



Dear Reader

Congratulations to Glasgow! Glasgow will host the 2014 Commonwealth Games. Marion Lacey was clearly first off the starting block when she raised this in her contribution.

For this edition of ARVAC's Bulletin I have asked knowledgeable colleagues from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to tell us about the situation where they are. With different administrations in all these locations and different legislation in some the possibility was obvious that the voluntary and community sector was developing in different directions. The contributions in this Bulletin appear to support this suggestion. So when the Prime Minister says referring to the voluntary and community sector: "*I believe that there is no problem in this country that can't be solved by the people of this country.*" Which country does he mean

and does it include his constituency? The divergence of voluntary and community sector activity in these locations is already leading to "*a common voice ... in direct opposition to Westminster*" regarding some issues in Scotland and is supposed to lead to a "*coherent voice for the people of Wales*". Even if we have at the moment a "clear policy framework for the shape of the future voluntary and community sector in England" we do not seem to have one for Britain. I suggest that the implications of this should be discussed and that we in The Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector should be actively leading the debate.

I am also delighted to use this opportunity to introduce to you a new exciting development for ARVAC. After much hard work we have now been able to make our re-

search database available to be searched online. The database includes 3,000 entries covering: community-based studies; relevant academic and institutional research; advice on how to carry out research; policy briefings, guides and directories; reports on research in progress and at present covers the period from 1978 to early 2006. While the database and the search engine are still in their infancy we are extremely excited as we believe that with the help of practitioners it can become the launch pad for a truly remarkable resource. Do visit http://www.arvac.org.uk/docs/info_service.html tell us what you think and start sending us references which are currently not included.

Jurgen Grotz
(editor)

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Is there a British Voluntary and Community Sector.

What do you think? Write for our next edition!

Cathy Pharoah

The State of the Sector(s)

A clear policy framework for the shape of the future voluntary and community sector in England has been put in place over the last few years. In some ways it is attempting to address the development needs of both the largest service-providing charities and the smaller local community organisations, recognising their difference. But have we got the right policy environment to ensure the sector's future success as a driver of innovation, change, user advocacy and local sustainability?

The major landmarks to future sector development are not hard to identify. The Office of the Third Sector was created in May 2006, placing responsibility for sector right at the heart of government in the Cabinet Office, and demonstrating the importance attached to its role in government policy and service delivery.

The new Charities Act reached the statute books in November 06, described by the Charity Commission as *a major piece of charity legislation, reflecting both the changes in society and the charity sector over the last decade. Essentially, it will set charitiesenabling them to adapt to new needs in society.*

Only time will tell how far-reaching the Act's effects will be. It provides public legitimacy for a whole range of new charitable purposes in practice increasingly accepted by the Commission over the last few years. This is important because the new purposes embrace some of today's most pressing concerns including citizenship and community development, human rights and environmental protection.

Already there are signs that the 'green sector' is developing a stronger voice, and regeneration charities have also been growing rapidly and strongly. There is little evidence yet, however, of the emergence of a stronger citizen and community sector. Although the Act has avoided a principled stand in contentious areas such as the status of public benefit in relation to private schools and hospitals, so their huge tax privileges will remain. But there is no compensatory charity tax benefit or 'credit' for smaller organizations. The Act's main benefit for small charities was that the Commission registration threshold was raised from £1000 to £5000. So how do the emerging environments for larger and smaller charities compare?

Future environment for large service-providing charities

For the large service-providing organizations the new environment is likely to be both more demanding as well as potentially rewarding. Transparency and accountability requirements will not go away, and charities' performance will increasingly be brought into the strong light of day. For example, Guidestar is providing comparative financial and other data on all registered charities. The Commission's Standard Information Returns mandatory for charities with incomes over £1 million are likely to be increasingly used as part of funding assessments, while information intermediaries such as New Philanthropy Capital will have a growing role in guiding donor decision-making. New consumer watchdogs such as the 'Intelligent Giving' website will ensure that any evidence of poor practice is brought to the giving public, and the Fundraising Standards Board will be keeping a watching brief over fundraising activities.

