<http://www.diva-portal.org>

Postprint

This is the accepted version of a paper published in *Urban Studies*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

MacKenzie, R., Forde, C. (2012)

Networks of Support for New Migrant Communities: Institutional Goals versus
Substantive Goals

Urban Studies, 49(3)

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:kau:diva-66720>

Networks of Support for New Migrant Communities: Institutional Goals versus Substantive Goals?

This article examines the role of support mechanisms for new migrant communities provided by networks of statutory, third sector and refugee community organisations. The article explores the dynamics of the relationships between support groups, with analysis located in the urban context of NorthTown. The findings point to the possibility of tension between migrant support groups where there is a perceived need to compete over resources or political influence. Moreover, it is argued that there is a risk that institutional goals of organisational sustainability may take precedence over substantive goals of support provision. The ability of support groups to assert agency in terms of strategic responses to structural constraints on sustainability is explored. It is argued that an organising logic based on the creation of a political community within the new migrant population can prove more sustainable than contingent communities based on commonalities of language or nationality.

Introduction

There has been a recent revival of studies on the role of support mechanisms for asylum seekers, labour migrants and refugees (Wren 2007, Zetter and Pearl 2000, Sales 2002, Kelly 2003). Although recent years have seen a move from ad hoc and informal support services for refugees and asylum seekers towards more formalised and centralised support (Sales 2002), the heavy reliance on community based networks to supplement statutory support has resulted in an increased blurring of the lines between statutory and non-statutory support. Such changes present organisational challenges, as some groups may by their informal nature lack the resources and organisational prowess to act as direct substitutes for statutory provision (McFarland and Walsh 1994). On the other hand, others have developed from community groups into a more formal and professional status (Sales 2002).

In this paper we examine the challenges and tensions associated with the changing experiences of providing support for new migrant communities. The paper explores the inter-organizational politics, tensions and conflicts between bodies aiming to provide voice for migrants, linked to increasing competition for resources. We present the findings from a case study of new migrant communities in NorthTown, a medium-sized urban area in the north of England. Based on interviews with representatives from various support agencies and with labour migrants, asylum seekers and refugees living in NorthTown, we explore the provision and use of support services. The paper utilises the case study town to map the various groups and networks of local statutory bodies, third sector organisations and refugee community groups operating alone and in conjunction to provide support to new migrant communities. The study shows that the purposive effort of different groups has a positive effect, yet there is also the danger of tensions building between support groups, particularly when there is a perceived need to compete for resources or political influence. We find that there is a risk that the institutional goals of these organisations, in terms of securing resources and influence, may take precedence over substantive goals of support provision. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Following a review of the literature and methodology, we examine the emergence of support groups and networks, setting developments within the particularities of the urban context of NorthTown. The subsequent section examines the

dynamics of the relationships between key support providers, exploring issues of sustainability and competition for resources. Concluding comments follow.

A Review of Debates

The 1999 Immigration Act saw a shift in government policy towards the ‘dispersal’ of asylum seekers away from the south east of England to newly designated reception centres in other parts of the country, often located in urban areas with limited experience of inward migration. The shift in policy necessitated the development of support groups in areas where the lack of chain migration meant an absence of established migrant community organisations or indeed a critical mass of individual national or ethnic groups in which such organisations could develop (Zetter and Pearl 2000). Subsequent geo-political changes through the expansion of the EU brought further inward migration in the form of new EU citizens exercising the right of freedom of movement and changed the immigration status of people from new member states already resident in the UK. The general growth in labour migrants in the UK labour market added to the increase in new migrant communities in areas of the country with limited experience of inward migration (Anderson 2010). Although with support requirements that are by turn distinct and over-lapping with those of asylum seekers and refugees, the increase in labour migration to Britain from Central Eastern Europe created a greater need for migrant support groups.

Support groups and organisations working with new migrant communities take a variety of forms. These forms reflect a mixture of statutory provision and voluntary organisations originating in the host community, NGOs, church groups, plus community groups from within established migrant communities (where present) (Zetter and Pearl 2000, Wren 2007). Crucially, they also include groups that emerge from within new migrant communities, including Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs), which are often based on commonality of language, nationality or ethnicity. Together, these bodies are highly heterogeneous in terms of degree of formal organisation and sustainability. Some RCOs may operate on the basis of what Kelly (2003) refers to as ‘contingent communities’. From the outside, this contingent community may appear as a unified group in order to gain the advantages

associated with formal status, in terms of securing access to funding opportunities. Yet in reality such contingent communities may lack a sense of commonality, unity, shared values or feelings of group-wide obligation. These associations without community reflect an expedient construction in order to conform to the expectations of the host society and 'fit' into the political space created by UK policy institutions and, crucially, be able to access financial resources within a funding model based on groups not individuals (Kelly 2003).

