

Third Sector Research Centre

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Mapping the environmental third sector in England

David Clifford, Frida Geyne Rajme, Graham Smith,
Rebecca Edwards, Milena Büchs and Clare Saunders

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Abstract

The third sector has a long history of environmental action and yet we lack systematic knowledge of the size, scope and activities of third sector organisations with an environmental mission. To address this gap, we analyse data from two databases – the Charity Commission Register and the National Survey of Third Sector Organisations – to provide the first systematic analysis of registered environmental third sector organisations in England. As well as providing much-needed data on different aspects of the environmental organisations, the article draws comparisons with the rest of the third sector, providing insights into the distinctive characteristics of environmental activity. It also draws preliminary comparisons with data from the United States. In undertaking this analysis, we highlight the methodological challenges of using these data sources to analyse any sub-sector or industry of the third sector in England.

Keywords

Environment, third sector, funding, data.

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Introduction

The third sector¹ – the multitude of value-driven organisations that exist outside the private and public sectors (Kendall and Knapp 1995; Alcock 2010) – has a long history of environmental action. Third sector organisations (TSOs) with an environmental mission are some of the most well-known and supported in the country: for example, the National Trust has established itself as the largest TSO by membership in England with some 3.5 million members; since the 1970s, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth have been highly effective in engaging public and media attention; Wildlife Trusts have been successful in conserving much-loved local green spaces. But these well-known environmental TSOs only scratch the surface of activity: there are many more organisations that do not have such widespread public recognition. Environmental TSOs operate at a range of levels (from local to international), focusing on a variety of environmental issues including nature conservation, waste and recycling, energy consumption and production, transport and food. The significant role of third sector action in responding to environmental issues has been widely recognised by policy-makers (Defra 2008; Task Force 2010). The former Director of Green Alliance in the UK argues:

The third sector holds the key to mobilising public concern, behaviour and political mobilisation, and to success in the struggle against climate change. It can, and in some instances already does, provide the inspiration and opportunity for collective action at all levels, within and across a myriad of different public interests. (Hale 2010: 264)

Given the policy interest in third sector engagement with the environment, our knowledge of the scale of activity of the environmental third sector – those TSOs for which environmental protection is a core part of their mission – is patchy at best. The most systematic work has been undertaken by social movement scholars who have made several attempts to map out the ‘environmental movement’ (Lowe and Goyder 1983; McCormick 1991; Rootes and Miller 2001). They have also studied prominent environmental organisations and environmental networks at different levels (Rootes 1999, 2006; Doherty et al. 2007; Saunders 2013) including, more recently, grassroots innovation (Hobson 2003; Seyfang and Smith 2007; Middlemiss and Parrish 2010). However, such studies of the environmental third sector are partial given their focus on specific types of environmental TSOs (typically the more politically-active): we lack systematic, quantitative evidence of the scale and characteristics of the broader environmental third sector (Kendall 2003: 190).

This paper offers a first attempt to analyse comprehensive and consistent data on the scale, income and activities of environmental charities and other registered third sector organisations; and to offer comparisons with the rest of the third sector. In so doing, we are able to offer an answer to the question: is there anything particularly distinctive about the environmental third sector?

We begin with an explanation of why there is so little quantitative data on the third sector in England, before introducing the two very different datasets on which our analysis is based: the National Survey of Third Sector Organisations in England and the Charity Commission Register for England and Wales. The approach we take to analysing these two databases can be seen as a significant methodological contribution to the quantitative study of the third sector more generally: as

far as we are aware, this is the first detailed analysis of any sub-sector or 'industry' of the third sector in England and thus the challenges we have faced will be relevant to the analysis of other fields of activity.

We then move on to an analysis of available data, providing insights on the following aspects of environmental TSOs, often drawing comparisons with the rest of the third sector in England:

- number of organisations
- foundation and registration
- income
- sources of funding
- roles and functions
- workforce – both employees and volunteers
- geography of local environmental activity

We end with reflections on the extent to which environmental TSOs exhibit distinctive characteristics compared to the broader third sector in England. Comparisons are also drawn with an existing, although more limited, study of environmental TSOs from the United States (Straughan and Pollak 2008).

Why the paucity of data? The state of empirical work on the (environmental) third sector

Reliable quantitative analysis on TSOs has been in scarce supply – a situation that has persisted, as Tarling (2000) has pointed out, despite recognition of the importance of the sector. But the situation has improved. For example, in the UK, the *Almanac* produced regularly by the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) uses data from the Charity Commission, and collected from charities' accounts, to describe broad patterns in income and expenditure, and employment, for charities in England and Wales. Internationally, the pioneering work of the John Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (Salamon and Anheier 1998) has collated data from a variety of countries to illustrate the importance of the third sector on a global scale (Salamon et al. 1999), with national studies using the same approach (on the UK, see Kendall and Knapp 1996; Kendall 2003).

Such work faces significant challenges, including, first, a lack of reliable data and, second, the conceptual and practical difficulties involved in identifying meaningful subpopulations of organisations for analysis (or, to use Kendall's (2003) term, 'vertical fields'). For these reasons, there is very little quantitative research on TSOs in the UK in general – let alone work which disaggregates overall patterns to examine specific fields within the third sector.

One poorly understood field of activity is the environment. It is only relatively recently that the environment has become an area of systematic research across the traditional disciplines of social science and within third sector studies it remains a marginalised object of analysis. Social movement scholars have paid attention to certain aspects and activities of the third sector: their studies typically

focus on particular protests and campaigns (from international to local level) and/or geographic areas (Rootes 1999, 2006; Saunders 2013). We have also more recently seen the emergence of research about more practical initiatives, on issues such as waste and recycling (Sharp and Luckin 2006), low carbon living (Seyfang and Smith 2007; Middlemiss and Parrish 2010), wildlife and conservation activities and volunteering (O'Brien et al. 2010; Sibley 2010), and community energy projects (Walker and Devine-Wright 2008) amongst others. However, such studies only give a partial sense of the characteristics of the environmental third sector. This paper represents the first attempt to provide a more comprehensive analysis of data on the size, shape and scope of this broader environmental third sector – and how it compares to the rest of the third sector. We are also able to offer some preliminary comparisons with data from the United States, where Straughan and Pollak (2008) offer an analysis of environmental non-profits that registered with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) over the period 1989-2005.

In taking forward the analysis of the environmental third sector, this study is timely not only substantively, but also from a methodological perspective. First, we are able to make use of the recently available National Survey of Third Sector Organisations (NSTSO) which provides detailed information on organisational characteristics across the different types of organisations that make up the third sector: charitable trusts, companies limited by guarantee, industrial and provident societies and community interest companies. Second, we are able to make use of Charity Commission Register (CCR) data which has been recently classified using the framework of the International Classification of Nonprofit Organisations (ICNPO). We build upon this existing classification, refining it in order to produce an accurate national listing of charities whose primary activity is environmental. These two developments mean that, for the first time, it is possible to build up a more systematic picture of the environmental sector in England.

About the data

The analysis that follows draws on two very different datasets. Below we explain the contrasting characteristics of each dataset and how environmental TSOs are classified in each case, before providing 'minimal' and 'maximal' definitions of the environmental third sector that will guide the analysis.

Charity Commission Register

The first source of data is the Charity Commission Register (CCR) for England and Wales. Charities with an income of above £5,000 are required to complete an annual return providing basic information about the organisation, including its geographical area of operation, field of activity, and date of registration.² Linking together financial information provided in these returns for different years provides us with data on charities' headline income and expenditure from 1995 onwards. As we will discuss in more detail later, the focus on Charities means that a number of well-known TSOs do not appear on this database: for example, only the charitable trusts created by Friends of the Earth and

Greenpeace to undertake research and fundraise would be included; not the 'parent' organisations, which (because of their campaigning missions) are both companies limited by guarantee.

We identify environmental organisations from this register in a two-step process. First we use information from a classification system called the International Classification of Nonprofit Organisations (ICNPO), developed by researchers in the United States to inform the work of the John Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (Salamon and Anheier 1992, 1996). This was designed to provide a basis for the classification of TSOs applicable to a variety of different national contexts, and focused on 'economic activities' – the type of services or goods provided – as the means of classification. It divides organisations into 12 major activity groups and 24 subgroups. One of the major activity groups (Group 5) is 'Environment' – 'organisations promoting and providing services in environmental conservation, pollution control and prevention, environmental education and health, and animal protection'. This is further divided into two subgroups: '5100 Environment', including groups involved in pollution abatement and control, natural resources conservation and protection and environmental beautification and open spaces; and '5200 Animal Protection', including animal protection and welfare, wildlife preservation and protection and veterinary services. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) applied the ICNPO framework to the Charity Commission Register. It used a variety of information in order to allocate organisations uniquely to a particular subgroup. The largest organisations were classified on an individual basis – determining the primary activity after examining the charity report and accounts, charitable objects (information on what the charity is legally entitled to do) and website. Since it was not possible to pursue this labour-intensive approach for all of the c.160,000 organisations on the register, they classified the vast majority using automated routines. The hierarchy of routines begins with more high quality methods such as a focus on repeated phrases in charity objects and matching with external registers, through to lower quality methods such as fuzzy descriptions using less precise key words in names and objects, matching with the Inter-departmental Business Register collected by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the use of CASCOT – the computer assisted structured coding tool developed by the University of Warwick (Kane 2008: 9-10).

In the second step, we refine this ICNPO classification. The degree of accuracy of the NCVO procedure has not been well established and so we examined each charity initially classified as 'environmental' or 'animal protection',³ and on an individual basis decided whether this classification was appropriate based on the organisation's name and/or close inspection of its objects or published mission statement. This was a practical option since we are interested in environmental organisations specifically: for larger fields of activity it would have been more difficult. 'False positives' were more of an issue than 'false negatives' under the ICNPO classification generated using the NCVO procedure. Overall, the individual examination removed around 44% of charities initially listed under Group 5 Environment by the NCVO procedure.⁴ Conversely, we took a random sample of 1,000 organisations initially not classified as environmental/animal welfare organisations and there were only four 'false negatives'. While the presence of false negatives in the organisations not examined individually may mean that we slightly underestimate the number of environmental charities, the small number in the random sample increases our confidence in our final listing.

We focus our analysis on environmental organisations as distinct from animal protection: in the UK it has been well documented that environmental organisations and animal rights/welfare comprise distinct organisational fields (Rootes 2003). The distinction between sub-group 5100 Environment and 5200 Animal Protection employed by ICNPO generates some overlap in the areas of natural resource conservation and wildlife preservation and protection. For example, local Wildlife Trusts appeared under both classifications and other organisations working for the conservation of species and habitats, such as the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, appeared under 5200. During the manual checking of the ICPNO classification, organisation such as these were, where necessary, re-classified under 5100 Environment. The result of our classification processes is arguably the most accurate national listing of environmental charities to date.

National Survey of Third Sector Organisations

The second source of data is the National Survey of Third Sector Organisations (NSTSO), the first survey of its kind, carried out in England in 2008 (see Gill 2008 for more details). By survey standards, the total national sample size is large (48,939), providing a useful opportunity to present key statistics even for specific subsectors within the third sector. It is also broader than the Charities Commission Register in that it includes not only charities but also Companies Limited by Guarantee, Community Interest Companies and Industrial and Provident Societies. In this sense, it samples the whole population of the environmental third sector that has a formal organisational status and is registered. Here we identify relevant organisations through responses to the question on fields in which the organisation works – which included the option ‘environment/sustainability’. We used the survey weights, which adjust for differences in sampling fractions and for differences in response rates between local authorities (and between different forms of the organisation: charity or non-charitable third sector organisation) to estimate national population totals from the survey data.

