

# Micro-mapping: what lies beneath the third sector radar?

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## **Micro-Mapping: What lies beneath the third sector radar?**

### **Abstract**

Academic and policy discussion of the third sector has increasingly come to recognise the importance of locating and understanding the range of organised activity that is not captured by sources dependent upon existing registration and member lists of organisations – sometimes referred to as ‘below-the-radar’ activity. Research to identify such organised activity requires the development and implementation of innovative methods to search beneath the radar and map what is found. This article reports on research carried out using a ‘micro-mapping’ approach in two urban locations in England. This revealed a wide range of organisations that had not been captured by more traditional methods and found that they were engaged in a range of activities providing distinctive services and supports within their local communities. The research also revealed the critical role played by *community bricoleurs* and *community hubs* in supporting and sustaining many of these organisations. We conclude that this has important implications for research (in developing a new methodology for micro-mapping) and for policy (in revealing the range and structure of ‘below-the-radar’ activity).

**Key words:** micro-mapping, below-radar groups, self-organised activity, third sector

### **Looking below the radar**

Academic research on the third sector has long been dogged by both theoretical and empirical challenges and conflicts. At the theoretical level there is debate over terminology. The sector is, for instance, referred to as the non-profit sector in the United States; as the non-government sector in international policy and development; and the voluntary and community sector has been the tradition in the UK. The term third sector seeks to encompass these, but is itself controversial – not least in the UK where the new Coalition government has rejected its usage, preferring to refer to the sector as ‘Civil Society’. In practice, all these different terms carry slightly different meanings and nuances – for instance, the voluntary and community sector in the UK did not tend to include social enterprises, and some have argued that Civil Society is not a synonym for the sector and has quite a different heritage and usage (Evers and Laville, 2004; Evers, 2010).

Some of these tensions and distinctions are explored in more detail in Alcock (2010), where it is concluded that the sector may be little more in practice than a ‘strategic unity’ constructed in particular circumstances for particular reasons. This is linked to a second theoretical conflict to do with the boundaries of the sector, and in particular its distinction from the public sector and the market (or for-profit) sector. Evers and Laville have argued that these boundaries cannot be firmly fixed and that on these margins there are ‘tension fields’, where organisations may move between, or span across, different sectors – and they include in this overlap the informal sector of family and neighbourhood too (Evers and Laville, 2004, pp. 17 and 22). More recently Billis (2010) has argued that these overlapping boundaries are in practice creating *hybrid* bodies that are no longer really

‘proper’ voluntary organisations, so that the notion of a distinctive sector itself is under theoretical challenge.

What we mean by the third sector is therefore contested. This links into empirical challenges to research on the sector too: different definitions of the sector can lead to different ways to operationalise the concept and will, subsequently, lead to different measures of its scale or structure; but the problems run deeper than this. Whatever definition we adopt we can only use this to develop an empirical picture, or map, of the sector if there is data about the organisations covered which we can interrogate to provide this. And here too there are conflicts over reliable and comprehensive sources.

Much of the statistical data on third sector organisations that is relied on by researchers comes from administrative records collected for other purposes – for instance, the Charity Commission register of recognised charities in England and Wales, or the register of Companies Limited by Guarantee in Companies House. Data such as these are used by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) to compile their annual *Almanac* on the sector in the UK (Clark et al, 2010) and by the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) to track changes in the sector over time (Clifford and Backus, 2010). However, these datasets can only tell us about organisations covered by these registers. Thus our knowledge of charities is limited by the definition of charitable purposes used to determine the need for registration, and the willingness of individual organisations to undertake the process of securing registration and entering their records. This is a legalistic, rather than a theoretical, definition of charity and is inevitably going to miss many organisations which we might want to include in any comprehensive measurement of the third sector.

The other major statistical sources of data are national surveys of organisations, or perhaps individuals. The only large-scale survey of organisations is the National Survey of Third Sector Organisations (NSTSO) commissioned by the (then) Office of the Third Sector (OTS) in 2008 and repeated by the Office for Civil Society (OCS) in 2010. This is an England-only survey – revealing a more general problem with statistics on the third sector in the UK to do with the recent devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland whereby securing comparable data across all four countries is now more difficult. The NSTSO survey was based on a sample of organisations across all local authorities that itself largely relied on datasets drawn from Charity Commission and Companies House registers. It had a good response rate (47%) and data collated from this work is been used by TSRC (Clifford, 2011), which has also used data from surveys of individuals, such as the Citizenship Survey, to develop measurement of volunteering levels (Staetsky and Mohan, 2011). But like all statistical surveys, this information is only as robust as the sample for and responses to survey questions on which it is based, and so it cannot provide a comprehensive empirical picture.

