Voluntary Organisations, Social Welfare and the City

1. Context

The voluntary sector has a long history of providing social welfare in the UK. Ranging from philanthropic to non-profit making bodies, the relative importance of voluntary sector organizations has, however, varied considerably over time. With the rapid development of state welfare services after the Second World War, the voluntary sector largely took a ‘back-seat’ in social provision, deferring to the newly emerging public services (Davis Smith et al, 1995). By contrast, 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, 1998, p.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) and increased the responsibility of local communities via ‘active citizens’ to provide services in tune with local needs (Taylor, 1998). Both these developments relied increasingly on voluntary sector organizations. With the election of a Labour Government in 1997 the momentum behind increasing the role of the voluntary sector has continued as part of ‘New Labour’s’ programme of welfare reform. This was signaled in the run up to the election by the publication of *Building the Future Together: Labour’s policies for Partnership between Government and the Voluntary Sector* and, more recently, in Scotland by the *Scottish Compact* (Scottish Office, 1998) which spells out how the government proposes to encourage a partnership with the voluntary sector, in order to deliver policies connected with the New Deal, the Child Care Strategy and the Social Inclusion agenda. The end of the millennium is therefore a critically important time for the voluntary sector.

A fairly extensive body of research has emerged since the mid-1980s which reflects this growing political and social significance of the voluntary sector (Kramer, 1986, Hedley and Smith, 1992) Deacon, 1996). There are, however, important aspects of the development of the voluntary sector in the UK that remain under-researched. In particular, while much has been written about general changes in the level of voluntary sector activity over time, little attention has focused on the uneven development of voluntary organizations across space, their embeddedness in particular places or their relationships with local, regional and national political contexts. That these are important omissions is signaled by a handful of geographical studies conducted in the UK and North America over the last twenty years.

In relation to the spatial distribution of voluntary activity Wolpert (1977) was one of the first researchers to draw attention to the significance of the uneven distribution of voluntary organizations. More recently, Wolch (1989 and 1990) in a comparative study of Los Angeles and London identified ‘voluntary sector rich’ and ‘voluntary sector poor’ areas of these cities while Fyfe (1995) and Milligan (1998) have highlighted neighbourhood and regional variations in UK voluntary activity in the fields of crime prevention and social welfare respectively. An important conclusion of this work is that
an uneven spatial distribution of voluntary sector activity can mean uneven access to services and to opportunities for participation and involvement in voluntary group activities. Other geographical research has focused on the links between place and the voluntary sector, revealing how voluntary organizations may be affected by or affect the characteristics of particular places. In Brown’s (1997) study of the geography of voluntary support for AIDS victims in Vancouver, for example, he shows how voluntary organizations locate in an area in response to local needs; while Milligan’s (1996) research on the locational preferences of individuals with mental ill-health in Dumfries shows how the presence of a voluntary organization in an area may impact on the movement and distribution of service recipients. More generally, Amin et al (1999) have argued in relation to the UK’s emerging ‘social economy’ (comprising organizations, including voluntary organizations, which do not conform to the conventions of ‘public’ private’ or state and market’) that social economy projects demonstrate a ‘close connection with specific localities and the involvement of communities and groups of people with particular needs’ (p.4). But as these researchers also acknowledge it is not simply the connection with place that is important but also ‘the particular relationships and processes that link social economy projects to their institutional environments’ (p.21). This signals the importance of a third area of geographical research focused on voluntary organizations and their political contexts. The most influential work here is by Wolch who focuses on those voluntary organizations charged with major collective service responsibilities previously shouldered by the public sector. Because these organizations rely on state grants and contracts, they remain within the arena of state regulation and this constitute what Wolch calls a shadow state apparatus. She draws attention, however, to the political tensions which exist within these developments. While, on the one hand, the involvement of the voluntary sector in a mixed economy of welfare provision may help democratize the delivery of welfare services, on the other hand, the dependence of these voluntary organizations on state contracts and grants may simply reinforce state authority over welfare provision. These are issues which also emerge from more recent geographical research on the UK social economy (Amin et al, 1999). These researcher argue that while the development of the social economy might be interpreted as contributing to the empowerment of local communities by mobilizing active citizens and social entrepreneurs and by taking power away from local authorities, few voluntary organizations can develop or flourish without public money which imposes constraints how they operate and can make medium or long term planning impossible.

Taken together these studies of the links between voluntary organizations, space, place and political context clearly demonstrate the importance of geographical perspectives on the role and development of voluntary organizations. Yet this research still provides only a partial and fragmented picture of the voluntary sector. In particular, most of these geographical studies focus either on space, place or political context rather than the inter-relationships between these different elements; and most studies (with exception of Wolch) focus on voluntary organizations 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 sector
activity in a particular area. The main aim of the proposed project is to understand this voluntary sector mosaic and this is spelt out in more detail below.

**The Main Aims of the Research and Principal Research Questions**

The main aim of the proposed research is to understand the development and distribution of social welfare voluntary activity by investigating the inter-relations between voluntary organizations, local communities and different tiers of the state. The study will focus on Glasgow, a city where because it has a range and concentration of poverty and deprivation unmatched by any other major city in the UK (!997, p.4), faces huge challenges in delivering social welfare and so provides a particularly appropriate and important place in which to investigate the development of the voluntary sector. Whilst acknowledging its diversity, it is of course necessary to have a working definition of the voluntary sector for the purposes of the research. Following Taylor, we define the voluntary 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” (Taylor, 1992, p.171).

This definition is closely aligned to the “narrow voluntary sector”\(^1\) as referred to by the SCVO (1997) in Scotland, and that of the Glasgow Local Authority (Glasgow City Council, 1997).

