport and avoid 'netsploitation' (Davies and Spicer, 2015).

Diversity and economic inequalities are said to affect local communities, reducing a shared sense of belonging and creating new intersected forms of social identity. Many traditions and older versions of solidarity have withered away, undermining cohesion in some places and altering how people connect with work colleagues and neighbours. Communities are deemed to be more fragmented, with social isolation and loneliness regarded as growing problems (Jopling, 2017). Associated mental health difficulties have given rise to befriending schemes and activities-based projects, such as Men in Sheds. A pioneering approach has been trialled by several local authorities using social impact bonds and social prescribing to invest in various programmes for improving the connected-ness of older people and patients suffering from various life-limiting conditions (Kimberlee, 2016).

The practices and habits of connecting have been dissected and promoted as essential to effective and sustainable community work in a variety of circumstances. Whilst noting caveats and drawbacks. Russell (2017) has argued for strategies that foster, but do not abuse or exploit, personal connections while Hobsbawm (2017) has warned against hyper-connectivity. Too much time spent online, dealing with cyber-relations and managing one's social network content, lowers the frequency of face-to-face interactions and diminishes the scope for consolidating real world relationships.

Modern trends – boundary spanning co-operation and communication

Social media technologies and the widening digital divide have clearly had an impact. IT-based crowd-sourcing platforms have transformed the ease and multiplied opportunities for information exchange, giving rise to the 'sharing economy' and widespread use of social media to facilitate collective intelligence gathering, problem solving and political organising (Mulgan, 2017). Global virtual communities have become a reality, credited with major political movements such as the Arab Spring and galvanising the anti-capitalist initiative known as 'Occupy' (Chomsky, 2012). Applications such as Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook have accelerated the pace with which we are able to create links with family, friends, colleagues and bare acquaintances, reaching across the world to maintain relations and mobilise for social change. Recent research examining the role of 'networked individuals' in organising 'connective' action for social change suggests that the future may see a decline in the significance of formal organisations in the expression of collective identity (McCosker, 2015; Harris and McCabe, 2017).

At the same time there has been a loss of communal spaces and community hubs (such as pubs, playgrounds, libraries and local shopping parades). Opportunities for just 'hanging out' in public

places has been restricted through the privatisation of what used to be public malls and encroachment on our rights to congregate for spontaneous street protests or celebrations. Nonetheless grassroots initiatives continue to spring up, perhaps as a response to these issues, though they increasingly depend on purely voluntary effort rather than community development support. Innovative strategies for boosting connectedness and releasing the 'value' of neighbourliness or local social capital have emerged, combining new technologies with old customs, such as the Great Get Together gatherings (<https://www.greatgettogether.org/>), street associations (<http://streetassociations.org/>) and the Royal Society of Arts 'connected communities' action research project. These are intended to proactively enable community members to design services and occasions that will foster new links and friendships often at a hyper-local level. Ideas associated with systems thinking and complexity theory are beginning to inform our understanding of community interactions and collective leadership. Studies of 'polynodal', iterative decision-making and delivery systems, along with their associated power dynamics have led to a more nuanced appreciation of distributed or complex adaptive models of leadership, with their focus on stewardship, participation, emergence and co-evolution (Hazy et al, 2007; Chadwick, 2010; Yergler, 2011).

The related field of social network analysis has benefited considerably from the advent of software designed to map connections and trace patterns of communication and cooperation, for example within organisational ecosystems or neighbourhoods. Another is to explore correlations between certain features of personal and community networks (identified through social network analysis) and real-world outcomes such as population happiness or social integration. It is likely that ever more sophisticated software, such as UCINET, Gephi or Kumu, will reveal significant causal links that will enhance our knowledge of the benefits *and* the hazards associated with 'well-connected communities', enabling those of us who work with communities to be both more committed but perhaps more circumspect in how we support and encourage networking.

Community development

The strengths-based approach to community development, popularised as ABCD (asset-based community development), acknowledges the benefits that accrue to 'well-connected communities' in terms of their capacity to influence and to organise social action. Relatively new concepts such as resilience and collective efficacy have gained traction and some models acknowledge the contribution of networks to these shared outcomes (SCDC, 2011). Internationally, community development, although in decline in the UK, continues to emphasise the importance of spinning community threads (Westoby, 2015) and maintaining 'effective and empowering relationships' between individuals, public bodies and other organisations 'that provide the basis for working for positive change' (IACD, 2018).

However, the decline of generic community development and large-scale disappearance of core-funding for voluntary sector infrastructure organisations has restricted collaboration and liaison at local levels. This has made it more difficult to nurture inter-personal relationships and organisational links among those working in and with communities. Economic strategies driven by neoliberalism and austerity politics have led to dramatic cuts in public spending, stimulating a search for alternative means of maintaining public services and community facilities, for example through self-help, volunteering and social action.

