

Researching the Third Sector through Time: Methods, Ethics and Insights

A one day seminar, hosted by the Timescapes Initiative
University of Leeds

Speakers Biographies and Abstracts

Scottish Government longitudinal study

Sue Bond (Napier)

Sue Bond is a Senior Research Fellow at the Employment Research Institute (ERI), Edinburgh Napier University. Sue has specialised in employment and policy-related research for 13 years, focusing on equalities and employment as well as evaluations of public policy initiatives.

Abstract

The Scottish Government has acknowledged that the third sector has a key role to play in delivering public services that are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs.

Using a qualitative longitudinal methodology over a period of three years, this study examines the opportunities and challenges facing third sector organisations in Scotland in the delivery of public services. This presentation will focus on results from the first year of the research. The first year aimed to establish a 'baseline' by which subsequent years of research could be compared.

The methodology involved qualitative research (including in-depth case studies and focus groups) with 20 voluntary sector organisations based in Scotland between December 2009 and May 2010.

The sector has a number opportunities afforded by the policy context, such as the Enterprising Third Sector Plan and competitive tendering. However, it also faces a series of challenges relating to devolved funding, managing in a competitive environment, and increasingly, budget constraints imposed on public services.

Third Sector Trends

Victoria Bell (Teesside)

Victoria Bell is a Research Associate at Teesside University. Her interdisciplinary research interests include tourism studies, particularly rural, heritage, cultural, and volunteer tourism; the voluntary and community sector and volunteering; young people and informal learning; qualitative methodologies, with a particular interest in visual methods. She is currently working on a longitudinal research project funded by the Northern Rock Foundation – the Third Sector Trends Study; an evaluation of O2's corporate social responsibility initiative - Think Big; and, an analysis of visitor engagement with Antony Gormley's Angel of the North.

Fred Robinson (Durham)

Fred Robinson is a Professorial Fellow at St Chad's College Durham and Visiting Professor at Northumbria and Teesside

Universities. He is an expert on economic and social development and the role and impacts of public policy and has conducted evaluations of a wide range of regeneration initiatives. He has also undertaken critical assessments of structures and processes of governance in North East England. He has extensive knowledge of the Third Sector and is currently working on the Third Sector Trends Study supported by the Northern Rock Foundation. He is a volunteer and chair at a mental health charity in Durham.

His latest project, supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, is exploring how universities can support disadvantaged communities.

Abstract

The aim of the Northern Rock Foundation Third Sector Trends Study is to provide a detailed analysis of the scale, role and dynamics of the third sector in North East England and Cumbria. The study has a strong focus on achieving a positive impact for the sector, its stakeholders and beneficiaries. A key objective is to support the development of policy and practice through the provision of a strong evidence base.

The research has several different strands, and a phased inter-related programme of work. Tony Chapman of Teesside University and Fred Robinson of Durham University are leading the qualitative strand that we will be discussing here. John Mohan of the University of Southampton led the quantitative work, alongside NCVO, Guidestar UK and Cumbria and Newcastle CVS.

The qualitative strands of the research are longitudinal. They include:

- A biennial study of a sample of 50 TSOs to explore interactions between the ‘external environment’ and the ‘internal dynamics’ of TSOs.
- A large scale survey which, like the TSO50, will be repeated biennially (in different years to the TSO50).
- The establishment of ‘Foresight Panels’ – invited key informants from within and beyond the third sector in North East England and Cumbria.

The first phases of these different elements have provided us with a baseline against which change can be measured and understood in two and four years time.

In this presentation we will discuss our approach to the research, including sampling, fieldwork and analysis. We will also explain how we intend to develop a ‘self analysis’ tool for TSOs on the completion of our longitudinal work to help them decide which practices and strategies to adopt in order to achieve their objectives.

Real Times: an in-depth study of third sector organisations over time

Rob Macmillan (Birmingham)

Rob Macmillan is a Research Fellow in the ESRC Third Sector Research Centre at the University of Birmingham, where he is responsible for co-ordinating the ‘Real Times’ qualitative longitudinal study. He has around 15 years experience of researching different aspects of the third sector, including qualitative studies of changing funding regimes, community-based voluntary action, capacity building and infrastructure, and the challenges involved in collaboration and competition in the sector.

