



Dear Reader

We at ARVAC 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 also believe that participation in the research process and access to its products should be freely and widely available and not restricted to academics and other professional researchers.

We have been trying to promote this for over 30 years now and as many of you will know it is not that easy.

The expectations and the language of the different constituents in this process can be so dramatically different that at times it feels almost impossible to achieve.

The fact that the last

decade has seen an unprecedented interest of policymakers in how to make use of voluntary and community organisations for policy gains often linked to increased funding has made the situation more difficult rather than easier.

It is therefore with great pleasure that in this issue we can report on the bridging work ARVAC undertakes with partners such as universities, councils for voluntary action, international colleagues and in the latest development with academic colleagues at the British Academy.

In the words of Louisa Hernandez, we are currently reducing degrees of separation.

Alas, there are not just two degrees of separation. As Cathy Pharoah points out we still know far too little about substantial areas of the voluntary and community sector. We also must accept that despite the efforts described by Julie Worrall there is no overarching agree-

ment in the academic community about the value or need for public engagement. Similarly we should not forget that the missing links between community research and both policy makers and academics have created a level of distrust among community organisations. We forget the challenges arising from this at our peril.

In 30 years we have edged forward and while we now see ahead of us again the very promising results of bridge building I believe that we will need to be prepared for at least another 30 years of hard and sustained work.

If you share the commitment and have the energy, join us and help to build more and stronger bridges.

Jurgen Grotz
(editor)

Inside this issue:

Cathy Pharoah 2

on new approaches to mapping the sector.

Julie Worrall 4

on Higher Education Beacons for Public Engagement.

Louisa Hernandez 6

on partnering and collaboration in community research.

Fiona Poland 8

reviews
"Sustainable Paths to Community Development. Helping Deprived Communities to Help Themselves."

John Diamond 9

reviews "Renewing Neighbourhoods: Work, enterprise and governance".

Fiona Poland 11

presents ARVAC's workplan for 2009.

INVITATION 14

"Civil Society in the age of Obama"

ARVAC/British Academy lecture
2009

Cathy Pharoah

MAPPING THE LOCAL SECTOR – NEW APPROACHES

There is still very little systematic or comparative information on the make-up of the local sector at different geographic, community or government levels. This evidence gap means that the huge contribution of local voluntary and community activity continues unacknowledged, except in fairly rhetorical terms, and that the policy basis is weak, although probably three-quarters of voluntary and community organisations operate locally. This paper outlines new research initiatives aimed at providing better tools for mapping the local and community sectors. The poor evidence base is often attributed to ‘Cinderella’ status compared with large national charities, but how far is it due to the significant methodological challenges of local mapping?

Existing research

Large national datasets like the NCVO ‘Civil Society Almanac’, or Guidestar, focus only on the major, national, and economically significant registered charities, and unfortunately the plethora of local surveys provide only fragmented and incomplete data. This is due to their methodological inconsistency, including in sector definitions, sampling (often unrepresentative), purposes (often narrow), and classifications (e.g. of funding sources, income, activities). A standard approach is taken only in the Local Voluntary Activity Surveys (Home Office, 1994, 1997), and studies based on existing national approaches (e.g. Macmillan 2005, Ponikiewski and Passey 2000). The Audit Commission provides standard Local Area Profiles guidance for local third sector surveys, but implementation has not been evaluated.

Tackling the challenges – what’s new?

A couple of recent research initiatives aim not just at better data, but at better tools. Challenges to robust local mapping are:

- what to include or exclude;
- sheer numbers, possibly more than three times that of registered charities;
- insufficient knowledge of the ‘population’ to set criteria for truly representative samples;

- lack of comprehensive and consistent local databases;
- difficulty of accessing tiny organisations.

Northern Rock Foundation ‘Third Sector Trends Study’ (TSTS)

When changes to regeneration funding and lottery distribution began to cause concern in 2006, the NRF decided a new study on the scale, scope and dynamics of its local third sector was needed to ensure effective future investment. NRF recognised the need for investment in research innovation and a broader understanding of the sector. The aims of its study are comprehensive, and its design contains both quantitative and qualitative research, including:

- robust mapping of the local third sector’s scale, finance, workforce, governance and activities;
- an in-depth representative panel to explore local sector dynamics;
- an analysis of the evolving policy context and stakeholder attitudes.