Conclusions

Much of the research and thinking outlined above requires further research and elaboration. One potential avenue currently being developed is suggested by models for measuring social returns on

investment but these are in their infancy regarding different kinds of connections. Nonetheless, the past ten years have given us a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of networks: their impact in people's lives and their contribution to society. The 'praxis' of networking is also more fully acknowledged, with an explicit emphasis on the need for reciprocity (Offer, 2012) and the value of respectful hospitality (Esteva *et al*, 2013).

As the latest research on empowering communities asserts: "We are social beings and the connections we make with each other help us to realise our potential and power" (Taylor and Baker, 2018, p.35). The value of networking for developing strong and active communities is recognised now more than ever.

The third edition of 'The Well-connected Community: a networking approach to community development' will be published in September 2019.

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Reflections: 'The third sector ain't dead, it just smells funny'

(With apologies to Frank Zappa)

Matt Scott

Introduction:

The Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) arose from the previous decade – the noughties – when government funding was plentiful, or at least plentiful for the larger voluntary sector organisations, an important caveat. As we reach the end of a decade of austerity, the contrast is stark: the feast followed by famine. As every good detective knows – we should always 'follow the money' if we want to solve a mystery. Equally, as every critical community practitioner would attest – we should also examine the ideology that is being reproduced. The place where the voluntary or third sector finds itself is as much a crisis of ideas – of what the voluntary sector is for – as it is a crisis of cash and the absence thereof.

The Third Sector in crisis

The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."

Gramsci (1971)

The Third Sector is in crisis because it let other actors determine its identity. Its leaders conspired in their own malleability and plasticity of purpose and had nowhere to go once that 'purpose' was inevitably superseded by events. The mantra of ChangeUp and Capacity Builders was about a sector that would be 'fit for purpose' and 'contract ready'. Post the 2008 crash a new hegemony saw little need to invest in a 'sector' that would either work for free, as volunteers, or whose work could be delivered by 'primes' – the juggernauts of outsourcing, including Capita, G4S, SERCO and ATOS.

The spinelessness of the sector is most vividly conveyed in that fact that cannot even retain use of its own name. Within a couple of decades we have moved from the voluntary to the third sector and now to 'civil society'. It is inconceivable that the public or private sector would allow itself to be renamed by another sector, yet so moribund has the voluntary/third/civil sector become that remaining is almost routine.

The 'sector' in its own words

In bringing my thoughts together for this reflection paper I drew on eight semi structured interviews with a range of UK practitioners, across the UK, from a range of fields and backgrounds, including three people of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background) and a gender split of five men and three women. The open ended nature of semi structured interviewing was chosen in order to enable interviewees to shape their own replies. Three prompt questions were provided:

- Given your work in the voluntary and community sector, what do you consider yourself to be a part of?

- Do you feel the words and terminology used by government and larger bodies covers what you do?
- How important do you think the words used are, do they reflect wider relationships of ideology and control and hence have a bearing on who has power and how they use it?

Whilst each interviewee gave nuanced feedback, none was happy with conventional descriptions of their work although the preference appeared to be with the nomenclature of voluntary and community sector as distinct from third sector, charity sector, civil society or social enterprise. Thus, amidst the small but experienced pool of interviewees a return to the early 1990s, when the voluntary and community sector was the primary category, was privileged as being the least problematic. Within this catch all category interviewees saw little commonality:

'The Voluntary and Community Sector is patently not a sector. ... There's no resemblance between the large and small. That's always been the downfall'

Another interviewee underlined the difference between smaller and larger sized VCS organisations:

'For me I still struggle with the concept of the voluntary sector and the community sector. From what I know, the voluntary sector is more patriarchal, middle class, do gooding, seen from the outside... Lots of people in the community sector don't fully associate with the voluntary sector, with its private management style and ways of working, which are those of people who are not willing to challenge the status quo. The community sector wants things to change but are held back - and one of the things that holds them back is the language'

Perhaps not surprisingly interviewees responded to the question about what they considered themselves part of by referring to their job or area of activity.

'In my experience people don't mention 'sectors' unless they are in the policy/political field... Most people don't give a toss about these terms - they talk about how they work with/within communities'

Some of those interviewed not only felt that the existing terms did not connect with their own understandings of what they did but that this linguistic slippage was rooted in more profound structural concerns.

