

Edited by

Marjorie Mayo,  
Zoraida Mendiwelo-Bendek  
and Carol Packham

# COMMUNITY RESEARCH for COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



## Community Research for Community Development

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Edited by

Marjorie Mayo

*Goldsmiths, University of London, UK*

Zoraida Mendiwelo-Bendek

*University of Lincoln, UK*

and

Carol Packham

*Manchester Metropolitan University, UK*

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First published 2013 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN 978–1–137–03473–1

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

*To the memory of Jenny Harris, inspirational theatre maker and dynamic community activist, who sadly died before the chapter that she planned to co-author with Chrissie Tiller was finished; and to all those who are promoting community research and community development for social justice in Britain and beyond*

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to express our appreciations and warmest thanks to our partners and to all those in communities who have contributed in their varying ways. Although we are not listing you individually, since there are so many of you, you know who you are. Thank you so very much for sharing your perceptions, your ideas and your experiences so patiently.

We would also like to thank our respective universities for their advice and support. This includes our thanks for the practical support that we received in the final stages of preparing this book for publication.

Last, but of course not least, we would like to express our gratitude to the Research Cluster's funders, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Office for Civil Society and the Barrow Cadbury Trust. Without their support, it would not have been possible to undertake these research projects via university–community partnerships.

## Contributors

**Hannah Berry** is a PhD student at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, with previous experience as a community activist and expertise in ethical investment. She is a director of the GAP Unit that carries out Freirian practice particularly with groups of women.

**Juan Camilo Cock** has been working with Praxis and with the Migrants' Rights Network as a researcher. He has recently completed a PhD on the spaces occupied by Colombian migrants living in London.

**Adam Dinham** is a professor at Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. He has worked as a social worker and community worker and now directs the Faiths and Civil Society Unit at Goldsmiths, focusing on linking research, policy and practice in faith-based social action.

**Rebecca Herron** is a reader at the University of Lincoln, UK. Her research interests include community organisation and community operational research. She has developed and tutored for short courses in Active Citizenship and Community Leadership at the university.

**Daniella Holland** is a PhD student at Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. She has extensive experience in voluntary work and has been carrying out research with the South Wales Workers Educational Association.

**Hannah Jones** completed a PhD on community cohesion at the Centre for Community Research, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. Her previous experience includes policy research in local government. She is currently a research associate in the Department of Social Policy and Criminology at the Open University, UK.

**Vaughan Jones** is the founding Chief Executive of Praxis and an experienced community worker, working in the areas of homelessness, migration and community development. He has a strong interest

in popular education methodologies rooted in the work of Paulo Freire.

**Marjorie Mayo** is Emeritus Professor at Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. Her research interests have included active learning for active citizenship and community research for community development.

**Zoraida Mendiwelson-Bendek** is Senior Research Fellow in Citizenship at the University of Lincoln, UK. Her research interests include community organisation and community-based research for active citizenship learning. She is chair of the Take Part Network.

**Green Nyoni** is a PhD student at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. He is former chair of Manchester Refugee Support Network, with wide experience of work on a voluntary basis in the refugee and people seeking asylum communities.

**Carol Packham** is Director of the Community Audit and Evaluation Centre in the Faculty of Education, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. Research specialisms include active citizenship, volunteering, community learning and participatory and emancipatory research approaches.

**Gabi Recknagel** is a PhD student at Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. She has worked in adult education and in the voluntary and community sector, including working on citizenship learning initiatives.

**Alison Rooke** is Lecturer in Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. Her research includes a range of evaluations on issues of community development, citizenship, participatory planning and participatory arts.

**Chrissie Tiller** works as a practitioner, researcher, facilitator, speaker, advisor and teacher in arts, culture and across sectors, alongside her role as Director of the MA in Participatory Arts at Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. Her work focuses on the role of the arts and culture in transnational and intercultural contexts.

**Jane Watts** works for the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). She has recently completed a PhD in adult education focusing on partnership learning and long-term unemployment.

**Robin Wright** is Director of Sport at the University of Lincoln and Vice Chair of Lincolnshire Volunteer Sports Forum. He has been the regional Vice Chair for voluntary sector and a member of Sport England's Volunteer Research Group.

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## **Part I**

# **Promoting Active Citizenship: Learning from Experiences and Third Sector Evaluation**

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# 1

## Community Development, Community Organising and Third Sector–University Research Partnerships

*Marjorie Mayo, Zoraida Mendiwolso-Bendek  
and Carol Packham*

### **The aims of this book**

This book sets out to explore the contributions that research can provide, supporting Third Sector organisations concerned with community development.

Whilst policy makers have been highlighting the opportunities for civil society, in the current policy context, critics have been pointing to the extent of the challenges. How can research – and research-based evidence – contribute to the development of strategic responses to these potential opportunities and only too present challenges?

Active citizenship, community organising and community development have emerged as topical, if highly controversial, policy concerns over the past decade or so. The terminology may have been contested and varied, but common strands can be identified, despite some shifts of emphasis and approach, over time. Community participation and empowerment featured prominently within New Labour's policy agendas, for instance. And community organising and community empowerment have featured in the policy statements of the Coalition government, since its formation in 2010. Drawing upon the learning approaches developed by both Paulo Freire (Freire, 1972) and Saul Alinsky (Alinsky, 1971, 1979), the programme, to train community organisers as part of the Big Society agenda, aims to provide the means for people – 'above all those who are most excluded from the inner circles of power and privilege – to combine and be counted, to discover

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their ability to identify those changes which will mean most to them and, on their own terms, take action to tackle vested interests' (Locality, 2010: 5).

This emphasis upon devolving power and promoting people's own self-activity, however, has not been without its critics. As Bauman amongst others has argued, neoliberal strategies have aimed to promote efficiency and choice by reducing the role of the state whilst expanding the roles of private and other non-statutory service providers (with the voluntary and community sectors as the acceptable faces of policies that have actually been more concerned with increasing marketisation). But the results have been proving problematic, according to the critics, with increasing pressures on civil society organisations, struggling to cope with the consequences. Despite the rhetoric of choice and empowerment, communities, and individuals within communities, are actually being expected to seek individual 'biographical solutions to systemic contradictions' (Bauman, 2011: 53). In the view of the New Economics Foundation (NEF), for example, '[t]he "Big Society" idea goes hand in hand with deep cuts in public spending' and goes on to argue that these cuts 'are only feasible alongside a strategy for shifting responsibility away from the state – to individuals, small groups, charities, philanthropists, local enterprise and big business'. Civil society will be left, NEF concludes, 'to fill the gaps left by public services, providing support to increasing numbers of poor, jobless, insecure and unsupported individuals' (NEF, 2012).

The likely future success or otherwise of Big Society initiatives is beyond the remit of this particular book. The point to emphasise here is simply that there are major challenges for civil society in the current context, whatever the policy makers suggest to the contrary, in terms of the potential opportunities to be grasped. In this increasingly marketised policy framework, organisations concerned with community development need to be more effective than ever, bidding for resources and tendering for contracts, but without losing sight of their distinctive values and missions in the process.

So how can research provide support to organisations facing these challenges? This collection explores these issues, in the context of programmes to strengthen Third Sector organisations' own capacities to undertake research and evaluation for themselves. What lessons can be drawn from such programmes? How might research contribute to voluntary and community sector organisations and groups, in their efforts to survive and to develop strategically for the future? And how might this all strengthen community development, social solidarity, community

cohesion and active citizenship more generally? As Third Sector organisations face increasing pressures to meet social needs – with decreasing public resources – in the coming period, the ability to provide research-based evidence to demonstrate the value of their outcomes for potential funders can be expected to become ever more significant. And so can the pressures to make the most effective use of resources, thinking strategically and building alliances with organisations with similar values, working towards transformative goals for the longer term.

This book provides a series of critical reflections on the lessons to be learned from varying initiatives – identifying examples of promising practices; building the Third Sector's research capacity; promoting, exploring and developing participatory approaches to research and developing partnerships between Third Sector organisations and researchers for the future. There are lessons to be shared here, both from British experiences and beyond, reflecting upon international experiences of university–community research partnerships, as the final chapter considers, for comparison.

The book concludes by identifying promising practices for the future with implications for policy and practice as well as implications for strengthening Third Sector research as part of the processes of community development for the future.

### **The outline of this chapter, more specifically**

This first chapter situates the book in the context of contemporary debates on community development. This includes reflections on the influence of the writings of Paul Freire and Saul Alinsky, who have both been cited as influences on policies to promote active citizenship and community organising (under previous governments as well as under the Coalition government). Paulo Freire's work has particular relevance here as a key influence, in addition, on the development of participatory approaches to research.

This introductory section provides the background for a summary discussion of public policies towards civil society and the role of the Third Sector, over the past decade or so, focusing upon policies to promote active citizenship, community participation, social cohesion and social solidarity. This sets the context within which to introduce the Third Sector Research Capacity Building Programme, launched by the New Labour government via the Economic and Social Research Council with support from the Cabinet Office – Office for Civil Society and the Barrow Cadbury Trust in 2008. This was the programme that supported

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the research projects that provide much of the evidence, which is to be considered in subsequent chapters.

### Contemporary debates

The discussion of the varying ways in which the writings of Paulo Freire and Saul Alinsky have been interpreted/misinterpreted needs to be set in the context of contemporary debates as these have been related to community development more generally. Community development has been and continues to be a contested field, characterised by varying definitions and competing theoretical perspectives, aims and objectives (Mayo, 2008). The term 'community' has been problematic enough to define, and so has the associated term 'community development'. Similar debates have been taking place when it comes to considering related terms such as 'community participation' (Hickey and Mohan, 2004), 'community empowerment' and 'community cohesion' (Ratcliffe and Newman, 2011) along with 'community education' to promote learning for 'active citizenship' (Mayo and Annette, 2010). These are terms that have been used in differing ways, covering varieties of underlying meanings, aims and objectives.

As Craig and others have argued, community development has 'always had an ambiguous nature' (Craig *et al.*, 2011: 7). It has been described as a broad church, from state-sponsored schemes to small-scale, poorly resourced, but independent community action. Community development, the authors continued, was 'not only a practice, involving skills, a knowledge base and a strong value base. It is also a goal, self-evidently the development of communities, in the context of social justice agendas, notwithstanding the different interests at work in defining what this is all about and why it matters' (Craig *et al.*, 2011: 7) – including the differing interests at work, defining the concept of social justice itself (Craig *et al.*, 2008).

Without going into detail here, the key points to emphasise from these varying debates are as follows. Community development has been promoted by governments, top-down, to manage social change without fundamentally disturbing the interests of the powerful. And it has been promoted top-down to facilitate self-help in order to legitimise reductions in service provision, shifting responsibilities from the public sector to the voluntary and community sectors, whilst opening up new spaces for the private market.

Alternatively, however, community development and community action initiatives have also been linked with progressive agendas to meet

social needs, promoting co-operation, equalities and social and environmental justice from the bottom-up. And finally, as Taylor has also argued, community development may be promoted in ways that move beyond the 'top-down'/'bottom-up' dichotomy, working both sides of the equation. The underlying aim may be to strengthen democratic processes and promote social justice agendas, enabling the voices of the most disadvantaged to be heard more effectively, whilst setting out to transform rather than to bypass or even undermine the structures of public service provision (Taylor, 2011).

There are parallels with discussions on community participation, community engagement and active citizenship. Have programmes been developed top-down, in the context of neoliberal agendas to manage social change more effectively, facilitating co-operation with the reduction of public service provision in times of increasing social needs? Have initiatives to promote active citizenship been developed from alternative perspectives such as the perspectives of libertarians, suspicious of the state and so concerned to strengthen the role of civil society in contrast? Or have programmes been developed with the aim of working both sides of the equation to build 'a more active and engaged civil society and a more responsive and effective state that can deliver needed public services' (Gaventa, 2004: 270)? As subsequent chapters demonstrate, these debates have particular relevance in the current policy context.

### **Differing interpretations of the specific influences of the writings of Paulo Freire and Saul Alinsky**

Given the contested meanings associated with these slippery concepts, it is perhaps unsurprising that Paulo Freire and Saul Alinsky, two key influences on community development, community education and community organising, have both been claimed as authoritative influences by policy makers from a range of different perspectives. In summary, Paulo Freire's approach to community education and experiential learning aimed to enable oppressed people to develop a critical understanding of their situation, questioning previously accepted ideas in order to develop strategies for social change, actively engaging with others, collectively, to transform oppressive social relationships.

The learning was to be based upon processes of problem-posing and dialogue, rather than treating people like empty vessels, waiting to have information and ideas poured into them. Once people had developed a critical understanding of their situation, through these processes of

problem-posing and dialogue, Freire argued, they would be in a position to develop strategies for social transformation (Freire, 1972). This was about making change possible.

As Ledwith and Springett, amongst others, have demonstrated, when Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was first published in English in 1972, it had an immediate impact on community development, as well as impacting upon related areas such as adult community education, adult literacy and popular health campaigns (Ledwith and Springett, 2010). His thinking was, in addition, influential in the development of participatory action research, starting from people's existing knowledge and concerns and working with them collaboratively, to develop the knowledge and critical understanding – knowledge as power for transformative action.

Freire has had his critics, from a range of perspectives, including Marxists critical of his emphasis upon changing people's consciousness rather than emphasising the need for structural change (Coben, 1995; Holst, 2002). Feminists have also been critical of the lack of gender analysis, at least in his early writings, as he himself recognised in his later writings (Freire and Shor, 1987). But despite such criticisms, Freire's ideas have been appropriated (and sometimes misappropriated) very widely, with policy makers from very varying perspectives claiming to be basing their programmes on Freirian approaches, as the following section illustrates.

There are parallels here with the claims to be made about the Freirian basis for a range of participatory action research initiatives. Participatory Action Research has been developed as a set of tools, enabling people to be actively involved in generating knowledge about their own conditions and how these can best be transformed (Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991). Over the past quarter century or more, participatory research methods have been applied in Africa, Asia and Latin America, as well as in the Global North (Tandon, 2005). Through the application of innovative methods, including the use of popular theatre (Boal, 1979), experts' monopoly of knowledge has been challenged, and alternative approaches to research have been developed. Subsequent chapters provide contemporary illustrations of the potential value of research in terms of producing knowledge and critical understanding underpinning strategies for community development. But participatory approaches to research have also been the subject of critical debate just as they have also been appropriated and misapplied, participatory research being easier said, perhaps, than done (Brock and Pettit, 2007; Newman, 2008). As subsequent chapters also illustrate, researchers committed to

participatory approaches need to manage the tensions inherent in their roles, as critical friends.

Meanwhile there are, in addition, parallels to be drawn with the work of Saul Alinsky, who has also been claimed as a key influence by policy makers and practitioners, from a variety of perspectives. Like community development approaches (Craig *et al.*, 2008) and Freirian approaches more generally (Coben, 1995; Holst, 2002), Alinsky-based approaches to community organising have been characterised as inherently controversial. In brief, Alinsky's pragmatic style of organising, as he himself developed it – often involving the imaginative use of conflict or the threat of conflict – focused upon mobilising people-power. His *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals* (Alinsky, 1971) sets this all out explicitly from the start. The rules were intended to provide the basis 'for a pragmatic attack' (Alinsky, 1971: xviii), offering a practical guide to the skills required in the here and now for building effective organisations and alliances.

Alinsky's approach has been taken up in a number of ways in recent times, including through London Citizens' Living Wage campaigns, for example. But Alinsky's style of organising has also been the subject of some criticism. In particular, it has been suggested that Alinsky was a populist, distrustful of political ideologies, 'with relatively little to say about what he was "for" on specific issues such as equality and human rights' (Eversley, 2009). Other critics have raised similar questions about how radical Alinsky's approach to community organising has actually been, arguing that it has been characterised by an 'absence of analysis of how inequality is reproduced and maintained through the existing economic and social structures and processes' (Mills and Robson, 2010: 13).

Although there are similarities between them, there are also significant differences between Freirian-based models and Alinsky-based models (although both approaches have been interpreted in varying ways in practice, differences that are beyond the scope of this chapter to explore in further detail). The analysis of the underlying causes of social problems and social injustices was central to Freire's approach – education as the basis for long-term strategies for social justice. Alinsky's approach, in contrast, has been perceived as being more centrally concerned with organising to attain achievable targets in the here and now. He emphasised the importance of people's self-organisation to achieve this. And he was generally sceptical about the role of the state, refusing to have any part in public programmes such as the US 'War on Poverty' (although he was less than entirely consistent on this, as it turned out in practice).

This issue of the role of the state – and anti-statism – would seem to have particular relevance in view of the fundamental challenges posed by the Coalition government. At a time when inequalities have been rising whilst poverty in Britain is predicted to rise, and public spending to be cut back by 2013 to a lower proportion of GDP than that in the United States (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker, 2011), anti-statism risks reinforcing the view that the responsibility for responding to increasing social needs and widening social inequalities should lie with civil society in general, and with active citizens more specifically. There are issues here for further research, as the following section on the policy context illustrates in more detail.

### **Policy contexts**

Before moving on to outline the Third Sector Research Capacity Building Programme that underpinned the research that provides the basis for the chapters that follow, the underlying policy contexts need outlining more generally. Previous governments have launched programmes to intervene in communities for a variety of purposes (Taylor, 2011). These have included efforts to reduce public expenditure and increase civic involvement to address a range of social, economic and political challenges, such as crime, sustainable development and the provision of care. There have been programmes to increase volunteering – for example, programmes to engage communities in service planning and service delivery and programmes to encourage Third Sector organisations to deliver public services themselves.

These varying approaches to public policy in the community can be traced back over the past decade or more. Under New Labour governments, for example, there were initiatives to draw the voluntary and community sectors into an expanded role in the delivery of public services. There were, in parallel, capacity building programmes such as ‘ChangeUp’ and ‘Futurebuilders’ to strengthen the voluntary and community sectors’ capacities to secure contracts to deliver public services. In this way, governments aimed to promote broader public service modernisation agendas, promoting competition and choice to provide services more cost effectively.

Public service modernisation agendas have been highly contentious of course (Clarke *et al.*, 2000, 2006; Page, 2007; Powell, 2008). Rather than attempting to provide a summary of the debates that have surrounded these issues, the point to emphasise here is simply this. Public service modernisation agendas have posed major challenges for the voluntary

and community sector, just as they have posed major challenges for the public sector more generally. Instead of receiving grants based upon relationships of trust with funders, Third Sector organisations have had to compete for resources, demonstrating their effectiveness, providing outputs to meet specific (often centrally determined) targets. Private sector structures of management have been imported in many cases, as part of strategies to respond to the challenges of the target cultures, including the challenges involved in producing appropriate evidence for the purposes of accountability. As subsequent chapters argue, there have been significant implications in terms of the need to strengthen evaluation processes in Third Sector organisations, as a result.

Critics have argued that service delivery became increasingly prominent at the expense of the Third Sector's other roles, stimulating innovation and supporting advocacy for social change. But service delivery did not entirely dominate the policy agenda. There were also New Labour government interventions that focused more widely, including interventions to promote community engagement in public and social policy. And there were initiatives to foster social cohesion, civil renewal and active citizenship (Harris and Schlappa, 2007) initiatives with particular relevance for the issues that are to be explored in subsequent chapters.

There were common policy threads between these latter types of interventions although there were differences of emphasis too, with shifts of focus, even within particular programmes over time. Programmes to promote active citizenship began with an emphasis on active citizenship as participation and democratic engagement in the promotion of equalities, including space for campaigning on social justice issues, for example. This was a focus that shifted over time, moving towards a narrower emphasis upon citizen involvement in formal structures of governance – for example, becoming a school governor or training to become a magistrate. In addition to this, there was increasing emphasis upon the promotion of volunteering (Mayo *et al.*, 2012) with less emphasis upon advocacy and campaigning, as a result. As it has already been suggested, active citizenship has been a contested term, susceptible to differing interpretations by policy makers and by practitioners, in varying contexts, as subsequent chapters consider in more detail.

## Active learning for active citizenship

Previous governments began to develop policies to promote active citizenship by launching programmes of citizenship education in schools

and colleges. These were then followed up with programmes to engage adults in communities too. It was these community-based learning programmes that have the most direct relevance for the concerns of this particular book.

The first of these programmes, 'Active Learning for Active Citizenship' (ALAC), was launched in 2004 by the then Home Secretary, David Blunkett. This was a two-year programme, based initially in the Home Office's Civil Renewal Unit and subsequently moved to the Department for Communities and Local Government. Learning programmes were delivered via Third Sector organisations based in seven regional hubs in South Yorkshire, the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, the South West, the East Midlands, London and the Tees Valley. These hubs worked as partnerships between voluntary and community sector organisations and academic institutions that had relevant experience of adult community-based education in their regions. These included Birkbeck, University of London; Fircroft in Birmingham; Manchester Metropolitan University; the University of Lincoln; and Northern College and the Workers Education Association in South Yorkshire.

### **The Freirian approach developed through ALAC**

ALAC started from the principle that active learning for active citizenship should build upon existing knowledge and experiences of good practice. The background paper set this within an explicitly Freirian approach, aiming to facilitate the processes of learning and reflection, to enable people 'to support each other in identifying the issues that concern us, and develop the confidence and skills to make a difference to the world around us' (Woodward, 2004: 1).

Equalities issues were to be centre stage, together with the principles of valuing diversity, strengthening co-operation, social cohesion and social solidarity in the pursuit of participation for social justice. Most importantly, the learning process itself aimed to be participatory and empowering, starting from people's own perceptions of their issues and their learning priorities, negotiated in dialogue with them, rather than imposed from outside. In summary, then, learner participation was to be central at every stage in the process of

- identifying learning priorities (from people with disabilities, wanting to be able to speak up more effectively, to refugees and asylum seekers wanting to learn about their rights and how to campaign around these);

- developing the learning programme to be directly relevant to learners' interests and experiences (delivered in appropriate ways, whether via formal courses, one-off workshops or study visits, tailored to take account of the needs of those with caring responsibilities);
- delivering programmes with the active involvement of the learners, with an emphasis upon the links between knowledge, critical understanding and active citizenship in practice; and
- evaluating the programme participatively.

ALAC was externally evaluated by one of the authors of this chapter and a colleague. This evaluation used a participatory approach that included participant observation with regular feedback and dialogue. The hubs were actively involved in the production of the evaluation framework, working together to decide the research methodologies and indicators to be used. Learners too were actively involved in the research processes through a series of workshops to share reflections together across the seven hubs (Mayo and Rooke, 2006).

In the event, at least amongst the policy makers, there seemed particular interest in the quantitative outputs – how many people were volunteering, how many were participating in structures of governance (as school governors for example) and how many were progressing in terms of gaining qualifications and improving their employability. The policy focus had been shifting. But even so, there was still space for reflections on people's experiences of empowerment more widely (Mayo and Rooke, 2006). Overall, on the basis of both types of evidence, ALAC was deemed to have been sufficiently successful to warrant a second, expanded initiative, the Take Part programme.

### **Take Part: Another Freirian programme?**

This £8.7-million programme was sponsored by the Department for Communities and Local Government and ran from 2008 to 2011. Although the Take Part programme was not a direct successor to ALAC, it was built around the Take Part Network, which had been formed by the ALAC hubs themselves to maintain their links and to take forward the rebranded ALAC approach. So, like its predecessor, the Take Part programme also acknowledged the influence of Paulo Freire.

Take Part consisted of two components: the 'Pathfinders', which were to apply the learning from ALAC more widely, and the 'National Support' programme, which was to engage organisations beyond the Pathfinders and enable them to run Take Part activities. There were

initially seven 'Pathfinders' (six of them were former ALAC hubs), subsequently increased to 18, bringing in several local authorities as well as Third Sector organisations.

The Pathfinders ran a variety of learning programmes, supporting people and organisations to strengthen their knowledge and skills and gain the confidence to become more involved in structures of governance. They were, in addition, supporting people to progress to various forms of education and training (which included offering accreditation options). The regional Take Part Regional Champions complemented the work of the Pathfinders by facilitating new Take Part activities and promoting the approach more widely. The evaluation report (published shortly after the completion of the Take Part initiative in 2011 (Miller and Hatamian, 2011)) provides a detailed account of the procedures and practices involved, assessing their impact and pointing to the importance of the lessons learned for the Big Society agenda.

As with the ALAC evaluations, the framework for the Take Part evaluation was developed following consultation with the relevant stakeholders. There were focus group discussions and surveys, including research with civic activists and other participants, tracking their progress and views over the lifespan of the Take Part programme. Whilst the emphasis had shifted further over time, there turned out to have been some space still for advocacy and campaigning, for example, around young people's issues. Subsequent studies have been following up past participants, investigating Take Part's impacts more fully over time, as part of the Third Sector Research Capacity Building Programme, launched in 2008, as subsequent chapters consider in more detail.

This Third Sector Research Capacity Building Programme consisted of three different clusters of researchers, together with the Third Sector Research Centre at the University of Birmingham. The cluster with specific relevance for this particular book has focused on the theme of community-based learning for active citizenship – led from the University of Lincoln, working in partnership with Goldsmiths, University of London, Manchester Metropolitan University and the Take Part Network. Through this programme, a series of research projects have been developed in partnership with Third Sector organisations of varying sizes, with varying remits and focus. The chapters that follow draw upon these initiatives and reflect upon the findings, in terms of the ways in which research might contribute to active citizenship and to community development, social justice and social solidarity more widely.

## More recent interpretations of Freire and Alinsky's writings

Meanwhile, following the change of government in 2010, the Big Society agenda has been launched and relaunched. The initial launch actually took place before the publication of the final evaluation of the Take Part programme – despite that report's potential relevance in terms of the lessons to be learned.

Although there have been variations in terminology and shifts in the ways in which concepts have been applied (as new governments tend to rebrand previous approaches), there have been parallels. The aims of the Big Society agenda have been summarised as community empowerment, opening up public services to Third Sector as well as private sector organisations and encouraging social action, enabling people to play a more active part in society (Cabinet Office, UK Government, 2012). Within this overall framework, the Community Organisers programme that was quoted earlier aims to address issues of power and empowerment for individuals and communities that have experienced disadvantage and disempowerment in the past. And like the Take Part and ALAC programmes before it, the Community Organisers programme has drawn on the thinking of Paulo Freire for its theoretical underpinnings – but adding acknowledgements to the thinking of Saul Alinsky.

As the opening to this chapter has already indicated, this has been a controversial agenda, and particularly so in the context of the massive expenditure cuts that have been impacting on the Third Sector as well as the public sector more generally. So how can Third Sector organisations respond most effectively to the opportunities of the current policy context, whilst taking account of the challenges of increasing marketisation and public expenditure cuts? How can they develop survival strategies without losing sight of their missions? How can they build collaborative rather than competitive relationships with others who share similar values and goals, across the Third Sector and beyond? And most importantly, in relation to the concerns of this book, how can research contribute, evaluating the lessons of previous experiences and co-constructing the knowledge and the research tools with which to develop evidence-based strategies for the future?

The chapters that follow consider ways in which research has contributed to community development policy and practice in the case in question. Through these examples, selected on the basis of the

editors' own research and that of their colleagues, the book aims to illustrate issues of wider relevance for community development more generally. More specifically too, the book aims to demonstrate the relevance of research processes that are themselves rooted in community development principles, geared towards the goals of empowerment and social justice. As subsequent chapters illustrate, a range of research methods have been employed. But underpinning these varying approaches, researchers have shared common commitments to working with rather than for communities, as critical friends, envisaging community research as part of the community development process, working towards agendas for social justice.

Chapter 2 explores the research evidence for the extent to which government-funded programmes and Third Sector Programmes to promote active citizenship have been able to mobilise and empower active citizens, individually and collectively. The achievements – and the limitations – of such programmes are considered, together with the ways in which research can provide feedback to providers and other Third Sector partner organisations. Whilst research should have the capacity to enable them to strengthen and further develop their programmes for the future, however, Third Sector organisations also face the challenges of the wider policy context in the current era of austerity.

Part II of the book focuses upon issues of social inclusion, community cohesion and social solidarity. How can research enable Third Sector organisations, including faith-based organisations, to evaluate and reflect upon their impact in communities most effectively? How can critical reflection strengthen Third Sector organisations' community development work with migrants, including women migrants, refugees and asylum seekers? How can research strengthen self-organisation enabling people to make their voices heard more effectively as active citizens? And how can research contribute to the development of social solidarity between generations?

Part III turns to research evaluating the contributions that community arts, media and sports can make to community development and active citizenship. This leads into Part IV, reflecting upon research into ways of strengthening the Third Sector's independent voice overall, promoting mutual support and solidarity between different types of organisations and agencies. Whilst the research identified strategies for promoting sustainability and resilience, however, questions remained as to the future in challenging times. The concluding chapter returns to these themes, raising questions about future strategies for community research for community development more generally.

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## 2

# How Inclusive and How Empowering? Two Case Studies Researching the Impact of Active Citizenship Learning Initiatives in a Social Policy Context

*Gabi Recknagel with Daniella Holland*

The research that forms the basis for this chapter explored the extent to which government-funded and Third Sector Programmes on active citizenship have been able to mobilise and empower citizens in communities. As Chapter 1 has argued, these programmes have presented both opportunities and challenges for Third Sector organisations. There have been inherent tensions in top-down programmes, providing public resources for active citizenship learning and community development – within shifting policy contexts over time. Research could provide evidence on some of the positive contributions as well as some of the limitations of such programmes, strengthening research capacities in the Third Sector for the future, in the process.

Two Third Sector provider organisations – one a voluntary sector local infrastructure organisation, a council for voluntary service (CVS) in England, the other the Workers Educational Association in South Wales (South Wales WEA) – both agreed to participate as partners in the research process. The research explored the impact of these respective learning programmes, focusing upon the contributions of the learning to the empowerment of people as active citizens, both individually and collectively, identifying comparisons as well as contrasts as a result, taking account of their varying funding contexts. The research intended to be inclusive by giving a voice to participants and providers from different and diverse backgrounds and communities on some key policy concepts.

This chapter has two aims. The first is to reflect upon selected aspects of the findings from these two parallel case studies. The second is to consider how these research studies contributed to community development theory and practice through the inclusive and participative research processes that they adopted. The final section includes comparisons between the two research experiences themselves, raising issues about community research for community development more generally.

Methodological issues occupied a central place in these projects, as the research aimed to benefit the Third Sector organisations in a variety of ways. On the one hand, the outcomes themselves could provide robust evidence of the impact of the organisations' interventions on beneficiaries and stakeholders. This could be potentially useful in terms of convincing funders of the value of the learning in terms of promoting active citizenship and community development. In addition, the participative nature of the research processes could provide opportunities for critical reflection, strengthening organisations' capacities to operate effectively in their respective – and shifting – policy contexts. This was to be carried out interactively, with regular communications between staff, managers and the researchers involved. This is how the heads of the organisations described their reasons for supporting the research, respectively:

We want[ed] to use this research to help the framework of citizenship and the role of voluntary groups and citizens in those activities, but also to re-inform us as an organisation about areas where we can develop services, now and in the future, to meet these agendas in a framework *where we are in control*.

(Interview with CVS CEO in July 2012, emphasis added)

We wished to strengthen our case studies and our analysis of the [WEA's] work in the 21st century. [...] We were particularly keen to explore how far [our] work and the distinctive approach of the [WEA] had any impact on learners becoming more active as citizens and being empowered through their learning.

(Interview with WEA Chief Executive/General Secretary August 2012)

Finally, an additional aim was to strengthen internal research capacity, and thus to equip the organisations in the face of future demands, increasing resilience in a changing Third Sector environment. This became more critical after the change of government in 2010 within

an overall tightening of public budgets, with subsequent changes to the funding of infrastructure services for the Third Sector, and to non-vocationally specific forms of adult learning.

The chapter starts by summarising the theoretical debates and the social policy frameworks that underpinned the research contexts before explaining the methodologies used, providing reflections on the research process, summarising some of the main research findings and concluding with a discussion of the overall impact of the research in terms of the contributions to community development and empowerment with the participating organisations.

### Theoretical and social policy context

As Chapter 1 argued, since 'active citizenship' emerged in the 1980s as a policy concept, it has been viewed with some suspicion by academics, practitioners and commentators across the Western world (e.g. Jochum *et al.*, 2005). Theoretical debates on citizenship studies during the 1980s and 1990s took as their starting point, the sociological approach developed by T.H. Marshall in 1950, stressing the social dimension of citizenship as a defining feature of the modern welfare state (Marshall, 1950). Since then relationships between citizens and the state have been changing, with rights and responsibilities framed by the political traditions of liberalism, civic republicanism and communitarianism (Jochum *et al.*, 2005; Hoskins *et al.*, 2012). These set out quite different approaches. The liberal-communitarian model of citizenship emphasises volunteering and community, with minimal participation in the public sphere, aside from voting. By contrast, the civic republican model considers not only active engagement in the community, but also in the public domain and the political community to be central for society and democracy. And the critical citizenship model encourages and educates people to take social and political action in order to challenge the status quo with a view to achieving greater social justice and a redistribution of power (Jochum *et al.*, 2005; Hoskins *et al.*, 2012).

In reality, by the late 1990s, these differences had become increasingly blurred under New Labour's Third Way that attempted to square the circles of these varying approaches (Finlayson, 2003). On the one hand, New Labour continued to use 'active citizenship' in ways that connected to the 'Citizens Charters' put in place by the previous government, positing 'citizens as consumers' (Finlayson, 2003; Clarke, 2005). On the other hand meanwhile, under the influence of civic republicans, the New Labour government promoted both active citizenship and

community empowerment as part of 'civil renewal' (Blunkett, 2003). There was, for example, a cross-departmental strategy called 'Together We Can', which urged active citizens and communities to get involved to 'improve public services' (Civil Renewal Unit, 2005).

There were inherent tensions here, although the nature of these tensions shifted over time (Finlayson, 2003; Clarke, 2005). As Chapter 1 has similarly argued, the civic republican perspective gradually weakened. In spite of overall commitments to the promotion of community engagement and civil renewal, adult learning for active citizenship was reduced as a priority, for example, in favour of New Labour's priority of equipping people for the job market in an increasingly globalised economy. Third Sector organisations concerned with community-based learning and community development were faced with the dilemmas of managing these shifting tensions in practice, attempting to meet official funders' top down requirements, whilst continuing to promote active citizenship learning and community development from the bottom up.

### **The Take Part Pathfinder programme as testing ground for policies on active citizenship**

As Chapter 1 has also suggested, the Take Part Pathfinder programme in England (2009–2011) with its targeted support for active citizenship through community-based learning via 18 partnerships illustrates how first New Labour, and then the Coalition government, translated their respective views on active citizenship into social policy measures, together with the issues this created for Third Sector delivery organisations. The Take Part programme was designed to increase the skills and confidence for participation amongst citizens, particularly those from more disadvantaged communities by building on the earlier ALAC pilot from 2004 to 2006 (Active Learning for Active Citizenship, see Woodward, 2004). However, unlike the smaller scale ALAC pilot, the New Labour government this time insisted on increasing participation not only in civil society in general, but also, more specifically, in civic roles (school governors, magistrates and many roles in the police and justice systems) reinforcing its citizen governance policies. The English infrastructure organisation that is the subject of this chapter led one of the 18 local Take Part Pathfinders.

After the new Coalition government had come to power in 2010, the aims of the Take Part programme were re-written. As a result, they were more closely aligned with the rhetoric of Cameron's 'Big Society': previous references to 'community empowerment' and 'citizen influence'

were replaced with 'helping communities help themselves', promoting 'social responsibility' and encouraging people to 'take ownership of issues in their communities and in their lives' (Take Part Network, 2011: 7–8). This signalled a shift in focus away from citizens' roles in influencing (and challenging) public institutions or policy makers and towards active citizens' direct involvement in service provision in their communities, including filling the gaps left by a reduced and reconfigured Welfare State. This change in emphasis occurred during the data collection for the research, with considerable impact, as the findings illustrate.

In contrast with successive governments' shifting preferences, the organisations delivering Take Part programmes had their own views, drawing on community development approaches to interpreting the terms 'active citizens' and 'empowerment'. Similarly, the WEA had long included citizenship as a core principle (Woodward, in Mayo and Annette, 2010: 103). These interpretations viewed active citizenship as a vehicle for collective action, empowerment and social change. Rather than being the reserve of the 'well-heeled' (in time, education or resources), priority was given to empower people from disadvantaged parts of communities in an inclusive approach. By enabling people to participate and to reflect on how power imbalances affected them, they could regain a sense of citizen identity and practice, it was argued, empowered to claim rights – or, to quote Lister, 'to be' and 'to act' as a citizen (Lister, 1997; Kabeer, 2005).

At this point, it should be added that the Welsh context was somewhat different from the English policy context, with varying implications for active citizenship learning and community development. This was because devolution under New Labour had provided more scope for relatively autonomous approaches in Wales. Third Sector organisations such as the South Wales WEA were able to continue to promote active citizenship learning and community engagement with more official support than their English counterparts perhaps, as a result. Even in Wales, though, there were increasing pressures towards a more vocational focus for adult learning more generally – with correspondingly less emphasis upon active citizenship more generally.

Despite some scepticism about the real extent of the scope for maintaining community development principles then, Third Sector practitioners set about providing government sponsored active citizenship learning programmes, negotiating and attempting to manage the inherent tensions. The central research focus then was to examine whether and to what extent the organisations were able to empower people and groups as active citizens, in particular, disadvantaged groups? And what

was the extent of active citizens' actual 'power' in the context of the changing opportunities afforded by the wider policy environment?

### **Empowering and participative research methodologies**

It was important for both organisations to adopt research methodologies that were congruent with their aims, values and practices. As the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) report 'Values into Action' (Jochum and Pratten, 2008) emphasised, the sector's values are a key factor for Third Sector organisations by defining not only *what* an organisation does but also *how* it does it. Social justice, empowering people and making voices heard, as well as holistic, person-centred and participative approaches are amongst these core values that influenced the research designs.

In both organisations, the research took the form of qualitative case studies, within an epistemological framework of critical social policy and a methodological framework of feminist research. The projects constituted action research, too, since in order to stimulate organisational learning on an ongoing basis, findings were fed back into the organisations regularly, rather than all together, at the end. These participative elements allowed the organisations to adjust the research activities according to shifting internal and external priorities, not least as a result of the changes in the policy and funding directions post-2010.

Data was collected in the form of semi-structured interviews with a wide range of stakeholders (beneficiaries, internal and external stakeholders) along with the examination of project documentation and course monitoring records, together with considerable participant observation. This latter method constituted a significant part of the research, allowing the researchers to observe – and actively participate in – learning sessions, meetings, casual exchanges and events such as conferences. Additionally, the voices of external stakeholders (partners in delivery as well as policy makers) were elicited in the form of interviews, to provide their perspective on the policies or the impact of the learning programmes on the subsequent actions of 'empowered' beneficiaries. These flexible and triangulated data collection strategies, combined with a 'grounded' approach to data analysis, allowed the researchers to develop rich and contextualised understandings of how these activities were being experienced in these locations, from different angles, and also to observe the interactions between the different aspects and their combined impact on active citizenship in practice.

## Advantages and disadvantages of insider–outsider positions

Another feature common to both projects was the fact that the researchers were voluntary sector practitioners, in one case recruited from within the organisation, in the other from without. This difference had some important methodological and practical implications as it turned out. There were some unexpected outcomes, as it will be suggested subsequently, illustrating some of the potential advantages and disadvantages inherent in either position.

In terms of advantages, feminist and qualitative researchers have long considered that familiarity with the settings allows the researcher as a situated person to use their ‘inter-subjective understanding’ with the persons studied (Reinharz, 1992: 46). This enables positive and non-exploitative relationships with participants and a more rounded interpretation of data. In both organisations, this ‘inter-subjective understanding’ proved overall beneficial: in both interview and participant observation situations, it minimised the barriers between learners and the researchers, for example. Thus, learners were generally not difficult to recruit to the research, being happy to contribute their views and experiences for the benefit of the organisation. Rather than feeling exploited, participants were keen to contribute their stories, in the conversational encounter of the interviews, conducted informally – the research protocol and formal consent form notwithstanding.

Moreover, participants generally felt sufficiently at ease to provide balanced and – where appropriate – critical rather than exclusively positive, feedback. For example, some queried how far provision was actually reaching those who, they felt, ‘needed them the most’. By exchanging useful information on local opportunities and issues, the power relationship between interviewer and interviewees was further rebalanced. Many interviewees were eager to know that their contribution had actually helped the research, and some spontaneously commented about their own interview experience:

I think it is good that you have taken the time to come and look at, you know, the lives of us, and I think that is brilliant. You have taken notice and you have done write ups about it.

(WEA learner)

I think we had a really interesting discussion.

(CVS learner)

I've been sort of expressing things – I haven't found it hard.

(Comment made by a particularly shy CVS participant)

Familiarity was also achieved through immersion into the learning settings, through which the outsider-researcher in particular was able to get to know and develop relationships of trust with learners and with tutors.

The prior knowledge brought by the insider-researcher provided privileged insights into the background and development of projects over time. This enabled a nuanced and in-depth understanding of issues that were subjected to further critical analyses. The researcher's experience of previous projects enabled her to highlight the key internal struggles and constraints inherent in the delivery of centrally designed 'pilot' programmes, the impact of government rhetoric on the organisation, such as the concept of 'active citizenship' and the impact of targets and other programme priorities on outcomes.

Insider familiarity also brought multiple downsides however, although some of these could be mitigated by the researcher's reflexivity. For example, one issue to emerge concerned the legacy of previous relationships, which were hampering the early stages of data collection. In particular, there were anxieties as to whether the insider-researcher's investigation would involve critical reflections on the work of colleagues. Some staff reacted defensively by acting as gatekeepers to their learners, thwarting the observation of classes, or withholding course information. Intense reflexivity and distancing from these sometimes frustrating situations allowed the insider-researcher, in time, to realise the vulnerability of some staff members under the gaze of the researcher fearing that their professional practice would be criticised as a result. It also brought to light the unequal power relations that resulted from their respective positions within the organisation (the insider-researcher being thought to be working closely with the organisation's director). The supervisor helped the researcher by identifying this as a project finding in its own right. And as part of the flexible research process, some individuals were eventually re-interviewed at a later date, when previous tensions had had time to dissipate.

Interestingly, when comparing the researchers' ability to approach their respective organisations critically, the results turned out to be somewhat surprising. Where one might have expected it to have been easier for the outsider-researcher to be critical of their research object, it was in fact the insider-researcher's more in-depth organisational

knowledge and long-term commitment to the organisation that provided potentially greater facility for critical analysis.

The outsider-researcher, by contrast, lacking the initial knowledge of the insider-researcher, had started from a critical theoretical position, questioning how far any Third Sector organisation could continue to provide challenging learning for active citizenship in the current policy context – however committed they may have been to achieving this, in principle. She had initially anticipated that such a critical perspective might lead to tensions with the partnership organisation, as the research progressed. In practice, however, the opposite turned out to be the case. Through participant observations, she developed increasing respect and admiration for the work of the organisation, appreciating the ways in which she witnessed participants becoming increasingly empowered. For example, in the organisation's work with people with disabilities, she observed the learners' growing confidence to challenge policy makers and service delivery professionals effectively. And she witnessed one particular group of learners taking over responsibility for running their own sessions – illustrating the WEA's commitment to working as a democratic organisation, run by its members. In summary, then, she found that maintaining her critical perspective was far more challenging than she had originally anticipated, as she became more and more convinced of the value – and values – of the organisation's work, in practice. Reflecting on potential sources of bias in the research as a result, she went on to observe a range of activities and groups that she selected on her own initiative, to ensure that she was obtaining a comprehensive picture, rather than simply observing the organisation's show-case projects and programmes.

Both positions, in the end, required a high level of reflexivity and flexibility. In addition, an essential component of the collaborative nature of the project was for the research processes to be jointly managed by the organisations and academic partners concerned. Regular reviews of research progress and priorities provided opportunities to address issues, including competing organisational priorities, maintaining flexibility whilst keeping the research on track, overall.

## **Select findings on active citizenship, empowerment and the impact of active citizenship learning**

### **Active citizenship in a Third Sector context**

The research provided three main insights into active citizenship as a socially constructed policy concept. The first insight showed that, even

though learners and active citizens often shared many of the underlying assumptions with policy makers, their intentions differed significantly from those of national policy makers. When asked to define active citizenship in their own words, learners from different backgrounds – and not only those who had attended classes formally described as ‘citizenship’ themed – emphasised the centrality of notions of ‘community’ and ‘volunteering’.<sup>1</sup> These notions were congruent with those of policy makers, sometimes directly reflecting phrases used in social policy, such as ‘helping other people’, ‘giving back to the community’ and wanting ‘to make a difference’, even ‘social responsibility’.<sup>2</sup> There was nothing new here.

Where people stubbornly disagreed with government rhetoric, however – particularly with the rhetoric associated with the ‘Big Society’, which was much in the news at the time of the interviews – was the notion that ‘active citizenship’ in the community or in public engagement should be anything but voluntary, a matter of choice and free will. For example, one very active citizen vituperated:

The other thing I was going to say, though, that popped into my head when we were talking, is that I get really cross with the current government saying that they want more people to be active citizens – Big Society – and I haven’t heard in the press the fact that actually, there are hundreds of thousands of people who are governors, probably tens of thousands maybe as many magistrates, guide leaders, Brownie leaders, Scout leaders, there is an army of people already doing huge amounts, and we are being bashed over the head to do more, what do they want!? I think there is a huge lack of acknowledgement of what’s going on already and how vital ... When I first did the [school] governor training there were some statistics, I can’t remember the amount, how much the country, the government gains, how much it saves, by having volunteer governors, whereas if they had to employ people, the millions it would cost. That never gets acknowledged.

(Take Part learner)

These sentiments were confirmed at a focus group on the Big Society, organised and recorded by the researcher at a local Take Part conference. Similarly, a South Wales WEA participant and active citizen felt that ‘[t]he expectations on volunteers are overwhelming’.

The second insight may have been more surprising: despite staff reticence towards use of the term ‘active citizen’ until it became unavoidable under the Take Part programme, learners in the programme and

in the interviews responded overall very positively. In fact, this turned out to contribute to their empowerment as the term ‘active citizenship’ described activities that fell outside of the usual vocabulary of ‘volunteering’. This finding was all the more interesting as neither the term ‘citizen’ nor ‘active citizen’ was in everyday usage in Britain at the time.