What these major statistical data sources can tell us about are those organisations that are in the national registers and their response to the national surveys. This is important information about a significant part of the third sector; but it is a part only. And, as the theoretical debates above reveal, it may ignore in particular those organisations on the boundaries of the sector that may not find their way into these official channels. The term ‘below-the-radar’ has been developed to refer to those organisations that operate outside of these official registers or lists. This too is a contested term to some extent and certainly we need to recognise that there are a number of different ‘radars’, seeking to detect and record voluntary organisation – and some organisations may be beyond one radar and within another (McCabe and Phillimore, 2009).

In addition to national listings, like the Charity Commission register, there are also local listings, in particular those held by local membership bodies, such as Community and Voluntary Services agencies (CVS). Researchers commissioned by the Northern Rock Foundation carried out work in the

North-East of England using local listings to develop a more detailed quantitative picture of organisations outside the Charity Commission radar and found an extended locally-variant range of activity (Mohan et al. 2010 and 2011). Local listings were also used by the OTS to carry out a booster survey in three local areas in 2009 to see if these organisations responded any differently to those in their main national sample (Ipsos MORI 2010).

There is recognition that our definition of third sector organisations needs to be a flexible and inclusive one therefore; and there have been attempts to move beyond some of the more established formal records to gain empirical information about them. Many of these, however, appear in grey literature produced by and for the third sector and have tended to be carried out for specific purposes. These include work by the regional infrastructure agency Greater Manchester Council for Voluntary Organisations summarised in their report '*Wake up Saddleworth*' (GMCVO 2008) and mapping of the contribution of the voluntary and community sector in the Yorkshire and Humber Region (Lewis 2001). There are also examples of projects that have focused on specific target communities, including the black minority ethnic and women's voluntary and community sectors (see for example, Voice4Change 2008 and Soteri 2002). These mapping projects have used different geographical locations and different definitions, and have operated with different levels of investment. Furthermore, they were not necessarily carried out to understand below-radar groups per se, and as a result variations between them make any meaningful comparisons between these studies difficult – a view echoed in a report by Pharoah and Siederer (2003) in which 43 local mapping studies (excluding studies by LOVAS) were reviewed.

There are also some important policy implications in these challenges to current definitions and measurement. Policy on, and for, the third sector has inevitably been based largely upon knowledge of the activities and needs of those organisations featuring on the radar. This is revealed most clearly in the NSTSO and its role in informing OTS/OCS and government policy more generally. It was one of the reasons that OTS carried out the booster survey in 2009, although their conclusion was that this did not reveal any significantly different issues of policy or practice amongst the organisations responding to this (Ipsos MORI 2010). If the activities and needs of organisations operating beyond these official sources are different and distinctive to some extent, however, then this could have important implications for policy makers, both inside government and beyond, who are wanting to promote and support third sector activity.

For the large part, however, our knowledge of the sector remains dominated by the sources on which we necessarily rely for information about it – by and large we can only see what is on the radar. And, as a consequence, policy is likely to be dominated by this focus too. There is an interesting challenge here for politicians and policy makers who wish to promote voluntary and community organisation as a key element of the *Big Society* that the government is seeking to create. If we can look below-the-radar, what will that tell us about the prospects for the Big Society, either now or in the future?

This article reports on research which was developed to move beyond the official, and semi-official, sources to try to map in detail all organisational activity within two discrete geographical areas - to see what lies beneath the third sector radar here. Inevitably this was a limited, and labour intensive, task and the areas covered were only small. We have referred to it as *micro-mapping*, or street-level measurement. It does not therefore provide a representative picture, or at least not one which could be scaled-up to be representative of other areas, still less the sector as a whole. But it does provide a fascinating insight into the depth, breadth and variety of organisational activity taking place within these areas, and suggests that, if we were able to look beneath the radar in other places too, we might find out much about the third sector and its place in our social lives that cannot be captured in official measures and top-down descriptions.

## The street-level method

### *Selecting sites*

The purpose of our street-level measurement was to provide a micro-map of all organisational activity taking place in a small local area. The specific commitment was to go beyond the existing records and listing of organisations (the different radar) and seek out activity that might not be listed, that might not have an address, or even a name – and that might not see the need to, or want to avoid, membership of, or engagement with, larger national or regional agencies. To do this we chose two distinct neighbourhoods, each located within wider urban conurbations. Tight geographical boundaries were important for this as it was anticipated that this would be intensive research that would inevitably require access to, and development to, a close knowledge of local people and places – although, as we shall discuss, it was recognised that organisational activity is not always contained neatly within small neighbourhoods.