Information and coverage: comparing the two databases

The data from the CCR and the NSTSO complement each other (see Table 1). Since the Charity Commission data is register based, it contains information on the *population*, rather than a *sample*. Therefore, where information is available in both sources, we prioritise information from the register. Unlike the survey, which provides a snapshot of the situation in 2008, we have information on headline income and expenditure for organisations on the register from 1995 to 2008 inclusive, and information on charities that have deregistered, allowing us to look at changes in charity numbers and finances over time. However, we also use the NSTSO since it contains information not available in the CCR. Notably, it contains detailed information on income sources, including whether or not an organisation is in receipt of public funds. It includes information on the scale of operation, enabling the identification of organisations that specifically work at a local neighbourhood level rather than, for example, across a local authority. It also provides information on non-charitable third sector organisations not covered by the CCR: it was designed to provide a representative sample of registered TSOs (companies limited by guarantee, community interest companies and industrial and provident societies as well as charities).

Table 1: Comparison of Charity Commission and NSTSO data

	Charity Commission Register	National Survey of Third Sector Organisations
<i>Country</i>	England and Wales	England
<i>Population of interest</i>	Registered charities	Registered charities and other third sector or voluntary organisations
<i>Population/Survey</i>	Population: over 160,000 registered charities	Survey: Sampling frame included c.170,000 organisations. Sampled c.100,000; response rate of 47%.
<i>Information</i>	Headline income and expenditure; date of registration/dissolution	As register, plus detailed information on funding sources and scale of operation
<i>Time</i>	Panel data on headline income and expenditure from 1995	Cross-sectional data: snapshot in 2008

The kind of organisations captured by both the CCR and NSTSO are in line with the ‘structural-operational’ definition of third sector organisations: a body must be a formal organisation, self-governing, independent of government, not profit-distributing, and voluntary (Kendall and Knapp 1993). In other words, these sources capture more formal ‘voluntary’ organisations rather than more informal ‘community’ organisations: by definition, organisations which are ‘below the [regulatory] radar’ (see, for example, McCabe et al 2011) will not be registered with the Charity Commission or Companies House, so will not appear in the CCR or the sampling frame for the NSTSO. For example, a review of environmental TSOs in two geographical areas in the United States found 20 times the number of organisations than were officially registered (Kempton et al. 2001). The organisations that our analysis focuses on are officially registered and therefore institutional in form: they have ‘some degree of internal organisational structure, relative persistence of goals, structures and activities, and meaningful organisational boundaries, i.e. some recognized difference between members and non-members’ (Salamon and Anheier 1996: 2). In other words, they are organisations which have an existence distinct from their surroundings (Cnaan and Milofsky 2007). We acknowledge that our analysis can offer little insight into those environmental TSOs that are not registered.

There are significant differences in the way in which CCR and NSTSO categorise environmental activity. The ICNPO categories were designed to be mutually exclusive, with each organisation located within only one activity group. This can create some difficulties given that many TSOs work across more than one field of activity. When categorising an organisations, researchers are required to judge its primary mission. In comparison, in the NSTSO, organisations are allowed to self-identify across more than one field of activity; they are asked to tick up to three ‘main activities’ of which ‘environment/sustainability’ is one option from a long list.

In the analysis that follows we are careful to distinguish between two different definitions of environmental TSOs:

1. a 'minimal' definition of *primarily-environmental charities* whose principal object is environmental – a mutually exclusive category drawn from CCR data
2. a 'maximal' definition of *the broad environmental third sector* – a wider, self-ascribed, non-mutually exclusive category drawn from the NSTSO.

It is convenient to think of the two populations as nested within one another: the CCR figure refers to charities with a distinctive environmental focus; the NSTSO figure includes not only these organisations, but also others whose work relates to the environment alongside other areas of activity, be it culture and leisure, education, community development, etc. In each section of the analysis, we indicate which data source we draw on.

The size of the environmental third sector (CCR and NSTSO data)

We estimate, using the CCR data with the refined ICNPO classification, that there were around 3,000 charities in England and Wales in 2008 whose primary activity falls within the major ICNPO activity group 5 Environment. Within this figure, which includes animal charities, we estimate that there are around 1,800 *primarily-environmental charities* in sub-group 5100 in England and Wales, and around 1,700 in England specifically (see Table 2).⁵ *Primarily-environmental charities* make up just over 1 per cent of all charities on the CCR.

Table 2: Estimates of the number of environmental organisations from different sources, 2008

		Environmental	
		<i>Charities</i>	<i>Other</i>
1	CCR (England and Wales)	1,815	-
2	CCR (England only)	1,702	-
3	NSTSO (England)	4,887	2,775

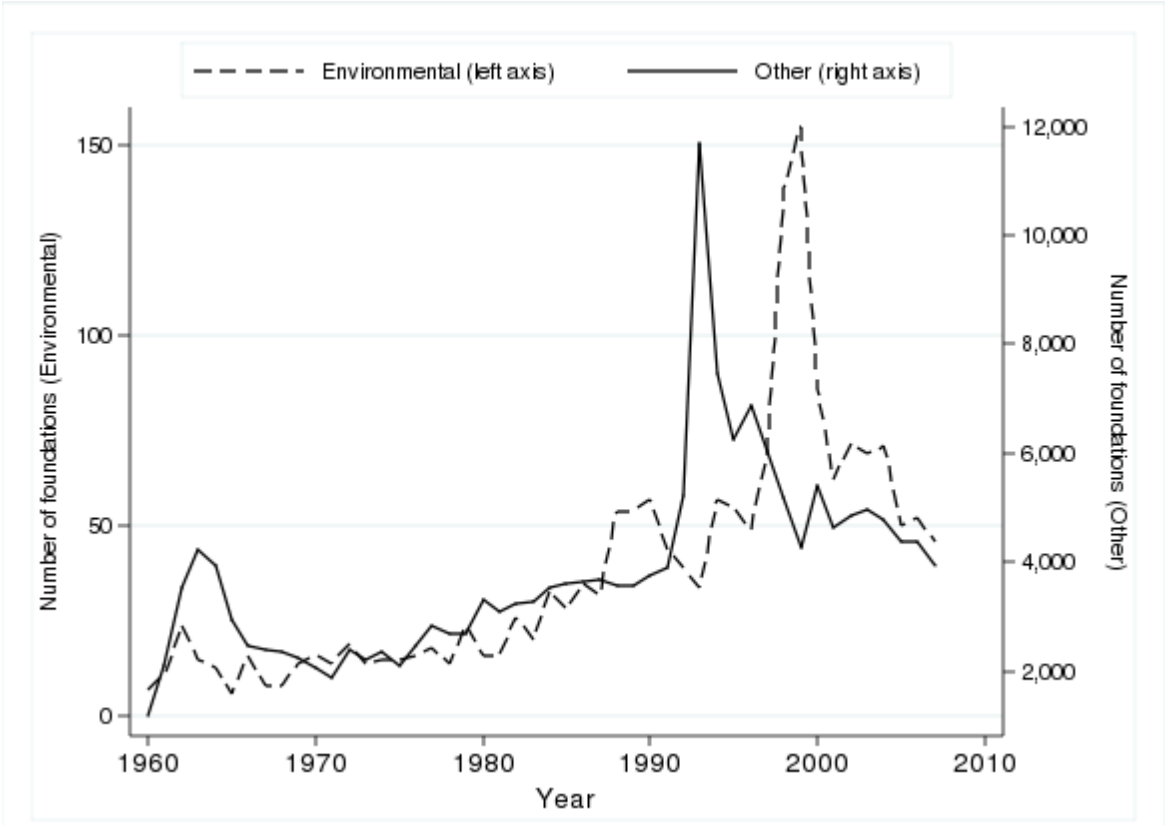
CCR: Charity Commission Register; NSTSO: National Survey of Third Sector Organisations
'Other' includes community interest companies, non-charitable companies limited by guarantee, and industrial and provident societies.

Not surprisingly the size of the maximal environmental third sector based on the NSTSO data is much higher. There are 4,887 charities that have environment as one of their three main activities; and 2,775 other forms of voluntary organisation. A total of 7,662 organisations are part of the broad environmental third sector: TSOs that have the environment as one of their main activities (see Table 2).

Foundations, registrations and dissolutions (CCR data)

Understanding trends in the foundation of primarily-environmental charities is not a simple task. The year of registration with the Charity Commission is not necessarily a good guide to when a charity was founded, primarily because of the impact of administrative practices at the Charity Commission and/or changes in charity legislation. We extract information from the governing document of charities, which contains information on significant dates within the charity’s history, and use the earliest date as an indicator of possible year of establishment. In the majority of cases, this corresponds to, or is earlier than, the year of registration; but in a small proportion (5% of cases) where the date of registration is earlier than the date of foundation, we use the year of registration instead.

Figure 1: Number of charity foundations, by type of organisation, 1960-2007



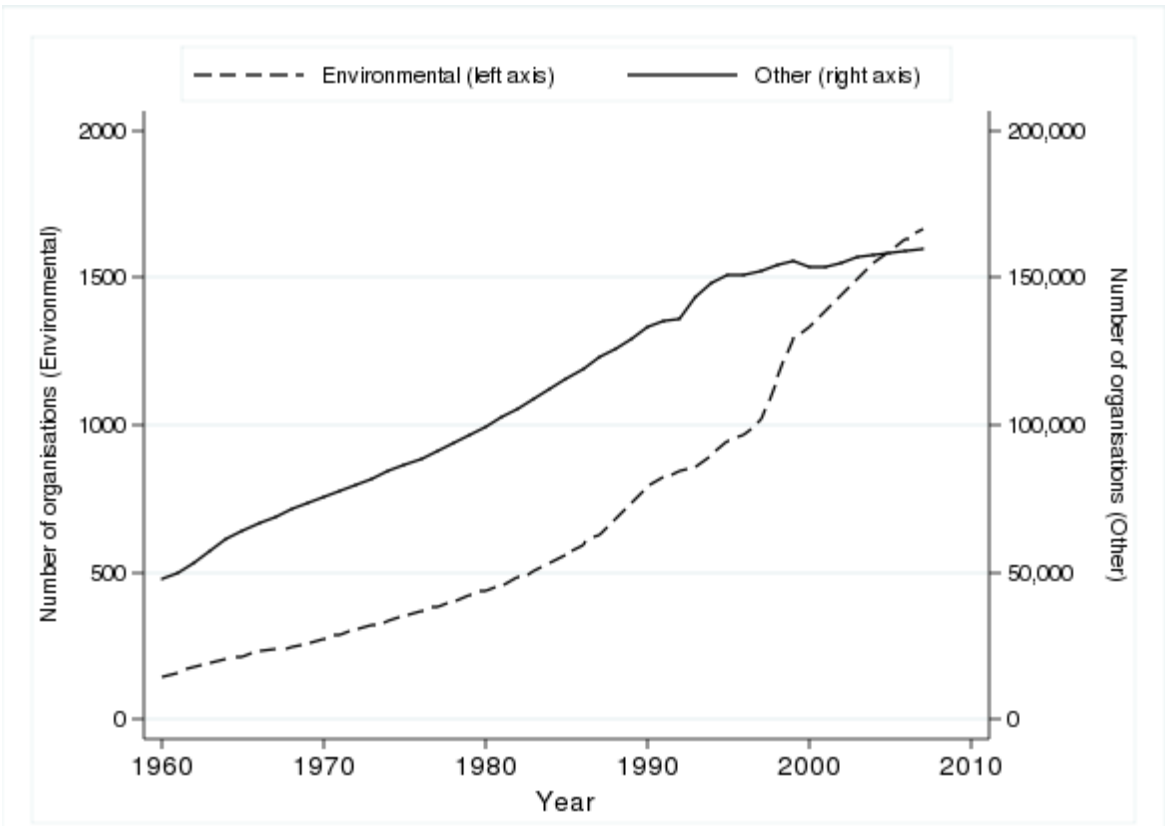
Source: analysis of CCR data

While extracting information from the governing document is preferable to the use of registration information, it remains an imperfect guide to dates of foundation. Figure 1, which presents trends in the foundation of charities, should be interpreted with care as a number of the peaks still appear to reflect administrative practices at the Commission or changes in legislation about the kind of organisations required to register. For example, the Register of Charities was developed initially in the early 1960s, so the significant number of foundations at this time probably reflects the formalisation

and registration of pre-existing organisations. By the late 1960s, when the registration of existing organisations was complete, the numbers of foundations settled down and, over the following two decades, increased gradually. The peak in foundations of organisations in the early 1990s reflects changes associated with the Charities Act 1992: any charity with an income of more than £1,000 now had to register, and many smaller organisations above this threshold appeared on the Register for the first time.