In terms of support for asylum seekers, many of the often ad hoc and locally driven initiatives underwent a process of formalisation following Home Office recommendations for improved coordination of support based on partnerships of local authorities, voluntary agencies and refugee community organizations (Sales 2002, Zetter and Pearl 2000). While some groups were able to embrace the requisite processes of formalisation and organisational development others, by virtue of their informal nature, lacked the resources, organisational prowess or even desire to become substitutes for statutory provision (McFarland and Walsh 1994, Zetter et al 2005, Wren 2007). New migrant groups may not have the same advantages as longer established settled communities in terms of the opportunity to develop strategies to operate within the dominant socio-political system (de Certeau 1984, cited in Williams 2006: 867, Kelly 2003) and in the case of asylum seekers the precarious nature of residency militates against developing and sustaining enduring community groups (Zetter et al 2005, Zetter and Pearl 2000). In such a context, Zetter and Pearl (2000) point to the well documented rise and demise of groups based on loose affiliations, fluid membership and institutional instability. Competition between organisations reinforces the disadvantages faced by newly formed grass-roots RCOs (Zetter and Pearl 2000), as the politics of organizational survival (Majka 1991) give established support groups a vested interest in protecting their own funding levels and domains of activity. Whilst the roles played by support groups may overlap or coexist (Zetter and Pearl 2000, Wren 2007), this does not necessarily translate into cooperation. As the roles performed by various NGOs, RCOs and even statutory bodies are often duplicative, power dynamics may be played out over competition for funding and political leverage, leading to hoarding of information and a lack of cooperation which is unusual for the voluntary sector (Majka 1991, Zetter and Pearl 2000, Wren 2007). Similarly, the ability of established groups to dominate political discourses within local networks may be used to reinforce the marginalisation of new grass-roots RCOs in terms of access to local power

streams (Routledge 2003, Zetter and Pearl 2000). There are structural influences to consider here, as the withdrawal of the state from direct economic and social intervention has led to the increased reliance on NGOs to fill the void, often through multi-agency approaches (Wren 2007). Whilst this has created opportunities for ‘strategic brokers’ (Larner and Craig 2005), individuals with political embeddedness in local networks of NGOs, local authority and regional agencies, to facilitate communication between actors, it has also created opportunities for the marginalisation of selected groups.

Zetter and Pearl (2000) argue that the role and potential of RCOs have been circumscribed by a series of structural constraints. These structural constraints include *inter alia*: a policy context of dispersal that has led to the lack of critical mass of new arrivals in new locations; consequently the precarious residency status of asylum seekers, the absence of social capital and political linkages associated with longer-standing migrant and BME communities militate against developing and sustaining RCOs; competition for scarce resources between RCOs and other support providers; these are compounded by an increasingly centralised and bureaucratised regime for funding allocation that favours institutionally formalised organisations and further precludes the likelihood of nascent RCOs breaking into established power streams in local networks dominated by established NGOs (Zetter and Pearl 2000). There are two key themes we seek to draw from this: firstly, the importance of structural constraints on the operation and development of RCOs and how this relates to the assertion of agency on the part of asylum seekers, refugees and labour migrants. They are not passive recipients nor structurally bound automatons (Williams 2006). Indeed, there is a need to better understand how structural influences impact upon the abilities of asylum seekers, refugees or labour migrants to apply agency. For example, the role of group leaders and key activists can often be vital in the provision of support, whilst their skills and experiences can be a key influence in navigating challenges and sustaining the organisations to which they contribute (Kelly 2003, Williams 2006, Zetter and Pearl 2000, Routledge 2010). Secondly, we highlight the tensions that may emerge between imperatives of organisational survival and potentially negative consequences of incorporation into more formalised, institutionalised structures. Leontidou’s (2010) analysis of the role of social movements in urban politics alerts us to the dangers of approaches that, by focussing on degrees of formalisation or issues of competitiveness and instrumental actors, miss the spontaneous and oppositional potential

of social movements less concerned with their organisational form. Again, our concern here is to not privilege structure at the expense of agency. Yet equally we must be sensitive to the contextual realities that shape the articulation of agency. Structural constraints may circumscribe the activities of RCOs, acting as a fetter on their development or sustainability. In short, these structural constraints ultimately exacerbate competition between groups for scarce funding and disadvantage less formalised RCOs (Zetter and Pearl 2000). This provides an imperative for increased formalisation, which has an opportunity cost in terms of spending time and resources in pursuit of funding at the expense of actually providing support. The inherent danger is that RCOs become overly focused on organisational survival (Majka 1991). Incorporation into formal structures may also bring an obligation to perform roles that may be at odds with the original ethos and purpose of grass-roots community organisations, or may require the organisation to refuse support to those not eligible under statutorily defined funding regimes (Zetter and Pearl 2000, Sales 2002).

The tension between the imperatives of organisational survival and the fulfilment of the original purpose of the group reflects a long-standing concern within the sociology of social movement organizations. In the 1960s, Zald and Denton (1963) and Zald and Ash (1966) warned of the dangers associated with the ‘institutionalization and goal displacement model of organizational transformation’ (Zald and Denton, 1963). As social movement organisations transform and institutionalise, their original goals may be displaced, in favour of sustaining the existence of the organisation:

‘Organizational maintenance is a special form of goal transformation, in which the primary activity of the organization becomes the maintenance of membership, funds and other requirements of organizational existence’ (Zald and Ash 1966: 327).

Yet, this displacement is not inevitable. As Zald and Ash (1966) are keen to stress, ‘goal commitment’ can act as a counterbalance to bureaucratization, allowing social movement organisations to sustain a more militant agenda against pressures to become more conservative and thus mainstream. Therefore small community based groups may be able to find ways of sustaining themselves without transforming to a more formal footing and the potential goal realignment that goes with it. Echoes of this alternative are apparent in more

recent contributions that highlight how grass-roots groups have reacted against their ongoing marginalisation created by the structural constraints on their development and sustainability by resisting incorporation into more formal structures (Zetter et al 2005, Wren 2007).

Methodology

The primary research draws from an urban based case study of NorthTown, an urban centre in the North of England with a population of 120,000. Until the mid-1990s, NorthTown had relatively limited experience of inward migration, although there were (relatively small) established Polish, Portuguese and Iranian communities. In the late 1990s there was some in-migration into the town from Kosovan Albanian refugees displaced by conflict in their home country. Following the 1999 Immigration Act, a reception centre for asylum seekers was established in NorthTown, increasing in-migration to the town. There has also been in-migration of labour migrants from Central Eastern Europe since 2004. The notoriously inaccurate official estimates from the Worker Registration Scheme recorded 1200 people registered in NorthTown between 2004 and 2009, the majority of whom originated in Poland.