Our methodology was adapted from earlier work by LOVAS (Local Voluntary Activity Surveys), though for our own different purposes. LOVAS was commissioned by the then Voluntary and Community Unit in the Home Office to understand the scope and characteristic of voluntary activity. By using search approaches such as walking-the-streets, scouring notice boards and collecting information from visits to public buildings, combined with other secondary sources (Marshall 1997), the aim was to map the entirety of volunteering in an area. This went beyond any given sector and was intended to lead to surveys on the distribution of voluntary activity (see, for example, Marshall et al. 1997), and the development of standardised tools that could be replicated by others to provide opportunities for comparisons between local areas and the same areas over time (Marshall 1997). The emphasis of LOVAS was on aspects of volunteering, rather than the composition of the wider third sector. Nevertheless, the multiple search tools developed for their initial phase of work had the appeal to be adapted for the purpose of capturing activity beyond official and local listings and locating very informal groups that may be without a name and address.

Anticipating the labour-intensive nature of ‘street-level’ fieldwork, tight geographical boundaries were put in place to manage the feasibility of the project. Two discrete geographical areas were selected, each located in relatively large urban areas: ‘High Street’, located within an urban local authority in the West Midlands; and ‘Mill Town’, located in an urban part of a local authority consisting of a mix of urban and semi-rural landscape in the North West of England. They were selected for their distinctive features with the potential to offer wider insights into the breadth of groups operating in different types of urban areas. In addition, one of these was selected because of its coverage in the NSTSO piloted study mentioned earlier – offering the potential advantage to do (future) comparative analyses.

*High Street* – a residential area consisting of six streets; one of which includes a High Street with restaurants and supermarkets selling diverse foods, a mix of faith buildings and public buildings including a job-centre and library. Within a few miles of a busy city centre, High Street is situated in a densely populated ward with more than 25,000 residents and has a high BME population (82%) compared with the city’s average (30%). It has a long history of migrant settlement with an established Asian and Black-Caribbean community, and a recent influx of migrant and asylum seekers that have not been captured in the 2001 census. At the time of the fieldwork in 2009-2010 the economically active constituted 54% of the population at ward level, which was lower than the city’s average of 61%.

*Mill Town* - a residential area situated within a mile of the town shopping centre. The wider conurbation consists of town and moorland country in the North West of England. In contrast with High Street, the local authority's population is predominantly white (over 90%) and the largest ethnic population is South Asian (4%). At the time of fieldwork, the economically-active constituted over 80% -- higher than the North West's average working population. Overall this is largely a white affluent area with some pockets of deprivations; Mill Town is one of them. Furthermore, like High Street, Mill Town has experienced an influx of migrant, refugee and asylum seekers that are not captured in the 2001 census figures.

### *Street walking and 'dropping in'*

The value of this research is as much about the methodology that we were able to develop, building on the LOVAS experience, as it is about the findings that flowed from this. It is worth some reflection on this process and the implications of it for future research. It meant that we developed different varieties of routes to carry out the searches.

In the case of 'High Street', the route was made up of a high street (hence the name) and five neighbouring (primarily residential) roads. This was constructed using existing knowledge of organisational activities that might be located in the area, based on some previous research in the area. Once the route was constructed, an 'indiscriminate sector search' approach was used to find groups. This involved a range of activities that included walking round the streets and dropping into as many buildings, whatever their purpose, to talk to any people who could help us.

Following this a different route was constructed for Mill Town. Here significantly more investigative time was put into selecting the area and drawing up the route and this involved developing contacts and meeting with staff from a regional infrastructure agency, local infrastructure agency and local authority neighbourhood liaison office. This was, in part, to help us to identify an area with contrasting features in terms of wider ethnic demographics – in practice a predominantly 'white' English population (although there was some anecdotal evidence of a growing refugee, asylum and migrant population settling in the area). A route was then constructed by connecting streets for five focal points (of voluntary and community activity) which were identified from a walking-interview with the Chief Executive of a local infrastructure agency. These five focal points were used to talk to people accessed in these 'spaces' to find out more about groups in the area, in contrast to the 'indiscriminate sector search' used in High Street.