'It's about winners and losers; the whole sector has become a beauty contest. It's not about advocacy and voice but about service delivery. There's a part of the sector that has come out of a tradition of taming the working class, the gongs and the private member clubs. They use community based voluntary action as a nice hobby, for kudos and buffing up their own organisations. It's about insiders and when they leave their not gone because their legacy and connections live on'

Such comments, strongly articulated as they are, often further polarise debate. This was noted by another interviewee in the following way:

'The community / voluntary sector distinction has exercised people at times but it is a sectional thing. Community people saying we're not like those charity bureaucrats'

Thus a forward looking agenda that might progress all the wings of community action and the broader spectrum of the VCS cannot afford to get stuck on an 'us and them' critique. It was notable

how many interviewees expressed a critical view of the more established or establishment parts of the sector. One interviewee noted the opportunity that was passed up:

'The 'third sector' acted as victims and didn't reclaim the agenda on their terms. There wasn't a proper conversation about how they wanted to be defined that would never happen to the City of London. As a sector our leaders could have said to government: 'thank you for telling us how you understand us but this is what we are'. If we don't have our own vision and mission it becomes funder led or commissioner imposed or chasing activity and outputs. It is shocking that a £40b sector can't get its act together, doesn't even have the ear of local and central government and is dispensable'

Interviewees concluded that the words used to describe the sector invariably didn't work. The following comments bear testimony to this disengagement:

'The local marginalisation of communities and the people who work closely with them is the greatest concern to many, and the power analysis usually focuses on this dimension i.e. local empowerment. Fewer have a politicised perspective on the wider context of their work, so issues of ideology and control are invisible to them - although many BME/feminist workers are more aware of language-as-power because language has been used to oppress them'

Continuing this theme another interviewee reinforced the sense of disconnect and the retrenchment in action and activism.

'It doesn't mean anything as there is no consistency... I think it's easier to define ourselves by what we do than by what we are part of... I would say the words are only really important to those that seek to control'

More than just charities

If we accept that most people do not really know what the sector is, then the short hand of 'charities' usually suffices. However this 'understanding' short changes the majority of community groups who are not charities. Before 2010 there was a general understanding that the third sector consisted of both informal community groups and larger more formal voluntary organisations, invariably charities. Yet researchers at NCVO have deployed a methodology that formalises exactly this separation. The 2009 Almanac recorded 870,000 civil society organisations ranging from 'small community organisations through to a significant number of large organisations'. The table of organisations (on page 9) noted that over two thirds of this total was 'informal community organisations' of which the data quality was 'poor'. The 2010 Almanac repeated this estimate, dubbing the 600,000 community organisations as 'below the radar organisations'. But further iterations of the Almanac proceeded to write them out of the script, in favour of a 'general charities' definition, i.e. that only charities counted as voluntary organisations. So what happened to the voluntary and community sector? What happened to small informal community associations? If there are only 160,000 or so charities but three or four times as many community groups, who we had got used to thinking as part of the broader 'sector', where did they go?

NCVO's use of the 'general charities' definition at a stroke allows them, as the self identified lead voluntary organisation, to imply (if not assert) that the voluntary sector is co-terminous with the charity sector. Those who works at a local level knows this is not the case; voluntary activity springs

from the collective action of community groups, with or without the more distant mediation of charities. Charities, under this measure have declared a form of UDI and frozen out the more numerous and poorer community groups from consideration, not just in the presentation of the sector in the Almanac but also in wider policy making.

There was no debate about this shift. No one asked local groups if they wanted to be inside or outside of a 'charity sector'. Nor does the charity sector want to lose the credibility that comes with being part of a wider informal sector. Happy on the one hand to chase after respectability of formal organisations, equally desperate to claim to be part of a social movement of organisers and activists, however improbable that may be.

One recent example of third sector press bias is perfectly captured by the Guardian which managed to consolidate top down myths about the sector by reproducing wilfully inaccurate statements such as:

"Despite making up 97% of the sector, small charities are disproportionately being hit by funding cuts, complex commissioning practices and changes to fundraising regulations".

Becca Bunce, policy and public affairs manager at the Small Charities Coalition

Wrong. Small charities do not make up 97% of the sector – not even close to it. In fact the majority of groups which do make up the sector couldn't care less about the special pleading around changes to charity regulation for the simple reason that they are not charities.

Conclusion

The sector unravels. Charity chiefs feel under attack as never before. Perhaps some might reflect on how the wounds hurt all the more because they are self-inflicted. One interviewee noted that there was a difference between being 'right' and being able to generate the cultural change that was necessary:

It is true that we need to rethink community infrastructure but how many people can you get behind it? ... It's really difficult for people to make sense about what is going on. The old roles are there but they've been subtly shifted by the context we're living in now. There's a difference between how people talk about what they do and how organisations and government talk. We should get behind that, connect with it and amplify those voices

The suggestion is to go beyond organisations and focus on citizen action as the most immediate expression of the values and purpose of the sector and hence the most appealing story to build from. The role of networks was identified as a defining model, disrupting and undercutting older models

(There are) a number of levels on interaction; links between tasks groups and projects; communities of practice and communities of interest, another level of social networks. These do not strong ties but serendipitous exchange of trust. The challenge is to enable and support these networks and get behind the individuals who are connectors

If the sector and social action has changed so much that it is better understood as an ecosystem of complementary networks, new behaviours, skills and language then it would be timely to consciously become early adopters.