While many of the peaks in Figure 1 reflect changing administrative or legislative practice, it is possible to identify trends reflecting underlying change in the environmental third sector. For example, the peak in foundation of environmental organisations in the late 1990s may well reflect the foundation of a number of ‘Millennium Green’ charities. Such charities were established as a requirement to receive funding by the Lottery (led by the Millennium Commission), aimed at local communities reclaiming disused public spaces and improving them to help enhance the local environment. For local organisations to receive funding of between £1,000 and £5,000, they had to establish their own charity.

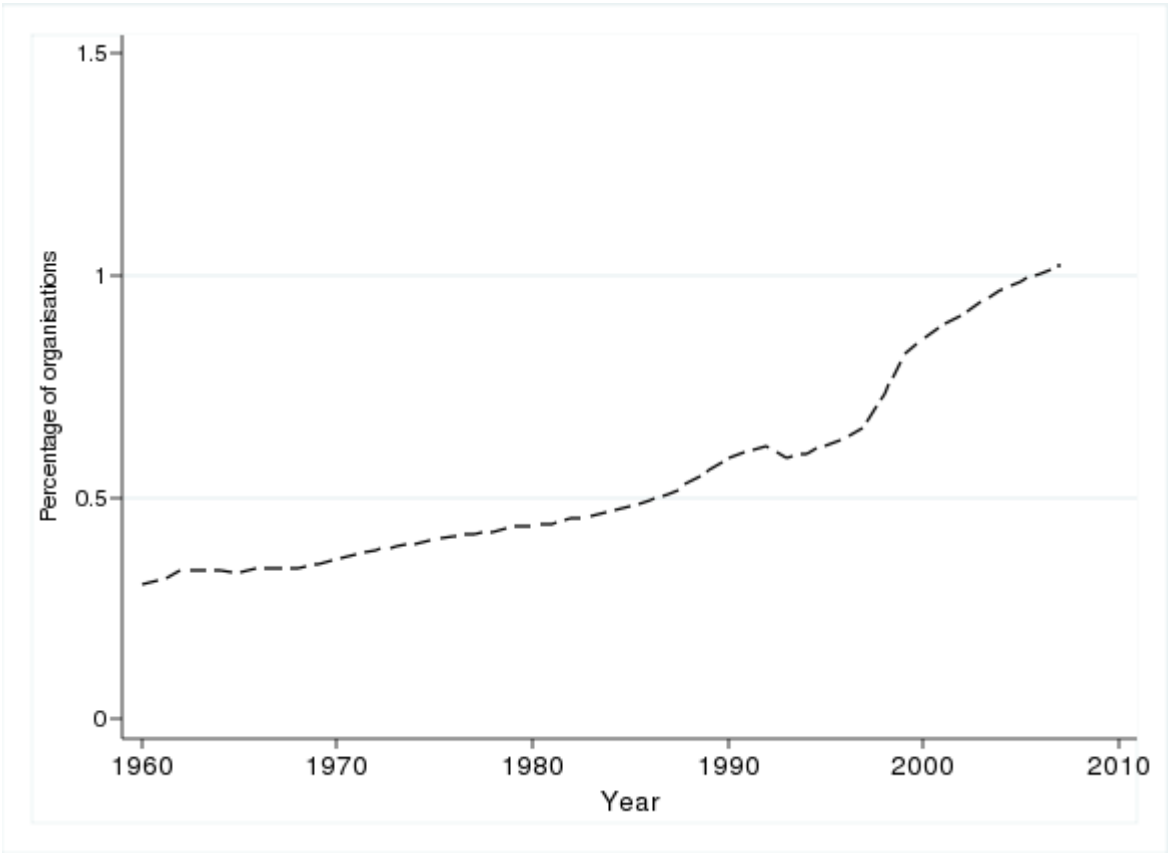
Figure 2: Number of charities on the Commission register, by type of organisation, 1960-2007



Source: analysis of CCR data

Given the year-to-year fluctuations in foundation and registration, it is easier to understand changes over the medium term by considering the number of different kinds of organisations on the register at a particular point in time. While remaining a small sub-population of charities, the number of environmental charities has increased (Figure 2). Indeed, the share (percentage) of the total organisations on the register which are environmental has also increased, from around 0.3 per cent in 1960 to around 1 per cent in 2008 (Figure 3; see also Table 3). In other words, in terms of charitable activity, as measured by the number of organisations, there is now more of a focus on environmental issues than ever before, even if it remains a relatively minor activity within the sector.

Figure 3: Percentage of charities on the Commission register classified as environmental, 1960-2007



Source: analysis of CCR data.

It is not possible to provide meaningful data on the annual number of dissolutions because the effect of Charity Commission administrative practices is even more pronounced: the early 1990s saw the removal of charities ‘exempt’ from registration from the Register; a data cleaning exercise was undertaken when the Register was computerised in the early 1990s; and since then periodic ‘purges’ of the register have taken place to remove organisations no longer considered to be active.

Income (CCR data)

Total income

Drawing on the CCR data, we are able to estimate the total income for primarily-environmental charities in 2008 at around £1.3bn (this and subsequent figures from the CCR relate to the approximately 1,700 charities with addresses in England). This estimate is based on a simple summation of individual organisation incomes – thus if some organisations pass on funds to others within the same subgroup, this will lead to an overestimate of total income through double counting. Table 3 places the size of environmental charity income within the context of other charities working within other fields of activity. The 1.1 per cent of primarily-environmental charities account for around 2.6 per cent of total (registered) charitable income in England.⁶

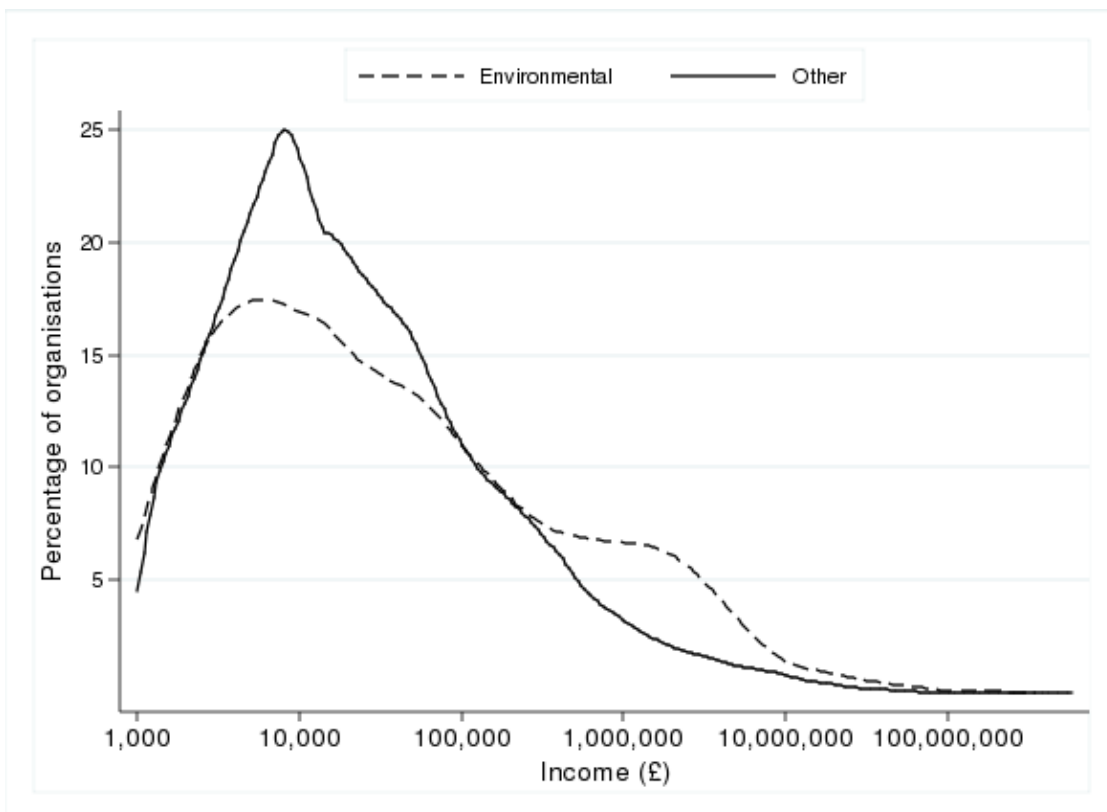
Table 3: Numbers of organisations and total income, according to ICNPO

ICNPO category	No. of organisations		Total income in 2008	
	(N)	% of total	(£m)	% of total
Education and research	25,539	18.7	11,596	23.4
Social Services	30,095	22.0	7,848	15.9
Development and Housing	19,291	14.1	5,777	11.7
Health	4,935	3.6	4,744	9.6
Religion	19,362	14.1	4,369	8.8
Culture and recreation	16,425	12.0	3,909	7.9
Philanthropic intermediaries; voluntarism promotion	9,945	7.3	3,043	6.2
International	3,541	2.6	2,755	5.6
Environmental	1,508	1.1	1,291	2.6
Business and Professional Associations, Unions	441	0.3	1,213	2.5
Law, Advocacy and Politics	2,889	2.1	1,039	2.1
<i>Animal</i>	1,091	0.8	598	1.2
Not elsewhere classified	26	0	982	2
<i>Total</i>	136,357		49,344	

Note: N – Number of organisations with non-missing income in 2008. These categories are based on the 12 major ‘activity groups’ in the ICNPO (International Classification of Nonprofit Organisations) classification, but with the major activity group ‘Environment’ divided into ‘Environment’ and ‘Animal’ subgroups. Note that the environment and animal categories have been refined, with each organisation checked individually. The other categories have not: they provide a useful basis for general comparison, but should be interpreted with more caution. Note too that organisations initially classified as environmental/animal, but removed from this category as the classification was refined, are still included in the totals.

Figure 4 shows the distribution by income of primarily-environmental charities as compared to all other charities. The distribution offers some indication that there is a degree of distinctiveness about the environmental sector: in comparison to the rest of the charitable sector, there are relatively fewer small/medium-size environmental organisations (between £10,000 to £100,000 income), with relatively more organisations above the £1 million income mark. For example, of those organisations with at least £1,000 in income, more than 10 per cent of environmental charities had incomes of at least £1m in income, compared to around 5 per cent for non-environmental charities.

Figure 4: Distribution of organisations by income in 2008



Source: analysis of CCR

Note: Income on logarithmic scale. Distribution smoothed using Kernel density estimation. Only organisations with income of at least £1,000 considered.