The three principal research questions to be addressed by the proposed research are:

1. **What types of voluntary organizations are active in Glasgow, where and why?** Our concern here is to reveal the diversity of social welfare voluntary activity across the city in terms of, for example, the types of services provided, the size, sources and duration of funding, the territorial reach of the organizations (in relation to where they draw their volunteers and where they deliver their services) and the spatial structure of organizations (particularly the mix of national, regional/city-wide, and neighbourhood voluntary organization in the city). In addition we will investigate the reasons that lie behind the location of voluntary organizations in the city. Here our concern is partly to tease apart those broad structural or contextual factors which have affected the development of voluntary activity (linked, for example, to changes in the infrastructure and priorities of the welfare) state, from issues connected more closely to human agency (such as the role of local social entrepreneurs in securing resources to develop a voluntary service).

2. **What forms of relationship develop between voluntary organizations and the places where they are active?** Building on the research of those interested in the social economy (see Amin et al, 1999), our interest is partly focused on the extent to which organizations demonstrate processes of either ‘empowerment’, by engaging with the

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\(^1\) That is, it excludes such organisations as hospital trusts, museums, universities, which might be charities, but which are not generally thought of as part of the ‘true’ voluntary sector.
concerns of local people, or ‘exclusion’, by protecting the interests of some groups within the community at the expense of others. In addition we are interested in ability of organization to promote ‘active citizenship’ by mobilizing volunteers within local communities.

3. What impact does the political context have on the development of voluntary organizations? Our interests here focus on the forms of relationship that particular voluntary organizations have developed with different levels and agents of the state and how this affects the development and priorities of voluntary organizations. Building on Wolch’s work, the research will partly focus on voluntary organizations which are tied to local or central government through grants or contracts, but it will also consider the experiences of organizations not directly funded by government but whose activities are still affected by changes in the wider political context. In particular, we are interested in how voluntary organizations perceptions of the impact of the new Scottish Parliament on their activities, an issue which has already generated so

While answers to these three questions will inevitably overlap, the cumulative product of examining the issues identified in these questions will be a detailed analysis and interpretation (a ‘thick description’) of the complexity and variety of social welfare voluntary organizations in Glasgow.

Research phases and methodologies
In order to answer the research questions set out above, the research will comprise two main phases and use a variety of methodologies.

Phase 1 Glasgow’s Voluntary Sector Mosaic
The main aim of phase 1 will be to piece together the mosaic of voluntary sector activity in the city. To do this voluntary organizations will be identified using the Glasgow Council for Voluntary Services directory supplemented by information gathered from the City Council and the Community Files held by Glasgow’s local public libraries. The combined use of these different sources of information on voluntary organizations should provide a comprehensive data set of voluntary activity in the city. A questionnaire will then be sent to these organizations requesting information on issues including:

- Reasons why the organization was established in Glasgow
- What types of service they provide
- How many volunteers, clients and paid employees
- Sources of funding (charitable donation bequest, fund raised donations, government grants, lottery, head office allowance)
- Organizational structure? National organizations? Strathclyde/city base organizations? Local, neighbourhood organizations?
- Territorial reach in terms of service provision and volunteers
- Length of time established and period of confirmed funding

The information from this questionnaire will be entered on to an Access database which can then be connected to Mapinfo, a GIS package which would allow the spatial analysis
of the data. The main analytical tasks would be to map the differential development of
the voluntary sector across space and relate this to patterns of socio-economic inequality
derived from the most recent census for Glasgow.

**Phase 2 Case studies of particular voluntary organizations**
While Phase 1 will provide the information to answer the first research question, phase 2
will concentrate on generating data relevant to answering questions 2 and 3. This will
require detailed analysis of a sample of voluntary organizations in the city. While the
final choice of organizations will be informed by the information from Phase 1, the
selection will be based on the matrix shown in Fig.1.

**Fig 1 case study selection criteria with examples of possible organizations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National organizations with branches in Glasgow</th>
<th>Mental Health</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Schizophrenia Fellowship</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>UK Islamic Mission</td>
<td>Victim Support Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strathclyde/Glasgow based organizations</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>Glasgow Chinese Women's Association</td>
<td>Safe Strathclyde Resource Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood/Local organizations</td>
<td>Mentally Ill Relatives Aid Group Eastend (MIRAGE)</td>
<td>Southside Asian Association</td>
<td>Safe Pollok Project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Fig 1 shows the nine voluntary organizations selected will be concerned with three
key areas of social welfare (mental health, ethnicity and crime) and will include national,
regional/city and local organizations. The rationale for the selection criteria are twofold.
First, mental health, ethnicity and crime are all issues identified as critical to the social
development of Glasgow (see Glasgow Regeneration Alliance, 1998) as well as key
areas of social welfare where there has been a significant expansion in voluntary activity
over the last ten years. Second, by focusing on organizations which operate at different
geographical scales it will be possible to examine a range of issues relevant to the
research, including the extent to which the development of the voluntary sector in
Glasgow reflects national programmes of voluntary activity or specific local priorities,
and whether organizations operating different geographical scales develop types of
relationship with local communities and levels of the state.

In-depth interviews will be carried out with the administrative staff of these organizations
both at a Glasgow ‘branch’ level and, if appropriate, with staff from regional and national
offices. In addition, the research will also examine relevant documentary held by these
organizations. The general aim of this data gathering exercise would be to build up a
profile of the ‘careers’ of particular voluntary organizations in Glasgow in terms of their
establishment and development within the city. The interviews would also probe the
relationships these organizations have with local communities within the city, particularly
in terms of how they identify and respond to local needs, and how they mobilize and train
volunteers to be ‘active citizens’. Finally, the interviews would also focus on how these organizations perceive their relationship with different tiers of government (ranging from local authorities, through to the Scottish Parliament and UK government) and ‘agents of the state’ (such as the police), focusing on the ways governments (from local to national) can both enable and constrain the development of the voluntary sector.