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Reflections on change: opportunities and challenges for community led development

Mandy Wilson

Reflecting back over ten years is a challenge, and elicits, from some, an instinctive knee-jerk reaction. The policy landscape has changed so substantially that it seems nothing is the same, and that what we are experiencing now is such a different reality that everything we thought we were learning about progressive community practice was a cruel mirage, an illusion of what the future policy climate might hold. So, to what extent is this the case? What was happening ten years ago, can we see any continuity between then and now, and what are the likely signs of community led change in the future?

By 2008, we had become accustomed to proactive community policy - in England this had been illustrated and experienced through a raft of programmes, primarily rolled out by the Department for Communities and Local Government under its National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR), and the Active Community Unit (ACU) in the Home Office. Although the writing was already on the wall for the fast disappearing NSNR as flagship programmes such as New Deal for Communities, Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders and the Single Community Programme were being wound up, energy remained with the launch of new programmes following the government's 'Action Plan for Community Empowerment'. Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government introduced the plan with a very clear statement:

*'There isn't a single service or development in Britain which hasn't been improved by actively involving local people'*¹²

Initiatives resulting from the plan got quickly underway, and included the National Empowerment Partnership (NEP) followed by the Targeted Support for Empowerment and Participation Programme (TSEPI). A national indicator was also put in place, National Indicator (NI) 4, to measure 'the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality'. The NEP, managed by the Community Development Foundation and delivered through Regional Empowerment Partnerships, intended to create a legacy of community infrastructure and engaging and community focused local authorities. It:

- promoted empowerment opportunities at community level, supporting individuals and communities to engage and take up opportunities to be involved in and influence local decisions - growing the demand
- promoted empowerment at public agency level, building the capacity of Local Authorities and other public agencies to engage and empower communities - growing the supply
- ensured a co-ordinated approach to empowerment activity across the third sector and public agencies - growing the networks.¹³

¹² *An Action Plan for Community Empowerment: building on success*, October 2007. Joint action plan from Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association

¹³ Sender, H., Khor, Z. and Carlisle, B. *National Empowerment Partnership - A final evaluation report*; Community Development Foundation July 2011.

By 2018, the NSNR and its subsequent policies seem an age ago and it is tempting to look back on the halcyon years of a burgeoning voluntary and community sector. Yet, whilst there was great enthusiasm for the investment in community policy and practice, there has also been much critique of the relationship between the national and the local, between government and communities. A growing body of opinion argued that the embrace of community development by an increasingly managerial state had squeezed the life – or at least its independence – out of it (Taylor, 2007)¹⁴, and there were many, including myself, who were critical of programmes that facilitated attempts to ‘manage’ community empowerment through performance measures and indicators. It was a time of resources aplenty as long as they were directed towards government agendas, and where the terms of engagement were highly prescribed.

When the coalition government came into power in 2010, much of what can be seen as ‘heavy handed’ and instrumentalist policy was swept aside. We were treated to the rhetoric of the ‘Big Society’, as ‘citizens’ we were encouraged to just get on with making our communities work, in a much more footloose and fancy-free fashion. The context in which government chose to be hands-off, of course, coincided with a (still ongoing) period of austerity driven policy. This has impacted disproportionately on poorer, and already more marginalized, communities and has witnessed changes in the public and voluntary sectors which were, almost, unimaginable 10 years ago.

In 2014, the Guardian published an article headed ‘The voluntary sector is dead. Long live the voluntary sector’¹⁵, in which Alex Whinnom, Chief Executive of Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations, described a situation where:

Colleagues in the public sector are losing their jobs or are over-stretched, services are being cut, and medium-sized organisations that rely on public sector contracts are in the same position. It's a kind of perfect storm.

.....

We're losing [infrastructure] systems ... Coupled with the impact of general recession and poor prospects, people are rolling up at the doorsteps of the voluntary groups in desperate need, services are being absolutely overwhelmed by demand. The sector ... can't possibly absorb it.

In the same year, 2014, Nicholas Deakin urged to voluntary sector to ‘seize the agenda’:

“the voluntary sector risks declining over the next ten years into a mere instrument of a shrunken state, voiceless and toothless, unless it seizes the agenda and creates its own vision.”¹⁶

In 2018, we know that many voluntary organisations have not been able to absorb increased demand for services within a shrinking sector, or indeed survive. So where does this leave the community sector – those small community based organisations that are often more informally organised and tend to emerge as mechanisms for community ‘voice’ or very local service provision in relation to ‘on the ground’ concerns? It appears that there are people up and down the land who are attempting to

¹⁴ Taylor, M. (2007) ‘Community participation in the real world: opportunities and pitfalls in new governance spaces’, *Urban Studies*, 44(2), 297–317.

¹⁵ The voluntary sector is dead. Long live the voluntary sector’, [Tim Smedley](#), Voluntary Sector Network, The Guardian, 2014

¹⁶ Seize the agenda or risk becoming an instrument of the state, Professor Nicholas Deakin in ‘*Making Good – the future of the voluntary sector*’, London, Civil Exchange, 2014

create an agenda, based on their vision for their communities. Despite the severity of cuts to public and voluntary sector support agencies, (often a first port of call for community groups seeking advice and help), there is still a lot of grassroots community action springing up, thriving and sustaining itself.