The research undertaken for this study was longitudinal in nature. Two waves of fieldwork took place, the first between 2005 and 2007, the second between 2009 and 2010. In the first phase of the research, 24 semi structured interviews were conducted with representatives NGOs, RCOs and statutory bodies. These interviews covered all the main formally established groups that provided support to asylum seekers, labour migrants and refugees in NorthTown. The researchers also undertook significant amounts of non-participant observation at key community support groups and at community events in NorthTown. The second wave of research took place in the late 2009 and early 2010, during which semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 organisations from the multi-agency support network. A key aim of the follow up research was to track the development of support services for new arrivals since 2005. Many of the organisations interviewed in the first phase were interviewed again and several of the participants were interviewed on multiple occasions throughout the research. The average length of interview was 45 minutes, with some lasting up to 2 hours. Reflecting the well-documented precarious nature of many RCOs

and community support groups, some of the groups interviewed in the first phase no longer existed by the time of the second round. A number of new support services and groups had been established, and interviews were conducted with as many of these as possible. Further non-participant observation was undertaken via attendance at community support groups, churches, shops and community events.

The data drawn on for this paper from both phases of the fieldwork are taken from two larger research projects. Both projects were funded by NorthTown local authority. In the first project, the aim was to gather data on the social and economic experiences of ‘new arrivals’ in NorthTown including their use and perceptions towards support services. In the second project, the aim was to examine the experiences of labour migrants in NorthTown, and their perceptions towards support services. These larger projects involved the collection of further primary research beyond that reported in this paper, in particular, a survey of new arrivals conducted during the first phase of the project, and semi-structured interviews with asylum seekers, refugees and labour migrants (46 in the first phase and 34 in the second). While the data from these interviews are not explicitly reported here they informed our understanding of the role support services in NorthTown, on which this paper focuses. These larger projects provided the researchers with access to agencies and support groups as well as labour migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. The involvement of the researchers in these larger projects allowed the research team to undertake significant observation in both phases of the research, for example at NorthTown local authority organised meetings, community events, project steering group and strategy meetings, community events and at many of the support group ‘drop-in’ sessions.

The empirical work below examines the role and development of a range of support services in NorthTown. These groups, organisations and services varied in terms of their ‘formality’, their connections to the state and their engagement with asylum seekers, refugees and labour migrants. Five of these groups are considered in this paper. NorthTown Asylum Team (NAT) was a formal local authority support service, supported financially by the Home Office UK Border Agency to provide advice, support and accommodation for asylum seeking families while they waited for a decision on their asylum application. NorthTown Community Voice

was established in 2001 with the aim of promoting good relations and harmony between BME communities and the wider community of NorthTown. A key mission of NorthTown Community Voice was to develop the organisation as a stand-alone and fully constituted body representative of minority ethnic communities, groups and organisations of NorthTown, with the aim of facilitating engagement with agencies and statutory bodies at all policy making and strategic levels on local, regional and national forums. The Asylum and Refugee Centre (ARC), was a drop-in centre for asylum seekers and refugees. This had originated from the host community as an informal, volunteer led organisation, although by the time of the research it was part-funded by the local authority. The Northern Organisation for Refugees, Migrants and Asylum Seekers (NORMAS) was established in 2006 as a grass-roots, migrant community-led organisation which worked with asylum seekers, refugees and labour migrants to build new lives in the UK. Finally, Safe Housing, was a statutory, formal organization established in 2000 to provide accommodation and support to dispersed asylum seekers in the Yorkshire and Humberside region under a contract with the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). .

Urban opportunity, urban space: The development of support groups

The underdevelopment of RCOs in new reception areas associated with the post-1999 strategy of dispersal has been well documented (Wren 2007). The absence of established migrant communities associated with chain migration removed any potential advantage in terms of existing RCOs and networks for newly arrived people. This absence of migrant communities and relative underdevelopment of support groups and networks can be seen as a structural constraint on the development of RCOs in new reception areas (Zetter and Pearl 2000) but this does not deny the agency of people who find themselves in this situation or mean that RCOs do not develop. As the head of NorthTown Community Voice describes below, structures may constrain choices but they do not remove the imperative for developing mechanisms of support and voice:

NorthTown doesn't have the history [of in-migration] that Leeds has, Doncaster or Sheffield or Rotherham or Bradford. It doesn't have a kind of

history at all...If it was by choice nobody really wanted to come to NorthTown because it was so isolated in itself and it was very difficult really to live but then when they brought the refugees in NorthTown, they didn't really have a choice so they changed the culture by default'

Although historically the town lacked the critical mass of migrant communities found in cities and towns in other parts of the region, NorthTown Community Voice was an established BME organisation that had grown out of longer standing minority ethnic communities. Therefore, although not developed to meet the needs of recently arrived immigrants, with established links to the local authority NorthTown Community Voice became increasingly involved in the multi-agency support approach the local authority was keen to cultivate. Given its longer standing and formalised organisational status, NorthTown Community Voice was well embedded in local political circuits and networked with other BME groups in the region.