The income associated with environmental activity is dominated by a small number of very large organisations, most notably the National Trust with an income of over £365 million. The largest five environmental charities account for around 50 per cent of the total income of all environmental charities. Table 4 lists the nine primarily-environmental charities with income above £20 million in 2008.⁷

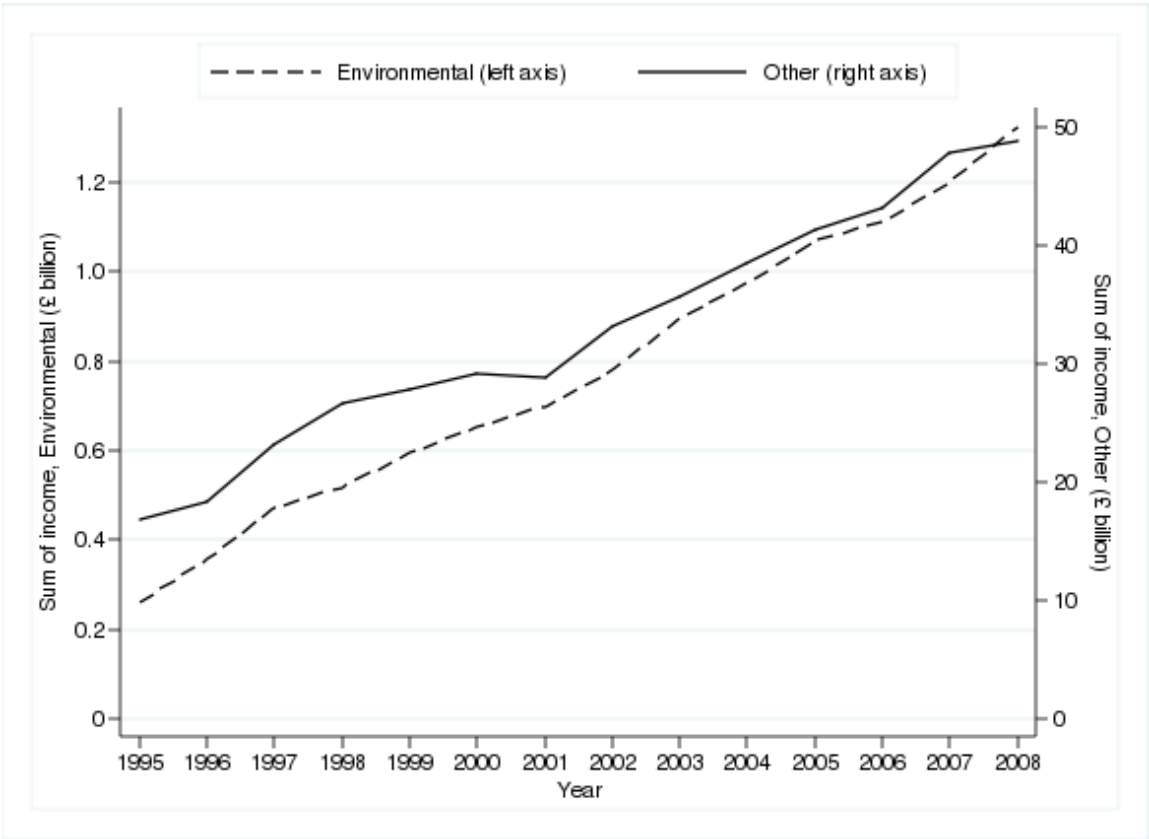
Table 4: Environmental charities with an income over £20 million in 2008

Name	Income (nearest £m)
National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty	356
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	104
The Royal Horticultural Society	60
WWF-UK	44
The Woodland Trust	30
Eden Trust	30
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV)	29
The Federation of Groundwork Trusts	29
Rufford Small Grants Foundation	28

Changes in income

We reconstruct trends in total income using the CCR panel, which includes headline income for charities on the Charity Commission Register from 1995 onwards. We adjust for inflation, standardising incomes in 2008 prices using the Retail Price Index. Figure 5 shows that the income of primarily-environmental charities grew in real terms from 1995 and roughly followed the increase in income for the whole of the charity sector.

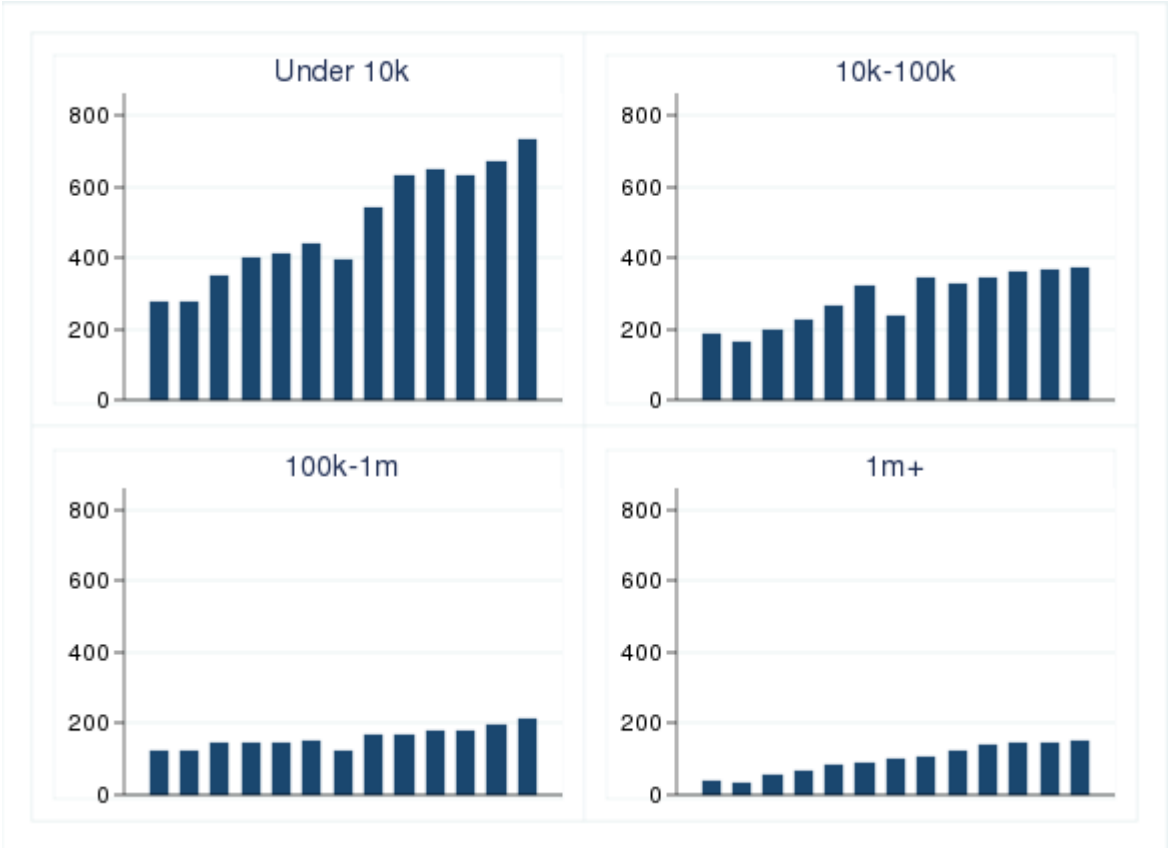
Figure 5: Growth of aggregate income, in 2008 prices



Source: analysis of CCR

Since the largest charities in a given year account for such a large share of total income, the growth in total income is largely a reflection of a growth in the number of large organisations. There has, however, been a growth in the number of environmental charities of all income size (see Figure 6) – and the most significant growth in terms of numbers has been in relatively small charities (under £10K).⁸ In other words, there are now more big environmental organisations than there were in 1995, but also many more small ones.

Figure 6: Growth in number of charities of a particular size, in 2008 prices

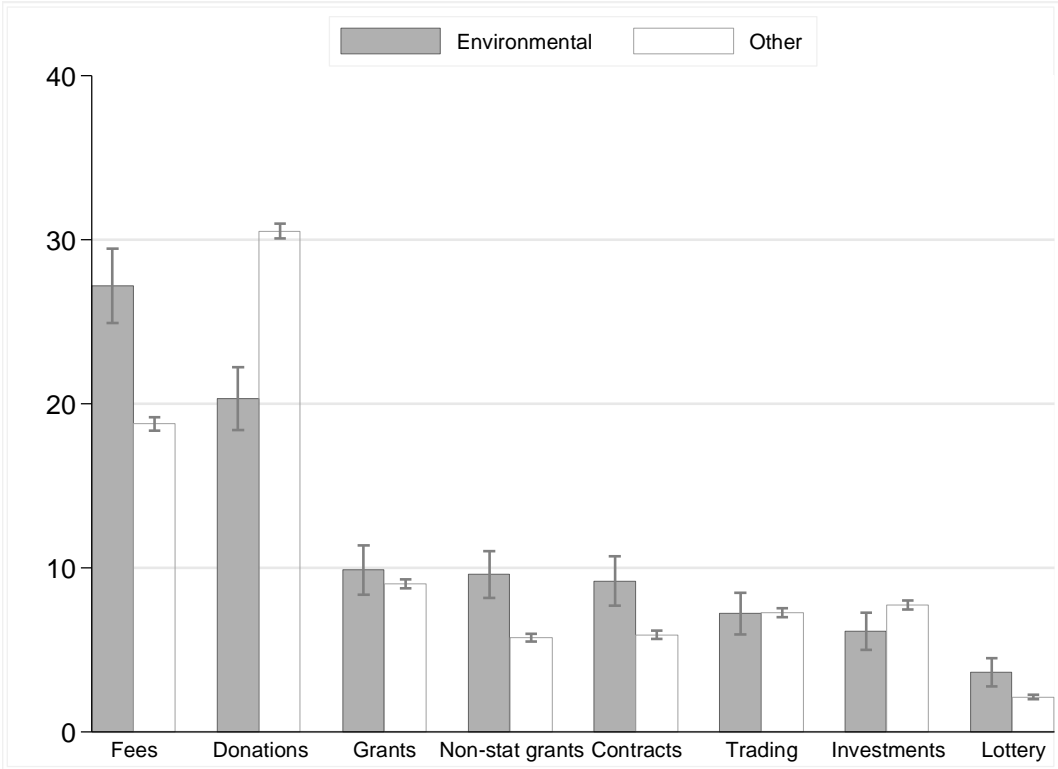


Source: analysis of CCR data

Sources of funding (NSTSO data)

The NSTSO allows us to interrogate the sources of funding for registered TSOs in a way not possible with the CCR: the survey asked organisations to indicate their most important income source.⁹ As Figure 7 shows, it is membership fees/subscriptions that are most important for the largest number of environmental TSOs.¹⁰ While donations and fundraising is the second most important source, grants would be almost as important if the two different types of grant recorded in the survey (from statutory and non-statutory bodies) were combined.