The research found an explanation for this phenomenon: the term ‘active citizen’ was conscientiously and deliberately mediated by the organisations in a ‘learner-centred’ way, adapted to reflect the realities and experiences of the organisations’ target audiences. Maybe this was more of an innovation for the English provider whose work was focused on the traditional notions of ‘volunteering’, whereas the South Wales WEA was already familiar with active citizenship as part of its mission statement. Meanwhile, in the English organisation, a diagram was adapted to convey the notion of active citizenship on its publicity and as a teaching tool in classes, where it was used interactively and as an introduction to active citizenship learning (Figure 2.1).

A closer look at the diagram used by the English organisation shows the focus on the type of involvements and opportunities – in a deliberately simplified form – that were likely to be relevant to the organisation’s target groups, that is, with an emphasis on formal and informal roles in the community and in public engagement. What was absent here were explicit references to ‘political’ or trade union forms of involvement, which did not really feature in the work or remit of the organisation (this stood in contrast with the type of participation with a political dimension encouraged by the WEA; through its strong links with trade unions and political organisations within the wider social

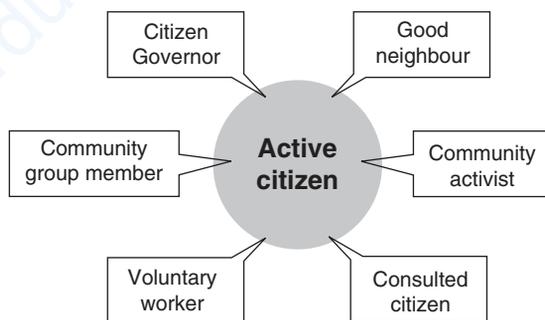


Figure 2.1 Active citizenship

movement, political education in the wider sense continued to play an important part in the organisation's work). However, thanks to the Parliamentary Outreach programme, an introduction to Parliament was well received by the learners and member organisations, as a result of which a group of Sure Start learners were converted to voting in the 2010 general election and even submitted written evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee.

When used as a teaching tool, this approach engaged learner audiences in reflection and joint discussion on their involvements. Since almost anybody in these settings could easily identify with at least one of these categories, it became a validating – and empowering – exercise through which learners, especially those from disadvantaged groups, could find acknowledgment for their involvements. Indeed, the validating effect of this recognition should not be understated, in particular for those whose involvement was taking place informally in the community, and who may have been feeling undervalued through lack of participation in the labour market. The following anecdote related by a learner illustrates this point:

one of our mutual friends is disabled, and [another friend of the interviewee] always takes her out one day a week, she takes her shopping and she collects her daughter from school, and she just does it automatically, no questions asked, not for any reward [ . . . ]; and me telling her, 'you are an active citizen doing that', she beamed, to be honest, she looked so proud, she had a name for what she was doing, if you like . . .

(CVS learner)

Such recognition, then, gave confidence and raised the self-esteem of individuals, thus boosting learner morale and encouraging them to consider further roles and opportunities.

A third finding, although specific to the English research and to the Take Part programme, revealed some of the tensions surrounding the notion of 'active citizenship'. Many Third Sector practitioners across this programme had misgivings over the appropriateness of the promotion of civic roles in the form of programme targets, which was felt to be contrary to community development principles and a learner-centred approach. For example, a tutor stated:

But *your* interpretation, *your* description and ideas about active citizenship is so different, you know, and I think no-one should be

dismissed for having their own views either, if someone feels strongly about what they are doing. If that empowers them then that will move them up and get them more involved in civic roles, which I know is what you want us to move forward to...

(CVS tutor, emphasis added)

This tutor's view was typical across the programme. It was widely argued that learners should set their own priorities in terms of how they chose to engage as active citizens, rather than feeling constrained to become involved in formal civic roles just because this would meet with government priorities, from the top down. (Incidentally, this quote illustrates the difficult transition, in the mind of colleagues, of substituting the insider-researcher's previous role of project coordinator with her new role as researcher.)

Although tutors were doubtful, however, as it turned out, the response at least to some of the civic roles was actually overwhelmingly positive. For example, for two consecutive years a total of four 'taster sessions' for magistrates were oversubscribed. These and other taster sessions were delivered in partnership with the appropriate authorities (the city council, the police authority, the magistrates courts and association and the school governor unit) and reached diverse audiences, including the organisation's usual learner groups, thus providing the potential for widening participation.

According to official aims, the principal outcomes of the taster courses were to be measured in terms of the number of people recruited into civic roles. But the main added value of the taster courses for their participants, conversely, was through the insight that they afforded into the workings of the respective public institutions (the magistrates courts, the police authority and the local authority in question). Learners were able to use this knowledge, subsequently, to engage with these institutions more effectively, as active citizens. Contrary to tutors' assumptions, keen interests in practical and bite-sized 'civic education' had been demonstrated, but this was especially from people who wanted to increase their confidence and influence as active citizens from outside, rather than from people who wanted to take on these civic roles themselves from the inside.<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion, then, whilst any attempts by governments to prescribe particular forms of active citizenship involvement were overwhelmingly rejected in this particular case study, the availability of free, interactive and experiential information sessions explaining the opportunities for and contexts of involvement was generally welcomed and embraced.

## Active citizenship learning for empowerment

Empowerment is a frequently used but contested term. The challenge these two research projects both faced was how to define, measure and then identify evidence of empowerment. As with the contested notion of active citizenship, the approach that was eventually adopted was to compare and contrast learners' and practitioners' perspectives with existing models identified in the literature. As a result, a customised model, contextualised to active citizenship learning, was thus 'co-produced' in the English organisation and mirrored in the findings from the South Wales WEA. In parallel with particular community development models, such as the ABCD framework, this model comprised four main components.<sup>4</sup> The first stage or component was 'confidence'. This was broken down into the following 'building blocks':

Self-belief and self-esteem, including the belief in 'the right to have rights' (Arendt, 1975):

- knowledge and understanding (including, sources of information and access to resources)
- skills, especially communication skills, such as 'speaking up', but also practical skills, including IT, meetings and so on
- recognition and acceptance

In addition, networking and ongoing support for active citizens were cited as important, as the following participant definitions emphasise:

For me [empowerment] means being able to stand on my own two feet and make my own decisions, and whether they be good or bad being able to follow up with the consequences as well, but *having the support as well*.

(CVS learner)

being able to do something and try and deliver on that, and *being supported*.

(CVS learner)

Similarly, one WEA learner described their personal motivation for requesting and attending a 'Know Your Rights' course as 'learn[ing] to act'.

Thus, recognition and acceptance for these learners referred to being given the opportunity to develop according to one's personal ability, to be challenged in a supportive way and to be able to learn from mistakes.

In other words, this involved being given the opportunity to learn from practice and to get recognition for the contribution one makes.

Active citizenship learning, then, filled a gap in the mainstream provision as it provided a wide range of different people with access to opportunities for learning, which enabled them to engage and become more effective. Furthermore, by being community based and connected to Third Sector networks, the learning gave access to involvement. Thus, any learning activity was greatly enhanced when opportunities for practice and involvement were also offered – and the opposite was also true: where learning was the only empowerment activity engaged in, outcomes tended to be much less significant. At the South Wales WEA, learners had the opportunity to practice decision-making by participating in the internal democratic structures of local branches, and this enhanced their confidence. At the CVS, learners were encouraged to volunteer, to become involved as service users and/or to set up their own ‘social action’ project. The research, then, provided evidence that courses in active citizenship learning, when taken in isolation, were limited in their scope, but when leading to meaningful involvement opportunities their impact could be significantly enhanced.

Empowerment is a complex and contested concept as it has already been suggested. The research found its components to operate on multiple levels, including the personal level as well as the level of active citizenship. At the active citizenship level, the case study organisations used the following learning and associated activities (Table 2.1) to empower active citizens (the list shown in the table is only illustrative, as the details of courses and course titles changed frequently).

The research also addressed the question of *how* empowerment outcomes were being achieved, and whether these outcomes could be directly attributed to the learning activities in question. Direct attribution was not easy, especially when empowerment had taken effect over the long term. Nevertheless many learners did identify the significance of learning events and highlighted those aspects of the learning provision that they perceived to have been empowering. The main factors or conditions that learners felt had turned the learning into positive and empowering experiences included the following:

- the personal qualities and professional competences of tutors, including the ability to engage learners individually whilst managing the group as a whole;
- group work and participative, interactive activities that encouraged peer support and learning from each other;
- content focussed on active citizenship;

Table 2.1 Active citizenship empowerment: examples of learning programmes

Component of active citizenship	At voluntary action	At the WEA
Confidence and self-esteem, including the realisation of one's basic citizenship rights	Speaking Up Making Your Voice Heard	Confidence enhancement embedded in overall approach to learning. Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship
Knowledge: Specifically, understanding of public institutions and decision-making processes; knowledge of governance, management and legal issues for community groups and charities	'How Your City Works' Community Leadership Tasters for civic roles Visits to public institutions How Parliament Works Standard training programme for voluntary sector groups	'Know Your Rights Course' Citizenship Politics and Government in Wales Trade Union studies Visits to Welsh Government, Westminster and Old Bailey
Skills: Interpersonal skills, goal-setting, communication skills, group skills, technical skills	Speaking Up Personal development courses IT courses Management courses Tailored courses to groups	IT, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Basic skills including Welsh; Work Place Learning Learner-requested courses Social enterprise learning
Recognition: Encouraging involvement, including by connecting citizens to each other, groups with each other, and both to vertical structures and to officials and decision-makers	Speaking Up British Council Active Citizen programme Information about local groups, support for new groups Networking events	Democratic branch network Community Learning Representatives programme Residential schools Public lectures Hustings

- practical and experiential learning enhanced by relevant guest speakers and visits;
- informality and the 'relaxed atmosphere';
- 'ground rules' (such as respect for others' views, confidentiality and non-discrimination);

- friendly and welcoming venues and learning environments (including outreach);
- small sizes of learner groups, enabling a personalised approach (particularly needed for less confident learners).

### **Empowerment case studies: Empowering groups as well as individuals**

Two brief case studies – one from the English CVS and the other from the South Wales WEA – illustrate how people with learning disabilities can be empowered to speak up effectively, given the right type of support, demonstrating what even relatively disadvantaged groups can achieve, both individually and collectively. These outcomes were the result of a combination of factors including both active citizenship learning, provided to service users in accessible ways, and powerful policy drivers, encouraging public and voluntary sector providers to promote service users' involvement, from their side. Most importantly too, these positive outcomes were also the result of people with disabilities' continuous engagement with their peers through community-based user groups.

#### **The CVS case study**

Since participating in a 'Speaking Up' course in 2003, a young man with a learning disability had developed into an effective advocate and trainer. He was co-chair of a partnership board (bringing providers and service users together), a very active volunteer and community member. In the words of the local Learning Disability Manager:

He's one of our greatest advocates for people with learning disabilities, particularly as he works very much within (the) strategic level for the council, the Partnership Trust and the National Health Service. He is a very much countywide, regional person, voice if you like, for people with learning disabilities, and eight years ago he was not really involved at all, [so it's] great to see.

In his role of co-chair of the local Learning Disability Partnership Board, set up to implement the government's 'Valuing People' strategy, this learner succeeded in changing the behaviour of professionals at the meetings: they learnt to speak in more accessible, user-friendly language, so eventually very little interpretation was needed, in order to allow other users and carers to participate effectively.

This learner contributed to a number of collective empowerment outcomes, explaining, for example, that

With one group we found that there was talk about the local Mencap centre possibly closing, and we contacted some people and managed to secure it. I also did a training session for another organisation, Voice UK, which is mainly for Hate Crime awareness, because quite a few people with learning difficulties have had very serious things like [a particularly disturbing case in the region] and other tragic cases, and [...] make sure people are aware of Hate Crime.

Hate Crime awareness raising for the police was the latest project initiated by a regional learning disability coalition, whose members, including this learner, had started to train police officers across the constabulary.

### **The South Wales WEA case study**

A South Wales WEA participant with a learning disability, who had attended a Disability and Equality Awareness Training course and other WEA classes, described how learning through the WEA had changed her life:

I would say that from those courses and from here, they offer so many things where I now feel a much stronger person because of it. Through meeting people I feel like I am a lot stronger now. That I can deal with things better. It taught me to be a better person.

(26/4/2010:7)

This learner had become empowered to take on the role of being a representative on the All Wales People First Group, which aimed to influence government policies and public attitudes towards people with learning disabilities. This group had previously contributed towards the 'Fulfilling the Promises' (2001) strategy as part of the Learning Disability Advisory Implementation Group for the Welsh Assembly Government. It was clear, through discussions and interviews with the member in question, that she had gained skills, knowledge and contacts through the networks that the group had been introduced to through the WEA and People First. The opportunities provided by these organisations had enabled her to participate in ways that were appropriate for

her. Then, in turn, she was empowered to attempt to influence wider social policy agendas in Wales.

### **Conclusion: The research contribution to community development**

These research projects have provided examples of how two Third Sector organisations have harnessed academic collaboration to empower themselves by engaging participatively in research. This significantly added to their knowledge and evidence base, critically examined and validated internal expertise and practices rooted in their values and helped them to develop appropriate research tools for the future.

Another main research aim was to engage active citizens in reflection on some key policy concepts – active citizenship, empowerment, the Big Society – and to include people from underrepresented groups in debates. The research in both locations was very successful in eliciting these views, and many participants were eager to contribute in order to make their voices heard. What is less certain is to what extent these views will reach policy makers, funders, scholars and service providers, at a time of shifting policy priorities and continuing budget cuts. The WEA may have been able to use its links with the devolved government in Wales to pass on research papers to government ministers and policy makers in Wales, although the impact on policies is as yet uncertain. Whether it will be able to continue to influence policy decisions, directly and indirectly informed by its participants, is less certain as the WEA faces fundamental structural changes under pressure from government. The CVS' influence, too, could become affected by structural changes resulting from the current transformation of the local infrastructure, encouraged by central government, although here the main concern – not necessarily unrelated – lies in the growing emphasis placed on employability training at the expense of active citizenship. Indeed, a greater reliance on contracts with agencies such as Job Centre Plus may shape the CVS learning provision significantly and for some time.<sup>5</sup> These changes could impede the implementation of research findings and even their dissemination, not only to policy makers and funders, but maybe even within Third Sector organisations, the CVS included. That is, unless active citizenship is reaffirmed as a key policy direction, with accompanying funding streams.

In terms of building research capacity, the research was able to co-produce tools for data collection and analysis. Interviews, for example, provided valuable in-depth insights which added value to existing

monitoring and evaluation data, whereas focus groups provided snapshots of views from local stakeholders that could be fed back to policy makers. These tools and practices could be embedded into the organisations' systems to enhance ongoing monitoring and evaluation in a way that ensures these are aligned to the organisations' aims and values, rather than to those of funders. This would enable the organisations to generate robust evidence, regularly, and to make the case for their impact. It could empower beneficiaries and staff by engaging them in reflecting on outcomes and practices, generating organisational learning, and informing strategic planning for the longer term. In addition, the critical understanding of key social policy frameworks that the research provided could support the organisations in taking their work forward more assertively into an uncertain and changing future.

At the South Wales WEA, according to the General Secretary, the case study 'has been used to pave the way for a continuing commitment to research. We are taking on a further studentship and we have set up a Research Sub Group of our Learner Experience Committee'.

In summary then, the studies demonstrated ways in which Third Sector organisations could use research, both to measure their impacts for funders and, most importantly, to facilitate reflective practice. Research can, in addition, provide evidence to illustrate the impacts of public policy. The potential benefits of public policies to promote active citizenship (however defined) and community engagement can be demonstrated, together with their limitations. Research can illustrate some of the tensions inherent in top down approaches to public policy in these fields – strengthening the case for the importance of working in partnerships with Third Sector organisations and communities more generally.

## Notes

1. The word 'community' was the most frequently cited noun in the 160,000-word learner-interview transcript sample of one of the research projects.
2. It was observed that sustained government rhetoric had left its mark with some vulnerable and out-of-work individuals who had internalised the notion that in return for receiving benefits they felt a moral obligation to 'give something back' by volunteering – and others felt they had to 'do something' to 'fill a gap' on their CV (curriculum vitae), to be credible to employers, as if having 'time out', for whatever reason, was unacceptable.
3. WEA members became involved in civic roles including members of pressure groups, as a result of participating in general WEA activities. This was a result of gaining skills, confidence and knowledge, as well as gaining access to wider

networks that enabled learners to take on formal roles in their communities, even at a national level.

4. The ABCD model is available online at <http://www.proveandimprove.org/tools/ABCD.php>.
5. The availability of learning free of charge seems to be the only way to attract learners, at least those interested in active citizenship learning. Attempts to offer Take Part style courses at a low fee after the end of the Take Part Pathfinder failed due to insufficient uptake.

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## Part II

# Third Sector Research and the Promotion of Social Inclusion and Solidarity

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# 3

## Impact Measurement or Agenda-Setting?

*Hannah Jones, Vaughan Jones and Juan Camilo Cock*

### Introduction

This chapter considers the growth of impact measurement in the Third Sector, and particularly the implications for smaller community organisations. Based on participative action research and reflective community development practice, we argue that the best way to understand the difference that community organisations make may not be through formulaic frameworks, but by starting from the real experiences of community organisations, their analysis of their context and those they work with, and by finding ways to understand and communicate these internally and externally.

The chapter is based on three distinct, but linked, pieces of work. Firstly, a collaborative research project attempted to identify existing frameworks for measuring impact specifically on 'community cohesion' and tried to identify how such frameworks could be used within small organisations. Secondly, and emerging from the first project, a piece of work engaged with small organisations themselves to consider the practicalities of understanding their impact, and how formal frameworks could relate to the work that they do. Finally, we reflect on work done within Praxis, a medium-sized community organisation, to incorporate an understanding of how it makes a difference (or impact) within the community in its day-to-day operations. Praxis is a community organisation committed to the rights of vulnerable migrants, fostering reconciliation, human rights and social justice.

The first research project emerged from a general concern within Praxis, as well as more broadly in the sector, about the ways that private-sector-derived management thinking was being applied to community

work (see below). However, more immediate incidents also helped to channel these ongoing concerns into action. The first discussions of undertaking research into the ways that the work of Praxis and similar community organisations can benefit local communities as a whole took place in the pre-election period of 2010, when the racist British National Party (BNP) was feared to be gaining support in Dagenham, East London. Praxis' principal experience is in a very different borough, Tower Hamlets, where it is based. However, at that time, Praxis had begun a project in Barking and Dagenham and needed to reflect on the different and new context. Given that some local and national policy approaches to the apparent growth in popularity of such parties had been to channel support away from organisations and projects seen to serve 'single-interest' groups, there was an added impetus for Praxis to find ways to demonstrate the importance of their work in terms of cohesion and solidarity, including with established communities, rather than being seen as only benefiting new migrants. Aside from pressures from funders, then, there was also a concern to demonstrate impacts to the wider local community and to understand these benefits internally. In response to this, Juan Camilo Cock worked with Praxis to undertake an analysis of existing literature, particularly the 'grey literature' produced by practitioners and policy makers on measuring how different factors or interventions impact on community cohesion.

The results of the first, desk-based, exercise provoked a further research project, in which Hannah Jones collaborated with Voluntary Action Islington (VAI) and a number of their smaller member organisations, in action research workshops where participants drew on academic and policy research, and on their own practical experience, to identify frameworks for understanding, measuring and communicating the differences they made to local communities on a range of issues (including community cohesion). The workshop element of this project was complemented by interviews with funders of local organisations, interviews that explored some of the issues arising from the workshops and identified that many of the difficulties and perceptions of impact measurement were shared between community organisations and their funders (Jones, 2012).

The chapter brings together findings from these two research projects, framed by Vaughan Jones' reflections, as the Chief Executive of Praxis Community Projects, on how the organisation has responded to the concept of impact measurement through internal and external learning and development.

## Background

The involvement of Praxis in this work emerged from a concern within the organisation about how project management tools, 'service delivery' and 'business thinking' had come to dominate discussion and process within civil society. Praxis is a community development organisation, committed to the human rights of vulnerable migrants. It provides advice, training, group work and interpreting to over 14,000 people each year. Through its casework and projects, it is addressing urgent issues of discrimination and exploitation in the areas of immigration law; homelessness and poor housing; unemployment, underemployment and exploitation in the workplace; access to health care; and maintaining and building social and family life. Praxis, as its name suggests, has the concept of learning through doing, and reflecting on action, at its heart (Mayo *et al.*, 2011).

Project management tools, whilst having a role, have limitations in the management of a complex community development programme like that of Praxis, where 'projects' interweave with each other and people interweave with the programme. A service delivery programme, whether delivered by a public or private sector body or a voluntary organisation, benefits greatly from these tools (see e.g. Lumley *et al.*, 2011). However, a community development programme is fundamentally different in that it is not predicated on a customer-provider relationship (Kenny, 2010). What works in the manufacture of goods and products and the delivery of services does not work for the creative processes through which human beings grow together and resolve common problems. Choosing what to measure (or not to measure), and how, is a political and ethical decision in itself (Arvidson, 2009; McCabe, 2011).

The attractions of project management frameworks for a funding provider are understandable. They need to be able to justify a spend against an outcome. However, they may, unintentionally, be forcing organisations into a mode of delivery inappropriate for their own theory of social change. Management thinking has too often redefined the 'charity' (as well as the public sector) as 'business'. The idea that community organisations could be more 'efficient' than the state at service delivery, with 'active citizenship' as an added bonus, contributed to the awarding of substantial outsourced government contracts to the Third Sector over the past decade and a half (Davies, 2008). By competing for service delivery contracts within public sector quasi-markets,

Third Sector leadership has become embroiled in business-model thinking, with growth and scalability often goals in themselves, putting at risk the aspects of community organisations that make them distinctive, desirable and 'effective' (Kelly, 2007; Carmel and Harlock, 2008). Simple business management philosophies can assume that one intervention will have the same impact wherever it is applied, neglecting the influence of circumstance, opportunity, personality, past trauma or just plain luck, be it good or bad.

In becoming legible to, and increasingly intertwined with, models of the new public management, civil society organisations become categorised and expected to fulfil specific roles. Some agencies are 'service delivery' whilst others are 'community projects' (Kenny, 2010). Some are 'campaigning' whilst others 'research' agencies. Some are the elite 'think tanks'. Some work with refugees, others with the homeless or disabled. The agencies are placed in silos according to the victim status of their beneficiaries. This is problematic for Praxis, which seeks to interweave the functions of service delivery, community project, evidence gathering and research with policy formulation and advocacy as an inclusive and participative trajectory towards social change. It also wants to see newcomers to the United Kingdom as both victims of circumstance or oppression and agents of change.

A truly independent civil society, operating within a genuine democratic framework, would surely be able to define itself and build the alliances and relationships it needs. Categorisation, far from creating a convenient means of measuring or assessing effectiveness, may restrict the desired impact (Kenny, 2010). The inherited wisdom of community development is that it is the interaction of approaches and relationships, rather than methodological rigidity, which produces a genuinely effective community transformation process. With this in mind, Praxis joined up with Goldsmiths, University of London, to examine whether there were alternative ways to understand and account for the impact that Praxis and similar organisations have on people's lives.

## What is impact?

It is important to be clear at the outset that there are two ways to answer the question 'what is impact?'. Firstly, there is 'impact' as a real thing, most simply this is *the difference made by an organisation* – everything that happens directly or indirectly, because the organisation exists, including intended and unintended effects (and which might not happen if it didn't exist). Secondly, 'impact' is a set of ideas – a trend, jargon or

language game – in the world of evaluation and measurement. In this sense, ‘impact’ might not necessarily be just about understanding the difference an organisation makes; it is also about presenting this in a way that is acceptable to others concerned with ‘impact measurement’ as a set of conventions. This chapter reflects on both senses of this term, with a focus on recognising that the second (measurement and presentation) is often the focus of work – but that most community organisations will be more interested in the first (‘real’) element. The two elements also relate to wider questions about the role of Third Sector organisations, either as a service delivery organisation, or an agent of social change.

But how can we describe the changes community development organisations such as Praxis make? And how can we know whether changes we observe are a product of a combination of activities, or a specific event or intervention? These questions are even more knotty for the very small organisations represented by VAI who took part in this research, for whom it becomes even more evident that the difference they make is influenced by and in conjunction with other factors and events, from the very local or personal to the international. How can a small organisation claim to have made significant changes in local fortunes? How can it know what circumstances would be if the group hadn’t been there or had intervened differently? How much do successes and failures depend on interactions with others, and how could this be understood, measured and communicated? These were the practical questions about impact measurement that the two research projects discussed here set out to investigate.

### **Tools for measuring the difference made by Third Sector organisations**

The first stage of research was undertaken by Juan Camilo Cock, working with Praxis, in 2009–2010. To link the impact of the organisation to a major policy agenda, it was decided to find previous evaluations of the impact of voluntary and community organisations on community cohesion, and to adapt successful models into indicators that could be used by Praxis. After nearly ten years of implementation of the community cohesion agenda in which the voluntary sector was deemed to play a major role, and in the context of the New Labour government’s emphasis on public sector performance management, it seemed sure that there would be useful models that could be adapted.

Community cohesion policy was developed by the UK government between 2001 and 2010, initially in response to a series of reports into

the 2001 disturbances in northern towns (Cantle, 2001; Clarke, 2001; Denham, 2001; Ouseley, 2001; Ritchie, 2001). Later, it was influenced by debates following the 2005 London bombings, new flows of European migration and a report by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in 2007 (COIC, 2007). The 2001 reports suggested communities were living 'parallel lives', sharing space but living in isolation and hardly coming into contact. Community cohesion policy aimed to increase contact between social groups, developing shared interests, values and sense of belonging (for a longer analysis of community cohesion as a policy, see Cock, 2010; Jones, 2013). The exact definition shifted with time and the concept has had its critics. Two of the main criticisms of the community cohesion agenda have been that it underplays the importance of inequality and discrimination in social conflicts, and that it has an undertone of assimilation (Back *et al.*, 2002; Worley, 2005; Burnett, 2007).

The then government saw local authorities as the appropriate level at which interventions should focus, to reflect local issues (DCLG, 2008, 2009). It emphasised bringing the voluntary sector on board as a key partner given its high levels of trust amongst the public and capacity to reach populations that may not engage with the public sector (LGA, 2002; DCLG, 2007). In theory, then, organisations such as Praxis should play an important role in fostering cohesion and there should be tools to capture that contribution.

A first stumbling block in the research was that there was plenty of guidance and toolkits on community cohesion for the public sector but not much that recognised the more unique needs of the voluntary sector. To monitor and evaluate community cohesion, government guidance suggested local authorities should: 'consider a "pick and mix" approach of quantitative and qualitative indicators and prioritise them under relevant titles such as sustainability (e.g. economic and social issues), safety (e.g. anti-social behaviour issues) and the strength of communities (e.g. the extent of social investment)' (Home Office, 2005).

The Department of Communities and Local Government developed a monitoring framework for community cohesion at a national and local authority level (HM Treasury, 2007; DCLG, 2009). Progress on community cohesion was based on three main indicators that acted as benchmarks. The indicators were the aggregate of individuals' perceptions of their local area. The three indicators were:

- (1) the percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area;

- (2) the percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood;
- (3) the percentage of people who have meaningful interactions with people from different backgrounds.

The first two were measured locally by the Place Survey carried out by local authorities, and all three were measured nationally by the Citizenship Survey (DCLG, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

Indicators developed to monitor local authority performance, usually collated through large-scale surveys, were unsuitable for assessing the impact of an organisation such as Praxis. These national indicators measured changes in perceptions over time but did little to identify the causes of any change. Such causes were probably multiple and disentangling the role of the voluntary sector, let alone one organisation within it, on public perceptions of an area would be a gargantuan task.

The results of the review suggested that the evaluation of voluntary and community sector initiatives in terms of their impact on community cohesion was still at an early stage of development and had clear weaknesses (Cock, 2010). Some of the main issues identified were as follows:

- (1) Lack of replicable outcome indicators. Indicators had been developed for national public bodies and public authorities, but there was a shortage of examples of useful indicators for smaller voluntary sector organisations.
- (2) Continued measurement of outputs rather than outcomes. Some evaluations relied on describing activities and number of beneficiaries rather than analysing the change produced by projects.
- (3) Reliance on project deliverers rather than on beneficiaries to judge what worked and what did not. Especially evaluations of public bodies and grant programmes too often relied on the expert opinion of key players rather than on data from beneficiaries themselves.
- (4) Over-reliance on illustrative case studies without outlining the selection process. Most of the official guidance was illustrated with examples of good practice. But there was too often no reflection on how these case studies were selected or on the criteria for judging them as examples of good practice.

The review found the most relevant published piece of work on evaluating the impact of voluntary sector initiatives on community cohesion to be a toolkit produced by Oldham Council. A key element of the Oldham

toolkit was that it was not prescriptive but rather went through the process of developing outcomes and indicators and suggesting themes related to cohesion. It also provided examples of ways of collecting evidence. This toolkit provided a list of indicators that could form the basis for Praxis to develop its own matrix of indicators on cohesion. However, there were no published evaluations that had used the toolkit.

### **The Oldham Council toolkit for evaluation community cohesion**

The Oldham toolkit included within its definition of impact a project's effects on several of the issues that either constitute or underpin community cohesion.

It divided the evaluation process into three broad stages:

- (1) Strategic evaluation: where project leaders evaluate the extent to which a project's activities and outputs contribute to the desired outcome. This is basically about connecting activities to the desired aims of a project.
- (2) Developing evaluation indicators: indicators are collected and monitored during the project's delivery and can help identify change when carrying out an evaluation.
- (3) Evaluation research: in-depth activities carried out to evaluate the results of a project. These can include focus groups, research interviews and self-completion questionnaires.

The toolkit suggested that project records and self-evaluation questionnaires were the best ways of collecting information for the relevant indicators. Several types of indicators suggested included: attendance measures, output measures, opinion measures and impact measures.

The toolkit grouped indicators by type of project using the following categories:

- (1) festivals, performances, open days, seminars and conferences;
- (2) sports, arts and cultural projects;
- (3) projects focused on education;
- (4) projects focused on supporting vulnerable people;
- (5) projects focused on the environment.

Each indicator in turn related to a particular strand within Oldham Council's local definition of community cohesion. The strands were

- (1) people share a sense of belonging and a common identity;
- (2) people are strong in their own identities and respect others;
- (3) a more equal borough;
- (4) people relate to each other;
- (5) people play their part;
- (6) resilience to threats and conflict.

The review's findings were that there was no off-the-peg solution available for Praxis to use in evaluating its impact on community cohesion. Three options were put forward.

#### **Developing indicators that monitor work done on intermediate factors that are expected to affect cohesion**

Assessing a project's impact on community cohesion is a difficult task if we assume that community cohesion is likely to have multiple causes and influences. Yet there are studies that have established a correlation between community cohesion and other factors on which it may be more feasible to demonstrate an impact. For example, Laurence and Heath (2008) found a negative correlation between deprivation and cohesion and a positive correlation between being able to influence local decisions and community cohesion, both at the individual and community levels. Praxis has projects that tackle both deprivation and empowerment. If it were to develop indicators that demonstrate an impact on these intermediate outcomes (deprivation and empowerment), then it could be inferred that this work should have an impact on cohesion.

#### **Developing a monitoring and evaluation programme that measures clearly defined aspects of community cohesion**

Measuring cohesion becomes more feasible if it is disaggregated into clearly defined component parts on which it is possible to measure impact. An organisation could derive the change it wanted to make from the definition of community cohesion it adopted and then track progress towards this change. This would measure change in the lives of beneficiaries and users of projects, and may therefore require extra resources to collect and analyse data.

### **Undertaking research projects that look specifically at the wider impact of the organisation's projects**

Academic research has a better record of understanding cohesion than the public sector and voluntary sector experiences that were analysed (DTZ, 2007; Markova and Black, 2007; Blake *et al.*, 2008; Hickman *et al.*, 2008; Jayaweera and Choudhury, 2008; Laurence and Heath, 2008). Such in-depth research could be used to evaluate impact. However, the research would probably have to focus on a specific project, rather than being an ongoing process of monitoring, with considerable staff and financial requirements. It would be academically oriented and include more complex methodologies. A project of the sort would probably analyse directly the impact of the organisation on community cohesion by studying the complex factors including, but going beyond, project interventions that affect community cohesion. It would probably also involve undertaking research not just with Praxis users and beneficiaries but with other people either by studying a different location or looking at local residents who were not direct users of Praxis' services and interventions.

As a result of the review's findings, Praxis reconsidered its approach to understanding impact and engaged in community-development-influenced processes for engendering its own fresh thinking within the organisation.

Separately, within the Taking Part research programme meanwhile, a related research project was developed, which took these ideas into a wider realm by using an action research approach to explore how community organisations use and develop impact measurement tools in practice.

### **Making the data fit the framework, or making a framework that fits the organisation?**

The second research project involved working with VAI, an umbrella organisation for the voluntary sector in Islington, with a researcher (Hannah Jones) participating in workshops that VAI had already planned for small organisations interested in developing their impact measurement. This was part of an existing programme funded by Trust for London. Finding that VAI already had this project in place was a great bonus for the research, as it meant that a group of small organisations were already meeting together to work on relevant subjects and had assigned time to do this. This was particularly valuable since, though in the initial stages of setting up this small project, we had found no

shortage of small organisations which were interested in the aims and ambitions of the research, it had proved very difficult for any of them to allocate the time to meet to discuss practicalities of the research, let alone participate actively (Phillimore *et al.*, 2010). This in itself is indicative of the kind of pressures which small community organisations are under, where they rely on volunteers and perhaps one or two paid members of staff. This can mean trying to maintain the organisation's core purpose whilst also raising money to ensure the continuation of the organisation, leaving them extremely hard-pressed for time and resources, squeezing out time and energy to allocate to longer-term strategic projects even when the enthusiasm is there. Working with an umbrella group, such as VAI, seemed an ideal solution, which highlighted the importance of such bodies in enabling smaller organisations to share resources and infrastructure.

In the process of working with VAI, it emerged that it would be important for the groups participating in the workshops to identify the kinds of impacts they wanted to make and measure, rather than starting from an existing set of indicators. Thus some time was spent discussing the language of measurement and of impact, the reasons those at the workshop wanted to measure impact, and the resources they had available to do so. This was an interactive process, building knowledge and practice through dialogue between the VAI facilitator, the academic researcher and the active participants and practitioners in the workshop. Participants not only had come to learn and develop new skills, but they also had a wealth of their own knowledge and experience and used the workshops as a way to think through some of the difficulties and possibilities of understanding impact that they had already encountered. The research practice involved facilitating discussion and learning at the workshops, and reflecting on the challenges participants had with impact measurement and the reasons they wanted to undertake it.

These reflections were then taken to research interviews with representatives of a small number of funders who worked with local organisations. Again, funders were under a lot of pressure of time and it was not possible to meet with many, but the research included a local authority, a national public-sector-supported funding organisation and a local charitable foundation. All of those interviewed were involved in working with community organisations in need of financial support, in making decisions about what support to give them and in requiring evidence of the organisation's work to do so. The interviews again were intended as an exchange of knowledge and thinking. What emerged was that the interviewees were very aware of the challenges posed by

existing impact measurement regimes, sympathetic to the difficulties small organisations might have with them and keen to find mutual solutions – whilst emphasising that they did need *some* way of knowing which groups would make best use of financial or other support.

All the participants, including the funders, found it hard to isolate evidence of what would be considered an ‘impact’, rather than an outcome. This was not just a philosophical problem, it was often also a practical one.

### **Where does a small organisation with a national reach feel its impact?**

One example of the practicalities of gathering appropriate data that could demonstrate the impact of a small organisation was the experience of DPPI (Disability, Pregnancy and Parenthood International). In the workshops, DPPI representatives explained that they wanted to make access to support and information for disabled parents easier, to create better awareness about the issues faced by disabled parents and to increase acceptance of disabled people as parents in the wider society. This was clear, but thinking about how to measure such changes was more difficult. The organisation certainly did not have the resources to conduct or commission a nation-wide survey of attitudes. And even asking users of the service about their experiences would be difficult, as (unlike many of the other organisations at the workshop) DPPI tended to just have one-off contact with people seeking information, rather than an ongoing relationship with local residents. So collecting large-scale, comparable data on indicators of change was going to be challenging.

Instead, we used the workshop to think about the kinds of information that *were* available to suggest changes DPPI had made. Examples included coverage of their work in a national newspaper, which had led to an increase in use of the service, and stories of how individual users’ lives had been improved by the service, where these had been followed up. These potential sources of data could be built on without a great deal of effort; for instance, by looking out for stories in the media about disabled parents to get a sense of how positively or negatively they were presented (as an indicator of widespread attitudes). This, of course, would not give direct evidence of changes made by DPPI rather than other factors,

but coupled with following up a small number of users' experiences, they could suggest how these small stories might indicate a wider effect. This suggested approach began from the information on changes that was available, and thought about how this could be used and developed to understand the organisation's impact.

There is often a rhetorical assumption that quantitative data provide 'better', more scientific evidence than qualitative data (Chauhan, 2009). This is epitomised in the characterising of the two types as 'hard' and 'soft' data. We characterised the two forms as 'statistics and stories' or 'narratives and numbers', to emphasise that *both* types of information are likely to be important in demonstrating and understanding impacts, both internally and externally. Narratives and numbers capture different information. Numbers may be more suited to demonstrating outcomes – countable things that have been achieved. But impact, in the sense of change that has complex causes and is not always expected, may be better told through descriptive stories of change (see Uprichard and Byrne, 2006 for a discussion of the power of narratives in understanding complex change). It may also be the most accessible way of demonstrating change for small organisations whose impact beyond their immediate users, volunteers or participants is hard to measure at a population level.

In the workshops, we started off by thinking that a simple way of visualising impact would be to identify specific areas where an organisation wanted to make a difference as spokes of a 'wheel', where impact would be represented by progress along a spoke towards the ideal maximum impact. But attempting to do this in the workshop, as a group, we quickly identified that this seemed an inappropriate way to visualise the impact. Imagining impact as starting at an origin ('no impact') and moving towards (or away from) a goal became impossible or at best irrelevant to the more holistic way we were inviting each other to think about 'impact' (Figure 3.1).

Even if we had been developing programmes to measure impact over time, the 'base line' of 'no impact' was not necessarily a clear-cut 'absence of social inclusion' (or whatever) but a specific, complex picture. We tried to imagine how we would identify 'no impact on social inclusion', compared to 'full impact on social inclusion', before working out what intermediate steps on this path might look like. The difficulties that participants had with completing this exercise, and the logical problems with it (would 'complete social inclusion' really be

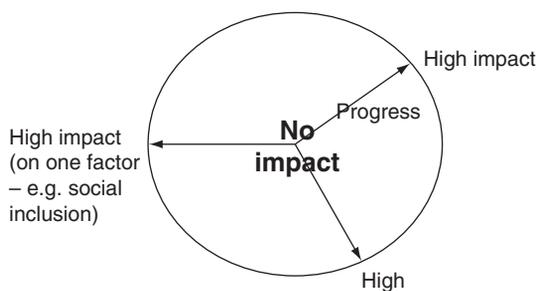


Figure 3.1 Impact wheel

possible?), suggested that we had become trapped in a model that did not necessarily work for visualising the impact in this context.

The 'wheel' seems more suited to *planning* change, rather than measuring the impact. This brought to the fore an issue, which we had started to tease out, that impacts might be unexpected – and not easily imagined in a linear model of cause and effect.

#### Unexpected changes: but does it count?

An example of unexpected change was given by one of the funding organisations interviewed for this research, where the interviewee remembered meeting a participant in one of the local gardening groups they had funded. She described how she had received an unexpectedly large number of cards when she had a stay in hospital, from friends she had made in the gardening group. The group could not of course have, as one of its planned and quantifiable outcomes, the number of greetings cards received by members when they fell ill. But in terms of impact, this story was an important sign of the difference the group had made to one individual who might otherwise have felt isolated and alone.

Thinking about some of the techniques that seem important in making the impact measurement useful to organisations, and which enable organisations to convince funders and others of their success, it was clear that an important element was knowing how to 'play the game'.<sup>2</sup> The tricky part of the 'game' of evaluation and impact measurement is that the most successful players of the game are the ones who have not

only learnt the rules, but learnt how to bend them. So, this research suggested that it is important for small organisations to find ways to play, and bend, the rules of the game of impact measurement. This means being confident about what is effective and being prepared to argue for it and debate it with funders and others. Part of this argument might be making the case for the importance of a strong collective community sector, rather than trying to focus on one's own lone organisation. There are practical difficulties with this: firstly, the competitive structure of the funding environment, and secondly, finding ways to capture the collective and shared effects of organisations. Nevertheless, in the workshop with several local organisations, some possibilities for sharing information on changes made did begin to emerge.

### **Sharing information on change**

One of the organisations participating in the workshops was FoodCycle. This is a charity that develops local volunteer groups to gather local surplus food and prepares meals for people in need. They work in partnership with a range of other charities, including a significant project with MIND, and recognised that some of the people they work with, such as homeless people, may also be in contact with other local community groups. FoodCycle already had quite a well-developed system for gathering feedback from volunteers and participants and developed new elements of this through the workshop, but they were also keen to share what information they had gathered on impact with other groups with whom they collaborated. The very simple way of doing this that they suggested was to send copies of their annual report, which would include an impact statement, to those partners. Partners could then see the kinds of difference made by FoodCycle, including the elements to which their own work may have contributed. This suggests that one simple way of representing the combined impact of community organisations would be to compile the stories of change and impact that different groups had collected, many of which might overlap and connect. The most obvious way to do this would be through existing umbrella groups (such as VAI) that could use this kind of information to lobby for the importance of the sector as a whole.

Most small community organisations are not short of passion or belief in their work and its worth. And funders already seem to be having internal discussions about better ways of capturing meaningful impact. Community organisations may need to find the confidence to focus on their own ambitions and not be too distracted by prescriptive performance frameworks, and here there is undoubtedly a role for umbrella groups within the sector, and funding organisations, to help to build this confidence and recognise the impact that groups make in their own terms.

### **Moving beyond management frameworks: Can you negotiate your own agenda?**

An example of such confidence is the continuing work by Praxis, which was, meanwhile, working to identify a new approach to understanding their impact following these research projects. The rapidly changing and increasingly threatening external operating environment and policy context put an even greater pressure on the organisation to have a sophisticated understanding of change. The first step was to review conventional thinking with a critical eye, open to a framework that admits spontaneity, randomness and chaos.

Bauman writes, 'We are coming to realize that contingency, randomness, haphazardness, ambiguity and irregularity are not products of occasional and in principle rectifiable blunders, but inalienable features of all existence; and so also unremovable from the social and individual lives of humans' (Bauman, 2010). Stacey (2003) alerts us to chaos, complexity and uncertainty not as the basis of a new framework but evidence that we have far less control over organisations and their achievements than we might like to believe. We can reconstruct by seeking out the mystical, circular, ecological in contrast to the prevailing linear production paradigm. With this starting point, Praxis is developing an approach to impact measurement, which is rooted in the reality of a contingent context rather than one that assumes a fixed set of circumstances.

It is worth exploring the suspicion that civil society has adopted management tools from industry far too uncritically and bought into a system unsuited to comprehending the complex interaction between human beings, society and their varying degrees of acceptance and belonging. This is a question of power and process. The manager or the agency's management team hold the power as the innovator, the designer, the producer, the monitor and the disseminator of the outcome. Terminology such as 'empowerment' or 'awareness raising' is

flawed if it suggests a power relationship between the empower-er and the empower-ed, the unaware and the awareness raiser. Praxis is seeking to allow agency to shift between actors. It is in the recognition of the fluid and complex nature of power that new narratives emerge. Victories are shifting sands, between moments of optimism; unperceived resilience in communities; concrete gains in policy; new patterns of social relationships; fresh perceptions of distinctiveness, uniqueness and commonalities; material sufficiency; more equitable resource distribution, but not merely the achievement of measurable outcomes.

Otto Scharmer (2009) talks of 'downloading the future'. That is to say, if we are asked to construct a future intervention, we invariably recreate what we have always known. The voluntary sector reproduces itself, often uncritically, bringing in the same tired responses to social problems that are dynamic and rapidly changing. Racism and poverty are far more resilient as prevailing forces than the countervailing projects designed to confront them. With these thoughts in mind, Praxis has shifted its thinking away from the quest for the holy grail of effective impact measurement to reasserting the importance of its underlying Freirian pedagogy. The agency is a space within which we can work to model a new future.

How to do this? Essential to Praxis' emerging paradigm is an understanding of values. These values of social solidarity, respect, equality, integrity are given concrete expression and legitimacy through an assertion of fundamental human rights. Specifically, for vulnerable migrants, these rights are the right to *shelter* (people with no recourse to public funds not being able to access entitlements under homelessness legislation); *livelihoods* (the community experiences restrictions on the right to work, extreme exploitation in the workplace and takes the initiative through its own entrepreneurial activity); and *health, family and social life* (traumatic experiences and poverty impact on health; access to health care is limited and families are separated through restrictive immigration controls whilst communities need space to create new, supportive social relationships).

In constructing an ongoing programme, Praxis draws upon evidence emerging from its everyday engagement, particularly through its open-access advice service, and gathers evidence through networks and forums and more structured research. The programme combines access to advocacy for individuals with project work focused not only on fundamental human rights but also on an ongoing analysis of the forces of discrimination and exclusion experienced in the day-to-day situations of new migrants.

Praxis' statements of its objectives are not SMART but visionary. Praxis is bringing the future into being by

- amplifying the voice of new communities so that they are actively engaged in the decisions that affect their lives;
- creating resilient communities that withstand and overcome disadvantage, discrimination and exploitation.

It would be mistaken not to draw upon the tools of project management where they are helpful, and Praxis does so. However, there is a far greater dependence upon action reflection cycles that also involve an assessment of power, drawing upon power analysis (Hunjan and Pettit, 2011). The framework Praxis has developed challenges the simplistic, mechanistic notions of management theory. It refuses to define the specific outcomes of its programme, whilst valuing conventional tools within project work. It focuses on values, aspirations and vision. By counterpoising an ongoing analysis of the present with the creation of inclusive spaces for new relationships of quality and equality, Praxis is not organising communities but allowing a new ecology of community to emerge. Success is not an event consequent upon one thing leading to another, but the serendipitous and rippling transformations within individuals, communities and the wider social, economic, political and cultural landscapes.