Research Outputs
It is envisaged there will be two main outputs from the research directed at practitioners/policy maker and academic audiences.

- In terms of policy makers and practitioners, briefing papers will be generated from the research and a workshop will be held to create an opportunity for discussion between the researchers and practitioners based around the research findings.
- In terms of the academic community, the research will help develop conceptual arguments within geography concerning the ‘shadow state’ and the social economy, and be of inter-disciplinary interest given that many of the theoretical debates about voluntarism outside geography ignore questions about the impact of space, place and geographical scale.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Social Welfare Voluntary Organisations in Glasgow (as at May/June 2000)  
Dataset

Technical Information:

This database was generated on a PC computer using the Microsoft Windows NT operating system and Microsoft Excel 97 software.

Database collection methods:

The database contains listings and classification of all those social welfare voluntary organisations known to exist within the Glasgow City Local Authority boundaries as at May/June 2000 (to the best of the researchers’ knowledge).

All data was gathered from publically available sources such as the Glasgow Main Library (the Mitchell Library), the Healthy Cities directory, directories of voluntary organisations (both hard copy and electronic) and current telephone directories.

As the data was all gathered from publically available sources, the researchers have not deemed it necessary to anonymise organisations listed in the dataset.

Further information on data collection methods is contained in the final report (enclosed).

Structure of database:

Organisations were classified using the LOVAS schema due to its level of sophistication and for comparability (see below).

All organisations were post-coded to allow for mapping and further analysis against a wide range of socio-demographic data.

Key to Database

Column Headings:

Column 1: No = Unique Number of Organisation  
Column 2: L1 = Lovas 1 coding  
Column 3: L2 = Lovas 2 coding  
Column 4: Name = Name of Organisation  
Column 5-7 Address = Address of Organisation  
Column 8 Postcode = Organisation’s postcode  
Column 9 Aims = Aims of organisation (where known)  
Column 10 Subject = main focus of organisation  
Column 11 Easting = grid reference for mapping  
Column 12 Northing = grid reference for mapping
**Lovas Codes:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L1</th>
<th>L1 Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1A</td>
<td>Businesses with employee volunteering schemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B</td>
<td>Public houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1C</td>
<td>Business-people’s charitable fund-raising organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1D</td>
<td>Professional and trade associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2A</td>
<td>Schools/colleges (secondary and higher education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B</td>
<td>Schools (primary education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2C</td>
<td>Statutory or public sector bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3A</td>
<td>Religious organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3B</td>
<td>Voluntary service activity based in religious groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3C</td>
<td>Community/self-help activity based in religious groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4A</td>
<td>Grant-making trusts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4B</td>
<td>Playgroups, nurseries and child-minding facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4C</td>
<td>Youth groups and youth clubs, including Scouts, Guides etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4D</td>
<td>Reform and campaigning groups; environmental, human and animal rights, peace, consumer and international organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4E</td>
<td>Health and disability services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4F</td>
<td>General voluntary service organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5A</td>
<td>Sports, recreation, hobbies and leisure associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5B</td>
<td>Cultural and arts associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5C</td>
<td>Housing associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5D</td>
<td>Tenants’ and residents’ associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5E</td>
<td>Neighbourhood Watch etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5F</td>
<td>Political parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5G</td>
<td>Co-operatives and mutual societies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5H</td>
<td>Women’s groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5I</td>
<td>Parent and toddler groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5J</td>
<td>General community and self-help groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6A</td>
<td>Ethnic minority-specific voluntary service organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6B</td>
<td>Ethnic minority-specific community and self-help groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L2</th>
<th>L2 Classification – serving specific categories of the population</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Members of a specific community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Elderly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>The young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Other age groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Parents/families (existing or prospective)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Single parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Ex-service men or women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Carers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Ethnic/cultural/religious groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Refugees, travellers, migrants</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Gays and lesbians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Voluntary organisations, charities (e.g. Council for Voluntary Services)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>L2 contd.</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Other organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Hospital patients or other institutional residents</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Addicts and substance abusers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Delinquents and criminals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>People with handicaps or disablement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Third world inhabitants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Poor or disadvantaged people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Victims of abuse or crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Professional or work-based groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
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<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Homeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Widows/widowers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Dealing with specific problems:**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Disablement</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>Particular illnesses</td>
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<td>46</td>
<td>General health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Childbirth/pregnancy problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Learning difficulties</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>Mental ill-health</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>Educational handicap</td>
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<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Homelessness/housing problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Unemployment</td>
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<td>54</td>
<td>Economic under-development</td>
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<td>55</td>
<td>Personal crises, bereavement, victimisation, disasters</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>Crime/delinquency</td>
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<td>57</td>
<td>Addictions</td>
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<td>58</td>
<td>Family/marital/divorce problems</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>Loneliness</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>Racism, sexism, discrimination, equal opportunities</td>
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<td>61</td>
<td>Legal problems/disputes</td>
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<td>62</td>
<td>Animal welfare</td>
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<td>63</td>
<td>Environmental issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Third world/international problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Lack of leisure facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Lack of transport facilities, traffic problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Community disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Civil liberties, human rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Moral issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Voluntary Organisations, Social Welfare and the City

Full Report of Research Activities and Results

ESRC Reference Number: R000223093

Award Holders:

Dr. Nicholas Fyfe, Department of Geography, University of Dundee
Dr. Christine Milligan, Institute for Health Research, Lancaster University