Professor John Mohan, University of Southampton, is leading new quantitative work alongside NCVO, Guidestar and Cumbria and Newcastle CVS; Professor Tony Chapman, University of Teesside and Professor Fred Robinson, Durham University, are carrying out a qualitative study. The advisory group represents the Office of the Third Sector, ESRC, ippr, Carnegie UK Trust, and local/regional public and voluntary sector bodies.

Estimating scale and scope Innovation in methodology involves establishing better local databases, and new approaches to estimation based on close study of a sample of small and highly representative areas, carefully selected to reflect key geographical levels (from region to neighbourhood), and important local socio-economic features (e.g. deprivation indices, rural/urban, population etc).

The research will:

- integrate existing data from principal sector registers and regulators, and other local directories, databases and information;
- examine a sample of local areas (as above), and produce reliable estimates and ratios to extrapolate to other similar areas;
- survey organisations not on national registers, and utilise existing data on national registered organisations;
- extrapolate local data on volunteers and workforce from large-scale datasets (e.g. Citizenship and Labour Force surveys, and Guidestar);
- compare local findings with national data and trends.

Yorkshire and Humber Regional Forum have already commissioned a similar study for their area, which will provide invaluable comparison.

Understanding local dynamics A representative panel of organisations, fully structured on the basis of the survey findings, will study sector dynamics. It will assess attitudes amongst the leaders of third sector organisations to social, economic and political trends, how such factors affect the local sector's capacity to help beneficiaries, how sector networks and relationships with public bodies develop and change. The research commenced in spring 2008; initial findings should be widely available from mid-2009.

Development of OTS Local Indicator Survey NI7

Further potential innovation in studying the local sector systematically may develop out of the government's new NI7 national indicator for local authorities. Under a new system established in 2008, top tier local authority areas are measured against 198 new National Indicators (NIs), two of which, for the first time, focus on the third sector. Indicator **NI7** is 'An environment for a thriving third sector', and tests the degree to which local statutory bodies sup-

port the success of third sector organisations. In developing NI7, OTS faced the challenges outlined above in establishing a survey sample of local third sector organisations with sufficient statistical robustness to measure change. After a thorough review, OTS decided that to begin the process of progress towards a system of local assessment, the survey sample would have to be based on a known population, namely the registers of charities, Community Interest Companies (CIC), Industrial & Provident Societies (IPS) and Companies Limited by Guarantee (CLG). 61 local authorities have signed up for NI7.

Numerous small community associations are not included in the survey, but OTS is committed to running pilots amongst samples of such non-registered or 'under the radar' organisations, as a practical experiment in whether (and how) such local surveys might best be combined with the national survey. Representatives of local organisations have been discussing options for the pilots with OTS over the last few months, and how to make best use of them. The aim is to learn more about getting surveys going in areas which have not had comprehensive surveys before, how to conduct local surveys in ways which make the most of the existing national data, and perhaps how far we have to travel before 'under the radar' groups might be incorporated robustly into a national survey. If you would like to contribute any thoughts and ideas on local pilots, feel free to contact Cathy Pharoah on cathy.pharoah@thirdsp.co.uk.

Cathy Pharoah is Co-Director of the ESRC Research Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy, Cass Business School.

Julie Worrall

HIGHER EDUCATION BEACONS FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Who are the Higher Education Beacons for Public Engagement?

The Beacons Funders (Research Council's UK, The Higher Education Funding Councils and the Wellcome Trust) specifically acknowledge what they describe as the 'research-driven culture' (including pressure on researchers to publish, attract funding for and build careers on 'hard research') which means that public and community engagement is not necessarily a priority within many universities. With the aim of changing this culture, they have invested a total of £9.2m from 2008-2012, to fund six Beacons, at the University of East Anglia (Community University Engagement East - CUE East), Newcastle, Manchester, Wales, Edinburgh and University College London, and a National Coordinating Centre (Bristol). All the Beacons are leading the effort to foster a change of culture in universities, assisting staff and students to engage with the public and with communities.