## **Conclusion**

Both of the research projects discussed here and the ongoing reflection cycles at Praxis have shown that off-the-peg toolkits and management solutions do not fit easily when measuring the impacts made by community development organisations. Yet, thinking of impact measurement as an opportunity to understand the change that community organisations can make could be powerful both for individual organisations and collectively as a sector. To do so, the experience of this action research is that imagination, passion and flexibility need to be brought together with an ongoing 'research mindedness' within community groups. By research mindedness, we mean recognising that organisations, groups and individuals already collect a wealth of information on the difference they make, but this might not be currently recognised as 'data'. It may simply be a question of systematically gathering

existing knowledge in one place – recognising that some evidence will be anecdotal, some numerical, some formally collected and some accidentally discovered. Questioning our own reasons for believing that organisations are effective is important, but so is questioning received wisdom about how this should be measured.

If community organisations and groups can become more aware of, and confident in, how they might use different research-based methods and approaches to develop their own reflective practice, this might help to push the boundaries of these frameworks and to challenge funders, policy makers and influencers to think about local community development issues in new and different, evidence-based ways. Such ‘research-minded’ work in challenging funders’ ideas as well as meeting the needs of funders in more straitened times might be difficult, but it could be valued in terms of strengthening the communities’ own reflective practice and progress in community development too.

Aside from being clear about the language games of performance measurement and the varied meanings ‘impact’ can have, community development groups can find ways to think about impact as a transformative and social justice-oriented tool, rather than simply a bureaucratic reporting requirement. The two key, related, findings highlighted here are (1) frameworks need to be developed in ways that fit the organisation (rather than making the organisation or its data fit an existing framework) and (2) impact measurement should allow space to recognise that change is often complex, non-linear and sometimes unexpected.

## Note

1. Large scale data collection on this scale has subsequently been reduced by the Coalition government.
2. A phrase coined by one of the funder interviewees, and very appropriately reminiscent of Bourdieu’s (1990 [1980]) discussion of how a ‘feel for the game’ constitutes part of a person’s cultural capital, or ability to function authoritatively in certain situations.

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# 4

## Research with Refugee and Asylum Seeker Organisations: Challenges of Insider Action Research

*Green Nyoni*

### Introduction

The focus of this study arose from the perceived inequalities that existed at Manchester Refugee Support Network (MRSN), including uneven participation in the organisation's management and decision-making processes and the under-representation of particular groups within the refugee and asylum seeker communities. The main research focus explored the role of MRSN and how it could best support the interests of these under-represented groups and individuals. One of the main objectives of the project was to strengthen MRSN's capacities to empower refugees, asylum seekers and under-represented groups within these communities by giving them a *voice* in MRSN both individually and collectively so that MRSN could provide them with improved services. It was therefore critical to ensure that the research methodology encouraged participants to be actively involved and engaged in the research process. This is particularly important for groups of people who feel that their voices have been suppressed and have been unable to find any appropriate channels through which to raise their fears and concerns. In order to gain the trust and confidence of the participants, it was felt that an 'insider research' approach would be most appropriate, then.

The term 'insider research' is used when the researcher has a particular connection or involvement with the organisation and/or group of individuals involved in the research study. Often the researcher conducts interviews and focus groups as a member of the organisation and this can sometimes lead to a number of challenges around confidentiality,

validity and ethics. Interestingly, within the context of this study, some of the challenges I faced as a researcher centred around the power of my own voice and the extent to which it may have emanated through the research overpowering those around me.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) describe giving voice as 'empowering people to be heard who might otherwise remain silent' (1998: 204) although the fundamental question is always – 'Whose story or voice is it? Is it about the participants' or the researcher's?' The participant's voice is 'always mediated through the research process and the researcher's understandings. Researchers play an active role in analysis, in identifying and presenting themes and patterns' (Bannister, 2011: 11). The positionality of the researcher is crucial in terms of the impact upon the research findings, something I was conscious of throughout the process.

Bearing these questions in mind, I felt that I had to constantly re-evaluate my position as both 'researcher', 'friend' and 'group member'. In this chapter, I reflect on the successes and challenges of the study from an insider researcher perspective. My research findings are based on interviews, focus groups and participant observation of various activities at MRSN, working with and talking to representatives from refugee community organisations (RCOs) and six other refugee organisations. These findings then informed the ideas which I shared with participants at MRSN as a way of improving the organisation and its effectiveness, for example through fundraising, governance and emancipatory activities.

This chapter analyses the benefits of the study to MRSN and then explores the barriers that prevented the study from being more successful, from both the organisation's and researcher's perspective. It also explores how emancipatory perspectives helped to empower some of the more isolated and detached members of the community as well as the limitations caused by destitution in achieving active citizenship. And it explores the complications faced by MRSN in fulfilling its potential because of the nature of the organisation, its members and the changing external funding landscape.

## **Background**

MRSN has almost 20 years' experience of working to support people who have sought or are seeking refuge in the United Kingdom. Over this time, it has achieved a growth in membership from 7 to 21 refugee community groups, and worked with over 50 refugee and migrant organisations across Greater Manchester. At the start of this study in 2010, MRSN had developed into a charitable organisation that

was composed of only seven trustees, with other members only participating during the election of trustees at Annual General Meetings. This lack of participation and engagement from the RCOs had led to an atmosphere of demotivation as well as a lack of equal representation at a time when the organisation needed their input most. So MRSN began to try and re-engage the stakeholders in order to ensure that all their needs were equally represented and their voices heard. I was subsequently appointed as a researcher, to undertake research to assist in this process.

At this time, Manchester Metropolitan University had received funding from the Economic and Social Research Council to support studentships linked to the 'Take Part' approach to active citizenship. As chapter 1 has already explained, the Take Part approach aimed to support communities in taking leading roles, actively participating in civic and civil matters (Mayo and Annette, 2010). The overall aim – to identify ways of increasing representation from RCOs and to improve the effectiveness of the network – was decided through negotiations with the MRSN management committee as being the focus for the studentship.

### Aims of the study

My main focus in undertaking this research was for the research to contribute to the creation of critical consciousness in the participants. I wanted the research to provide insights and support, enabling the refugees, asylum seekers and under-represented groups within this community to find their *voice*, because their voices had been suppressed by the discriminatory hegemony of immigration: the new sociological racism (Balibar, 1994).

More specifically, in addition to the discriminatory hegemony in the wider environment, the environment at MRSN itself had become bureaucratic and decisions were revolving around seven people instead of all stakeholders. And there were patriarchal attitudes. Women were not finding the spaces to contribute their voice and those who tried were being discouraged by domineering men and this made them withdraw. Young people were not even considered in the organisation. There were no specific activities for young people and they were not being encouraged to be involved in decision-making or planning. The research needed to identify ways of addressing these challenges, enabling the voices of the under-represented groups, particularly the women and the young people, to be heard more effectively as part of wider agendas for

social change, social solidarity and social justice. However, I realised that this would be a significant challenge for everyone involved, not least as this was the first time that MRSN had been part of such an in-depth and long-term research project. There were times when conflict and tension with former colleagues threatened to lead to the breakdown of the study as a whole, and I constantly had to re-evaluate the research design and my role within it.

As the study progressed, however, the majority of stakeholders began to embrace a more collaborative spirit. This was cultivated through my feedback from comparative studies, re-enforcing the impact of other initiatives such as leadership training, which was being provided whilst the research was ongoing. As a result, as it will be argued subsequently, the organisation's engagement with the women began to be more encouraging and the women themselves developed a more emancipatory spirit by being more assertive. Overall then, the organisation's activities became more representative, as a result of engaging with the research process.

### **Research methodology**

I aimed to gain as much in-depth data as possible and by documenting the multiple perspectives of participants' experiences and set out to draw out a number of themes and patterns that would help to provide MRSN with a toolkit to develop its community work. This in turn would improve the services available to the members and help them to alleviate some of the problems that they were encountering on a daily basis as a result of their participation in a range of activities as active citizens (Mayo and Annette, 2010).

### **The role of insider researcher**

I had been part of MRSN for nearly a decade as Secretary, then Chair of the Management Committee and subsequently as chair of the trustees. I was also involved in its development from a network to a charity. This had given me in-depth knowledge of the organisation and its members and they trusted me as a person they could relate to – in their eyes 'I was one of them'. Like them, I had gone through the asylum process in order to acquire refugee status; I felt that as a black, male refugee this would enable me to share and understand their experiences better than an 'outsider'.

Olson similarly argues that the researcher who shares a particular characteristic, for example, gender, ethnicity or culture, with the

researched is an insider, and everyone else, not sharing that particular characteristic, is an outsider (Olson, 1977: 171). However, Mercer argues that other studies show the boundaries between insider/outsider to be far more complex, permeable and unstable (Mercer, 2007: 4). This was something that I came to understand and appreciate more as the study progressed.

Due to my status within the group, the participants trusted me and were, I believe, honest and open in their responses to my questions. A specific example of this trust was that despite being a devout Seventh Day Adventist Christian man, I was able to conduct interviews with Muslim women on a one-to-one basis without anyone else being in the room. I felt that my position within the organisation enabled me to motivate staff, trustees, RCOs and volunteers to actively participate. And I also felt this collaborative partnership empowered the participants to become active researchers themselves in their own right.

I set out then to engage MRSN, its workers, trustees and members in a process of self-reflection and development, using a participatory research approach. This yielded observations and promoted dialogues with similar network organisations as well as within MRSN. Paulo Freire's seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) is seen by many (Craig and Mayo, 1995) as central in the development of participatory action research. Since then, the approach has developed significantly and several studies (Cole and Williams, 2007; Williams *et al.*, 2008; Sayce, 2011) acknowledge the value of participatory research as a way of ensuring that marginalised and vulnerable groups' experiences are valued and recorded. Participation is often highest where the participants' own and generate the research process and, as Ledwith and Springett explain, 'participatory approaches to practice are about teaching people to question answers rather than answer questions' (Ledwith and Springett, 2010: 21). Within my role, I aimed to encourage our members to do exactly that: question answers rather than answer questions.

## Challenges to being an insider researcher

During the course of the study, I began to realise how my position as insider researcher might in fact be impacting negatively on the research findings though – and perhaps the participants' own experience. One of the main ethical principles underpinning research is the guarantee of confidentiality. In this instance, this was potentially problematic. Participants might have been reluctant to share or divulge any sensitive

information, which they felt might be potentially damaging to either themselves or the organisation, if made public.

In contrast, such information could have been divulged to an outsider who would be anonymous to the organisation and therefore able to adopt a more independent and neutral position and interpretation (Smith, 1999). In addition, Murray and Lawrence (2000) argue that the findings of an insider researcher could be discredited as being biased and therefore lacking validity and reliability. In this study, this concern was addressed as participants were involved with each stage of the process and all the findings were shared and discussed.

## Data collection

Data was collected through unstructured interviews with representatives from six RCOs (three in Manchester, two in Yorkshire and one in the North East) and semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation with the rest of the participants who were all involved with MRSN and associated RCOs. Interviews were conducted with 58 participants, and these took on average from 45 minutes to an hour. The focus groups took an hour or more, depending on the participants' level of engagement.

My aim was that both the researcher and the participants should hold positions of 'power' in the interview process and the focus group discussions. The participants initiated some project ideas that they felt would be valuable to develop; for example, a new youth project, an immigration advice service and a refugee awareness day. As the researcher, at times I also guided the participants, through further questioning or 'probing'. I feel, on reflection, that this at times may have influenced the direction of the study. On the whole though, I did feel that the participants all felt comfortable talking about any of the topics involved – although there were times when we accidentally highlighted an area that they were more sensitive about discussing together in a focus group. Overall these research processes were effective then, and the participants raised a number of issues that they highlighted as important in supporting the development and sustainability of the organisation, including issues relating to governance, fund raising, collaborative working and emancipatory activities.

This study focussed on both the learning and working experiences of the participants. As writers such as Antonacopoulou *et al.* (2005) and Costley *et al.* (2010) argue, people's development in life is shaped by their working and learning, a process of knowledge transference. In this

study, research participants at MRSN were working and learning, at the same time trying to improve MRSN in this informal learning setting where they were situated. This could be termed 'life wide or life place' and was done through a series of discussion forums and feedback sessions (Costley et al., 2010).

I probably knew the majority of the participants personally. Although we were from different cultural, religious, ethnic, backgrounds, we all shared the status of being refugees and asylum seekers (Gluck, 1994). According to Robertson, the in-depth awareness of the culture is unsurpassed when one is part of the culture that is under study (Robertson, 1983).

In choosing to engage the participants in open and unstructured dialogue, I was able to collect some rich and in-depth data. There was 'a degree of depth, flexibility, richness, and vitality often lacking in conventional questionnaire-based interviews' (Miles and Crush, 1993: 85). This approach facilitated the discovery of 'not only what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did' (Portelli, 1998: 67). Rosalto (1989) also argues that it is a myth that investigators can develop an empirically detached attitude in a study as if they were rigid and lacked flexibility. So data collected by an insider researcher should not always be viewed with suspicion; what is important is that it is not covertly collected.

## Feedback and responses

Feedback on the research findings was carried out both informally and formally. This entailed engaging with participants – anytime and anywhere some would call me to discuss matters concerning the organisation. I felt this to be a positive development as it gave the opportunity for certain issues to be resolved before formal feedback sessions in team meetings and the like. However, some members perceived my presence and research as a threat to their opinions, and therefore initially the research findings feedback sessions were not met with much enthusiasm. This necessitated a change of approach on my part. Instead of giving detailed findings and recommendations, I gave various perspectives about 'concepts' and ideas. For example, in relation to governance options, following visits I made to other similar organisations, I would explore the different options that I had observed and discuss the various management theories I had witnessed. This change in approach resulted in renewed interest and motivation from the participants who then developed a more positive attitude towards the formative research

process. It could be argued that the change in receptiveness from MRSN could have stemmed from the perception that the feedback stimulated the participants' growing self-awareness and created feelings of reflection on their role and actions in the process. It could further be argued that the change of my approach, which was liberationist (Freire, 1972), brought the realisation that the formative feedback was part of a process of learning that could be unpredictable and uncontrollable (Godwin, 1994).

Findings from these discussions were presented to the management committee and trustees and at other meetings and training events. This resulted in the development of an enhanced Community Leadership Training programme and a refugee awareness campaign. The biggest contribution to the positive outcomes of my formative study was the realisation from the trustees that every voice was important, and as an organisation there was a need to create a new culture of working, an accommodating environment that nurtured all voices.

### **Outcomes of the study**

In general, the study achieved its main outcome of giving the MRSN members the chance to challenge some of the issues that had in the past hindered their progression to become active citizens, at an individual and organisational level. It also enabled them to participate more fully in the day-to-day running and development of the organisation, which helped to improve the services on offer, both to themselves and other members of the community. This is illustrated through some case studies given below.

As discussed in the introduction, changes in policies and funding affecting refugees and asylum seekers in general had impacted negatively on the nature of MRSN as a support- and service-provider organisation within the community, resulting in fewer RCOs participating in the management and direction of the organisation. In addition, there were some groups who were not being represented at all or engaged in any of the activities of the organisation, particularly young people and women.

Based on the findings of comparative studies and a previous research I had undertaken with looked-after unaccompanied asylum-seeker children (Nyoni, 2010), there was a clear need identified for MRSN to make greater connections with young people and their projects. Through a series of collaborative and participatory workshops, the staff at MRSN developed initiatives that would help them to connect to other

organisations in Manchester, which were working with, and supporting, young people.

During the progress of the study, it also became clear that not only were women under-represented in the organisation, both in terms of members and staff, but that they were also reluctant to assume a more overt role and lacked the necessary confidence to volunteer as trustees. Again, they perceived their contribution to be 'less valuable' than others and felt that a female perspective would not be welcomed within such a patriarchal organisation. By giving women individual time through the interview process, the focus groups, and their participation in the community leadership training, many women gained in confidence and felt that their views could and should be listened to. As a result, more women were willing to get involved in a range of MRSN activities and management structures. Some of the women members began to feel more emancipated more generally too, after finding the confidence to share their views within an environment in which they felt safe and comfortable. Some of even the most isolated women began to take more active roles in campaigning for their rights and raising awareness of refugees' and asylum-seekers' issues with local community and council representatives.

During the course of the study, I came to realise that there were a number of issues that I had not previously identified or considered as possible constraints to the research. These included the destitution of some of the members, changes to the organisation's funding and the changing dynamics within the organisation itself.

The destitution of some of MRSN service users impacted significantly on their ability to actively engage or fully participate in the activities of MRSN, or the research process. Destitution is a manifestation of the lack of living needs, which could be accommodation, food and clothing (Immigration and Asylum Act, 1999). In the UK context, where there is a Welfare State, it could additionally include the inability to access statutory support. Destitution stems from 'systematic material poverty and disadvantage, social exclusion, oppression and institutionalised structural inequalities and social divisions within society as a whole' (Walker and Walker, 1997: 8). Asylum seekers are unsurprisingly particularly vulnerable, not only to destitution itself, but to the problems associated with living in poverty; for example, poor health, social isolation, lack of confidence and depression. All of these impact on their ability to become active citizens within their community as they feel they have nothing to offer and no 'voice' to communicate with. As Walker and Walker state

social exclusion emanates from the dynamic process of being shut out of ... the social economic, political, and cultural systems, which determine the social integration of the person in society.

(1997: 8)

Being involved in an environment, which is familiar to them, with people they feel comfortable with, can often help to combat feelings of social isolation. The highlighting, through the research process, of the impact of destitution on the engagement process, both within MRSN and more widely, enabled these issues to be prioritised so that destitute asylum seekers were seen by MRSN as not only individuals in need of support and advice, but members of communities potentially able to engage in democratic and empowering processes.

Not only have many of the potential members of MRSN been experiencing social exclusion and discrimination as a result of their status. The organisation faces the additional challenges posed by the composition of their membership, which is unusually diverse. Unlike many VCS groups, the main factor that brings people together within the MRSN community is their status as refugees or asylum seekers. Members come from many different countries, speak different languages and hold differing religious beliefs, some of which are in conflict with each other. In addition, there are class, caste and gender divisions to be addressed. The challenge for the research was not only to be aware of these differences but also to work to the research focus, examining ways to extend representation, for the future of the organisation and the well-being of all, more generally.

However, the make-up of the membership also meant that although they possessed a wide range of skills and knowledge, and previous experience, they often came with no material resources. And their previous occupations did not always provide them with skills that would be transferable to a small voluntary organisation (e.g. having been a high-ranking officer in the armed forces was not necessarily a helpful background, when it came to participating in a small voluntary organisation). In addition to these internal pressures, the research took place at a time of major external pressure and funding changes.

Cuts in funding and bureaucratic barriers have all placed increasing pressure on the organisation, threatening its abilities not only to support its members but also to survive at all. MRSN is an organisation that relies significantly on the contributions of volunteers, who provide services in support of the paid staff. However, the circumstances of this group often change according to their citizenship or financial status, leaving

the organisation when their lives become more stable and they want to move on to employment and a secure family life. As a result, a number of skilled volunteers have left the organisation, to be replaced by people less familiar with the principles and ethos of MRSN or with Third Sector management issues more generally.

The division of labour between the staff was also an issue in terms of the relationships between their roles and the roles of the trustees and the fundraisers. This created tensions and conflicts – which were exacerbated with the recent austerity cuts. One large external funding cut led to the loss of 2 MRSN paid staff members, 30 volunteers and 10 RCOs who were involved with the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES). (MRSN had received an annual grant of £90,000 from the RIES project of which £50,000 went towards salaries and £40,000 was spent on running costs and payment to the RCOs for infrastructure support.) The government also withdrew funding from the Migrant Impact Fund that had contributed an annual amount of £160,326 that had paid the salaries of four staff having represented the most significant source of external funding for MRSN. In addition, substantial funding from The Big Lottery to support the work of the Refugee and Migrant Forum was not continued.

## Conclusion

Despite all the challenges and upheavals MRSN has recently faced, I believe that this collaborative process has impacted positively on the organisation and helped to support its sustainability. By giving the members more of a 'voice' they now have the confidence to actively engage, not only in MRSN activities, but also within the community as a whole. They feel they have something of value to contribute, but more importantly they also feel that someone is listening to them. My role as 'insider researcher' provided both the catalyst and opportunity for members to engage in a participatory research project that helped them to develop greater confidence and self-esteem. MRSN was able to harness its members' new-found enthusiasm and motivation and direct it to developing new initiatives to help secure the future of the organisation.

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# 5

## Researching Empowerment in Practice: Working with a Women's Refugee and Asylum Group

*Hannah Berry*

This chapter examines the case for community-development-based approaches for working with refugees and asylum seekers, contrasting practice that sets out to empower women to speak up for their rights with provision that starts from a perception of asylum seekers as individualised victims in need merely of services and assistance. The research upon which this is based explored the benefits of collaborative awareness raising for disrupting prejudice, challenging discrimination and fostering solidarity in the host population. Collaborative awareness raising was, in addition, examined in terms of the potential contributions to building refugees' own resistance to the debilitating impacts of racism and the consequences of what have been described as 'the withdrawal of humanising practices... lack of welcome... and a heightening of the adversarial approach to those who seek to make their lives in the UK' (O'Neill, 2010: xiv), which has characterised the asylum system for more than a decade.

As a researcher, I was a PhD student based at Manchester Metropolitan University that was working in partnership with the host organisation, the GAP Unit, a small community interest company that was facilitating group work, often with women. The research followed GAP Unit's main piece of funded work between 2009 and 2011, a project involving women who were refugees or seeking asylum. At the centre of the project was the Arise and Shine group, 14 women from 10 countries at different stages in the asylum process for whom the group was both a space for giving and receiving mutual support and an action base for various public awareness-raising activities. The aim of the study was to create, through participant interviews, group discussions and personal reflection, an account that would be helpful for other Third Sector

practitioners who were wanting to be effective and empowering allies to migrant women. As well as sharing what the women taught us about 'what works', the resulting research highlights political and ethical questions and dilemmas of practice (and representation) which community workers might productively consider more generally.

My colleague Carolina de Otezya and I are co-directors of GAP Unit, founded in 2009. Coming from Venezuela's 'popular education' movement, she brings particular experience and a strong commitment to Freirian practice. She has spent 25 years supporting the empowerment of people, especially women, facing poverty, injustice and marginalisation, helping them develop their organisations and networks, connect to power holders, assert their rights and demand change.

My research began six months into GAP Unit's Arise and Shine project, when participant feedback had already confirmed that the first phase had been worth doing and a second stage was about to start. Paulo Freire (1996: 47) placed great emphasis on the collective learning that comes from reflection on action, so GAP Unit's community projects are, as a matter of course, participatory and strong on evaluation. With Arise and Shine, we were under no pressure to measure outcomes or impacts beyond funders' unproblematic requirements and did not foresee a direct repeat of the project, so the studentship primarily represented a chance to

1. read, learn and develop a more nuanced understanding of the kinds of social, moral and political issues and dilemmas implicated in community work with diverse groups, and to improve my ability to theorise and communicate my work as an insider and activist as well as a researcher;
2. share reflections and recommendations (especially the participants' insights and wisdom) with other practitioners and activists;
3. extend the awareness raising of Arise and Shine through wider dissemination of the participants' views on the asylum system and what needs to change.

The first point relates to the researcher's own 'capacity building', which can also support the organisation where s/he is an internal researcher and planning to stay on. The second refers to the systematisation and sharing of learning, in my case with people such as this book's target readers, who are studying or undertaking similar work either formally or as unpaid activists. With regard to the third point, academic theses

tend to offer little scope for dissemination without resources for translation into other formats and genres, but I still aim to contribute 'to the polyphony of voices' (Pannett, 2011: 241) exposing injustices and calling for change.

## **The action**

Arise and Shine started out as series of discussions with members of five women's organisations in Greater Manchester and Preston, during which participants were invited to share their experiences of the asylum system and how it could be improved. A 'learning exchange event' then gathered everyone together to consolidate the process of identifying concerns and targets for change and to create new connections across the region. It was also an opportunity for cultural exchange, with more than 80 women sharing music, dance, stories and food from their countries and celebrating their collective strength as women.<sup>1</sup> The idea had been to make participants aware of existing campaigns and other ways of taking action on the issues they had identified. However, several individual participants were keen to continue collaborating with GAP Unit. This prompted the formation of the Arise and Shine Group, for which further funding was secured. From then on (Phase 2), the project was driven by the participants' desire to do something together to fight back against the exclusions of the asylum system.

The group became both a forum for mutual support and an action group, with the GAP Unit drawing on our experience of facilitation and on our networks and resources to make it happen. Three of those who joined were also core members of Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST), a well-respected, self-organised, Manchester-based group that was growing increasingly experienced in self-advocacy. One of them, Lydia Besong, was writing an educational play called 'How I Became an Asylum Seeker', and when they saw a work-in-progress version of this performed by members of WAST, Arise and Shine participants realised it would be the perfect vehicle for the awareness raising they wanted to do. Our funder (the regional empowerment body, North West Together We Can) agreed, so we were able to rehire the director to work with WAST to refine their production and add new scenes, whilst the Arise and Shine Group took on organising for it to be shown to audiences of public sector decision makers and staff whose work brought them into contact with new migrants in some way.

The play was performed in theatres in two cities, on each occasion followed by an hour-long workshop bringing audience members

into dialogue with the WAST actors and other Arise and Shine members. A few months later, the women initiated the 'Educate!' project (Phase 3), visiting schools to speak with children, young people and their teachers. When pre-16 citizenship education was first introduced to the English National Curriculum in 2002, critics questioned whether the new lessons were properly 'preparing young people for citizenship in the context of globalisation, including the impact of globalisation on Britain, in terms of migration flows, including the flows of refugees and asylum seekers' (Mayo and Rooke, 2006: 15). Craig *et al.* (2004) were amongst those calling for more experiential learning to address questions of social and moral responsibility and develop skills of reflection, enquiry and debate, and the enthusiasm of the primary and secondary teachers we approached for an invitation reflected these concerns. Some of the WAST members had previously given talks in schools and felt it was important because

if you go to a school with something that is so touching, if it touches this child she won't let the parents rest, she will always tell the parents 'this is happening, this is happening'.

(Lydia)

They believed that the work would generate

support from the next generation, because they will know the real story, they will realise these things, because they've heard it direct from asylum seeker.

(Naima)

A final 'women's gathering' was held with the last of the money. Thereafter, the group reconvened every five or six months to catch up with each other, celebrate legal victories, share a meal and participate in some structured activities from Carolina's repertoire of popular education activities. Lydia said of these meetings:

Maybe you just say what was nice in the past weeks or, or what's also there. For me, it cheers you up... It makes you forget about even if you have some other drawbacks, you forget about them but you focus on the nice things that happened to you, and also we are all friendly and together with each one.

'What's also there' refers to difficult experiences: periods of detention and threatened deportation, bereavements, health problems, the

hardship of eviction and destitution. Women would respond with prayers, affirmation, expressions of solidarity and stories of their own to boost hope and resilience in anyone who was feeling down. Here, for example, Susan describes how hearing defiant tales from Lydia and Sofia, who had both just secured release from Yarls Wood Immigration Removal Centre, helped with her paralysing fear that she could herself be detained any day:

Staying at home, being alone, nobody can push me; otherwise I will just sit, be seated, all my mind, all my intelligence; like me, am I possible? But that mixing and sharing some words, those words are the ones who push me, which will push me, then and having that confidence; no, if Sofia did go through it, Lydia managed it, if she's – she was explaining to me – so, I can as well! That sharing with me gives me the extent of pushing myself as well.

Arise and Shine was a group process during which the women took collective action and evaluated how it had gone, but it was not an action research project precisely in the sense that neither they nor I had set out to solve a specific problem, and nor was there a cyclical process of feeding back findings into action. Members were aware that I was making a case study of our collaboration but I did not want to interfere with the course of events or impose a research remit on it. I discretely recorded our meetings, but most of the data transcribed and analysed came from hour-long interviews with seven participants, the evaluation sessions (which would have been held anyway) at the end of each phase and one of our later meetings at which I presented themes from my preliminary analysis to see whether the group found them an accurate summary of their ideas and opinions (they did). This had led into a recorded discussion rather like an informal focus group where I was able to explore other questions that had arisen in the course of the research.

The project unfolded according to its own logic, without reference to what was going on elsewhere, but Navarro's survey reveals that it was many ways typical of projects being conceptualised by refugee and ally organisations nationally:

A key part of community development is enabling people to articulate their own concerns and hopes. Projects in a northern mill town, a town in south east England and a city in Scotland have all provided support to asylum seekers and refugees to enable them to speak at conferences, seminars or workshops as well as visiting schools

to talk about issues and raise awareness regarding asylum seekers and refugees and inviting refugees as guest speakers.... An overriding requirement in supporting RCOs [refugee community organisations]... is the need to create safe spaces for people to meet, in environments and locations where they will be welcomed and not feel threatened. In other neighbourhood settings workers were supporting women led groups with the current emphasis being on self help and supporting the establishment of a women's group to enable them to advocate on behalf of other women who are asylum seekers and refugees.

(Navarro, 2006: 13)

### **Learning from Arise and Shine**

In terms of their legal status, the members of Arise and Shine were a mixture of recent and long-standing refugees, asylum seekers who had arrived recently or been waiting for years and 'visa over-stayers' lost in a Home Office backlog but subject to the same conditions as asylum seekers (housed in the same substandard accommodation, in receipt of an income well below citizen benefit levels, not permitted to work or study).<sup>2</sup> All had a strong faith, either Muslim or Christian. They were from the Sudan, Bangladesh, Uganda, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Eritrea, Malawi, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Some were married, some widowed, some single. Those who were mothers had children ranging from toddlers to grown adults, either living with them or 'back home', or both. Levels of spoken English, formal education, political and professional experience also varied considerably within the group. This diversity was a strength; all of the participants had chosen to be part of (or, at least, stayed with) the group because they knew they had something to contribute and to gain from one another.

Another differential was the extent of the women's involvement in other associational activities locally, in addition to Arise and Shine and their faith community. Some had a large number of voluntary commitments, whilst for others Arise and Shine had been their first venture beyond groups we had worked with in the first phase. Fiona had been pretty much exclusively attending Refugee Mothers United (RMU), where access to professional counselling had helped her cope with problems that had been threatening to overwhelm her, including the ongoing uncertainty of her legal case, the absence of her daughter, having no money and the demands of a small baby and a husband struggling with mental illness. She was also grateful for the birth partner

RMU had provided and for the sense of community she got from the bi-weekly drop-in, adding, 'As a group, we take ourselves as a family, to look upon each other, so Jane is like our mother'. She highlights that the organisation's core offerings are of support and assistance, mainly from the manager, Jane.

Wherever we want to go, which numbers we need to call, which support we need, she knows already, because she's born here, and we are new to the system and sometimes we are new even in Preston.

'What is in RMU is not what is in GAP Unit', said Fiona, however. Her account indicated that Arise and Shine had complemented the other group, in particular through its focus on their shared predicament as asylum seekers, and on its political framing. Freire believed that the conditions for political action are created when people who are oppressed begin to talk about their problems, freeing themselves from fatalism and isolation. In addition, the hostility and indifference they are exposed to as asylum seekers is also cast in a different light by the realisation that they have superior knowledge to those who have merely absorbed negative populist assumptions. 'I'm telling you, they didn't know anything! They asked from a perspective whereby you see that someone completely doesn't know what is going on, who is a refugee and who is an asylum seeker!', said Fiona of the teachers she had talked with in one of the schools.

The school visits also broke an invisible barrier for Fiona, who had developed a level of apprehension and mistrust towards young British people:

At first I thought, these youth have grown in Europe, they won't be able to listen (to) my ideas or my worries and everything ... But they were very, very calm, and eager to listen more what I had to say. And I was like 'Eh! Even I can talk to the youth, and the youth can listen to me!'

Having begun thinking 15 minutes would feel interminable she came to wish she had been allocated twice as long, because she had so much left to say. This was despite having found part of the talk quite upsetting, because she had found herself mentioning the child in Uganda whom she had not seen since she was a toddler, something she usually kept concealed, even from herself. A barrage of questions followed from the curious students who identified with this nine-year old and

wanted to understand more. It was a difficult, emotional, but finally cathartic experience, allowing Fiona to process emotions she had been suppressing and to let go of some self-blame:

The most important thing I got in the schools project was to talk about my daughter. I feel my daughter is part of me now, because I don't fear talking about her, it doesn't bring any inconveniences if I'm telling eh! any person about her... The children asked 'Why did you have to leave her, back home?' And I was like, 'I didn't have enough money to bring her on board... it was not like a planned travel that we are going to travel like you will wake up with your mum and dad, you are going somewhere for holiday. No, no, no. It was through desperation that you needed to move out from your country to another one. You didn't know how much longer you will be even there'. Yeah? So it was very good, and a very nice experience. I will never forget about it, honestly, I will never forget about that. And it, it really filled in the gap between the youth and me.

After sharing this story at a conference, I was asked if we had not taken risks in exposing the women to such situations. Fiona's view was that 'it wasn't risky... We were not forced to talk about what we didn't want to talk' (although she pointed out that, unusually for GAP Unit, we had not done a proper group evaluation that day; instead of going to a café to 'talk all what we've talked... to sit down, relax *deeply*, before you get your journey', the debrief had been done hastily on the bus on the way home). Of course, things might not have gone as well as they did, but what we were keen to avoid was the opposite tendency, apparent in many support organisations, of seeing asylum-seeking women through a prism of vulnerability, in need only of care and protection. This neglects the role of challenge and agency in people's recovery of personal strength in the face of experiences of racism and rejection, which is something that came across very powerfully in my interviews.

Fiona's definition of empowerment was 'letting me do things by myself'. For Lydia, it was 'making you feel like in your life never accept defeat, always know that you can break that wall – I just have to find I can break it.' For Elinah, empowerment happens when 'a situation comes, you just face it and you challenge it, sometimes without even thinking what you are doing, and then when you are sitting down, "Oh, I did that! Wow! This is", you see, "good!" And you see yourself rising to a level all the time.' Tendayi also attributed the recovery of her agency partly to what we undertook together. 'From the activities which

we were doing, I realised “No, you are still Tendayi, you are still capable of doing the things which you were capable of doing, whether ten years ago, you are still capable of doing those things.” She appreciated the fact that GAP Unit staff would ‘go in the background, behind the scenes, and you let us, you just say “you do it”, which is a very strong point about the organisation’.

RMU offered a different and valuable type of service, but the contrast is instructive. According to Fiona, ‘We don’t have whereby we are talking to each other about our problems. No. When everyone has problems in RMU, you just approach the manager’. RMU is centrally organised with a focus on meeting practical needs and providing individualised care. In Fiona’s view, ‘simply, leave to remain has been bringing us there. And maybe we only talk about that, Home Office, only, and from there, everyone they get on with their business, and that’s how it has been’. Running self-esteem sessions in RMU’s hall during the first phase of Arise and Shine, it was evidently a new experience for the women to be encouraged to sit round in a circle and talk to one another; whereas what Fiona had valued above all else with Arise and Shine was the chance to talk in depth with and learn from the other women in the group:

When I joined the GAP Unit, I knew that even me I can stand up, for myself, even stand up for somebody else... Because the women in GAP Unit they were really different from those of RMU. The women in GAP Unit, the problem had not really taken them too much, they were still strong though they had a problem going on same as mine. Whereas in RMU the problem really takes its toll with the women. And I think the problem is because we expect from one person to do everything for us. So we don’t look out there, to see how can we help ourselves.

As a result of the personal strength she had gained from spending time with older women she considered role models, Fiona said she had

come to realise that I’m the strongest person in RMU. And everyone thinks that I can be a support worker to other women. But they don’t know where I’ve got the courage to do that, it’s from going to GAP Unit. The women behave *very* different, strong, some women had even more problems than I do, but they were strong[er], than I was!...I try to explain, that I have *another* group, whereby the women have made me strong.

## Summing up

The Arise and Shine meetings were never frequent. At the height of the project, we met every few weeks, in addition to the workshops and events we were organising, but for most of the time it was every few months, moving to twice a year after Phase 3. I asked Fiona if it was a problem that we got together so infrequently and it turned out that she saw this as an advantage:

Whenever it came, I was ready prepared, but I don't think if it was frequent I would manage... I found it very useful that there was a gap between – from one session to the other.

The time and energy needed to travel from Preston to Manchester and back was partly the reason, but she also explained the importance of the 'gap' in term of having to

digest all what I've asked the women... I was trying to arrange other questions for the next meeting, what can I ask these women if I meet them?... Because I had plenty of time till the next meeting. So I wait for myself to see whether I can implement what I've got in the first meeting, and how, how bring it practical.

This made sense to Carolina, remembering her work with communities in Venezuela. People have busy lives, and sometimes doing things too regularly can make them a chore, rather than something to wait for and look forward to. It is good to know that the pace can be slow and that meeting only sporadically will not automatically undermine a sense of continuity or intensity, because the costs can mount up. As the interviews also revealed, the provision of travel expenses, childcare (either a crèche or individual subsidy) and refreshments, ideally in the form of hot, home-cooked non-British food (much better received than cold sandwiches!) is very important in this kind of work. Hiring a room can be expensive too, especially if it needs to be in a city centre location for accessibility to those travelling in from elsewhere.

My research confirmed what makes for empowering community development work with women who are seeking asylum or who are refugees. The ingredients are simple: some ideas for action, some good volunteers and associates (including refugees themselves – two of the women became GAP Unit associates), some money. The action can begin with swapping stories and experiences, which for those who are

less politicised, can be a process of conscientisation. Formulation of demands and a strategy for targeting a particular audience, whether school children or national policy makers, come next. According to Wroe, who interviewed some of the same women for her research, a narrative approach to advocacy (as with the WAST play and the school workshops) 'is a way of ensuring that the agency lies with the subject of oppression or domination and that it is their desires that drive social change work, rather than the desires of a humanitarian organisation or campaigner' (Wroe, 2012: 48). This is important, since as Rainbird has demonstrated, support organisations often inadvertently perpetuate the social exclusion of asylum seekers by acting as gatekeepers in their representation (Rainbird, 2011: 419). Storytelling often remains central even if the group's selected strategy is a confrontational one, namely the testimonies to camera given by WAST women on the steps of St George's Hall following their march on UK Border Authority headquarters in Liverpool.<sup>3</sup> Wroe continues:

It is important that those who are affected by the asylum system have a platform to tell their stories and to make their demands... Through a process of critical story-telling minority groups are empowered to take up their own struggles where they are often merely represented by someone with more footing in the social hierarchy. It is through these processes that new ways of understanding each other and the world emerge and that the knowledge and identities imposed by the status quo are challenged.

(Wroe, 2012: 49, 263)

Several Arise and Shine members were involved in other proactive, self-determining migrant groups in Greater Manchester, including WAST, Salford Forum for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum, Manchester Refugee and Migrants Forum, United For Change and the Revive Action Group, all of which were engaged in awareness raising, advocacy and campaigning and had been creating, in recent years, 'a collective voice which speaks up and is heard at forums, networks, partnerships and panels' (Navarro, 2006: 15). Apart from WAST, which was founded by asylum seekers in collaboration with allies with a long history of activism, it is possible to trace all of these groups and networks back to Freirian empowerment programmes, notably two 'schools of participation' in Manchester and Salford in 2005 and 2010<sup>4</sup> (case studies of the Salford 'school' can be read in Arrowsmith *et al.*, 2011 and Mayo *et al.*, 2012). The longest established of these, Manchester Refugee and

Migrants Forum, is on hold at the time of writing as it cannot afford to cover travel as well as afford the other costs of getting people together. Salford Forum is facing a similar threat as small grant streams disappear from the local authority's budget. The increasing scarcity of financial resources for such projects clearly presents an impediment to the embedding of these important forms of migrant self-assertion and integration. Nevertheless, Arise and Shine points to the value of holding even very sporadic face-to-face meetings, rather than disbanding networks entirely. The Arise and Shine process was 'owned' by the participants; they were not considered clients but were active members, making decisions, taking on tasks in disregard of perceived language barriers. The examples gathered by Navarro in 2006 (Navarro, 2006) and the Greater Manchester examples listed above (including the Action Group initiated by church charity Revive, previously just known for its drop-in service and individual case work) suggest that community development approaches have a good footing in the refugee sector already. However, if 'the dominant ideology about refugee people seeking asylum is that they are in need of support and services rather than empowerment' (Jones, 2010: 67) and 'support organizations continue to treat asylum seekers as lacking knowledge about the asylum system' (Rainbird, 2012: 415), the evidence of Arise and Shine is that this needs to be rethought. Tailored services offering therapeutic care and material support and advice are vital, and as Wroe concedes, it is not within the scope of all organisations to foster spaces for mutual collaborative work. However, she concludes that 'despite the obvious importance of these opportunities... they are often the least prioritised' (Wroe, 2012: 261).

Ultimately, the success of Arise and Shine as a space for action in which participants could 'recognise themselves and be recognised for what they are or want to be' (Melucci, 1996: 219–220) can be attributed in large part to intangible, relational factors. A member said of the Arise and Shine Group, 'this is my family where I can share issues freely, listen to others and support them where possible'. Recurrent words in discussion and interviews were 'genuine' and 'truthful', and they describe a collective achievement. 'The atmosphere which you created, it was very warm, a warm atmosphere. Welcoming. And instantly that's where the familiar relationship came from', said Tendayi, but it was she and the others who created the atmosphere, through their humour, thoughtfulness, hymn singing, optimism, sensitivity and exuberance; we just set out the chairs. What GAP Unit provided was what Tendayi called 'the missing thing'; that is,

When you go to, to an organisation, they believe you. They value you as who you are. There's no suspicion, to say 'Hm mmm you might be, this!' Showing empathy is one of the – and believing. To say 'What you are saying is true, although I don't agree with this, but what you are telling me is true'.

Shared respect for one another's faith and cultural identity, openness to sharing, attentive listening to one another's ideas, trust in the process – these qualities developed automatically, without the setting of 'ground rules'. A final comment from Tendayi captures the essence of the project:

GAP took us on a holistic nature, they didn't focus on one, on the campaigns that is strategic only, but all the whole, all what affects us – physical, social, emotional, spiritual, everything!

The Arise and Shine project showed that it is those directly affected who are best positioned to bring home to service providers, commissioners and the wider community the injustices of the asylum system that needs to change. They themselves benefit significantly from opportunities to use their insider knowledge in this way, especially if well-supported through an enriching, participatory process to analyse their situation, assert their rights and gain or recover political agency.

## Notes

1. There is no space here to look at the women-only nature of the project, but the gender dimension was central and fundamental.
2. For more on the privations of the asylum system, see Squire (2009), Da Lomba (2010), Querton (2012) and Mulvey (2010).
3. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=duVFBZoTQjs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duVFBZoTQjs).
4. My colleague Carolina had introduced this Latin American popular education methodology to Community Pride in 2000.

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# 6

## Measurement as Reflection in Faith-Based Social Action

*Adam Dinham*

This chapter examines the role of faith-based social action in the increasingly mixed economy of welfare. In that context, it scrutinises the requirement for evaluative measurement aimed at holding providers to account and challenges narrow, instrumental approaches. It considers the possibilities for developing research strategies and research tools that meet the requirements of policy makers whilst at the same time contributing to faith groups' own constructive reflective practice and how they share that with each other and the wider voluntary and community sector.

This is intended to underpin the key goal of this book, to explore the contribution that research can make to strengthening community development in contemporary Britain. As chapter 1 sets out, this is a Britain in which economic crisis and political change have dramatically altered the landscape of community in recent years, both intellectually and practically. More now than ever, community development finds itself in a context of neoliberalism and globalisation, which privilege markets as the dominant mode by which to imagine and act in shared space.

Community, which was at the centre of the preceding Labour governments' social policy from 1997 to 2010 (Dinham, 2005), has as a result been stood down as a solution-bearing entity for policy makers to work with and support, as we have seen in other chapters. It must be acknowledged that 'community as policy' had many of its own problems (Dinham, 2009), but it is nevertheless striking how little we now hear of it. In the new politics after the election of 2010, communities are cast simply as the places in which self-helpers can organise to take on many of the functions previously carried out by state. Indeed, policy makers after 2010 fully expect that the withdrawal of state support will encourage a thousand flowers to bloom. This makes for a radically

different and distinctive backdrop for a discussion of community development and the research, which could strengthen it. It is precisely the relationship between this macro-structural backdrop and research in communities themselves, which this chapter explores.

There is a significantly less politicised understanding of community after 2010, and a more consensual attitude to its role and purpose. This raises the question whether research can play a part in challenging that. Community development devotees would almost certainly want it to. Many would regard it as ethically incumbent on them, in pursuit of the core community development values of participation, empowerment, inclusion and social justice. These are essentially politically potent ideas that seek to engage with and challenge the shape of things. So what role can there be for research which reflects them?

The research process at the heart of this chapter came into being precisely to engage with this particular challenge in this particular political context. As a result, it is illuminating of this time and place. But it also has resonance for the wider question of how to imagine and re-imagine community as common space, as we shall see.

It is a research process that is complicated further by its focus on faith-based community settings. This is neither accidental nor incidental: not accidental because of my own combination of disciplinary and practice backgrounds in Theology and Religious Studies, followed by Social Work and Community Development, and then Politics. These have come together over a decade or so in a body of research exploring the role of faith-based participants in the public realm (Dinham *et al.*, 2009), as well as what they do and how they do it; and not incidental because of the interesting possibility that faith-based community development has within it the capacity to shake up established ways of looking at the world and expand the canvas of concerns in ways that help rebalance the relationship between markets and community (Dinham, 2012). Ford talks about this as re-engaging with the wisdoms residing in religious traditions (Ford, 2012). This nevertheless – and crucially – does not require a re-engagement – let alone a commitment – with their religious creeds, organisations or communities: just with some of the many ideas and insights that inform them. Indeed, Freire himself made extensive use of religious (in his case, Christian) language and metaphors.

The point is that in neoliberal contexts, as the state withdraws, and welfare economies mix, something has to fill the gap. Increasingly faith communities have been doing so – and in a big way (Putnam, 2011; Dinham, 2007). This has often provoked controversy but whatever one thinks of it, faith groups are widely present in voluntary and community

settings; how they are visible, accountable, transparent and reflective is an important challenge as a result.

