

Putting the Voluntary Sector in its Place: Geographical Perspectives on Voluntary Activity and Social Welfare in Glasgow

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Abstract

The growing political and social significance of the voluntary sector in contemporary welfare reform is reflected in a wide body of research that has emerged in the political and social policy literature since the mid-1980s. While this work adds considerably to our understanding of the changing role of the voluntary welfare sector, these accounts are largely aspatial. Yet, geographical perspectives offer important insights into the development of the voluntary sector at both micro-and macro-levels. The purpose of this paper is thus twofold: first we wish to draw attention to what it is that geographers do that may be of interest to those working in the field of social policy; and second, we illustrate why such perspectives are important. Drawing on recently completed work in Glasgow, we demonstrate how geographical approaches can contribute to a greater understanding of the uneven development of the voluntary sector across space and how voluntary organisations become embedded in particular places. By unravelling some of the complex webs of inter-relationships that operate across the geographical and political spaces that extend from national to local we reveal some unique insights into those factors that act to facilitate or constrain the development of voluntary activity across the city with implications for access, service delivery and policy development. Hence, we maintain, that geographical approaches to voluntarism are important for social policy as such approaches argue that *where* events occur matter to both their form and outcome.

Introduction

Over the last two decades it has been widely acknowledged that the ‘post-war model of the corporatist welfare state is no longer sustainable, thus requiring non-state actors to meet the burden of social welfare’ (Amin *et al.*, 1999: 3). Informed by neo-liberalism, successive Conservative Governments in the 1980s and 1990s moved towards market-based approaches to local welfare service delivery, underpinned by the notion of the citizen—consumer (Cochrane, 1998). Local communities have been encouraged to take increased responsibility via ‘active citizens’ for the provision of services in tune with local needs (Taylor and Bassi, 1998). Both these developments have relied increasingly on voluntary sector organisations. Since their election in 1997, the UK Labour Government have continued this momentum as part of their programme of welfare reform.

In a speech to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in January 1999 the Prime Minister laid down the challenge to ‘ignite a new spirit of involvement in the community’ (Morris, 1999: 249). This has been reflected in the development of compacts between government and the voluntary sector across England, Scotland and Wales – documents that specifically recognise the complementary roles played by government and the voluntary sector in the development and delivery of public policy and services; and that the government has a role to play in promoting voluntary and community activity. This renewed interest in civil society in the UK indicates that is a critically important time for the development of the voluntary sector.

Current interest in voluntary action is not simply a UK obsession – there are much wider ramifications for the development of civil society – echoed in the United Nations’ proclamation of the year 2001 as being the International Year of Volunteers (Morris, 1999). In part, this is linked to welfare state restructuring being pursued by many of the world’s advanced capitalist societies. In the USA, for example, Peck (1998) points to the abandonment of a Fordist welfare state regime in favour of a post-Fordist workfare state that is associated with a localisation of responsibility for welfare in which voluntary, non-profit organisations are seen to play an increasingly important role (Twombly, 2001). The Third Way welfare reform agenda in the UK places a similar emphasis on the importance of developing a ‘civil society’ with voluntary associations as its organised vanguard (Giddens, 1998: 78). It is not just welfare reform, however, that has underpinned the increased profile of voluntarism. Political concerns over the erosion of citizenship and the need to encourage the development of social capital have further underscored the importance attached to voluntary activity in fostering a local sense of civic responsibility and engagement (Brown, 1997; Putnam, 2000). Hence, this is an important time for those working within the field of social policy to re-examine voluntary activity, and in particular its role in welfare reform and the implications for the equity of access to welfare services.

The growing political and social significance of the voluntary sector is reflected in a wide body of research that has emerged since the mid-1980s. While it is not the purpose of this paper to review these works (though see Fyfe and Milligan, 2003), notable areas of activity include: international comparisons of the voluntary sector (e.g. Ragin, 1998; Salamon *et al.*, 2000); the changing political context of voluntary activity (e.g. Taylor and Bassi, 1998; Morison, 2000; Mitchell, 2001); active citizenship and social capital (Putnam, 1993; Portes and Landholt, 1996; Boix and Posner, 1998); the professionalisation of the voluntary sector (Courtney, 1994; Gaston and Alexander, 2001; Gainer and Padyani, 2002; Wyatt, 2002); and the nature of volunteering (Clary and Snyder, 1999; Wardell *et al.*, 2000; Reed and Selbee, 2000). While such work adds considerably to our understanding of the changing role of the voluntary sector in advanced capitalist societies, these accounts are largely aspatial. Yet, geographical perspectives can

offer unique insights into the development of the voluntary sector at both micro- and macro-levels that are of particular relevance to those working in the field of social policy. In a climate of welfare reform underpinned, in part, by an increased reliance on voluntary and community activity, understanding the complex webs of interaction that act to facilitate or constrain the development and coverage of voluntary organisations across space and within places is of critical importance in ensuring equitable access to welfare. It is this specific aspect of voluntary sector development that we address within this paper.