Delivery is also likely to come under greater scrutiny. The last few years have seen landmark government funding programmes aimed at building sector capacity, including primarily Capacitybuilders and Futurebuilders. Smaller programmes include the Adventure Capital Fund to encourage the use of loan and investment finance to build social enterprise activities. Experience of these programmes is showing that capacity-building is a slower and more challenging process than realized. The role of local authorities has been put under the National Audit Office spotlight, and it has called for improvements in local funding relationships, such as longer contracts, to help bolster sector capacity. Government will be looking for results from these initiatives, and in a tighter economic environment over the next few years, further sector investment may depend on evidence of success. We may already have passed the high water mark of sector investment.

Future environment for local and community organisations

Smaller local and community organizations may escape some of these pressures, partly because of restricted opportunity to participate in new opportunities. Such neglect of the smaller organizations may come at a cost. New research indicates that the sector is indeed focusing more on service delivery than innovation than it was a decade ago. And the recent statement from Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations that local authorities risk killing off innovative third sector organisations if they do not change their attitudes to working with smaller voluntary groups is likely to speak for many. GMCVO claims that there is *a danger that the very organisations best placed to support hard-to-reach communities could be left on the sidelines.*

But the importance of the smaller local organizations is on various radars if still somewhat uncertainly reflected in policy. The Government's recent major third sector review acknowledges the importance of community groups in sustainable communities and local advocacy, and their need for specialized funds. It will be unable to deliver on a thriving third sector without paying more than lip service to this. But policy is still often reactive rather than proactive. Government set up the Local Community Sector Task Force because of the significant implications of the wind-down of the Single Regeneration Budget for local sector funding: the Task Force recommended the extension of the Adventure Capital Fund to support 'Community Anchor' organisations as a conduit for small local grants, and additional funding through the Local Area Agreements, in the form of Community Micro Grants. Government has allocated a new £80 million fund for grants for small community groups, to be distributed over four years and the new Community Assets Fund (CAF) will provide grants for the refurbishment of local authority buildings for community use and their transfer to third sector ownership or management.

And smaller groups do have the advantage of access to some specially ring-fenced funds. For example, the Lloyds TSB Foundation Community Programme has two parts, the Open Programme for organizations with incomes below £1 million, and the Priority Programme, which funds rural needs, physical disability and refugees. Both are aimed at underfunded organizations, with low reserves. The Lottery Awards for All fund is specially designed to provide smaller sums of money to help local groups with specific needs, with a streamlined grants process to enable speedy and simple access.

The idea of small-scale seed funding, scaled up gradually to help build capacity is built into the approach of many of the newer social enterprise funders such as UnLtd and the London Rebuilding Society. The Scarman Trust has created Can Do Investment Funds at a neighbourhood level which streamlines access to money for small organisations that can deliver tangible local service outcomes.

Another new route to very small-scale local finance is the many Community Development Finance Intermediaries which have sprung up around the country, providing loans from £900 - £24,000 for needs from purchasing or renovating buildings to purchasing or leasing. ACRE has published a guide on sources of funding for village halls and community centres, in recognition of their importance to small often isolated, communities.

The aggregate impact of such fragmented initiatives on the strength and capacity of the future local sector remains to be seen. The value of addressing the needs of smaller local organisations in highly specialised ways is on the agenda, though maybe not far or fast enough to keep pace with local need and demand. But, whether large or small, sustainability and fitness for purpose are vital if sector organisations are to fulfil the expectations of their future role embodied in the current policy environment. The current state of the sector indicates that there are many question marks around this.

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Leeann Brady

The voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland

The voluntary and community sector plays a crucial role in the social, economic and environmental life of Northern Ireland. It is estimated that there are 4,500 organisations in the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland (NICVA, 2005), which is supported by an estimated 28,932 paid employees and an estimated 88,000 formal volunteers (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007).