In addition to NorthTown Community Voice, a network of statutory, NGO and RCO groups existed within the town and stretched beyond into the region. Third sector organisations established by volunteers from the host community provided drop-in centres for asylum seekers, refugees and labour migrants at two churches and other community based centres. The space provided by these drop-in centres facilitated the subsequent development of RCOs, which emerged from the asylum seeker community. These groups had taken different forms, for example a group of Zimbabwean women set up the NorthTown Asylum Action Group, which was initially oriented around nationality. Similarly, both Russian and Albanian language groups had emerged and fallen into abeyance. These groups reflected the classic 'contingent community' form of organisation, where shared ethnicity, nationality or language formed the basis for organisation, often as a means of accessing funding regimes geared to deal with organisations rather than individuals (Kelly 2003). Bringing together highly heterogeneous ranges of interests in terms of class, gender or ethnicity under an organising identity based on a single commonality, the sustainability of such groups is recognised as being fraught with difficulties (Kelly 2003, Zetter and Pearl 2000). A range of short-lived 'contingent community' groups had emerged and fallen into abeyance either because of a

finite *raison d'être*, an inability to attract funding, or simply as a result of the loose affiliations, fluid membership and institutional instability documented elsewhere (Zetter and Pearl 2000). Although these groups interacted with one another in a variable fashion, in turn they interacted within their own networks, linking to equivalent groups, Polish and Russian language groups for example, in other geographies. Such connections, however, were also prone to the ephemeral nature of many RCOs. A notable exception to this trend was NORMAS, a grass-roots organisation that emerged from the asylum seeker community and went on to demonstrate greater sustainability than many of its counterparts. In addition, the political skills of the key organiser also facilitated personal dialogues with representatives from other agencies, and crucially the local authority, that were perhaps disproportionate to the degree of formalisation of the organisation she represented. Carefully developed and nurtured links to the northern branch of the Refugee Council, located in a nearby city, provided an additional political resource, which may be seen to have offset the relative absence of longstanding localised embeddedness.

Routledge (2010) cites the importance of urban and political space for the active participation of the political life of the city. Similarly, the creation of new community groups does not occur in a vacuum (D'arcus 2010) but is shaped by spatiality. In NorthTown, the urban environment provided the space in which to organise. It was notable that the asylum seeker reception centre, which also provided temporary residence for asylum seekers prior to the allocation of accommodation through Safe Housing, was located some distance from the town centre yet it was the town centre that provided the urban space for the organisation of RCOs. Much of the accommodation provided by NASS for asylum seekers was in centrally located areas. Although over time new arrival communities were increasingly spread across NorthTown, there were similarly central districts that were recognised as historic 'starter areas' for incoming labour migrants, characterised by low cost housing and often located near prominent employers. It was in town centre churches that drop-in centres were established, also at the YMCA and a community centre, which were both centrally located. The space provided by these drop-in centres established by volunteers from the host community proved important to the development of RCOs, serving as incubators to the development of grass-roots groups from within the asylum seeker community. Urban location combined with the space provided by churches and community centres, bringing together different groups of

people in shared locations and shared spaces. This not only provided opportunities for engagement with, or at least raised awareness of, other support providers but importantly also provided the ‘convergence space’ (Routledge 2003) in which to meet other social actors, people from the host community and other migrants from across the formal demarcations imposed by immigration status. It was notable over the two periods of research that drop-in centres initially aimed at asylum seekers, and crucially assumed to be so by migrant workers at the earlier stage of research, had become increasingly utilised by a broader range of people regardless of formal migration status. Reflecting well documented problems associated with the withdrawal of statutory support following an asylum decision (Sales 2002, Phillimore and Goodson 2006), recipients of both positive and negative decisions continued to use drop-in centres such as ARC, facilities ostensibly supplied for asylum seekers and funded on that basis. Labour migrants were far less likely to attend such drop-in centres in the first stage of research but by the second phase this demarcation was less rigid. Beyond the advocacy and advice roles specifically relating to the asylum process (Zetter and Pearl 2000), the role of drop-in centres was vital for facilitating access to other social and material support needed by members of all new arrival communities, such as registering with a doctor, help with access to schools for their children and improving English language skills.

The urban environment also provided the opportunity (and catalyst) for organisation (D’arcus 2010) to engage in what Heynen (2006, cited in Routledge 2010) calls the politics of visibility. Marginalised groups such as labour migrants and, arguably more so, asylum seekers are often rendered invisible in national political discourses (Routledge 2010), beyond reduction to an abstract ‘problem’ of resource-depletion. This discourse of burden had been propagated within the national and local media, often tinged with xenophobic and racist rhetoric. The urban space of NorthTown therefore became a key battleground in raising local awareness and countering the media demonisation of migrants in a town with limited experience of inward migration and cultural diversity. Crucially, for groups like NorthTown Community Voice or NORMAS and other RCOs, this involved moving beyond the private space of drop-in centres and into public spaces, holding meetings and events in town centre cafes and bars. The aim was to breakout of hidden locations to raise awareness of the changing cultural diversity of NorthTown and the positive contribution this could make to the town. Public space events celebrating cultural diversity were also held in parks and in the

town centre shopping area. This latter location was particularly controversial due to the increased activity of the BNP, meaning this public space as political space became a contested issue. For several migrants interviewed at this time, the presence of a BNP stall in the main shopping precinct on a Saturday afternoon made this public space hostile and to be avoided. For activists and community group organisers this heightened the need for raising the profile of new arrival communities in order to counter myths and negative assumption fuelled by a lack of knowledge or direct experience of culturally diverse communities. This was again about maintaining visibility and asserting the legitimacy not only of residency but also of social participation, echoing long standing 'Right to the city' struggles played out in numerous urban environments (Routledge 2010, Chatterton 2010, Leontidou 2010). Direct confrontation of the BNP over this public space was avoided, although there were spontaneous and forceful reactions against their presence by local people who were not themselves from either BME or new arrival communities.