June 2001
Background

Over the last two decades in the UK 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, p.3). Informed by neo-liberalism, successive Conservative Governments in the 1980s and 1990s promoted the development market-based approaches to local welfare service delivery, underpinned by the notion of the citizen-consumer (Cochrane, 1998), and encouraged local communities to take responsibility for some of their welfare needs via an ‘active citizenship’ strategy (Kearns, 1992; Taylor, 1996). Both these developments meant an increasingly important and high profile role for voluntary sector organizations. With the election of a Labour Government in 1997 the momentum behind developing the role of the voluntary sector has continued as part of ‘New Labour’s’ programme of welfare reform. This was signalled in the run up to the 1997 election by the publication of Building the Future Together: Labour’s policies for Partnership between Government and the Voluntary Sector. This was reflected in Scotland in the Scottish Compact (Scottish Office, 1998), a document that spells out the principles of how the Scottish Executive and the voluntary sector should work together in partnership. Examples of the higher profile role for the voluntary sector in post-devolution Scotland now include the Active Communities initiative, which aims to increase the numbers of range of people involved in volunteering; and the Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPS) schemes, which are attempting to tackle social exclusion in specific geographical areas and among particular communities via partnerships involving the public, private and voluntary sectors.

An extensive body of research has emerged since the mid-1980s which reflects the growing political and social significance of the voluntary sector (Kramer, 1986; Hedley and Smith, 1992; Deacon, 1996; Craig & Manthorpe, 1999). In terms of geographical perspectives, however, research has been limited. In relation to the spatial distribution of voluntary activity Wolpert (1977) has drawn attention to the significance of the uneven distribution of voluntary organisations; while Wolch (1989, 1990) in a comparative study of Los Angeles and London identified ‘voluntary sector rich’ and ‘voluntary sector poor’ areas of these cities (see too Fyfe, 1995; Milligan 1996, 2001). Other geographical research has focused on the links between place and the voluntary sector, revealing how voluntary organizations may be affected by, or affect, the characteristics of particular places (see for example, Brown, 1997; Parr, 1997; Gorsky et al, 1999; Kearns and Joseph, 2000). Brown’s (1997) study of the geography of voluntary support for AIDS victims in Vancouver, for example, illustrates how voluntary organizations locate in an area in response to local needs. More generally, Amin et al (1999) have argued in relation to the UK’s emerging ‘social economy’ that projects demonstrate a ‘close connection with specific localities and the involvement of communities and groups of people with particular needs’ (p.4). But as these researchers also acknowledge, it is not simply the connection with place that is important but also ‘the particular relationships and processes that link social economy projects to their institutional environments’ (p.21). This signals the importance of a third area of geographical research focused on
voluntary organizations and their political contexts. The most influential work here is by Wolch (1989, 1990) who focuses on those voluntary organizations charged with major collective service responsibilities previously shouldered by the public sector. Because these organizations rely on state grants and contracts, they remain within the arena of state regulation and this constitutes what Wolch refers to as a ‘shadow state’ apparatus (1990, xvi).

Taken together these studies of the links between voluntary organizations, space, place and political context clearly demonstrate the importance of geographical perspectives on the role and development of voluntary organizations. Yet this research still provides only a partial and fragmented picture of the voluntary sector. What is missing from these works 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 sector activity in a particular area. This study sought to redress this gap in the literature through mapping out the inter-relationships between social welfare voluntary organisations and the local community and political contexts within which they are active.

Objectives

The main aim of the research has been to understand the development and distribution of social welfare voluntary activity in Glasgow by investigating the inter-relations that exist between voluntary organizations, local communities and different tiers of the state. The specific objectives of the project were:

1. **To establish what types of voluntary organizations are active in Glasgow, where and why**

   The focus of this objective was to examine the diversity of social welfare voluntary activity across the city and to investigate the reasons for the location of voluntary organizations in particular areas. In particular we wanted to tease apart those broad structural or contextual factors that have affected the development of voluntary activity, from issues connected more closely to human agency.

   This objective was addressed by constructing a database of all voluntary organisations involved in social welfare in the city; incorporating this database within a Geographical Information System (GIS) to explore links between voluntary activity and socio-economic indicators; a questionnaire sent to all voluntary organisations operating in the fields of health, criminal justice, and black and ethnic minority issues; and interviews with representatives of particular voluntary organisations operating in these areas. The objective was met in full.

2. **To establish what forms of relationship develop between voluntary organizations and the places where they are active**

   The focus of this objective was on how organisations sought to promote ‘active citizenship’ by drawing upon volunteers within local communities and the notion of ‘empowering citizens’ by engaging with the concerns of local people and through examining the changing nature of the voluntary sector.
This objective was addressed through the questionnaire and interview stages of the research and was met in full.

3. To establish what impact the political context has on the development of voluntary organizations

The focus of this objective was to examine the forms of relationship that particular voluntary organizations have developed with different levels and agents of the state, and how this affected the development and priorities of organisations. In particular, we were interested in voluntary organizations' perceptions of the impact of the new Scottish Parliament on their activities.

As with Objective 2, these issues were addressed through the questionnaire and interview stages of the research and were met in full.

Methods

The research involved three main methodological phases:

1. Data base construction and GIS mapping

The initial phase of the research focused on constructing an Excel database of all social welfare voluntary organisations active with the boundaries of Glasgow City Council area as of May/June 2000. We used two main sources to construct this database:

- the information held by Glasgow’s central public library (The Mitchell Library) of all current voluntary and community groups in the city which contained 6283 entries;
- A database developed jointly by Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS) and the Glasgow Healthy City Partnership (GHCP) of voluntary organisations which contained 1948 entries.