Rebecca Taylor (Birmingham)

Rebecca Taylor is a Research Fellow in the ESRC Third Sector Research Centre at the University of Birmingham where she is

part of the Real Times team led by Rob Macmillan and the Theory and Policy research stream led by Pete Alcock. She is completing a study of the impact of the recession on the sector's policy landscape and starting research on BIG as a policy actor. She has worked on several qualitative longitudinal studies over the past 10 years in her previous post at PSI and before that at South Bank University.

Abstract

Qualitative longitudinal research offers the prospect of a deeper understanding of the dynamic operation and unfolding of third sector activities. In exploring the complex sources and experiences of continuity and change over time, it may enable us to see the third sector in new and insightful ways. The Third Sector Research Centre has been developing an in-depth qualitative longitudinal study of third sector organisations called 'Real Times', in which the fortunes, strategies, challenges and performance of a diverse group of organisations are being followed over a three year period in the first instance. We aim through this study to gain a richer appreciation of what happens and what matters to third sector organisations over time. In this presentation we will outline firstly the context, rationale and theoretical underpinnings of the study, and how this has informed the focus, design and structure of the research. We follow this with some discussion of the process and dilemmas of recruiting case study organisations for long term research, alongside some insights from the first wave of fieldwork, with particular reference to the 'position' of case study organisations at what may be regarded as a significant turning point for the third sector as a whole.

Volunteering journeys: understanding patterns of volunteering

Irene Hardill (Northumbria)

Irene Hardill is Professor of Public Policy, Department of Social Sciences, Northumbria University. She has a particular expertise in volunteering and the voluntary and community sector, demography and ageing, and knowledge exchange. Her current research is supported by a series of grants from the ESRC, and includes a New Dynamics of Ageing research grant on sustaining IT use by older people, the Process and Impact Review of the Engaging Scottish Local Authorities Scheme (ESRC/SFC), an ESRC CASE studentship with AgeUK, and an ESRC seminar series on the mixed economy of welfare. She has just completed a book *Enterprising Care: Unpaid voluntary action in the 21st century* for Policy Press with Dr Sue Baines, and co-edited a special issue of *Social Policy and Society* on remaking the economy of welfare that will be published in March 2011.

Abstract

In recent years in policy terms in the UK, as elsewhere, volunteering has become increasingly associated with training for the workplace; a view which offers little to individuals 'beyond' the labour market because of age, disability or care commitments. Applying a neo-Durkheimian framework to a study of volunteers I examine how far the patterns of volunteering can be explained by the underlying institutional factors of strong and weak social regulation and social integration. It draws upon an in-depth ESRC-funded study of volunteering, which used life history interviews with volunteers in an English community beset by concentrated poverty and worklessness.

The life history method and the third sector: insights from recent research on boundary crossing between government and third sector**David Lewis (LSE)**

David Lewis is a full Professor of Social Policy and Development at London School of Economics who specialises in development policy and management, with a particular interest in Non-Governmental Organisations and civil society. He has also written on rural development, organisational issues in development agencies, and anthropological approaches to development.

Abstract

Most research on the relationship between third sector and public sector tends to focus on formal organisational or operational issues. Far less is known about what happens at sector boundaries, or about informal relationships across sectors, and how these develop and change over time. I will talk about recent research on this interface that focused on the people who operate, or move, across this sector boundary. During the research, which was funded as part of the Economic and Social Research Council's Non-Governmental Public Action (NGPA) programme, I talked to people who crossed over in the UK, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. The research drew primarily on work-life history interviews, designed to bring people's experiences alive.

Home-Start through time: the place of personal testimony in organisational history and research**Zoe Munby**

Director of Learning and Quality at *Home-Start* UK

Abstract

For 38 years local Home-Start schemes have been coordinating parent-to-parent support for families in their own homes. This intimate and sustained service has accumulated a wealth of case studies, witness statements and anecdote. The challenge for Home-Start UK, the organisation which co-ordinates this network of community-based services, is how best to use this resource on support for families over time, both to understand the organisation better and to secure its place in the future.