The role and development of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland must be placed into the wider context of the legacy of the troubles and the democratic deficit that existed in the political arena. In many respects the thirty years of democratic deficit provided the perfect catalyst for the development of new forms of governance, particularly involving the voluntary and community sector in the process of government. During the years of direct rule the voluntary and community sector participated in policy making to a degree that is unusual elsewhere (McCall & Williamson, 2001). The significant role of the voluntary and community sector was widely acknowledged during the peace process in the search for a political settlement in Northern Ireland. Since this time various policy initiatives have acknowledged the role of sector, including Programmes for Government, Partners for Change, Government's Strategy for Support of the Voluntary and Community Sector (2001-2004), the Taskforce on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector report Investing Together (2004), Government's response to the Taskforce, Positive Steps (2005) and the policy for tackling sectarianism a Shared Future(2005). The sector has also been represented centrally in the major process of Reviewing Public Administration. In addition to this there have been a number of wider UK initiatives such as the Compact (1998) and the Treasury Cross Cutting Review of the Sector (2002 and 2004) which have recognised and encouraged the role of the voluntary and community sector in creating a vibrant and healthy society.

Despite massive improvements in Northern Ireland over the last decade, sectarianism and its impact on day to day life is still very much in existence, if not necessarily discussed openly. The direct rule Government published 'A Shared Future' (2005) accompanied by the first draft Triennial Action Plan, both of which have been broadly welcomed,

but it is unlikely that either will be adopted in their current form by the new devolved administration. Sectarianism and racism are problems found at every level of society across Northern Ireland. Voluntary and community organisations recognise that if, as a society we are going to move forward, we have to be brave and ensure that government and key stakeholders, including the voluntary and community sector remain committed to the principles of 'A Shared Future'. This will by no means be an easy journey, but it is one the voluntary and community sector is fully committed to.

'Positive Steps' (2005) ⁽¹⁾ has been a very important development for the voluntary and community sector. It states that the government is committed to streamlining the delivery of statutory funding to the voluntary and community sector and there should be the introduction of audit requirements that are proportionate to the size and turnover of organisations. The report makes clear that organisations should be 'kitemarked' for good governance and financial control before they can benefit from the reduced audit and regulatory controls that are promised. The actions set an agenda for investment and transformation. An extra £23 million ⁽²⁾ was made available to 2009 to help support this process.

Voluntary and community organisations in Northern Ireland have a long history of tackling 'bread and butter' issues. The publication of the Anti-Poverty Strategy (2006) which outlined government's commitment to work to eliminate poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland by 2020 was a prime example of the collective voluntary and community sector challenging government. The sector conducted a concerted campaign to ensure that any policy developed by government was robust and effective. The sector remains committed to ensuring the strategy is met in Northern Ireland.

The return of the Assembly in May 2007 is seen by all sections of Northern Irish society as an important step towards a normalised political environment.

The changing political landscape in Northern Ireland is viewed as an opportunity for the voluntary and community sector to have a more direct influence on policy making⁽³⁾. In particular the Review of Public Administration (RPA) which is designed to place local government, with the sector and other stakeholders at the heart of local decision making is an issue of great importance, particularly as the devolved administration is carrying out a 'review of the review'. Despite such uncertainty, one thing we can be certain of is that the RPA will change the sector's relationship with central and local government in key areas such as the delivery of public services and community planning. As a consequence of the change in relationships it is inevitable that certain aspects of how the voluntary and community sector operates need to modernise and become more efficient in order to survive. It is a time for the sector to begin to put its house in order to be prepared for future arrangements.

One common issue that permeates all the prominent issues affecting the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland is the importance of evidence based policy. Traditionally many charities have relied on the assumption that what they are doing will generate a positive outcome. This attitude is becoming harder to justify and there is pressure on the voluntary and community sector to be more accountable and to be able to show value for money.