After merging these databases, removing duplicates, those organisations not relevant to the theme of social welfare and those outside the city council boundaries, the final data base had 2599 entries. For each organisation we had information on its aims, the name of the coordinator, and a six-digit postcode. In addition each organisation was assigned a code derived from the Home Office based Local Voluntary Activity Survey or LOVAS classification scheme (see Marshall, 1997). There are a number of differing systems for classifying the voluntary sector, ranging from international classifications, such as the International Classification of Non-Profit Organisations (ICNPO) (Salamon and Anheier, 1997), to the more local, such as that used by GCVS (GCVS, 2000). Our decision to adopt the LOVAS scheme was based on its level of sophistication (organisations are coded according to their organisational base, type of activity and the category of population served), it further allowed for comparability at a UK level with other voluntary activity surveys undertaken by the Home Office.

The database was incorporated into an ArcInfo GIS together with socio-demographic data derived from the 1991 census, the 1998 Scottish Office Deprivation Statistics, Glasgow City Council Data on Worklessness and Disability Living Allowance;
Glasgow Alliance data on Social Inclusion Partnership area boundaries; and Greater Glasgow Health Board information on mental health. By selecting different types of voluntary organisations from the database and different background data, it is possible to look not only at the relationships between the distribution of voluntary organisations and other socio-economic variables (see Fig. 1 and Fig.2) but also at the area of benefit (see Fig 3).

Figure 1: Distribution of Voluntary Organisations in Glasgow.

Figure 2: Distribution of Black & Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations and Population in Glasgow.
2. Questionnaire survey

In order to examine the characteristics of particular voluntary organisations in more detail, a questionnaire was distributed to those organisations involved in three broad areas of social welfare: health, crime and criminal justice, and black and ethnic minority issues. Informing this choice were a combination of reasons: the importance of each of these issues within Glasgow (see Glasgow Regeneration Alliance, 1998); the potential of these areas to highlight different features of the inter-relationships between voluntary organisations and their social and political environments; and the expertise and interests of the researchers.

The survey addressed four broad themes: the structure and funding of organisations; the characteristics of volunteers and paid staff; the links to policy making at local and national levels of government; and the organisations ‘area of benefit’ in terms of where services are provided (see Appendix 1). Following piloting in Dundee and publication of article in the GCVS and GHCP newsletters informing organisations about the research, 615 questionnaires were posted. Table 1 shows the numbers of responses and response rates generated by successive mailing of the questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of organisation</th>
<th>Total number</th>
<th>Responded first time</th>
<th>Responded after first reminder</th>
<th>Responded after second reminder (only sent to Black/ethnic orgs)</th>
<th>Total response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/Ethnic</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An overall response rate of 24% was disappointing but not unexpected. While lower than the 30% response rate achieved by Maloney, et al (2000) in their study of the whole of Glasgow’s voluntary and community sector, it is considerably higher than the 14% achieved by Wolch in her survey of voluntary organisations in London (1990, p. 235). More importantly, feedback received during the survey and in interviews with voluntary organisations concerning how organisations currently view requests for research information, indicates that future survey research in these field needs to be carefully conducted for two reasons. First, the increased research interest in the voluntary sector resulting from its higher political profile means that many organisations are experiencing ‘questionnaire fatigue’ and are increasingly unwilling to divert resources to requests for information from the research community. This is a particular problem for the many small voluntary organisations who have few staff and resources. Second, many organisations interviewed stressed that since devolution in Scotland, they were (in the words of one organisation) being ‘consulted to death’. Again, this means that research requests are increasingly ignored. The wider implications of this for research are discussed later under ‘Future Research Priorities’.

The data from the questionnaires has been placed on an SPSS database and analysis to date has focused on producing descriptive statistical summaries of the responses.

3. **Interviewing**

The third phase of the research involved in-depth interviews with three broad groups of people:

- **Representatives of voluntary organisations** from the three sectors targeted by the questionnaire survey (i.e. health\(^1\), crime and criminal justice and black and ethnic minority groups). For each sector interviews were held with organisations based in Glasgow but operating at different geographical scales (local, city-wide and national) in order to examine differences in how organisations engage with local communities and local and national tiers of government. (24 interviews);

- **Representatives of umbrella organisations** operating within the voluntary sector at a local level (GCVS and GHCP) and a national level (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations) (5 interviews);

- **Representatives of local and national government and related agencies.** At a local level, interviews were held with Glasgow City Councillors and council officers as well as with the Glasgow Alliance and representatives of local Social Inclusion Partnership boards. At national level. Interviews were held with staff of the Social Inclusion Division and the Voluntary Issues Unit of the Scottish Executive. The purpose of all these interviews was to examine the nature of political engagement between different tiers and agencies of government and the voluntary sector. (11 interviews).

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\(^1\) Given the diversity of health organisations, respondents were only selected from the mental health sector.
Results

1. Mapping Glasgow’s voluntary sector

Previous research on the spatial distribution of voluntary activity revealed the existence of voluntary sector rich and voluntary sector poor parts of the city, a pattern, it is argued, is related to income. In particular, voluntary sector rich areas have been linked to middle-class communities who provide the core of voluntary labour (see Wolpert, 1977; Wolch and Geiger, 1986; Wolch, 1990). The research in Glasgow has revealed that the relationship between voluntarism and wealth is less clear-cut than these earlier studies indicate. Indeed, as Figure 4 shows, there is clear evidence that voluntarism is thriving in many relatively deprived areas of the city.

Figure 4: Distribution of Voluntary Organisations and Deprivation in Glasgow

Moreover, while the specific location of an organisation does not necessarily correspond with the ‘area of benefit’ in terms of where services are provided (as illustrated in Figure 3), Figures 5 and 6 indicate that there appear to be some important disparities between areas of greatest need and the availability of particular services.
Figure 5: Distribution of Crime Voluntary Organisations, Neighbourhood Watch and Proxy for Crime in Glasgow.