In this context, there is both an opportunity and a threat. The opportunity is to use an increased presence in the mixed economy, and increased policy-talk of community, to contest neoliberalism in such a way as to revalorise community development principles, values and practices. This comes with the need to hold the plethora of community players – including faith-based ones – to account in the mixed economy through measurement of what they do. The research we are coming to in this chapter is, in part, an exploration of doing so in ways that stretch how we imagine society and apportion value.

The threat lies in neoliberalism's urge to confine this through targets and measurement that respond to a narrow canvas of instrumental concerns – is this 'effective'? Is it 'value for money'?

Community development research can focus on measurement which does both: holding community actors to account, including in terms of costs and impacts; but at the same time contesting ideas of the valuable and the common good, and stretching and challenging neoliberalism's narrow focus on profit. The faith-based settings at the heart of the study in this chapter provide an example of how this might work. In turn, they might also help provide some of the language or wisdom that has gone missing from the politics in question.

## **Neoliberalism and ideas of measurement**

The possibility of contesting value through research is central, therefore. The measurement of activities in the mixed economy of welfare is crucial to holding it to account. At the same time, approaches to measurement reveal the character of the politics in which those activities take place. In this sense they are highly normative.

Though valued by policy makers and others, this makes measurement a contested notion, and a menu of approaches is available. These may be tick-boxing at one end of the spectrum and highly participatory at the other. Tick-boxing is likely to reflect the neoliberal hegemony that confines and instrumentalises it. Participation is likely to challenge it, especially if Freire is right that people have innate capacities and talents; a view, shared at the level of theology by the full range of faith communities too.

In faith-based settings, there is a considerable amount of measurement research on faiths and social action, which has been generated by faith communities themselves. Some has sought to highlight the

distinctive role of faith-based activity and provide illustrative examples (Musgrave, 1999). Others use practical examples to analyse church-related community development, including new opportunities and methods (Finneron *et al.*, 2001). Some is intended for theorists and practitioners, analysing the methods and thinking behind effective faith-based regeneration and practice (Ahmed *et al.*, 2004). Other resources seek to inform strategic development and insights (Smith and Randolph-Horne, 2000; GLE/LCG, 2002; LGA Publications, 2002; CRCYH, 2002). Yet another body of work seeks to demonstrate the impact and contribution made by faiths to aspects of civil society. For example, in the South East, *Beyond Belief* (March 2004) claims that there are at least two community action projects for each faith centre in the region; and in the East, *Faith in the East of England* (July 2005) identifies 180,000 beneficiaries of faith-based community development.

More recently, there has been a tendency for research to emphasise the economic impact of faiths, reflecting the neoliberal dominance. For example, a 2005 study commissioned by the North West Development Agency analysed the impact on quality of life and economic prosperity in the region by measuring the value of faith communities' buildings and volunteers. The report estimates that overall faith communities in the Northwest generate between £90.7 million and £94.9 million per annum to civil society in the region (Northwest Forum of Faiths, 2005). Borrowing from economic analyses, others have sought to understand faiths' contribution in terms of social capital (Furbey *et al.*, 2006).

In the wider voluntary and community sector, measurement has been unpacked in theoretical explorations, as well as empirical studies. For example, according to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), quality services are those that are needed by users or a particular cause, well run, assessed and improved, shown to make a positive and measurable difference and continuously developed in order to achieve the very best results ([www.ncvo.org.uk](http://www.ncvo.org.uk)). However, distinctions are properly drawn between organisational aspects, services and impacts. Thus, a quality *organisation* may or may not provide good quality *services* and may or may not have an *impact* upon people, communities or other organisations, resulting in change expressed as outputs or outcomes. This is an important distinction in itself. Outcomes measurements observe overall changes, benefits, learning or other effects that occur in individuals and organisations as a result of services and activities provided by an organisation (Walker *et al.*, 2000; Ellis, 2009). Outputs, on the other hand, measure only those tangible, practical products that result from action and not the process of achieving them.

Walker *et al.* (2000, p. 13) synthesise this, suggesting that measuring both surmounts the temptation merely to measure what is measurable, such as the activities and physical changes, rather than what is important, such as the enduring effects on people and communities, which may be encapsulated in stories and narrative. At the same time, Walker argues that the purpose of collecting evidence of outcomes should not only merely be to provide a report to funding bodies and to achieve a bench mark, but also to provide information for an organisation to reflect upon how appropriately it is performing and to what degree of quality.

This is echoed in an analysis of faith in the public realm, which unpicks the idea of the faith community (Dinham and Lowndes, 2008). This highlights that there are at least three different 'narratives' of faith-based participation in the public sphere (see Dinham and Lowndes, 2008), any one of which could be measured: whilst civil servants and their local counterparts might see religions as top-down pyramids, with faith leaders able to mobilise followers and release resources, the religions would see themselves rather as webs of goals and relationships, amongst which some, but not all, would be directed towards public service. A third model, derived from the idea of a stakeholder democracy as seen by New Labour, sees 'faith' as a sector within the voluntary sector, more like a segment of an orange, and needing to demonstrate the same sorts of professionalism and expertise. From each of these perspectives, differing motivations, values, goals and aspirations are enjoined. The relationship between what is valued and what is measured reflects the differences in power, which apply to each 'narrative'. It could be expected that the measurements that get made will be the ones with the most power – and in contemporary Britain that means those which relate most closely and accommodatingly to neoliberalism and markets.

Yet, those concerned with community development would argue that 'value' is often least recognised where it occurs in its smallest units, in local community settings. This is a view shared by liberation theology, for example, as well as the theologies of many traditions of faith, which have a bias to the poor. What is measured in community contexts, including faith-based ones, must then, at least in part, arise from the reflections and values of their own participants and narratives, at local level, if they are to be heard. It can allow them to articulate what they do in terms of what they *value*. In doing so, it ought to serve as a process of reflection for community-based actors themselves, as well as simply a process to prove to others their legitimacy as public actors.

In the case of faith-based settings, this can be especially helpful in a largely secular context that is often sceptical about their participation.

## Measurement in faith-based settings

These observations resulted in a research project, which is the main topic of this chapter. This was conducted in a 'knowledge transfer partnership' (KTP) between the Faith-Based Regeneration Network (FbRN) and the Faiths and Civil Society Unit, Goldsmiths, University of London (FCSU) in 2009–2012. The KTP was part of the broader 'Taking Part' consortium of researchers, policy makers and practitioners aiming to develop knowledge, skills and capacity for civil society (Third Sector) activity, which has given rise to this volume.

The research to produce knowledge to be 'transferred' was undertaken in two projects (in 2006 and 2007–08), which generated detailed knowledge about the value of faith-based organisations in community social action. The first (Dinham, 2006) – undertaken before the KTP – comprehensively and systematically reviewed 'grey' research residing at regional and community levels across England to produce a national dataset of faith-based activities in social action. This identified a problem with measurement at national level since each region and community level project was using localised and highly differentiated language and methodology. This inhibited comparability and the ability to communicate effectively between areas. It also impeded communication between faith-based practitioners and their partners in the wider society. This forestalled ways of relating activities to needs through the correlation of independent analyses. These were compelling reasons for rethinking the ways in which faith-based activity in communities is measured.

The second project that underpinned the development of the KTP had been supported by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). This project considered the potential for national indicators or 'domains' for measuring faith-based social action. These were developed in a two-day workshop with purposively sampled policy makers, researchers and community development practitioners in faith-based settings, using participatory community development processes and values.

This participatory research led to the conclusion that the challenge was to measure quality in faith-based settings in ways that develop the activity rather than merely 'demonstrate' it or show it off. We called this process 'measurement as reflection' (Dinham and Shaw, 2011).

The KTP involved a process to test this out in faith-based settings. We identified a faith-based partner, the FbRN, and a non-faith-based one, Community Matters, both engaged in supporting community development work in local settings. Community Matters had, over many years, developed and used a mainstream community measurement tool – called *VISIBLE* – which uses reflective evaluation in voluntary and community settings. We worked in this partnership to try out the *VISIBLE* tool in seven faith-based settings. We reflected on the process to ask two key questions:

1. Are faith-based settings reflective in their assessments of their action?
2. Do mainstream tools articulate value in faith-based settings or are new, distinctive tools required?

Working with seven pilots, we carried out semi-structured interviews ( $n = 18$ ) to explore their experiences of working with the *VISIBLE* tool, asking about its adequacy and appropriateness in capturing what they valued as quality. We also interrogated what the process implied for projects' own development. We used this to explore the degree to which mainstream tools, as represented by *VISIBLE*, would fit in faith-based settings to measure quality as a process of reflection. We considered what features of the tool facilitated this 'fit', and which, if any, did not. An assessment of the fit between *VISIBLE* and these faith-based settings could reveal continuities and discontinuities within and between faith-based settings as well as non-faith-based counterparts.

*VISIBLE* was chosen as the tool to pilot in faith-based settings in this study because it is a quality standard framework specifically designed for small local community groups, such as those which predominate in faith-based social action. *VISIBLE* is accredited by the Charity Commission, the Cabinet Office, the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Community Alliance. It is a developmental tool requiring organisations to demonstrate legal compliance and accountable practices and procedures across a range of indicators. It also emphasises measurement as a developmental journey.

The seven faith-based settings were selected through a process of open recruitment. We advertised the opportunity to take part through the FbRN network, which extends to almost 4,000 faith-based groups. We received a large number of enquiries and applications to participate and chose the seven against criteria established in the project's steering group. The study was qualitative and indicative and, therefore, derives its validity, not from being representative, but by being generalisable to theory. Nevertheless we focused on taking into account the following

factors in making our selection: geographical spread, a range of faith traditions and a range of types of community service or project.

To complete the **VISIBLE** process, each organisation compiles a portfolio set against indicators, some of which are compulsory and some self-selected. These are written in such a way as to require critical reflection on current practice. It is reckoned to take a minimum of nine months to complete, taking into account the requirement for the governing body and staff to be fully informed and engaged with the process. Organisations plan their own way of completing their chosen indicators, using an online workbook, and have no time constraint placed upon them. In this case, none of the projects in the study were required to complete the standard within the research period as we felt this could obscure the aim of exploring the fit between the tool and the setting.

Once completed, the workbook and a set of required documents are submitted for desk-based assessment. Following this, an assessor visits the project for a full-day meeting with staff, the governing body, users and partners. Successful projects are then accredited for three years.

A crucial part of the piloting process that was undertaken in this study was the provision of a mentor to work with each pilot project – something not used as standard in the usual process in mainstream settings. We introduced this element as an aspect of the reflection that both researchers and settings needed to do to understand the ‘fit’. The mentors were all faith-based community practitioners with extensive knowledge and experience of management and organisational practice. Mentors signed an agreement to join the project induction training, visit the project at least twice during the process, keep in weekly contact with the project, and liaise with the research team via the programme manager. Their involvement was a key methodological aspect of capturing an ‘evaluation of the evaluation’. As it turned out, it also proved to be significantly beneficial to the process itself, as we shall see.

## **Measurement as reflection in faith-based settings**

The study found that the main reason why faith-based organisations undertake a quality measurement process is to seek organisational development and the improvement of services in a process of reflection. Volunteers, staff and trustees said that they were highly committed to faith-based social action but much more committed to the measurement process than to achieving a quality mark:

[Y]ou may not achieve the accreditation but the process you will have done, you will have done all the things and it will still mean

something to you. For me that wouldn't be a disaster if we didn't get the accreditation.

At the same time, participants felt that the process gained their organisations greater credibility and commitment from the wider community.

Once we've got an accreditation that means something to a lot of people then people sit up and listen.

Asked 'why measure?', the top priority was consistently 'to improve services'. The next most prioritised aspect was 'to improve organisation' and 'to demonstrate quality to service users'. Least prioritised was 'to gain the quality mark'. Within this, faith-based social action projects thought that demonstrating their quality to national government was their lowest priority. They also emphatically argued that national government should pay for organisations to undertake a quality process. Participants said this was because they felt that there was pressure from central government to prove accountability and demonstrate standards.

At the same time, participants also said that a supportive relationship with national government was very important in order to understand the policy contexts in which local work was taking place. They wanted to maximise their contribution by swimming with the tide where possible.

The study also found that reflective practice was a common model in faith-based social action but using this kind of 'required' measurement to achieve it was not. What was required was a measurement tool which was sufficiently flexible to allow participants to determine their own indicators of value, at their own pace and for their own clearly articulated purposes.

Stop every now and then, take notice of where you are, take notice about what's happened and have a think about where you're going next.

Participants also noted a difference between measuring an organisation and measuring the activities of a faith community. They saw 'communities' as real spaces in which real people live, whilst organisations were seen as structures in which people work. Therefore, there was an emphasis on communities as spaces of solidarity and relationality, not simply

organisational structures. Reflection on faith-based social action takes place in these contexts. Participants noted that many measurement tools miss this by focusing on organisational performance.

VISIBLE definitely comes across as something that's got localised community groups at heart... it's keeping in mind targets but outcomes and all the other things that are important so for organisations where it is about dealing with people.

Participants also said that faith-based social action was marked out by a disposition towards reflection in the form of wisdom and attentive hospitality: factors that they thought aided a reflective nature. They commented that seeking to welcome the stranger and to offer service as hospitality to everyone unlocks an organisation to be open to new possibilities and challenges from unexpected people and places.

[W]e can't differentiate, he's poor or he's rich no, there is no difference between any person. So a beggar, he can sit with us and have food, there's no 'no, no you can't sit here'.

In this way, faith was being connected directly to service. Therefore, reflection upon that faith was regarded as essential to renewing effective service. This raises the question whether faith-based settings need a tool that measures and reflects the faith-base. Participants certainly spoke of their religious faith when discussing the values underpinning their work. For example,

if you're not providing, then any Sikh organisation fails to fulfil his commitment.

They felt that this tool enabled their values and their relationship to their faith to be expressed and measured, even though it did not specifically ask about faith – and they liked this. At the same time, participants recognised that all social action organisations have a value-base and that faith and non-faith groups often share similar values.

[I] am very wary of, very wary of suggesting any faith based organisation has qualities and values that are not found in other organisations because I don't think we have any particular claim on goodness, integrity, generosity and all that.

Indeed, some participants remarked that there was little distinctive or unique in the values of the faith-based organisation they worked for, though others said that there was a difference:

faith motivation behind the work, the work of committed volunteers – cleaning the loos.

faith values give an independence – we're not beholden to funders.

Nevertheless, participants referred to their faith as a deep emotional commitment underpinning their social action.

[W]hat drives me, and I would agree with absolutely what A was saying, that it's my Islamic motivation to do good and to help others whatever faith they are.

They said they felt passionate about the local area, about the organisation and the needs it was meeting in the context of a relationship between their faith and their service to others, sometimes described as 'working out theology in practice'.

This also revealed that measurement was felt to be important for showing the extent to which an organisation offers its services and activities to all, the experience of welcome and hospitality it offers, and the way it conducts its business in an open and transparent way.

The doors open and they open automatically for a very good reason because we want everyone to feel welcome so whoever's walking past, the doors will open, there's no judgment going on here, you don't have to worry if the doors will open for you, whether you're welcome in there or not because the doors automatically open and for us umm that's I think very distinct, I mean we are saying you are welcome, you are of value, we will offer you hospitality, we will offer you God's love.

This challenges the common assumption that faith-based services must somehow neutralise or privatise the faith-base of their action. All of the participants in this study said that they felt it wrong to evangelise through their social action. Services must be 'without strings'. But they also said that their passion resides in their faith and that this could be expressed, for example, in promotional material, in such a way as

to sharpen the vision and communicate the ethos very openly and honestly.

Well we are Christian we don't hide it.

This could be important. Expressing religious reasons for faith-based social action may also be an important aspect of 'being accountable' since it spells out why a service is being offered, who it is intended for and what it might feel like to use the service. Whilst participants were clear that services should not 'feel' religious, some felt that being explicit in materials about the beliefs and values underpinning them would provide a fuller 'flavour'. Examples were leaflets containing a Biblical phrase expressing a motivation, such as 'Blessed are the poor' or posters in the faith traditions' language advertising faith festivals.

It was also observed that in some cases there may be appropriate reasons why faith-based organisations might restrict services, for example, to female Muslims or orthodox Jews who would not otherwise use this service and may have no alternatives. Participants were keen to argue that such provision was sometimes plausible. This could have been a sticking point since the approach taken by the tool used in this research only allows open-access types of organisations to achieve the quality mark. This was regarded as problematic. Measurement tools in faith-based settings, therefore, need to consider how a nuanced understanding of what motivates restrictive provision is essential. Tools must be able to measure this positively and non-normatively, where appropriate. But this may be an uncomfortable message for a largely secular context.

It is a critical point because a lack of clarity about what motivates faith groups can be a cause of tension when external funders and partners are wary or sceptical of working with them. Some interviewees remarked that given the suspicion that faith-based organisations sometimes experience from funders and commissioning bodies, it may turn out to be increasingly important for faith-based organisations to become more transparent about what they do, and why and how they do it, as they tender to supply services. If faith-based organisations can demonstrate their quality – *including* in faith-based terms – this may alleviate some of this suspicion. This may broaden the language of measurement and might reintroduce an unfamiliar or lost vocabulary to the public sphere – the language of religious traditions. There will likely be much controversy on this point, but if the mixed economy has faith-based providers within it, as policy makers require, it needs to improve the

quality of conversation about religion and religious participants in order to handle that well (Dinham and Jones, 2012). Indeed, some of the pilot projects remarked that it was important for them to explain their faith-based reasons as a matter of acting with authenticity. They felt that this particular tool allows faith to be articulated as a relevant aspect of service without evangelism or conditionality.

Others thought that external bodies often stereotyped faith-based organisations as evangelical and axe-grinding, as well as potentially sexist, homophobic and paternalistic. This sometimes led to misunderstandings about services.

[T]here is something about our ethos as faith based, that in a sense does make it really quite hard for groups like CVS to really understand what drives us.... sometimes a real distrust still of the faith based organisations.

[Partners]... can't get, umm sometimes an ease I suppose that we can be doing what we say we are doing without some sort of other agendas attached, that they're naturally quite worried about.

I feel that they don't take us seriously because we're a faith sector organisation.

[W]e've got the word Faith in our organisation... and we've been mulling over for the past year about, you know, having that word in our actual name.

What was valued about the tool used in this study was its ability to enable faith-based organisations to reveal areas of tension in publicly accountable ways and to work through and resolve them where possible.

### **Leadership as participation**

Participants said that a central issue in achieving the measurement as reflection is how leadership was approached.

More support from the trustees would have been the resource I would have been looking for which hasn't really come.

Projects had previously rejected alternatives to VISIBLE because they were inflexible, did not reflect their values and tended to be led from the 'top down'. Participants distinguished between leadership on

processes (especially getting started) and leadership on values. They also distinguished between leadership styles and leadership structures.

[W]e try to be quite a light organisation bureaucratically, as working class community that is one thing that can stifle and kill, is to have too much paper work, too many committees, too much official organisation – very very important but a lot of things in a community like this tend to happen informally and I mean at the sessions even with steering committee members, we have our meetings absolutely but a lot of the stuff gets worked out, talked about, discussed, debated while the kids are playing basketball among the parents, the mums and occasionally the dads.

This is an important point in a neoliberal policy context that increasingly emphasises entrepreneurship and social enterprise. These are models associated with competition and business-like approaches as a driving force for strong services. The wider literature suggests that this approach will work well for some (Dinham, 2006). But for others, it contrasts too starkly in tone and practice with collaborative models, which stress the importance of services being generated in the context of relationships in communities. Policies for ‘localism’ and ‘community organising’ could benefit from this ‘community’ disposition, but the concern is that pursuing only entrepreneurial approaches could squeeze out these collaborative contributions. Measuring – and thereby valuing – both will be important for the goal of strengthening civil society if the most is to be made of both.

This is especially important because, according to our sample, a collaborative approach is preferred by actors in faith-based social action settings in communities such as these. Participants said that their way of working was collaborative, bottom-up, consensual, inclusive and empowering. The *VISIBLE* tool helped these settings to sharpen their focus on collaborative, community-oriented approaches and to locate this within the pressures of changes in policy and practice.

An important aspect of this is the confidence this tool can give to make reflective self-assessment rooted in the community itself, independently of fluctuating policy contexts. Those interviewed felt that this enabled them to return continuously to their core goals and practices and, therefore, to offer higher quality services. Faith-based social action engages the local by understanding the relationality of communities and working with that. This relies on community development skills and bottom-up facilitative approaches as much as on being entrepreneurial.

The challenge in neoliberal contexts is to synthesise 'relational community' with an enterprising spirit and to make research capable of capturing both.

## **Mentorship**

Participants in this study particularly valued the process of mentorship. We conducted semi-structured reflective interviews with mentors ( $n=7$ ) and further reflective interviews with participants in the projects ( $n=18$ ). These showed that the mentoring role was felt to be essential.

I think they've (mentor and programme manager) been totally supportive because if you go to either of them and ask for support you get it, so they have been supportive.

Participants concluded that mentorship introduced a chain of action, which was essential to the 'measurement as reflection' process: first, that measurement as reflection added value, whilst measurement alone may not; second, that the reflective cycle required investment of time, will and money; third, that mentorship, as a key part of this investment, entailed a relationship with a person in addition to a commitment to the measurement process. The mentor, in a sense, joined the community rather than providing it with consultancy; fourth, that the learning disposition engendered by reflection was being underpinned by this relationship through discussion and supervision with a person who was acting as an independent 'eye'; fifth, that mentoring thereby led to identifying, sharing and disseminating knowledge and understanding. This applied within the mentoring relationship, in the wider organisation and potentially across the civil society bodies between which mentors could move. This could be particularly important when transferring good practice between settings in different faith traditions. And organisations could develop a 'thinking head' in a measurement process, which was supported by a mentor.

The mentoring relationship was also seen as part of humanising the measurement process, 'warming it up' and setting the 'professional' in the context of relationships. It was seen as an aspect of the hospitality, which faith-based settings said was important to them.

## **Conclusions**

This study found an overwhelming degree of consonance between approaches to the measurement of quality in mainstream and

faith-based settings, drawn from the degree to which the mainstream tool 'fitted'. Tools for measuring the quality in faith-based social action settings were being valued most when they were also being used to reflect. The key components indicated by this study reside in a ten-point framework for faith-based measurement research that connects to principles of community development and contests neoliberal ideas of the valuable:

1. The main driver for faith-based social action projects to undertake a quality tool is the process itself rather than the goal of obtaining a quality mark. Without it, the process is regarded as static, not dynamic; instrumental, not creative.
2. An organisation has to commit resources to the measurement process if it is to be of deep benefit. This is an investment that produces a worthwhile return for the organisation, but resources are scarce, especially for the non-core activity of research. This raises the question, who will pay in the absence of a grant-making culture for this?
3. The support of a mentor is invaluable because it humanises and 'warms up' research as reflection. It produces a research 'community', but once again costs money, which is scarce.
4. The indications are that faith-based social action projects are unable or unwilling to pay to undertake the necessary processes to obtain a quality standard and think that national government should provide funding for it. They see this as 'quid pro quo' for tapping the resources which reside in faith communities. But neoliberal politics emphasise self-help and financial self-sufficiency. It is unlikely to regard reflective research as a mutually investable benefit.
5. Measurement takes time. It is a process not a moment. It requires a culture of organisational learning, rooted in relationships in the relevant communities.
6. Faith-based social action settings do not usually wish to evangelise. Their aim is to serve in practical ways. Nevertheless, measurement can help to articulate the faith underlying faith-based social action. This can be important for ensuring that the work is well understood in terms of what it is, where it comes from and what service provision will feel like. It can also defuse concerns about 'services with strings' by spelling out what is being provided, for whom, with what reasons and goals and by what methods. Revealing the values and beliefs underpinning services allows users to make informed choices. It could add to authenticity across the voluntary

and community sector and could be applied generally, as well as in faith-based settings.

7. Faith-based social action providers feel that they are marked out by an attentiveness and disposition towards wisdom and hospitality – factors that they think aid reflectiveness, together with an expectation of transformation and quality improvements. They desire a measurement approach that captures and articulates this, because they regard it as valuable. This might contest and stretch ideas of the valuable, and other partners may need to improve their ability to think and talk effectively about religious faiths.
8. Faith-based social action flourishes through facilitative styles of leadership, which coincide with a community development approach. These emphasise inclusiveness, participation and empowerment, which are elements of strong relationships and well-connected communities.
9. Faith-based social action projects value the measurement process because it gains them credibility and commitment from the wider community. This is especially important in a largely secular context, which has lost the ability to talk informedly about religion. Without this, the result is frequently suspicion.
10. Demonstrating quality to the whole range of audiences is important and a quality measurement process needs to respond to all these expectations.

This project revealed the elements of mainstream tools which make them effective in faith-based settings. To the extent that they fit well together it also reflects a close connection between faith groups and the wider voluntary and community sector in practice. More widely, it makes a contribution to a general understanding of community research. A key element is the importance of determining aspects of what to measure locally, as well as to be held to core requirements such as regulatory compliance. This could be said to offer something for everyone: funders, policy makers, service-users and others can see what the setting is up to, and even why, and with what effects and quality; project staff and volunteers engage in human-to-human conversations about their work in ways that enable reflection and sharpen the delivery of the service in question, in the process.

What is also clear is the importance of distributed involvement in the measurement process right around the organisation, including those involved in governance as well as staff, volunteers, partners and service users. There needs to be an emphasis on relational aspects of evaluation

that connect people. An inclusive approach can empower even the most junior of participants to have a voice. Reflective research can thus enable organisations to become learning environments with everybody contributing according to their role and their skills.

Finally, because some of what is measured is chosen within the setting, not dictated from elsewhere, this approach has the potential to redefine the valuable. It can result in the introduction of new or unfamiliar categories that are innovative or novel as public categories, for example, love, forgiveness or grace. These have not had a great deal of traction in service delivery in the last century or so (though before that such ideas certainly did). We can debate what should be counted and whether it is desirable. The debate will doubtlessly be uncomfortable for some. But we can nevertheless conclude that reflective measurement provides an opportunity for redefining the value by empowering the providers and users themselves to set out what they would like to measure. This seems apposite in the neoliberal, financial-crisis context with which the chapter began.

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# 7

## Community Learning Approaches to Solidarity between the Generations: Research Evidence and Evaluation Tools for Impact

*Jane Watts*

### Introduction

A: We both live in the neighbourhood and we are members of a group that we have set up following courses with the Learning Communities Team and support from Neighbourhood Partnerships. Life was quite dull and boring before all of this started, but we had a lot more free time!

B: The house was a bit tidier, and I had time to cut the grass...

A: Now [...] my daughter thinks one of my jobs is going to meetings!

B: My son did a project on "How to Change my Community" and told the school about what we have been doing and they didn't believe him! So a lot has happened in the last 2 years since we did the first course.

A: It all started with the 'My Life in [...]' course. We were given cameras to take pictures of things in our area that we thought needed to be improved and we made these into digital stories. It was a Family Learning course so our children got involved as well.

The extracts above are from a presentation made by members of the group at the heart of this chapter, which focuses on the difficulties new, small community groups can face when trying to understand the 'difference' they are making in their community. The chapter draws on the experience of a community group which was working to build social solidarity and make changes locally through working across generations. My partnership with them was as a researcher and community educator,

working with the University of Lincoln. The aim of the joint research project was to enable the group to assess its impact and to investigate together how to develop more effective activities for local change. The chapter considers to what extent the group could use its findings to develop better practice in intergenerational community activism.

In the context of current government policy and the prime minister's stated aim of creating a 'Big Society', it was timely to consider the role played by intergenerational practice in the development of active citizenship and neighbourhood-based community development. The university research with the group, through *Taking Part*, was intended to support the group to understand and use the evidence they generated to evaluate their work and enable them to grow into a force for change locally.

There are three themes at play in this chapter: intergenerational learning; active learning for active citizenship and its role in developing active citizens; and participatory research in community development settings. These three themes are explored against a backdrop of the current policy context. A brief introduction to these themes follows.

Alan Hatton Yeo of the Beth Johnson Foundation defines the aims of intergenerational practice as bringing 'people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities, which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contribute to building more cohesive communities' (Thomas, 2009, 5).

Intergenerational learning is well developed but has sometimes tended to focus upon grandparents helping their grandchildren to read or young people teaching older people to use IT, rather than necessarily promoting active citizenship and social solidarity. Nor has it necessarily been founded on the sense of mutualism that Hatton Yeo suggests as good practice. More recent projects<sup>1</sup> have extended the scope of intergenerational learning, whilst some are moving towards the notion of 'multigenerational learning' as being a more nuanced tool to address issues such as lack of cohesion, diminishing aspirations and low levels of citizen engagement.<sup>2</sup>

Intergenerational learning needs also to be considered in the context of the more developed practice of family learning. Family learning refers to approaches that 'engage children and their parents and carers or grandparents in learning and involve explicit learning outcomes for adults and children' (NIACE, 2009). This learning not only supports children to learn through the engagement of family members, but is also seen as a method for attracting the adults into learning, which would benefit the whole family and, it is claimed, the wider

community, though evidence of the latter is not well documented (NIACE, 2009).

There has been considerable European interest in intergenerational learning and in many countries there is a more established practice.<sup>3</sup> The link to active citizenship has been acknowledged through a series of European-funded programmes. However, the concepts of 'generation' and by turn 'intergenerational' are acknowledged to be socially constructed and to have different meanings in different countries and societies (Pain, 2005). In the UK context, intergenerational projects abound, many run by community or other organisations that do not necessarily have the knowledge, resources or skills to support the gathering of evidence and impact.

Intergenerational work and practice, then, has a range of meanings, methods and approaches; much of the intergenerational activity related to active citizenship has traditionally taken the form of rather narrow approaches to 'volunteering'. Another aspect of intergenerational work is mentoring; this has been introduced frequently as either a way of encouraging children or young people, particularly those who are considered disaffected or with low aspirations, to achieve their potential or to change the behaviour of young people at risk of offending (Springate *et al.*, 2008). These do not focus on the mutual learning for community change and empowerment under consideration here.

Pain (2005) provides a useful explanation of the use of intergenerational work in developing sustainable and cohesive communities. She draws attention to the changing demographics of Western societies with a growing proportion of the populations being older against the background of relatively poor participation in civic and civil activity by much younger people. Springate *et al.* (2008) provided a detailed review of the potential of intergenerational work to deliver increased participation and positive outcomes for individuals and communities.

Tam (2010) refers to the importance of everyone developing citizenship skills and becoming active citizens; in particular, he stresses the importance of not just individuals in their communities becoming empowered as citizens but adds that institutions, their staff and policy and decision-makers also need to acquire better skills for involvement. This is not just a one-way street where disempowered and disadvantaged individuals and groups are expected to equip themselves to become active and engaged whereas those they might seek to influence are not required to take action. All will need to make changes.

Active citizenship here defines activity that supports people to engage more fully with their communities and to participate fully in civil and

civic activity in whatever field, from formal engagement as an elected representative, to voluntary and charitable activity and movements for social change. Jochum *et al.* (2005) suggested a matrix of activity ranging from individual to collective action from the informal to the formal with different people engaging in different ways at different times and possibly in several ways simultaneously. There is no implied sense of progression, though taking up something formal, such as standing for election, may well occur later in an individual's engagement, whereas other more formal activities, such as becoming a school governor, may occur at a relevant point in the life course. The members of the case study group below were at a very early stage in these processes.

Participatory research is embedded in community development practice and is key to the development of active learning for active citizenship (Ledwith, 2009; Ledwith and Springett, 2010; Mayo and Annette, 2010). The case study below was developed using the principles of experiential learning and was intended to support the group to draw learning from their experiences and activities, reflecting on them to use their learning to meet the needs of their community more effectively. To make a real difference, group members needed to understand what impact they had, and how or why this came about. In other words, they needed to continue to think critically and to develop some 'really useful knowledge' with which to bring about changes (Thompson, 1997).

The research questions were: How does a fledgling group show evidence of impact? What impact evaluation methods can be introduced to a relatively new group? How can an understanding of some basic research support a community group of this kind? How could the group show evidence of the relationship between intergenerational learning and active citizenship learning? What scope is there for the future development of an articulation between intergenerational learning and active citizenship learning?

### **The research case study**

The aim was to use the methods of active learning for active citizenship in a partnership with an organisation that promoted both intergenerational learning and active citizenship, based on the principles of participatory practice (Ledwith and Springett, 2010). Further, it was intended to support this partner's capacity to find evidence of its impact on community empowerment in order to learn from the findings to make more effective change in future. The partner organisation would identify and evidence the ways in which the learning contributed to

the development of active citizens and community change. In this way, it was hoped to articulate the relationship between intergenerational and active citizenship learning to highlight the potential for further development.

The methodological approach was to work with a community group, using experiential learning to enable them to reflect more systematically on their activities, identify the evidence they were generating, explain how this evidence could be used to construct 'findings' and then to use these findings to engender further change, improved activities, stronger work plans and more engaged active citizenship. We would also examine how the group could pursue positive intergenerational work through identifying good practice. The methods consisted of group work, discussion and reflection of key themes identified by the group, experiential learning to look at evidence from different perspectives, learner involvement in planning and running the workshop activities, developing group ownership of the data, evaluation and planning processes.

Community groups tackling intergenerational, regeneration or indeed any other issues locally need access to additional skills and information. This can enable them to learn from their experiences and use the evidence that they gather during their activities to develop and support local change, as active citizens. This research was intended to support the group to move in this direction.

A community group involved in both local activity and working intergenerationally was sought – and identified – to take part in this case study. Initially, the group members did not see themselves as either active citizens or indeed as an 'intergenerational group'. But through the course of the research, they came to see how they could describe themselves as active citizens. They also observed that their children and other young people were involved because that reflected the reality of the group members' lives. They did not intentionally develop themselves as active citizens or as an intergenerational group; but rather, their aim was to improve their community in whatever ways made sense to them.

The methods used were selected to underpin the aim of co-producing knowledge and evidence of impact. They were therefore participative and led, as far as possible, by the partner organisation, facilitated by me as researcher and supported, for reasons of both good practice and sustainability, by the usual supporters of the community group. The methods were rooted in community development practice.

Group selection had proved to be quite difficult, in practice, as there had appeared to be few independent groups that combined an active citizenship approach with an intergenerational approach in a genuinely

mutual way. There were many intergenerational projects but they were often driven through schools, colleges or large voluntary sector bodies, which encouraged intergenerational 'volunteering' by young people. These included projects to encourage young people to support older people by visiting them or teaching them IT – or by older people mentoring young people to support them with doing their homework or with career progression. I was looking for groups engaging in activity which was more mutual in approach and which engaged all generations in improving their communities together. The criteria were that the group should be engaged in experiential and informal learning based in active learning for active citizenship approaches. Several groups that had wanted to take part suffered funding cuts but eventually a group declared that it would be interested and my partnership with them began, supported by staff from the local authority community learning service.

As a researcher, I visited the group over a period of three months with the intention of supporting their recognition and use of evidence and data. During the first visit, I was presented with work that they had already undertaken. We then established a method for the joint work for this particular project. I was able to take some time to review with them the evaluation methods and the potential data that the group already owned. Whilst this was limited, it was greater than the group members had themselves understood at the outset, comprising, as it did, all the knowledge that they had already gleaned from their activities to date. Visits were also made to key locations for the group's activities. A date was set for a workshop, to be led by the group, for its members and stakeholders. The community learning worker was then interviewed to establish the background from her perspective. The workshop's aims were to help the group to learn from its experience; to establish ways of evaluating the impact of the group's activities; and to help the group to learn new ways of using this information to plan more effectively for the future.

### **The group and its context**

The area that the group members come from has been described as disadvantaged; it is a small neighbourhood in one of the largest suburbs, comprising two electoral wards, of a medium-sized British city. This neighbourhood has a poor level of resources with few community facilities and shops. There is no pub on the estate, which is built on covenanted land. The housing stock and infrastructure are generally

poor, though some houses and gardens are well maintained by residents. Access to employment is not good and the area has less than adequate public transport links.

The group meets at the Children's Centre, which is attached to the small local primary school, with a nursery, infants and junior schools and less than 200 children. The Children's Centre faces an uncertain future though as it is being turned into a Community Interest Company. This presents a considerable threat to the group as it has provided the main source of support. The school claims to support the group by making rooms available and through support from community staff. The local neighbourhood partnership is a regeneration body covering a broader area than just this estate. The community group has some limited support from this source too in terms of community development and banking facilities.

The neighbourhood is close to a natural wood and park with a historic site. These have, according to the group, not only suffered from neglect, vandalism and poor decision-making at local government level, but have also benefited from a number of projects focusing on the archaeology and the environment/conservation. These historical elements have, to their surprise, proved important for the group's choice of activities.

The group came about quite incidentally through a community learning initiative, organised by the adult and community learning service in a nearby city. In discussion, one member said, with a laugh, that 'It was all [the community learning worker]'s fault! It was about two and a half year's ago'. This first course, run by the city's community learning service, and based on identified local interest, was on digital photography and was called 'My Life In [the neighbourhood]'. The course was structured as a family learning programme with two hours per session over 10 weeks. Adults were on their own for the first hour and children attended with their parent/carer for the second hour.

Part of the aim was to build confidence and engage the community with the school, which was especially vital as the school was the only community facility on the estate. The community tutor introduced a range of activities to do with the digital cameras in the local area, focusing initially on 'likes and dislikes'. The photographs of 'dislikes' consisted of rubbish and broken buildings. The 'likes' included the shops and the woods, which all 'needed improvement'. The photographs were edited into a digital story board, to show what could be done to improve the area. 'Digital Story' has become a familiar teaching and learning technique in adult learning contexts to support reflective and experiential learning, which has both a direct individual benefit

(e.g. photography) and a direct community benefit (e.g. campaigning for change and the development of cohesion) (Schuller and Watson, 2009).

The digital stories contained powerful messages to send out to policy makers, organisations and the local community. The resulting meetings started to support the parents and children to make changes. In the words of one of the parents: 'The amazing thing about getting involved with community change is that when you know the right people suggestions can actually start to become reality!' Places to play for the children and a space for people of all ages to socialise and learn were identified as issues.

Later the group, including both older and younger children, made a revised digital story presentation to a local MP. The key issues identified were perceived to be linked – play and the lack of a community centre. To address these needs, the group agreed to do more courses including play training, which led to a range of volunteering opportunities. However, the group was not successful in persuading the authority to grant permission for the use of a local building. To realise any of the plans for the community centre would mean a major fundraising effort as well as dealing with the politics, regulations, permissions and funding needed. The group did not yet feel ready to deal with this level of engagement, but had stayed optimistic that these plans would one day come to fruition. However, they appeared to be relying on unnamed external people, groups or organisations for taking this work forward with no plans for how these contacts would come about. All the activities led some group members to become involved in some way though, whether in play work, in local conservation projects, and/or running a festival that became an annual event.

In discussion, the group agreed that the combined activities had, to an extent, helped them to get to know people in the neighbourhood. They strongly agreed that they had discovered much new information about their area, despite having lived there for many years. They also agreed that they had learned a great deal about local decision-making and the council. However, the group also realised that they had not sufficiently evaluated any of their activities and that they did not have a clear plan for the future. They were working in ways, which were reactive rather than deciding what to do and taking the steps to become a 'proper group'.

The group organised a workshop with me, which was attended by most current members and some of the staff from supporting organisations. The first session was spent developing a simple evaluation

framework and testing it against the experience of the group so far. Additionally, they looked into the importance of collecting and using data and evidence. The evaluation tool was based on four basic questions: what went well? (and how do we know?); what was difficult? (and how do we know?); what caused problems? (and what did we do about them?); what did we learn (and how did we learn it/what can we learn from it)? The framework was tested against some sample activity themes, chosen as part of the workshop preparation, namely, digital stories, play training and the festival. The results of these discussions are now discussed in turn.

'Digital Stories' work was vital in developing the group, involving the children and young people and in taking on local issues. The most important of these was the meeting with the MP, during which a 'throw-away comment' about the local saint's day and how it used to be celebrated led to finding out more about local history, which then led to the development and timing of the festival. In this way considerable 'incidental learning' could be identified, a key feature of this kind of community learning (Foley, 1999). In particular, the young people were able to take a positive role in making unrehearsed comments to the MP, which were reflective and well received.

Despite this, the group was still despondent about the area. As one group member said:

There's a problem [here] – there's no community – maybe because we don't have a community centre, where people could meet up. People come along [from the council] and we've heard it all before – nothing ever happens.

The group believed that the play training had been seen as especially positive though and, according to information from the school where much of the activity was located, had contributed to considerable improvements in playground behaviour and accident reduction. The play training had also involved some valuable learning about play, which the group had been able to utilise both personally and for their volunteering role. This kind of work was seen as valuable for the community because it brought people together and involved children of all ages playing together. Their reflections on play included:

The Playing Out workshop was 'great – we were chalking on the roads and it felt really naughty!

You have to educate the parents – they didn't like their kids coming home dirty – but we suggested to Play Rangers that they needed to remind the parents to send some play clothes so that the kids didn't mess up their uniforms for the next day.

I got really passionate about it. I've never missed a session.... The highlight was when we were teaching the children how to use a saw to make the signboards. It was good to see kids working together who don't normally get on.

One of my main reasons to get involved was to do with the older people – you get left out if you haven't got kids.

The remainder of the workshop focused on planning for the future based on the lessons learned from the earlier evaluation session. There were two parts to this – planning for the future of the group and planning for the current year's festival. The group had not done a thorough evaluation of the previous year's festival and they agreed that it would support the development of the next one, if they were to do this evaluation with me. I suggested that a simple planning framework could be used, reflecting the evaluation tool and using the data from the evidence and evaluation session to do some practical planning. The workshop ended with a discussion on whether the group saw themselves as 'active citizens' which they still didn't. We also discussed how the group could keep involving young people and children – which was one of its strengths.

## **Discussion**

### **The research role**

As might be expected, this kind of participative action research, supporting the group to reflect on its findings, was not without challenges for the researcher. As an ally of the group but one who was well outside of its context and everyday experiences, the challenge was to achieve a balance between being an outsider and an insider, the latter being especially relevant during the co-delivery of the workshop. By applying some of the principles of participatory practice and research, it was possible for us to work together in achieving this balance (Ledwith and Springett, 2010). As a 'visitor,' I had to remain aware of the implications of being in a space occupied by the group, as an external 'expert,' there deliberately to share knowledge. It was important to be aware of the power that knowledge might appear to bring and to focus on power sharing

and empowerment. Although limited in time, the research showed the potential to strengthen practice, both by increasing the group's confidence in taking control of the processes and in supporting the group's reflections on their findings.

### **Active citizenship**

Successful activists have treated social struggles as learning experiences.

(Alinsky, 1971 in Foley, 1999)

As stated in the introduction, this volume examines the potential for 'delivering programmes with the active involvement of the learners, with an emphasis upon the links between knowledge, critical understanding and active citizenship in practice'.

Active citizenship, and any associated research or learning, is likely to be a fluid process, with individuals and groups engaging in different ways at different times. Individuals may become involved with a community group or do some voluntary work but that group as a whole may then become involved in running or changing something locally. The local community learning staff saw themselves as having an enabling role in relation to community learning and development and had a commitment to the engagement of everyone in the community. In the case of this particular group, although starting from basics, the members were able to move quickly into analysing the key issues that they identified for improving their communities. Learning how to communicate and engage with the appropriate policy makers is an important part of developing active citizenship, and the group had made a step in this direction already through the meetings with the MP, the neighbourhood partnership and the local councillor.

The concept of the 'Big Society' informs current policy. The group had heard the expression, but did not really relate it to their own activities and were quite cynical about what it might mean. They suggested that it contrasted with their experiences of living in a community with few resources, where important services appeared to be threatened with cuts. Neither the group nor the intermediary practitioners thought that the implementation of a Big Society approach might change the way that the group could develop or affect its access to funding.

### **The group's evaluation**

Initially, the group struggled with the notion of an even-handed evaluation that was based on evidence they had collected and which, whilst

including their own perceptions, would encompass a range of opinions. The inclusion of 'external' practitioners and intermediaries in the workshop, and my facilitative input as researcher, were crucial in helping the group to look at their work from more than one perspective and to use these reflections in developing improved plans for the future, recognising the achievements that had already been made.

For example, in a presentation two women explained that:

We both got jobs following the courses we have done. As well as being a Learning Champion I am working in the school now and have finished training to use the Play Pod in school play time with the children. We still need to get more going for the adults and we would like to work together more to get a café and community centre in the area.

It was important to build on the informal evaluations that had occurred in the general conversations and unstructured reflections that had been shared between group members both during their previous activities and thereafter. This was the building block that I could offer and that they could use to see what evidence they had, to learn to gather information and to carry out reflections in a more systematic way. It seemed that it was this systematisation, which emerged from the workshop, which was most new to the group members, who explained that they would not have set about it in this way without the joint work with Taking Part.

The work the group had done had actually been considerable. As they said:

Over this time we had been discovering more and more about our community. One exciting thing is that there was a [saint's] day in the past that used to be celebrated. Someone said "We should have a fun day and revive it!" That was a logistical nightmare... we started from knowing absolutely nothing but luckily we have had lots of help from people.

The group had, from very little, and with very little resourcing, although with the support of various courses and community development practitioners, managed to make a difference locally, with the potential for more. Once we had reflected on this in the workshop, they identified that they had made changes by bringing more play into the area, starting a festival and contributing new ideas and challenges for local politicians and officers. All of this was on a small scale of course but the

ambitions were longer term and had wider implications for community change and intergenerational involvement.

### **Intergenerational work in active citizenship**

At first, the group's reaction to their intergenerational work was somewhat puzzling; they seemed to want to downplay it or deny it. However, they were not experiencing the exclusion of children and young people that increasingly occurs, more generally, when activities are strongly demarcated. For this group, in contrast, children and young people were just 'there' although the group did not perceive that including them contributed something additional or special. However, the community learning practitioner's perception differed:

The intergenerational element of the group and its work came about through the first course, Living in [the neighbourhood] (digital story) being a family learning course. This course was structured as being the first hour adults and then the second hour children and adults. The children really got into it and were very, very engaged with both taking the photos and discussing them. Another piece of work involved comparing all the parks in [the city] and the children loved that too. That was how it came about that it is the children's voices which are heard on the films in the presentations and their involvement which comes across strongly.<sup>4</sup>

It was felt that the family learning activity had really helped individuals, such as the child of one of the group's members with a potentially difficult transition to secondary school, for example. But all the children were becoming more engaged with their community and wanting to help improve it.