We do this in two ways: firstly, the paper briefly outlines some of the ways in which geographers have contributed to a wider understanding of voluntary sector development in the UK and other advanced capitalist states. Secondly, building on these established interests amongst human geographers in voluntarism, we draw on material from our own recently completed research in the Scottish city of Glasgow, to illustrate how a greater understanding of place can provide unique insights into the development of voluntary welfare activity across space.

Locating voluntarism: geographical perspectives

Geographical work on the voluntary sector focuses on three key themes: space, place and political context. In relation to the spatial distribution of voluntary activity, several researchers have highlighted the uneven distribution of organisations and the existence of voluntary sector ‘rich’ and voluntary sector ‘poor’ areas of cities (see Wolpert, 1977; Wolch and Geiger, 1983; Wolch, 1989 and 1990). More recently Fyfe (1995) and Milligan (1998) have highlighted neighbourhood and regional variations in UK voluntary activity in the fields of crime prevention and social care respectively. Not only does this uneven spatial distribution of voluntary activity mean uneven access to services but also differences in the opportunities for participation and involvement in voluntary group activities. Explanations for these patterns have focused partly on differences in local cultures and the historical development of philanthropy within particular places over time (Bryson *et al.*, 2002). Also important, however, are changes in policy and funding structures at both local and national government levels. In particular, spatially targeted programmes can lead to the development of voluntary activity in ways that are both piecemeal and sporadic, owing as much to the availability of resources in some areas as they do to any planned action based on identified need (Milligan, 2001).

A second area of geographical interest concerns the links between voluntary organisations and the places in which they are active, revealing how voluntary sector development can be affected by, and affect, the characteristics of particular places. Brown’s (1997) work on Aids activism in Vancouver, for example, revealed how voluntary sector development was connected to local, place-based needs, leading to the agglomeration of Aids voluntary groups in particular parts of the city and contributing to the emergence of so-called ‘service dependent

ghettos' within cities (Dear and Wolch, 1987). As Milligan's (1996) work on voluntarism and mental health further illustrated, the presence of the voluntary sector provision in an area can impact on the movement and distribution of service recipients in both positive and negative ways. This type of geographical work draws attention to the need for greater awareness amongst policy-makers of the wider impact of local voluntary sector development on service users and how such development can act to re-shape the characteristics of particular places. The nature of places is also important to understanding differences in levels of volunteering. Higher levels of volunteering are generally associated with rural rather than urban areas and with more affluent rather than deprived communities (see Wardell *et al.*, 2000; Prime *et al.*, 2002). However, there is also some evidence of a growth in voluntary participation amongst the unemployed living in economically depressed localities as they seek to recreate positive working lives for themselves through voluntary work (e.g. Macdonald, 1996).

The third strand of geographical work on voluntarism focuses on the political context of voluntary activity. The most influential work, here, is by Wolch (1989, 1990) who coined the term 'shadow state' apparatus to describe voluntary organisations charged with major welfare service responsibilities (often previously shouldered by the public sector) but which remain within the arena of state control because of funding and regulatory regimes. Wolch draws particular attention to the political tensions that exist within the shadow state apparatus. While on the one hand the involvement of the voluntary sector in a mixed economy of welfare provision may help democratise the delivery of welfare services, on the other the increasing dependence of these organisations on state contracts and grants may simply reinforce state control over welfare provision. These are issues that also emerge from more recent geographical research on the UK social economy (Amin *et al.*, 1999). While the development of the social economy (which includes voluntary organisations) might be interpreted as contributing to the empowerment of local communities by mobilising active citizens and taking power away from local authorities, few voluntary organisations can flourish without public money which imposes constraints on how they operate. For Hasson and Ley (1994), this highlights the importance of understanding not just *how* political activity in relation to voluntarism is being played out in society, but *where*. Focusing on welfare voluntarism in both Canada and Israel, they maintain that while on the one hand renewed interest in civil society in these states indicates a revival of urban politics and apparent decentring of power, on the other there is an increasing absorption of some voluntary organisations within the institutional-political system and the emergence of co-production or partnership working. This is manifest in the emergence of new, hybridised forms of politics that are emerging in actual locations where the state and civil society overlap. Understanding these changes in political culture

and structure are crucial if we are to enable successful citizenship to develop within and across these newly emerging spaces of civil society.

Taken together these studies of the links between voluntarism, space, place and political context clearly demonstrate the unique insights offered by geographical perspectives on the role and development of voluntary organisations. Yet this research still only offers a partial and fragmented picture of the voluntary sector. In particular, most of these studies focus on space, place or political context rather than the inter-relationships between these different elements (though see Milligan, 2001); and most studies (with the exception of Wolch, 1990) focus on voluntary organisations linked to just one area of social policy. What is missing is an understanding of the interplay between space, place and political context for making sense of the development and distribution of a range of voluntary activity in a particular area. It is this particular aspect of voluntarism that we address in the second part of this paper.

The character of the voluntary sector, however, is extremely complex, comprising a myriad of organisational structures, activities and motivations. Thus, we begin by briefly outlining how we define the voluntary sector for the purposes of our work.