It was hoped that 2007 would be a landmark year in terms of charity legislation in Northern Ireland as it was anticipated that new Northern Ireland Charities Order and the formation of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland would be passed. However, when devolution was restored to Northern Ireland so too was this issue. It is now envisaged that it will be 2009 before the Order passes into legislation. Voluntary and community organisations in Northern Ireland continue to operate under very arcane charity legislation.

Another issue of prominent importance has been the publication of the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy (2006) which has been welcomed and many demands of the voluntary and community sector have been included within it. There is a strong desire to see 'First Steps Towards Sustainability' fully implemented across all sectors of society. Alongside this, calls for an independent Envi-

ronmental Protection Agency for Northern Ireland are finally being heeded and a review of environmental governance has taken place.

Like the current political situation in Northern Ireland, the future of the voluntary and community sector is unclear. To be sure the sector has fulfilled a very important role in society. The challenges are multi faceted but a core challenge is the need for the sector to demonstrate value for money and to be able to articulate clearly the impact it has in wider society.

Footnotes

⁽¹⁾The Government's response to 'Investing Together', the report of the Task force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector (2004)

⁽²⁾ This £23 million is made up of the £18 million allocated to the Modernisation Fund (£3 million is revenue funding and £15 million is capital funding) and a further £5m allocated to the Community Investment Fund

⁽³⁾ Viewfinder (2007) found that over three quarters (78.9%) respondents believe that the new devolved Assembly offers voluntary and community groups the opportunity to influence policy making. The Viewfinder survey was circulated to 931 NICVA members at the beginning of the summer of 2007 and there was a 37.1% response rate.

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Marion Lacey

The state of Scotland's Voluntary Sector

November 9th is marked in the calendar as the day Glasgow hears whether Scotland has been successful in bidding for the 2014 Commonwealth Games. Though it may get less coverage in the national press than the 2012 Olympics for certain sections of the voluntary sector this accolade could be significant.

At the risk of overdoing the sporting analogy which bits of the Scottish voluntary sector can be expected to get medals in the next ten years and what would these be for? - Increase in turnover and total employees? Share of the social care or housing market? Reductions in staff turnover? The one that may be of most interest is success in terms of influencing the Scottish government's policy agenda. To be really successful athletes must prepare mentally. How do different sections within the voluntary sector look in terms of their 'mental attitude' to attempting to influence the policy agenda for the benefit of their clients? The following is a personal reflection on 'medal ratings' based on my involvement as a research observer and charity trustee.

The change in the balance of power achieved by the SNP last May has still to be tested in the current budget setting process. However the Scottish Government's pronouncements suggest that many of the voluntary sector's hard fought policies - around health, social care, housing, training, and asylum seekers - will continue to be prioritised because, though developed in conjunction with the previous labour administration, there has been often tacit support from the minority parties including SNP. For the national voluntary organisations and network bodies it's just a slight shift in terms of who they now

need to lobby. Voluntary sector CEOs are in the main on a first name basis with MSPs and their advisers.

There is a coming together between prominent individual social entrepreneurs, the Scottish Grant Making Trusts, and the Scottish Government around the big new ideas - particularly around NEET strategies and international development. And similarly there is a close partnership between the Government and leading voluntary sector members active in the social enterprise club. Well established names particularly in the social care and training sectors have responded by reinventing themselves and merging delivery arms. And there are also new recruits to social enterprise thinking. A small community-based arts organisation (GAP) which three years ago provided drop-in facilities for drug addicts in the Gorbals has now wider aspirations and is successfully competing across Scotland with the private sector for public art contracts funded through public sector regeneration monies. The sector is exploiting its social mission status to land public sector funded programmes.

Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) established in 2005 is working with funders as well as voluntary organisations to change the evaluation culture towards a focus on joint learning between funder and funded on the impact of better service delivery through (grant) funding investments. There have been big shifts in understanding about evaluation models initiated by some of the major trust funds including the Big Lottery in conjunction with ESS and with support from certain sections and departments of the Scottish Government.