Fieldwork was carried out over twelve-months by one part-time researcher with some assistance from a community researcher and volunteers. In the first area (High Street) a community researcher was employed to add local and cultural knowledge and (potentially) widen access to community activities in the area. Volunteers also worked on an ad-hoc base and assisted with searches and location of information about groups, including some street-walking and on-line searches. As already indicated multiple search tools were used to find local community activities. These were not carried out in any particular sequence and in practice multiple searches were used at any given time.

- Solo walks – this included walking through streets looking at notice boards and adverts in, for example, shop windows, outside buildings and elsewhere.
- Walking interview – as noted earlier, this was carried out in Mill Town with the Chief Executive Officer of a local infrastructure agency to identify a search route, although it also helped to locate a number of local groups.
- Visiting buildings and open spaces that people might meet in. These included, for example,

community centres, faith-based buildings, leisure centres, libraries and (in High Street) shops. Visits involved scouring notice boards, picking up leaflets, reading adverts and other information on groups. Where possible, we spoke with people who might know of groups meeting in these and other places and looked through publically available diaries and appointment calendars to identify groups using communal rooms and offices.

- Conversations, emails and interviews with people who were identified as having knowledge about activities going on in buildings and the local area.
- On-line searches for groups identified to us as well as looking for groups in the selected postal code areas

These multiple search tools were used to maximize opportune moments to gather information as-and-when individuals were available. Where it was possible to speak directly with people who reported some form of connection with groups, a form was used to collect basic information on the groups and other potential leads. Even using a simple four-page form in any systematic way, however, presented challenges. This was because whilst some individuals reported knowing of groups, they often did not have complete information or even a full name for the person(s) leading the groups and activities.

The information about local groups and activities we gathered through these methods was, as we have explained, confined to small local areas in largely deprived urban neighbourhoods. This inevitably meant that we were likely to exclude organisations that did not have fixed-based geographical bases, for example, groups on the move such as the 'Reclaim the Streets' cycling campaigns. Virtual networks were also unlikely to be captured. We were operating in urban environments and it is likely that activities and organisational structure may be different in inner city, suburban or rural areas – although these are challenges for future similar research, which we hope that others will follow.

## **58 varieties**

The most important finding from our street-level measurement was the scale and range of organisational activity that we found: 58 self-organised activities operating in and around 11 streets of England. There is a lot going on below-the-radar, and it is making a significant contribution to our 'Civil Society'. Moreover we suspect that this is a conservative estimate of below-radar groups and activities in these two locations: with more time and more resources to follow-up incomplete leads it is highly likely we would have found more.

We arrived at the figure of 58 using a process of elimination from information on over 215 entities initially identified. Groups and activities were excluded if they did not, for example, operate within the 'street-walking' routes, if they were projects and activities provided by registered charities and other sector organisations, such as businesses and public libraries. We also excluded activities organised by individuals aimed at generating an income for classes, such as Judo and Karate. In addition, groups were excluded if we did not have sufficient information on them.

These remaining 58 below-radar groups covered a diverse range of services and activities for those who share a particular topic of interest and who are from a 'target community', such as a particular ethnic background, faith, country of origin, the elderly, youth and disabled people and combinations of these and, more generally, geared towards individuals living in the local area. Despite their diversity, they were not completely disparate and it was possible to identify six main types of below-radar activity. In alphabetical order these are:

- Arts and music,

- Multicultural and multiple faith and ethnic identities
- Niche and specialist interest
- Self-help and mutual support
- Single identity cultural, faith and ethnic activities
- Social club-based activities.

These types are somewhat arbitrary and are used for descriptive and analytical purposes rather than to suggest that these groups are one-dimensional; indeed, in reality there was substantial overlap between several of them.

*Arts and music:*

This included groups in which art and music appear to be the central focus of activity. They embraced one group for those who are 'into all kinds of jazz', a writer group and an art group. There was also a folk-dancing group that focused on the performance dance traditionally associated with a particular ethnic group and could, arguably, be considered under the single identity type too.

*Multicultural and multiple faith and ethnic identities:*

This type included those focusing on activities targeted towards people who were from several (usually more than two) faiths, ethnicities and countries. Although there were examples of groups geared towards a mix of established ethnic communities and recent arrivals, several of them focused on activities and services for recent UK arrivals. They included a 'multinational football team' initially set up as part of a cohesion project by a registered charity to bring together young isolated (refugee) men and a 'patchwork quilt group' for refugee and asylum-seeker women.

*Niche specialist interests:*

These included groups for people who come together to share a very specific, niche interest, including a 'dowser group', a group for those interested in (old-style) filmmaking and 'film watching' and another for those interested in transmitters and radios.