What do we mean by public and community engagement?

The Beacons believe that engagement between universities, the public and communities is about communicating knowledge, enriching cultural life, providing a service, being in dialogue with the public and communities and in dialogue with the public and policy-makers. Engagement can involve a wide range of activities; we recognise that it can often be complex, multi-faceted and can mean different things to different people. It can include user involvement in research, public seminars, debates, forums, focus groups and work-

shops, drama outreach, volunteering, delivering museum education and much more.

Building networks

The National Coordinating Centre is building networks across the Beacons, with non-Beacon universities and with other organisations in all sectors practising public and community engagement. There are clearly a number of striking similarities between the aims of the Beacons initiative and those of ARVAC. For example, ARVAC encourages and facilitates networking and collaboration between people undertaking research in or on community organisations. We all have an interest in building knowledge networks, working with community organisations and in bringing about a more dialogistic approach to engagement and we would all strongly assert that knowledge is not the sole domain of higher education.

In addition to building a knowledge network comprising a number of learning groups from the Beacons and others, the National Coordinating Centre is working towards a public engagement 'charter' which will define public engagement and promote a code of practice. They are keen to hear from organisations that might have a view on defining public engagement and on the idea of a 'charter'. In addition, they are working with V to deliver a significant increase in the quality and quantity of student volunteering and to build the strategic importance of volunteering and engagement by universities.

Introducing CUE East, one of the six Beacons

At the University of East Anglia (UEA) we are working to build recognition of public engagement as a recognised, valued and rewarded part of academic practice across all UEA disciplines. We provide support, encouragement and training for staff and students, an infrastructure dedicated to building capacity at all levels, funds, facilities and community contacts for developing new activities, and rewards and incentives for individual engagement practitioners. We also contribute to the continuing development of UEA's strategy on engagement and we are cited as a strategic priority in the University's Corporate Plan 2008-2012. Our core vision at CUE East is built on the clear understanding that successful public engagement requires as much attention to inward-looking activities at the university as the outward-looking engagement activities themselves.

Our inward looking activities include an Engagement Continuing Professional Development Programme, an Engagement Tracker (a tool for staff and students to record their engagement activities and build their engagement portfolio), and an incentives and rewards scheme (a fund that will identify and reward key individuals who make significant contributions to engagement). We have also devised new promotions criteria for UEA staff on public and community engagement (our awards will be presented at UEA's Congregation in July 2009) and an Enhancement Fund (support for projects that build on well established public and community engagement activities, helping us to embed the key principles and practices across all the university's disciplines and those that have not traditionally been involved with engagement).

Through our outward looking activities we are trying to take a bottom-up and listen-

ing approach. We have a range of project partners including Voluntary Norfolk, Business in the Community and the County Strategic Partnership. We have set up a city contact point, located off-campus in The Forum, Norwich, where Liane Ward, our Operations Manager is hosted by BBC East (our city contact point is generously sponsored by The Forum Trust and May Gurney plc), and a Sustainable Living Partnership Fund (support for new and innovative engagement projects. Sustainable living includes for example climate change, diet and health work, BioPolitics, Biofuels, the GM debate, novel plants, work on ethics and consumerism, energy, waste and transport, carbon literacy and low impact eco-housing).

The Beacon Funders are also changing

The Beacon Funders work closely with the Beacons on all aspects of the programme. The Research Councils, for example are asking researchers to think more about the potential impact of their work from the very start of the research grant application process. They will also be including engagement in peer review and looking to create a framework to guide researchers' involvement in public engagement, by establishing the outcomes that they wish to see from engagement. In addition, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce) will be commissioning an analysis of the public engagement aspects of universities' Higher Education Innovation Fund strategies; the Hefce fund that resources university business and community engagement.

