



The third sector in unsettled times

insights from a qualitative longitudinal study

Rob Macmillan and Rebecca Taylor
Third Sector Research Centre
University of Birmingham

'Change on the ground'
3rd seminar in the SRA/TSRC series *'The Third Sector in transition'*
London, 9th May 2013

Hosted by:

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

Funded by:

 **Cabinet Office**
Office for Civil Society

BARROW  CADBURY

E · S · R · C
ECONOMIC
& SOCIAL
RESEARCH
COUNCIL



Summary

Part One: “The third sector in unsettled times”

- A great unsettlement?
- ‘Real Times’ in a nutshell
- A field guide to a sector in transition

Part Two: “Below the radar in unsettled times”

- Tales from two villages....
 - ‘Sycamore’ and ‘Larch’
 - Layers of community investment
-



A great unsettlement?

A third sector in transition?

- economic context – (dual) impact for the sector of recession, austerity and cuts
- political context and priorities – the Coalition’s framing of a fiscal crisis; the ‘Big Society’ as a (partial) decoupling of sector and state?
- ‘Shaking-out’ - contraction and closure? enough ‘room’ for everyone?
- ‘Shaking-up’ - organisations being more ‘enterprising’, demonstrating value and greater consolidation

What is an ‘unsettlement’?

- Where resources, relationships, approaches and understandings are called into question (from Fligstein and McAdam 2012)
- Continuity and change – compared to what?

'Real Times' in a nutshell...

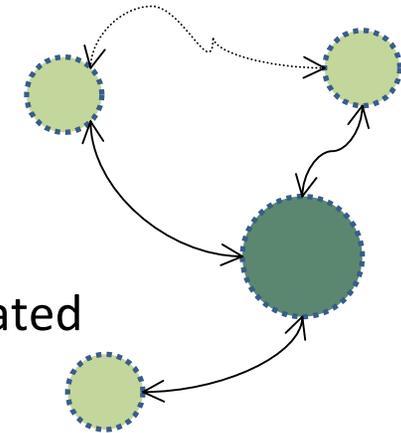


Overall aim

- To establish, maintain and analyse a qualitative longitudinal sample of third sector organisations, groups and activities

Research structure and timing

- Diverse set of 15 core case studies plus a range of related 'complementary' case studies
- Spring 2010 to Summer 2013: five waves of interviews, observations and documentary analysis



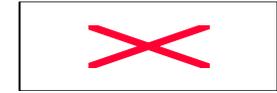
Purpose and research questions

- Understanding how third sector activity operates in practice over time
- Fortunes, strategies, challenges and performance
- What happens, what matters, and understanding continuity and change



Methodological/theoretical basis

- Growing interest in qualitative longitudinal research - snapshots and moving pictures
- Taking time seriously – dimension and object of study
- Exploring the qualities of change – fast/slow; endogenous/exogenous, etc.
- A ‘field’ based understanding of the third sector – context, relation and ‘room’
- Narrative profiles, storylines and ‘process tracing’
- **The promise of ‘seeing things differently’?**



The overall story so far...

A picture dominated by cuts for some...

- From anticipatory anxiety to the experience of public spending cuts
- Restructuring and redundancies
- Ongoing uncertainty about the scale and scope of cuts, and emerging policy agendas
- Thwarted plans and contained ambitions

But not for all...

- Organisations planning growth
- Re-positioning and the development of new ventures and services
- Relative insulation from the changing context



Wave	'a large, local information, rights and advice organisation '
4 <i>Jul-Aug '12</i>	Building new political alliances – new well connected Chair; outsourcing; slow transition – fundraising and stakeholder development
3 <i>Sept-Oct '11</i>	Reprieve through transition – successful bid for less; redundancies and partial closure; restructuring and changing role of volunteers; Legal Aid changes
2 <i>Feb-Apr '11</i>	Survival crisis – LA cuts basic funding; campaign to save the service; transition funding; re-commissioning for less; competition amongst advice providers
1 <i>Mar-Jun '10</i>	Stable - Annual surplus to 'weather the storm' and service development; anticipating outsourcing opportunities; bidding in partnership for specialist contract
<i>Pre-Wave 1</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Turbulent recent history - stabilised through new CEO and Chair from 2006• Relatively secure funding through LA grants and contracts, plus additional specialist contracts and project grants

'Birch'

- High service demand and pressure – performance target driven
- 'Us and them' - local political engagement and influences
- Who's in charge? - leadership
- Crowded competitive field