During the digital story work, the group agreed that 'this was really fun doing things with the older kids'.

Intergenerational work in this context was connected entirely to the lives of the people in the group, the majority of whom had children who they perceived to be at risk of being excluded from the community around them but whose views on the community were vital for its future as well as its present. In addition, for the group, the involvement of children and young people was of vital importance in preventing trouble and difficulties in the community, which were widely perceived, locally, to be caused by young people or children. Furthermore, the group would be united in desiring positive futures for its young people, aiming to strengthen their opportunities in every possible way – whether through

play or through community activities or just through gaining access to more resources. It was important to the group to acknowledge that not all of them had children, but they all wanted to see communities where there was integration between the generations. The importance of play and play training in furthering this proved a practical way of addressing the issues that were raised from the group's investigative work, giving some 'quick wins' in the community and involving both adults and children/young people.

Intergenerational work is likely to become more important as we are subject to continuing demographic change, whilst communities are under great pressure from new challenges, economic crisis and the lack of employment opportunities, the lack of community resources and diminishing access to services. If tensions arise and cohesion is threatened, it is this kind of intergenerational mutual co-operation which is likely to lead to increased cohesion. Rather than simply focusing on intergenerational learning in fact, it would be important to try to bring people together, and this is where the concept of multigenerational activity becomes significant. Whilst some of this was suggested by Pain (2005), she was of course writing before the latest economic crisis. However, in many less advantaged communities, there had been little evidence of the impact of better economic times in the past. Though more people were reported by the group to have had jobs in the recent past, these neighbourhoods had not really ever recovered from the previous economic downturns of the 1980s and 1990s (Harkness *et al.*, 2012).

### **Role of the catalysts and intermediaries**

Whilst the group was determining its own way forward, the members agreed that it would not have existed without outside inputs. The role of the community learning service should not be underestimated in bringing the members together in the first place. The group had received support from the local Children's Centre and the local primary school (although the group perceived the latter to be a tricky relationship). Play and youth workers and the neighbourhood partnership had also proved important allies.

Development workers in the community learning service are free to develop different directions and passions according to the neighbourhoods where they work, which means that they can engage in genuinely bottom up work and roll it out, based on learner needs, and working with partners. The staff member reflected that 'as ever with community work there is a risk of over-promising; at the moment this could be an issue[in relation to the proposed community centre] but so far the group

is hanging onto this as a kind of vision but not in an unrealistic way – this vision has been driving them so far’.

The group’s perception of the intermediaries varied and it was important to reflect on this with them. They were very positive about the community learning service, but there was little understanding about the extent or limitations of their offer. The group also perceived the Children’s Centre’s role as positive. The group’s attitude to the school was much more mixed though. It is important to remember that many of the group’s children attended this school and this affected the perceptions the group had, in terms of the power relations between the school and the individuals (whether adults or children) and the school in relationship to the community. Whilst there was some criticism of the school, at other times the group acknowledged that the school had opportunities to offer – particularly in relation to play – and the group had been happy to accept its support. Some of them actually volunteered there. However, the group did not necessarily feel respected by the school as they believed that the school’s needs would always dominate.

### **Changing community**

As the research progressed, the group became increasingly aware of what it needed to do to make changes in the community and to become a fully functioning group (although it was clear that this would not be straightforward). As one member reflected, ‘if you want a community centre you have to get it yourselves’. At the same time another group member made an oblique reference to the concept of Big Society when she added: ‘as a society we’ve got so used to people doing things for you – now we have to do it ourselves, but we do get support?’

The group was well aware of the challenges ahead in their own community and in trying to harness enthusiasm and support to make changes. In this, they were facing the perceived apathy of some community members and some outright hostility. Community consensus is a myth put about by some policy makers and this group was entirely realistic about having to win people to their cause through demonstrating success and through the art of persuasion. The group’s example, which we discussed in detail here, was their difficulty in achieving agreement amongst a limited number of residents, to enable them to hold a Playing Out session, as some neighbours would not agree to a temporary street closure. Through discussion we suggested that improved communication skills and information sharing by the group, together with the high profile that Playing Out is receiving nationally, would enable the group to change people’s minds over time. The disappointment that this initial refusal had engendered in the group was palpable though; it had

been a hard lesson for them to learn that their enthusiasm would not necessarily be sufficient to get things done.

The meetings held with councillors, the partnership and the MP were seen as important but the group did not perceive these as likely to have much impact. Any changes were more likely to be self-organised, they recognised, but at the same time they doubted their abilities in achieving this as they had little access to resources, whether as individuals or as a community, and their voice had little power.

It appeared to the professionals working with the group that this particular community, which is relatively small, can be overlooked when bigger pots of funding are allocated. The key issues identified in Digital Stories were litter and rubbish; play opportunities; youth opportunities; public transport and access to learning and work. Some group members became Community Learning Champions to encourage more engagement in learning locally, as low skills and low employment were also identified. These issues were relatively modest in terms of their implications for funding then, but problematic, all the same.

The group was interesting for a number of reasons: they were a relatively new group that was not formally constituted; they were in a disadvantaged community with few resources; the group was made up of women and their children and the group could be described as 'marginalised' already before it had even begun. Interestingly, the group did not reflect, whilst I was there, on its makeup (other than to acknowledge that not all group members had children); they were of varying ages and races, but this was not mentioned in discussion. This range of backgrounds gave them a good start for building a future group which would be inclusive and could bring about greater cohesion.

However, the possibilities for sustainability were not promising. This was not a good time to start a new group – particularly one which might need funding – as the voluntary and community sector was facing considerable cuts at the local level.<sup>5</sup> It was evident that this group was prepared to take a long view though and slowly build its capacity to bring about the changes that we identified as needed. This was reflected in the words of one of the adults: 'The amazing thing about getting involved with community change is that when you know the right people suggestions can actually start to become reality!'

## Conclusions

The research case study was intended to demonstrate the value of community-based research and that its impact could be strengthened

through involvement of the community group in experiential learning, to find evidence and to use that evidence to further their aims and develop stronger communities. One key aspect of this work was opening up the space for identifying evidence and entering into dialogue and discussion merely by the group members being offered the opportunity and agreeing to set aside the time from their busy lives to participate.

Prior to working with the researcher, the local community learning staff had a commitment to working in a spirit of dialogue, working with community groups to create empowerment for individuals and communities. It is clear that family learning and resultant intergenerational activity had also enabled some increase in intergenerational solidarity in the local community. As the head of the community learning service wrote:

For the families in [the neighbourhood], it hasn't been a choice of 'state' or 'society'. This pilot project has demonstrated how committed and expert local government professionals can work alongside local residents to empower them to bring about positive community change. For adult and community learning services, successful community development learning requires us to adopt a new approach to course design and delivery. Rather than offering a pre-determined curriculum to passive potential learners, tutors will need to have the confidence to co-create the course content to achieve desired outcomes. In the true spirit of Paulo Freire, perhaps we will see tutors and participants acting as learning partners, sharing meaningful knowledge and expertise to bring about lasting social, political and community change. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.

(Freire, 1972)<sup>6</sup>

For the group could understand how to take its next steps, develop proper plans and reflect effectively on its experience, learning lessons as it went, it was vital for them to acquire some basic research and participatory evaluation skills. These skills would further help to legitimise the group so that it could become formally recognised and apply for funding. The group already had a wealth of data at its disposal but was not yet able to translate that evidence into planning or organisational strengths. Although the group had already presented

its findings about the neighbourhood and community to policy and decision-makers, there was some way to go in developing the follow up.

It was useful to keep the participatory evaluation framework straightforward and make it transparent and usable in any context. The group had not seen its Digital Stories as evidence and had not appreciated the need for being systematic in collecting and keeping data, in evaluating and in using the evidence to help them plan, carry out and fund their activities. Co-working with researchers supporting this experiential learning and ongoing engagement over a longer period could enable deeper understanding to be developed.

It is particularly difficult for a fledgling group to show evidence of impact and it was in making sense of the evidence they had that this research proved the most positive. As the invited researcher, I could inform the discussion by bringing in external experiences – comparisons with other groups in other cities – and relating the findings to policies or practices of which the group had little or no prior knowledge.

Many communities are apparently marginalised and the neighbourhood in this case study could be described as one of them. The group too was potentially marginalised, both in its newness and its makeup, being largely formed of women, children and young people, who also had relatively little access to resources of any kind. Their relative success so far has been a testament to their creativity as a group as well as to the good quality community work that has taken place. The very basic evaluation tools that we applied proved successful as a powerful introduction to gathering evidence and evaluating it.

The group struggled with concepts such as active citizenship or intergenerational learning and did not generally identify themselves with them. However, to progress as a group and especially to raise funds, the group would need to align itself with such concepts and policy developments. Again this was where, as researcher, I could bring in useful external information. New groups need to confront these difficulties but the necessary involvement of intermediaries can lead to the potential bureaucratisation of their development without that being their wish. Some groups decide to stay outside the funding environment in order to be able to progress their own active citizenship plans but this would not be realistic for such a group, wanting to open a community centre.

The term 'intergenerational' remains problematic for me as it is so often misconstrued as meaning 'between two generations'. To increase levels of cohesion and empowerment and to reflect more accurately the reality of our communities, it could be better, in future, to focus on the

concept of multigenerational working and learning, to bring together greater cross-community involvement.

Through the research, we found that the link between intergenerational, or rather multigenerational, learning and active citizenship needs to be made explicit and the support workers and other intermediaries, as well as the group, need to be very determined to succeed and ensure that it reflects the needs, wishes and capacity of the community. Skilled development work and enthusiastic community groups are required for success. Researchers can bring a positive impact by sharing skills and encouraging action and reflection processes alongside the community development learning staff. This was certainly demonstrated through the activity described here; although a connection with me/other researchers over a period of time might prove even more effective.

It appears to be difficult to link young people into activity and projects outside of youth/play services and outside of school. Yet, this was key to the way this group developed and its understanding of local issues, helping to determine what it would do next. For the group, involving young people and children was just what they did – the children were in their homes and lives and communities. The group wanted to help them develop and the community to be a good place for all of them to live, find work, learn and join in.

Support can come from community learning but much of its curriculum does not enable the reflection and action we were building in this example (Foley, 1999). In reflecting on the research role, I believe that a much longer engagement would have been useful. The methods chosen were practical and the group responded positively, learning much in the process, but I recognise the potentially dubious effectiveness of short-term pieces of work and the dependence on other intermediaries to continue support to the group. However, there is certainly scope to develop a deeper relationship between intergenerational work and active citizenship by employing reflective practices in an intentional manner, supported where possible by appropriate intermediaries.

## Notes

1. For example, Adult and Community Learning Fund. See [www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk).
2. University of Leicester Lifelong Learning Centre Seminar with Alan Hatton Yeo, November 2011.
3. The European Network for Intergenerational Learning (ENIL) aims to foster new ideas and developments in intergenerational learning. It offers practitioners, policy makers, organisations and individuals across Europe a platform and

channels for the ongoing exchange of expertise, good practice, news, research and developments in the field ([www.enilnet.eu](http://www.enilnet.eu)).

4. Extract from presentation given by group members and community learning staff.
5. NCVO reported 500 cuts worth £77 million on [www.ncvo.org.uk](http://www.ncvo.org.uk) on 10 July 2012. This figure is updated weekly.
6. From an unpublished article by the head of the community learning service and the community education development officer, citing Paulo Freire (1972).

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## Part III

# Evaluating the Role and Contributions of Community Arts, Media and Sports

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# 8

## Participatory Arts and Community Development: Taking *Part*

Chrissie Tiller

The role of the arts in community development has a long and honourable history in the United Kingdom. Who takes part in the arts themselves remains a question of class and privilege, however.

The Taking *Part* Conference<sup>1</sup> in 2010 brought arts and culture, higher education and Third Sector organisations from the United Kingdom, the United States, South Africa and Europe together, to uncover current practices and explore new possibilities. In particular, the aim was to look at the impact of recent political, social and funding ecologies on access and participation in more marginalised communities. Finding effective models for uncovering the value of participation and innovative approaches to making the work were central themes: contributions of colleagues from other countries and political systems enabling us to hold up a mirror to our own situation. This chapter reflects upon these contributions, starting with reflections on recent histories and policy contexts. Subsequent sections focus on varying strategies in response to current challenges, including reflections on the implications for research. How to demonstrate the value of the ways in which the arts can creatively contribute, rather than becoming trapped in more instrumental approaches to evaluative research?

Thirteen years of New Labour meant the UK arts community was well rehearsed in bringing its arguments in line with shifting government directives: despite a growing unease in finding itself delivering policy rather than providing what David Edgar calls, 'the voice of criticism, provocation and dissent' (Edgar, 2004). The debate around *instrumental value* versus *intrinsic worth* had become part of the territory. Beginning with the then Culture Secretary, Chris Smith's, insistence on monitoring outputs and outcomes: '[t]his is not something for nothing. We want to see measurable outcomes for the investment which is being made'

(Smith, 1999: 14) the agenda had recently shifted to Tessa Jowell's 'art for art's sake' nod to the establishment (Jowell, 2004).

The May 2010 general election changed the landscape once more: for the arts as every other aspect of public provision. The new Chancellor may have professed a commitment to art's, 'vital role in our communities, helping to bind people together and create real social value' (Osborne, 2009), but what Nicholas Serota, Director of the Tate, termed the *blitzkrieg* (Serota, 2010) had begun. A 30% cut to Arts Council England's funding was announced. Umbrella organisations, such as the Film Council, were disbanded. And, despite working with business consultants to demonstrate the economic benefits of engaging young people with the arts (Price Waterhouse Cooper, 2010), Labour's flagship schools' programme, Creative Partnerships, was abandoned.

Ten days before *Taking Part* opened at the South Bank Centre, the realities of what was being called 'the new age of austerity' (Cameron cited Summers, 2009) were starting to take effect. The conference felt like a timely intervention.

In her welcoming speech, Jude Kelly, artistic director of the South Bank, spoke about, 'the right to art' being 'paramount', in any civil society. Raising questions around the usefulness of terms such as 'identifying need', set up by funders, Kelly asked whether we should be moving to arguments of 'want' or 'entitlement' (Opening Speech *Taking Part* Conference South Bank, 29 October 2010) as expressed in Article 27 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. The South Bank Centre did not belong to a privileged arts elite but to everyone in London: London's diverse communities should therefore have the right to influence what is shown there, who shows it and how it is shown. Power politics and cultural hegemonies, Kelly asserted, needed to become things of the past.

Whilst noting the effect of the new funding climate on national institutions such as the South Bank Centre, many *Taking Part* participants knew the cuts would impact disproportionately on their own smaller, community-based organisations. Most were already facing cuts to their local authority budgets: up to 100% in some cases. Forty-eight per cent of funding in the visual arts was to be directed to the 'Top 20' galleries and production agencies (Dany, 2011). Access and participation once again became the responsibility of larger arts institutions widening their 'audience base'. Small-scale organisations, such as the Horniman Museum in South East London, were to be left to the, 'responsibility of (their) local communities' (Birkett, 2010).

This shift in policy was not unexpected. Under New Labour, community arts programmes had been increasingly asked to evidence their value solely in terms of social inclusion, educational improvement

or creating employment. The McMaster Review (McMaster, 2008) had reopened the space for the 'art for art's sake' lobby. Excellence and innovation were to be favoured; funding was to be focused once more on those larger national organisations that it was felt could guarantee art of high quality and distinction. Earlier inclusion policies began to be dismissed, as little more than ticking boxes, and critic James Fenton was able to scorn what he called Labour's 'access pottinness':

It descends from Stalinism, from the old questions of the form: 'What has your string quartet done, comrade, to further the cause of revolution?' One might have expected such perverse rhetoric to die with Stalinism. Instead it morphed into a social-democratic 'instrumentalism' – the arts were to be judged as instruments of social change. The oboe concerto was expected to help young mothers escape the poverty trap.

(Fenton, 2004)

The reality was quite different. Although ten years of supporting the arts in tackling social, education and economic issues had brought wider access, in IPPR's report on arts and civil renewal Kearney confirmed the fact that the main beneficiaries of 'publicly subsidised art and heritage' remained the, 'affluent and well educated' (Kearney, 2006. 39). The right to 'enjoy the arts' and 'participate in the cultural life of the community', continued to be reliant on what Bourdieu notes as the ability to, 'play the game' (Bourdieu 1984: 330) in the field of cultural and creativity by being culturally and socially literate.

The pendulum of what constitutes societal value in the arts in the United Kingdom has constantly swung between a Kantian emphasis on the intrinsic and aesthetic to William Morris's notions of art, like freedom and education, being a universal right. Public funding and arts policies have, however, mostly erred on the side of ensuring arts' intrinsic value is something best appreciated by a small minority. Engagement with the Arts may have been accepted as a 'civilising virtue', by the founder of the Royal Academy, Joshua Reynolds, but it was one best confined to, 'those whom their superiority sets free from labour', rather than 'the mechanic classes'(Reynolds, 1801). The decision to include the word 'Royal' in the title of this first publicly funded institution, and subsequently that of many others, only served to reinforce a correlation between arts and privilege.

From the Romantic poets and painters, glorifying the life of the 'common man' whilst seeing little need (with the exception of Blake) to engage with his day-to-day reality, art has mostly been something to do

for communities rather than make *with* them. Even the Barnettts' enlightened Whitechapel Exhibitions often felt like opportunities for workers to engage with the arts in order to bring about their 'social and spiritual betterment' (Koven, 1994: 37) and improvement. Arts Education may have been grasped as a possible response to the strikes and civil unrest of the thirties, but unlike Roosevelt's New Deal policies, encouraging personal creativity was never part of the agenda. A group of miners approaching the Workers Educational Association (Kelly, 1962) for an art class in 1934 soon realised no one thought they might want to paint. In an ironic twist, the story of these 'Pitmen Painters' has enjoyed a sentimental life on Broadway, whilst the work itself is housed in the Woodhorn Colliery Museum and Gallery: long after the demise of the mines themselves as a source of employment or community.

When the first public body to fund arts activities, CEMA (Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) was formally established in 1941, it declared its intention to become an opportunity for common man to feel, 'one with... a community finer, more gifted, more splendid... than he can be by himself' (Keynes, 1946). Arguments, by those who had witnessed the benefits of arts activities for the unemployed and local communities, that engagement with the arts should be, 'closely linked to their practice' (Gibson, 2010: 1) were quickly dismissed. By December 1941, the lines between professional and 'amateur' or 'community' arts were resolutely drawn and the latter consigned to the stewardship of the National Council of Social Service. When the Arts Council was set up in 1946, it not only invited ex-CEMA chair, Lord Keynes, to be its Chairman but adopted his slogan, 'The Best for the Most'; with a 'distinct emphasis on the best': (Cartwright, 2011) a view that would remain prevalent until well into the sixties.

Jennie Lee, Labour's first Minister of Arts, may have felt exclusion from participation in the arts was as damaging to the privileged minority as it was to the underprivileged majority but her 1965 White Paper failed to undermine the centrality and power of the large institutions. Whilst the Housing of the Arts Bill encouraged the growth of community arts centres in 1969, one-third of Arts Council spending was still going to the National Theatre, Royal Opera House, Royal Shakespeare Company and Sadler's Wells.

In contextualising current practice in a period of funding austerity, Taking *Part* participants inevitably turned to the great blossoming of radical community arts projects that began to emerge at the beginning of the seventies. The Arts Council and government may have continued to mainly fund arts organisations serving a privileged elite but the

practice of individual artists was making an important shift. Widening educational opportunities had offered social mobility to a new generation of working and lower middle class university and art school students. Alongside a growing political radicalism and engagement with class, race and sexual politics, they had begun to recognise the potential of the arts in developing community. Not only in subverting convention and the status quo but also in building community identity and giving a voice to those who had, so far, remained voiceless. Building on the models of their US counterparts, newly conscious graduates took over run-down inner city buildings and set up community arts centres, such as the Arts Labs, in London, Birmingham and other large cities. It was from these experiments with counter culture, new forms and radical content that partnerships with the communities in which they found themselves living were created. For a short time, cultural action and community arts practice were synonymous.

In London at least, this spirit of radical intervention continued to flourish through the eighties. Whilst the Arts Council was responding to government cuts by devolving more funding to the regions (*The Glory of the Garden*, 1984), the Great London Council (GLC), under the leadership of Ken Livingstone, unashamedly embraced this grassroots arts and cultural activity as part of their platform. The medium, as McLuhan might have said, had become the 'political message'.

Events such as the GLC's Jobs for a Change and Anti-Racism Festivals brought artists and activists together, for the first time since the 1930s, to tackle real community issues, whilst the move from subsidising 'high' culture in London to supporting local projects opened up platforms for minorities: shaping a climate of creative cross-sectoral co-operation. The (then called) Albany Empire, under the stewardship of inspirational theatre maker and community activist, Jenny Harris, became a beacon for ways in which arts centres could both serve their local community and bring in young audiences from the radical political movements. Popular art forms were encouraged and participatory practice encouraged by new sources of funding. As Bianchini (1987: 108) points out in his analysis of GLC cultural policy, 'In order to promote... the celebration of working class, women's, black and youth histories'... the GLC began to fund contemporary cultural forms like photography, video, pop music... traditionally neglected by the state'.

A commitment to content and participatory practice meant artists and arts organisations working in communities placed themselves outside what they saw as the measures and values of the cultural hegemony, placing an emphasis on process rather than product. Whilst allowing

them to be more radical in their approach to what constituted arts practice, it made them increasingly dependent on local government and Arts Council support. It also made them more vulnerable to being drawn into the governmental 'instrumentalisation' of the arts that became a feature of the late eighties.

Having developed themselves as small enterprises, with the support of government-led Enterprise Allowance and ManPower Services schemes, many also found themselves being pulled into the notion of 'creative and cultural industries'. Suddenly community-based artists were able to justify themselves, not in terms of the art or the effect they were having on community development in the sense of empowerment and giving a voice to the marginalised, but in terms of their contribution to the economy. Working with communities through the arts began to be seen as a solution to unemployment, the decline of manufacturing and the demise of traditional jobs. As Angela McRobbie points out in 'Everyone is Creative' (2002), encouraging an enterprise culture enabled the government to create, 'a future generation of socially diverse creative workers... brimming with ideas and whose skills need not only be channelled into the fields of art and culture but will also be good for business'.

This notion of the arts as 'industries', despite the fact that most of their 'employees' were freelancers and without contracts, national insurance or unemployment rights, was appealing. It seemed to connect artists even more directly with the communities they were hoping to support by offering them skills that might allow them to set up enterprises and leave the ranks of those needing employment. Finally, it seemed, here was a way of capturing the impact of the arts in 'real' terms. Ten years after Myerscough (1988), the Department for Culture, Media and Sport could justify investment in these 'creative industries' by showing they not only generated £60 billion in revenue and £7.5 billion in exports every year, but also accounted for over 1.4 million jobs. They were also growing faster than any other sector in the economy.

Capital funding was suddenly available to turn run-down inner city areas into cultural hubs. Those who had begun by recognising the value of the arts in bringing about community development through encouraging radical solutions were faced with a new dilemma. How could they justify a move from using the arts to provide communities with insights into their own issues and creative tools with which to comment on them to delivering government agendas supporting the gentrification of the inner city areas in which these communities had made their homes? The limitations of large-scale capital regeneration programmes in terms of real local social impact were also becoming increasingly obvious.

A 1994 National Heritage Report had also indicated that mainstream arts and cultural events were still being enjoyed by a relatively narrow section of the population. A different kind of response was needed. The first piece of research responding to this need for proof of the arts value in instrumental terms was conducted in 1993 by Comedia; the findings from its case studies feeding into Matarasso's influential piece on measuring the impact of participatory arts on communities, 'Use or Ornament?' (1997).

'Use or Ornament' has subsequently been criticised for flawed methodology (Belfiore and Merli, 2002). Matarasso himself points out its limitations. 'There is a trade-off between precision and detail on the one hand and control of evaluation by those involved in an activity on the other' (Matarasso, 1997: 15).

Methods, which appear suitable to social scientists, cannot easily be used by arts workers and community groups, for whom evaluation, however important, is always secondary to achieving a programme.

(Matarasso, 1997. 15)

More recently he also accedes it was probably, '...a mistake to transfer the word "impact" from an economic discourse to a social discourse where it is simply not appropriate' (Matarasso, 2010). As an approach to evaluation, it may have contributed to making arts with communities more vulnerable to being judged solely in terms of social impact. 'I know that Arts and Culture make a contribution to health, to education, to crime reduction, to strong communities, to the economy and to the nation's well-being but I don't always know how to evaluate it or describe it. We have to find a language and a way of describing its worth' (Morris, 2003).

For many arts organisations, particularly those working in community contexts, *Use or Ornament* finally offered tools that could capture the non-arts-based outcomes of the work through practice-based methods. Other researchers, such as Belfiore and Bennet (2010) in their University of Warwick podcast, have highlighted its shortcomings as a methodology, condemning the arts for only making their arguments, like the National Health Service (NHS), in times of funding cuts, but they have so far presented few alternatives. Despite academic rigour, these critiques offer little practical guidance to those working in the field and needing to marshal their arguments in response to funding bids.

Twelve years later, in a new climate of cuts and austerity, *Taking Part* was an opportunity for community-based arts organisations, to

revisit what John Holden calls their 'disruptive and oppositional' roots (Holden, 2006: 30). Many felt it was a time to reconsider their role. In their eagerness for their value to be measurable and publicly recognised, had they allowed themselves to become little more than government tools for ameliorating rather than challenging social deprivation? Was it time for them to return to their seventies and eighties roots of enabling communities to find their own voice, dealing with complex situations through arts capacity to embrace paradox and nuance? As Richard Eyre, ex-director of the National had noted: 'Politics is the great generaliser and literature the great particulariser, and not only are they in an inverse relationship to each other they are in an antagonistic relationship. How can you be an artist and renounce the nuance? How can you be a politician and allow the nuance?' (Eyre, 2005).

The arts organisations that were part of Taking *Part* felt they were increasingly struggling to do nothing more than meet the *social impact* outcomes set by public funding bodies and government targets. The need for measurable results was increasingly ironing out artistic integrity and creative innovation and the artistic and aesthetic could often feel as though they were very secondary to guaranteeing social outcomes (Bishop, 2005).

Taking *Part* brought national and international arts organisations, Third Sector partners, the voluntary sector and researchers together to open up this very conversation. By identifying itself as an 'un-conference', this event set out to explore effective ways of evidencing the value and measuring the impact of the arts in community development whilst recognising access to arts and making meaning through participation in them, as a basic human right. It wanted to put the old oppositional ways of setting *instrumental* or participatory art against *intrinsically valuable* art for art's sake behind us by looking at evaluation models that might provide us with 'coherent (and challenging) accounts of the role art does, can and could play in helping imagine and create more fulfilling lives in a better society' (Knell and Taylor, 2011: 28).

The Rand Corporation's 2004 study 'Gifts of the Muse' (Rand: 17) had drawn a new line in the sand: 'What draws people to the arts is not the hope that the experience will make them smarter or more self-disciplined. Instead it is the expectation that encountering a work of art can be a rewarding experience, one that offers them pleasure and emotional stimulation and meaning'.

Within the practice of younger artists engaged in what Bourriard (2002) and, later, Bishop (2006) identify as 'relational art', there was a

parallel desire to use their work to examine social issues in a critical context. Theatre, film and visual artists were moving towards creating work that took on a more overtly oppositional approach to social engagement: doing what art does best in exploring contradiction, complexity and conflict.

Concerned that the very participatory nature of much earlier community-based arts work had left little systematic evaluation or documentation, *Taking Part* also wanted to challenge perceptions that its claims could therefore be dismissed as anecdotal and subjective. The lack of methodical evidencing can be problematic. At a time 'where a growing part of the population is culturally and creatively disenfranchised' (Holden, 2010: 63), it was important to be able to capture this experience and expertise. By bringing 'survivors' from the seventies and eighties Community Arts movements together with students, young and emerging artists, Third Sector workers and social entrepreneurs to uncover new ways of sharing and documenting practice, we hoped to share the stories in new ways.

If arts and culture would need to begin articulating their value using methods that fit more closely with central government methodologies, as O'Brien (2010) has recently warned the arts sector (i.e. by using the Cabinet's Green Book Cost Benefit Analysis), we needed to find ways of sharing the value of our work. Capturing the learning experience and the process was as important as results. We might be entering an economic and funding climate where the case for the Arts would have to be made in terms of social return on public investment, but this made it even more pressing to find space for earlier activists and radicals to share their practice with younger artists trying to make sense of their work and give a voice to the communities they lived in.

What was clear, as we began to share thoughts across generations, in World Cafe and Open Space sessions, was the current funding climate with its 'Big Society' notions of volunteerism, felt less like equal ownership and more like a return to the discourse of community engagement being something done to, rather than with. Even the language of Arts Council's recent policy statement 'Great Art for Everyone' (2010) resonated much more closely with early 20th-century policies of institutions opening their doors to what Bernard Shaw might have called the 'deserving poor'.

There was a growing sense amongst delegates of the imperative to think outside survival instincts to something that would take us beyond the paradigm of the production of art as the privilege of the few for the edification of the many. Participants felt the need to confront the

concept of excellence belonging to 10 or 12 major national institutions suggested by McMasters (2008) and make the arguments for what it might mean in more diverse contexts. Why, one delegate asked, 'When we go to see a good piece of youth theatre or a community performance can it often be more moving and engaging than a piece seen at the National Theatre?' How could we set about finding the language to describe quality of experience and product in our own terms?

Many agreed there was still 'little evidence that...prioritisation of social or economic objectives has had any substantial impact on the decisions...made about mainstream arts funding, or indeed...arts organisations go about their work' (Bunting *et al.*, 2010: 11). Indeed, as Lynch (2011: 7) notes in her report on museums and galleries, 'Whose Cake is it Anyway?', there has been little shift in the participation and engagement agendas of most major arts institutions. 'Overall, the greatest difficulty expressed by a number of community partners surrounded the issues of collaboration and co-production, with offers of participation typically amounting to the disillusioning experience of being 'empowerment-lite'. Some projects led by large institutions have left community participants feeling that rather than finding their own voice they had, 'colluded in their own marginalisation, disempowerment and even exclusion' (Lynch, 2011: 12).

As artists and creative workers based in community and participatory contexts, we wanted to question and revisit the way we had drifted from those earlier oppositional and radical roots to signing up wholesale to the notion of delivering the participation agenda of the last government. Had we, we asked ourselves, not only allowed, but even welcomed, being pigeonholed into deliverers of social cohesion whilst ignoring the need to explore radical, political alternatives? Had we become sick and surfeited on structures and subsidy and might we need to rediscover discomfort and dissatisfaction? Refuting the idea that community arts had been *totally* taken over by inclusion policies, we recognised the importance, in this period of change, of fighting against the institutional wiping out of the traces of practice, only to reinvent it within new lexicons.

At the same time, there was optimism that, within this current economic meltdown, there were new possibilities. Could we, and should we, as some of the younger artists prompted, be thinking of ways in which we might revisit those eighties models? What, someone asked, had become of learning loops and Stud Terkel's assertion that 'Hope has never trickled down. It has always sprung up?' (Terkel, 2003 Intro: xv). Could we think about working and even living in new ways, shifting

our own language from social cohesion and exclusion back to that of radical social change? Could we make the Big Society not the content of our work but the context of its struggle? Adopt its language turning it into something that might challenge the whole notion of community as a comfortable alternative to the wider concept of society, manageable only when it operates at a local level?

Could we also acknowledge that, despite increased funding possibilities, the reasons for our work had not disappeared under New Labour? In fact the differentials between rich and poor had grown wider than ever and were continuing to grow under the new Coalition Government. As colleagues from Greece, Portugal and Norway pointed out nationalism, factionalism and a false sense of localism were becoming part of responses to the current European economic crisis. Was it time for the arts to re-engage with wider issues, to fight for the rights of those who had remained on the margins and outside the power? Could the arts, as Naseem Khan challenged us, be used to put right the dissonance of disparate communities? Could cultural workers draw on their understanding of the past to dig deep to find people's stories, culture and roots?

We decided it might be time for the arts to, once again, become risk making as well as risk-taking. Although we might want to argue the role of the arts and creativity in economic regeneration, we felt we should also challenge perceptions of the impact this regeneration had made on local communities. We wanted to revisit recent history, re-examining our language in terms of what had taken place over the last 15 years looking at wider concepts of creative activity. To extend the cross-sectoral and cross-disciplinary partnerships we had created to explore ways in which the arts might once more become a nexus of creative resistance: inviting health workers, youth workers, public sector workers, scientists and teachers to be part of our enquiry.

Might we revisit the divide between amateur and professional so firmly established in 1941 and question the continuing hierarchical nature of arts policy, looking at real co-creation rather than tick-box responses to collaboration and participation? Could we challenge the notion of the arms length principle and ask that the arts take on a more direct political and socially engaged agenda? Insist that the Arts Council not only take on the responsibility of ensuring the major arts institutions begin to engage with access and participation in new and meaningful ways but also supporting community-led initiatives? Not only inviting people across the thresholds of arts institutions to build up audiences but also involving them in real decisions about the work

shown there: shifting definitions of culture and changing whose stories are told.

We also wondered what learning from the past we might draw on as lessons for the future? How could we, or should we, begin to question the individualism of current society: drawing on the cultural legacy of the sixties and seventies to revisit feminism, race, ethnicity and class? And how might some of those old connections between political activism and radical arts practice look today?

We were keen to learn from our colleagues from other countries. What could we take from the ways in which Peter Stark, one of the original sixties' Arts Lab radicals, was describing how young people in South Africa were owning the future of their country and using the arts to do this? What could we learn from the ways in which they were taking over public spaces, performing ownership, framing the arts in the context of Article 27 and the Human Rights agenda? How might we reframe our own policies in terms of the South African White paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage: 'No government can legislate creativity into effect. At best government can seek to ensure that its resources are used equitably so that impediments to expression are removed, that the social and political climate are conducive to self-expression, and that the arts, culture and heritage allow the full diversity of our people to be expressed in a framework of equity...' (cited Stark, 2010).

What could we learn from the Arts and Civic Engagement Impact Initiative of Animating Democracy programme established by our colleagues from Americans for the Arts? Setting up a Field Lab to 'coalesce knowledge and advance learning among practitioners, researchers, evaluators, and funders who share common questions about assessing and communicating social impact of arts-based civic engagement work' (Schaffer Bacon and Korza, 2010). Equipping all stakeholders with 'practical knowledge and useful/usable tools and models' to strengthen (their) capacity to assess and describe their own social outcomes.

Or what could we learn from the commoditisation of art that colleagues from Portugal and Turkey felt was being brought about by centralised policies, pushing other, more locally based practices to the margins? The legacy of the past, such as the '74 revolution in Portugal, still has such a stronghold on cultural life that the plurality of practice outside major cities needs to fight to be acknowledged in shared public space. Or, in Turkey, where in projects such as Sinopale, artists are placing local development issues back on the national and international agendas by 'building dialogue through shared collective memory and organising it, through artistic and cultural production, to create new possibilities' (Abore, 2010).

Practical and creative models for capturing value in new ways were offered. In 'Towards Case-making' Barbara Schaffer Bacon, from Animating Democracy, guided us through their Arts and Civic Engagement Impact Initiative in the United States. In particular, she explained the ways in which what they have called 'Social Impact Indicators' could be developed to cover a range of arts activities and their outcomes; at an individual, group, community and systemic level. By exploring typical outcomes from arts projects, over different time frames, the changes taking place grouped into six categories:

- Awareness and knowledge – what people know;
- Attitudes and motivation – what people think and feel;
- Behaviour and participation – what people do;
- Discourse – what is being said and heard;
- Capacity – know-how and resources;
- Systems, policies and conditions – change that is lasting.

The resulting IMPACT site looks at artistic strategies as well as sample outcomes and examples of evidence; keeping the ownership of the evaluation process with the artist. It looks at how qualitative data can be given equal weighting to quantitative data. Case-making was being considered much more in terms of how arts practice can be incorporated into the collecting and sharing of stories: drawing on the power of narrative, visual documentation and the ability of art to capture complex issues. Speaking about her Art at Work programme, artist Marty Pottenger led us through a poetry and photography project with the Portland Police Department whose resulting calendar and responses to it, through interviews, blogs and written reflections, used creative tools to measuring impact on both police morale and the public's perception of them.

Others underlined the importance of making the research tools themselves reflect the artistic practice/process being used by projects. In speaking about Creativity, Culture and Education's Prevent programme, Sarah Holloway spoke of ways in which participants had been encouraged to use their newly acquired artistic skills, such as film, new media or creative writing, to capture their own sense of the project's value. How, Open Space sessions asked, do we make measurement the master of change rather than the servant?

The need to re-engage with arts at every level, revaluing creativity in daily life and develop a dynamic dialogue between grassroots practice, traditional crafts and new technologies emerged as a prevailing topic. Captured vividly in the Mirrie Dancers' project from the Shetlands, a

cross-generational project that fuses traditional crafts with new technologies, it reminded us of the importance of not being pressured by funding requirements to parachute in and look for proof of instant impact. Instead it underlined the importance of embedding the work within communities, placing the focus on process and quality work that makes a real difference: accepting that change takes time.

At the end of the two days, we acknowledged that the more ephemeral nature of participatory practice may well have allowed it to be overlooked or neglected within official narratives in the past. We recognised the importance of sharing practice, as we had done here, across generations, disciplines and levels of experience. We agreed on the importance of asserting, especially in difficult times, the value of what we are doing artistically, politically and socially. We accepted the importance of taking on the responsibility to document and write our own legacy: lest others write it for us.

Alongside the necessity to capture our work, we also celebrated our own collective memory: the ways in which we had constantly adapted ourselves to new political and funding contexts, reframing our work within the current rhetoric. We anticipated ongoing conversations, creating a platform for knowledge exchange that would mirror the reciprocity, openness, rigour, inclusivity and quality (of both process and product) that we aim for in our work.

Warning against the results of the increased *instrumentalisation* of the arts in 2005, Christopher Frayling bemoaned the shrinking of government arts funding policies to Venus de Milo proportions. Predicting the 'erosion of artistic independence', he argued for a return to the role of the arts practitioner 'in the decision-making process'. At the same time, he acknowledged the rich diversity of traditions, forms and artistry recent policies had helped to bring about in creating an arts' ecology, 'more reflective of the society that nourishes it than ever before'. Five years later 'the ensuing cuts to culture' were, as Claire Bishop notes, impossible to separate 'from an assault on welfare, education, and social equality'.

It was this climate in which *Taking Part* opened. If, as Arts Council England claims, 'Communities cannot thrive without these cultural experiences that help us to gain a deeper sense of ourselves and our shared heritage' (ACE *et al.*, 2006: 1–2), then there is a long struggle in front of us to ensure our communities continue to have access not only as audiences but also to the means of production in the arts. Research into new ways of evaluating work and recording practice has the possibility to play a strong and central role within this battle. More detailed accounts of creative evaluation processes presented at the *Taking Part*

conference are included within this publication. Other contributions can be found at <http://www.gold.ac.uk/taking-part/contributions/>.

## Note

1. Supported by Arts Council England, Paul Hamlyn and Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

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# 9

## Contradiction, Collaboration and Criticality: Researching Empowerment and Citizenship in Community-Based Arts

*Alison Rooke*

### Setting the scene: Community arts and cultural policy

This chapter examines the work of two London-based community arts organisations: London Bubble Theatre and the Stream Arts which were selected as The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Take Part case studies.<sup>1</sup> The work of these organisations demonstrates how arts organisations and arts practitioners are well placed to explore the themes of social action and community empowerment. Through participative and socially engaged practice, they create highly relevant and aesthetically sophisticated local projects which stimulate people to take an active and critical role in civic society. Both of these research studies were presented to the Taking Part conference/'un-conference', contributing to discussions with colleagues from arts organisations, Third Sector organisations and academics from the United Kingdom and beyond, internationally, as the previous chapter has already explained.

These Take Part case studies offer lessons regarding the relationship between the 'community arts' sector and the people they work with *and* the role of research in these organisations. As well as examining the social significance of these projects, this chapter also takes as its focus the ways these projects might be evaluated as part of a wider consideration of the evaluation regimes that the community arts sector is subject to. The chapter argues that whilst the community arts sector is required to evaluate the impact of their work in order to evidence the social impact of their work and in that process demonstrate their accountability to funders, this limits the potential for research and collaborative

critical reflective practice within these organisations. The case studies also illustrate some of the debates regarding the relationship between the aesthetic dimensions of 'participative' 'collaborative' or 'socially engaged' art practice and community empowerment. In addition, they point to the value of developing a critical and collaborative research culture as a way of developing reflective practice amongst organisations and their participants.

The chapter highlights the dangers of an evaluation framework which foregrounds versions of active citizenship which are compliant and conservative and argues for the value of the spaces that such projects offer, making apparent social concerns and creating convivial and playful spaces for critical reflection (Freire, 1970). Evaluation frameworks which accompany sources of funding can underestimate and distort the critical and creative work of community arts organisations. Due to an emphasis on the impact on individuals, they also overlook the often less tangible dimensions of their work such as community development and active citizenship. The case study research focussed on how arts organisations encourage and develop active citizenship and community empowerment and the ways their practice differs from, or complements, community development work and other initiatives that have community engagement as a central logic.

Historically, community art projects have often been based in deprived areas, with a community oriented, grassroots approach.<sup>2</sup> One of the broad aims of the community arts movement has been one of opening up the means of cultural production and expression to all. This participative ethos was a critique of an experience of art mediated through the acquisition of cultural capital and distanced spectatorship and contemplation, in the recognition that art can provide both mode of expression and a space of critical pedagogy. As Tiller argues (this volume) under New Labour cultural policy, this sector found itself delivering the government agenda rather than providing the voice of criticism and dissent. Since the 1990s in the United Kingdom, under the New Labour government, national and local policy makers and funders recognised the value of the work of the arts sector.<sup>3</sup> Arts organisations and artists have been seen as important players in the revitalisation of communities and a project of social inclusion.

A substantial body of academic work made a strong case for the social impact of the arts. Research by Galloway (1995), Landry *et al.* (1996), and Matarasso (1997) established a case for the social impact of the arts (Lynch, 2011). Matarasso's study provided the earliest authoritative evidence of the impact of socially relevant arts practice. This body of

research was also important in establishing a workable methodological framework for social impact assessment, providing practical evaluation instruments to guide public policy planning and development, clearer definitions of the social benefits of the arts and, for the first time, coherently bringing these matters to the attention of policymakers and the arts funding agencies. Concurrently, arts practice became increasingly subject to modes of evaluation which employ quantitative matrixes and systematic toolkits (Belfiore, 2004, 2009, 2010, 2010a).

This growing body of research was timely, coinciding with the election of the New Labour government, new funding streams for the arts (such as the Lottery and Single Regeneration Budget, SRB) and a technocratic desire for systematic performance measurement within the new 'audit culture' (Power, 1999; Strathern, 2000). Less central to this sector, and often totally overlooked in debates regarding the impact of the arts, are questions about the kind of work art should do. A hegemonic understanding of art as a social utility elides the radical histories and potential of participatory and socially engaged art forms. As George Yudice has argued, the meanings and effects of culture are produced expediently through of a set of institutional preconditions and processes.

The "bottom line" is that cultural institutions and funders are increasingly turning to the measurement of utility because there is no other accepted legitimation for social investment. In this context, the idea that the experience of *jouissance*, the unconsealment of truth, or deconstructive critique might be admissible criteria for investment in culture comes off as a conceit worthy of a Kafkaesque performance skit.

(Yudice, 2003: 16)

Within the disciplines of art practice, education, curation and cultural policy, a number of critics are concerned with the ways that art potentially provides an imaginative and critical space to address and engage with public issues that are defined by those directly impacted by them. Here arts participation has radical potential as a part of a project of social justice and societal change (Bruyne and Gielen, 2011; Negri, 2011). Partly in response to the perils of instrumentality within the field of arts education and curation, this field of debate has focused on the extent to which socially engaged and participatory practice should or should not be used to reach aims that are defined through social policy, that is, should art's purpose be increasing the skills/well-being of participants? Should it aim to improve 'community cohesion', increase citizenship?

Or should it offer opportunities to reflect critically and respond to the social situations which it intervenes in? Some of these debates propose the incorporation of social processes into definitions of art, claiming new forms of aesthetics informed by the 'relational' or the 'dialogic' (Kester, 1998; Kester, 2004; Bourriard 2010). Others suggest that engaging in social fixing or filling gaps in the depletion of social service funding and community development organising decreases the possibility for freedom, expression and creative autonomy (Bishop, 2006).<sup>4</sup>

Others, still, argue that art *could* offer processes and practices of political autonomy in relation to social problems, that is, that art *can* address social problems, but not in ways that necessarily bring about behavioural changes defined by the state, the corporation or other social bodies not directly involved in the day-to-day lives of those most impacted by inequality and social injustice (e.g. reducing the number of people on social welfare or developing well-behaved compliant citizens). Drawing on histories of community arts in the United Kingdom in the 1970s, as well as from traditions of popular education deriving from Paulo Freire (1970), participatory social and artistic research (Borda, 1991) and the use of art by social movements, this latter tendency suggests that socially engaged art has the ability to address issues as they are defined by participants in a collective process, making use of artistic skills in order to change perceptions and social relations. It relocates the question of whether art is 'good' to whether it makes use of aesthetic, relationship-building and communicative properties to provoke political impacts that groups have defined as relevant and important.

Within this spirit, the Take Part case studies demonstrate the ways that the arts sector working with a participative ethos (which spans community arts organisations and the education departments of larger galleries, etc.) can encourage critical active citizenship. Simultaneously, they demonstrate the regimes of governmentality that the arts sector specifically (and the Third Sector more generally) are subject to.