The voluntary sector concept

The 1601 Charity Law indicates that philanthropy and charitable institutions have played a role in UK welfare for at least four centuries (Taylor, 1992). Terms such as voluntarism and voluntary organisation, however, are relatively modern and tend to be used without precise definition, which can, as a result, confuse materially different activities. This reflects the traditionally atheoretical nature of the study of voluntarism and its inception within pragmatic policy-making rather than as an academic discipline. The problems associated with attempts to define the voluntary sector have been highlighted by numerous commentators (see, for example, Hedley and Smith, 1992; Giner and Sarasa, 1996; and Anheir and Salamon, 1999). Such difficulties are compounded by the diversity of roles and activities undertaken by voluntary organisations – ranging from lobbying and pressure groups; mutual support and advocacy; leisure and cultural activities to direct welfare service provision. In many instances organisations are involved in one or more of these activities, highlighting the convoluted nature of the sector, leading Kendall and Knapp (1995) to conclude, rather aptly, that the voluntary sector resembles something of a ‘a loose and baggy monster’. However, while acknowledging its diversity, it is necessary to have a working definition, thus, for the purposes of our study we followed Taylor (1992: 171) in defining the voluntary sector as comprising:

Self-governing associations of people who have joined together to take action for public benefit. They are not created by statute, or established for financial gain. They are founded on voluntary

effort, but may employ paid staff and may have income from statutory sources. Some, by no means all, are charities. They address a wide range of issues through direct service, advocacy, self-help and mutual aid and campaigning.

This definition was adopted as it is closely aligned to that used by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (1997) in Scotland, and that used by the Glasgow Local Authority (Glasgow City Council, 1997). It was thus deemed appropriate for research conducted in one of Scotland's major cities. Though not directly addressed within this paper, it is also a definition that accords with that used by Wolch (1990) in her analysis of the voluntary sector as a 'shadow state' – the conceptual underpinning for this study.

Voluntary organisations, social welfare and the city

The wider study upon which this paper draws was undertaken in Glasgow, one of the most densely populated cities in Scotland. Glasgow is also a city whose population experiences some of the highest rates of poverty and deprivation in the UK (Glasgow Alliance Social Inclusion Inquiry, 1998) and, as such, it faces huge challenges in delivering social welfare. In recent years, it has also been subject to significant political upheaval and financial difficulties (Sinclair, 1997) due, in large part, to the political re-organisation of local government under the 1996 Local Authorities (Scotland) Act. The presence of an active voluntary sector, thus, has a significant role to play in supporting the social welfare needs of its population.

Constructing Glasgow's voluntary sector profile

Constructing a local profile of the voluntary sector can be fraught with difficulties because of problems of definition and dynamism. Not only are there difficulties defining voluntary organisations (see above), but the dynamism of the sector in terms of 'birth' and 'death' rates means databases quickly become out of date. For the purposes of this study, however, we drew on a set of overlapping and regularly updated databases held by the city's main public library, the Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector and the Glasgow Healthy Cities Partnership, together with other publicly available data. This yielded 2,585 voluntary organisations concerned with the delivery of social welfare across the city. These organisations were classified by category using the Local Voluntary Action Survey (LOVAS) schema.¹ Table 1 provides an overview of their main areas of activity.

The data on these voluntary organisations were mapped using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) software, together with a range of socio-economic data, as a means of stimulating further investigation about the possible relationships between place, voluntary organisations and social need. Following the mapping process, the study focused on three key areas of social welfare:

TABLE 1. Organisational focus of welfare voluntary organisations in Glasgow.

Organisational focus	No. of organisations	% of total
Health	426	16.5
Youth	460	17.8
Housing/neighbourhood	326	12.6
Disability	287	11.1
Elderly	276	10.7
Crime	41	1.6
Poverty	161	6.2
Ethnicity	148	5.7
Other support organisations (e.g. carers groups)	253	9.8
Other welfare organisations	207	8.0

health, ethnicity and crime and criminal justice. Questionnaires were sent to all known voluntary organisations within these three sectors in order to gain more detailed information about organisations, the services they deliver, where and how they engage with local communities and with local and national government. Finally, we undertook a series of in-depth interviews with key informants from voluntary organisations within each of these sectors that operate at local, regional and national levels and with officials within local (Glasgow City Council) and national (Scottish Executive) government. The aim, here, was to gain a more nuanced understanding of those inter-relationships that operate between local communities, the voluntary sector and the state.

Making sense of the voluntary sector map

Building on earlier geographical work the study sought to examine the relationships between voluntary sector activity and place. Although previous research has linked the distribution of organisations to the economic prosperity of communities, and particularly to a working middle-class that is seen to form the core of voluntary labour (Wolpert, 1977; Wolch, 1989, 1990), in Glasgow this relationship is far less clear-cut. Indeed, there is clear evidence that voluntarism is thriving in some relatively *deprived* areas of the city, suggesting the need for a much more nuanced understanding of how the relationship between voluntarism and place is played out across the city.

Of course, mapping the voluntary sector in this way, while a useful starting point for informing policy and practice, has its limitations. The picture of voluntary sector activity is only partial in that it focuses explicitly on the geographical location of the organisation itself, rather than its area of benefit. The agglomeration of voluntary sector activity within Glasgow's urban core, for example, to some extent, reflects the operational scale of the organisation

(i.e. whether city-wide or regional). Nevertheless, outside the urban core, voluntary organisations do tend to operate within limited geographical boundaries, and, as this section will reveal, locational decisions at the micro-scale are considerably more complex than a simple reflection of operational scale.