Wave	'A family support and parenting project'
4 Aug-Sept '12	Uncertain future – new offices; outcomes star; 6 months grant funding left; LA commissioning process beginning; awareness of competition
3 Aug-Oct '11	Internal conflict – over new professionalised identity; external reputation improves; new business plan; LA structures and funding changing
2 Dec '10	Stabilisation and new developments – new systems; re-branding; introduction of more structured services; expansion/new projects
1 Apr-Jul '10	Crisis - dismissal of founding coordinator; torn loyalties but trustee board, staff, volunteers and users mostly hold together; new coordinator recruited
<i>Pre-Wave 1</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Established 2004 – informal (unruly?) drop-in sessions• Five year foundation grant and LA funding both awarded 2008 enables expansion and paid staff

'Hawthorn'

- Liability of smallness? – boundaries and informality
- Who's in charge? - leadership
- Commissioning-ready?
- Capacity building – business planning and tendering



Uncertain futures

“we are a different animal now than we were 12 months ago. We would not have focused on half the things that we’ve focused on. We’re not as good as we need to be, and that’s what I mean about it takes a long time to change.

“It’s been difficult to plan for....and that’s the big thing even at the moment, that actually it is still difficult to see what’s in front of you.. The plans have to be ‘we’re as flexible as we need to be to do what we need to do’, you know... But it doesn’t necessarily feel comfortable really, that you’re having to be so quick on your feet that actually you don’t want to lay things down because that might slow you down, so let’s keep it open and fluid”



Unfolding fields...

- Accommodating diversity, complexity, context and change...
- Strategic action fields (Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 2012)
“actors (who can be individual or collective) are attuned to and interact with one another on the basis of shared (which is not to say consensual) understandings about the purpose of the field, relationships to others in the field (including who has power and why), and the rules governing legitimate action in the field” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012: 9).
- Multiple overlapping fields – organisations *as/in* fields (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008)
- Sources of stability and change: perpetual struggle, interdependence, sensitivity and proximate social fields – *‘a stone thrown in a still pond’*
- Emergence, stability and unsettlement/crisis: of positions, norms and institutions



1. Restructuring/redundancy

- Cutting costs
- Multiple agendas – necessary evils and organisational agendas
- Managerial restlessness
- Substitution between paid and unpaid work

“it’s some of the most painful stuff I’ve ever had to do, it’s absolutely horrible, absolutely horrible. People come in and really look you in the eye and tell you how desperately they want their job and they enjoy their job and you just feel dreadful because, you know, it’s not about whether you want your job or not...It’s about how much money we’ve got and as much as you like your job, we’re not going to have a job for everybody at the end of this and it’s shit, what can I tell you?”



2. Reconfiguration/merger

- An ongoing but contested theme in third sector conversation – ‘small drops in millions of buckets’
- A preference for ‘sharing without merging’
- Acquisition as a growth strategy (housing group structures):
“the strategy around that has to be tacit and not overt so I don’t think you go out there and openly pursue a kind of merger and acquisition strategy”
- Lots of talk but little action (family support):
“so there’s quite a lot of potential basket cases out there if I’m honest, and it wouldn’t be sensible for either charity to, the coming together of two baskets is not a good idea”



3. Repositioning/rebranding

- Niche (in relation to others):

“you’ve got to be aware of what other people are doing. We certainly try and stay close to key competitors and their tactics to understand what the world is going to look like and we try and adjust our plans accordingly. We do quite a lot of I suppose what the private sector would call market analysis, you know, what’s the... horizon scanning, another kind of phrase for it, what is the world going to look like, what are the political directions, how do we position ourselves to work in that way....”

- Branding as a strategy of affiliation and distinction from others/the past:

“where I want to be by the end of the year, which will be a completely different organisation, a fresh new start and that kind of professionalism will be seen by our stakeholders, which I think then by the end of the following year we really would be in a good position to have the data, have a proven track record of delivering quality services, to go and get more funding”.



Conclusion

- A great unsettlement?
- Adjustment strategies over time to preserve/advance 'room'...
- 'Room' as - the 'space' for an organisation to operate in a given field, involving:
 - an acknowledged role and position, based on a context-specific, ongoing, sometimes awkward and contested accommodation between similarly placed organisations operating in a given catchment area, and
 - a capacity to continue its activities to pursue its aims.
- Seeing things differently?