The policy landscape surrounding the community arts is challenging. The United Kingdom's Coalition government's much criticised concept of the 'Big Society' emphasises 'social action, public service reform and community empowerment' volunteering and 'philanthrocapitalism' (Rutherford, 2010). These are themes which have relevance for the community arts sector. However, when combined with an 'austere' financial climate in which philanthropic giving and corporate funding are expected to replace public investment, they are less promising. These funding streams come with an increased emphasis on business planning and demonstrating cost/benefit analysis with an associated set of

measurements, matrices and systematic toolkits that arts organisations will no doubt be compelled to respond to.

### **The case studies: Stream Arts and London Bubble Theatre Company**

The two Take Part case studies have much in common. Both are located in South East London and have a long history of working with local communities in localities which have been transformed due to large-scale urban regeneration. London Bubble's premises, which sits close to the river Thames, is surrounded by gentrified post-industrial 'loft apartments' and gated communities sitting next to blocks of social housing which were built in the post-war period following the destruction of street housing in extensive air raids. In the area that Stream Arts work in, the local area has also undergone extensive riverside regeneration. The Greenwich Peninsula in the Borough of Greenwich, once dominated by gasworks and a power station, has undergone tremendous change during the 1990s' development after the area was purchased by English Partnerships (now the Homes and Communities Agency) and subsequently developed with the building of the Millennium Dome (now renamed the O<sub>2</sub>) new homes, a primary school, a retail park and community facilities such as a riverside path and ecology park to open up access to parkland along the river.

The first case study focused on London Bubble's Theatre Company and their intergenerational Grandchildren of the Blitz project, which developed into a theatre production entitled 'Blackbirds'. This applied theatre project was selected as it offered a clear example of London Bubble's theatre making methodology, their intergenerational practice and the company's participatory ethos. London Bubble was established in 1972 with a mission to tour shows to audiences in outer London. Originally, the company used a tent theatre format, then, as it evolved it added a community projects team and delivered participatory or applied theatre projects within community settings. Since 1998, the London Bubble Theatre has aimed to '[P]rovide the artistic direction, skills, environment and resources to create inspirational, inclusive, involving theatre, which shares stories that animate the spaces of the city and the spirits of its citizens'. Their work is underpinned by the belief 'that every Londoner should have access to creating, participating in, and enjoying theatre – to communicate, connect and inspire' (taken from London Bubble website). London Bubble is an interesting case study as they attract a great deal of longitudinal participation from diverse

participants. Their work engages Londoners as participants, practitioners and audiences. So, for example, their current activities are inclusive to all age groups, and intergenerational interaction plays a key role in the development of their programmes. As a theatre company that has been established since 1972, they have been attracting longitudinal participation on a variety of levels.

This research was concerned with the quality of this participation and understanding. The Grandchildren of the Blitz-applied theatre project is a clear example of London Bubble's theatre-making methodology and their intergenerational practice. Planning commenced in 2009, work with participants commenced in May 2010 – to continue to January 2012. This intergenerational research-led participatory project set out to explore the local experience of the Blitz period of the Second World War in Bermondsey, Rotherhithe and Deptford, and to uncover the experiences and stories of those who lived through the Blitz. London Bubble, like Stream Arts, has had a long-term creative engagement with local communities in areas undergoing urban development and regeneration.

The Grandchildren of the Blitz project investigated memories of a period when the docklands and the surrounding areas, where London Bubble is based, were a key target for wartime bombing raids. During the Second World War many of the houses, buildings and some entire streets were completely destroyed. As the area has been developed over the years and subject to large-scale capital-led regeneration and gentrification in the 1980s and 1990s, the damage to this largely working class landscape is hidden and forgotten today. For the Grandchildren of the Blitz project, local children were trained in oral history interview methods, and then, accompanied by a 'middle generation', interviewed local older people who had lived through the Blitz. This research-led process built on interviews conducted by children with elders, who themselves had been children during the Blitz. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The extensive research and development phase culminated in a play *Blackbirds*, written by Simon Staring, in response to the research and workshop phase of the production. This culminated in a performance of a play entitled *Blackbirds* over six nights at Dilston Grove, an arts building within a former Mission Church on the edge of Southwark Park. The play toured in the autumn of 2011. This case study provides an example of the inventive and inclusive methods that go towards creating an applied theatre production. The final performance of *Blackbirds* performance was the result of a process that included participative workshops.

The second case study, Stream Arts, is a creative production agency based in North Greenwich since 1980s.<sup>5</sup> Stream Arts bring together art practice and local people through playful and collaborative projects. This case study research focuses on two Stream Arts commissions: *Now Hear This* by The Holy Mountain and A-X by the artists, gethan&myles. Both projects were part of Stream Arts' Peninsula programme of commissions that aim to engage local communities in creative responses to the political, economical and physical changes of the Peninsula Ward of the London Borough of Greenwich. These commissions were examples of art which brought together research-led arts practice, local opinion and the politics of regeneration in particularly interesting ways. *Now Hear This* was the first commission in the Voices strand of Stream's Peninsula programme.

This strand of project was focused on giving voice to people living and working in the area through a variety of media and stimulating debate around issues of local concern. For their commission with Stream Arts, Holy Mountain created a phone line whereby residents of the Peninsula could call in with dispatches about issues related to the area of Greenwich. They also ran parallel activities, such as walks around the local area, or meetings, such as the event 'A Local Conversation', when local residents were invited to have a discussion about some of the issues raised in the phone calls. A-X was conceived by gethan&myles in response to Stream's brief, 'Performing Social Space'. Stream were looking for a project that was innovative in its approach to working with local residents to elicit perceptions of the local area, and which would explore the potential of the varied physical environment of the Peninsula as a site for staging performative events and interventions. For this commission, the artists visited locations around the Peninsula (parks, schools, the street or libraries amongst others) and invited local residents of all ages and backgrounds to playfully reflect and muse upon Greenwich Peninsula and surrounding East Greenwich area.

The gethan&myles also collected statements from documents regarding the local area produced by official entities, such as the local authority, developers, or housing agencies. The statements were edited and displayed on two solar-powered dot-matrix LED (light-emitting diode) signs (usually found on highways announcing traffic disruptions). The intention was to place these in four different locations in Greenwich over four weeks.

This motif of conversation, found in the first case study, was also apparent in the A to X project. A to X can be understood as a conversation between the two signs. Sign 'A' represented the 'official voice' of

the Greenwich Peninsula, displaying statements taken from road signs, documents produced by the local authority, developers promotional material and so on, whereas sign 'X' represented the 'local voice' of people, displaying the words of local residents that the artists gathered during their research.

(A sign) It's like a unified voice. It's the general establishment recording. So it's the voice from official documents, or brochures. (...). In the A sign, it all sounds the same. Whether it is a developer, or (the council they have a very shared style of language. And representing the community, they cannot say "it's everything", they simplify it, and so they make this unified voice. Whether X is the voice of hundreds of local people we talked to a very small cross section of people.

(Interview with gethan&myles, 2010)

The media chosen by the artist, LCD (liquid-crystal display) signs, directly referenced the physical changes to the local infrastructure and the disruption this causes local people.

[We're] taking something out from its context. People around here, they're used to see these signs in the context of giving bad news, saying this road is blocked, or there's gonna be delays... So taking them from the road and putting them here in this park with all the trees around, in this big avenue, with the graves of sailors from the Spital. So it's like this amazing kind of historic place, and then you have this weird kind of robotic thing...

(Myles, from interview with gethan&myles)

As described by Stream Arts in their project publicity, this was a project which 'gives voice to the residents of East Greenwich and the Peninsula through a poetic and witty intervention in the local landscape'.

Over the past three months gethan&myles have talked to hundreds of people of all ages in East Greenwich and the Peninsula. Their words – beautiful, sad, uplifting and funny – will be displayed on flashing signs in three different locations, as these commonplace pieces of road-furniture are transformed into performative, sculptural objects.

(A-X Press Release, Stream Arts 2010)

By juxtaposing these two sets of voices in public space in the area, the artists aimed to show how Greenwich Peninsula has a wide diversity of opinions and a plurality of identities, and in this way aimed to create space for debate. Although Stream is not a community development organisation they do a lot of work, which is similar to that of community development organisations, in that they invite local people to come together, to take part in local research and debate, invite them to reflect on local processes and so on.

In this context, the Critical Friends group is an important space of participation within Stream Arts. The 'Critical Friends' group, made up of local residents, was facilitated by Sophie Hope, an artist and academic.<sup>6</sup> This group ran regular workshops, edited a blog and compiled research materials into a Critical Friends magazine produced every four months through regular workshops which provided sites for the writings, documentation, performances and presentations created by Critical Friends. Considering the large-scale regeneration, the area the organisation is located in, the scale of participation it allowed was somewhat limited. This was due to resources and Stream Arts' size. Furthermore, the wider possibility of the development of an active and engaged community through the participatory artwork was also curtailed due to the loss of community development organisations in the area.

In the Peninsula we have really been able to build up a programme of kind of interconnected projects over the five or six last years. Things have hugely changed on the Peninsula, obviously. There was a lot of more community infrastructure when we started off. A lot of that has disappeared now through the folding of the programmes and through the economic crisis, which has seen a lot of the community workers in the area disappear. So it has not been a kind of neat progressive line of us being able to work in a consistent fashion, because the support has disappeared in lots of areas.

(Interview with Stream Arts Director)

The Critical Friends group was an important space of active citizenship both within Stream, as a space of participation, and within the local area more generally as it provided a space to reflect on arts commissions, artists' intentions and the role of art in urban change. At the time of the research, their capacity was limited due to resources. This group had, to some extent, grown out of Stream's Peninsula programme in the recognition of the short-term nature of arts commissioning practice whereby

artists 'parachute' into an area and then leave swiftly at the end of a commission. As the Director discussed here:

[T]he artists don't stick around for the long term, and that's always been one of the things we have tried to work against. Given the constraint that we are a very small organisation and considering the funding you need to actually build long term programmes. [W]hat you can achieve is obviously far greater over a long period of time than over a smaller period of time. You build up knowledge of the community, and you can involve the community over a longer period of time.

### Community theatre and active citizenship

The case study research demonstrated some of the ways that arts participation *can* encourage and activate active citizenship. Many galleries and arts organisations are doing community development work, bringing together local communities through on going collaboration and what has been termed 'durational' practice (Doherty and O'Neill, 2012) which aims to counter the transient short-term ways that artists are deployed in social settings. London Bubble Theatre is an excellent example of an organisation which provides multiple and flexible cultural spaces of participation where participants have the opportunity to enact, practise and develop active citizenship. London Bubble can be understood as an open and dialogical space which mirrors some of the ideals of citizenship discussed in this book. Participants and practitioners have been able to move within and through these spaces as they grow and develop their creative skills and their qualities as active citizens. These multifaceted modes of participation have been central to the company's commitment to co-production and collaboration. London Bubble is a flexible, open, welcoming organisation. New participants become part of an evolving group of community performers from diverse backgrounds, and are subtly 'inducted' into the culture of the company as they move through the multiple spaces of participation that London Bubble offers. Participation in London Bubble is not circumscribed to a specific body, such as a consultative body, a user-group or a group of 'critical friends'. Rather, participation in London Bubble takes place on a variety of levels. Participants may begin to participate in an age-specific resident group or through a specific production but they are not limited to these more 'formal groups'. Participants experience London Bubble as open and responsive.

Bubble have tried to make themselves more open creatively, it's much more ambiguous, written through workshops, with the writer coming back with the scripts, the script getting changed.

The distinction between professionals and participants was distinct but it has changed. It has been eroded over time.

The way that Bubble reflects and listens is organic and involving. [I]t is a complex democracy.

(Quotes from adult focus group)

This was a strong theme in the focus groups conducted as part of the research. As stated by this long-term participant who began taking part 'accidentally', as she explains here,

I came in sideways, I was asked to fill in. I was actually doing the tea and biscuits and then they said, 'Will you stand in for this part?' And I did it. And then they said 'you might be interested in coming to the Bubble'. And I came, and was part of the group for a long while. [ ] They always seem to provide challenges that people want. If you put the commitment in, if you want it, then things come your way, if you are up for it'.

(Female Participant – Adult Focus Group)

London Bubble was perceived as having a horizontal structure. Their 'open door' enabled people to participate in a way that was appropriate to their capacity and levels of comfort at the time, given their other commitments, ambitions and desires. This flexible space of participation and development has been one of the key factors in engendering the longitudinal participation that is the focus of this study. This was a strong theme in the focus groups when the research team asked participants to produce 'time lines' of their participation in London Bubble. Some adult participants who had begun coming to Bubble as small children, brought along by their parents, had flowed in and out of the company as they grew, moved, entered formal education or training and returned as practitioners or participants. As described here:

I was a London Bubble baby, before I was born it has always been constant thing in my life and has always been there for me what ever is going on in my life. When I was seven my parents broke up and a social worker took me to a workshop and I remember thinking this

is what I want to do. My mother took me to the show that night 'Arabian Nights' it was my first theatrical experience. If it wasn't for London Bubble I would not be where I am now I would not have gone to university and studied theatre and I thank my parents for being supportive. My teacher told me 'you should not do theatre. You will not get anywhere. You should stay here and do maths and business studies'. I told them I would not do that. I knew I wanted to be myself and I wanted my placement to be at London Bubble. London Bubble supported me through my professional career and when I was a student. It has given me confidence; others have asked how did it give you confidence? I was a shy child I would hide behind my parents. I can be who I want to be, people ask how is it going at London Bubble and it becomes engrained in your life and it has etched onto other people in my life.

(Female Participant and facilitator – Young people focus group)

The active citizenship that was being encouraged and developed within London Bubble was building the capacity of participants to take part as active citizens in spaces beyond London Bubble. The skills and attitudes which were being developed were having an impact as participants took their learning beyond the company. This was a particularly strong theme in the young peoples group where participants spoke of the ways that they had developed their active learning through taking part in Bubble and the ways that this had impacted on their wider participation as citizens.

I don't think I would have volunteered in activities at school if I had not come to London Bubble in the first place.

My mum has seen a change in me. I want to go out and work with young people involved in crime now. When you come to London Bubble all your worries are gone it makes you feel comfortable. It is a family unit. I have become a different person since I joined.

(Young people focus group)

## **From community arts to creative production**

Stream Arts also provided an excellent illustration of the relationships between arts and active citizenship. Clearly the two projects, which the case study examined, demonstrated the citizenship dimensions of

their work. Stream Art's work also demonstrated tremendous potential in developing active citizenship. The tensions which arose in this case study research are instructive, though, in understanding the difficult position occupied by community arts organisations in collaborating with local stakeholders.

*Now Hear This* and A-X provided a space where residents of Greenwich Peninsula and other participants could speak up and have their say about the issues of their everyday life in their local area. By collecting these experiences through participative workshops and sharing and displaying them creatively in the public realm, the artists of both projects opened up a collective space of critique and reflection for residents. This had value in itself, as an opportunity to think, reflect and enjoy oneself in the process. Both projects were an opportunity for participants to voice their opinions about the regeneration of the area and the changes it had brought to the physical infrastructure and social fabric of the Peninsula. Participants in both projects expressed nostalgia, or discontent with the development process: the privatisation of local space, the ways in which the population of the area was being imagined without consideration of the needs of families with children or older people.

There is nothing to do, 'cause the council don't think about the children too much. (...) They gotta pay attention to the children. Nowadays is all new built stuff, they don't build anything for the children. Just to get on the streets, you know, they are just bored, there's nothing to do. Kids have resorted into just walking into car parks and looking at fancy cars all the time. It's not very exciting.

I used the libraries in Greenwich for years. And East Greenwich library now, which has always been slightly run down, for all the length of time I've known it it's virtually falling apart. It's a beautiful building – Victorian – and people care desperately about it. And however much is said, nothing is ever done.

(Now Hear This Transcripts)

Both projects offer examples about the ways in which socially engaged art, active citizenship and community empowerment issues dovetail. Clearly, these projects, by using playful and interactive methodologies, offered enjoyable ways of involving local people in arts practice and democratic processes. This was in keeping with the aims of the Peninsula Programme and can be seen in earlier Peninsula projects.<sup>7</sup> They creatively and temporarily disrupted the dominant spatial meanings, controlled spaces and language of the Peninsula.

In this way, Stream's projects were seeking to approach political and social issues from an oblique angle, with lightness of touch rather than through didactic messages. The cultural value of the art work was not found merely in the spaces of participation it offered, but also in the ways that they intelligently mirrored spaces of democratic participation provided by the local authority and regeneration agencies (such as processes of consultation). In this way, they aestheticized citizenship processes and the contradictions and failures of participatory democracy.

Stream Art collaborated with, and received funding from, local agencies invested in managing the social changes that accompany regeneration and promoting the positive aspects of urban change. Artists who seek to give voice to local residents open up opportunities to respond to and critique these processes though, however obliquely. The A to X project, for example, encountered a series of barriers to its full realisation. The proposed sites for the art work were refused and the text displayed was perceived as provocative and critical leading to the LCD signs being turned off and the text revised. This led to considerable frustration for the artists who felt that they were not able to honour their promises to the local people they had engaged in the creative process. It also resulted in Stream Arts staff being compromised in their commitments to a variety of stakeholders including, funders, local landowners, participants and artists.

This difficult position illustrates the tensions between engendering forms of active citizenship and community empowerment which is critical of the national and local agencies that exert power through ownership and funding. And it illustrates the difficulties facing arts organisations which seek to create spaces of empowerment and citizenship whilst in contractual relations with local agencies and a range of private and public funding bodies of which participants may be critical. This complex position is instructive when thinking about the kinds of active citizenship that can be engendered through these projects and the terms through which evaluation criteria led by notions of citizenship might be developed.

## **Developing critical conversations through research**

As well as researching the case study organisations in relationship to citizenship and empowerment, the research brief also included working with organisations to develop their research capacity and assist the organisations in developing methodologies for collecting data/evidence in relation to active citizenship and community empowerment.

It is also worth noting that both of the case study organisations were using participatory research in the development and evaluation of their creative practice. London Bubble employs a wide range of quantitative and qualitative research methods when evaluating their practice and evidencing the impact of their work on audiences and participants alike. This active interest in collecting and analysing research data informs the company's development and evolving practice. So, for example, Grandchildren of the Blitz was an intergenerational researched participatory project which set out to explore the local experience of the Blitz period of the Second World War in Bermondsey, Rotherhithe and Deptford, and to uncover the experiences and stories of those who lived through the Blitz. The younger participants researched the Blitz period and were trained in oral history Interview methods by the Imperial War Museum. This research informed the development of the script for the Blackbirds production. Within Stream Arts commissioned artists often conduct research, which is at times playful and inventive, informing and/or being part of processes of community engagement. Stream Arts are also subject to evaluation scrutiny. Evaluative research offers a potential space for critical and reflexive discussion of the successes and learning from Stream's artists commissions. In parallel to the Critical Friends, more formal evaluation is conducted by external consultants and researchers.

Each of these research settings offered different challenges to the research team. These, in turn, reflect wider inter-institutional relations between the Third Sector and the university and the tensions and possibilities associated with engaged critical academic research. Perceptions of the research differed amongst the various agents involved. For both organisations having academic research, conducted with theoretical rigor, carried out about and with their organisation, was recognised as a valuable resource with added value. The research team also recognised that this kind of short-term 'case study' work is viewed as part of the 'housework' of the academy, and not held in particularly high esteem within the matrices of performance through which university departments are evaluated.<sup>8</sup>

The research teams conducted the research critically. They were aware that these organisations *did* develop active citizenship in valuable and interesting ways that were largely overlooked by their funders and supporters. They also recognised that finding ways to methodologically evidence citizenship and empowerment could be useful for the organisations themselves whilst also being yet another manifestation of the instrumentalisation of participative arts practice. For example,

the Stream Arts projects *Now Hear This* and A-X opened up a collective space of critique and reflection for residents whilst London Bubble provides multiple opportunities for participants, volunteers and staff to exercise and active citizenship in their day-to-day work and through specific productions.

The contrasting institutional settings which surrounded the research led to some tensions though. Although London Bubble had 'matched' their case study funding with funding for an evaluation of the same project for 'added value', the expectations of the research teams' available time and resources were high and at times over ambitious. Past experiences of research at Stream Arts<sup>9</sup> led to a misconception that the research would result in an evaluation report about two specific projects that were being delivered whereas in actuality the organisation itself and the projects it delivered were the subject of the case study. This led to tensions when some of the art work proved to be politically sensitive. The temporary closure and censorship of the A to X project, and subsequent events, were instructive in understanding the complex webs of institutional and funding relationships and the local relations of governmentality that Stream Arts sat within. This, in turn, pointed towards ways in which active citizenship was enabled in some ways and disallowed in others. These tensions were of great relevance to the research, pointing to the difficulties of combining a desire to collaborate with both local regeneration agencies who were investing in promoting the positive aspects of urban change, and artists who were seeking to give voice to local residents who may be looking to critique these processes, however obliquely. This led to moments of discomfort and considerable negotiation.

## Conclusion

In thinking about the relationship between arts and citizenship, it is worth considering what participative art does in relationship to civic and civil participation. Previous research into the social impact of participating in art has identified individual outcomes such as raised levels of self-esteem and confidence, an enhanced feeling of self-determination and control and skills development. This emphasis on individual impacts leads to the social and citizenship dimensions of this work being overlooked. The case study projects clearly demonstrated some of the ways that arts organisations do community development. It was significant that many of the people interviewed in the research did not see themselves as particularly active politically, nor did they express a

desire to take part in more overtly political spaces of community participation. However, they did express a desire to take part in, and feel part of, something that was both collective and local. The attraction and value of both organisations was often discussed in terms of the playfulness of these modes of participation. Participants in these organisations appreciated not needing to have a lot of specialist knowledge to take part. Instead, value was placed on having fun, being silly and playful. Art participation offered respite from the seriousness of more formal spaces of citizenship. Indeed the seriousness of some of the discussions that took place in the interview and focus groups at London Bubble was often met with an element of tolerance, as participants took part before returning to the 'serious playfulness' (Rooke, 2010) of the theatre workshops, which create the informal and open and welcoming space that is London Bubble.

Participative art provides a space to come together with others, whether informally or formally, a space to encounter difference, to collaboratively take part in the production of an art work, and realise one's potential. Participation in art can offer a social and cultural space for gaining skills, expressing opinions and challenging power structures. Playful, creative and imaginative participations are inclusive and pedagogical (Rooke, 2010) as they do not depend solely on verbal and written articulations which are requisite in some of the more formal spaces of citizenship participation. Instead, through playful and accessible practice, the perspectives of some of the most disadvantaged or silenced groups can be heard.

At its best participatory and collaborative art can offer a space of critical pedagogy which addresses community empowerment and citizenship. Participation in arts praxis can be an exciting and liberating experience and alternative to cultural spectatorship. Citizens may decide for themselves what is to count as culture, express that sense of culture and, in that process, work out what kind of citizens they are. This creative and pedagogical space can also make apparent the constraints of social relations thereby opening up a space of critique and the production of critical knowledge. The projects described here, albeit in different ways, were bringing local people together in the process of creating of a temporary aesthetic communication, whether a play or an installation. In doing so, these organisations were making possible both individual and collective experiences in which the familiar and local were being seen differently, as they entered the world of the symbolic and the imagination, however temporarily and saw everyday reality differently.

A consideration of the specific character of the practices of community and participatory arts needs to be foregrounded if we are to begin to understand both the complex ways that these projects develop active citizenship and community development alongside the significance of the aesthetic communication found in the art work itself. At a time when professional and state-funded community development is undergoing considerable change and a decline in funding, when cultural solutions to addressing social inequalities are employed expediently to solve social ills, there are critical conversations to be had between these sectors regarding the forms of governmentality to which they are each subjected. There is clear potential here for valuable collaboration and shared reflection between practitioners from these different sectors regarding the political, ethical and social tensions that their work explores and addresses. There is also a clear need for critical research and reflection which explore the possibilities of reclaiming evaluation as an informative, generative, critical and non-partisan activity in the context of contemporary social and cultural policy. In a political and economic climate which emphasises the need for empirical justification for monies spent on social interventions and the arts, the question of how to differentiate between evaluation which is an extension of 'cost/benefit analysis' and evidence-based policy and that which is an opportunity for critical and collaborative reflection is pressing.

## Notes

1. The Take Part case study reports are available from <http://www.gold.ac.uk/cucr/research/>.
2. See Tiller, C, this volume for further discussion of the history of community arts in the United Kingdom.
3. The Cultural Industry Task Force and PAT 10 investigation (2001) as well as the work of Comedia (and especially Landry and Matarasso) were key landmarks in this argument. Within this policy landscape, the arts are seen as instrumental in creating a knowledge economy and a skilled workforce. However, whilst the value of the cultural and creative sector to physical and economic regeneration has been extremely widely recognised (in part due to high profile physical projects like the Baltic Exchange in Newcastle, the new Laban building in Deptford or the Tate Modern at Bankside).
4. Clearly this mirrors debates within the community and voluntary sector regarding co-option or acquiescence of the community and voluntary sector under neoliberalism (Craig *et al.*, 2011).
5. Stream Arts were being previously called Independent Photography. Independent Photography was a local community arts resource, carrying out audio and visual work in partnership with various arms of the local authority such as Greenwich Youth and Play Services, Children's Services, Safer Neighbourhood

- Teams, and the Looked After Children Team. Stream Arts were rebranded in 2008, marking a shift in Steam Arts mission, from being a community resource whose focus was working with young people and local people, addressing social inequality, to a being an arts agency commissioning location-specific, artist-led participatory public and collaborative art project. In the period, since the research was completed, Stream Arts are under new management.
6. See Hope, S. (2011) for discussion of the Critical Friends evaluative model. This model of participation is also highlighted in the (2011) Paul Hamlyn Foundation Report 'Whose Cake is it Anyway' as a model of 'embedding local collaboration and developing individual capability for participation rather than "empowerment-lite", the work becomes firmly situated in the organisation's locality and developed with the help of new, long-term community partnerships as "critical friends"' (2011: 08).
  7. So, for example, Christian Nold's Greenwich emotion map used mapping and biotechnologies to creatively show the emotional responses to changes in the local environment such as increased traffic.
  8. The university is itself subject to the scrutiny of an evaluation framework which is subject to considerable debate regarding the measurement of its value. See <http://www.ref.ac.uk/>.
  9. I carried out several evaluations of several small Stream Arts projects prior to the Take Part research. These were not made public.

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# 10

## Sports Volunteering and Community Engagement

*Robin Wright, Zoraida Mendiwelso-Bendek and Rebecca Herron*

### Introduction

This chapter reflects on how volunteering in sport and grassroots sports' organisation may contribute to community development, engagement and cohesion in rural communities. This subject has particular relevance in the context of debates on the legacy of the Olympic and Paralympic Games held in Britain in the summer of 2012; the backdrop against which much of this community-based research was undertaken.

Along with two other researchers working at Lincoln University, we researched this through a number of semi-formal and informal community-based learning activities (see also Norris, 2010; and Roebuck, 2012). These researches have involved working with sports volunteers and with local voluntary sector sports clubs in Lincolnshire.

The research has focussed, predominantly, on rural counties of the United Kingdom and used a variety of community-based learning approaches, building on work that has been undertaken over a number of years. This has involved working in partnership with local sports partnerships, local clubs and associations and sports volunteers.

This chapter illustrates that research and community development outcomes can develop together and that this can also lead to new forms of civil engagement – connecting sport to wider issues in civil society (such as youth and community participation and strengthening the relationship between different generations).

In the process of this participatory, community-based research, it has also been possible for us to *co-create* insights on wider topics such as the value of volunteering, the routes into volunteering, support mechanisms for volunteers and some preliminary understanding of the impact

of community sport activities and sports volunteering on civil society (see e.g. Olympics NRG, 2012; Universities Week Report, 2012).

### **Identifying emerging research interests**

The current chapter explores the specific contribution to understanding sports and community issues generated in Lincolnshire through a research process based upon a series of learning activities. These were developed collaboratively between the University of Lincoln (ESRC Third Sector 'Taking Part?' capacity research cluster), Lincolnshire Sports Partnership and local volunteers.

In keeping with the principles of community-based research and experiential learning (Freire, 1972, 1997; Mayo and Rooke, 2006; Mayo and Annette, 2010), the specific research topics emerged over time from discussions with participants and their own reflections on their experiences and areas of interest. As general themes began to emerge, these were developed through informal learning workshops with sports volunteers and other participatory action research activities (e.g. see the section 'Mini case study').

Over the years, several distinct, but connected, research-learning activities have explored interconnected issues. These activities have included 'Volunteering in Sport' workshops (Norris, 2010) and using active learning to help shape community organisation in sport (Roebuck, 2012).

The initial individual and club interest in participating in these activities appears to have been mostly the opportunity to reflect more on peoples' own activities; to highlight and reflect together on challenges, strengths and opportunities for their sport and their communities and to potentially rethink current practice in the light of these.

In addition to this, as part of a research cluster interested in strengthening civil society, we introduced and extended learners' conversations related to active citizenship, social justice and community engagement and cohesion (Take Part, 2006, 2011). These concepts initially felt somewhat juxtaposed; however, synergies were quickly identified between the topics and this created further opportunities for new dialogue, perspectives and insight (see for an example of this process, Norris, 2010).

### **Identifying research topics**

Through these community-based learning processes, several interconnected research themes eventually became apparent. The following

in particular have been identified as appropriate research questions underpinning the research:

- How can grassroots, community-based sport and sports' volunteering contribute to strengthening civil society? In particular, how can they be seen to play a role in strengthening community cohesion, engagement and development?
- How can informal learning support the organisation of sport in the voluntary sector and help to articulate and support the work of volunteers in strengthening the communities?
- How can engaging in informal learning and participatory action research contribute to building robust research capacity (for all research partners; including universities, state and Third Sector and the community organisations themselves)?

As researchers coming from a Business School perspective, we were particularly interested in the organisation of communities and how research could be used to support self-organisation within communities. In this way, we see our work as building on a constructed conversation approach (Mendiweso Bendek, 2002, 2012; Take Part, 2006, 2011; Mendiweso-Bendek and Herron, 2010). It is also part of a wider movement to develop (and potentially rethink) research as a co-production process between universities and community partners (Mayo *et al.*, 2012).

### **Background context – Why Sports' Volunteering is important**

With the Olympic Games having been held in Britain in 2012, much attention in the United Kingdom turned towards debating the legacy of the games – and in doing so has raised (albeit tangentially) the more long-term discussion about the value of sport in our society, the impact of competitive sport in our collective psyche and the role that sporting activities play in shaping and developing our communities (Legacy Trust, 2012; Olympics NRG, 2012; Spaaij, 2012). The Games also highlighted the transformative power that organised sport can have on communities (creating new physical and social infrastructure and new opportunities); not just on physical landscapes but on community spirit, inclusion and participation and on social attitudes, behaviours and norms; for example, shaping attitudes to disability, highlighting

the value of volunteering and emphasising the value of participation both in sport and in support for sport (DCMS, 2008; Legacy Trust, 2012; Olympics NRG, 2012).

The notion that sports and sports volunteering have social as well as athletic value has a long legacy. For example, sports (and sporting competitions) have frequently been seen as a means to replace conflict with 'sporting' competition and to bring disparate communities together through the 'unifying power' of sport (Carter, 2010; Holmes *et al.*, 2012; Minard and Jeavan, 2012; Zeitz Foundation, 2012) – with the intention that individuals may learn new social insights in the process and that communities may develop in ways that improve social cohesion and inclusion or development and empower communities (Coalter, 2011; Holmes *et al.*, 2012). However, despite their espoused political neutrality many sports have often (sometimes unwittingly and often unwillingly) found themselves at the forefront of political tensions and social debate (for example in relation to cricket tours to South Africa during Apartheid or more recently issues of racism connected with the Euro 2012 football competition in Poland and The Ukraine).

These famous/infamous moments may also sometimes be viewed as an opportunity for transformational actions and inspirational role models; consider, for example, how the stories surrounding Jesse Owens' successes in the 1936 Olympics have highlighted attitudes to racism, or indeed the impact modern football has had on changing attitudes to race and racism.<sup>1</sup> Of course, sport is no panacea for social ills and may often reinforce rather than break negative cycles; however, its power (particularly with an increasingly globalised media coverage) is potentially – and often actually – immense.

This is picked up by other authors who show the value of sports and sports volunteering in building civil society. Putnam, when he wanted to highlight the role of social capital in communities, famously chose a sporting example to be the title of his book: *Bowling Alone* (Putnam, 2000). Similarly, Halpern (2005) also highlighted the significance of sport in relation to social capital in the United Kingdom;

Overall, associational membership in the UK appears to have been stable, or even to have risen since the 1960s. [...] In terms of associations, this rise was heavily concentrated in environmental organizations, and to some extent sports clubs.

(Halpern, 2005: 212)

A report commissioned by Sport England also highlighted the role and scale of volunteering in sport in England in 2002:

volunteers are a hugely important resource to sport in England:

- there are 5,821,400 sports volunteers, representing nearly 15% of the adult population;
- they contribute 1.2 billion hours each year to sport, equivalent to 720,000 additional full time paid workers;
- the value of the time contributed by sports volunteers in England is estimated at over £14 billion; the volunteers help to sustain over 106,400 affiliated clubs in England, serving over 8 million members;
- the sporting sector makes the single biggest contribution to total volunteering in England, with 26% of all volunteers citing ‘sport’ as their main area of interest.

(Sport England, 2003: 3)

Perhaps the role of *volunteering* in sports is, however, sometimes underestimated and under-represented, particularly in increasingly ‘professionalised’ high-level sport. Many people actively engaged in sporting activities may not see these activities as volunteering as the Sport England report (Sport England, 2003) also pointed out:

Voluntary contribution to sport is of such a scale that when quantified it outstrips all other voluntary activity and dwarfs the amount of paid employment in sport. The research suggests, however, that we take this voluntary support for granted at our peril. Sport is dependent on volunteers but there are increasing pressures within society that threaten the sustainability of volunteering at the levels we currently enjoy.

Despite its scale and importance, volunteering in sport has not received the recognition and support from Government it deserves. It is the ‘poor relation’ of the voluntary sector and yet the benefit it brings both to those volunteering and to those who take part with their support should not be underestimated. Sport and active recreation with a revitalized voluntary sector can make increasingly vital contributions to the health of the nation, community regeneration and cohesion, community safety and educational attainment.

(Sport England, 2003: 2)

It has been our experience, through our research, that community members are able to quickly recognise the many essential roles that enthusiastic volunteers may make to supporting both grassroots and high-level competitive sport (Norris, 2010). Indeed, it seems competitive sport in the United Kingdom from grassroots to international competition would be unlikely to be viable in its current form without the input of committed volunteers (Sport England, 2003; Olympics NRG, 2012). Despite this, many of the individuals concerned never recognise themselves as ‘volunteers’ as such (only as people who help enable the continuation of local sport and the development of sporting opportunities for local people – particularly for young people).

Sport is a great way of getting people active and involved. Large numbers of people give their time to run local sports clubs, coach young people and organise sporting events across the country. Those giving their time to sports organisations are not always recognised as being ‘volunteers’ and so don’t always know how to access the range of advice and support available for volunteer co-ordinators and volunteer-involving organisation.

(source: Volunteering England website; a part of NCVO<sup>2</sup>)

These discussions emphasise the wider question of the value of sports and sports volunteering – the motivations for the high levels of volunteering from the general public and the scope for research to understand the scope for action in communities – in order to celebrate activities, to help ensure their sustained viability and to challenge all involved to reflect more on the social-transformational aspects of their work.

### **Our research approach: Informal learning and participatory research**

Our particular research interest in this has focussed around the contribution that grassroots sport (in local rural communities) can be seen to make to community engagement and the development of wider civil society. We set about doing this in a participatory manner – engaging sports volunteers in a number of ways to help shape an ongoing dialogue about these issues and to stimulate learning and reflection. In doing this, we used the general principles of the *Take Part Approach* and notions of experiential learning and community co-production of knowledge (Take Part, 2006, 2011).

In our research, we have taken a localised and grassroots perspective on the transformational and socially impactful nature of sports and sports volunteering at a community level. As researchers based in a predominantly rural part of the United Kingdom, we are particularly interested in the role sports, sports clubs and volunteering plays in shaping the local landscapes of such rural and semi-rural communities. We have been keen to understand what engages people in voluntary and Third Sector activities, what motivates them to continue and how they understand the impact of their collective actions on the communities in which they live. We are also interested in how people engage in decision-making processes, how these decisions shape communities and how this engagement (e.g. at a club level) might also impact on engagement and cohesion issues in the wider communities of which they are a part.

We have been keen throughout to see research as the co-production of knowledge that could strengthen the community action – as a form of community development, created and steered in a participatory manner by the participants involved. So part of the research process has been to explore different ways of doing this.

As part of an ongoing programme of active citizenship research at the University of Lincoln, we have been initiated and engaged in *Take Part* learning activities in Lincolnshire with sports volunteers over a number of years. These spaces for learning and reflection have used ideas embodied in the national *Take Part* learning framework (Woodward, 2004; *Take Part*, 2006, 2011; Miller and Hatamian, 2011) to create spaces for reflection, research and learning about the role of active citizens and community leaders in civil society.

## **Community-based learning**

We started this participatory research work by creating spaces (through evening workshops and other conversations) for coaches, club organisers and other sports volunteers to look beyond the sports-development aspects of their activities and to think together about the various contributions made as volunteers, people's routes into volunteering, support structures for volunteering and the impact on communities.<sup>3</sup> This involved a partnership approach working with the local Sports Partnership, The Director of Sport at the University of Lincoln (also active in several Third Sector networks), local authority sports officers (from across East Midlands) and sports volunteers (including coaches,

umpires, referees, club chairs, secretaries and new and longer established volunteers).

The research – developed over a number of years – created several quite distinct phases of activity each of which informs the findings presented here. These distinct (but related) research spaces include:

1. 'Active Citizenship Sports Volunteering' learning events (workshops and evening courses) within the UK Take Part Pathfinder Programme.
2. Dialogue and co-production of Case Studies with several East Midlands local authorities through the Lincolnshire Sports Partnership (as part of the Pathfinder Programme).
3. Take Part learning engagements with local parish councils – including understanding the development of sports and a youth club in a local village.
4. East Midlands Take Part Champions work – exploring and disseminating practices in the Third Sector – including those enabling physical activities for young people.
5. An ESRC Research Cluster-funded research project – developing learning and reflection spaces, including the initial development of a local forum as part of the action research process; described below in a mini case study (see section 'Mini case study').

Our goal has been to explore, using an informal learning approach, the research questions; which themselves emerged through facilitated conversations with community volunteers in a gradual, co-constructed manner (Take Part, 2006, 2011; Mendiwelo Bendek, 2012). This participatory research process has involved people in reflective learning activities (workshops, evening 'courses', facilitated dialogues, written correspondence and data collection). Through this process, a dialogue has been built over time on the issues of relevance to these individuals and this domain, for example, sports volunteers (Norris, 2010) and community organisation (Roebuck, 2012).

### Using a 'Take Part Approach'

In line with the *Take Part Approach* and Freirian educational principles (Freire, 1972, 1997; Take Part, 2006, 2011) in each situation, we have taken as our starting points the every-day life experiences of

the participants – drawing into these conversations, as appropriate, elements from the Take Part learning framework (Take Part, 2006, 2011) and recording and reflecting on the emerging conversations. As Norris describes, talking about the informal learning workshops with sports volunteers:

Whilst the questions provided the framework for the discussion evening, the project group allowed the discussion to deviate from the question. This was done to allow the volunteers to lead the conversation, and to really explore their understandings of what they thought the meaning of Active Citizenship was, why they volunteered, volunteering etc.

(Norris, 2010: 7)

Each phase involved a series of engagements with different groups and in each case the research started by exploring issues identified as relevant by each group. The interests identified are different in each case; however, it has also been possible to have an overview of these activities from a general perspective and to reflect on the progress made towards generating preliminary research findings. Before doing so, we present a mini case study in order to illustrate the basis for some of the findings of this research.

### **Mini case study – supporting sport's organisation (through participatory research)**

A recent element of our research has provided us with an opportunity to work with (and indeed temporarily constitute) a group of local sports' volunteers in a rural community. The community concerned spans several small- to medium-sized villages in Lincolnshire, most of which have their own long-established sports clubs and Parish Councils.

The researchers sought to engage with groups of learners in these villages and co-construct community learning and reflection spaces (Roebuck, 2012). This required a careful process of building trust and conversations, initially at a one-to-one level, through interviews and later through group work. Through this process, researchers were able to convene meetings with leaders of different local sports clubs who shared issues of concern with them and discussed how they were organising themselves in their locality. The research developed and extended these conversations with participants; not only starting from the point

of their own experiences, but also challenging and extending these in the process. Conversations were recorded (as part of an open research process) but otherwise managed as an informal knowledge-sharing and idea-generating session (Roebuck, 2012).

In the process of doing this, the value of creating a local sports forum was raised and discussed by participants. It was decided (by the participants) that this was a good way forward and an initial forum was created by the participants – with the support of the researchers involved.

The researchers developed the discussion and linked it to wider considerations of decision-making and planning in the area. During this process members of the forum became more engaged with other general local decision-making forums supported by the local district council – that is, engaging with structures outside sport. In the process, there appears to have been increasing recognition of the value sports could play in meeting wider community objectives (e.g. developing opportunities for children and young people in particular).

Key elements in this process have been identified by Roebuck (2012). Some points of particular interest are highlighted below:

*Engaging with sports volunteers:* Initially there was some resistance to the idea of engaging with the researchers; this was fuelled largely by a concern that the research (including learning and development activities) was only going to deliver a ‘talking shop’ and also a concern about ‘hidden agendas’ or policy manipulations (Roebuck, 2012).

This was, however, overcome by a conscious effort to build trust and mutual understanding. This took the form of a series of one-to-one interviews and discussions identifying the local needs and interests and establishing the potential to work in a more co-operative manner across clubs and locations (Roebuck, 2012).

*Creating new structures/developing a sports forum:* Researchers were able to gradually build up local insights into the potential benefits of creating a local forum. Club organisers (tennis, cricket and other village-based clubs) were able to identify in a safe and secure way the additional benefits they might get by pooling their expertise and linking across the locality to other sports/clubs.

The research process that was used opened up imaginative (and actual) spaces for community members to meet and share resources (such as experience, knowledge and even physical resources such as equipment, teams and playing fields). In one village, for example,

the chairs of the local cricket and tennis clubs had never previously met:

the Chairmen of [...] Cricket Club and [...] Tennis Club had never met or held a conversation together despite their two clubhouses standing approximately 10 yards apart.

(Roebuck, 2012: 16)

*Engaging with local political forums and decision makers:* Once the process of engagement and reflection had started, the process developed its own momentum (as would be expected in an ongoing community development situation) and new, unexpected (or at least un-planned for) outcomes resulted. For example, people engaging in the sports forum were asked by local district and parish councillors if they were interested in attending local forum meetings as part of the desire to develop provision for children and young people. Engagement with political leaders at all levels – particularly parish councils – was seen as an important element of opening up thinking to a community-wide level rather than maintaining only a somewhat restricted ‘parochial’ club perspective (Roebuck, 2012).

The clubs (for the most part in the villages involved) were already owned and run by local members – in this sense the process was not empowering them in the sense of handing over assets and control but rather in creating new opportunities to access and influence decision-makers and to create new perspectives that looked more roundly at developing the common good.

*Research as a catalyst:* The research process itself has been understood as a catalysing process. Using the traditional tools of research (observation, reflection, interviewing and questioning) can create new ways of thinking, and stimulate new actions.

The presence of the researchers can be directly connected to the creation of new organisational forms and activities in the villages and perhaps even to shifts in the perspectives and scope of those participating. Equally the researchers have also learnt much in the process including *process learning* (about doing research this way) and *content learning* (about the motivations and limitations of sports volunteering and about how local sport is and could be organised).

*Sustaining and revising relationships in the longer term:* As a co-participant, the researcher is also partially co-responsible for the medium to long-term experience of those participating. The researchers acted in a

way that they believed was sufficient to support the initial development (and subsequent change processes) of the groups involved and to develop their skills to maintain their continued learning, reflection and development after the end of the formal research process. In this case (as with many community development experiences), the researchers were mindful to build trust and agency without developing a dependency on the researchers/facilitators. This is a challenging line to establish but one that, if achieved, provides possibilities for long-term sustainability and development.<sup>4</sup>

### **Preliminary findings on the role grassroots sport plays in strengthening the civil society in rural communities**

The research is ongoing, but it is already possible to present some preliminary findings based on the informal learning workshops, interviews and participatory research undertaken. Lessons drawn on the process of research and building capacity for research within the partnerships and informal learning will be discussed in the concluding section of this chapter. Here we focus particularly on the first set of questions:

How can grassroots, community-based sport contribute to strengthening civil society? In particular, how can it play a role in strengthening community cohesion, community engagement and community development at grass-root levels?

*Routes into volunteering:* One clear message emerging from the informal learning workshops (Norris, 2010) is that volunteering in sport is often something that was quite unplanned; something that started as part of everyday family life. Something that started out as escorting one's own children to a sporting activity often developed into informal (and sometimes then formalised) volunteering and coaching – this volunteering activity often continuing long after the children in question have finished the original sporting activity:

However the strongest message that came out of the focus groups was they volunteered due to their children getting involved within the sport. To allow the club/organisation/league to continue to run and grow the involvement of parent volunteers is fundamental. Many stated their involvement then developed from there, even after their child's involvement had finished.

(Norris, 2010: 5)

*Duty and responsibility:* People talked about their reasons for participating in sports volunteering and these included feelings of obligation and a concern to maintain opportunities for others and 'to give something back' – the feeling that there was no-one else to do it was also expressed, or (in a similar but slightly more positive vein) that participants had seen an opportunity for providing others with something they valued and they did not want to walk away from this. Others reflected that volunteering was often cultural and just 'what we do' – often following patterns laid down within families:

Part of your 'make-up' to volunteer – sometimes through your parents as they have always volunteered.

To go that further step to put themselves out to make a change/difference.

Allowing something to survive.

(Norris, 2010: 8)

As Norris (2010: 8) reflects:

Reasons for getting involved in volunteering were vast, however the majority of our group stated that they started when their child got involved in the sport and the club needing an extra pair of hands.

It was agreed though that there is always a catalyst to start volunteering in sport.