In addition to small events organised by individual groups there were also larger awareness raising events involving multiple organisations, local authority agencies such as NAT and other local political and social institutions. One such event, held annually at the town hall, involved a range of statutory support agencies but also RCOs, the Trades Council and some trade unions. At one level this could be seen as reflecting the potential for the development of nascent links between new socio-political groups and NorthTowns traditional agents of social change and justice in the form of the labour movement and progressive members of the local political apparatus. Although these relationships were prone to the processes of rivalry and exclusion from local political power circuits reported elsewhere in the paper, the urban environment provided the opportunity for these groups to encounter one another (D'arcus 2010). As George, a representative of NorthTown Community Voice recounted the event in 2010:

We hold events which for example [the] cultural diversity festival... so that really encourages and raises the awareness of [NorthTown Community Voice] as well as migrants, as well we raise awareness to the indigenous population to what [NorthTown Community Voice] is about and what services we do. And then by doing that and we reach not just BME people but we reach the

indigenous population as well. One of those events could reach up to four thousand, five thousand people that could come. And this has been held now a number of years... it gets held in the town hall.... What we do is on this event we bring we call all the third sector organisations as well as first sector organisation and any service providers so they can come in and hold a stand for example.... they just advertise their services and when people come in they can go and talk to the services and that's how it's really doing... many things in one session. So it's really sharing as well as raising the profile of [NorthTown Community Voice] and the communities as well as bringing the indigenous population in too.

Sustainability, structural constraints and agency through strategy

Given the importance of the support they provided organisational sustainability was a key issue across the range of groups. However, with different degrees of formal organisation and transient memberships or constituencies the propensity for sustainability varied (Wren 2007). All groups faced key structural constraints in terms of the ability to access funding, the bureaucratic demands success in accessing such funding put upon organisations and, crucially, the competition for resources created by statutory funding regimes (Zetter and Pearl 2000). The ability to operate within these structural constraints was again varied across groups, reflecting disparities in power resources but also due to the application of agency in the form of the political adroitness of key organisers.

In terms of a sustainability strategy based on a high degree of formalisation, NorthTown Community Voice provided a key example of a third sector group that had pursued formalisation to an advanced degree, reflected in the development of bureaucratic systems and new competences. With a track record of support and representation roles in long-standing BME communities, plus established political and social networks, NorthTown Community Voice had built up competences that were recognised across NorthTown as being useful to the provision of support and representation to asylum seekers. Between the two periods of research NorthTown Community Voice had gone from playing a minor role in the

provision of support for asylum seekers, based on pre-existing working relations with the local authority, to being a key player in the provision of support for new arrival communities. This role expansion reflected a classic compensatory process mirroring the withdrawal of the state from key areas of support provision and coordination. The role played by NAT in terms of supporting drop-in centres and coordinating multi-agency responses to the needs of asylum seekers had increasingly relocated to NorthTown Community Voice as the dedicated local authority functions were wound down. From being one of a range of support providers, NorthTown voice became a key umbrella organisation of new arrival community groups, subsuming some grass-roots RCOs along the way, and crucially acting as a conduit to directing those in need of support to other statutory and third-sector providers (Wren 2007). Interestingly this process paralleled the growing recognition within the local authority led multi-agency support network of the need to expand the type of support provided for asylum seekers to labour migrants and refugees. Carl, a NorthTown Community Voice worker explained, how their role had developed by 2010:

[NorthTown Voice] is here to like help all BME communities. So be it economic migrants, in terms of social services, access to education, health services, it can provide them that first contact point and then signposting to the partner organisations... That's what we do, so you know the different groups that you see there do different things. In relations to that specifically we do have [ARC] which is a drop-in session for refugee and asylum seekers as a whole, and in there again is the drop-in centre where they can go and have access to English ESOL classes ok.

When asked specifically about support for recent migrants from Poland:

They can have anything, pretty much anything, to do with socially... economically... so let's say if it's health service, we've got the support where NHS people from the foundation trust can come and tell them how to sign up to a GP doctors, what to do when they go to hospital and register. If it comes to education, we've got education workers who come and advise them what the kids need to get to school and what they need to do if it's socially. [NorthTown Voice] is made up of the different community groups, and the Polish community will have events and they walk in here, our primary objective is to

help them wherever it means that we can. So they can come here with any problem they want, they can come in and say.

At one level this had meant a redefining of the goals of the organisation in order to accommodate this new role. For the leadership of NorthTown Community Voice this also represented an opportunity to access new sources of funding that were only available to groups that were on a more formal footing; funding from local and national government through the subcontracting of asylum seeker support and even European level Structural Funds. Whilst they did provide the resources to allow the support group to sustain itself over time and to develop and to gain a higher profile, accessing such funds necessarily also entailed meeting a specific set of externally imposed goals and objectives, thus reinforcing the organisational formalisation. This in turn was seen as a means through which the support group could shape the future direction of local level support activities for new arrival communities. There was a perception expressed by representatives of other organisations that more formally established groups were able to secure a louder 'voice' in local strategic forums. Proficiency in identifying and applying to funding streams in turn developed over time and led to NorthTown Community Voice being highly effective in terms of attracting resources, in this sense placing them at considerable advantage over newly established community groups. Yet there was a contradiction at the heart of this process. The extensive formalisation of third sector support groups created new dynamics in the form of new institutional goals associated with organisational survival. The inherent danger here was that institutional goals associated with organisational survival obscured substantive goals (Majka 1991, Zetter and Pearl 2000, Wren 2007). This should not be seen just in terms of the provision of service by the individual organisation but also in terms of tensions with other organisations within the multi-agency approach to support provision. Representatives from both RCOs and statutory organisations involved in NorthTown's multi-agency support network raised the issue of challenging behaviour, which was ultimately a product of the competition for resources, straining relations between organisations. As one representative from a local statutory body who had worked in concert with NorthTown Community Voice across a number of support projects observed:

I helped them to write a funding bid... they had the management of it and turned very territorial and because of that, I kind of backed off.... Sometimes it is a competition for scarce resources, isn't it? And also it depends on where

you are looking. But you might think that the long term and whatever we call it private voluntary community, NGO - is it called now third sector... however you dress it up - is in a sense in competition with statutory services and that is an economic reality. So I suppose that makes it comprehensible.

In a competitive funding environment the possibility of some organisations being squeezed out in terms of resource allocation led to tensions in the relationship between agencies ostensibly pursuing a shared agenda, reflecting a structural constraint on both the sustainability of some groups and on the development of service provision more generally (Zetter and Pearl 2000, Wren 2007). Ultimately a reflection of funding issues, there was also a perception of competition between formally established organisations over the provision of aspects of support to asylum seekers, for example the control of drop-in centres, such as the one established by ARC, and the supply of English language training. Notwithstanding the implications in terms of resource allocation, the control of drop-in centres was also important given the reliance on such space for the incubation of new grass-roots groups who lacked access to their own resources. For example, NORMAS had emerged from relationships formed at ARC. The tensions that arose over the perception of competition between groups led to the organiser of NORMAS, a longstanding attendee of ARC, being barred from the drop-in centre.

These tensions had arisen over the perceived goal incongruities between the agenda pursued by the leadership of NorthTown Community Voice and the representatives of the asylum seeker community. The set of aims developed to meet long standing needs for the representation of BME communities were perceived to not address the specific needs of asylum seekers and refugees, despite the specific mandate to address the needs of all new arrival communities associated with central and local government funding. As one of the new community based groups that emerged in response to the perceived gaps in provision by established organisations, NORMAS broadened the provision of support but added to potential competition for resources. The coexistence of this range of informal and formal support groups was, therefore, fraught with tensions but also reflected a dynamic process where the degree of organisational formalisation shifted over time.

One of the potential disadvantages associated with the process of formalisation is the waning ability to adapt and react to changes in the context in which support is required. Whereas formalisation may bring advantages through improved bureaucratic processes, this may be at the cost of proximity to new arrival communities. Conversely, by their nature, emerging community based organisations had a direct, organic relationship with those they represented and supported and were perhaps better placed to adapt to change in the demographics of new arrival communities or to developments in their needs. In another example, the previously mentioned RCO founded by a group of Zimbabwean asylum seekers was inspired by the desire to go beyond the perceived limitations of the support provided by existing drop-in centres. In no small part motivated by an appetite for some sense of self-determination, this short-lived RCO was established to address the specific needs of asylum seekers for advice, advocacy and, crucially, voice in relation to failed asylum applications. As a founding member of the group explained:

“I am actually a pioneer of the [NorthTown Asylum Action Group]. Because when we moved here we found refugee groups like [ARC], but they don’t get *involved* with asylum seekers and the issues that [are of concern] such as asylum claims. It is just socialising and talking and playing games. If someone gets a refusal they need advice – so we decided to form the group”.

Whilst these new informal groups served to meet a wider set of needs – some of which were emergent over time – their capacity to do so, financially and bureaucratically, was also constrained by their distance from the resources of more formal groups and the state. Yet it was precisely this distance from the state, along with flexible, emergent agendas, which allowed these informal groups to effectively meet of the needs of new arrival communities. This contradiction at the heart of the process of formalisation and the access to resources again reflected the structural constraints on the development of support mechanisms.

NORMAS provided an interesting example of a RCO that had navigated the structural constraints of its operating context, avoiding the pitfalls associated with extensive formalisation, the competitive environment and the sustainability problems that had accounted for some of the other grass-roots RCOs that had risen from new arrival communities. Rather than reflecting the form of ‘contingent community’ (Kelly 2003) that

was based on commonalities of language or nationality, NORMAS pursued a more consciously politically oriented basis for its organisation. These ‘political communities’ were not bound together in terms of a common ideology but rather in seeking what united people across differences in nationality, ethnicity, gender, language and crucially immigration status, in terms of shared material need and experience. Interviewed in 2006, the founder and key organiser explained her vision for the emergent RCO that could adapt to the changing support needs of NorthTown’s new arrival communities:

‘The grass-roots organisations are better....we are debating whether we should be a refugee group or a ‘migrant’ group – whether we should include migrant workers. Some say no, I say yes. They need help, they face isolation and exploitation.’

By 2009 NORMAS had established itself on a relatively formal footing, but it still maintained its vision of having a flexible and emergent model, driven by the needs of its members. In other words, it was effectively straddling formal and informal status. The main organiser was a member of key strategic forums for new arrival communities, and the support group had secured some resources from local authority funding to allow the organisation to develop. Yet consciously sustaining elements of the informal status of the group was seen as a key advantage by the organiser because this meant NORMAS was less constrained by the narrower goals of some of the formal support groups.