The spatial organisation of voluntarism in the city is affected by a complex range of influences operating at both micro-and macro-scale that bear little relation to the affluence of a particular locale. At the micro-scale, for example, organisations revealed that siting strategies were linked not just to the identification of need, but also to the allocation of space as a 'free resource' or at a reduced rent, or the need to rationalise services and reduce overheads. However, location and the expansion of voluntary services in particular places can also be constrained by a lack of available premises within key areas of need. As one respondent explained in relation to one of Glasgow's more deprived communities, 'Office space and community facilities are a big problem in the Gorbals. . . . At the moment there is limited space and that's now starting to impact on service delivery from the voluntary sector in the area . . . there's not that many voluntary sector community groups left in the Gorbals.'

The map of voluntary activity in the city is also shaped, in part, by specific problems of accessibility experienced by the client group that the organisation was set up to serve. Organisations highlighted the need to be located within a short walking distance of key public transport routes if voluntary services are to be fully utilised. Yet, as disability organisations also pointed out, the inability of their client group to access services and support in the city centre due to poor disabled access, obliged them to relocate to the urban periphery where physical access is easier, if more geographically distant. Others pointed to the need to locate in places that their client group could safely access. 'Turf-territoriality' in peripheral areas of Glasgow, for example, creates a self-imposed spatial exclusion for ex-offenders wishing to access support services. As one co-ordinator noted, 'Oh yes, our job couldn't be anywhere else but the city centre – we have difficulties with gangs that can't enter into other parts of Glasgow where there would be some gang rivalry. So it's easier for them to come here and stay anonymous.' The city centre, in this instance, provided a 'neutral zone' that clients from across the city could safely access. At the micro-level, the co-ordinator further emphasised the importance of finding *appropriate* office space in the city, noting, 'We used to be based in quite posh offices that we had to share with one of the Christian groups But they [service users] found that quite difficult because guys were having to come up the same stairs and emblazoned on the wall, was, you know, "He who sins shall die in hell" – it was quite disturbing to some of our guys, especially if they had mental health difficulties So I found this place – I wanted it to be "normal" for my clients, so they would not feel any more stigmatised than what they already were'

Urban policy and voluntary landscapes of exclusion

While locational decisions can, in part, be defined by practical and pragmatic concerns associated with access and the availability of low cost premises close to an identified need, they are also influenced by the wider policy environment within which voluntary organisations operate. Indeed, given that over half the organisations in our survey received their main funding from either central government (normally the Scottish Executive) or local government (Glasgow City Council), any change in social policy will have a significant impact on the voluntary landscape in the city. The long history of spatially targeted urban regeneration programmes in Glasgow has been of particular importance. Under the urban programme, local authorities could put forward projects to be run by voluntary organisations and community groups in Areas of Priority Treatment (APTs). Given the territorial extent of severe deprivation in Glasgow, many areas were eligible for Urban Aid, though not all areas chose to bid for these funds to support voluntary activity. Indeed, as our work revealed, there was an significant interplay between the structural context provided by central state funding opportunities, and the importance of human agency in the form of the bids put forward for Urban Aid by the local council's area co-ordinators in different parts of the city. As a local authority official explained, 'Drumchapel did very well out of the Urban Programme mainly because the Area Co-ordinator for the Dumchapel area was zealous in applying for Urban Aid while the then Area co-ordinator for Easterhouse wasn't.'

In the mid-1990s, urban programme restructuring moved away from APTs towards Priority Partnership Areas (PPAs). The criteria for PPA status varied from that of APTs and as a consequence some voluntary organisations found themselves in geographically defined areas that were now excluded from this source of income. The most recent form of spatially targeted funding centers on Social Inclusion Partnership areas (SIPs)² as part of the Scottish Executive's broader social inclusion strategy. Each SIP area has funding available for voluntary organisations to deliver services that contribute to the social inclusion agenda. The result has been to create what one local observer referred to as a 'feeding frenzy' for funding amongst voluntary organisations as they target SIP areas as places for further service development. Given that SIPs overlap extensively with previous territorial programmes, the effect has been to reinforce existing patterns of unevenness in the development of voluntarism across the city, a pattern exacerbated by its agglomerative effect on other key funding bodies. Urban Aid and changes from APTs to PPAs and the current SIP status have all had differing, but geographically defined, eligibility criteria attached to voluntary sector funding opportunities. Each of these programmes has laid down layers of state funding potential for voluntary organisations in different parts of the city for limited periods of time. The net effect has been to create a dynamic mosaic of

opportunities for voluntary organisations to develop services in geographically defined communities.