(ibid: 9)

*Membership and belonging:* Participants reported that one of the motivations for becoming or remaining a sports volunteer was the feeling of community involvement created through volunteering. It was reported that participation in sport, either directly or indirectly as a coach or active club member, helped enable a sense of community membership and encouraged a sense of belonging. Participants responded to questions about what 'Active Citizenship' meant to them included:

Actually doing something and being engaged in society.

Being part of a group.

Working with groups like Community Sports Networks(CSN). These are groups in each District where sport works with local District

councils, Primary Care Trust, Volunteer organisations (CVS), School Sport Partnerships and local volunteers.

(Norris, 2010: 8)

*Social and Personal Recognition:* People reflected on how many people in the wider community had come to know them through their engagement in sport. There was also a feeling that the local community valued (or at least acknowledged) the contributions that people make in sport.

Yes we do, [feel valued by our community] although we think the community thinks that we get paid to be coaches, and don't think we do it all as volunteers.

(Workshop participant, quoted in Norris, 2010: 23)

*Variety and diversity (of contribution) required in sport:* Research discussions also reflected on the variety of roles and skills required to maintain a club – drawing on and recognising the contribution people could make in a variety of ways (participating in the sport itself, coaching, running the club, maintaining grounds, kits, transport or social functions).

Active Citizenship looks at how active people be/become/belong within their communities, and sport is an excellent tool to demonstrate how people take an active role in developing their community. From developing a sports club by increasing participation, to coaching a volleyball Under 10 team, to marking the lines out on the cricket boundary; each individual plays an active role within developing sport within their community.

(Norris, 2010: 6)

This was seen as part of the value of the clubs as they drew in a variety of local people with different skills, knowledge, physical ability and personalities. It was also seen by some as a *great leveller* and integrating force.

*Support mechanisms for volunteers:* The workshop participants (documented in Norris, 2010) highlighted the value of training for young people and echoed Halpern's (2004) view on the importance of engaging young people early into volunteering activity:

once a volunteer, always a volunteer; which is why programmes such as Step into Sport, CSLA<sup>5</sup> and JSLA<sup>6</sup> are so important. If young

people can start volunteering at an early age, it is inherent in them to carry on.

(Norris, 2010: 9)

However, it was also recognised that effective volunteering in sport often calls for specific skills and these are not always available to community organisations. In practice, many people had been able to transfer skills learnt in work-settings. This was not always the case though and learners felt there was much more scope for training and development in the sector:

There are very few adult programmes to put sports volunteers through a leadership programme. The verdict is that a lot of skills are learnt in a work environment and are transposed into the sports setting.

From the findings that came out of the volunteer discussions it is clear we need a generic leadership course [to be] developed that would cut across all sports.

(Norris, 2010: 11)

The changing landscape of bureaucracy and certification was also a concern shared as part of this research – and whilst recognising the importance of this increased monitoring it was also felt that this may be putting people off volunteering or making existing volunteers less inclined to continue.

Despite recent research and findings (Active People, 2009)<sup>7</sup> stating that volunteering levels are on the increase, the group discussed that volunteers within the County were not as forthcoming as they used to be and people are less inclined to volunteer.

Are volunteers being put off with the amount of paperwork, courses to attend and CRB checks?

(Norris, 2010: 9)

This echoes findings from Chapter 2, for example. Many people prefer informal forms of volunteering to more formalised 'semi-professional' forms. *Sense of community*: Whilst not directly expressing it this way, it seems that many participants saw sport as a cohesive force within their communities – bringing people together who may otherwise have had little occasion to interact:

a number of people had suggested that they enjoyed village life because people said hello in the street and they felt that much of this came through the interaction of sporting and other social groups. The sports clubs were now discussing how to create spaces for social interaction through events and tournaments that recognise current social groups within the village communities and then encourage them to engage with others. There was a desire to make the events around the club even if not the club's actual playing profile more reflective of local communities.

(Roebuck, 2012: 24)

*Sustained Engagement and Participation:* The opportunity for sport to engage people in sustained activity with other people was identified as one of its distinctive and attractive characteristics. The cradle-to-grave nature of physical activity was also noted in the conversations – for example, sports clubs may start with children as young as five and often offer opportunities for people to remain within sport, for example, in coaching or club management roles long after their own competitive sporting activities have finished. Indeed, the transfer of experience from one person to another was seen as part of the appeal of sports' volunteering at a community level and the opportunity to span generations and to pass things onto future generations.

*Inclusiveness and continuity:* Sport was seen as providing opportunities for people of different ages – and different levels of ability (sporting and otherwise). For example, participants reflected on how sports' clubs spanned several generations – for example, linking old and young people within a village.

Within cricket we get a lot of praise from grandparents

(Norris, 2010: 23)

Active Citizenship relates among others to how people can promote community cohesion and social solidarity, therefore strengthening civil society as well as empowering themselves as an individual/groups/communities.

(Norris, 2010: 6)

It was noted that clubs could also be exclusionary, but notwithstanding this were felt to have the potential to create a unique slicing/mixing of

the community that was not replicated in other social structures, such as work or social activities.

*Boundaries and Identity:* Sports' clubs' physical location inside (or associated with) particular villages was also seen as an element in connecting people (although sometimes it also had the simultaneous effect of reinforcing boundaries *between* different villages – through club membership or sporting competitions). Whilst there were many instances where sport and local clubs could create increased social cohesion, there was also a discussion about 'tribalism' or at least 'localism'/'parochialism' both between clubs within a village, between different sports and most notably between different villages.

It is clear that local politics and intrigues may occur, but it was generally felt that these were symptomatic of wider community issues and that sports generally *could* help to break down these barriers. For example, in the case of the sports forum (discussed previously), the discussion between clubs about sharing resources and use of grounds was seen as a powerful means to overcome local territorial barriers. Thus, sports clubs were seen as playing an important role in working beyond traditional boundaries and making a more coherent larger community identity – beyond the boundaries of the villages involved.

Conversations with Parish Councillors recognised a parochialism between villages when it came to the planning of facilities, venues and activities. The village cricket clubs however provided a good example of co-operation.

(Roebuck, 2012: 16)

It became increasingly evident [...] that although the work these sports volunteers were doing was reducing isolation and providing services to a number of residents, if they were to reach out and enact further social change and achieve the community cohesion that [was] envisaged then they must reach across the boundaries of their current imagined communities to communicate and provide reciprocal support across neighbouring villages.

(Roebuck, 2012: 17/18)

*Control and use of 'Public Space' and 'Community' Assets:* Another key aspect identified through the research was the use and ownership of 'public' space/community spaces in rural locations. Although often surrounded by open space – the availability of public space can be limited in small rural locations. Sports clubs (often set-up as trusts)

may own, and provide access to, recreation space for use by community members.

Discussion continued as to how the clubs could overcome the inequity of sports' provision across the villages whilst also engaging the more isolated communities. The group began to identify the locations of redundant tennis courts or cricket fields in neighbouring villages or the current existence of unused facilities on both state owned school properties and private individuals' land.

(Roebuck, 2012: 23/24)

It was felt here that an important difference existed between urban and rural facilities: whilst sports are often run by local councils in urban areas, often sports such as tennis or cricket in rural areas were run by clubs (trusts). Thus, access to use these facilities could also directly affect community connectivity, inclusion, social activity and cohesion in a village location.

### **Reflections on the Research Process itself; Community Research/Community Development Research**

As this research approach sees community research as part of a process of community development (and vice versa), it is therefore important to reflect on the ways in which communities may be said to have developed through the research processes involved.

The aim of the research was not to collect externally generated data on the situations, people and communities concerned, but rather to stimulate and generate reflection *within* these groups, which in turn generated knowledge that could be directly used by participants as well as shaping 'external' understanding of key issues and concerns. This has been a gradual process of sense-making, iterative conversations and opportunities (spaces) for reflection. It is only claimed here that the process has generated preliminary findings – to be explored and tested in further research engagements. But it is claimed that researching this way makes a genuine attempt<sup>8</sup> to strengthen the capacity of those engaged in the study.

Development (in terms of research and in communities themselves) is of course a subtle process, inexorably intertwined with many other experiences and influences happening at the same time. This makes isolating causal factors problematic. However, some initial potential community impacts can be identified. For example, the process of action

research with local sports group has explored the possibilities for two new forums,<sup>9</sup> strengthening a network of sports clubs across different local communities.

This has also led to discussions about the exchange of resources and ongoing (and strengthened) engagement with local authorities and partners. Initiating this forum also led to a new connection with established democratic structures (e.g. through the local government forum). Indeed, the creation of local sports forums seems to be a potential way to create purposeful engagement on a range of community development issues.

The work of the original active learning workshop groups was recognised by the Olympics Inspire Mark as contributing to the wider legacy of the Olympic Games. This acknowledgement has provided some external recognition of the place of learning and reflection – and particularly the value of articulating what people do as volunteers, why they do this and how this may contribute to community development.

### **Lessons from the Research (on Research)**

Using an informal-learning approach as part of a research endeavour has a number of distinctive characteristics. These impact on the way the research can be planned, undertaken and the conclusions that can be drawn from it.

#### **Starting from the experiences of the learners themselves**

Learning experiences must be relevant and developmental for those involved if they are to be maintained over time and be considered valuable by those participating. This means that, although we may be able to identify (at the outset) issues of interest to us as researchers, the process of engaging people in conversation on these issues must be made in an authentic and co-developed way. The researchers must therefore be prepared to adjust and readjust as necessary in this process – and may not in the end research what they anticipated at the outset. This provides ongoing challenges for data capture and research reporting.

#### **Steering research and collecting data over time**

The learning conversations started from the interests and experiences of participants whilst the researcher/tutor had the responsibility to raise relevant themes that could ‘stretch’ participants and stimulate new thinking. But the discussions should not become *too* heavily steered and controlled by the learning facilitator. This meant that sometimes there was less immediate ‘data’ collected on a particular issue than

the researchers would ideally have hoped for (or planned). Subsequent explorations may be necessary in order to explore a particular line of enquiry; or the line of enquiry may indeed need to be re-framed. It may also mean that the participants may never reach a particular conclusion on a particular theme – although thinking has been stimulated and ideas contributed to an emerging discourse.

It *should*, however, mean that the facilitators also learn in the process, understanding the most pressing and authentic issues for the group concerned. It may be that certain issues – particularly the more abstract ones – need more pre-conversation before they can be satisfactorily introduced. Otherwise they can appear alien and unnaturally imposed into the conversation. This usually implies that the researchers need to build up sustainable forms of engagement and develop conversations over an extended period of time, or need to do more conceptual framing and groundwork before introducing a new concept or theme.

### **Producing data**

The process of doing research this way leads to a variety of data. This includes direct observations and illustrations, data collected during workshops, evidence of decision-making from minutes and accounts and the participants' own feed-back. In this manner, the material and conclusions drawn are being refined (and micro-tested) on a continual basis. The data takes a variety of forms (digital recordings of interviews, workshops, meetings or collectively shared recordings made on flipcharts) but does not take primacy over the other elements of the research process – such as the engagement of participants and the value they draw from being involved. This means that the process of constructing 'evidence' is a gradual process – but one that can have inherent validity in the context of the groups involved.

### **Building community knowledge together**

The second (related) point is that the research (and concurrent learning) does not have only one-sided outcomes. The aspiration [and expectation] is that both the researcher/facilitator and the other participants all learn through the process of engagement in the learning activities (Freire, 1972, 1997; Take Part, 2011).

### **New forms of social action**

This learning may also lead to recognisable, new forms of action (new skills put to use elsewhere, new forms of engagement with civic processes, new forms of social action) as well as the longer-term (but

harder to capture) impacts of learning on subsequent actions. Learning becomes seen as potentially a transformational and empowering experience (Take Part, 2011) – part of the critical reflection processes that need to be embedded in the process throughout (Mayo and Rooke, 2006; Mayo *et al.*, 2012).

### **Building trust**

Developing participatory research requires an element of trust to develop between all the participants, as Roebuck remarked:

This piece of action research suggests that the active learning process cannot be delivered in an instant as an element of trust has to exist, at the very least with a core number of volunteers who will begin to recognise and convince others of the benefits of working together to effect social change.

(Roebuck, 2012: 27)

### **Creating spaces for reflection**

The research process was found to create new spaces for reflection. On the whole these spaces were not provided in other forums and were found to be valuable learning processes. The work of the Pathfinder learning sessions was acknowledged by the Universities Week Report for the Olympic Games (2012) – which highlighted the idea of ‘Unsung Heroes’. This choice of title (by the external reports’ authors) emphasises the general need for this kind of research – to raise awareness of the role of sports volunteers – both in terms of the impact on sport and in the wider community – and to create spaces for reflection and learning that can inform further community development (see also the End of Games Report; Olympics NRG, 2012).

### **Introducing new uses of unfamiliar language**

It is clear that the participants in our research were familiar with the language of sport; they were also used to thinking about how they were contributing to the aims of their particular clubs and their chosen sport(s). They may also have been partially aware of their contribution within their local communities. However, for many, the opening of discussions about *community cohesion*, *social justice* and *social inequality* introduced a new lexicon. This process continues and ongoing research is exploring to what extent these ideas start to become more naturally incorporated into local discussions. What *is* clear at the moment is that

engagement with these debates at a local level has considerable potential for growth – opening up new possibilities (including, for example, new funding streams or activities) that may help directly extend the potential for community development.

## Reflections on the challenges of researching this way

The research found that it was easier for participants to relate to issues of an immediate and personal nature than more abstract and distanced concepts. This is indeed a principle of the Take Part Approach (Take Part, 2006, 2011). The learning/research process thus creates spaces for connecting experiences (provided by participants) with more conceptual discussions (facilitated by the researchers). Ideally, this dialogue creates a dynamic tension that enables learning to take place on some of these issues at different times and in different ways. In this process, participants were able to articulate their own internal club activities (e.g. sports' volunteering and club organisation) and to be challenged to relate this to discussions about how (and indeed, 'if') this club activity contributes to shaping the 'outside' community of which it is (at least nominally) part. In this way, the participants were given an opportunity to view their clubs' (and their own) activities from an external perspective – thinking more about how they contributed to strengthening civil society. In some cases (such as the evening workshops), this was quite a direct and fairly abstract discussion. In other cases (e.g. developing the forums), the project developed more as a practical action research programme where participants were looking mostly at their collective organisational structure.

Whilst people may have recognised their work was voluntary and appreciated by those involved in a particular sport, few participants had considered their roles in relation to wider discussions about volunteering and building a more just and equal society. Furthermore, it appeared at this stage to be easier for participants to engage with general discussions about *strengthening society* – or *building the common good* than to engage in discussions about *community cohesion*, *social justice* or *social inequality*. The reasons for this are as yet unclear (but echo comments in other chapters). The less familiar terms used in these discussions required some unpacking with participants – and from a research perspective this was of interest in itself.

Sport has been largely viewed by our research participants (rightly or wrongly) as a generally open resource – that can cross class, race and age divides, but it was still challenging to draw out examples where

individuals had challenged the status quo or instigated social change. Whilst sport may create valuable platforms for creating spaces for reflection and development of these ideas, the conversations have had to be stretched (through critical challenge) to even *introduce* these elements into the discussion.

This research is ongoing. The use of the Take Part Learning approach as a means of doing research has created some shared insights (for researchers and community members) and points of potential interest to both. Further exploration, challenging, developing and extending these points, is required.

The need to maintain the dual needs (of creating 'abstracted' knowledge and of stimulating social action) continues to be our goal. The process of doing research this way is not easy. It is certainly not quick, and it often produces findings that are hard to attribute to exact data sources. But it does provide a means for the co-production of meanings and accessing the embedded grassroots knowledge that communities hold and develop to maintain and build their own activities. It also helps make visible concepts that can be discussed and debated and extended in wider domains.

As we develop our practice, we learn more as researchers both about capturing the content of conversations as well as understanding more about the impact of these endeavours on the learners, facilitators, sports clubs and the wider community. The process is not only challenging but also creates value in a range of forms (and for a number of participants) and so contributes to creating knowledge which can be shared more widely. The traditional knowledge-arbitrators (universities and government leaders) are no longer to be seen as the full repositories of knowledge. It is doubtful of course whether they ever have been. But now there is at least more acknowledgement of the importance of the local contextual and positional knowledge that supports actions in our communities – and more understanding about the role that researchers may be able to play in facilitating the development of shared knowledge through these processes of constructed dialogue.

## Notes

1. A debate which can be witnessed through the UEFA *RESPECT* campaign and in recent incidents in the EURO 2012 competition.
2. <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/component/gpb/sport-volunteering>.
3. Work on this was recognised by the Olympics Inspire Award and highlighted in the review of Universities work with the Games (refs: Universities Week, 2012).

4. It is felt that some continued co-ordination and impetus input may be necessary in the medium term in this case. In another case (also part of this research but in a different, more urban context), the forum has already continued in a very successful form and is actively creating new funding streams and sporting opportunities in its area.
5. CSLA: Community Sports Leader Award.
6. JSLA: Junior Sports Leader Award.
7. Sport England (2009) *Active People Survey 3, 2008/09*, Sport England [available at [http://www.sportengland.org/research/active\\_people\\_survey.aspx](http://www.sportengland.org/research/active_people_survey.aspx), accessed February 2013].
8. Whilst the intent is genuine (and can be evidenced in distinct community outcomes in several cases), it is not claimed that every research engagement is always successful in finding ways to do this.
9. One in the villages discussed in the case study and one in a more urban setting. The latter has been subsequently successful in bidding for new resources for the local community.

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## **Part IV**

# **Strengthening the Third Sector's Independent Voice: Addressing Challenges and Identifying Ways of Strengthening Mutual Support and Sustainability**

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# 11

## Collaboration and Mutual Support in the Third Sector

*Hannah Jones*

### **Introduction**

How can community organisations work together to support one another? Can collaborative work strengthen individual organisations as well as the Third Sector as a whole? Are there benefits that large organisations can gain from working with smaller organisations, and vice versa? And are there drawbacks, limitations or challenges to working together or sharing resources?

These were some of the questions that led bassac (the British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres – now merged with the Development Trusts Association to become Locality) to develop the research discussed in this chapter. As a membership body for community anchor organisations, which themselves bring together community groups at a local level, bassac members had some knowledge that collaborative working could benefit the Third Sector, individual organisations and communities themselves. Working with an academic researcher through the Take Part programme allowed the time and space to gather detailed evidence of how such collaborative working functions in a range of case studies, to analyse why it works (and why sometimes it doesn't) and help bassac members and others to learn from this shared practice (see Jones, 2011 for the full report).

The work came at a time (2011) when two themes of public debate in the United Kingdom reached a peak: firstly, the championing of 'The Big Society' by the Coalition Government, which would emphasise voluntarism, self-reliance or philanthropy over publicly funded, state-supported amenities (Cameron, 2010); and secondly, the more long-term drive to quantify performance and 'impact' of public activities.

Of course, this also coincided with pushes for 'austerity' and funding cuts in a time of recession.

As many research participants pointed out, the 'Big Society' rhetoric fails to acknowledge the complexity of the voluntary and community sector. Part of this complexity is the result of the previous (New Labour) government's development of 'The Third Sector' as a compromise between state planning and private venture. This Third Way social democratic approach directed significant government funds to community and voluntary organisations (Flood, 2010), both to increase 'active citizenship' and democratic voice outside of state institutions, and to allow policy experimentation beyond the restrictions of directly managed government (Anheier, 2004). Some see this as a continuation of earlier state-supported community development work under Conservative governments from 1979, co-opting community organisations within quasi-market structures as a mechanism for managing community expectations, and negating independent, campaigning or transformative aspects of community development (Miller and Ahmad, 1997). Many organisations and groups are now intertwined with government bodies and compete for state-funding streams in a way which the Big Society approach does not appear to recognise. This was a situation mentioned several times during fieldwork for this chapter.

'Evidence-based policy' gained ground in the same period, with its emphasis on proving, and then pursuing, 'what works' (Sanderson, 2002). Whilst the Coalition government has pledged to reduce targets and audit (DCLG, 2010), the imperative to prove the effectiveness of Third Sector interventions in econometric terms remains, whether to funders, stakeholders and governors, or clients. This applies, in particular, to infrastructure organisations such as bassac and their membership of community anchors, which could be perceived as an 'extra layer' beyond the 'front-line' organisations doing the urgent work (another trope of 'austerity Britain').

This context made the research timely, but the project also grew from the ethos of bassac and the Taking Part programme as a whole: to identify social justice, community development-focused ways of working in the current context. In particular, the nature of bassac's work and that of their members – as community anchors focused on encouraging co-operation between organisations – focused the research on how members were responding to such challenges in mutually supportive ways. The research began from an understanding that whilst financial solvency may be crucial to sustaining some community work, this could be approached in ways outside the assumptions of market-oriented approaches, by learning and sharing between organisations.

'Community anchor organisations' are understood, here, to be organisations that usually have a building – or other forms of infrastructure – which smaller community organisations can also use. This organisational relationship is sometimes known as 'hosting'. The intention of the research was to go beyond a mapping of the formal structures and contractual relationships that might be involved in hosting, in order to understand how individuals and groups negotiate the relationships that make hosting work.

Community organising and Third Sector activity is often linked to an increase in 'social capital' for individuals and communities. The relationships described here do indeed provide evidence of how social (and cultural) capital can be built. However, most policy-oriented discussion of 'social capital' uses a definition of this term that ignores power relations. In contrast, this chapter understands social and cultural capital through Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) development of the concepts, emphasising that 'capital' is a way of exchanging power. It considers how sharing cultural and social capital in mutual ways can benefit community organisations and the communities they work with, rather than assuming such groups must be in competition with one another.

## Understanding social capital

Though there are ongoing debates about how to understand the concept of social capital, a straightforward summary is that social capital is the networks, norms and trust, which are created and sustained through social relationships (see e.g. Putnam, 2000). By mixing with a wider variety of people, individuals can expand the links they have to different parts of society and the information they have about different aspects of life. This can increase their opportunities to access social and economic goods including work, housing, health, help or friendships. These networks, and the opportunities that they afford, can also be shared within communities.

Thinking in community development terms, it is important to recognise power relations in order to understand how co-operative relationships can enable – or constrain – the sharing of resources and power to effect change. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) definition of capital as a form of power, with an exchange value, social capital consists of the personal relationships a person has, but more attention is paid to how this functions as a form of *capital*, where having a personal relationship with someone may encourage them to offer help. Creating these connections requires labour – time and energy spent building a relationship.

*Cultural* capital is a connected concept used by Bourdieu to mean a set of values or behaviours that can be embodied as a way of knowing how to behave successfully in a particular situation. A person might learn how to behave in different situations (gain cultural capital) through knowledge gained through their personal relationships (social capital); or they might build more social relationships by knowing how to behave 'correctly' in different situations.

Bourdieu's connection of social capital to labour and exchange is important to the discussion in this chapter because it highlights that social capital is not a magical 'good' that emerges when people take part in associational activities. Such activities require work – energy, ideas and emotional labour – and, often, the securing of funds or premises through such work. When organisations develop hosting relationships, they share, and 'profit from' different types of capital. The sharing or leasing of building space is a form of physical capital, easily quantified in monetary terms as economic capital, particularly when a rent is applied or notionally applied. The host organisation sharing its space cheaply or for free (in monetary terms) is in effect transferring economic capital to the organisation it hosts. However, this research highlights that other forms of exchange can be just as important. Table 11.1 provides an initial model for thinking about the different ways that social capital invested in relationships between community organisations can produce gains for both sides of the relationship.

## Understanding relationships between organisations

It emerged in the initial stages of research that while shared building space was a useful way to begin thinking about hosting, this did not encompass the full range of support that might be offered. Hosting is not *just* about providing a tenancy; it can also be about shared capacity, networks and organisational connections *without* the provision of physical accommodation. Some participants suggested the idea of a 'virtual building', representing the skills and support they provided, to describe this type of hosting arrangement.

Before beginning the empirical research, then, we began to frame the research question. Discussions with bassac made it clear that though we would be using a case study approach (not claiming to be representative of all community anchor experiences), we should aim to include a diversity of organisational experiences. To the extent this was possible in a small study, we achieved this by working with organisations in both urban and rural areas, in different regions of England,

*Table 11.1* Elements of social capital as inputs and outputs of hosting relationships

<b>Inputs</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Skills at building relationships	Relationship of trust between individuals	Ongoing communications between individuals and organisations
Shared interest in working together	Relationship of trust between organisations	Knowing where organisations' stand if things go wrong
Time spent listening and understanding joint needs	Shared understanding of boundaries to relationship	Opportunities to adapt relationships and organisations when needed
Innovation and ideas about new ways of working	Shared enthusiasm for working together on new idea	Connections and shared learning between participants in both host and hosted organisations Improved well-being of the communities served by both organisations

established in the last few years or running for over a century; with a diversity of funding models; with a range of aims and activities; and both with and without a central building space in which to host.

Table 11.2 tries to capture the range of hosting relationships that emerged from the research. This is a tool to help understanding, and is not meant to provide a rigid framework or define all the types of support relationship that are possible. Indeed, many community anchors maintain different types of hosting relationship with different organisations, and the nature of the relationship can change over time. For explanations of how the case study community anchors exhibited these characteristics in practice, see the next section of this chapter.

## **Doing the research**

The research was designed to gather the narratives of managers of community anchors and leaders of hosted organisations. Supplemented by a small amount of background documentation, the majority of the field-work involved semi-structured interviews, focus groups and site visits.

Table 11.2 Spectrum of hosting relationships

Type of relationship	Characteristics
Landlord and tenant	Community anchor owns a large building and provides space and facilities to smaller organisations on a contractual basis, with little further interaction between them.
Good neighbours	Community anchor provides space and facilities to smaller organisation on a contractual basis. Within the building there are shared services, spaces and facilities and the organisations may work together on some projects, share advice or develop joint initiatives.
Extended family	The community anchor may not have office or meeting space to rent out, but supports smaller organisations to find space, raise funds or develop initiatives through a network arrangement. They may or may not be located in the same physical space.

Interviews and focus groups were reflexive and interactive, led as much by the concerns of research participants as of the researcher; however, they were centred on the following questions:

- What is hosting?
- In your experience, does the hosting relationship change over time?
- What are the benefits of hosting?
- What are the difficulties?
- What might you do differently if you were starting again?

Six individual interviews and four focus groups each of around an hour were recorded and transcribed. Several less formal interviews and discussions took place with workers and volunteers in community anchor and hosted organisations, and site visits were made to all of the case study organisations but one. Detailed notes on these interactions informed the findings of this study, and where appropriate excerpts from recorded interviews and focus groups are included to illustrate research findings.

An important part of doing this research, like most qualitative research projects, was building relationships of trust and exchange between the researcher and research participants, and between the researcher and those commissioning the research. This is often an unseen part of social research, unmentioned when the findings are reported. However, this project itself was about collaborative work, and it was delivered by a partnership between a university (Goldsmiths) and

a community sector organisation (bassac). As the research progressed, it emerged that many of the important skills (challenges and benefits) of building relationships between Third Sector organisations were parallel to those of working in research. In the conclusion to the chapter, I include reflections on some of the parallel benefits and challenges of developing collaborative research between higher education and the community sector.

## Findings

### The case study community anchors

Five organisations took part in the research, and this section gives some brief context about their different histories, aims, staffing, geography, funding and relationships with smaller organisations.

#### *St Margaret's House: A 'good neighbour'*

St Margaret's House Settlement was located in Bethnal Green, east London. Established in 1889, St Margaret's provided services and projects for the local community, by hosting smaller organisations in their buildings, offices and meeting spaces. The settlement owned the buildings from which it operated and did not rely on government support or grants for funding. St Margaret's also had a number of social enterprise initiatives which it either ran directly (including a community café on site) or supported on behalf of independent organisations (including a 'charity boutique' and an arts and crafts workshop space). The intention was that these social enterprise arms would eventually subsidise the hosted organisations with which they were associated. While tenants were largely Third Sector organisations (including the Bangladeshi Parents and Carers Association, Quaker Social Action and the University of the Third Age), there were also a number of other professionals who rented space (architects, a photographer, a comedian) and contributed their skills to the settlement community. At the time of the research, all of the St Margaret's rental space was full, and they were considering further ways to expand their ventures in the community. St Margaret's was a good example of a community anchor providing the 'good neighbour' model, but with a less hands-on, 'landlord and tenant' relationship for those organisations that preferred this.

#### *Doughnut Factory: Between 'landlord and tenant' and 'good neighbour'*

The Doughnut Factory was based in Acton, outer west London. It was not a traditional community anchor, but a social enterprise arm of Action Acton, a local regeneration charity. Its location in outer London

was important to the organisation's mission (promoting local enterprise and employment), but could also present challenges in finding tenants. The Doughnut Factory offered flexible work space to small businesses and self-employed individuals, with an emphasis on creative industries and social enterprises. They provided office facilities, business support advice, seminars and networking opportunities, and encouraged tenants to obtain services from each other and within the local community, to live locally and use environmentally friendly forms of transport.

The Doughnut Factory was developed by one of the original business tenants of the building, who approached local organisations about developing it into a social enterprise with more tenants, better facilities and a community vision. The hosting role in the sense of renting office space was thus the reason for the Doughnut Factory's existence, but also central to its mission is the provision of the 'added value' of a community-focused organisation. The Doughnut Factory was also somewhere between the 'landlord and tenant' and 'good neighbour' models.

*Cricklewood Homeless Concern (CHC): 'landlord and tenant', 'good neighbour' and 'extended family'*

CHC was a community anchor in the north London borough of Brent. Initially set up as a service for homeless people, it went on to provide holistic services to support vulnerable and disadvantaged people to take part in society. In its new resource centre, built in 2008, the charity provided services directly to this target group, including counselling, training, befriending and advice. The resource centre also had meeting and event space that was rented to local community organisations. CHC 'hosted' services from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the local college and the local general practitioner (GP) service, though all of these organisations were bigger than CHC itself. CHC provided them with space to deliver their service, and access to clients who they might otherwise find it difficult to contact.

Another non-traditional hosting model was a partnership between CHC and local churches to deliver night shelters over the winter period. In 2010–2011, CHC provided the strategic planning and services, while the churches provided the physical space and befriending service. So CHC had a mixture of all three hosting models – the 'landlord and tenant' model applied to those organisations simply renting meeting space in the hall; the 'good neighbour' model to those services complementing the core offer of CHC on site (such as DWP advice); and the

'extended family' model to the work with churches to provide a winter night shelter off-site.

*Ambleside Parish Centre: Both 'landlord and tenant' and 'good neighbour'*

Ambleside Parish Centre was a rural community venue in the Lake District, opened in 2006 with funds from the local Anglican and Methodist churches and a National Lottery grant. The Centre was leased to an independent Trust consisting of representatives from the churches, local organisations and voluntary groups. It rented out space to events and ongoing community activities, and developed initiatives directly through the Parish Centre Trust. The majority of the Centre's income came from leasing space, to both local community businesses (such as Tai Chi and yoga teachers) and to community groups (such as a youth group and a migrant women's project), many of which depended on government funding. Other activities in the Parish Centre included an older people's group, the local chiropody service, counselling sessions and an Art Society.

Some research participants described the relationship of the Centre to its users as simply that of 'landlord and tenant', based around invoicing and the use of rooms at certain times (in contrast to community activities developed directly by the Centre itself). However, others were keen to stress the importance of the building as a community hub. The value of the shared space for hosting activities was increased by the shortage of similar alternative venues in a rural setting, and by the welcoming atmosphere of the Centre, which some users related to its religious basis. 'Whereas you know other places have got a very specific purpose, this is all encompassing, all welcoming I feel'.

The opportunities to attract community members to one event or activity who may have visited the centre for another purpose were also mentioned, though few could identify specific examples where this had happened in practice. Thus there was at least the potential and intention for the Centre to develop its hosting within the 'good neighbour' model alongside the 'landlord and tenant' role.

*Health for All: 'Extended family'*

Health for All was a community development charity in South Leeds. It worked with local people in disadvantaged inner city neighbourhoods to help them identify unmet need and establish services in response. At the time of the research, Health for All managed 16 projects and supported 85 community groups. Though it managed nine community premises, most of these were leased from other organisations and Health

for All did not have a specific community hub building. The organisation included an enterprise arm that comprised their business services, crèche and community transport, all of which were run as distinct social enterprises and sold their services to organisations within and outside the Health for All network.

Health for All's emphasis was on community development, and the organisation could be described as having a 'virtual hosting' role. That is, rather than sharing physical space across community groups (although this did also occur) the emphasis was on how Health for All provided capacity and expertise to smaller organisations. This often involved working with community members to identify need and help them to organise new groups or services, and to apply for funding, usually from statutory grants or from larger charitable funds. These initiatives were usually formed as independent organisations, but under the Health for All banner. Because they were linked in this way, organisations were aware of other services linked to Health for All, in the way that sharing a building might heighten awareness and ease of access. For instance, they could refer families from a support group to a counselling service, or access social enterprises including the creche or community transport provision more easily than if they were entirely distinct organisations. Health for All did lease space to other organisations within the buildings it ran, but the emphasis here was much more on the 'extended family' model of hosting, flexible in relation to both community needs and the availability of new funding streams.

## **Benefits of hosting relationships**

This section describes the types of advantages hosting relationships can provide to the community anchor, organisations they host and the communities they both serve.

### **Revenue raising**

One of the most important reasons community anchors gave for entering into hosting relationships was funding. All of the community anchors involved in this research relied to some extent on income from renting space to smaller organisations. Many of the initiatives they supported also provided some income to the core organisation (for example, the community transport service at Health for All). As McKay *et al.* (2011) have found, in the context of scarce resources from grants and donations, commercial forms of revenue have become increasingly important for UK charities in maintaining their operations. It is

important to recognise that pragmatic business thinking was necessary to all of the organisations engaged in this research. However, all of them were clear that they did not wish revenue raising to become the aim or focus of their activities, and they actively resisted the idea that the money raised by collaborative working or hosting was the reason for engaging in such activities.

### **Meeting community needs**

Collaborating helped community anchors to meet their core mission of serving their community, and to flexibly adapt to changing community needs by developing new services and projects outside their core capability (such as a GP service based at CHC). For users, having a range of community provision in one place, or linked through a common network, makes access much easier. It also makes it easier for service providers to reach the clients they want to work with.

In a rural setting with few suitable venues for large community events or centrally located services, a community anchor with flexible space was particularly valuable. As one Ambleside Parish Centre participant pointed out:

It's using the facilities that the community has and being creative, whereas in the cities, you wouldn't have a chiroprapist in the middle of a parish centre. They'd be in the medical centre.

### **Efficiency of knowing each other and being able to work across organisations**

Being in the same building, or within the same network, means that workers and volunteers are aware of other services and initiatives the community can access. For example, at St Margaret's

[knowing everyone] is priceless . . . we have meetings on the stairs, and I find that the best way to work with people.

Hosted organisations can benefit from shared material resources; for example, the Evergreen older people's group in Ambleside had purchased furniture specifically for use at their own group meetings, but made this available to other groups when they were not using it.

### **Increasing the reach of services into diverse communities**

Hosted organisations can act as a gateway for people to access other services. Ambleside Migrant Women's Project, for example, had brought

in advice services to the Parish Centre offered by the Cumbrian Multicultural Service and the Citizens' Advice Bureau. Though organised by the Migrant group, advice was accessible to all. As a result,

people have started coming in just for the odd chat... it's a hook to bring them in and they may start to use the Parish Centre more broadly.

The provision of mainstream activities or services alongside more targeted ones can increase integration across the community, and raise awareness and involvement in different community activities. At St Margaret's, a social enterprise community cafe acted as a 'notice-board' for the activities of St Margaret's House and its partners, through which they recruited volunteers, raised awareness of service provision, and attracted new tenants, as well as being a revenue-raising and community-building venture in itself.

### **Safety net and a mark of trust**

Being associated with a community anchor can offer smaller organisations the possibility of further support from a sympathetic ally in times of need. St Margaret's House, for example, had supported some of its tenants through funding gaps, by negotiating rent holidays and helping them to apply for further funding or develop new revenue plans. Health for All had helped organisations to ensure continuity of service when a funding stream or project ended, by linking them to, or adapting, other hosted services. Additionally, the association with a larger, established and trusted community anchor acts as a reference point for the community, service users and funders.

### **Challenges of hosting relationships and overcoming them**

Like the previous section, this discussion is based on the perceptions and experiences of workers and volunteers in community anchor and hosted organisations. Even in the most successful relationships, potential for difficulties can be anticipated, or lessons can be learned about how to overcome them.

### **Balancing business imperatives and compassionate support**

The two key reasons that community anchors gave for hosting – to raise revenue and to support their goals in the community – could sometimes be in tension. This could become problematic, either when

the community anchor was struggling to balance its own books, or when smaller organisations had trouble meeting their rental obligations. Though the community anchor's instincts might be to support smaller organisations as far as possible regardless (or especially in case of) financial need, managers were aware that this could put at risk their wider operations.

This relates to concerns expressed in the community development literature about the potential for marketisation of the sector to undermine emancipatory goals (e.g. Hoggett *et al.*, 2009). However, all of the organisations in this research were aware of tensions between a traditional business model and their organisations' social justice aims, but were finding ways around the tyranny of simple financial or competitive considerations. The Doughnut Factory, for example, had had to adapt their policy on the types of organisations they would host to fill the rental space. Though they continued to favour creative social enterprises, the remit was widened to encompass a broader range of businesses, in order to allow the shared community space and local business services to thrive.

Ambleside Parish Centre's business plan involved raising enough rental income to maintain the centre and pay for salaries, in a context where both statutory funding and space rental for public and private sector business meetings had reduced. Maximising income from rents was not straightforward when the majority of users were community organisations who could not afford the highest rate. The Centre negotiated with regular community users to be flexible about which rooms they used on which days when a large alternative booking such as a wedding had been made, but ensuring that users were not upset by this required sensitivity and negotiation. Both the Centre manager and the community groups using the space were very conscious of the need for the Centre to raise income, but even those groups with stable finances found it hard to pay market rents. There had been occasions when regular community users refused to pay an increase in rent, and the Centre made concessions in order to maintain their booking.

St Margaret's had been able to support struggling organisations with rent holidays while they applied for new funding streams on three occasions in the 18 months prior to this research. These rent holidays had conditions, including a discussion of the smaller organisation's plans and the likelihood of successful fundraising, and setting a deadline for them to become solvent again. Such arrangements are only possible when the community anchor has flexible enough finances to offer this support. Nor do they avoid the need for difficult decisions;

as acknowledged in the St Margaret's arrangements, deadlines and conditions still needed to be set beyond which the hosting relationship may have to end.

### **Negotiating the level of involvement and support**

The levels of involvement of community anchors in the running of hosted organisations were also a potential area of tension. This might occur when one side expected a 'landlord and tenant model' while the other anticipated a 'good neighbour' model, and the tension could work both ways. A hosted organisation might feel that their community anchor was being overbearing or taking too much interest in their day-to-day dealings, while the community anchor believed tenants should take a more active part in the wider network. On the other hand, a community anchor might enter a relationship expecting only to rent space to an independent organisation, whereas the smaller organisation wished to be more closely associated with the anchor.

In most cases, participants had overcome different expectations by negotiation and flexibility, adapting different hosting relationships over time. In a small number of cases, expectations had been so different that relationships had deteriorated and had to end. In each of these cases, this was described as largely attributable to 'personality conflict' between key people, suggesting that the interpersonal aspects of ongoing negotiation are as important as establishing contractual arrangements at the outset.

Though flexibility and variation in hosting relationships is usually seen as a positive attribute of hosting, there were times when its fuzziness could cause difficulties, for instance, in the complexity of the relationship between Health for All and the networks and groups they supported. A number of their funding applications had been turned down, apparently because the funders did not understand this support relationship. Funders had argued that Health for All ought to support initiatives with their own core funding, though this is not the community anchor model that they have. In some cases, it was felt that a funding application might be more likely to succeed if it did not mention the association.

There also seemed to be a lack of understanding of Health for All's model of accountability and community development approach, leading to conflict with funders and partners:

I think the biggest difficulty is the challenges from the gatekeepers...you think you're giving ownership to families, whereas some

people in local authorities portray it is as if we are not taking responsibility, whereas all we are trying to do is take them along, so that if our funding runs out they are not just left on their own not doing anything.

Participants suggested they might begin to address these questions about involvement and accountability through improving communication with local authorities and others. This communication would not just be about the impacts services could have on the ground, but also the added benefits of working within the hosting model.

### **Anticipating problems that might arise**

Many participants pinpointed aspects of their experience to learn from. These ranged from the practical – aspects of building design not suitable for all community purposes – to the more political – establishing the purposes and boundaries of the community anchor's activities.

In Ambleside, the only faith-based community anchor in this study, the role of the churches in governing the Centre did not present a problem for the majority of research participants. In fact, many found it to be of benefit to have a 'spiritual', 'welcoming' place even if users, workers or volunteers were of a different faith or no faith. However, one participant did describe practical conflicts over use of space while church services were going on in a different building, and prioritisation of community and faith use in publicity for the Centre. Like many of the areas for potential conflict, this seemed to be an issue where a clear position at the outset coupled with good ongoing personal relationships might help to avoid problems. Though the Centre did have a constitution setting out the faith elements of its mission, it seemed to be in practical arrangements, rather than principle, that this could be a stumbling block in a hosting relationship.

An area of potential conflict that many community anchors had *not* anticipated was the possibility that an organisation they disagreed with should wish to use their building space or other support. This was not just a hypothetical question; one participant reported just such a situation, when an extremist far right organisation had wanted to rent their premises. This would have been in conflict with their organisational goals, but they did not have a formal procedure in place to deal with the situation. Many case study organisations said that they 'would rent the space to anybody who will pay!', particularly meeting rooms. Reflecting on what they might do in a similar situation, they largely felt it unlikely that an organisation with opposing views would want

to be involved with them. In general, there was an absence of specific protocols in place to deal with this eventuality.

At Health for All, we discussed what might happen if, within the community development model, an autonomous group began to develop extremist sympathies. Workers argued that the best way to address this would be through a consistent community development stance that listened to the actual issues being raised and tried to discuss and address them, being clear about the boundaries of where a hosting relationship may in fact become untenable. As one participant put it:

you might have to say the time has come where we need to part, but you would try and work around those feelings and those issues first, if there was a problem with a certain aspect of their community, then try and put them in touch with somebody who would know how to deal with that first.

In another case, Ambleside Parish Centre's constitution contained some provisions on the types of activities to be carried out in the centre. As a Christian organisation, teaching or worship of another faith was not permitted, although groups associated with other faiths were welcome to use the space for other activities. On the same basis, an extremist political group might in theory be able to use the centre for a non-political event, where a political rally might be more controversial (though there did not seem to be any specific provision in the constitution to rule this out). In practice, it was thought that feeling in the village would be antagonistic to an extremist group using the Centre and it might be decided not to rent space to them on this basis. In summary, it seemed that such an eventuality would have to be negotiated in practice, and was not anticipated as likely.

## **Discussion**

### **Making it work: People at the heart of hosting relationships**

All participants agreed that the challenges of hosting were far outweighed by its benefits for community anchors, hosted organisations and local communities. All also suggested that communication, flexibility and commitment were central to overcoming and thriving on these challenges. The importance of anticipating problems and having transparent standards and practices in place was stressed, but it was less easy to ensure the element of people skills that enables partnership to

thrive. A participant in Ambleside summed up a view that seemed to be common to many involved in the study:

It is entirely about relationships. It's eye contact and talking and sitting with and offering coffee to, and listening to what's being said and trying to get the handle on why they're saying what they're saying and respond. That's what it always is.

Participants at Health for All noted the importance of this kind of interpersonal work, and the labour involved in carrying it out, which was not always obvious to colleagues, funders or communities and service users:

I can remember one woman just saying, ooh, how do you get a job like yours? Cos all they'd see is the tip of the service, which was me sipping my tea with them, and they wouldn't see the arrangement of the creche, or the transport, or the getting the funding for those, or getting the speakers and – fair enough!

Yet there could also be problems in linking training in these interpersonal skills to practical outcomes. A participant from CHC described an action learning event which had been 'almost like a support group for managers!' and which she felt was a waste of time compared to more practical workshops based around specific questions, learning points and concrete actions.

### **Communication between anchors and hosted organisations**

Keeping effective communication flowing between the community anchor and the organisations they hosted was seen as essential to maintaining a successful relationship. This is hardly surprising given that many of the benefits of hosting that were identified also related to successful communication.

I think it's important to be in a position where people feel that they can come to you and ask you for help... I really genuinely feel that we have a good relationship with the people here, just by being – what's the jargon? Outward facing.

What participants said about how they maintained effective communication may seem surprisingly simple. In Ambleside Parish Centre,

straightforward measures like making an effort to welcome users and visitors and spending time talking in shared spaces were not seen as side issues. They were central to maintaining a successful centre.

The community anchors also worked to maintain good relationships among the various organisations they hosted. For instance, potential conflict could arise over the use of communal kitchen space, noise impinging from one activity to another, or crossovers of different client groups in the same space. By being available and aware of frustrations at the earliest possible juncture, community anchors could address such issues. Warm relations appeared to be self-perpetuating and the Centre managers in particular were well aware of their importance, though these elements may not often be accounted for in formal performance measures or management frameworks.

### **Communicating the value of the hosting relationship**

Many community anchors and hosted organisations relied on outside funding bodies to sustain their organisations, but these bodies did not always understand the hosting relationship, and it could even become a barrier in securing funding or forming new partnerships. These challenges echoed more general issues of perception of the Third Sector. One participant recalled being at a cross-sector child protection event where people in a training session discussed their associations of the Third Sector with words like 'powerless', 'amateur' and 'unsung heroes':

not necessarily what they thought, but words that were associated with the third sector, that they had a lot of work to do but not really much power to do anything with it.

Participants could become frustrated with a lack of understanding of their work, but felt there were things they could do to help. Indeed, doing so was important in enabling community anchors and their hosted organisations to succeed:

you have to keep everybody happy... one thing we could do is educating some of the partners a bit more about the benefits of working with us... it's almost that maybe we're a threat, rather than a partner and an asset to what they're trying to do.

Sometimes some of these local authority people want to support us, but they are stuck themselves in their own bureaucracy, and there is only so much they can do so, if you come midway, sometimes it does work.