Figure 6: Distribution of Mental Health Voluntary and Statutory Organisations and Mental Health Referral Data in Glasgow.
Of particular interest to us, however, was the way these maps provide a starting point for examining the complexity of locational influences on voluntary organisations, some of which reflect broad structural processes, while others are more closely related to issues of human agency.

In terms of structural processes, the urban regeneration funding policies pursued by local and central government are of key importance. The voluntary map of Glasgow partly reflects the impact of successive funding initiatives like the Urban Programme, Areas of Priority Treatment (APTs) and, most recently, the Social Inclusion Partnership (SIPs) areas. Each of these national strategies has targeted specific territorial areas within the city that have then influenced the spatial expansion and contraction of voluntary activity. The current SIP initiative, for example, has created what one interviewee described as a ‘feeding frenzy’ for funding among voluntary organisations in the SIP areas. As a representative of one SIP explained:

A number of funding bodies have recognised that Social Inclusion Partnership areas do need more support and have taken the decision to positively discriminate ... in favour of those areas. So locating in a SIP area can mean that an organisation has got a better chance of getting money from other funders.

Funding regimes do not, of course, operate in the abstract but depend on strong applications being made from individuals and groups within the city. In explaining the sparseness of voluntary organisations in some areas of the city, several interviewees emphasised the weakness of the voluntary sector infrastructure and, in particular, the absence of social entrepreneurs who might have the skills necessary to bring funds into an area. As one respondent explained:

In terms of skills and abilities and writing funding applications, Greater Pollok has an abysmal record. ... The understanding I have from the people I have spoke to in the Lottery and some of the other major grant sources, like Comic Relief, Children in Need, is that when they do get applications from Pollok they are almost bending over backwards to try and support them because they recognise the area doesn’t have a lot of support from other funding agencies, but the quality of application is so poor.

The weak infrastructure for voluntary organisations in some areas of the city is also bound up with the city’s political geography. In areas where local councillors were not members of the Council’s ruling group or who subscribed to the view that ‘municipal is best’, the voluntary sector is under-developed relative to other areas. The maps of voluntary organisations in the city are also shaped by other influences related to the interplay between structural features of the city and human agency. For example, several organisations highlighted the need to be located within a short walking distance of public transport routes in order that their services could be fully utilised by their client group. Others emphasised the poor levels of disabled access in the city centre and thus the need to locate facilities in areas that their client group could more easily access. For one criminal justice organisation, however, a city centre location was essential, providing a neutral social space that members of different territorial gangs across the city could safely enter:

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.
At a micro-level, the availability of affordable office accommodation is also an important locational factor. In some relatively deprived areas of the city, like Pollok to the south west and the Gorbals on the south side of the river, the absence of suitable premises has constrained the development of local voluntary activity. While many organisations share accommodation with other not-for-profit groups, such space is not always suitable for their clients, as the co-ordinator of this criminal justice organisation explained:

We used to be based in one of the 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 as the Christian group and emblazoned on the wall, was “He who sins shall die in hell” – it was quite disturbing to some of our guys, especially if they had any mental health difficulties…. So I found this place -I wanted it to be ‘normal’ for my clients, so they could come up and not feel any more stigmatised than what they already were.

2. **Active and empowered citizens?**

One of the key themes of both academic and political discourse concerning the voluntary sector is the way in which the sector can contribute to the development of active citizenship and the empowering of citizens (see Wolch, 1989; Kearns, 1992). The evidence from the Glasgow study suggests, however, that changes in the nature of voluntarism and in the activities of government in recent years mean that the scope of the voluntary sector to create active and empowered citizens is more limited and complex than has previously been acknowledged. In part this is because most large organisations use relatively small numbers of mainly part-time volunteers and increasingly rely on paid, professional staff to deliver what are often complex and highly sensitive services. The co-ordinator of a criminal justice voluntary organisation, for example, contrasted the organisation’s recent past (where untrained volunteers were seen as ‘dangerous mavericks’) with the current situation that involves smaller numbers of trained volunteers and who choose to be known as ‘professional befrienders’. Another co-ordinator for a national mental health voluntary organisation illustrated how the role for volunteers within their organisation was limited to that of the management committee:

We are 400 people and the only people who regularly volunteer are the Board of Management. It’s very much a staff organisation, and we’ve looked at how to make use of volunteering but .. we don’t have the scale to make it worthwhile in terms of the time and trouble investing in managing volunteers to run a service. This isn’t an area where it’s very easy to use volunteers.

This trend towards professionalism has led some commentators to argue that voluntary sector activity can actually disempower citizens through clientization. (see Brown, 1997, pp.107-119). In addition, disempowerment can also be experienced as a consequence of the increased bureaucratisation associated with the move towards more ‘professional’ services provided by voluntary organisations giving local people less scope to influence local services. As the co-ordinator of a national criminal justice voluntary organisation explained in the context of a re-structuring of the services provided in Glasgow:

We’ve lost our local management committee and ... I know my colleagues have issues with it because they felt they had more support [under the old structure of local independent organisations]. They could contact their treasurer or their vice chair or a member of the committee to gain support. ... Whereas now, they have to take it to our co-ordinator, who then has to take it to our committee .... They felt they would lose their local identity because we were moving into this bigger organisation.
The increased professionalism and bureaucratization of voluntary activity also has implications for the position of the voluntary sector in relation to the state and civil society. While Wolch’s concerns about the voluntary sector as a ‘shadow state’, tied into the state via policies and procedures and increasingly distant from civil society, appear well founded in relation to some aspects of the voluntary sector activity, the diversity of voluntary organisations makes such generalisations difficult to sustain. This is examined in the next section.