Figure 7: Percentage of organisations by their most important income stream: environmental vs. other third sector organisations

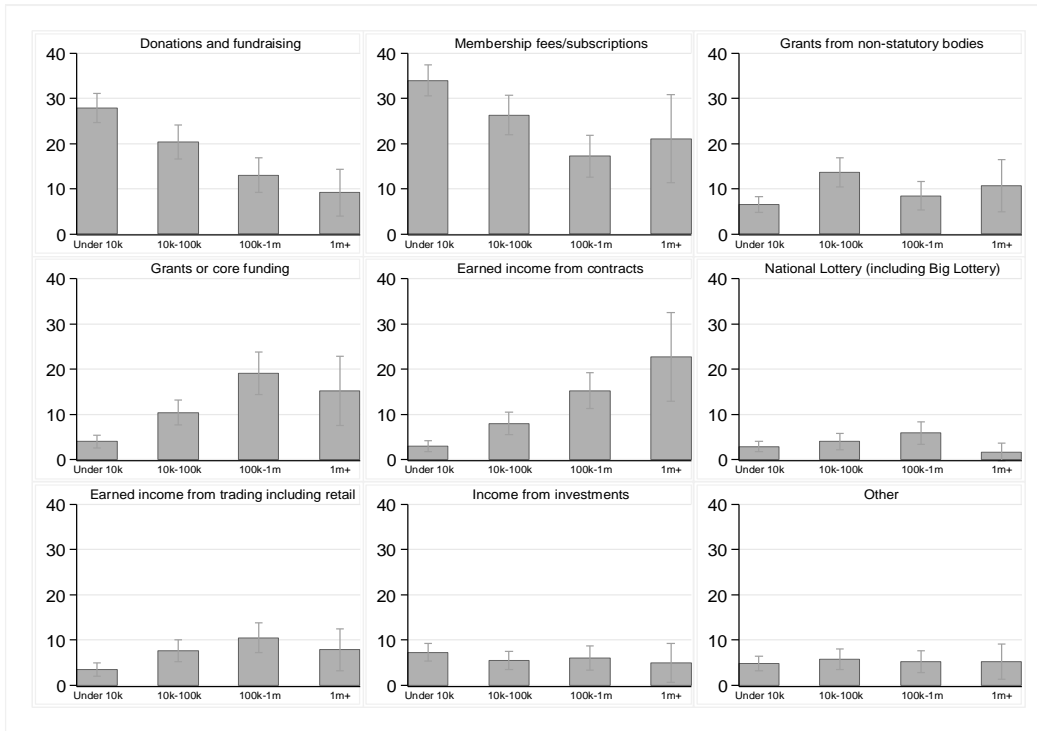


Source: analysis of NSTSO (2008).
 Note: spikes are 95% confidence intervals.

Comparing the sources of income for environmental TSOs with those of the rest of the sector, we uncover some notable differences in the relative importance of income streams. On average, TSOs outside the maximal environmental third sector rely most heavily on donations and fundraising, as compared to membership fees/subscriptions for environmental TSOs: the difference in both cases being around 10 per cent.

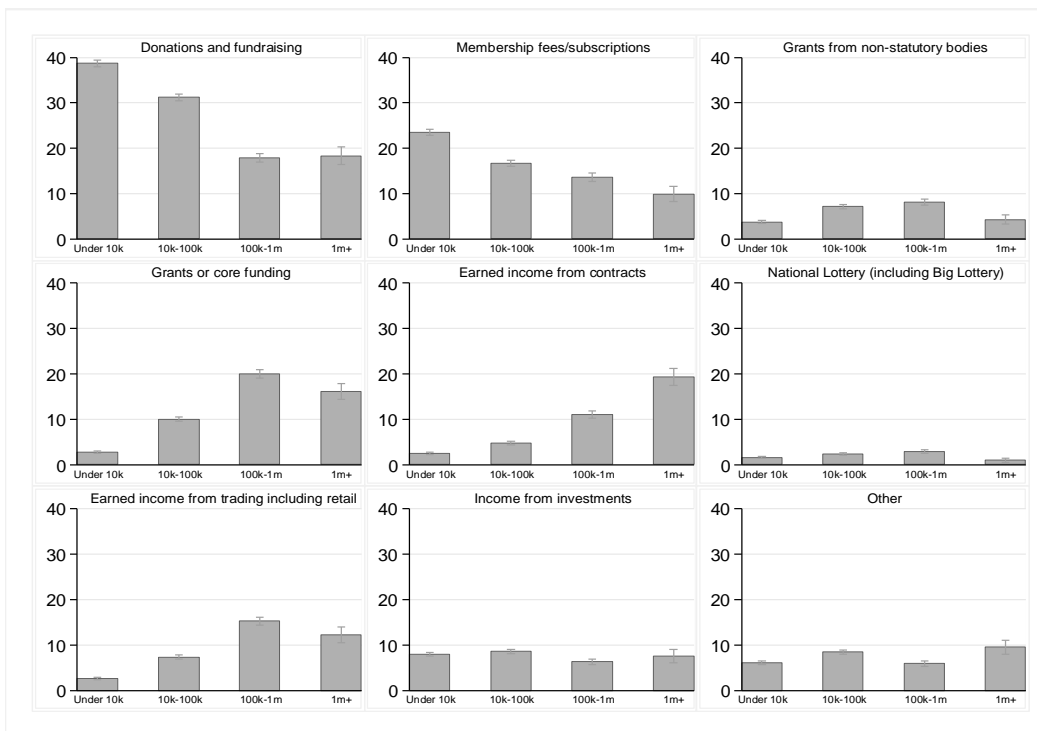
Turning our attention to the spread of funding across environmental TSOs, we find that the overall figures hide differences related to size (Figure 8). Smaller organisations tend to be more reliant on membership fees/subscriptions and donations and fundraising; whereas the importance of earned income from contracts, grants or core funding and to a lesser extent trading increases for the larger environmental TSOs. These trends in funding sources according to size are similar for other organisations in the third sector, not just environmental TSOs (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Percentage of environmental organisations of particular sizes, by their most important income stream



Source: analysis of NSTSO (2008). Note: spikes are 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 9: Percentage of other organisations of particular sizes, by their most important income stream



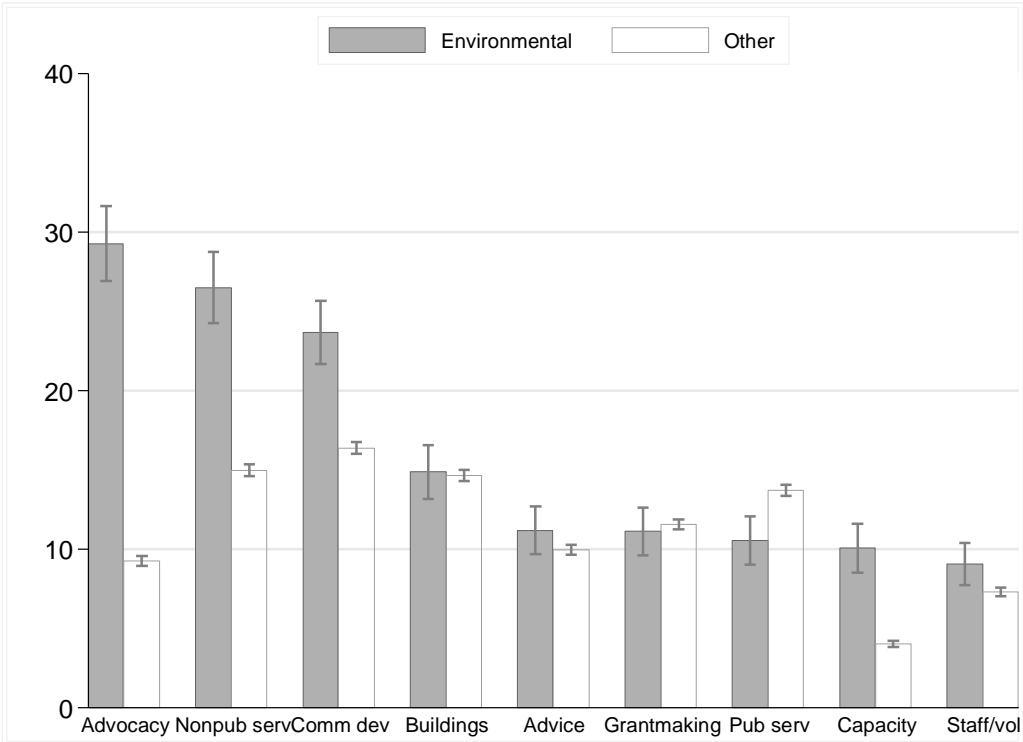
Source: analysis of NSTSO (2008). Note: spikes are 95% confidence intervals.

The differences in funding sources between environmental and other organisations are not simply a reflection of differences in the size (income) distribution between these different groups. In all categories, environmental organisations receive higher levels of income from membership fees and subscriptions than other types of TSOs; and lower levels of income from donations and fundraising.

Roles and functions (NSTSO data)

While there are differences in income source between registered environmental and non-environmental TSOs, an even more significant distinction emerges in relation to the main functions that organisations undertake. In responding to the NSTSO, organisations were able to select up to three ‘main roles’. As Figure 10 suggests, the most common role of organisations within the broad environmental third sector is advocacy. Some 30 per cent of organisations indicate this as one of their three primary functions – three times as many compared to non-environmental TSOs. The second and third most important roles of TSOs within the maximal environmental third sector are also well above the sector average: non-public service and community development. We also find that more environmental organisations are involved in capacity building and providing support for other TSOs as compared to the sector average. The environmental sector does appear distinctive in the priority it places on certain types of activity.

Figure 10: Percentage of organisations by their main roles: environmental vs. other third sector organisations

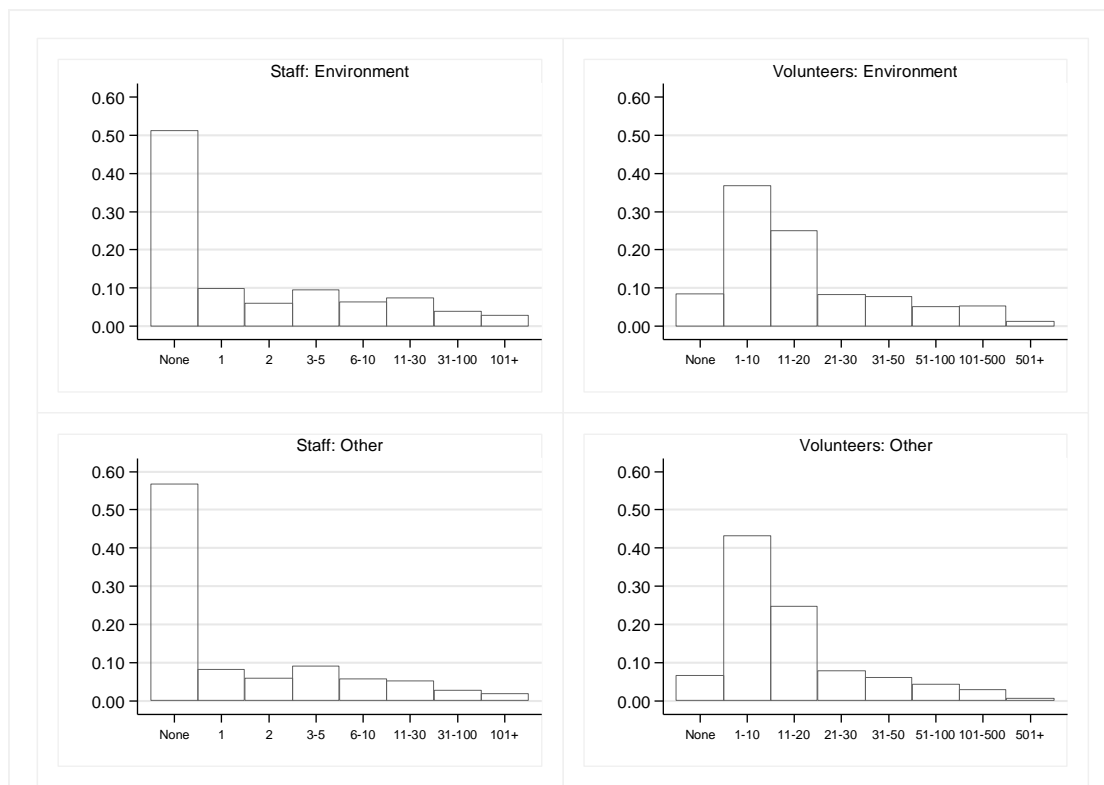


Source: analysis of NSTSO (2008). Note: organisations could select up to three main roles, so percentages sum to more than 100. Spikes are 95% confidence intervals.