While the skewing of funding opportunities is targeted at areas of greatest need, it also raises a number of problems. Area-based funding programmes create complex patterns of inclusion and exclusion. The strong element of localism in the SIP programme, where individual SIP boards set their own priorities, means that some groups find it difficult to establish a presence in particular places, an issue that has been raised particularly by organisations serving the needs of 'unpopular' client groups (e.g. mental health and domestic violence). As the co-ordinator of a mental health organisation explained: 'the SIP thing is a particular problem because we cannot get mental health on the social inclusion agenda'. The inability to access such an important source of funding clearly has an impact on how specific sub-sectors develop across the city. Further, as Turok and Hopkins (1998) caution, those areas that do not receive funding through territorially based funding programmes may be doubly penalised because the skewing of financial resources towards successful areas may mean a progressive diversion of resources from losers, while the 'winner takes all' as a result of complex co-funding arrangements. As one respondent put it: 'Some communities that were just out [side] of these SIP areas felt they were being excluded . . . and they felt they had the same deprivation . . . And that's caused quite a bit of aggro, because it means not only do SIP monies concentrate in these areas, but it means that other agencies in the city think, "oh well, maybe we should concentrate on those SIP areas" – so they lever in more money to these areas whereas those outside felt . . . more deprived than they were previously.'

Connecting with communities

'[A]ll local agencies need a sophisticated understanding of the nature of the communities they serve . . . It is essential that each organisation also works closely with their own stakeholders and service users. This should again help to build a wider community ownership of all aspects of community cohesion' (Home Office, 2002: 14–16).

Renewed emphasis on the promotion of active communities to meet the Government's community cohesion programme places an increased emphasis on voluntary sector participation. Indeed, a key objective of the UK Government's Active Communities Unit is to encourage people to become actively involved in their communities through the development of the voluntary and community sector. For such an objective to be achieved, it is critical to understand: (a) how voluntary organisations engage with communities in particular places; and (b) how the development of the voluntary sector within places impacts on this engagement.

Voluntary management committees play an important role in connecting the organisation to local people and keeping in touch with local views and needs.

As one local organiser put it, 'the management committee are all local people, so you can say it's the community that are managing the project and giving it direction as well, through their involvement'. Hence, while organisations note the importance of co-opting strategically placed individuals who can support or advance the organisational cause at the level of local or national government, there is a clear recognition that management committees also need to reflect the communities they are serving. In Glasgow, many local community members serving on management committees also serve on other voluntary committees or local fora. This is seen as serving a three-fold function: firstly, as a means of networking with other organisations and their strategically co-opted committee members; secondly, as a conduit to the local community – advertising their local presence and services provided; and, thirdly, as a means of increasing their own awareness of other organisations within the local community, services offered and potential unmet need. The dynamic nature of the voluntary sector reinforces the importance of this function, for as one organiser put it, 'a lot of organisations and projects start up and go away and its really difficult to keep track of what's there'.

The extent to which organisations successfully engage with the local community is also, to some extent, influenced by organisational size and the growing drive towards professionalisation. The increasingly complex services provided by the voluntary sector, combined with the need to meet those requirements laid down by the state as part of its monitoring process, makes such change an inevitable part of the growth process. In Glasgow, this was illustrated by the experience of a crime and criminal justice organisation that developed, organically, as an assortment of locally based autonomous organisations. Growth, heightened public expectations and the drive to deliver a professional and equitable service across Scotland led to organisational restructuring resulting in a hierarchical structure in which one single Glasgow-based organisation is now responsible to the national body. Concomitant with this has been the development of a corporate structure with unified policy and decision-making and a loss of local autonomy. As one member of the organisation explained, 'we had to become more *one* organisation than lots of wee organisations – now we are all practising the same, whereas before, if you took something to your local management committee, you could get them to pass something locally and you had their support and backing. Now you have to adhere to the guidelines, regulations and everybody is doing the same. They've got standardisation, its becoming more professional.'

While the increased harmonisation of service delivery and standards is designed to improve the quality of services delivered to service users, re-organisation has not been without its casualties. Restructuring has resulted in the loss of local management committees raising anxieties amongst local volunteers over the distancing of support and concerns that the organisation's flexibility and its ability to make decisions quickly – the traditional strengths of the voluntary

sector – are being eroded as a consequence. As one respondent put it, ‘we don’t get as much support as we used to . . . I know my colleagues have issues with it because they could contact a member of the committee to gain support – and if they had a problem, they got an answer. Now, they have to take it to our co-ordinator who has to take it to our area committee, who then has to sit down and discuss it and then bring it back. The decision-making structures are becoming more bureaucratic and distant.’

Re-organisation has also caused some volunteers to feel they have been ‘pushed out’ of the organisation, and concerns have been voiced that the drive for professionalisation is causing a loss of local identity as the local community structure becomes a non-autonomous part of the bigger organisation. As the co-ordinator commented, ‘we have to be careful that we don’t lose the whole focus of the service which is on volunteers working for people in the community who are hurting for one reason or another. We want to be professional, but we still want to keep this user-friendly.’ This problem has been widely recognised by respondents within our study who note that, while it is clearly important to provide a good quality service, there is also a requirement to remain aware to the needs of local volunteers. One of the difficulties organisations face in restructuring is that it can have the effect of reducing the continuity of contact, both with the organisation itself and the service user. Both these aspects of voluntary participation, however, are seen as crucial to the continued and positive engagement of local volunteers with the organisation.