For more information, please see the websites below - **National Coordinating Centre** - www.publicengagement.ac.uk

CUE East - www.cueeast.org

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Louisa Hernandez

TWO DEGREES OF SEPARATION: REFLECTIONS ON PARTNERING AND COLLABORATION IN COMMUNITY RESEARCH

'...data sharing between agencies and authorities is essential for improving the understanding of needs, how need is met and the unmet needs in a population.'⁽¹⁾

Research is knowledge, but structures and processes also need to be in place to facilitate the making and sharing of this knowledge. There is no point in small groups building capacity and spending time preparing good research if it does not feed into decision making processes. While evidence might not assure outcomes, it does need to be heard and considered. Partnerships should be able to create the structures and processes both to help groups do better research and open up the routes to it being heard.

Further there is a need to develop partnerships where groups can easily access research that matters to them. It is equally important that groups are supported to develop research that matters to the community. In community research it is critical to develop better links between producers of research and the groups that research might benefit, ensuring the information is an active accessible resource especially for smaller groups.

Recent examples of partnering and collaboration between ARVAC and IVAC provide a simple example of where organisations working together can secure tangible benefits for community groups. ARVAC's mission of 'promoting effective community action through research' gels well with Islington Voluntary Action Council's (IVAC) policy and research project that supports local groups to carry out community research in order to contribute to the decision making process. Small groups can often be excluded because they do not have the capacity to access or produce research. This limits their ability to give a full account of the problems.

⁽¹⁾ Association of Public Health Observatories from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) resource pack section 4 data sharing.

<http://www.yhpho.org.uk/viewResource.aspx?id=15>

Arguably these groups then have less knowledge to reflect on the wider implications for any action they propose in response to the problems they have identified. In IVAC's scoping report we found that while some organisations produce data that could be made public and ultimately be useful to the wider local community, groups found it often difficult to find or had limited knowledge of where to find the resources.

IVAC was funded by City Parochial, a grant making trust, to create resources and opportunities for local groups to build their capacity to play a part in informing choices within the Local Strategic Partnership. As part of an initial scoping exercise to understand what research resources existed that might benefit local groups, IVAC identified ARVAC's community research toolkit *Getting started resource pack for community groups*.

Request of a pack led to an invitation to the ARVAC AGM in November 2007. Thus, a web search, a phone call and the invitation of myself on to the ARVAC board brought us one degree of separation closer.

ARVAC has a long tradition of supporting community action through research. The networks of researchers are impressive and collaborative approaches are welcome. While ARVAC is a national organisation and IVAC's work is consigned to mainly the London Borough of Islington there have been a number of reasons why this collaboration has been of mutual benefit and value to the groups and organisations we work with.

The first example was the *Getting started moving on* community research conference on November 10th, 2008. Organised as a joint effort over a six month period by ARVAC'S board members and network of researchers and IVAC, this conference offered its attendees, including many small groups, the opportunity to hear first hand examples of research in practice as well as providing introductory seminars on doing research.

Among these small groups was a local cold weather shelter that IVAC's policy and research project has been working with. This group attended Turning Point's conference seminar on their Connected Care research programme and ARVAC's seminar on the Getting started community research toolkit. An attendee from this group noted that getting to meet and hear practiced researchers who were prepared to share their work gave insight and a sense of the possible. In this case reducing degrees of separation opened up the possibility of sharing knowledge and created an environment where understanding, like glue, can bond to practical action.

The key note speaker Professor Peter Alcock invited by ARVAC meant local groups were able to access information first hand about the new Third Sector research centre from its new Director. In-turn local groups were able to offer a few thoughts on local research priorities that perhaps this new national body might absorb into its priorities.

The scoping report IVAC had produced highlighted that many of the groups IVAC works with lack a suitably equipped work space in tandem with a lack of access to research resources. In another example of collaboration, a series of meetings between IVAC and Islington Central Library nurtured the idea of setting up a community research resource. Although this was not a particularly ground breaking idea, this was a new collaboration for Islington Central Library and IVAC. The conference was held at this venue and launched the Community Research Resource on the same day, creating a positive context for its future development. This offered an opportunity for groups to discuss research and make links both locally and nationally. In addition, the one-to-one support and other resources that can now be accessed by local groups at the Library got off to a good start by having its profile raised. ARVAC's national position created credibility.