Workforce (NSTSO data)

Since the CCR does not contain reliable data on the workforce composition of TSOs, we draw on the NSTSO to estimate the nature of the workforce – both full-time equivalent (FTE) and volunteer numbers – within TSOs with an environmental mission (the maximal definition of the environmental sector). In total, we estimate that there are around 72,500 FTE employees (95% CI c.60,000 - 85,000), and around 393,000 volunteers, (95% CI c.304,000 - 483,000) working for the 7661 third sector organisations in the ‘environment/sustainability’ field.¹¹ While environmental organisations represent 4.5% of the total number of organisations in the NSTSO, they account for an estimated 6.1% of the total FTE employees, and 6% of the estimated number of total volunteers; the latter figure no doubt reflecting the significant number of conservation-orientated organisations within the field of activity.

Figure 11: Estimated proportion of organisations according to number of staff/volunteers, by type of organisation (environmental/other)



Source: analysis of NSTSO data.

Figure 11 further breaks down both staff and volunteer numbers within bands (note banding is adopted in the survey to protect the anonymity of organisations). Just over half of environmental organisations do not employ any FTE staff. However, if we combine bands, there is a reasonably significant proportion of organisations with at least one, but fewer than 30, FTE staff. Again, there are only a few organisations with large numbers of volunteers – the majority have 20 or fewer. Indeed, as

we noted in relation to income, there are a small number of large organisations that employ substantial numbers of paid staff and/or have considerable numbers of volunteers. While the overall employment and volunteer profiles are similar between environmental and other organisations, compared to other organisations there is evidence that a higher proportion of environmental organisations have more than 30 FTEs (7.7% compared to 4.6%), and that a higher proportion have more than 100 volunteers (6.0% compared to 3.6%). This is consistent with the differences in the distribution of income.

The geography of local environmental activity

Scale of operation (CCR data)

Returning to the CCR, we are able to differentiate the scale of operation of primarily-environmental charities through data recorded under ‘area of operation’ in charity annual returns. Table 5 examines the share of organisations, and share of total income, according to scale of operation. A higher proportion of environmental organisations, compared to other organisations on the register, work across at least 10 local authority areas (26% vs. 22%), and organisations working at this scale account for a greater share of income for environmental organisations compared to other charities (78% vs. 56%). But, the largest number of primarily-environmental charities (c.900 or just over 50 per cent) work specifically *within* one local authority area. These locally-based organisations account for only 9% of total income to environmental charities. However, these are smaller proportions than for other types of TSO, indicating that environmental activity is relatively less ‘localised’.

Table 5: Scale of operation of organisations in England and Wales: share of organisations, and share of total income, for environmental and other organisations

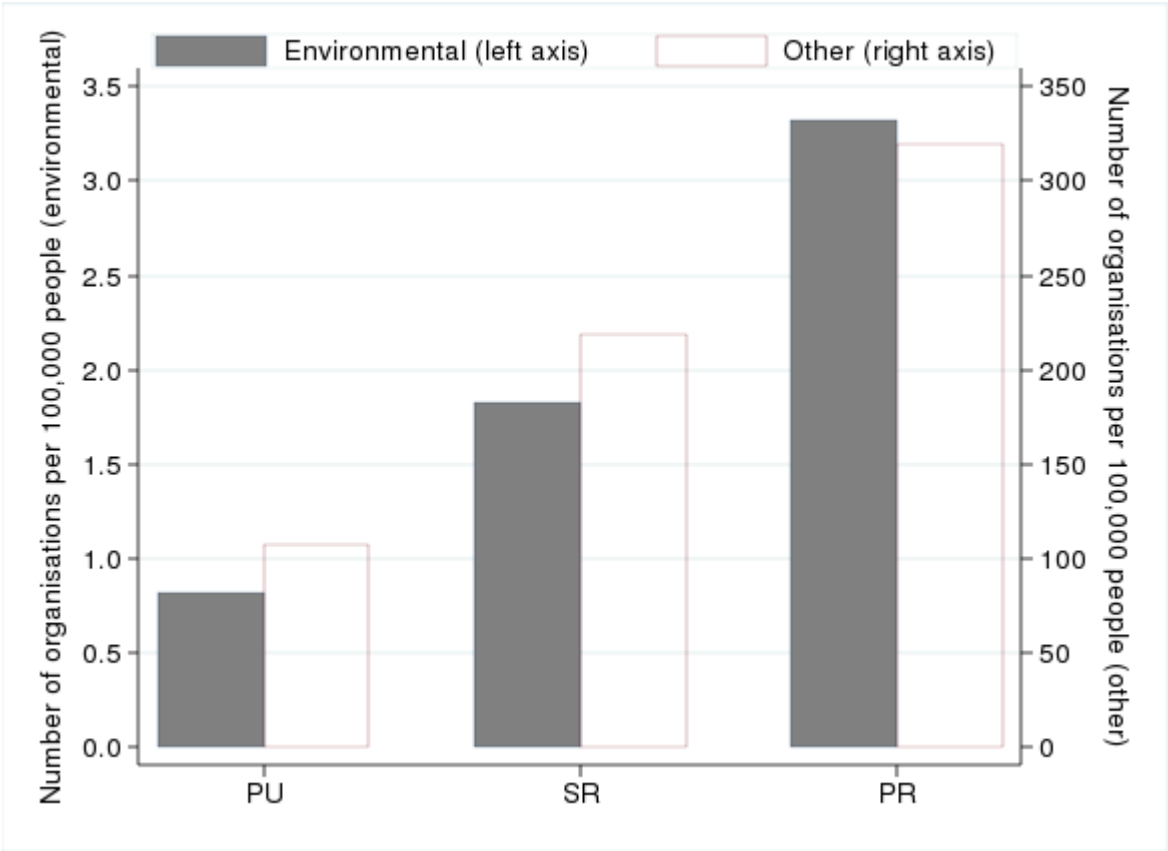
Scale of operation (LAs = Local Authority areas)	Share of organisations (%)		Share of total income (%)	
	<i>Environmental</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Environmental</i>	<i>Other</i>
One LA	54	61	9	24
Two to nine LAs	18	14	12	16
Ten or more LAs	26	22	78	56
Internationally only	1	3	1	4
	<i>N=1,674</i>	<i>N=158,354</i>	<i>Tot. inc=£1.3bn</i>	<i>Tot.inc=£47.8bn</i>

Regional variation (CCR data)

There has been a growing interest in local environmental TSOs and networks, but again this is often focused on local campaigns (Rootes 1999, 2007). To examine geographical patterns in the prevalence of environmental charities, we restrict analysis to those working within one specific local authority area. Figure 12 shows differences in the prevalence of local primarily-environmental charities compared to other local charities per 100,000 people across the country, according to urban/rural

status. We use information from the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) to classify local authorities as predominantly urban, significantly rural or predominantly rural. It is generally the case that rural areas host more locally-focused TSOs and it is the same for environmental organisations. Indeed, the difference between rural and urban areas in the prevalence of locally-focused organisations is more marked for environmental than for other organisations (as illustrated in Figure 12; note the different scales on the y-axis).

Figure 12: Number of organisations per 100,000 people according to urban/rural status by type of organisation (environmental/other) [Note: only organisations working within one specific local authority considered]



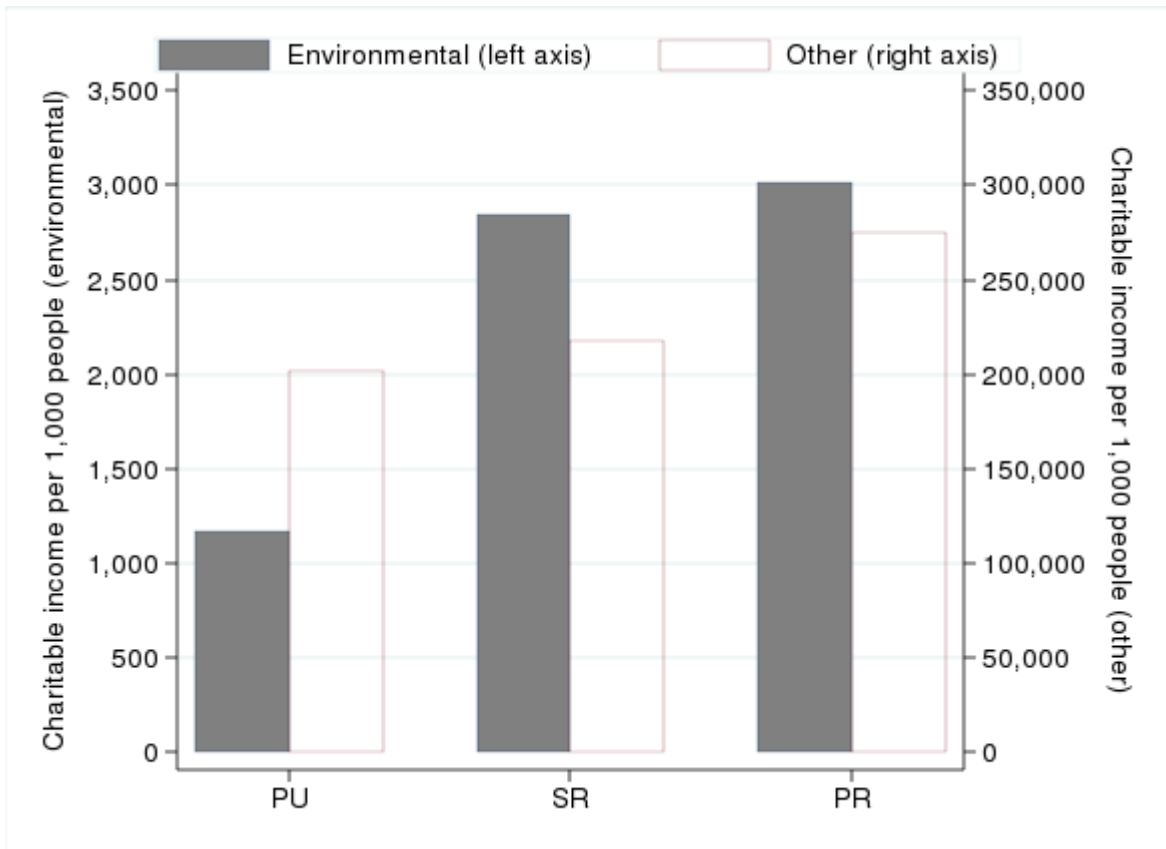
Source: analysis of CCR data.

Note: PU – Predominantly Urban; SR – Significantly Rural; PR – Predominantly Rural.

Again, restricting our analysis to charities working within one specific local authority area, Figure 13 shows differences in total charitable income per 1,000 people between urban and rural areas.¹² Considering non-environmental charities, the difference between rural and urban areas in terms of total charitable income is smaller than the difference in the number of organisations (as shown in Figure 12) reflecting the bigger average size of charities working in urban areas. In comparison, this difference in charitable income between rural and urban areas is again more marked for environmental organisations. In other words, the gradient in local organisational activity between rural

and urban areas is particularly marked for environmental organisations – whether measured in terms of number of organisations or total income per capita. Local environmental activity (and income) is particularly focused on rural areas.