This has not happened in a policy vacuum – there are a number of government and charitable initiatives, possibly with different motivations, that are seeking to secure longevity in the community sector. Localism, and the associated ‘community rights’ agendas, inherited from the last Labour government, have stimulated a raft of programmes such as Neighbourhood Planning, Our Place, First Steps and Community Economic Development. Although these have been quite small in scale, there were also three flagship ‘Big Society’ programmes launched in 2011 – the National Citizens Service which is still running, Community First and the Community Organisers programme which has been supported through four incarnations and currently runs until 2020. Also, in 2011, Big Lottery endowed £200 million to the Big Local programme, which is managed by an independent trust (Local Trust) and strategically delivered at a very local level by groups of residents. Big Local works on the premise that over a ten to fifteen year period, residents in 150 areas will use their one million pound investment to build skills in the community and make a difference to where they live. The concepts of hands off but ‘on tap’ facilitation and support, flexible financial arrangements, networking for mutual support and transfer of knowledge through learning events are certainly not new¹⁷ but the size of the programme is significant. Similarly, the People’s Health Trust is resourcing residents and community groups to tackle health inequalities where they live.

The skeptic in me may question the rationale for some of the programmes government has rolled out – both in terms of the very small resources available in some of the programmes, the extent to which they are meaningful and how they are pushing responsibility for the quality of community life down to the micro community level. On the other hand, active residents across a whole range and type of neighbourhoods, are certainly open to, and ‘up for’ an agenda which is defined by community experience, rather than state bureaucracy. Some of the current programmes (as well as small and not so small self help and campaigning initiatives) undoubtedly put issues around power and relationships with the state at the forefront, which, one could argue, was lacking in the programmes of ten years ago. The opening up of resident led spaces has overcome some of the exclusion faced by ‘ordinary people’ when spaces for participation were controlled by top down agendas a decade ago, and allowed for greater dynamism. Support for very local action may be seen as piecemeal and lacking strategy to tackle the causes of inequality, but it has energized a great many people to come together, collectively take action and importantly, in many cases, to have fun.

Examples of action include the small scale but nonetheless significant such as:

- the ‘Mums don’t go to Iceland’ campaign, which (supported by community organisers) overturned the supermarket’s decision to implement car park charges
- the management take over by the Big Local group of a local authority run (and very underused) community centre on an outer estate in Sheffield where there are no other public facilities.

¹⁷ Taylor, M., Wilson, M., Purdue, D., Wilde, P.; *Changing Neighbourhoods, Lessons from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Programme*, 2007, Policy Press.

It is interesting that, across the Big Local areas, the one thing that has become a cause to rally around, is the need for community space – community hubs are being established across the country. Bigger community campaigns are also progressing, from the community led housing scheme initiated by another Big Local group which has provided local job opportunities and apprenticeships, affordable homes and improved the look and feel of the neighbourhood, to the community economic development visions of keeping money in the local economy to sustain community activity in future years.

One final point about community led change as enacted in 2018 which I hope will provide learning for future policy. Many of the programmes aimed at residents of the last five years or so have eschewed the need for formal governance structures at the level of the community group. There is an understanding that these can strangle creativity, they become burdensome and unnecessarily bureaucratic for small resident led groups and lead to an organisational survival instinct and corresponding agenda rather than to an outward community outcomes focused one. Considerations around this informed the Community Organisers and the Big Local programmes. How this plays out at community level is something to watch for the future – there is evidence that many groups feel they should or need to formally constitute themselves, and difficult challenges have surfaced in relation to responsibilities and accountability and how residents negotiate the local and political context – but it also opens up new possibilities.

So what of the next ten years? In some ways, the speed of change in the last decade has been so fast and significant that it feels impossible to predict what the future holds. On the other hand, many of the issues that focus residents' attention are the same as they always have been, the desire for a welcoming environment, services for young and older people at neighbourhood level, decent and affordable housing etc. On the other hand, the way that community life is lived and experienced is changing: there are less spaces and opportunities for causal encounters with neighbours; people work long and irregular hours which makes traditional forms of organising more difficult; people are arguably being asked to take on not so much opportunities but liabilities – for example, the shifting of public libraries from councils to residents brings people who just want to keep a local facility open into all the complexities of funding, building management, committee arrangements etc.

There is no doubt that tensions within, and between, communities are very much to the fore, whether that be from the fallout from Brexit or the competition to see your GP. Community led development has to negotiate the fine grain of micro-politics and this requires support. The way that help from local councils (and from voluntary sector infrastructure organisations) was delivered may have been problematic for communities, but support as and when it was needed did make a significant contribution. But there is hope for the future, it isn't all doom and gloom - the current emphasis on listening, involving, networking is an important step forward, as is resources in the hands of communities - and you should never underestimate people!