Between research periods the drop-in centre established by NORMAS had changed from being almost exclusively attended by asylum seekers to starting to include other new arrival communities, particularly Central Eastern European labour migrants. The NORMAS activists were not oblivious to differences existing between various migrant individuals and groups, particularly between Central Eastern European labour migrants on one hand and refugees and asylum seekers on the other. The ethos of NORMAS, however, was to build links across new arrival communities regardless of ethnicity, nationality or immigration status. As the group founder noted:

‘They [Central Eastern Europeans labour migrants] think about themselves as different from non-European migrants...But their needs and problems are very similar’

The drop-in centre’s urban location, which lied in close proximity to a firm that was the major local employer of Central Eastern European migrants, provided an opportunity for NORMAS to act as a social support hub. Moreover, a new initiative of a ‘mother and toddler’ group had attracted young families of labour migrants. This reflected another strategy for engagement with a broader constituency spanning the new arrival communities, by providing space and support for relatively anodyne, everyday activities.

‘If someone wants something, we can do it. If someone wants a dancing class, we can put it on. We’ve managed to get an allotment, we organise day trips.’

These activities brought asylum seekers, refugees and labour migrants into regular contact with one another, allowing for the sharing of experience and the recognition of shared experiences. To apply Chatterton’s (2010) adaptation of Routledge’s (2003) concept, NORMAS provided the ‘convergence space’ in which ‘politics happen’. The everyday activities provided a point of engagement for the ‘political community’ that NORMAS reflected, based on common material needs and experience, and could provide the link into the more overtly political role NORMAS played in terms of lobbying, campaigning and raising awareness of the new arrival communities within the town. When applied to the experience of asylum seekers and refugees, or indeed labour migrants displaced from their home communities, such mundane activities also took on the dimension of recapturing moments of normality.

The pivotal role played by the group’s founder held obvious implications for the scale of operations at NORMAS and for the level or extent of support they could provide. Although the agency of the individual provided strategic vision, focus and dynamism that were important to sustainability and to not losing sight of the group’s original substantive goals (Zald and Ash 1966, Zetter and Pearl 2000), it also provided an inherent limitation to the likelihood of development into a more formalised, bureaucratically structured and larger support provider. Recognition of this limit to formalisation was not a point of concern

however, but rather fitted the group's previously noted philosophy regarding the benefits of small grass-roots organisations.

Conclusion

The development of support networks for new migrant communities in NorthTown faced the structural constraints reported in other studies (Zetter and Pearl 2000, Wren 2007). The limited history of inward migration to the town meant that the potential advantages of support groups and networks associated with long standing migrant communities were largely absent. With NorthTown Community Voice the only established group representing BME communities in the town, there were no pre-existing RCOs associated with chain migration from the countries of origin of new migrant communities (Zetter and Pearl 2000). However, this does not mean that asylum seekers, refugees and labour migrants did not apply their agency in establishing grass-roots community groups to supplement the support roles provided by statutory and third-sector organisations from the host community. It is well documented that applying such agency is important for avoiding a sense of being passive recipients of support from the host community (Williams 2006), but the fact that groups such as NORMAS were inspired by a sense of disenfranchisement within arrangements based on the representation of established BME communities also shows the importance new arrival communities attached to having their own voice in NorthTown.

The emergence of support networks and new RCOs did not occur in a vacuum but rather was facilitated and shaped by spatiality and the urban context of NorthTown (D'arcus 2010). The central location of statutory and third sector support services, importantly including drop-in centres, largely mirrored the concentration of residency of new migrant communities. Spatiality was key in terms of drop-in centres such as ARC, and in time NORMAS, providing the 'convergence space' for 'politics to happen' (Routledge 2010, Chatterton 2010) in terms of the emergence and operation of RCOs. The public places and spaces of the town centre also became crucial to the political space needed to participate in the political life of NorthTown (Routledge 2010). A range of events held in cafes, bars, parks, shopping precincts and even the town hall were politically important in terms of both the interaction

between communities and in bringing together grass-roots RCOs and other social and political actors from NorthTown (Panelli and Lerner 2010). Such events were also crucial to the politics of visibility (Heynen 2010). The urban and political space facilitated the agency of RCOs in terms of expressing voice, raising awareness of new arrival communities in NorthTown, but crucially, for asserting an agenda of social legitimacy and participation seen in 'right to the city' campaigns elsewhere (Routledge 2010, Chatterton 2010, Leontidou 2010). The importance of legitimising the social and political participation of new migrant communities is brought into particular relief in areas that have had relatively stable urban identities radically altered by deindustrialisation and increased ethnic and cultural diversity. In NorthTown the politics of urban identity (D'arcus 2010) became contested in public and political spaces by the presence of far-right groups such as the BNP and in political narratives by xenophobic scaremongering in the media.

The particularities of the urban location influenced the dynamics of relations between groups within the multi-agency network of support for new arrival communities. As an urban area with a population of 120,000, the nature of the political space in NorthTown was circumscribed both by the size of the town and the limited history of inward migration. This context allowed NorthTown Community Voice to assert a domination of local political networks and agendas in a way that may have been less likely in a larger urban context with a greater plurality of established political actors from BME and new arrival communities. This adds another dimension to well documented tensions between support groups resulting from the structural constraints on their development and operation created by the need to compete for resources (Zetter and Pearl 2000).