Engaging with volunteers and the local community in the delivery of increasingly complex welfare services, thus, places voluntary organisations in a dilemma. While on the one hand the needs being serviced by the voluntary sector require a professionalisation of the organisation in order to maximise its effectiveness, on the other organisations also need to be able to relate to the experience that is common to that community, ensuring that the community has some sense of ownership of the organisation whose role is to respond to their needs. In the words of one respondent, ‘reaching out, being there, hanging out, really listening – connecting and trying to generate a shared sense of what needs to be done is a key thing’. Such sentiments emphasise the importance of being locally accessible and knowing the community in which organisations are active.

While the drive for professionalisation and the impact of growth on those voluntary organisations serving a national agenda can act to reduce their ability to maintain a local identity, it would be wrong to assume that all organisations serve this same agenda. Some are territorially designed to meet the very specific needs of particular communities. In Glasgow, this was particularly true of black and ethnic minority organisations as illustrated by one organisation set up to serve the elderly Chinese community. Early Chinese migrant workers resided almost exclusively in the Garnethill area of Glasgow, and, while the working population

is now more widely dispersed across the city, Garnethill still forms the heart of the Chinese community. As the co-ordinator of the organisation noted, the Chinese population still tends to migrate to Garnethill on retirement, where they know they will gain from culturally responsive community support. The organisation has thus been developed to meet a need that is both culturally and territorially specific. Location is clearly important, not only in terms of accessibility for its service users, but also in terms of its role in maintaining Chinese identity within Glasgow.

Because this organisation has been designed to meet the needs of a culturally specific community, the way in which the organisation seeks to engage with the local community also needs to reflect the Chinese culture. Decision-making occurs in a very non-hierarchical and informal way in order to maximise participation. As the co-ordinator put it: 'we run in a democratic way. All their [volunteers'] suggestions, all their comments are welcome, because they also have a lot to contribute . . . you have to do that in such an informal way because I would say the culture in the Chinese community, they don't like things to be too formal, because sometimes the formality will drive them away.'

Whilst the hierarchically and locally independent organisational structures represent the two extremes on a spectrum, some organisations operate within a 'federal' structure. Here local organisations affiliate within an overarching structure in which each organisation is locally autonomous, but has the use of the 'brand name'. In this way, organisations are able to benefit from the support of the national office and the national profile of the organisation on the proviso that it agrees to operate within the overarching ethos and philosophy of the national organisation. This facilitates the maintenance of local community relationships. As a national representative of one federally structured health organisation noted, 'each one is an independent charity . . . they have a local management committee and they are volunteers, so its very much local motivation that makes a scheme work'. However, as this same respondent also noted, where local motivation is absent it can result in geographically uneven service development. As she explains, 'we don't develop quite as fast as people expect . . . we don't say there's these blank areas where we'll develop schemes. Its not a case of us going along with a pool of money and building up an service . . . sometimes you simply cannot get the thing off the ground – that can be a bit of a frustration.' Further development of an organisation she notes 'doesn't necessarily relate to the population in need, it relates more to the finances of the [individual] scheme'.

So, in part, the extent to which voluntary organisations engage with the local community is linked to the fact that some organisations are territorially designed to meet the needs of particular communities but is also due, in part, to their organisational structure. The extent to which locally based organisations have autonomy over the development and delivery of their services, for example, is dependent on whether an organisation serves a local, regional or national

agenda and the extent to which its structure is locally autonomous, federal or hierarchically structured. Local connections between voluntary organisations and the community are thus seen to operate on a continuum between local and national, based on their bureaucratic and organisational structure. The spatial remit and organisational structure of a voluntary organisation thus has clear implications for the extent to which it is able to form local attachments, and hence the development of the voluntary landscape across the city.

A changing political geography of voluntarism

Of critical importance in understanding voluntary sector development is an appreciation of the interplay between voluntary activity, place and the political context within which organisations operate. Local authority restructuring in Scotland in 1996, meant that the geographical boundaries of many local authorities changed and many voluntary organisations found that their boundaries were no longer co-terminous with that of the new local authority within which they were located (Craig and Manthorpe, 1999). For Glasgow, this represented a change from regional to local government and presented considerable difficulties for voluntary organisations that were specifically set up to address a regional agenda. Others had to take decisions about whether to continue to operate across two or more local authority boundaries – with all the associated funding and regulatory difficulties that entails – or whether to relocate their services to one geographically defined local authority (Milligan, 2001).