The ambition is to further develop this resource and ARVAC is seen as an important contributor to this development. For example we know that groups need good quality accessible training in community research practice. We now have a venue, a resource and an infrastructure to co-ordinate and support groups to attend. ARVAC's knowledge, style and commitment to community development make it a natural choice for local groups to turn to for training and support in community research and in-turn, IVAC as an example of a local organisation has active networks which it has developed from its range of programmes. In addition to the policy and research project IVAC has a capacity building team working on a day-to-day basis with groups that are often excluded. IVAC hosts the Islington Local Involvement Network (LINK) that enables local people to influence health and social care delivery and delivers in partnership with local groups an *Improving reach* programme aimed specifically at responding to the needs of frontline organisations working in and with excluded communities. We hope that developing partnership and collaboration between all agencies will bring better resources, better understanding and the potential for more strategic delivery of community research.

The activities described here are simple and rely on sharing and seeing how cooperation can help supply the resources to respond to the intended mission. They lack any whiff of enforced 'innovation', 'income generation' or individualistic practices that increases the potential of very busy, resource intensive silos. This reflection offers that reducing degrees of separation supports a better shared approach to doing and supporting community research.

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Charlotte and Don Young (2008) *Sustainable Paths to Community Development. Helping Deprived Communities to Help Themselves*. School for Social Entrepreneurs: London.

Web: www.wwe.org.uk

Reviewed by: Fiona Poland, University of East Anglia

20th December 2008

There is a rueful irony in reading this book's description of the discomfort of the moderately well off in UK society as "the group which suffers most from the plethora of scandals and scams caused by the behaviour of the banking, mortgage, insurance and financial services industries" (p.18). It was, of course, written before the financial tsunami which has since transformed individual experiences of such discomforts into growing recognition of shared pain whose only remedies may lie in collective agency. This highly readable text marshals an impressive set of arguments, evidence and the authors' experiences at the School for Social Entrepreneurs (SSE), to convey the urgency of addressing issues of social cohesion in UK society, not through top-down initiatives lacking specific community relevance, but through social enterprise approaches which may more effectively promote community action.

The early chapters point out how huge and growing structural inequalities undermine both funding and political support needed to allow real change. Initial UK government responses aimed to encourage citizenship have frequently been bogged down in bureaucratic structure-building, giving social enterprise-based approaches greater purchase. The authors go on to explain the theoretical relevance here of social capital, community leadership and community-based solutions. They suggest that the persistent pattern in UK society of high individualism combined with low power distance promises greater success to solutions based on "lighting many fires" rather than on imposing overarching strategic programmes. While such contingent approaches may be resisted by official and professional interests, support for community activists may attract greater credibility. Encouraging learning through doing rather than by imposing financially-incentivised standards may generate more effective engagement. They contrast

examples of more locally-responsive and regenerative activities sponsored by e.g. Joseph Rowntree Foundation or New Economics Foundation, with the relatively small demonstrable effects or local recognition of ambitious and costly programmes such as New Deal. They go on to set out and provide examples of the approach and potential for change of the School for Social Entrepreneurs (SSE). This concentrates on building social enterprise by supporting participants to identify and reflect on their perceptions of barriers, their own attitudes, local resources and capability in an integrated way. They conclude that the role of government support needs to be more contingent and less comprehensively controlling. We may welcome the way the arguments and evidence here can be used to nail the current official over-reliance on auditing, prescriptions of governance (as means) and voice (as an end) rather than action and agency, if we are seriously to promote engagement and enterprise. Similarly, if we seek useful evidence of what works, this approach also suggests the need to draw on qualitative analyses of experiences rather on target-matching.

However, to maximise the impact of this book, it perhaps needed to make clearer its intended audience and purpose. Is it mainly aiming to convince politicians and policymakers, who the authors seem to suggest may be currently rather impervious to evidence? Or is it a means to provide tools for community activists? In this case, to enable the reader to move on to develop social entrepreneurial skills in practice, I would have liked more in the later chapters to define and exemplify those specific skills and learning processes which SSE have found most effective for supporting community action.