The experiences of support groups in NorthTown exemplify the challenges of sustainability in a competitive resourcing environment and the alternative strategies adopted by organisations in responding to these structural constraints. The degree of formalisation can be a key factor. NorthTown Community Voice, for example, represented a formalised response. Building on existing bureaucratic capacities and established links to funding regimes, NorthTown Community Voice developed new competences as it expanded its support role for new migrant communities, thus allowing access to new resource streams to ensure

organisational sustainability. However, such an approach contains the inherent danger of 'goal displacement' (Zald and Denton, 1963), leading to the organisational goal of sustainability taking precedence over substantive goals of service provision. In NorthTown's multi-agency support network, this became manifest in problematic relationships between NorthTown Community Voice and other groups that ostensibly shared the same substantive goals in terms of helping and representing new arrival communities (Majka 1991). Strategic alternatives to formalisation are possible. It has been established in other studies that RCOs may consciously resist formalisation and incorporation into broader official structures (Zetter et al 2005, Wren 2007) to avoid the dilution or transformation of their original goals. Although this may have been a constrained choice given the dynamics of local power networks in NorthTown, NORMAS reflected an approach in which the flexibility allowed by avoidance of incorporation into the prescribed agendas associated with official funding regimes was hailed as an advantage. NORMAS represented a balance between the lack of formalisation of other short-lived RCOs within NorthTown and the expansive bureaucratisation of NorthTown Community Voice. Within this, the role of the founding organiser of NORMAS had been important in maintaining 'goal commitment' as a counterbalance against formalisation (Zald and Ash 1966), again showing outcomes are not inevitable. The strategy of organising on the basis of a more political community, articulating a commonality of social and material needs and shared experiences across national and ethnic lines, and demarcations imposed by immigration status, differed considerably from the organising logic of other RCOs. Yet NORMAS proved more sustainable than the 'contingent communities' based on narrow bonds of a commonality of language or nationality (Kelly 2003). That the founding organiser was central to these developments is not to privilege the role of the individual but rather to recognise the application of agency in terms of strategic responses to structural constraints; thereby not negating the influence of these structural constraints but ensuring outcomes are not fixed.

The varied strategic responses to the challenges of sustainability demonstrate the application of agency in the context of considerable structural constraints. Analysis that focuses on degrees of organisational formalisation, issues of competitiveness and instrumental actors has been criticised for denying the role of agency within these structural constraints (Leontidou 2010). Yet equally we must be sensitive to the contextual realities that shape the articulation

of agency. Structural constraints circumscribe the activities of ROCs, often acting as a fetter on their development or sustainability (Zetter and Pearl 2000). Crucially, however, these structural constraints do not lead to predetermined or universal outcomes, as demonstrated in this paper. The ability to assert agency is not denied but rather better understood by recognition of structural influences.

References

- Anderson, B. (2010) 'Migration, Immigration Controls and the Fashioning of Precarious Workers', *Work, Employment and Society*, 24(2):300-317
- Chatterton, P. (2010) 'So What Does It Mean to be Anti-Capitalist? Conversations with Activists from Urban Social Centres', *Urban Studies*, 47(6):1205-1224
- D'arcus, B. (2010) 'The Urban Geography of Red Power: The American Indian Movement in Minneapolis-Saint Paul, 1968-70', *Urban Studies*, 47(6):1241-1255
- Kelly, L. (2003) 'Bosnian Refugees in Britain: Questioning Community', *Sociology*, 37(1): 35-49
- Leontidou, L. (2010) 'Urban Social Movements in 'Weak' Civil Societies: The Right to the City and Cosmopolitan Activism in Southern Europe', *Urban Studies*, 47(6):1179-1203
- Lerner, W. and Graig, D. (2005) 'After Neoliberalism? Community Activism and Local Partnerships in Aotearoa New Zealand', *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, 37(3):402-424
- McFarland, E. and Walsh, D. (1994) 'Bosnian refugees in Glasgow: a multi-agency response', *Critical Social Policy*, 14 (1): 91 - 99
- Majka, L. (1991) 'Assessing Refugee Assistance Organisation in the United States and the United Kingdom', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 4(3):267-283
- Odmalm, P. (2004) 'Civil society, migrant organizations and political parties: theoretical linkages and applications to the Swedish context', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30(3):471-489
- Panelli, R. and Lerner, W. (2010) 'Timely Partnerships? Contrasting Geographies of Activism in New Zealand and Australia', *Urban Studies*, 47 (6):1343- 1366.
- Phillimore J, Goodson L (2006) 'Problem or Opportunity? Asylum Seekers, Refugees, Employment and Social Exclusion in Deprived Urban Areas', *Urban Studies* 43(10):1-22
- Sales, R (2002) 'The deserving and the undeserving? Refugees, asylum seekers and welfare in Britain', *Critical Social Policy*, 22 (3):456 - 478
- Routledge, P. (2003) 'Convergence Space: Process Geographies of Grassroots Globalization Networks', *Transactions Institute of British Geographers*, 28, 333-349.
- Routledge, P. (2010) 'Introduction: Cities, Justice and Conflict', *Urban Studies*, 47(6):1165-1177.
- Williams, L. (2006) 'Social Networks of Refugees in the United Kingdom: Tradition, Tactics and New Community Spaces', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 32(5):865-879

Wren, K. (2007) 'Supporting Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Glasgow: The Role of Multi-Agency Networks'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20(3): 391-413

Zald, M.N. and Ash, R. (1966) Social Movement Organizations, Decay and Change', *Social Forces*, 44(3):327-341

Zald, M.N. and Denton, P. (1963) 'From Evangelism to General Service: The Transformation of the YMCA', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 8(2):214-234

Zetter, R., Griffiths, D. and Sigona, N. (2005) 'Social Capital or Social Exclusion? The Impact of Asylum-Seeker Dispersal on UK Refugee Community Organisations', *Community Development Journal*, 40(2):169-181

Zetter, R. and Pearl, M. (2000) 'The Minority Within the Minority: Refugee Community-Based Organisations in the UK and the Impact of Restrictionism on Asylum-Seekers', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 26(4):675-697