Figure 13: Total charitable income per 1,000 people according to urban/rural status by type of organisation (environmental/other) [Note: only organisations working within one specific local authority considered]

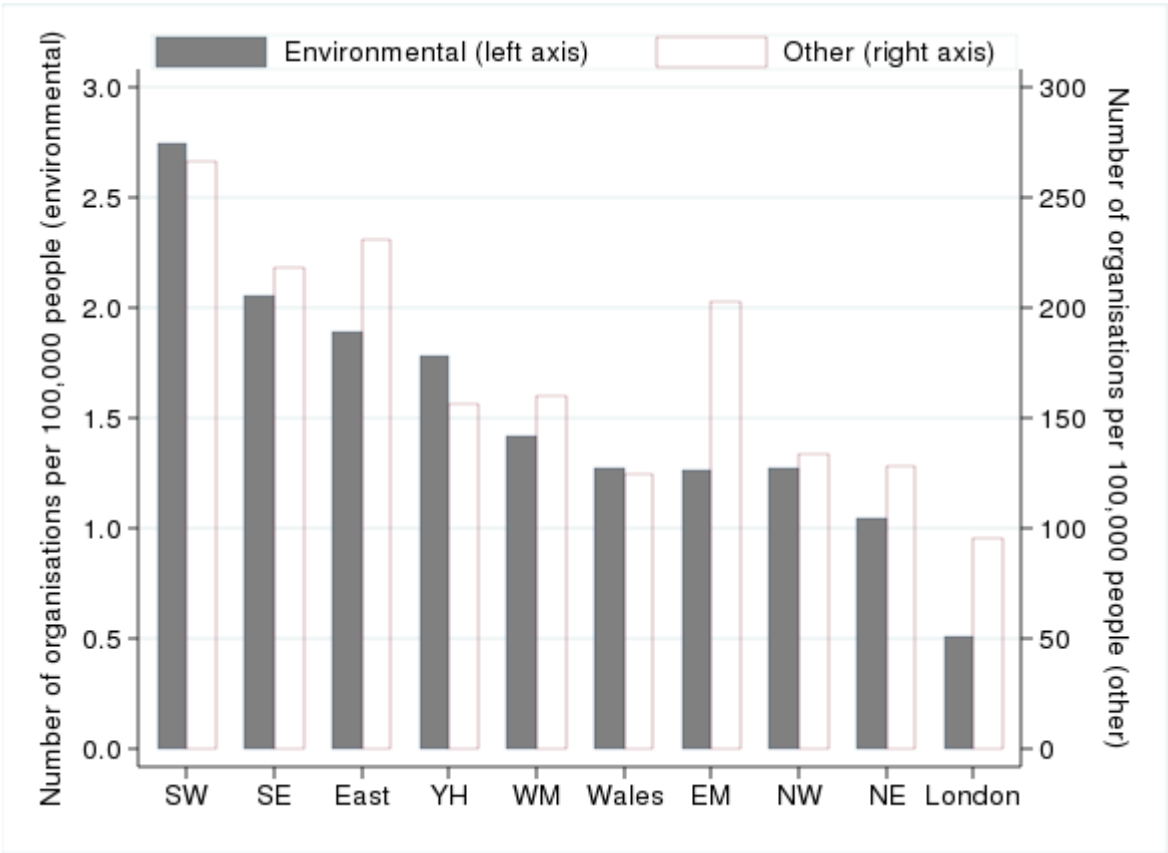


Source: analysis of CCR data.

Note: PU – Predominantly Urban; SR – Significantly Rural; PR – Predominantly Rural.

Figure 14 examines differences in the prevalence of local primarily-environmental charities according to region. These differences to a large extent reflect differences in the level of rurality between different regions. Those regions that have a relatively high prevalence of charities in general also tend to have a relatively high prevalence of environmental organisations. The East Midlands and London are particularly distinctive in having a lower prevalence of environmental charities than might be expected given the relatively high number of other organisations in the region.

Figure 14: Number of organisations per 100,000 people according to region by type of organisation (environmental/other) [Note: only organisations working within one specific local authority considered]

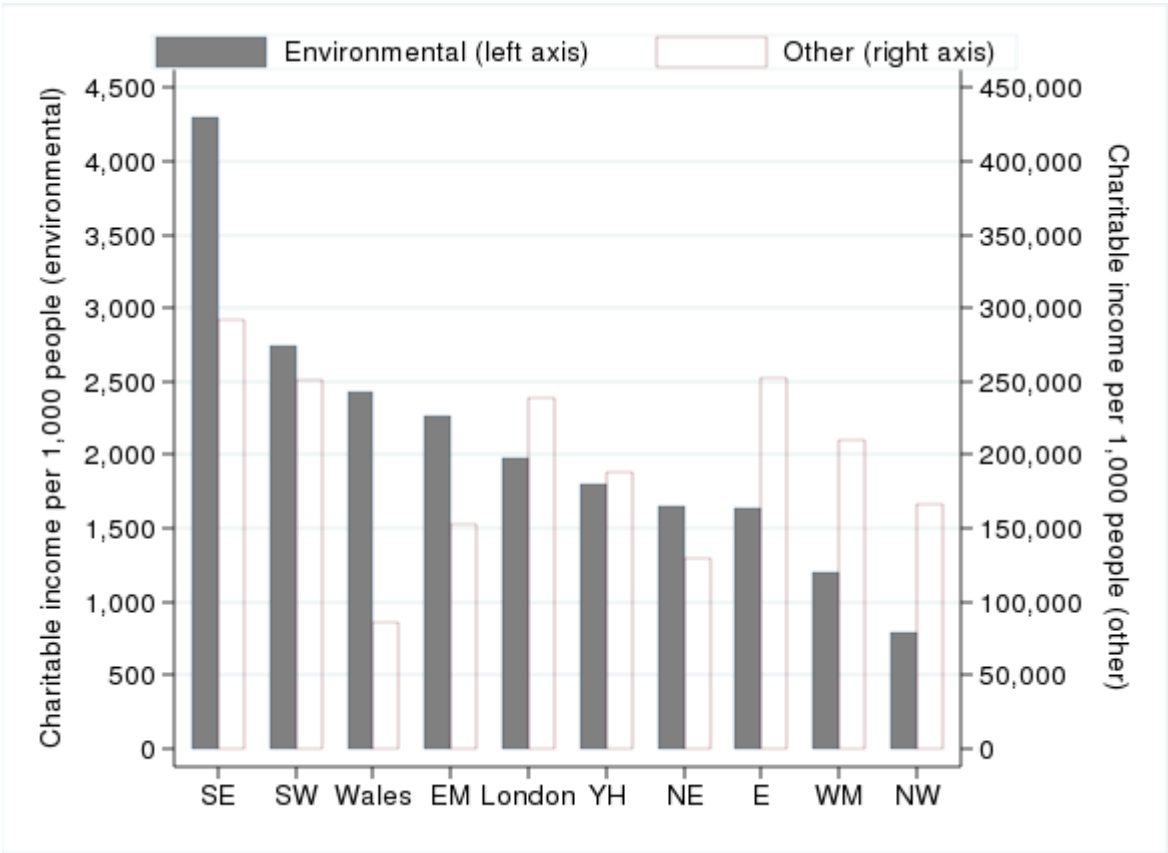


Source: analysis of CCR data.

Note: E – East; EM – East Midlands; NE – North East; NW – North West; SE – South East; SW – South West; WM – West Midlands; YH – Yorkshire and Humber.

The East Midlands is less distinctive, however, when considering total income rather than numbers of local environmental charities (Figure 15). Wales has a higher level of income to environmental organisations than anticipated given the income of other charities, while London, the East of England, the West Midlands and the North West have a lower level of income amongst local environmental charities than might be expected.¹³ Note that if organisations that crossed more than one local authority had been included in the analysis, the location of the headquarters of the National Trust in the South West and a number of large environmental charities in London would have skewed the data significantly.

Figure 15: Total charitable income per 1,000 people according to region by type of organisation (environmental/other) [Note: only organisations working within one specific local authority considered]



Source: analysis of CCR data.

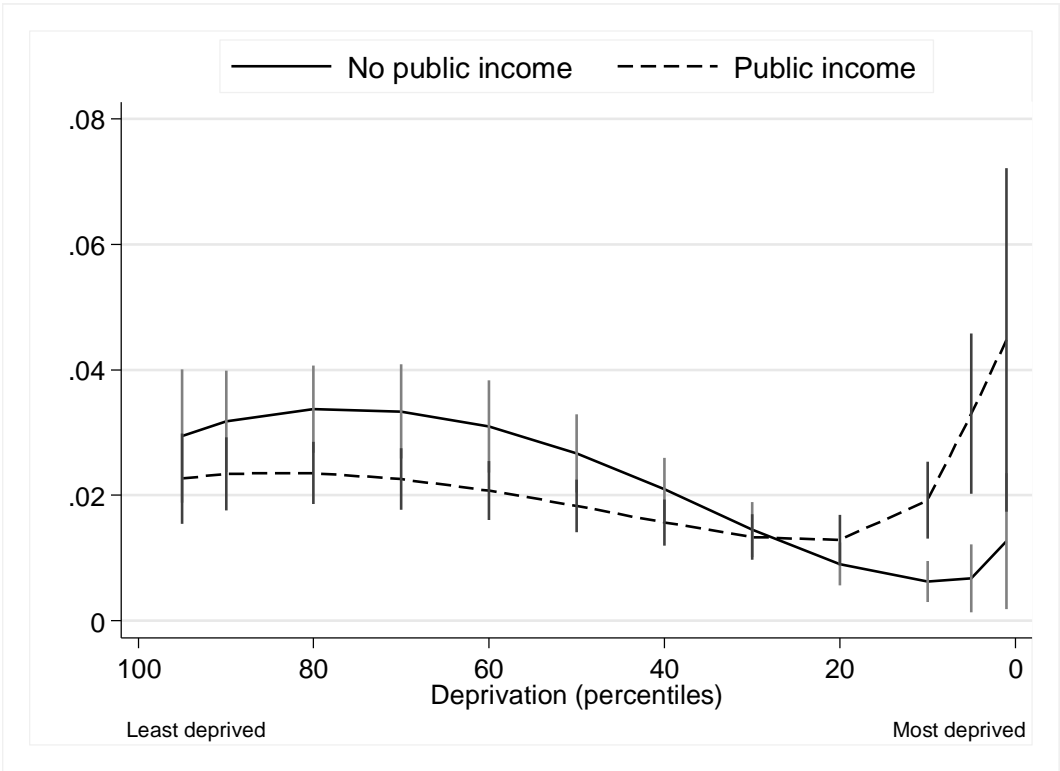
Note: E – East; EM – East Midlands; NE – North East; NW – North West; SE – South East; SW – South West; WM – West Midlands; YH – Yorkshire and Humber.

Neighbourhood scale: the socio-economics of local environmental activity (NSTSO data)

Returning to the NSTSO data allows even more fine-grained geographical analysis of the prevalence rate of local environmental TSOs per 1,000 people (i.e. organisations working at the neighbourhood scale). We compare the prevalence rate of these organisations between less deprived and more deprived local areas (measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation at the Lower Super Output Area level;¹⁴ for more details about the method, see Clifford (2012)). This is possible since, unlike the CCR data, the NSTSO data allows us to identify those organisations specifically working at a neighbourhood scale, rather than across a wider area like a local authority. Of the approximately 7,600 TSOs that make up the broad environmental third sector, we estimate that around 2,200 operate at the neighbourhood scale.