*Self-help and mutual support:*

These were groups who supported each other, usually through identified shared-experiences and mutual monetary support. They included a seasonal 'lone-parent' group who met weekly over the summer at a church hall, parents whose children had died through gun-crime, women's aid support (not part of the national Women's Aid group) and a support group for the hard-of-hearing. Three groups were identified as supporting each other primarily for mutual monetary purposes, all of which were reported to stem back to practices and needs of migrant Pakistani communities settling in the local area during the 1950s – including a group supporting burial services and a 'friend-saving-club'.

*Single-identity cultural, faith and ethnic activities*

These included groups that specified support for people from a particular ethnic or faith group or country of origin, from both established communities and recent UK arrivals. There was a significant number in both High Street and Mill Town. They covered a wide range of activities and interests for a diverse range of users from different countries and ethnicities. In the case of the groups in High Street cumulatively these covered people from ten different countries, including Angola, Lithuania, Russia and Sudan. Whilst many of the groups offered opportunities to learn English and classes for children to learn their parents' 'mother-tongue', many of them also organised cultural and social activities such as cooking lessons and sewing, to provide opportunities for people to come together.

*Social club based activities:*

These were what some might consider as 'hobby' groups, and, all but one group were advertised as being for elderly people. They included a bridge club, line-dancing, machine-knitting, sewing classes



and 'senior sports', whilst others offered more general activities for the 'elderly'. The other group was a social club for young disabled people.

A summary of these types is outlined in Table 1. It is worth noting that four groups did not sit well in any of these six types. They include a community farm for abused and animals, a group that looks after local communal areas by, for example, planting flower beds and a group of friends and family who put together savings on a regular bases to send money to orphans and widows from a nominated village in Pakistan. Furthermore, due to insufficient information, a further nine groups were not included in these six types.

{Insert Table Heading and Table here}

Even in such small localities, the vast diversity of below-radar groups was clearly evident – with variation between and within the six types. By and large, many of them were embedded into their communities, operating within a specific socio-cultural context at very local area. Although not in their entirety, many of them were likely to reflect the interests and needs of those within their local area. For instance, groups in High Street tended to fall into the two types: 'Multicultural identity' and 'Single-cultural identity' and captured more than ten different ethnicities, faith and countries - reflecting an area that some refer to as 'super diverse'. In contrast, there was more variation in Mill Town, including groups with niche interests and activities for the elderly, as well as multicultural- and single-cultural identity groups.

### **Tapping in tapping out and giving out**

What our micro-mapping also revealed was some of the innovative and flexible aims and activities of these local organisations. Much of these activities were self-organised and not in receipt of any formal funding and were able to generate resources – both financial and human – and distribute these to meet community needs. Expounding on this are illustrative examples on the abilities of groups to generate resources by '**tapping in**' to their own users and '**tapping out**' beyond their users to blend resources for their work and activities with a further dimension on '**giving out**'; highlighting that whilst many below-radar groups existed to support their own users, there were several instances in which very small local groups were distributing resources (money and time) to wider communities.

#### *Tapping in...*

In the case of '*tapping in*', several groups self-sustained their activities by asking for donations and charging nominal amounts of money to cover the basic costs of, for example, room-hire and food. Illustrating this was the case of a writing group that asked for a £3 weekly donation to cover the cost of room hire and the seasonal lone-parent group mentioned earlier that asked users for a £1 weekly donation to cover the cost of tea and biscuits.

In addition, there were cases in which members regularly contributed money to a shared pot to support each other, resembling mutual saving and insurance-type schemes. As noted earlier, one example here was the burial service, referred to as the 'Death Committee'. This group's history was set within the context of what was then a new Pakistani community in Mill Town during the 1950s. Initially, the basic function was for each individual to make a regular contribution to a shared pot which would then be used to help cover the cost of sending a member's deceased body home for burial. This group continued to function in the 2010s and now tends to be used to cover funeral services in the UK.

### *Tapping out ...*

In the case of groups 'tapping out' to generate resources beyond their users, they did this in a variety of ways including innovative entrepreneurial activities such as making and selling jewellery, arts and craft. Some obtained small amounts of money from charitable trusts and other schemes set up for small groups. These tended to be for discrete projects and for the purchase of specified products. In addition, some groups received payment in-kind that contributed towards sustaining activities.

Two powerful illustrations of the multiple ways in which groups obtained resources from within (tapping in) and outside of their user group (tapping out) are evident in the pen portraits of a women's international group and a community farm for abandoned and abused animals..