Real time change: Reflections from qualitative longitudinal research on voluntary action

Rob Macmillan and Angela Ellis Paine

Introduction

The last decade has been a particularly challenging period for many third sector organisations. Coming after the sustained growth in income and activities during the New Labour period, and a (generally) productive partnership with the government,, it has felt particularly unsettled and bleak since 2010. The Conservatives' pursuit of austerity has seen income from government to the voluntary sector fall (<https://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac17/income-from-government-2/>) at the same time as demand for many social welfare services has increased. Ongoing demographic shifts have added further pressures. Brexit has compounded wider uncertainties. The effects of these developments are likely to have been felt unevenly across the sector – while some organisations and indeed some parts of the sector have found the environment particularly challenging (for example, infrastructure bodies appear to be have been particularly hard hit), others have found opportunities for growth and development.

Throughout this time TSRC has been undertaking qualitative, longitudinal research with a small group of voluntary and community organisations. Overall, across two phases of the study, the research runs from 2010-2020. Here we reflect on both the research process and findings, highlighting particular themes which we think mirror broader developments and dynamics within voluntary action over the past decade.

The study

Given the tendency for research – qualitative research in particular - on voluntary organisations to provide cross-sectional snap shots, it is rare to be able to provide in-depth qualitative insights over, what will be, a ten year period. The overall aim of the study is to follow the journeys of voluntary organisations and voluntary action over time, in real time. The first phase of the study – 'Real Times' – involved 15 case study sites and ran from 2010-2014. It focused on broad questions of the changing fortunes of and challenges faced by a range of organisations. The case studies were selected to reflect diversity in terms of geographical spread, size, scope, and field. Within each case, interviews were conducted – by a team of researchers at TSRC - with chief executives, senior officers, chairs, and a range of external stakeholders. The second (current) phase – 'Change in the Making' – runs from 2016-2020 and focuses on four of the original 15 cases, selected because they demonstrated different and particularly interesting aspects of change, while also operating at different scales and in different spaces. We are now more specifically focusing on questions of change: on how change is understood, experienced, negotiated and created within voluntary organisations. To do so, we are speaking to a broad range of people – to trustees, staff from across the organisation, to volunteers, service users, partners, commissioners, and other stakeholders. Alongside the qualitative work, our colleagues have been analysing data from the financial accounts of these case study organisations and comparing them to others within their field, geographical area and beyond.

We first engaged with our case studies in what was effectively the last year of a period of growth, and have subsequently followed them through the challenging years of austerity. Hence we have been able to observe the multiple dilemmas that voluntary and community organisations face in their everyday work and the different strategies that they adopt in navigating their way through shifting environments. By providing a short story from each of our current cases (encompassing five organisations in four case study sites,), before drawing out several cross-cutting themes, we hope to provide a glimpse into the rich insights that are being provided through the study.

Organisational journeys

LARCH

Larch is a series of community activities organised by residents and others in a relatively deprived ex-mining area in the north of England. The research focuses on two organisations.

LARCH 1 is a community association set up in the late 1990s with the support of a coalfields regeneration programme. By the time the research got underway in 2010, the association was running a heritage centre, a shop with a cafe, a mini-bus, a village hall and various other community activities. After a decade or so of considerable activity, however, the association was beginning to struggle with the effects of regeneration programmes ending, the necessary effort in repeatedly applying for grant funding, and the challenge of recruiting and retaining volunteers. Over the last few years these challenges have intensified, with diminishing infrastructure support, unsuccessful funding bids, escalating maintenance costs, and an ageing and dwindling volunteer base. The arrival of a competitor café in the village was the final straw for the shop/café which has now closed ; the mini-bus has been sold, and the Heritage Centre has been down-sized. The village hall has gone through various ups and downs but is currently being offered a new lease of life through the involvement of a new, energetic volunteer and the potential redevelopment of some outbuildings into office space. The few remaining volunteers, who have dedicated a considerable amount of their lives to the work, and arguably built their identity around their involvement, are thinking of closing the association down.

LARCH 2 is a horticultural social enterprise aiming to support disadvantaged people through engaging them in horticultural activities. It was set up at the start of the decade, shortly after the research began. Progress for the first couple of years was relatively slow as those involved negotiated leases on land (the land belongs to the community association) and worked on securing the site and preparing the land, building up networks, funding and a service user/volunteer base. Over time, however, momentum has built, funding secured, staff recruited, produce grown and sold, volunteers (service users) supported and reputation developed. This upward trajectory, however, has not been without its twists and turns: personnel issues and endless funding applications with the inevitable mixed success have proved particularly challenging. The mood, however, remains energetic and optimistic and plans are constantly evolving as new opportunities arise.