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Stephen Syrett and David North (2008) *Renewing Neighbourhoods: Work, enterprise and governance*. Bristol: The Policy Press (290pp)

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Reviewed by John Diamond, Edge Hill University,

November 2008

Timing and context seem to be the critical challenges for both writers and publishers. This book provides a lot of insight and detailed commentary on a number of New Labour initiatives which are well worth the read but the timing and context made me "read" this book in a different way (I suspect) from the one intended. Any analysis on the theme(s) of "renewing neighbourhoods" which does not locate that discussion in the current economic context and the implications it has for the public and private sector (as well as the Voluntary, Community, Faith Sector or the Third Sector) is highlighting a number of (unintended?) absentees from the discussion.

The authors provide a very detailed, thoughtful and well argued critique of area based interventions within contemporary UK urban policy and, in particular, they examine the underlying policy ideas which informed the practice and series of initiatives launched by New Labour post 1997. In the context setting chapters to the book they demonstrate real skill at unpicking the particularities of programmes and seek to look at the common or recurrent themes in projects and one off developments which go back to the late 1960s. They make the point that area based initiatives are, in a real sense, a statement of continuity with the past. The focus on neighbourhood renewal by New Labour from 2001 onwards was no different from the spatially con-

structed projects of the Urban Programme or the Single Regeneration Budget or City Challenge (the latter two launched by the Conservatives in the 1990s).

This theme of continuity in policy conception and practice is important for practitioners and VCFS focussed researchers. On the one hand it provides a sense of the familiar and, as a consequence, enables us to anticipate developments and speculate on trends with some confidence. On the other hand we can run the risk of missing subtle and important changes in policy/practice or more significantly changes in the theoretical/conceptual frameworks in play. It is this latter point which I think this book adds to our understanding and awareness.

The core theme of the relationship(s) between the place (the neighbourhood), the experiences of individuals (poverty and "worklessness") and the strategy(ies) (enterprise and economic intervention) with the local regulatory frameworks (the local authority and its partners) is well explored and discussed. They make a number of important and valuable observations on local practices derived from their research (some of which was funded/commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation) and they set out an important discussion on how the separate "bits" identified above can be linked theoretically as well as conceptually.

The linking sets of ideas focus on the ways in which there are a shared set of assumptions within the policy making community and New Labour on the "taken for granted" claims of neo-liberalism. In effect, therefore, the argument is that places and neighbourhoods "fail" for a combination of reasons: the market, local state agencies, cycle of deprivation within families and communities, the retreat by the middleclass and the withdrawal too of the state itself. Indeed they provide a number of very powerful diagrams/charts which would be excellent stimulus for discussion and exploration with groups and organisations in local communities.

In seeking to describe how New Labour did or did not break with the past they set out the ideas which shaped the social exclusion agenda and the neighbourhood renewal focus. They stress the importance of the ideas developed by Putnam on social capital and specifically they draw out the case for social enterprise and the "entrepreneurship". They also draw upon the experiences of a number of New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiatives too in order to both describe particular ways of working but also to point to the evidence base from which they make their conclusions.

The case study material is interesting and (again) I can see how we could use it to draw in the experiences of local groups and organisations. But the weakness of the NDC material and the sections on governance at the local level is the absences from the discussion. It seems to me that as we explore and examine local decision making structures and ways of managing the local state through partnerships or other regulatory

processes we are talking about power, politics and authority. Missing from their discussion is the VCFS. Indeed neither the VCFS or the Third Sector get a mention in the index. But, of the policy and ideological changes over the past decade it would seem to me that the "rediscovery" of the voluntary sector by New Labour and its reclassification as the "Third Sector" tells us a lot about the conceptual models in play at the moment. Moreover, the review in 2007 by the Treasury of the role/contribution of the sector to social and economic regeneration is not given sufficient space to explore the policy and practice implications it presented.

There is a real need for studies such as this which then go onto combine a reflection on the policy/practice changes or processes which have been discussed. Whilst the authors conclude with a call for a more inclusive approach to policy and they are explicit on the need to counter the neo-liberal claims about "failing" neighbourhoods and places what might have added to the weight of the case was the place, location and potential of a sector which is in many ways better able to make the case for change.