#### **Women's group in High Street**

This group consisted of women from established ethnic communities and recent arrivals to the UK in the local area. Users were from diverse backgrounds and different countries, including: Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and India.

Initially, the group came together as a result of women from different third sector groups (using the same building) talking 'over a cup of coffee' about the changes of eligibility for subsidized places at the local colleges English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes: the new means-tested criterion that were introduced in line with the Learning Skills Council meant that several of the women were not being able access this service:

*... it was just through meeting other women in the other organisations over a cup of coffee... we just thought it wasn't very fair, we didn't find it logical that the very people needing this provision couldn't tap into it because of financial issues. And it sort of developed on from there as a sort of coffee morning group where we invited women to come along and just talk and in what way they could improve their English because they were from different countries, different backgrounds. Just by talking they could make friends, they could improve their English language skills... and it developed from there.*

Although this group initially met to learn English, users began to identify other issues faced by women in the local community; and, with the assistance from staff in their host organisation they managed to obtain external resources to run ad-hoc events. These included events on: 'confidence-building for women', the menopause and health awareness on cancer(s). Some of these events were held at a nearby school and at a local fire station. More recently, the group's interest has broadened to include learning about their 'rights' and having their 'say' on 'services in their area'.

Although the group received some support from key (paid) staff who worked in the building, they operated as a volunteer-led group and did not have paid staff of their own. At the time of fieldwork, however, their expanding interests meant they were looking for ways to obtain additional amounts of money to achieve their vision of having a 'permanent post for a development worker who can take up the day-to-day running of this organisation'. Until then, however, they raised money through the sell of bric-a-brac and making and selling, for example, jewellery.

*It was one way of overcoming that barrier (financial support) until we get some funding for a paid member... and also I think those kind of things draw women in, jewellery, make up, books ...' are raising money to support their activities ...*

Recently this group has obtained a small pot of money from a funding body that supports local grassroots organisations to help with some of their activities.

### Community Farm in Mill Town

The community farm is for abused and abandoned animals and includes 100 battery hens, a goat, pigs and rabbits. The farm was volunteer-run by *Paul*, a retired farmer, along with support from his wife.

Despite the farm's work spanning over the North West region, there are no paid staff to sustain the mammoth task of running the farm which involves: obtaining resources to transport animals, maintaining the land, feeding and cleaning out animals' homes and finding the money to cover vet fees (one of the largest financial outgoings).

Paul is an incredibly resourceful person who 'taps in' and 'taps out' in multiple ways to sustain the farm. He has, for example, established links with local and national organisations to support the work by providing time, money and other services. Illustrating this, Paul has an agreement with DEFRA for the transportation of some of the animals and a veterinarian who does occasional pro-bono work; and he has obtained money from local funding bodies to purchase specified equipment. In addition, he has help from volunteers and participants from work experience schemes, including schools, youth offending rehabilitation programmes and work programmes that help to, for example, '*clean out, muck out and feed the rabbits*'. On top of this, Paul creates ways to raise money by, for example, doing weekend car-boot sales, selling free-range eggs and buying and selling bedding plants.

### *Giving out...*

In addition to 'tapping in' and 'tapping out' to sustain themselves, several of these small local groups generated resources and distributed them to (their) wider communities – '*giving out*' – for different reasons and in a variety of ways. For instance, the case where friends and family put together savings on a regular bases to send to orphans and widows of a nominated village in Pakistan. In another case, responding to a community centre's appeal to raise money for a replacement boiler and necessary building work for this, several below-radar groups were involved in and organised their own events to raise money. Women from one of the 'multicultural identity' groups, for example, ran a day-event offering 'threading services' at £3 per treatment, others cooked and sold meals, and one group put a temporary surcharge on their weekly dance class fee. At the time of fieldwork, cumulatively, these groups raised over £1,000 to contribute towards a project that was estimated to cost in excess of £40,000. In addition another group was setting up a volunteer befriending service for isolated people in their local community.

Other illustrations included the international women's group that organised health awareness events for women in the local area, and Paul from the Community Farm who attended several local events, sometimes with animals:

*We take the animals out to garden parties and schools and we're out with [local organisation] on 10<sup>th</sup> July ... we work with [national animal charity] ... We take animals and it's amazing how many people have never touched a live animal, a farm animal and things like that. There's no money in it for us. It's the satisfaction.*

Paul's engagement with local and government programmes could also be considered as offering services to participants of these schemes and, arguably, contributed towards benefitting the wider community.