SIP developments have added a further layer of complexity to the relationship between the voluntary sector and the local state that is of particular significance because it raises questions about how the development of voluntarism is bound up with new forms of governance in the city. In particular, it highlights the increasing importance of institutions that are not bound by traditional forms of accountability to local electorates. The individual SIP boards have an important degree of policy and fiscal discretion over the funding of voluntary sector projects in each SIP area that could be interpreted as a welcome development in terms of localism to social policy. Nevertheless, there are concerns about the more formal accountability of SIP boards to the wider community. Within Glasgow, the SIP agenda operates within the framework of the Glasgow Alliance (established in 1998) whose members include the City Council, the Glasgow Development Agency, the Scottish Executive and the Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector. The Alliance is an independent body – its independence being viewed as crucial to its success in terms of depoliticising initiatives. Indeed, under the SIP arrangement, it would appear that the role of local government is largely that of a ‘strategic enabler’ rather than a central player. Of course this must not be overstated given that the City Council continues to play a key role in the funding of voluntary sector organisations. Nevertheless, in areas of most acute deprivation,

the development of voluntarism is being significantly influenced by institutions that are largely funded centrally (i.e. from Edinburgh) and following an agenda that has no formal democratic mandate. As one council official explained: 'The decisions are taken locally over which we have no direct control. You could argue that a councillor is on the board [of each SIP] but the councillor can be outvoted and quite often is.'

The complexity of the relationship between the voluntary sector and the state has been compounded by devolution and the investiture of the Scottish Parliament, in 1999, with many of those powers relating to social welfare previously held by Government at Westminster. As a consequence, the political landscape in Scotland has changed significantly since the mid-1990s and voluntary organisations have found themselves having to forge new relationships and develop new spaces within which to they might influence policy at the levels of both local and national government.

At the level of national (Scottish) government, voluntary organisations have been quick to seize the opportunities presented by devolution, with national organisations pointing to an increased level of accessibility and activity between the voluntary sector and the Scottish Executive. Organisations have indicated to an increase in requests for their input into parliamentary enquiries and an intensification of joint-working with other organisations with common aims, as they join forces to lobby, organise joint manifestos and receptions for MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament) to raise awareness on specific issues of common interest. As a respondent from one national mental health organisation explained, 'There have been a number of changes since devolution. The physical proximity [of the Parliament] makes a difference. It's now much more common for us to engage in both formal and informal meetings... We are devoting much more time and energy to lobbying Scottish Parliament than we do Westminster, because the Scottish Parliament has control of so many issues that are of direct relevance to us. Our lobbying of Westminster is really now restricted to benefits issues.'

Clearly, the inter-dependencies between voluntary organisations and the state are complex. In part this is because the state itself is highly complex. Yet this is not the whole story; in examining three different areas of social welfare voluntary activity, we found key differences in their relationships with the different tiers of government. Some groups are much more connected to local and/or national government than others and hence exhibit very different patterns of ability to affect policy, which in turn impacts on sub-sectoral development within places.

This was particularly evident within the black and ethnic minority sector. Glasgow has a large number of small black and ethnic minority organisations that have limited contact with the state. There is also evidence of a generational divide within this sub-sector, with older, more established organisations

characteristically demonstrating a passive relationship with statutory actors, whilst newer organisations, with younger management boards, are more challenging. However, it is also important to recognise that the tendency amongst policy-makers to refer to ethnic minority organisations under the label of 'black and ethnic minority' groups can, of itself, be profoundly unhelpful in that it highlights a failure to recognise the diversity of the populations these organisations were set up to serve. As the co-ordinator of one Muslim organisation put it, 'we have to realise that Muslims, generally, are a totally different kettle of fish – because the needs of a Muslim and the solutions to their problems are totally different from a Hindu or a Sikh or someone who is Chinese'. This sentiment was reinforced by other respondents from black and ethnic minority organisations who highlighted state-funders' insistence on the provision of multi-cultural services – often set up in, or next to, temples, mosques or other religious places.

Overall, we found limited evidence that black and ethnic minority organisations are, as yet, well integrated into strategic-level decision-making. This is particularly true at the level of the local authority. And, while there is evidence that government at both local and national levels is making concerted efforts to consult these organisations on policy issues, they have yet to recognise that the extent of consultation is proving problematic for small, locally based organisations, with limited resources to cope with. As one organisational leader commented, 'If we went to all the meetings that the Local Authority expects people to go to, 'cause they're liasing with the black community, you wouldn't get any work done! A number of years ago we were campaigning for people to actually *be* consulted. The problem is now you're consulted to death!'

While, in part, variations in the relationship between voluntary organisations and the local and national states are linked to organisational size and the ability of larger organisations to command greater political resources, this is not the whole picture. While the local state needs to maximise opportunities for all organisations to contribute to the consultative process, contrary to much of the literature surrounding the ability of voluntary organisations to influence the state (e.g. Kramer, 1986), we would argue that size, of itself, is not necessarily a limiting factor. Organisations, despite being small and locally based, can develop and effectively use their social networks and the uniqueness of their services to open up opportunities to influence the policy process. As the co-ordinator of a mental health organisation explained, 'I don't think I would have a snowball in hell's chance of influencing the social work committee on anything. Because it would be, "Oh, who's she?" However, I'm tied into a social work network that would be represented at those meetings, so our aim is to ensure that the senior officers in the council are aware of what we're doing . . . What you have to do is develop alternatives to existing systems.'