However the sector is doing less well elsewhere. Local government is mostly unaffected by new ideas on evaluation as a partnership process. The community planning framework that has been developed with health and local government and other public services appears to have learnt nothing about joint evaluation of project funding. Local government is also walking away from funding locally based organisations. The Gorbals Arts Project had to turn its back on its local community because the local authority led Social Inclusion Partnership withdrew all its funding. CHEX (Community Health Exchange) the umbrella body of locally based community health initiatives reports uncertainty about funding agreements from March 2008 onwards. This is the same picture across other service delivery networks where the choice is between funding the national versus the local delivery arms.

Although there is a common voice between politicians and the voluntary sector on the asylum issue, in direct opposition to Westminster, the black and minority ethnic sector is still primarily a volunteer culturally divided sector which could potentially become further divided. Their complaint is that the small pockets of money they used to tap into are now being redirected by local government to interpreting services and language classes for new arrivals from Eastern Europe. These organisations, like disability and other equality groups, are not even on the 'starting blocks' in terms of being more than invitees to consultative conferences and workshops.

While the policy context and legislative structures are open to the sector continuing to influence policy development and implementation processes, the divides within the sector are continuing to grow. Key to addressing these divides as always are the network bodies. Most are aware of this responsibility. But many seem to be attracted to investing energy in getting their voices heard as opposed to the more laborious 'coaching' task of getting the smaller players up to speed with the personnel and resources that will enable them to join the race.

It will be interesting to see, if the Commonwealth Games bid is successful, what happens to the community sector in the east end of Glasgow. The Wise Group, a very successful social enterprise in the pre-employment training business, has the big advantage of having its HQ a stone's throw from the proposed Commonwealth Games athletics stadium. This area in the inner east end has been the focus of regeneration programmes starting in the early 80s with the GEAR project. But unlike its neighbour the Merchant City, which is basking in an upmarket housing boom, the community is populated with poorly funded organisations that have not benefited from any economic boom and instead are fighting the age old bread and butter problems of locally based groups namely poverty, ill-health, crime and low levels of community self confidence.

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Bryan Collis

The state of the voluntary sector in Wales

How healthy is the voluntary sector in Wales? Well, first of all, is it the voluntary sector we are or should be talking about? Recent shifts in terminology appear to favour the 'Third Sector' as the best way forward in describing the sector. Certainly the definition which has been used in the Welsh Assembly Government's Voluntary Sector Scheme ⁽¹⁾ fits this term better than a traditional voluntary sector definition. Housing Associations have always been included in the definition in Wales, as have working men's clubs and, in recent years, local regeneration partnerships ⁽²⁾ where there is a substantial voluntary sector presence.

So, how healthy is the sector? It is made up of approximately 30,000 expressions of activity, with almost 11,000 registered charities. ⁽³⁾ Most organisations are associated with sports and recreation, community based activity, benevolent organisations and health and social care activity. Overall, the income is estimated as £1.2 billion. This has grown slightly since 2003, but has, in reality, only kept pace with inflation.

The lifeblood of the sector is the people who give of their time, effort and money. There are currently no decent figures for the number of volunteers in Wales, with the Welsh data from the Citizenship survey ⁽⁴⁾ suggesting that 77 percent of adults volunteer either informally or with an organisation (1.83 million people). 47 percent had volunteered with an organisation. The Living in Wales survey ⁽⁵⁾, using a very different question suggests that 19 percent of adults volunteer with an organisation. With such different estimates, the blood pressure is difficult to measure, but anecdotal evidence suggest that organisations find it harder and harder to recruit volunteers and trustees. The age

and gender profile of volunteers is dominated by older women. To counter this, the Assembly is investing in youth volunteering schemes through the Russell Commission. Volunteering appears to be more prevalent in rural areas, and among people who speak Welsh as their first language. This makes the sector a place where the values of bilingualism are important and there are a number of strong Welsh language based networks of organisations which are a significant dimension to the sector.