HAWTHORN

Hawthorn was established in 2004 as a fairly informal, volunteer-run, family support organisation, running drop-in sessions for teenage mums. It has expanded considerably since then, particularly following the receipt, in 2008, of a five year foundation grant and local authority funding. Secure

funding enabled the recruitment of paid staff and the expansion of services. Just as our research began, in 2010, however, the organisation went through a period of crisis associated with the dismissal of the founding coordinator, torn loyalties amongst remaining staff and trustees, the recruitment of a new CEO, and subsequently the introduction of new systems, the development of a more professional identity and a more formalised way of working. Activities have expanded – the organisation continues to run drop in sessions for young mums but also hosts a group for dads, and now has a sizeable programme of family support services. The last year has been dominated by the commissioning processes for local authority family support services. The excitement of success, following months of partnership building (and dismantling), tender writing, and general too-ing and fro-ing was quickly replaced by anxiety as the commissioners raised the prospect of altering funding and target agreements before the contract was even signed.

BIRCH

Birch is a large, well-established, advice organisation, operating at local authority level in a large city. Although quantitative analysis of its funding history suggests a relatively 'flat' or stable trajectory, its recent history would perhaps be better described as turbulent. As the research began in 2010 the organisation was recovering from a period of financial turmoil and the subsequent recruitment of a new CEO and Chair and the securing of various local authority contracts and grants. Together these created an annual surplus which enabled the organisation to invest in service and partnership development in anticipation of bidding for new contracts. A year later, however, crisis hit again – local authority funding was cut, competition amongst providers intensified, and there was a campaign to save the service. A period of reprieve through transition funding, a(nother) new CEO and Chair, restructuring, a new emphasis on volunteer involvement, and the building of new alliances seemed to put the organisation back on more solid footings, but not for long. Funding is again scarce, and a 'channel shift' in service provision is underway, moving from face-to-face advice towards online and telephone provision, which it is hoped will reduce costs and increase service levels. The future is again uncertain.

FIG

Fig is a large, longstanding, family support services organisation, operating at national level with local projects. It works with children, young people and families to tackle disadvantage and social exclusion. The organisation had grown rapidly under New Labour's agenda and investment in early years and family support. By 2010 as the research began, a majority of its income was from statutory sources, mainly local authorities. Anxiety levels were rising following the Coalition's first comprehensive spending review and anticipated cuts. The next few years were dominated by uncertainty, cuts, redundancy, and restructuring. Although the uncertainty continues, the recruitment of a new CEO, more restructuring, work on values, and considerable investment in developing business capacity, the organisation now appears more confident and secure. There is a focus on developing innovative new models of service and funding, on being agile and responsive, on diversifying the funding base, and on careful risk management. Activities have diversified and expanded. Initial financial growth, however, is now levelling off, and the costs of commissioning, in an increasingly competitive environment with challenging contract requirements, are particularly visible at a local level where the turnover of projects and staff is high.

Some common themes

Drawing these accounts together, we want to highlight three cross-cutting reflections.

- First, the cases are **variously sensitive to a changing ‘external’ context** of the wider public spending environment (i.e. the multiple dimensions and consequences of austerity), public policy priorities, and commissioning strategies and practices. Fig, Birch and Hawthorn (and more recently Larch’s social enterprise) are funded primarily to deliver public service work under contracts and grants, and their stories over the last few years have involved the anxiety of cuts, retendering exercises and grant applications. However, whilst each organisation might look a little different compared with a few years ago, the organisations remain intact, and in some cases seem better positioned now than three or four years ago. Elsewhere in Larch there is an evident struggle to keep basic community activities going, with limited capacity to organise activities or generate the resources to introduce new things. There is a link here to a wider decline in regeneration funding, community development, and voluntary sector infrastructure. It is important, however, not to overlook underlying continuity – none of our cases have fallen over significant financial ‘cliff edges’ and broadly speaking the kinds of services and activities the case studies are providing remain the same.
- Second, there are some important **‘internal’ dynamics to consider in stories of change**. Fig, Birch and Hawthorn have all had changes of CEO in the last three years, and in each case this seems to be associated with new attention to structures and systems, underpinned by notable changes in leadership approach or style. Frontline work seems to be highly pressured, and maybe intensifying, as the cases try to cope with increasing and more complex demand for services, where a supporting array of other services and referral points seems to have declined. However there are interesting comparisons: the visible whiteboard of monthly debt advice case targets in Birch’s office, and the introduction of individual caseload targets for family support in Hawthorn, providing a stark contrast with the deliberately relaxed and informal therapeutic atmosphere on the horticultural social enterprise in Larch (although the introduction of ‘action plans’ for service users/volunteers here may signal a leading edge of structure and monitoring).
- Third, it is perhaps important to bridge the artificial divide between ‘external’ and ‘internal’ dimensions, as these are fundamentally intertwined. It is thus important to think of **the interpretive space in between external context and internal developments**, or how the external world and internal operation of organisations are understood and framed. Respondents at different levels in the case studies talk of the (internal) organisational changes they are involved in or are introducing as linked to the imperatives or incentives of (external) developments currently underway. They are judged as making sense in the light of wider trends. This was apparent in the ways in which respondents in Fig and Hawthorn spoke of ideas for withdrawing from some of their commissioning dominated environments; each trying to explore new ways of pursuing their work on more of their own terms. Whilst these seem like quite proactive and innovative thoughts for funding existing work, Birch is seeking to change fundamentally the way it provides services; but importantly this is not solely or simply related to an external funding constraint.