It is important to note, however, that not all organisations are concerned to influence the wider policy process. Some community-based organisations are concerned only to improve the quality of life within their own localities and so have little interest in influencing activity outside these very specific places. Further, there is a long history of complementary working in some areas of voluntary activity, as for example, with health-related voluntary organisations and the statutory sector (particularly in the health and social services). As a result, organisations in these sub-sectors have developed closer working relationships with the state and so have a greater understanding of where best to target their political resources – lessons that newer sectors are still in the process of developing. As the co-ordinator of one organisation working in the field of crime and criminal justice noted, ‘I’m seconded to the Chief Executive’s [office] and I have staff from the Chief Executive’s office working for community safety. I also have staff from the Fire Brigade and the Police, so its worked out very well in terms of informing policy, in that I would be responsible for writing papers to committee – to policy resources, to social inclusion – on aspects related to community safety.’

Rather than the voluntary sector lying between the local state and civil society, these shifts in the relationship between the voluntary sector and different tiers of government place politics in new locations – both beyond and inside state-centred spaces. While it is too early to assess the full impact of these changes in the Scottish context, they are illustrative of an increased blurring of the boundaries between the voluntary sector and the state and the emergence of new political spaces, where state and civil society can be seen to overlap, highlighting some of the ways in which old spaces of political activity are being redefined and new spaces are emerging.

Discussion

We set out at the beginning of this paper to address two main questions: firstly what is that geographers do that will be of interest to those working in the field of social policy; and, secondly, why is this important from a social policy perspective?

In responding to these questions, we have drawn attention to some of the ways in which geographical perspectives can contribute to a greater understanding of the uneven development of the voluntary sector across space, how organisations become embedded in particular places and their relationships with local, regional or national political contexts. By drawing on the findings from the Glasgow study, we have begun to unravel some of the complex web of inter-relationships that operate across those geographical and political spaces that extend from the local to the national, to reveal some unique insights into those factors that act to facilitate or constrain the development of voluntary activity across the city.

While mapping the voluntary sector offers a starting point from which to examine the uneven distribution of the voluntary sector, a more in-depth analysis reveals how it is affected by a complex range of influences that operate at both the macro- and micro-scale. These range from pragmatic siting strategies associated with available space and the need to constrain costs, to awareness of the highly specific needs of the client group the organisation was set up to serve. But this is not the whole story; voluntary sector development within places and across space is also influenced by the local and national policy environments within which it operates. In particular, government programmes aimed at reducing social exclusion and deprivation, combined with the uncertain funding environment within which voluntary organisations operate, act to lay down layers of time-limited state funding in parts of the city, with an agglomerating effect on other potential funding opportunities. So while on the one hand changes in state funding programmes can act to create a dynamic mosaic of opportunities for voluntary organisations to develop in geographically defined communities, on the other these developments can also contribute to local networks of access and exclusion. Understanding the characteristics of place thus provides important insights into the uneven distribution of the voluntary sector with implications for access, service delivery and policy development.

The promotion of active and inclusive communities is key to both the Government's Active Communities agenda and the Social Inclusion Programme. As we have illustrated, however, the extent to which voluntary organisations successfully engage with local communities is shaped largely by organisational growth, the extent to which they attempt to harmonise services and their drive toward professionalisation. The extent of local autonomy over the development and delivery of services is dependent on whether an organisation serves a local, regional or national agenda. Local autonomous organisations tend to display flattened decision-making structures, where policy formation lies close to the communities in which they operate. At the other extreme, those serving regional or national agendas tend towards hierarchical decision-making structures where decision-making is increasingly distanced from local volunteers and service users. This has important implications for the extent to which voluntary organisations are able to form local attachments, impacting on the development of the voluntary landscape across the city. Local connections between voluntary organisations and the community thus appear to operate on a continuum between local and national, based on their bureaucratic and organisational structures.

Understanding the interplay between voluntary activity, place and political context is also important. We have drawn attention to the differing political landscapes within which voluntary organisations operate and how their relationships with the state – and hence their ability to influence the policy process at both local and national levels – is affected by these environments.

Recent changes in the Scottish political landscape, at both local and national levels, has had an important impact on voluntary sector development, with organisations finding themselves having to forge new relationships in the local and national policy arenas. However, we have also illustrated how voluntarism is bound up with new forms of governance across Glasgow, in which the local state is becoming more a strategic enabler than a central player. Such developments are creating new places in which the politics of the city are being played out. Yet it is also clear that differing groups within the voluntary sector have differing abilities to access these new sites of governance (and hence the political agenda), raising questions about the extent to which voluntary and community partnership in the delivery of social welfare may be contributing to an increase in the so-called democratic deficit.

For those working in the field of social policy, then, the promise of taking a geographical approach to voluntarism is to insist that *where* these events are taking place matters to both their form and outcome (Brown, 1997).

Notes

- 1 LOVAS surveys were commissioned by the Home Office (Westminster) to assess the vitality and resources of voluntary action at local level across England and Wales (but not Scotland). Its aim has been to provide researchers with a systematic methodology to enable comparability across different studies. Adoption of this schema has not been unproblematic, and whilst we do not discuss this here, it is an issue that we address in other work arising from this project.
- 2 While most SIPs are spatially defined, the strategy does make small provision for theme-based SIPs. Three currently exist in Glasgow: Routes Out of Prostitution; Glasgow Anti-Racist Alliance, The Big Step (care leavers).

Acknowledgement

This study was funded by the ESRC Reference No: R000223093.

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