Compared to the general level of volunteering, the number of people employed by the sector has grown markedly over the last few years, with current estimates at 46,000 full or part time posts within the sector. Of these, the majority are employed in organisations providing health and social care services.

Giving/donations have historically been the main source of income for the third sector, but by 2005 this had changed with the public sector becoming the largest source of income. Public sector includes; Welsh Assembly Government, Local Authority, Assembly Sponsored Public Body, UK Government funding, Health bodies and European funding.

While a potential increase by third sector organisations in public sector funding is good news for many, it is worth noting that the majority of the third sector consists of small local groups that are not reliant on income streams from public sector, but traditionally source their income via their members/donations and rely on relatively small amounts of money to achieve their aims.

During this same period, self-generated funds (charity shops, enterprise activities, housing rent) have been steadily increasing (18% in 2005) in addition to income from trusts (3%) and Lottery funding (3%)

One area of funding which has had a major effect is European Funding. With the end of Objective 1 funding in 2007, a number of organisations, particularly infrastructure ones, have been downsizing. The new convergence funding will be disbursed in a more focussed way, with fewer, larger grants, which has major implications for the sector. Also, the funding is unlikely to be available until mid 2008, resulting in a high degree of uncertainty for organisations involved. This is combining with other situations to make financial sustainability a real issue for many organisations.

Associated with the Voluntary Sector Scheme, the Assembly has developed a 10 year strategic action plan, which has a number of goals for the sector. A major part of this is how the sector interacts with the citizen – led services agenda brought in under the banner 'Making the Connections'. This includes local public service boards, which should provide a new forum for local decision making. This represents a different approach to public service provision to that espoused in England, and may have real opportunities for the sector to engage in service development.

Finally, the Government of Wales Act 2006 introduced scrutiny committees into the Welsh Assembly. This new role is one which will challenge the sector to be a coherent voice for the people of Wales.

These different pictures suggest a diverse and healthy sector, which has a number of challenges if it is to realise its many goals. Understanding the numerous interactions

between the different sub-sectors, Welsh public policy and events in other parts of the UK is a rich vein for researchers. Please think about Wales next time you have a research question.

Footnotes:

(1) In Wales, there is not a compact, but a scheme, set up by the Government of Wales Act 1998 and 2006, owned by the Assembly, which describes the relationship between the Assembly and the sector. It includes a partnership council, a map of networks and a framework for 6 monthly meetings between each Minister and the sector.

(2) I'm thinking here of Communities First Partnerships and many Leader + groups.

(3) Figures used here are published in The Third Sector Almanac, WCVA, December 2007

(4) This survey had 540 respondents in Wales for the core sample in 2005.

(5) This survey has almost 7,500 respondents

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Colin Rochester

Supporting Less Formal Voluntary Action

The Community Foundations Network has asked me to carry out a study of less formal manifestations of voluntary action, the wide range of activity that is not undertaken by professionally managed and more or less bureaucratically structured voluntary agencies. Memorably described in the title of a New Economics Foundation report as “low flying heroes” – because they operate below the radar on which the formal voluntary sector is captured – these initiatives take a variety of forms including individual social entrepreneurs and “community champions”; semi-organised or loosely coupled groups; grassroots associations; self-help and mutual aid groups; and small ‘hybrid’ voluntary agencies. While the organisational behaviour of the agencies that make up the ‘formal’ voluntary sector is comparatively familiar, much less is known about the ways in which their less formal counterparts are organised and how they manage their activities. There is no shortage of evidence that they are “different” but there is little in the way of systematic explanations of the nature of those “differences” and discussion of their implications. This project will address that gap in knowledge by aiming to develop a body of knowledge and understanding about less formal manifestations of voluntary action which will identify their distinctive organisational characteristics (how they are “different”); the “comparative advantage” of their approaches (what they can do that is “better” than other forms of action); the nature of the challenges they face in maintaining their activities; and the kinds of support which would most help them to achieve their goals. More specifically, the project will identify the key means of increasing the impact of less formal voluntary action by: ensuring that organisations are able to sustain their activities over time; assisting them to develop their effectiveness and/or improve the quality of their activities; and where appropriate, enabling them to make their activities available to a larger number of people through growth or replication.