What we're doing at the moment is planting all these seeds hoping that they will grow and we'll have a strong enough service come April that we can deliver in this new regime...at the moment we're still really in a bit of no man's land....



Further information

'Real Times' is being undertaken by a team of five researchers at TSRC:

Rob Macmillan, Malin Arvidson, Andri Soteri-Proctor, Rebecca Taylor and Simon Teasdale.

- *Seeing things differently? The promise of qualitative longitudinal research on the third sector* (TSRC WP56, Mar '11)
- *First Impressions: introducing the 'Real Times' third sector case studies* (TSRC WP67, Nov '11)
- *Making sense of the Big Society: perspectives from the third sector* (TSRC WP90, Jan '13)

Forthcoming: *The third sector in unsettled times – a field guide*

www.tsrc.ac.uk



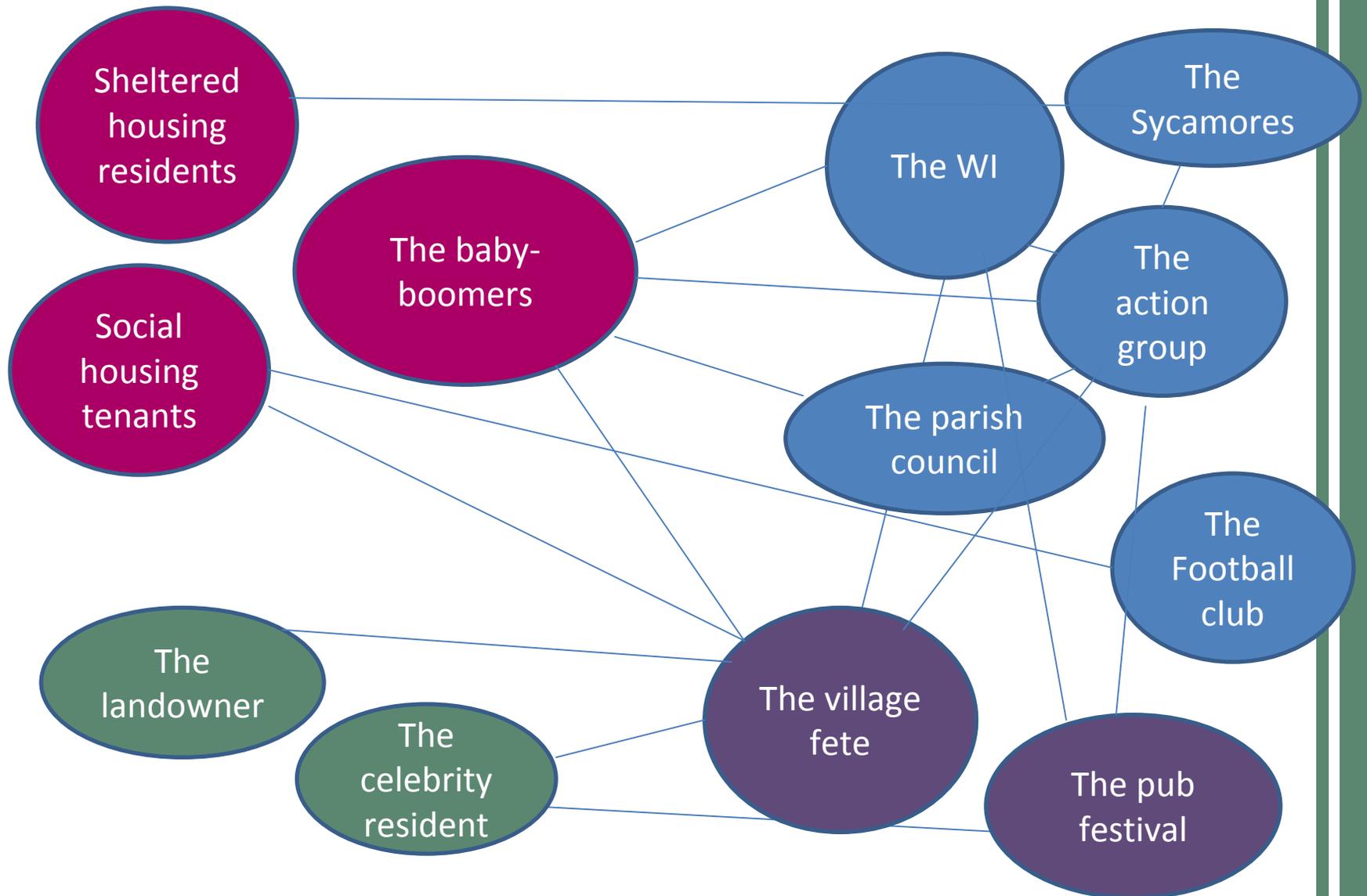
Part Two

Below the radar in unsettled times: tales from two villages

- Grassroots not service delivery
- Our 'BTR' cases raise questions about...
 - the differential impacts of wider social context on the sector
 - the nature of change, the role of class and history, and sedimentary layers (Massey 1995, 2nd ed)