## Bricoleurs and community hubs

Self-organised activities in this study can, in part, be seen as the collective endeavours of individual 'bricoleurs'. This is a term adapted from the work of Lévi-Strauss in social entrepreneurial literature to refer to individuals who are able to draw on and acquire a mix of resources to get on with what they are doing, and making ends meet by blending whatever they can for their own purposes (see for example, Di Dominico et al. 2010). Examples include the mutual groups set within the historical socio-cultural context of what were once the new economic migrants in the 1950s in Mill Town, and groups set up at a time in need of (financial) support and have continued. Even more so, perhaps examples of this can be found in the pen portraits on the Community Farm found in Mill Town and the women's group found in High Street. In the case of the farm, with his drive and commitment Paul successfully tapped into local and national networks to obtain money, time and equipment to sustain the farm for abused and abandoned animals. This is fittingly captured in a quotation:

*Once I [Paul] get into something I don't give a damn: I just go and go. I'll get it because Robert the Bruce says 'try, try and try again'. You have to don't you? ... They can say yes or no, but I won't take no for an answer. I have to keep going."*

Like Paul, users from the women's group pulled together multiple resources for their activities, including making and selling art, craft and jewellery. In contrast, however, this group's location in a building offering communal space had the additional advantage of (potential) frequent access to (paid and unpaid) staff and, in particular, access to a related phenomena that we refer to as 'Community Bricoleurs'.

Our focus in the locations used by the activities and organisations that we identified revealed a story beyond, yet entwined with, bricoleurs, and to do with the (potential) resources and opportunities arising from the use of shared space. As noted earlier, several of the groups in this study operated with small overheads and little, if any, finance to sustain their activities. In this sense money was not (directly, at least) central for them to sustain themselves. Nevertheless, whether or not they were aware of this, many of these groups were supported in a variety of ways (both directly and indirectly) by paid and unpaid staff working in the buildings that they used. At the most basic level, for example, staff prepared space for their use by putting away and setting up furniture. Some also received assistance with holding meetings, and there were several examples of staff helping groups put together applications for small pots of money. More fundamentally, there were staff who worked behind the scenes to ensure that the shared space itself was a financially viable resource to the community, by bringing in money to sustain their own organisation and, thereby, the building in which these groups meet.

Other opportunities arising from the use of shared-space included the cross-over between different groups and the cross-fertilisation that resulted in the creation of new groups. For example, in the case of the community centre that needed a replacement boiler, fundraising activities such as a jumble-sale stall located in the main communal hall led to a cross-over between groups. In another case women from different groups 'chatting over coffee' led to the identification of shared concerns on the (lack of) access to ESOL classes, subsequently leading to the formation of a self-support group that went on to offer a diverse range of activities on, for example, health awareness.

Of critical importance here were the 'community bricoleurs' who we found operating in shared spaces used by local groups. These are distinct from individual bricoleurs who, in this study, obtain and blend a mix of resources to support and sustain their *own* group. Community bricoleurs instead operated beyond the boundaries of any one group and pulled together resources for *several* groups and individuals. Two illustrations, one from each of the piloted areas, demonstrate the vision and commitment to support and sustain below-radar activities provided by these community bricoleurs.

One is a paid staff found in an organisation that might be considered a ‘community hub’ or ‘community anchor organisation’ in High Street; although there are different definitions some of the defining features include centres with a multitude of purposes that are neighbourhood based (see, for example, CLES 2009). The second is a volunteer and trustee of, again, what some might consider to be a ‘community hub’.

The first example is that of *Ben*, a white male in his 70s. Since his retirement, Ben’s continued interest on the ‘plight of refugees’ and lack of infrastructural support available to them (before the time of organisations such as the National Asylum Support Services) led to the development of an organisation that could provide a physical base for refugee and migrant community groups. The success of forming this organization was assisted not only by his vision, but by his historical positioning: Ben has worked on housing issues for several decades in the city council and the housing sector and was a member of a political party, he was also involved with various local and national committees, including the Cabinet Office. Using his networks and connections combined with his vision and skills, Ben pulled together money and other resources from, for example, a housing organisation, the city council and a regeneration community cohesion funding pot to re-wire an affordable property accessed from a private landlord (with rent covered by a large national housing association) to provide space for multiple groups:

*[we] begged and borrowed desks and chairs... nothing matches in here but it’s all serviceable*

After three years of financial support from a housing association, the final third year being an extension to an initial two-year agreement, what was once a below-radar organization itself is now an independent self-sustaining charity, registered with the Charity Commission. The organisation is now home to several groups, some are constituted and others not, some are registered charities, some are at varying process of registering as charities and others are not.