The first stage of the project will take the form of a literature review. This will draw on a wide range of sources: key academic texts; important practitioner accounts; government publications; other policy-related reports from “think-tanks” and others; academic journals in the field of non-profit and voluntary sector studies; volunteering

and community development; conference papers; and “grey literature” accessed through ARVAC’s the community research database.

An initial framework has been developed for collecting and presenting ideas and information. This covers:

What or who are they and what do they do?

Boundaries, definitions and typologies; mapping and sign-posting the territory; fields of work and kinds of activity; and numbers and distribution.

How do they work? Formation and founding choices; issues of growth, development and change; organisational structures and processes; the nature of leadership in less formal organisations; governance and accountability; and relationships with the external environment - the social policy context; relationships with government agencies; infrastructure bodies; and funders.

Questions of quality: The impact of less formal kinds of voluntary action - their value and benefits (including their comparative advantages) - and how these might be evaluated; and issues of organisational capacity and effectiveness

Conclusions: What are their key characteristics? What distinctive challenges do they face? What kinds of support do they need/could they benefit from? and The implications for funders and funding.

I have already identified key pieces of literature from the US and Canada, Europe, Australia and beyond as well as from Britain but I would be very glad to hear from ARVAC members and Bulletin readers about studies that they have found helpful in understanding less formal voluntary action and especially about less well known sources.

Please contact me at:

C.Rochester@roehampton.ac.uk. All help will be acknowledged and I will ensure that those who contribute receive a copy of the finished review.

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Rob Macmillan with Elaine Batty, Roslind Goudie, Gareth Morgan and Sarah Pearson (2007) *Building Effective Local VCS Infrastructure: the characteristics of successful support for the local voluntary and community sector. Final Report.* NAVCA and Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESCR): Sheffield. June 2007.

Louisa Thomson, Julie Caulier-Grice (2007) *Improving Small Scale Grant Funding for Local Voluntary and Community Organisations – discussion paper.* The Young Foundation: London.

Reviewed by: Fiona Poland,

These recent reports use research to guide decision-making on support and resources for local voluntary and community sectors. The CRESCR study highlights the widespread uncertainty governing the policymaking and operating conditions for infrastructure development, 'under a shadow of rationalisation, merger and potential local government reorganisation' (MacMillan, 2007: 30). It draws on new email survey findings from 81 local infrastructure organisations (LOIs) and case study research from eight LIOs, to examine how local infrastructure organisations developed and which pathways to development may currently be more sustainable. It links the greater success experienced by some local infrastructure organisations to various enabling contextual factors. So, they suggest that extensive ongoing reorganisation of funding for the sector may well heighten competition between organisations for funding, roles and reputation and so, paradoxically increase constraints on the capacity for local infrastructure to collaborate or integrate. Within such an environment, no single model of development of local VCS infrastructure organisation is indicated. Nonetheless some elements essential for successful development are identified as having enough 'room' to operate, ability to gain 'resources', to develop 'relationships' and to build 'regard'. However, this dis-

cussion on supporting effectiveness is limited by its not offering measures of LIOs' effectiveness as such. Instead, the report provides different evidence, about how questions about effectiveness are currently being expressed in practice, highlighting lack of agreement around such questions. Tensions centring on effectiveness in practice may partly relate to a wider lack of agreement on the purpose of voluntary sector, perhaps giving less priority to extending diversity in community action than to integrating voluntary groups within service planning. However, what may enable an LIO to profile local voluntary sector contributions to planning and policymaking may not fit as well with the more-traditional LIO/ CVS activities of facilitating networking and the effective functioning of local organisations. This report highlights the increasing importance of the role of LIOs' Chief Executives in establishing and maintaining links through which their organisations may extend their 'room', resources and reputation in the local action context. The issues this usefully points up for the sector may have been given additional force if linked more explicitly to the development and validity of the NAVCA performance indicators deployed here to assess effectiveness of LIOs.