3. Relations between the voluntary sector and the state – difference and diversity.

According to Wolch (1990) the ‘shadow state’ represents a sector that operates outside traditional democratic control and yet is gaining increasing political influence with which to affect policy. Such a view, we maintain, is one that fails to take account of the heterogeneity of the voluntary sector and the diversity of individuals who participate. In Glasgow, issues of democratic control and the ability to influence local policy varied enormously between organisations depending on sources of funding, the size and resources of an organisation, and the field of activity. In relation to black and ethnic minority organisations, for example, nine of the twenty-eight organisations responding to the questionnaire received their main funding from the City Council. There was also agreement among the black and ethnic minority groups interviewed that while the City Council was trying to involve them much more in the policy process, few felt they had the resources to respond effectively to these opportunities. As a member of one group explained:

Part of the problem is that smallish organisations like ours are expected to be involved in so many things but you don’t have the resources to do it. I mean if we went to all the meetings that the Local Authority expects people to go to, ‘cause they’re liaising with the black community, you wouldn’t get any work done! A number of years ago we were complaining and campaigning for people to actually be consulted. The problem is now you’re consulted to death!

By contrast, other organisations have developed increasingly closer working relationships with the state. Accordingly they have found themselves drawn into the heart of local policy-making process. One voluntary criminal justice organisation, for example, was now working within the Chief Executive’s office of the local authority and also had representatives of statutory sector seconded to work within the organisation. Such developments reveal an increased blurring of the boundaries between local government and voluntary sector and between state and civil society.

Other organisations, despite being small, have developed particular strategies to ensure that their views are heard in the local policy arena. One local mental health organisation, for example, admitted the small size of the organisation meant they would not have ‘a snowball in hells chance of influencing the social work committee. As a consequence, they have focused on developing their social work networks and stressing the uniqueness of their service to open up opportunities for influencing policy-makers at both local and national level. It is important to add, however, that other small locality-based organisations had little or no interest in gaining increased political influence or in seeking to shape the wider policy process. For them, the sole raison d’être of the organisation was to serve the areas in which they were situated.

At a national level, the existence of a Scottish Parliament is generally viewed very positively by most voluntary organisations. Some noted that ‘there’s been much more
of a push for consultation in a way that we didn’t get from Westminster’, while others noted that they were now ‘engaging directly in a dialogue with people who might have some influence’. The questionnaire revealed, however, that perceptions of the opportunities to influence policy at this level varied greatly between the three sectors covered in the study. Very few (18%) of the black and ethnic minority organisations agreed with the view that the Scottish Executive provided opportunities to influence policy as compared to 42% of health organisations. Moreover, for those organisations that had seen an increased level of consultation as a result of the Scottish Parliament, this presented very real difficulties in terms of handling the increased workload without additional resources to cope with it.

4. Implications for theory and policy

Wolch’s (1990) work on the ‘shadow state’ has arguably provided some of the most influential theoretical ideas informing research on the voluntary sector in human geography. On the basis of our research in Glasgow, however, we would argue that it is important refine and re-think some elements of the ‘shadow state’ thesis.

In particular, we would argue that the inter-relationships and inter-dependencies between voluntary organisations and the state are becoming more complex than the shadow state thesis allows. In part this is because the state, itself, is becoming differentiated. In Glasgow, for example, voluntary organisations have a variety of relationships with political institutions based in Westminster, Edinburgh and Glasgow. However, by examining organisations associated with three distinct areas of social welfare, it has also been possible to illustrate just how complex the interplay is between state and civil society in the voluntary sector. We uncovered very different patterns of ability to affect policy between organisations operating in both similar and differing areas of social policy and for differing reasons.

These changing relationships also reflect the shifts from urban government to urban governance (Goodwin and Painter, 1996; Imrie and Raco, 1999) which means that voluntary organisations now interact with a wide range of actors in the private and public sectors that are involved in regulating local economies and societies. This shift is particularly important in relation to the shadow state thesis because it calls into question the privileging of a state-centred approach to the analysis of voluntary organisations advocated by Wolch. While such an approach may be necessary, it is not sufficient to capture the ways in which the distinctions between state and civil society are becoming increasingly interwoven. These shifts place politics in new locations – both beyond and inside state-centred spaces. As we have revealed, the increased blurring of the boundaries between the voluntary sector and the state in the Scottish context has begun to map out the existence of new political spaces, where state and civil society can be seen to overlap (Brown, 1997). Hence, our work highlights some of the ways in which old spaces of political activity are being redefined and new spaces are emerging.

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2 One recent example of this is the launch of Social Investment Scotland in 2001, a partnership between banks and the Scottish Executive to provide loans to voluntary organisations. This is likely to have implications for these organisations’ traditional reliance on public funding and donations.
A further concern of the shadow state thesis is that the voluntary sector is less accountable to the public than traditional state organisations because it is located outside traditional democratic controls. While it is certainly true that voluntary lobbying organisations do operate outwith democratic control (as do lobbying groups across all sectors of public life), our findings indicate that voluntary social welfare organisations in receipt of state resources are, in fact, subject to significant public scrutiny and monitoring by the state. Indeed, organisations have argued, that as service providers, they are subject to greater scrutiny than comparable public sector providers. In this sense, they may be more akin to a sub-state than a shadow state apparatus. Our study indicates that only those voluntary organisations who consciously locate themselves outside the state can act without reference to state scrutiny.