Professor John Diamond works in the Centre for Local Policy Studies at Edge Hill University (Lancashire), UK.

Fiona Poland

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR COMMUNITY RESEARCH: ARVAC'S WORKPLAN FOR 2009

In the first ARVAC Bulletin of 2008 (Issue 105), Colin Rochester set out our 2008 workplan. Its practicality and timeliness have been borne out by the activities it has enabled us to take forward since then. Most of its themes have gained impetus in 2008 and those which have moved on most gained from having a champion to add momentum.

One good example of this has been the successful November 2008 combined conference and AGM organised jointly between ARVAC and the Islington Voluntary Action Council (IVAC), owing much to the energies and enterprise of Louisa Hernandez, who joined our board of Trustees last year. Its workshops linked national research resources with community level research interests and IVAC's excellent organisation and input for the day helped underline the relevance of that strand of our work which aims to promote appropriate forms of research in or with community organisations through networking. Its accessibility was enhanced with funds from the CUE East Beacon of Public Engagement.

Developing key working partnerships

Another ARVAC aim is to identify gaps in knowledge of the community sector and needs for further research. We have been fortunate in continuing to recruit board members who can bring experience of doing this from a wide range of engagement with community sector research. Most are actively developing community research good practice and capacity to inform a variety of types of community engagement in volunteering, charitable community resourcing and giving, policymaking, housing, health and social care and local and faith communities.

Board Members for 2009 are:

Sarah Coombes (Third Sector Foresight Team, National Council for Voluntary Organisation (NCVO))

John Diamond (Centre for Local Policy Edge Hill University)

Fleur Gatfield (Research and Development Unit, Salvation Army)

Jurgen Grotz (freelance researcher and ARVAC Bulletin and website editor)

Louisa Hernandez, Islington Voluntary Action Council (IVAC)

Steven Howlett (Centre for the Study of Voluntary and Community Activity, Roehampton University and ARVAC Vice Chair)

Jayne Humm - (Community Development Foundation)

Kate Jones (Turning Point Centre of Excellence in Connected Care and ARVAC Treasurer)

Fiona Poland (University of East Anglia and ARVAC Chair)

Anastasia Mihailidou (Charities Evaluation Services)

Cathy Pharaoh (ESRC Charitable Giving and Philanthropy Research Centre, City University)

Colin Rochester (Centre for the Study of Voluntary and Community Activity, Roehampton University and Company Sec)

Julie Worrall CUE East, Beacon of Public Engagement, University of East Anglia)

Meta Zimmeck (freelance researcher)

We now find ourselves in a stronger position to raise our profile and to realise our aims. Our relationship with Roehampton University provides a vital base as well as a working relationship with a centre for education and research and particular contribution in building community sector capacity. Over this year we will review the potential for building ARVAC's partnerships with e.g. the Centre for Third Sector Research, CDF, NCVO, Research Councils' Beacons National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement and the Centre for Charitable Giving Research as we decide how best to support community sector research in current circumstances.

Promoting community access to ARVAC resources, resource-building and defining the ARVAC constituency

Today, there are many specific demands in 'community' as there is increased public interest in what 'community' now means and how it can be engaged. This is a good time to build the ARVAC constituency of those interested in community research. It is clear from recent conversations with several potential partners, including new academic centres, that there is also particular interest in ARVAC's focus on encouraging dialogue with harder-to-reach groups and on addressing their research needs. We need to evidence how we are working with these groups, what are the areas where they need support and what types of services prioritised in our workplan can be usefully resourced.

An important question raised as we engage more with community research needs is: if our mission is to make resources widely available to support community researching and to seek funding to allow ARVAC to do this, should we remain a membership organisation or not? If we want to maximise community access to ARVAC-developed resources, this may mean moving beyond a formal membership focus. We need to review this issue over this year and are now building information about potential members and users.