The complementary discussion paper from the Young Foundation, extends the scenario of uncertainties currently facing community organisations, specifically to the operation of grant-making mechanisms for smaller community groups. The authors have undertaken a wide-ranging review of existing statistical, survey and case study research and highlight how between 1995 and 2004, numbers of all charitable organisations in the UK were seen to rise in the UK, numbers of those with incomes over £10M nearly trebling, in contrast to the smallest organisations (with annual incomes of less than £100K) which rose by only a third to 146,963. The research goes on to evaluate existing funding mechanisms in relation to broad outcomes of social capital, community cohesion, empowerment and economic benefits. Small community organisations are seen to play a distinctive role in developing community action in building and engaging with social capital. The comparison of such organisations' experiences in other national contexts - Denmark, France, Australia and Canada - suggests how similar are the challenges facing them - often relating to amounts of government-enabled funding or limited means available to small groups, of accessing it. Most countries have recently reviewed their third sector activities and resourcing, yet this does not seem to have generated any systematic information-sharing across government sectors to underpin public servants' engagement in grant-making to small community organisations. Widespread review and reorganisation actually seems to be contributing to a reduction in explicit support for small scale community activity, perhaps if the focus is shifting to a too-narrow concept of 'rationalisation' and short-term outcomes. Such short-

termism may well run the danger of excluding a sector more likely to develop locally-sustainable and creative solutions to poverty and social exclusion. The authors underline how for smaller community groups, funding arrangements need to recognise that their participation will be slower and less likely to yield results within reduced grant timeframes. A key message is the importance for small community organisations of support and developmental work being provided alongside a funding process which therefore needs to deliver more than just money. Clear regulation, improved accessibility and channels of distribution are also seen to be especially important for smaller organisations. Their greater diversity and reflectiveness of local concerns calls for more decentralised decision making processes and for points of contact between grant-makers and community groups to be clear, transparent and underpinned by good locally-available information, contacts and governance. It is perhaps ironic that such requirements mirror the more familiar components of LIO activity identified in the CRESCR report as those with which LIOs remain more at ease, but which may be increasingly de-emphasised.

The appearance of both reports at this time underlines the need for government and policymakers to recognise their role in enabling a dynamic, community sector which can stimulate civic engagement rather than forcing a too-narrow focus on partnership in service delivery.

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ARVAC Annual General Meeting 09 January 2007

As is usual we are inviting all ARVAC members to our Annual General Meeting. As ARVAC has changed dramatically over the last year or two we would very much appreciate it if you could find the time to come to the meeting. We will need to discuss how ARVAC can continue to be a strong and effective voice for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector given that it is again an organisation run by its members and trustees only.

As the outgoing Chair I am urging all members as a matter of importance to get involved, without us there will be no ARVAC and our voice will be lost. Please try to come along and discuss how we can work together effectively.

Steven Howlett



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promoting effective community action
through research

About ARVAC

ARVAC (The Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector) was established in 1978. It is a membership organisation and acts as a resource for people interested in research in or on community organisations.

We believe that voluntary and community organisations play a vital role in creating and sustaining healthy communities, and that research plays an essential role in increasing the effectiveness of those organisations involved in voluntary and community action.

We want to hear from you:

Please send us:

- News items
- Details of new publications, resources or websites
- Information about research in progress
- Meetings or events you would like us to publicise
- Comments or opinion pieces you would like to share with other ARVAC members

by e-mail to
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