Figure 16 shows how these neighbourhood organisations are distributed across the country. The sample sizes become quite small when examining neighbourhood environmental organisations disaggregated by level of local area deprivation and receipt of public income, but the overall message is clear – in more deprived areas, there are more organisations that receive some public income than those that do not; in less deprived areas, the reverse is the case. And, in total, considering the sum of organisations irrespective of whether they receive income from government, there tend to be more environmental neighbourhood organisations in less deprived areas than in more deprived areas. These findings parallel the patterns for neighbourhood organisations in general, and are consistent with a key element of ‘voluntary sector failure’, resource insufficiency, and the important role of government in ensuring resources are available in areas of particular need (Clifford 2012). If the current trajectory of withdrawal of public sector funding for third sector activity continues, it would appear as if it will be environmental activity in areas of deprivation that are more likely to suffer; areas where there is already less voluntary activity (Mohan and Bullock 2012).

Figure 16: Prevalence of local voluntary sector environmental organisations, non-publicly funded and publicly funded, by percentiles of area level deprivation



Source: analysis of NSTSO (2008).

Note: y-axis: prevalence (per 1,000 people); x-axis: percentiles of area deprivation.

Spikes represent 95% confidence intervals.

Discussion: a distinctive area of third sector activity?

From our analysis of the Charity Commission Register and National Survey of Third Sector Organisations, can any claims of 'distinctiveness' be made for the environmental third sector in England (whether in terms of the minimal or maximal definition)? Arguably there are at least four aspects of environmental activity that distinguish it from other parts of the third sector. Here we also introduce data from the United States which gives us a sense of whether these patterns of distinctiveness may extend beyond England: we draw comparison with Straughan and Pollak's (2008) analysis of environmental non-profits¹⁵ that have registered with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) (over the period 1989-2005). This comparison can only be indicative because of the over 26,000 organisations on the IRS database whose primary mission was conservation and protection of the natural and human environment, only 30 per cent filed a return, providing details of their finances and activities. Organisations with annual revenues below \$25,000 are not required to return (Straughan and Pollak's (2008) analysis of environmental non-profits¹⁶ that have registered with the Internal Revenue Service (Straughan and Pollak 2008: 2). Thus Straughan and Pollak's sample is more heavily biased towards larger organisations.¹⁷

First, data from the CCR suggests that the environmental third sector (in this case, charities) remains very small in terms of numbers of organisations (just over 1%) and income (2.6%) compared to other elements of the third sector. The data from the US is similar: environmental organisations make up less than 2 per cent of all non-profits registered with the IRS (Straughan and Pollak's 2008: 15). The Environmental Funders Network reports comparable data for the philanthropic support of environmental TSOs in the UK, suggesting: 'Given the increasing threats to human well-being from environmental problems and the opportunities for embedding sustainability in government policy, business practice and the public mindset, this figure remains disappointingly low' (Cracknell et al. 2012: 4). While our analysis suggests that the proportion of charities working in the environmental field has increased in recent years, it remains a relatively small number, potentially weakening the widely held policy perspective that the third sector 'holds the key to mobilising public concern, behaviour and political mobilisation, and to success in the struggle against climate change' (Hale 2010: 264).

Second, in relation to the distribution of income, there is a higher proportion of environmental charities with an income of over £1 million as compared to other fields of activity. And within that group of wealthy organisations, there are some extremely high-income charities, not least the National Trust. Again there is a comparable distribution of income in the US, with 69% of revenue going to 3% of organisations (Straughan and Pollak 2008: 2). The sector is also distinctive in terms of income sources: drawing from the NSTSO, we find that environmental organisations are more reliant on membership fees as compared to non-environmental organisations, for which donations and fundraising are a more important source of income. Here there is a difference between England and the US: in the latter, fees and services for goods and donations are the largest two areas of funding for environmental non-profits (Straughan and Pollak 2008: 17). But again there is similarity in relation to the increasing income of environmental organisations over time in both countries, although as we have noted, from a very low base when compared to the total income of the third sector.

A third area of distinction is in relation to local environmental activity. Measured through the CCR, charitable activity and income at the local level across the third sector is skewed towards rural action;

but this is even more pronounced amongst primarily-environmental charities. Environmental action is typically framed in relation to rural activities such as resource conservation. The same is true in the US: the three areas of activity most commonly checked by organisations registering with the IRS are natural resource, water and land conservation. The traditional concerns of the environmental sector remain dominant, raising questions as to its capacity to respond to newer challenges such as climate change and urban sustainability (c.f. Cracknell et al. 2012).

And finally, arguably the area where the environmental third sector is particularly distinctive is in relation to the roles and functions it plays. Here comparisons with the US are difficult to make because of the difference in data collection. In the early part of this paper we raised the concern that academic studies have been focused primarily on politically-oriented social movement actors at the expense of other organisations within the environmental third sector. This criticism still holds, but it is significant that advocacy is the most common function of environmental TSOs. And this focus on advocacy is a clear differentiating characteristic from the broader third sector. Similarly environmental TSOs are much more likely to be involved in non-public service, community development and capacity building across the third sector. In terms of its actions, the environmental third sector is distinctive.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is two-fold. The first is methodological: a contribution to the quantitative analysis of data on the third sector. The study aims to act as an exemplar of how two very different databases (CCR and NSTSO) can be exploited to provide an overview of a particular field of activity or industry. Our focus has been environmental TSOs: the challenges we have faced and sought to overcome can inform future analysis of other fields of activity across the third sector.

Beyond this methodological contribution, we provide a much-needed analysis of data on the shape and impact of environmental third sector organisations. Current studies of the environmental third sector tend to be skewed towards qualitative analysis of certain types of activity, in particular overtly political protests and campaigns. Our aim has been to provide more systematic quantitative analysis of the nature of the environmental third sector as a whole. The characteristics of the available datasets (CCR and NSTSO) have meant that this analysis has had to be limited to registered TSOs. We can only speculate how inclusion of the 'below-the-radar', non-registered organisations would have affected the analysis: it would certainly have increased the proportion of organisations working at the local and neighbourhood levels. This caveat aside, the analysis has generated interesting insights into the nature of environmental organisations. There is enough evidence to suggest that the environmental third sector in England is indeed distinctive when compared to the rest of the third sector.

Endnotes

¹ The term 'third sector' is notoriously difficult to define given the scope of action and organisations beyond the private and public sector (themselves contested concepts). Other terms such as the voluntary sector and non-for-profit sector are more limited in the range of organisations they include and are sub-sets of the broader third sector.

² While not required to register, a number of Charities below £5,000 choose to register and make a return.

³ Our thanks to Angelica Finnegan for undertaking this laborious but necessary task.

⁴ The procedure is much more accurate for 5200 Animal Protection where some 75 per cent of charities were correctly specified. In comparison, for 5100 Environment only 45 per cent of charities were correctly specified because of the reliance on the lower quality routines to identify organisations. Clearly some charities (e.g. animal protection) are much easier to identify through their name and objects. The listing of environmental charities and data on the effectiveness of the different NCVO routines is available from the authors.

⁵ We estimate figures for 2008 from the CCR to ensure comparability with the NSTSO. Since that point, the Charity Commission has undertaken a periodic update of the register, deregistering inactive organisations. At the beginning of 2010 there were around 1740 organisations within the environmental subgroup.

⁶ This is similar to the estimate that 3 per cent of all philanthropic activity of around 150 UK-based trusts and foundations in the UK is targeted at environmental activities (Cracknell et al. 2012).

⁷ There is a significant difference between the 9th largest primarily-environmental charity with an income of around £28 million and the 10th at just below £18 million. There are 19 environmental charities in total with an income above £10 million in 2008.

⁸ A small proportion of this increase in the number of smaller organisations may reflect the increased coverage of our data with time – a higher proportion (an estimated 90 per cent) of organisations report income figures in the later years of the panel than in earlier years (an estimated 70 per cent).

⁹ Note that this need not mean that the funding source represents the majority of an organisation's income. The categories used in the survey are: 'donations and fundraising activities'; 'membership fees/subscriptions'; 'grants from non-statutory bodies'; 'national lottery (e.g. Big Lottery)'; 'grants or core funding (including Service Level Agreements)'; 'earned income from contracts'; 'earned income from trading including retail'; 'income from investments'; 'none of these'; 'don't know'. Figures 7, 8 and 9 are based on these categories.

¹⁰ The categories used in the NSTSO were designed to distinguish between 'voluntary' and 'earned' income sources. In practice, this is sometimes difficult to operationalise, as in the case of income from membership. As the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) (Charity Commission, 2005) recognises, where charities receive membership subscriptions, sometimes 'these may be in the nature of a gift'; sometimes 'they may effectively buy services or access to certain privileges'. The SORP recommends that 'where the substance of the subscription is that of a gift, the incoming resource should be recognised on the same basis as a donation'; where 'the subscription purchases the right to

services or benefits, the incoming resource should be recognised as the service or benefit is provided'. However, the NSTSO does not distinguish between different kinds of membership income in this way. Instead, organisations are asked to simply indicate whether or not they receive income from 'membership fees/subscriptions'. This conflates different kinds of income within the same category, though the comparisons between the environmental subsector and other charitable subsectors should be robust unless there is any systematic tendency for environmental organisations to record their membership income in a different way to other organisations in their responses to the NSTSO. For a discussion of the difficulties of defining 'membership' amongst some environmental third sector organisations, see Bosso (2005) and Rootes and Miller (2001).

¹¹ Estimation was necessary since the information on staff and volunteers is banded (categorised) to preserve the anonymity of organisations. Since the last category is open-ended (101 or more for FTE; 501 or more for volunteers), the estimates of total FTE employees and of volunteers are strongly sensitive to the choice of a representative value for this open-ended category. For further details see Geyne-Rajme and Mohan (2012)

¹² Estimates of total income can be sensitive to the presence of a small number of large organisations within a particular local authority – the presence of the National Trust in Swindon for example.

¹³ The analysis offered by the Environmental Funders Network in *Where the Green Grants Went 5* suggests that 'the regions receiving the smallest share of grants relative to their population size are the East Midlands, West Midlands, Northern Ireland, and Yorkshire and the Humber' (Cracknell et al. 2012: 19).

¹⁴ Lower Super Output Areas have an average population of 1,500 people. The index of multiple deprivation is a summary of seven domains of deprivation relating to: income; employment; health and disability; education, health and training; barriers to housing and services; crime; and characteristics of the local environment. It is a measure of deprivation, such that the least deprived areas should not be labelled as necessarily the most affluent, and it is designed to be more discriminating of deprivation than non-deprivation. See Noble et al. (2006) for more information.

¹⁵ The term 'non-profit' is widely used in the US where the 'nondistribution constraint' is the criteria often appealed to in distinguishing the non-profit sector (Salamon and Anheier 1997).

¹⁶ The term 'non-profit' is widely used in the US where the 'nondistribution constraint' is the criteria often appealed to in distinguishing the non-profit sector (Salamon and Anheier 1996).

¹⁷ See Brulle (2000), Bosso (2005) and Dowie (1995) for earlier attempts to analyse the US 'environmental movement', with a focus on the larger national advocacy organisations. Brulle also draws on the IRS.

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About the 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.

Third Sector Research Centre, Park House, 40 Edgbaston Park Road,
University of Birmingham, Birmingham, B15 2RT

Tel: 0121 414 3086

Email: info@tsrc.ac.uk

www.tsrc.ac.uk

Environment

Whilst environmental protests have had a big voice in recent years, we have relatively little knowledge about the broader third sector's relationship with the environment. This project will examine the activities and contributions of a broad range of environmental organisations, as well as the extent to which wider elements of the third sector are responding to environmental challenges, in particular climate change. The project focuses on three main elements: mapping the environmental third sector; mainstreaming the environment; and promoting sustainable living. More information can be found on the TSRC website.

Contact the author

David Clifford

d.clifford@tsrc.ac.uk

02380 594442

Graham Smith

g.smith@westminster.ac.uk



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