One way to do this is use our current interactive resources to help identify our constituency and how we may need to engage them – drawing on their knowledge as well as articulating ways to meet their needs as follows:

- *ARVAC Database* – The database of some 3,000 items is now available on line and this is a significant means of addressing many if not all of our aims. Queries continue to be actively pursued, suggesting it is worth updating and we are now working on this.
- *ARVAC Bulletin* – Jurgen's editorial overview of those accessing the Bulletin on-line suggests a continuously-changing mix of members and supporters.
- *ARVAC Website* – The website is also giving us useful information about who is accessing and downloads from our pages. We are exploring the potential of adding a research advice surgery to encourage further use of the website and perhaps linking some access to services to some user information collection to help in highlighting current concerns and issues.

A key priority for this year will therefore be to seek some funding to redesign the website to further improve access and information collection via users.

Taking the workplan forward

We are also identifying more people to lead or develop specific areas of activity. Our work in identifying our constituency will help define audiences and future users as well as helping frame our model for how we work. We can draw on our partnerships with national centres and policies to add to local events, to use our community links to help inform funders seeking to enable local groups and to establish an ARVAC presence on their websites.

Events

We aim to continue a partnership approach to organising collaborative events:

- *ARVAC/CASS ESRC Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy joint events*; we are in discussion with a number of people prominent in community researching who are interested in presenting at events which could be organised jointly with and hosted at the Centre to allow an extended national-community audience.
- *ESRC Third Sector Research Centre (Univ of Birmingham)*; Pete Alcock (Director, ESRC Third Sector Research Centre) introduced the work of the Centre at the recent ARVAC/ IVAC conference. We are now exploring ways in which ARVAC-TSR Centre events can build more community-based research.
- *Governance Workpages*; the development by Kevin Noonan of the Big Lottery-funded Governance Workpages with the interactive involvement of the sector has been ARVAC's main currently-funded project. As this nears completion, we aim to ensure that their existence is publicised to encourage their wide use. The 2008 AGM and joint event with IVAC provided a useful starting point, and we plan a fuller end-of-project launch in early summer 2009.

Publications and Community Research Training

Publications and training, of course, provide an important basis for sharing knowledge of community researching.

- *Bulletin* - this continues to be a major success story and three more good issues have been delivered during 2008. We aim to sustain this in 2009.

- *Community Research – Getting Started* continues to be recognised as a valuable asset for developing community-based researching and we re-launched it at the 2008 AGM as a free on-line resource to ensure maximum community access within our resources. Many local developments such as Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) to encourage community involvement in health and social care services and Research Councils UK Beacons of Public Engagement to encourage HE to build knowledge networks for public engagement are increasing the relevance of our training. We seek to develop partnerships so as to offer training relating to the *Getting Started* resource.
- *Other publications* can be produced as by-products of the activities discussed above.

We currently have a small working fund. If we are going to expand our work programme we will need more administrative support (to promote information and communication and to organise events and training) and also technical support (particularly for the web pages and database). We will use our working fund to pump-prime activities now highlighted as strategically important and are seeking new funder support for specific projects.

2009 promises to be a stimulating year with many community research challenges and opportunities to focus ARVAC's collaborative activities!

Fiona Poland is the current ARVAC Chair and is Senior Lecturer in Therapy Research at the University of East Anglia.



ARVAC/British Academy lecture

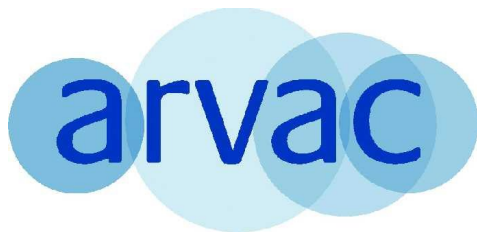
24 February 2009, 17.00– 19.00

“Civil Society in the age of Obama” and “ A decade of Civil Society under New Labour”

Speakers: **Jon Van Til** Rutgers University, USA
 Colin Rochester Roehampton University, London

Chair: **Nicholas Deakin**

Attendance is free but places are limited, please register and book a place via ARVAC by contacting S.Howlett@roehampton.ac.uk.



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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
j.grotz@roehampton.ac.uk