Conclusions

The past decade has undoubtedly been challenging for many organisations within the third sector. Much has changed and continues to change. Austerity has contributed to significant funding cuts,

demand for services has increased, the policy environment is less supportive, competition between organisations (within and outside the sector) is seen to be increasing, infrastructure support has been dismantled, and organisations are developing new ways of working and looking at new forms of financing and resourcing services. At the same time, however, on some levels there has been continuity – quantitative analysis of financial accounts indicates a somewhat surprising degree of long term stability. Following the journeys of organisations over time, however, provides rich insights into what lies behind these broader trends of continuity and change: into how organisations navigate the complex environments in which they operate, the dilemmas they face along the way and the diverse, negotiated, and sometimes contested, ways in which they respond.

Voluntary and Community Action in the Age of Irony?

Angus McCabe

Much has been written about the voluntary and community sector in a decade of austerity. There seems little point in adding to this misery literature. Rather it may be worth thinking of community action in an age of irony – or ironies.

Indeed, there are numerous ironies:

- Whilst the idea of charity and charities per se falls out of favour politically and in the eyes of the public (in the wake of the Kids Company, Oxfam and Save the Children ‘scandals’) increasing numbers of people have become reliant on charity – with the growth, for example of foodbanks.
- Paradoxically, there has been a renewed interest in the sector. There have been a plethora of recent inquiries - Civil Society Futures, Powerful Communities 2020s and the Locality Commission on the future of localism – to name but a few. But these often feel like the ‘sector talking to itself’ rather than stimulating broader debate on what ‘the sector is’, why it exists and the values that may (or may not) underpin voluntary action.
- Further, the irony of the Government’s recent Civil Society Strategy would not be lost on Matt Scott (Reflection 11). We are now not the voluntary or community sector, or the third sector – but have been renamed as the ‘social sector’ – which now includes the private sector and (beyond formal charities and social enterprises) has ‘hived off’ people and communities. So no longer a sector – or the ‘strategic unity’ discussed by Pete Alcock.
- As ‘the big issues’ of global warming and poverty, or the divisive impact of Brexit, ‘get bigger’ voluntary and community action seems to be on the retreat in terms of having a voice on such issues. The emphasis has become localism – and hyper-local responses to community needs. Linked to this
- That emphasis on hyper-localism has meant that the focus for action is geographical – on communities of place – at a time of increasing super-diversity and transient populations which may relate more closely with communities of identity and interest. Certainly, identity politics is certainly lower down the agenda – if not off it completely.

What seems to underlie some of these ironies is a lack of rigorous political analysis or voice in ‘the sector’. The political dimension of community development has been largely stripped out. Community development has largely become a depoliticized capacity building (Ware Reflection 7) or doing ‘good works’ in alleviating – if not challenging – poverty and inequality. At one level this is reflected in faith based social action where the current emphasis is on a narrative theology of encounters and stories – rather than the more radical tradition of liberation theology.

But what do these ironies tell us about the future of community action – or, indeed, the voluntary (sorry, social) sector? Predicting its future has always been problematic. The demise of charity, predicted by Richard Crossman in the early years of the welfare state, has clearly not happened. The impending disasters post-recession and the 2010 general election, have not quite turned out the way they were predicted. Indeed (another irony) parts of the sector, particularly the large national charities, have grown – rather in withering on the vine of lost contracts. Indeed, if we look at the

inquiries into the sector listed above, they present a very accurate picture of ‘where we are now’ – but are reticent to predict the future.

So a prediction? Again this is linked to the idea of an ‘age of irony’. Irony involves the ability to hold and understand two apparently contradictory positions at the same time. Maybe the hope for community action is that this is exactly what it can do – hold and understand contrary positions – rather than becoming a more divisive force in an already divided society.

What is not in doubt though is that community action, in various forms (both positive and negative) will survive – whatever the interest or dis-interest of governments.

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About the Third Sector Research Centre

The third sector provides support and services to millions of people. Whether providing front-line services, making policy or campaigning for change, good quality research is vital for organisations to achieve the best possible impact. The Third Sector Research Centre exists to develop the evidence base on, for and with the third sector in the UK. Working closely with practitioners, policy-makers and other academics, TSRC is undertaking and reviewing research, and making this research widely available. The Centre works in collaboration with the third sector, ensuring its

research reflects the realities of those working within it, and helping to build the sector's capacity to use and conduct research.

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