Groups, events and associations





Wave	'the action group'	'the village fete'
4 <i>Aug-Sept '12</i>	Resignations and elections and slight shift in focus but the group continues	The Sycamore games – different event, new committee, some dissenters
3 <i>June '11</i>	Group continue to work on issues and a new plan drafted in April	Village fete return to the usual format and committees
2 <i>Nov '10- Jan '11</i>	The group is formalised with an AGM and elected committee	
1 <i>Jan-May '10</i>	Group established to implement the action points in the parish plan	Running since 2002 with several organising committees. Big themed event for spring 2010 over two days
<i>Pre-Wave 1</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relatively affluent village in the Southwest -• Good infrastructure (shop, pub, church and primary school) and close to a large market town• Large group of active residents and a parish plan• 2010 - what to do about the village hall and what to do about a planned housing development ?	

'Sycamore'

- The same old faces
- The landowner and the village
- Us and them



Change

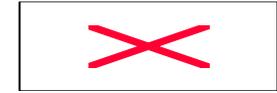
- A thriving village with ‘a spritely step about it now’, but depends who you are
- Us and them – power struggle and conflict- interests change, groups realign
- Slow moving, mostly small scale, a series of ups and downs
- Layers of investment – generations of patronage, land/capital, skills and expertise, time



Wave	'Heritage Centre'	'Horticultural Social Enterprise'
4 <i>Aug-Sept '12</i>	Fundraising auction; operating on reduced scale in smaller building	Successful funding bids secure staff; summer fun day draws the crowds
3 <i>Aug-Sept '11</i>	In arrears - rent negotiations; moving out and closing down?	Selling first produce; funding bids unsuccessful
2 <i>Feb '11</i>	Unsuccessful funding bids; winter damage	Severe winter slows progress; volunteers and placements
1 <i>Apr-Aug '10</i>	Struggling with few volunteers; awaiting funding bids	Lease for land; building networks
<i>Pre-Wave 1</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relatively deprived ex-mining village• Late 1990s Coalfields regeneration programmes – housing and community economic development• 2010 - What happens when the money runs out and political will diminishes?	

'Larch'

- Brown hair and grey hair
- Dwindling infrastructure support
- Who pays for space?
- Movers and shakers



Layers of investment

Doreen Massey argues that local areas:

*“are products of long and varied histories. Different economic activities and forms of social organisation have come and gone, established their dominance, lingered on and later died away...**the structure of local economies can be seen as the product of the combination of ‘layers’, of the successive imposition over the years of new rounds of investment, new forms of activity”***

(Massey 1995: 114, emphasis added).

- The past shapes the present, though not in some deterministic way
- Complex historical outcomes are not just economic:

“The layers of history which are sedimented over time are not just economic; there are also cultural, political and ideological strata, layers which also have their local specificities” (Massey 1995: 116).

Layering – a comparison



'Sycamore'

The here and now:

- A thriving village?
- Relatively affluent
- Core group of activists; us/them
- Fundraising events
- Facilitative parish council

A product of:

- Agricultural history
- Importance of landownership
- No area-based regeneration
- Class - resources, skills and connections

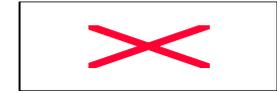
'Larch'

The here and now:

- A struggling village?
- Relatively deprived
- Core group of activists; us/them
- Fundraising and enterprise
- Challenging parish council

A product of:

- Coal-mining and aftermath
- Coalfields regeneration
- Disinvestment in community development
- Class and 'movers and shakers'



Thinking about time and community

- Sedimentary layers of (community) investment of:
 - money, time, energy, mobilisation, connection...
- and perhaps now 'disinvestment' (with differential impacts)...?

Community development...

- 'takes time' (but how long is needed?)
- leaves legacies (but how strong are these?)