Part of this reaching out to other organisations was being seen at meetings and events, networking and becoming known among other local services and organisations. CHC did this both through leaders making strategic partnerships at a senior level, and individual projects inviting their funders and partners to any opportunity to showcase the community work being achieved. This was seen as crucial:

there's no other way that you can make sure that you're available for any opportunities that come open if they don't know about you and what you're doing...you have to work at those relationships, they don't just happen. Even if the people change, you have to be on top of it.

### **Passion, commitment and energy**

Participants from all of the case studies stressed the importance of having individuals with the passion, commitment, and energy to make community organisations and hosting relationships succeed. Coming up with innovative solutions, having the dedication to persevere when the work became challenging and finding the time to keep others on board seemed to be what kept hosting relationships going. Though, as discussed above, these qualities might not always be noticed in the everyday work of organisations themselves or their partners and users, making this passion and dedication visible was also important to making organisations gel and feel supported.

Particular individuals in different organisations were described as charismatic and dedicated, suggesting that it was these personal qualities as much as formal or structural arrangements, which had made their partnerships a success. In some cases, it seemed like the challenges of working in the Third Sector and in hosting relationships in particular could only be met through such passion and commitment, which enabled challenges to be turned into opportunities. For example, at Health for All, the reliance on short-term funding that is often seen as a hurdle, and more so when dealing with several different hosted organisations, could also be seen as a way of allowing change and adaptation:

I think because we are reliant on [limited-term] funding, the focus always has to change in some way, the basic what you're delivering might be the same, but it might be a slightly different angle to it. So if we had an unlimited amount of money then would we change as much as we are doing? You might get stuck in a bit of a rut.

A simple way that people's relationships were made visible was through social events celebrating the achievements of hosted organisations and their users. For instance, at St Margaret's House:

We're helping host a party for all the service users that came through the door of Quaker Social Action in the last year, in the garden. So it's things like that, having enough time and energy when people ask for your involvement, to be able to do that.

Similarly, at CHC, an important advantage of the hosting role was that both workers and users could see the support they received in one place, and feel that it made up a whole and coherent offer:

you might have one person going through a whole journey, through the Centre, which is really nice.

### **Sharing social and cultural capital through collaborative approaches**

The need for practical guidelines and boundaries at the outset of hosting was clear, but participants stressed that these were only effective in the presence of strong personal relationships. Communication, flexibility, imagination, time, energy and passion were important in making successful partnerships work. To return to the beginning of the chapter, these skills could be thought of as *cultural capital* (ways of behaving) that enables one to build greater *social capital* (networks of helping relationships). Hosting relationships are always mediated through personal relationships, between representatives of host and hosted organisations, and their clients, users and participants. As such, much of the 'social capital' that is built through hosting relationships (and whether it is created, and whether it has positive effects) depends on the skills and personalities of the people involved.

By thinking in terms of the exchange value of social, cultural and economic capital, we bring in the element of power: those with more capital have more power. So even whilst most of the relationships encountered were successfully working together, there was always a realism about 'bottom lines' and the fact that sometimes one organisation may have to end a co-operative relationship. This could be about economic constraints, but it could also be that a hosting organisation refuses to share its social, cultural and economic resources with another because of a clash of beliefs – for example, if a fascist organisation wanted to use

a community building, this might conflict with the ambitions of the host, who might withhold access to that resource. The 'bottom line' for survival of community associations is not always a financial one.

Collaborative research relationships have parallels with some of the benefits and challenges of working together that have been found through this research. Table 11.3 shows some of the benefits that can be gained from collaboration between universities and community groups in doing research – and some of the risks that also need to be considered when embarking on such a project.

Hopefully, it is clear from this table that the benefits of collaborative relationships in the process of *doing* this research, as well as the relationships the research was investigating, were shared and two-way. But it should also be clear from the table that there are challenges and risks on both sides too, and that managing and negotiating these exchanges

*Table 11.3* Benefits and challenges of research partnerships between universities and communities

	For university	For community organisation
Benefits	<p>Opportunity to test or apply knowledge</p> <p>'Impact' recognised in assessments</p> <p>Potential opportunities for research funding</p> <p>Access to research participants</p> <p>Increased knowledge of what research could be useful</p>	<p>Opportunity to evaluate or test existing or new practices and ideas</p> <p>Opportunity to demonstrate effective practice</p> <p>Potential opportunities for additional funding</p> <p>Chance to develop research skills and networks</p> <p>Opportunity to bring in additional expertise and knowledge and to reflect on practice</p>
Challenges	<p>Meeting both academic and user needs</p> <p>Developing a shared language across sectors</p> <p>Potential that making research 'useful' might limit findings</p> <p>Organising different time-commitments and timescales</p>	<p>Meeting service needs alongside needs of the research partnership</p> <p>Research findings might not be what was expected!</p> <p>Organisational and users' needs or circumstances might change before the research is published</p>

is as important in the process of doing research as it is in day-to-day practice.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to all of the organisations and individuals who participated in the research for this report, whose generous sharing of their time, insights and enthusiasm made the research possible.

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# 12

## 'Resilience' and Small Voluntary and Community Sector Groups

*Carol Packham*

The themes of resilience and survival have become prominent over the life of the research for this book, as the impact of the economic downturn, coupled with cuts in public spending, has made the consideration of the role and future of the voluntary community sector (VCS) matters of increasing concern. This chapter discusses the research approach and focus that was adopted by the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) element of the Capacity Building Cluster (CBC), drawing on the findings of two six months research placements that explored the role of Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations, and from smaller research vouchers, all with the focus of how to enable sustainability and facilitate change with small, VCS organisations and groups. During the course of this research, as the chapter will also demonstrate, the nature of the concept of resilience itself began to be disputed and alternatives began to be explored.

The Manchester programmes used research approaches developed from critical community development and informal education as utilised by practitioners such as youth and community workers, and as evidenced in the model of Critical Community Practice (Butcher *et al.*, 2007). These have been based on the principles of social justice, and collective action with high levels of participation between the research and evaluation partners. The aim was to ensure that the research contributed to the sustainability and capacity building of the partners in question. In the main, this has been achieved by the researcher being imbedded in the research agency, (or being an existing member of the agency) and using a formative approach to the research, as illustrated, for example, in previous chapters.

The approach was not without challenges, however, as previous chapters have also illustrated, meeting formal academic requirements and priorities that may differ from community-based priorities and

approaches. The precarious and changing nature of the partner organisations' own resource bases themselves proved problematic, in addition, illustrating aspects of the challenges of resilience and sustainability through the research process itself. In one case, for example, the partner organisation ceased to operate altogether. For many others, their priorities changed as a result of funding and policy constraints, whilst in others again, staff changes made formative research particularly challenging, the research focus having to be reintroduced and negotiated. These contradictions reflected the wider changes within the Third Sector. The community partners' desire to work with a university may have initially been to help engagement in critical reflection to aid in organisational and service delivery improvement. Over the life of the CBC, this relationship became more about survival, organisations seeing the status the university research provided, plus data for crucial funding bids, and the researcher as giving access to information and resources at a time of increased funding constraints. As one partner explained:

We wanted this (*research*) report as ammunition.

(Alex Winnom (GMCVO))

Meanwhile the funding for the CBC was also becoming potentially more precarious following the General Election of 2010, with a new government that was responsible for the very 'austerity' that we were exploring. As noted by McCabe in a working paper on 'Below the radar in a Big Society? Reflections on community engagement, empowerment and social action in a changing policy context':

can such activity, which has often been independent of, and operated outside the state, be co-opted to deliver particular government policy objectives? (2010np).

## Research context

Two connected trends have impacted on VCS organisations over the life of our research, the implementation of the Coalition government's reduction in the state delivery of tax-funded public services and welfare benefits, termed the 'New Austerity' (NEF, 2012) and the focus upon community self-help, under the banner of the 'Big Society'.

The UK Cabinet Office has stated that 'the Big Society' is 'about helping people to come together to improve their own lives. It's about

putting more power in people's hands – a massive transfer of power from Whitehall to local communities' (Cabinet Office, 2013).

Although the 'Big Society' concept has not been widely understood or adopted, even within the Conservative Party who launched it (Scott, 2011), the fundamental approach, coupled with the cuts in local authority as well as national funding, has led to a growing crisis in VCS organisations. A report from Civil Exchange *The Big Society Audit 2012* points out that

'Far from being strengthened in the first two years of the Big Society, the voluntary sector is now facing a major potential funding gap as a result of an estimated £3.3 billion in cuts in statutory funding.' ... 'Most worryingly, public services delivered by voluntary organisations in disadvantaged areas are more likely to be at risk from public sector cuts and to provide services to disadvantaged people'. (2012)

A further report by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO, 2011) predicted that the VSC in England would stand to lose £2.8 billion over the spending review period 2011–2016. This was the very sector which the Government had tasked with providing replacement services. As the New Economics Foundation (NEF) predicted in 2010

Governments cuts are only feasible alongside a strategy for shifting responsibility away from the state – to individuals, small groups, charities, philanthropists, local enterprise and big business'. Civil society will be left, 'to fill the gaps left by public services, providing support to increasing numbers of poor, jobless, insecure and unsupported individuals.

(NEF, 2010)

In addition, there has been little sign of the replacement of public services from the private and social enterprise/mutual sectors as the Government had hoped. Research from the MMU's CBC showed that 21% (46) of VCS groups that had set up as some type of social enterprise or not for profit organisation, 49% thought that they would fold within three years – mainly as a result of cuts in contracts from local authorities (Davidson and Packham 2012).

In addition to pressure on VCS organisations, their beneficiaries, those who were most requiring public services, were also experiencing

increased pressures. The 'New Austerity' simultaneously threatened the capacity of VCS groups to respond to these increased needs. As the NEF summarises, in their interim report, 'The New Austerity and the Big Society', in its current shape, 'the Big Society will fall short of offering a socially just alternative to the welfare state' (NEF, 2012).

### **Why the MMU focus on small VCS groups?**

Many of the existing MMU partners at the commencement of the CBC were small VCS groups, or groups who served to support them. Our partners, like others in the sector, were experiencing the impact of policy changes and economic constraints and were questioning their futures and role in the new environment. Although much of previous research charting change had been sector wide, it had started to identify the particular impact of changes on small VCS groups.

Research was also highlighting the important roles that these groups were playing in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable, whose situations were worsening under the 'New Austerity', with reduced benefits and services. Reports from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO, 2011) and Church Action on Poverty (2011) claimed that rising unemployment, cuts in services and higher living costs had adversely impacted on small voluntary groups and the communities they served.

Not only has the VCS sector been important for responding to needs and priorities, the reduction in the sector's and groups 'organisational capacity' (NEF 2012) has meant that

the organisations that are best placed to make the Big Society a reality are being stretched to breaking point', the people and social spaces where people came together to undertake community activity are disappearing.

(NEF, 2012)

The space that small community and voluntary sector groups provide within civil society to identify, respond to and meet unmet needs, often in innovative and creative ways, and to provide collective and empowering responses as an independent sector is also being threatened, as groups that have traditionally been an independent civil society sector are now being contracted to carry out what was previously the work of the state as part of their fight for survival.

## Methodology

The MMU CBC research programme adopted an approach that took into account this changing environment, seeking to work in participatory ways that would enable the partner organisations to reflect, evaluate and make strategic decisions regarding their future directions, as well as equipping them with research findings and skills, building their organisational capacities through the research process itself.

The importance of the process of evaluation and research as 'practical hermeneutics' was identified by Schwandt (2002) who argued for processes of interaction, critical dialogue and reflection to be carried out by the researcher, interacting with those at the heart of the evaluation to arrive at better understandings. However, our approach was not merely to obtain more accurate research and evaluation findings, but by applying the principles of community development, to ensure that the process was part of the capacity building of the organisation and its members.

The value of this approach has been indicated by Gaventa when discussing the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in global citizen action:

NGOs must (also) be able to strengthen their participatory processes for monitoring and assessing their own effectiveness and to use the results of such exercises for organisational learning.

(Gaventa, 2011: 255)

The Manchester research placements were carried out with two VCS support organisations: Communities North West (CNW), a small regional group working across the North West of England, and the Greater Manchester Council for Voluntary Organisations (GMCVO), a larger infrastructure organisation working across the Greater Manchester area. Both organisations wanted to utilise the research partnership to identify how best to improve their work with small voluntary and community organisations, by helping to identify needs, trends and good practices.

The research with GMCVO focused on 'Project Towpath', a Community Grants programme that sought to support smaller Third Sector organisations with close links to excluded and disadvantaged communities to undertake first engagement activities with people excluded from education and employment. At the time of the study, Towpath had

funded more than 60 different groups from over 170 applicants. The research was entitled 'Was it Worth it?' reflecting the need to explore whether the grants programme was of value to the small groups. The project set out to identify the 'cost' to GMCVO as well as identifying whether there were benefits from the programme for the organisations' future development.

The researcher was based at the organisation and worked closely with the project team to identify the most appropriate research methods. He described his formative role as follows:

there was a continuous process of engagement and interaction between the researcher and GMCVO, particularly with the staff most closely working on Project Towpath ... so much of the research undertaken can be seen as ethnographic in nature, using this day-to-day experience to build up a more complete picture of the ways in which the host organisation functioned with respect to the community it supports. Therefore, it was possible to use the experience in a more responsive, formative way, and to develop understandings and knowledge that would have benefits beyond the immediate object of study ... a process of engagement, dialogue and reflection informed the development of the research design and methodology.

(Arrowsmith and Packham, 2010: 3)

The second placement took place between July 2011 and February 2012, almost 18 months after the Towpath research, during a period of unprecedented change within the VCS. This was primarily brought about by the factors discussed earlier, changed government priorities, cuts in public spending and so in grants to community groups, coupled with increasing demand from increasingly impoverished communities for community resources. The research was carried out with Community North West (CNW), a small but vibrant regional organisation that had identified the 'resilience' focus. The research was to explore the changes taking place within the many small VCS groups (with annual funding under £50,000 per year, across the North West), and to identify any strategies that were being adopted to improve their sustainability. As with the GMCVO project, the research drew on the organisations' networks and relationships with small CVS organisations. The responses from 215 groups (70% with incomes of less than £10,000, 15% with no income) showed the diversity and fragility of these groups as well as helping to indicate the requirements needed for their resilience and survival.

The CNW research was carried out by a community development worker with experience of running a regional Third Sector infrastructure organisation, who also had a working relationship with the research partner and was familiar with many local groups and issues. As a result, the researcher had an 'insider' and participatory approach. As in the GMCVO research, the researcher was based with the agency for most of the placement, having ongoing discussions with the workers about the best ways to obtain views and ensure representation.

A steering group was established of management committee members and other key stakeholders and this steering group was consulted at regular points through the research process. A series of Resilience seminars were held at which members of community groups devised the questionnaire to be utilised. The draft data from the questionnaires and from follow-up interviews were then discussed at a Resilience Conference, held jointly between CNW, MMU, Community Development Exchange (CDX), the National Coalition for Independent Action (NCIA), the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and Voice4change.

In addition, a third project with particular relevance here was carried out by the National Coalition for Independent Action (NCIA). This Inquiry into 'Local Activism and Dissent' (Waterhouse and Scott, 2013) mapped alternative approaches more widely. Whilst this was a national rather than a more local exercise, the research was also conducted in participative ways, negotiating the research framework with the NCIA, and providing feedback on formative findings to the NCIA national network and discussing possible actions. This project used semi-structured interview techniques clearly based in an emancipatory approach (Humphries *et al.*, 2000) reflective of the principles of the Inquiry organisation (NCIA). The researchers described the data-gathering interview process as using 'reflective observations situated in the field' taking place in 'a spirit of reciprocity and praxis, to open up liberating dialogic action. Ideological and personal positions were made visible during discussions in order to prompt mutual collaboration, challenge and insights' (Waterhouse and Scott, 2013: 6).

## Emerging insights

Over the length of the CBC, the insider, formative research approach has enabled the emergence of pictures of emerging of trends within the sector. From the initial research with GMCVO, the notion of developing 'organisational capacity' amongst smaller Third Sector groups emerged as a key – and inherently problematic – aspect of the research.

The second research placement further explored the role of CVS support and facilitation in the context of dramatic funding cuts to the CVS groups in question and their support organisations. The 'Surviving Thriving or Dying, resilience and small community groups in the north west of England' (Davidson and Packham, 2012) research showed that not only was there an increased demand for the services and resources provided by small VCS groups, particularly those working with 'disadvantaged' groups, but also that crucially these groups were themselves struggling to survive.

The research indicated that many groups were dependent on the role of local and regional infrastructure organisations to provide information, and training, citing their local authority as being the largest provider of support. Of the 215 groups, 85 identified as specifically working with disadvantaged groups (e.g. disabled people). Of these groups, 80% said that they expected demand for their services to increase (compared to 68% for all respondents). In addition, 78% of all respondents said they had been affected by local authority cuts in funding, and as a result 51% said it was likely that their group would close within the next three years.

The findings show that the groups most likely to survive, and to be most resilient, were those involved in self-help, relying on their own volunteers and having their own income. In the main, these were groups with incomes of less than £10,000 pa (126 respondents). However, these groups also valued professional support and small amounts of resourcing, sometimes shared, such as, for example, shared use of premises or facilities (although this type of interdependence could often make small groups more vulnerable, depending upon the fortunes of their hosts, see Jones' chapter in this volume).

The groups who emerged as being most at risk, or least resilient, were those who were providing services, particularly services for 'vulnerable groups', having paid staff and relying significantly on external funding. The findings also showed that small VCS groups were taking for granted and valuing the provision of information, training and other support services that had been provided by organisations which were themselves at risk, for example, Councils for Voluntary Service such as GMCVO, as discussed above, and CNW.

## **Resilience in groups and individuals**

The research has focussed on what facilitated groups' and individuals' sustainability in response to the changing circumstances of small

CVS groups and the increasing pressures being placed on them to support communities and their members, experiencing increasing hardship. This coincided with wider academic attempts to explore and explain what was taking place and to identify strategies for survival or resilience.

This notion of 'resilience' was being applied to communities' and community groups' abilities to survive or thrive in response to the current socio/political/economic climate. The concept had been adopted from work in the geographical sciences and work on mental illness, initially being developed to understand and support communities' and individuals' abilities to respond to (rapid) change (such as environmental disasters or episodes of mental ill health) focussing on the ability to 'bounce back' after major life-challenging events.

The concept has been imbedded in the UK government's approach to community self-help as the Cabinet Office National Strategic Framework on Community states: 'This programme is part of the Government's "Big Society" commitment to reduce the barriers that prevent people from being able to help themselves and be more resilient to shocks' (Cabinet Office, 2011: 3).

As expressed by Ungar, 'there was time not long ago when interventions were exclusively focussed on combating disorder. The shift to building resilience at both the level of individuals and communities is more than just semantic' (2008: 36).

Features of resilience that are common in relation to individuals, communities and groups are that intervention seeks to develop perseverance, problem-solving skills and resourcefulness, a positive outlook (hope), a sense of purposefulness and confidence, autonomy and self-efficacy and not only a sense of control and social competence but also sociability (drawn from Krovetz, 1999; Ungar, 2004, 2008; Holland, 2007; Wilding, 2011). However, many resilience models have focussed on the individual's or the group's survival, responding to the impacts of these wider problems. There has been less focus on the wider potential for challenging and changing the underlying causes.

This could be said to be the case with the projects outlined above, for example, the 'Was it Worth it' research, exploring the small grants programme, was deemed a success in relation to helping to

create an evidence base for the potential involvement of smaller organizations in complex quality assured public service delivery contracts.

(GMCVO email, 2012)

This had been about helping groups to adapt to a competitive environment rather than enabling them either to have an independent and unique role within their communities or to be creative and challenging.

Fitzsimons *et al.* (2011) suggest that for groups to be resilient, like individuals they need confidence, a sense of purpose and 'pro-social bonding', that is, links to other groups both for support and resourcing, problem solving and empowerment. However, our research shows that pressures on groups in relation to increased demands for services and reduced resources have resulted in increased tensions between competing groups. This has, therefore, been reducing the potential for partnership and effective communication so making the groups less sustainable and resilient.

The notion of resilience also draws heavily on assumptions that individuals and groups 'should be able' to have the qualities required to 'bounce back' and that if they don't they are vulnerable, often leading to value judgements about those deemed to be least resilient and potentially further reinforcing stereotypes of individuals and communities. There are parallels here with approaches that focus upon 'blaming the victims', if they fail to cope with increasingly problematic circumstances. This links closely too with notions of personal 'agency and community strength' (Harrison, 2013). Such approaches to individual and community resilience emphasise the potential for survival, and often fail to explore the structural causes of 'shock' such as the impact of cuts in welfare benefits and services, the unequal distribution of power and the unequal ability to survive and respond. As Harrison (2013) discusses when exploring changes in women's experiences in Newhaven, emphasis on the positive aspects of resilience is damaging if this overlooks the long-term impacts of poverty and structural change.

Whether using a pathologising or strength-based approach to resilience, writers such as Harrison (2013) have suggested that the emphasis on resilience is still problematic, as it 'may overemphasize the ability of people to "bounce back" and undervalue the hidden costs of resilience, especially those with gendered dimensions; and that it may be associated with policy prescriptions that shift responsibility for dealing with crisis away from the public sphere' (Harrison, 2013).

## **Challenging notions of resilience**

As a result of the changing context of our research, the acquisition of a growing body of knowledge, the growing awareness that the VCS

sector was threatened with dying as opposed to thriving (Davidson and Packham, 2012) and our growing unease with focussing attention on resilience rather than political analysis and challenge, MMU joined with the NCIA in a participatory 'Inquiry'. This was to identify positive actions/and alternative responses that were being taken within the sector – identified as being 'activism and dissent' (Waterhouse and Scott, 2013).

The Inquiry explored these issues with representatives of 76 groups to identify what activism was taking place, and how, and the ways in which the action was and could be supported. On the basis of analysing the interviews and discussions with those involved, Waterhouse and Scott summarised as follows:

Much social action locally is described as fragmented, fragile and small scale, with small numbers of people at its heart. Alliances are mostly made up of individuals not groups, based on informal links and with some members fighting for their own entitlements, as well as for ideological beliefs and community needs... There appears to be a growing movement, away from service provision and capacity building, in favour of mutual aid, self-help, self-sufficiency and co-operation.

(Waterhouse and Scott, 2013:2)

However, different types of dissenters were also identified:

- 'active dissenters';
- those involved in 'subversive dissent';
- those who had removed themselves from the 'system' and were the 'self-helpers' who were self-reliant;
- 'potential dissenters' and lastly a group termed;
- 'colluders' or 'collaborators'.

Reflecting on this last group, Waterhouse and Scott concluded that 'if you remain silent or inactive against injustice, then you are essentially conspiring with it' (Waterhouse and Scott, 2013: 29).

Likewise, Waterhouse and Scott identified that there were particular types of activist involved in dissent. There were those who were involved in 'conflict and challenge' and might be involved in collective political activism against the state and government polices (e.g. Disability Rights groups). There were those who were engaged in activism through 'collaboration' (e.g. with the state by taking on the provision of state

services) and, lastly, those who may have been acting as 'individual activists' taking action whenever possible.

### **The way forward?**

The discussions above demonstrate that the MMU CBC had the benefit of being able to change the emphasis of the focus of our research over the five-year life of the CBC, reflecting our emerging findings and associated changes in the VCS. The emphasis throughout had been on using participatory methods to facilitate ownership of the research and its findings by the participating partner groups, and to support them to give voice to participants, either directly through their increased knowledge, confidence and sense of identity, or by strengthening the case for their work through research evidence-based practice.

Although the latter work challenged the shift towards resilience-focussed approaches, there were common themes that have emerged.

All of the research findings alluded to the importance of having a voice and influence, through the development of self-confidence and an increased awareness of the causes of discrimination and oppression. For survival and an increased ability to influence change, the importance of collective action was also identified, through networking, co-operation and building alliances.

To facilitate awareness both of identity and the potential for change for individuals and groups, the importance of finding 'homes' and 'spaces' for critical thinking and action was highlighted too. In all cases, such spaces had been skilfully facilitated by researchers, enabling participatory practice and critical dialogue and the co-production of knowledge to take place. These have been utilised by the agencies concerned in both formative and summative ways. To be able to mitigate and influence external factors, these 'spaces' can importantly provide the potential to create innovation and alternatives (Wilding, 2011; Hillman and Blume 2011, for Urban Forum).

The importance of the independence of the VCS was identified, in line with Seabrook's view that small groups may be better placed to withstand increasing economic hardships stating that 'there is a chance that some small community groups may be insulated from the cuts due to their independence from public funding – small organisations are resourceful, used to running on a shoestring and operating outside public service delivery' (Seabrook, 2011). This, however, relies on groups co-operating and increasing their protective and supportive capacities

through engagement in meaningful participation (e.g. via volunteering, and by affecting decisions, bringing about change (Wilding, 2011)).

VCS organisations and groups also need to develop their own resourcefulness, sharing and finding new sources of support, often from new partners and funding streams. The NEF report *New Austerity* (NEF, 2012) makes three recommendations here:

- recognise, start with and build on local assets;
- value collaboration over competition (e.g. co-production);
- provide training and capacity building.

This may all involve finding and working with allies. For example, the NCIA research identified an important potential ally within the trade union movement. This echoed the findings from research elsewhere in the Cluster, 'Swords of Justice and Civic Pillars, research with the Trades Union Congress identifying models of good practice in relation to trade union/community collaborations: the case for greater engagement between British trade unions and community organisations' (Trades Union Congress, 2010). Meanwhile, in Manchester, the research process has hopefully also shown that the university can ally with the work of their research partners in the VCS, helping to provide spaces for critical thinking through such research projects, including through providing evidence to support groups to make the case for the importance of their work.

Nevertheless, though, moves towards reducing the role of the state and increasing the role of small VCS organisations remains problematic. The sector itself, whilst struggling for its survival, has been pushed into relationships that challenge the independent nature of civil society itself. The sector is increasingly being left in the position of being divided into 'campaigners' – often individuals in loose alliances – whilst those directly affected by cuts and austerity are being left to confront the causes of community hardship and societal upheaval. Meanwhile, co-opted voluntary and community groups have been remaining silent or distracted from their real purpose (Waterhouse and Scott, 2013) struggling to survive in the context of funding regimes, which move groups into competitive rather than collaborative relationships.

Voluntary and community groups have been essential parts of a vibrant Third Sector, and civil society more generally, places where independent action has been developed creatively, where necessary challenging the state as well as the market. This role may be threatened

by the shifting boundaries between the state, the market and civil society more widely.

The recent popularity of the notion of resilience, although potentially enabling groups to identify their strengths and work collaboratively, has come at a time when the government has been shifting responsibility towards the individual and community – away from the state. As Harrison has argued:

the expansion of resilience discourse has emerged at the same time as strengthened ideologies of individual responsibility and active citizenship, and policy positions that favour the withdrawal of the public provision of support for those who are confronting poverty.

(Harrison, 2013: 110)

This poses a challenge to academics and practitioners such as those who have been involved in government-funded programmes to promote active citizenship such as the Active Learning for Active Citizenship and Take Part programmes, which were the forerunners of this Research Cluster. We have attempted to use the resources made available through these programmes to enable VCS groups to engage in collective dialogue and action, and, where necessary, to challenge local and national state structures. However, with a different emphasis and priorities, these approaches, rather than being seen as a complement to the state, can be used to replace the role of the state, placing the emphasis for meeting individual and community needs with local volunteers and activists.

Likewise, what are the implications for community development? Whilst the MMU CBC was not overtly a community development project, its research approach met the community development criteria of participation, informal education and anti-discriminatory practice.

Although the research was not carried out in many cases by community development workers, the researchers were, however, appointed because they showed a commitment to and understanding of community development practice. Thus the researchers were well aware of some of the dilemmas involved in community development, including the dilemmas involved in coping with varying approaches and perspectives (Shaw, 2011). The work of the MMU CBC research team can be seen to have moved from an initial engagement with explorations of the technical community development role (GMCVO), through working professionally with individuals and groups and on towards particular types of

radical approaches being advocated by the NCIA study (Waterhouse and Scott, 2013).

As summarised by Waterhouse and Scott (2013):

activists reach for the approach that suits them, ideologically and personally. Those suited to active dissent and challenge, mutual aid and informal relationships, will gravitate to self-organising alliances, (others may be more suited) to collaborative activism within a pre-scriptive institutional framework. Community development agencies may offer either approach, dependent on the political preferences of that agency and individual development workers.

(2013: 27)

We set out to ensure that this Cluster's research partnerships would facilitate critical explorations of these questions and the associated options involved. This would enable us to contribute to empowering organisations and groups to develop their own strategies for pursuing social justice agendas, despite living through a time of increasing demoralisation and social fragmentation more generally.

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# Conclusions: Futures for Community–University Research Partnerships in Challenging Times?

*Marjorie Mayo, Zoraida Mendiwelo-Bendek and Carol Packham*

The resources that were made available through the Research Cluster provided much appreciated opportunities to explore the potential benefits of community–university partnerships. As previous chapters in this book have demonstrated, these resources enabled researchers to build upon previous approaches to research partnerships with communities, including previous models and approaches to participative action research (Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991; Estella *et al.*, 2000; Tandon, 2005; Hart *et al.*, 2007). Community-based research partnerships were to be participative and inclusive, sharing knowledge through processes of dialogue and firmly committed to the pursuit of social justice agendas. Parallels emerge in addition, in terms of building upon previously developed models and approaches to active citizenship learning, social solidarity and community development both in Britain and internationally (Freire, 1972; Fryer, 2010; Laginder *et al.*, 2013).

This concluding chapter starts by summarising varying ways in which these differing research projects have been contributing to community development. This sets the framework within which to highlight some of the challenges and dilemmas that have been emerging, as a result, pointing to some of the limitations as well as the potential value to be added by community–university partnerships. Meanwhile, in parallel, the research can also serve to highlight some of the challenges and dilemmas inherent in public policies to promote active citizenship and community development more generally, as these have been shifting over time.

Having reflected upon some of the limitations, the chapter concludes by focusing, conversely, upon potentially positive implications for the future. Public resources can still make a difference, when provided through democratically accountable partnerships, whether these

are resources for community–university research, and/or for the promotion of active citizenship and community development more generally. Alongside the experiences of the Research Cluster, there are models to be shared from elsewhere, both from Britain (Hart *et al.*, 2007; Robinson *et al.*, 2012) and internationally (Hall, 2009; Tandon and Hall, 2012).

### Differing types of research contributions

In summary then, the Research Cluster offered much-valued opportunities to work in partnership with Third Sector organisations and community groups concerned with learning for active citizenship and with community development overall. With these research resources, there was unique scope to build on the work of Active Learning for Active Citizenship and Take Part, across the three areas (Lincoln, London and Manchester), each with their own specialisms more specifically. These included focuses upon working with young people (including working with young people inter/multi-generationally) working with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, working with faith-based organisations and working with community arts, media- and sports-based initiatives.

Community research, community development and community-based learning for active citizenship are separate but linked and potentially overlapping spheres, as previous studies have already illustrated (Goodson and Phillimore, 2012). On the basis of the Cluster's experiences, these potentially overlapping spheres include the following:

- Research can enable organisations, groups and communities to map needs, identifying where new or expanded interventions could be required, whether in terms of public policy interventions, or in terms of community-based interventions, or both. This type of research may combine both qualitative and quantitative methods, including offering scope for participative approaches. More specifically, research can also map particular types of initiatives and practices, identifying ideal types of different approaches to strengthening Third Sector capacities overall. This type of research in the Cluster included the mapping of different types of 'hosting' arrangements in the Third Sector, for instance, as explored in the chapter on this topic.
- In addition, research can critically explore the impact of public policy interventions on individuals, groups, organisations and communities, testing out policy makers' Theories of Change as these are

being applied in practice. The chapter reflecting upon research into the impacts of government and Third Sector initiatives to promote community-based learning for active citizenship, the subject of the second chapter, is a case in point. Here, too, a range of research methods may be appropriate (including document analysis, surveys, focus groups and participant observation). There are potentially important implications here. Research findings can provide the evidence for feedback, contributing to public policy debates, as well as providing feedback directly to Third Sector providers. The case studies included the Workers Educational Association South Wales and an English intermediary organisation provider, both of which organisations worked in partnership with the researchers to explore these questions.

- Research can critically examine strategies to strengthen self-organisation in the Third Sector, more generally too. The chapters provide a number of examples of this type of research, including research that was supporting self-organisation amongst particular groups and communities and social movements more widely. There are potential lessons from particular approaches here, such as lessons on ways in which the arts, media and sports can contribute to strengthening self-organisation and community development overall.
- More specifically, research can also identify tools and practices for evaluation, in order to demonstrate the value of Third Sector contributions. Systematic evidence has become more and more relevant, as organisations and groups have faced increasing pressures, attempting to convince funders and policy makers to provide them with resources despite a deteriorating funding context, in the current age of austerity. Evaluation tools and practices emerged as items of particular concern for Third Sector partners – unsurprisingly given this wider policy context. As several chapters have demonstrated in their varying ways, however, there have been major challenges for researchers here, working with organisations and groups to move beyond tick-box types of approaches, aiming to develop evaluation tools that would actually measure the real value of their interventions, focusing upon sustainable impacts over time.
- Finally, research can contribute to facilitating reflective practice, supporting Third Sector organisations in developing strategies to analyse their own contributions more effectively, identifying ways of strengthening practice, surviving in challenging times without losing sight of their overall missions and ethos in the process.

As the experiences of the Research Cluster illustrate, these varying types of research can each, in their differing ways, draw upon community development approaches, working in partnership to support Third Sector organisations, community groups and social movements. It has been research to facilitate reflective practice that has demonstrated the most powerful long-term potential, though, moving beyond attempts to identify tool kits (however necessary) to strengthen 'research mindedness' in the Third Sector, with enhanced abilities to identify ways in which research could contribute, together with enhanced capacities to undertake research directly and/or to commission research successfully themselves.

### **Emerging challenges and dilemmas**

As it has already been suggested, community research, community development and community-based learning for active citizenship are separate but linked and potentially overlapping spheres. Whilst they may be mutually re-enforcing, there may also be tensions between them. As Goodson and Phillimore have pointed out, community research involves challenges as well as opportunities, including theoretical, methodological and practical challenges, with varying levels of involvement, empowerment, participation and impacts on people, policies and practices (Goodson and Phillimore, 2012). The research processes that have been explored in the previous chapters similarly reveal a number of issues and dilemmas. There have been balances to be negotiated, taking account of the requirements of the research overall (including the particular requirements and the research rigour that students have needed to demonstrate for the successful completion of their PhDs) – whilst maintaining sensitivity to organisations' changing priorities. There have been particular challenges here, as organisations and groups have needed to respond with flexibility and creativity, in the face of shifting policy frameworks and diminishing funding opportunities.

Another – and in some cases related – set of dilemmas and challenges emerged, when researchers set about negotiating their differing positions whether as insiders or outsiders – or as somewhere in between, in research contexts that were effectively combining elements of both. To produce convincing findings, researchers have had to stand back, on occasion, to question accepted norms and practices, stimulating critical reflection across the community–university divide. There are examples to illustrate the potential benefits of a relatively distanced position, bringing fresh perspectives from outside the organisation in question.

But there are also examples to illustrate the potential benefits to be gained from the insights of relative insiders. Neither position emerged as free of tensions, as it turned out though, each requiring constant reflectivity, mutual trust and ongoing support (including support from supervisors as well as from colleagues in Third Sector organisations and groups).

The importance of developing these types of partnerships, based on mutual trust and shared understandings, became increasingly evident, over the life of the Research Cluster. The changing policy context posed more and more challenges requiring flexibility and creativity, both for Third Sector organisations and agencies and indeed for universities and research more generally. As a number of chapters have illustrated, Third Sector organisations faced further and further pressures in terms of their sustainability. And most importantly they faced increasing dilemmas, holding onto their missions and ethos in the context of increasing marketisation. Reflexivity was centrally important in this regard, as organisations struggled with the challenges of survival – without losing sight of their own organisational aims and values.

Meanwhile, universities were facing their own challenges, both in terms of their funding situations and in terms of their overall missions and ethos. There was evidence of increasing awareness of the importance of social responsibility in general, including increasing awareness amongst universities of the importance of facing outwards and demonstrating their impacts, in terms of engaging with their wider communities (Robinson *et al.*, 2012). This was sometimes in competition with governments' concerns to prioritise research of direct relevance for the world of business, rather than prioritising research for social as well as for economic objectives. Despite this official emphasis upon universities' wider engagement (whether for economic and or for social priorities), the reality was more contradictory, however. Over this period, there was overall evidence of retrenchment, as universities cut back on activities that were less readily fundable, such as many of their community education initiatives.

As Alan Tuckett, former Chief Executive of the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education, has argued, learning for citizenship and belonging should surely be key to 'the achievement of the Big Society' that the 'coalition government in Britain has put at the centre of its social policy agenda' (Tuckett, 2010: xv). When he had first come into adult education university, extramural programmes had been flourishing, Tuckett continued, along with a range of initiatives to 'support working-class communities to use learning to secure social change'.

Meanwhile, in Brazil, Paulo Freire had been developing his work on literacy as 'cultural action for freedom' (Tuckett, 2010: xv). Since then, however, much of the infrastructure had been eroded, including a large proportion of university community education departments – although a number of specialist bodies were still managing to survive along with the Workers Educational Association. And university researchers were coming under increasing pressure to focus on producing the most academically prestigious outputs – such as articles in peer-reviewed journals – rather than upon producing policy reports for the Third Sector and for communities and social movements more generally.

There would seem to be parallels here with some of the tensions that were being experienced in the Third Sector, as outlined in the first chapter, with contradictory expectations and pressures from policy makers and from funders, tensions that increased significantly, following the change of government in 2010. The Third Sector was being encouraged to compete for service delivery contracts whilst facilitating the promotion of the so-called 'Big Society', filling the widening gaps between people's needs and the services available to meet these needs – against the background of cuts that were resulting in the effective dismantling of the Third Sector's own infrastructure, as previous chapters have also illustrated.

In summary, some of the limits and dilemmas inherent in community–university research partnerships were being demonstrated then, as well as some of the possibilities. Research had potentially important contributions to bring to these relationships, but this was only part of the story, as research-based evidence revealed, in parallel. So what might be the implications for the future of community–university partnerships in the current context?

### **Futures for community–university partnerships in challenging times?**

Despite the limitations and dilemmas outlined above, the Cluster provided valuable – and valued – resources to strengthen community research for community development. Building partnerships based upon mutual understanding and trust could prove challenging. But this was absolutely not to conclude that these were not challenges that merited addressing. Again there are parallels here with research findings about the challenges of participating in varying government initiatives to promote active citizenship, community engagement and community

development more generally. As Chapter 1 began by suggesting, these programmes have been inherently problematic, with increasing tensions especially when top-down approaches have focused upon attempting to persuade communities to 'do it for themselves' in response to a retreating state.

As publications such as 'In and Against the State' have been arguing over the years (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1970), active citizens and communities have campaigned for different approaches to the provision of welfare and well-being. The state should be less paternalistic and less punitive it has been argued, for example, working in more participative ways. But this was not at all to imply that the state should retreat altogether. Stephane Hessel – himself described as an inspiration for the Occupy movement, author of 'Time for Outrage', epitomising faith in the future of a new century – has argued in comparable vein, summarising the demands of more contemporary social movements. As he explained, 'the present generation is not asking governments to disappear but to change the way they deal with people's needs' (Willsher, *The Guardian*, 2013: 23).

The term 'In and Against the State' has similarly been applied in recent discussions of popular education and community development (Crowther, 2013), highlighting the ways in which the state can support the powerful against the vulnerable as well as the ways in which the state can provide resources and legislate against discrimination and oppression. To what extent, then, could popular education and the state be compatible, in Crowther's view? What could be done 'to maximise the potential for popular education to contribute to a socially just and democratic society?' (Crowther, 2013: 259). How might popular educators challenge the market interests undermining the state – alongside those concerned with community development more generally? And how might they defend the provision of state welfare in a period of governmental retreat, reinvigorating the public sphere in the process? The key, Crowther suggested, related to their commitment 'to engage the deep well of knowledge and experience of ordinary people – the victims rather than designers of the present day economic calamity' (Crowther, 2013: 267). Whilst their knowledge was essential for socially just solutions, he continued though, 'learning from the dispossessed is not an uncritical or uncomplicated process' as Paulo Freire had similarly argued (Crowther, 2013: 267). This echoes with the findings from a number of the previous chapters. Community research has been requiring creativity as well as commitment, negotiating the tensions inherent in community research partnerships.

Whatever the tensions though, the need for building these types of partnership has been increasing in the current policy context. Marketisation has been posing increasing challenges for the Third Sector, along with increasing challenges for individuals and groups, the so-called 'squeezed middle' as well as the most disadvantaged and oppressed. As Crowther concluded then, social progressives 'have to defend the role of the state in promoting welfare for those groups who most need it and are least able to defend it' (Crowther, 2013: 271) whilst challenging the ways in which unequal social relations are being reproduced, including the ways in which public policies have been stigmatising and blaming the most vulnerable in society.

As Fraser has argued more generally, 'public and private institutions in contemporary liberal democratic societies (tend) to reproduce sexual, racial and class inequality by applying standards and rules in the same way to all who come under their purview' (Young, 2008: 280), regardless of their unequal structural positions. Contemporary liberal democratic societies such as Britain do not constitute level playing fields, far from it. So strategies to promote increasing democracy and social justice have needed to address the following dimensions of inequality, in Fraser's view by focussing upon:

- issues of redistribution (to address socio-economic inequalities)
- issues of recognition (challenging the hidden and not so hidden injuries of class, race and gender, such as social and cultural marginalisation and the lack of social respect) and
- issues of participation (challenging marginalisation and exclusion from political processes including denial of 'the chance to press first-order justice claims in a given community', the right to rights and the right to claim those rights and to claim new rights). (Fraser, 2008: 280)

Issues of participation, including participation in the research processes themselves, have particular relevance here, representing the concerns to be addressed by community educators and by those concerned with community development more generally. As Sen has put the case (Sen, 1992), people need capabilities in order to achieve effective functioning as citizens, capabilities that can be developed through education, amongst other ways. There are agendas here for those concerned with community education and community development, as previous chapters have demonstrated, facilitating and enabling people to find their voices effectively, as individuals, groups and communities, working

alongside others, including social movements, committed to the pursuit of social justice. Community research partnerships can provide support, in tandem, strengthening processes of critical analysis and reflexive practice.

### **So what next?**

Although successive governments have expressed commitments to strengthening the Third Sector in varying ways, these are challenging times when it comes to the provision of public resources, challenges that seem likely to remain in some form or another, at least for the immediate future. So voluntary and community sector organisations and groups can be expected to face continuing pressures to provide evidence to support their cases for funding. They will, in addition, need to convince their own management committees, members, supporters and service users, demonstrating genuine accountability to those that they serve. Meanwhile, as it has already been suggested, universities and other research-based organisations face continuing challenges too. Funding may be expected to be similarly restricted in the coming period. So the case for continuing resources needs to be made, drawing upon the evidence from research.

Previous chapters have illustrated some of the potential benefits. Third Sector organisations have valued research partnerships for a number of reasons including their contributions to community development overall. Universities and university-based researchers have similarly benefited, as previous chapters have also illustrated. As it has already been suggested, universities are also under increasing pressure to demonstrate their wider relevance, including their social as well as their economic impacts. And students are under increasing pressure to find ways to improve their employability, looking to the future when they complete their degrees. This means that there is growing interest in community–university partnerships, especially when these offer opportunities for internships and for dissertation projects to be undertaken in students' chosen career fields. When supervised effectively, such research projects can provide valuable learning opportunities, at undergraduate and particularly at postgraduate levels, as well as producing useful outcomes for the partner agencies involved.

There is increasing evidence concerning the value of such partnerships, from the Science Shops of Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Ulster through to the Community University Partnership Programme, pioneering such partnerships at the University of Brighton

(Hart *et al.*, 2007). As the report sponsored by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation similarly demonstrated, there are significant potential benefits for universities in the process, as well as benefits for communities, with particular benefits for students gaining relevant experience for their future careers, as well as benefits in terms of enriching the curricula more generally (Robinson *et al.*, 2012). Universities are potentially important community assets, this report reflected, having much to contribute as well as much to gain from such partnerships. These collaborations had demonstrated the importance of the partnership processes involved, the report argued, as well as the outcomes – ‘using approaches and methods that encourage reciprocity and respect’ (Robinson *et al.*, 2012: 4). But universities could do more, including doing more to stimulate and promote debate, striving to ensure that the voices of the most disadvantaged could be heard and taken into account, as well as the voices of the less disadvantaged. Public policy needed to support these approaches, the report concluded, both in terms of providing resources and in terms of addressing institutional and professional academic barriers to participation and partnerships.

There are lessons to be learnt from international experiences as well as from experiences here in Britain (Goodson and Phillimore, 2012). As Lucio-Villegas explained, in his presentation to the Fifth Living Knowledge Conference in 2012, for instance, the Catedra Paulo Freire emerged from a partnership agreement between the University of Seville and the Paulo Freire Institute of Spain, an organisation consisting of individuals and social movements. The aim had been to promote dialogue and participatory research.

In their Framework for Action for 2012–2016, UNESCO’s co-chairs on Community-based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, Rajesh Tandon and Budd Hall summarised the importance of such higher education institutions’ contributions, emphasising the importance of generating global knowledge to address global challenges. The Framework for Action drew upon experiences across continents, including experiences exchanged between colleagues from different universities through the Global Alliance for Community-Engaged Research as well as those exchanged between partners at national levels (Tandon and Hall, 2012).

In conclusion, there are experiences to share internationally then, as well as experiences to share more locally. As this collection demonstrates, research can strengthen Third Sector organisations and groups concerned with community organisation and community development, enabling them to face current challenges and promote active citizenship

and social justice agendas more effectively for the future. Research-based evidence can provide the basis from which to compile convincing bids for resources. And most importantly, participatory approaches to research can strengthen the Third Sector's ability to develop its own proactive strategies, rooted in cycles of action and reflection. The resources required to support these types of initiatives are relatively minor, especially when set in the context of the costs of failing to provide such support – including the costs of failing to address the barriers to participation in a society that aims to be sustainably democratic. Support for community-engaged research needs to form part of future policy agendas then, along with support for community engagement and community development for social justice more widely.

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