Moreover, these findings are not just of theoretical importance; they are also of policy relevance. The notion that it is possible to have a policy for the ‘voluntary sector’ seems increasingly problematic. By examining voluntary organisations linked to three very different areas of social policy, the importance of recognising the diversity of the voluntary sector becomes very apparent. Organisations vary greatly in their size, resources, organisational structure, links with the public and private sectors, and abilities and aspirations to affect policy. As one of our respondents put it, ‘[having a policy for the voluntary sector] is a bit like having a policy for the private sector. The private sector contains Microsoft and self-employed window cleaners and you would never dream of putting them together’.

Activities

The preliminary findings from the project have been disseminated at international, national and local conferences, seminars and workshops and to both academic and user audiences.

User Engagement

Throughout the research, the award holders have given high priority to user engagement, particularly in terms of offering rapid feedback to those who provided information for the research (via the database, questionnaires, and interviews) and the wider ‘user’ community of policy makers and practitioners. The main focus for this feedback was a one-day workshop organised by the researchers and held in Glasgow on 11 May 2001. Attended by over sixty delegates ranging from representatives from the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive to co-ordinators of local voluntary organisations, the day comprised presentations by the researchers, workshop sessions, keynote addresses by GCVS and GHCP and a poster display of the research findings (see Plates 1, 2 and 3 and Appendix 3). Evaluation forms completed by delegates indicated a high level of interest and satisfaction with the day.
Plate 1: Workshop Poster Display.

Plate 2: Poster Display – Section on Black and Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations.
We were also invited speakers at the SCVO one-day conference. ‘Impacting on Social Justice: the voluntary sector research agenda’ (27 April 2001). They used the mapping stage of the project to address the challenges of measuring the size and shape of the voluntary sector. On the basis of this presentation we have been invited to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations forthcoming research conference (September 2001) to address similar issues. We also presented our research to the Head of the Social Inclusion Division at the Scottish Executive who is particularly interested in mapping elements of the project.

Academic engagement

In terms of academic engagement, emerging themes and issues from the research have been presented to local audiences (via seminars at the Universities of Dundee and Lancaster), national audiences (via a paper presented at the Royal Geographical Society / Institute of British Geographers Annual Conference, Plymouth, UK, 2001) and international audiences (via a paper delivered to the Association of American Geographers Annual Conference (New York, USA, 2001).

We have also been invited to give seminars on the research at the Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh and Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Birmingham in the Spring of 2002. We have also been invited as guest speakers to address a symposium on the Changing Geographies of Care at the University of Southampton in September 2001.
**Outputs**

*User engagement*

We have contributed articles outlining the research to the newsletters of GCVS, GHCP and SCVO at the start of the project. We have also been commissioned to write articles summarising the results of the research for *Third Force News* (the SCVO newspaper), *Voluntarysector* and the *GCVS Newsletter*. We have been asked to place the findings of our project *reSearchWeb*, a web gateway funded by the Scottish Executive for research in social work and social care. We will also produce an end of project report that will be disseminated to end-users including the voluntary and statutory sectors.

*Academic engagement*

A chapter for a book is in draft form (see Nominated Publications). The book, edited by Milligan, C. and Conradson, D., is entitled *Geographies of Voluntarism*, (Blackwell - RGS/IBG book series). The book brings together research findings from a range of national and international projects, including other research awarded funding under the ESRC’s Democracy and Participation initiative (anticipated date of publication, 2002).

We are currently writing a journal article entitled: *Rethinking the Shadow State: policy, place and diversity in the voluntary sector*. The article addresses the theoretical basis of the study and will be submitted to *Progress in Human Geography* in September 2001

We also intend to publish in journals that take our work beyond geography’s disciplinary boundaries and thus plan to write articles for *The Journal of Social Policy* and *Voluntas*. The research has also highlighted issues that are of specific interest to those working in the fields of health, crime and ethnicity and to this end we will submit articles to appropriate journals such as *Health and Place*; the *British Journal of Criminology* and *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.

**Impacts**

Combining the database of voluntary organisations in Glasgow with a GIS has generated considerable interest among policy-makers and practitioners at local, Glasgow-wide and national levels. Specific examples include:

- A request from SCVO for a paper detailing the procedures used to construct and code the database of voluntary organisations and the GIS methodology;

- Discussions with the Scottish Executive concerning the scope for using the methodology developed in this project for a review of Scotland’s social economy;

- Requests for copies of the database from GCVS and GHCP;

- A request from Glasgow City Council for maps of all care support organisations across Glasgow to inform their response to the new care strategy as outlined by the Scottish Executive;

- A request by the Greater Pollock Social Inclusion Partnership Board for maps of the voluntary sector in the Pollok area of Glasgow.
Future Research Priorities

In terms of future research priorities, two key issues have emerged:

- Research on the voluntary sector and the social economy focuses overwhelmingly on urban locations. By contrast, the nature and extent of voluntary activity in rural areas is far less understood. Given that voluntarism in rural areas faces distinctive challenges, this is an area where further research could address both substantive issues (such as the difficulties of delivery welfare services in rural environments) and theoretical questions (relating, for example, to the existence of a rural ‘shadow state’).

- Research on the voluntary activity tends to offer only a ‘snap shot’ of the sector. There is little ‘history’ that helps us to understand the ebb and flow of voluntary organisations across space and through time. The mapping methodology developed in this project could be developed to allow some longitudinal analysis of how the voluntary sector responds to the changing social and political environments. This would be of particular value to policy makers and practitioners.

As indicated earlier, however, any future research must be sensitive to the tensions, clearly evident, between the voluntary sector and research community. Given the increasing pressures on the voluntary sector, it is important that they play a more active role in shaping the research agenda and working in partnership with researchers rather than simply being the passive subjects of research. The issues outlined above reflect precisely such a dialogue and have involved discussion with GCVS, SCVO and NCVO. Indeed, we are currently preparing a bid for funding research on voluntary organisations in rural areas working with the voluntary sector Four Nations Research Group.

References