The second example is *Brenda*, a trustee and volunteer of a community centre that offers services to the local (geographic) community, which includes the provision of space to local voluntary and community groups. Brenda spends much of her time at the centre offering (voluntary) support to individuals and community groups; in particular, those who are refugee and asylum seekers. During one of our fieldwork visits, as part of a volunteer-support user group Brenda offered support to refugees and asylum seekers who were looking for (emergency) assistance to complete some forms; she has also been pivotal in setting up off-shoots from this group to help individuals support each other. They include a group of women refugees who get together to sew and talk, and a weekly evening social club for young isolated refugee men.

Like Ben, Brenda has a wide network that spans sectors and she has been adeptly described as a woman with ‘many fingers in many pies’ – using her skills and knowledge to obtain a mix of resources and bring them into the space in which these groups operate in. She had also managed to tap into networks at the nearby Further Education college to obtain small amounts of money to run ESOL classes for refugee and asylum seekers attending the community centre.

### **Big Society or little societies?**

What our micro-mapping has revealed is that when we do look beneath the established third-sector radar, we can find a range of organised activity that has not been captured by official sources; in short, the work demonstrates that there is a lot going on below-the-radar. More than this, however, the findings illustrate a number of features that are rarely identified or explored in research on the

sector which relies on more established sources. Not surprisingly perhaps much of this activity is self-organised and unfunded (at least in terms of formal grants or contracts from public or private funders). However, it does both generate and distribute resources, and through this is able to respond to a range of local needs and priorities, which would be unlikely to be the subject of larger formal organisations, or still less public services - for instance, the death committee and the women's international group.

There was thus a wide range and scale of activity in the two areas that we examined. We identified '58 varieties' of organisation that can contribute towards the development of the typologies of mission and form discussed earlier. This is a wide range of activity, but it is far from disparate. Indeed as our analysis explains, the development of organisations, their 'tapping in' and 'tapping out' of resources, and the spaces that they share mean that they do not operate as islands. There is co-ordination and collaboration, and many organisations rely on these relationships to survive such as the volunteer-support user group that relies on the voluntary efforts of Brenda and the community farm (though not in the case of shared-space).

What is more there are key catalysts to this community collaboration. The *bricoleurs* who help to draw in and co-ordinate activity and organisation are frequently critical to the development and maintenance of these relationships; and the shared spaces in which many activities take place are often an essential resource. Community hubs and community bricoleurs were at the centre of the organisational activity that we were able to identify and analyse through our street-level measurement in High Street and Mill Town. This could be an isolated co-incidence of dense and co-ordinated community activity; but that seems unlikely – and, if it is not, then some important research and policy implications flow from this.

Our micro-mapping research utilised an innovative methodology to explore an empirical and theoretical lacuna in third sector research. We wanted to know what, if anything, was going on below-the-radar, and what it could tell us about the broader nature of the third sector. It was intensive research in two small areas, and obviously it would be helpful if this could be rolled out to a wider range of local settings to explore to what extent local organisations replicate or depart from the models we found here. This is potentially expensive research, but it is also closely linked to local policy development (as we discuss below). Our methodology could be adapted and implemented by community researchers in any local area who want to look beneath the radar and engage in street-level measurement; and we are developing guidance and protocols for such replication, which could be the basis for micro-mapping of the sector on a much wider basis. Additional, more detailed work being explored on, for example, the acquisition of knowledge, skills and expertise is being carried out in TSRC's 'Family Trees' project<sup>1</sup>.

There are also significant policy implications flowing from this work. Policy makers in government and outside frequently seek to engage with and to support third sector activity, and want to use information about the sector to inform this. In particular, at the local community level our research suggests that policy making needs to move beyond the established organisations to embrace too the more informal activity taking place below-the-radar. For local policy makers this could mean engaging in micro-mapping within their area, and perhaps drawing on our methodological developments to facilitate this.

This may be of importance also to the new UK government on a national basis (at least in England), with their commitment to 'Building the Big Society' (Cabinet Office, 2010), to localism and to the promotion of citizen and community action. If there is to be a new Big Society, then perhaps it is mainly to be found below-the-radar. Or rather, as our research suggests, it may be that we already

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tsrc.ac.uk/Research/BelowtheRadarBtR/Familytrees/tabid/731/Default.aspx>

have a much 'bigger' society than we realise, comprised in practice of lots of little societies, interdependent with each other and with other local agents and resources. It is these agents, and the resources they can muster, that could be critical to its future development.

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