

# **Nonprofit Organisations as Builders of Social Capital and Channels of Expression: the Case of Ireland**

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## **Abstract**

*Nonprofit organisations have been identified as fulfilling a distinctive set of roles across a wide variety of countries. The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project undertook an impact analysis component to investigate the roles that nonprofit organisations play. This paper focuses on the two significant roles of community building and expression and analyses whether nonprofit organisations are, in fact, performing these roles.*

*This paper reports on qualitative research and therefore does not purport to measure the extent of community building or the level of expression among nonprofit organisations in Ireland. It will illustrate, instead, how community or social capital building can occur and the form that expressionism can take and has taken in an Irish context. A qualitative picture attached to a quantitative map brings a more rounded focus and serves to add some flesh onto the skeleton that has started to be constructed in Ireland. This paper, therefore, begins to provide an ecological approach to the study of the Irish nonprofit sector, a method that we are interested in exploring in the Centre for Nonprofit Management at Trinity College Dublin*

## **Introduction**

Five roles have been attributed to the nonprofit sector in the international literature (for example, Weisbrod 1975, Smith 1973, Hansmann 1980, Kramer 1981, Salamon 1987, Berger and Neuhaus 1996, Kingsley and Gibson 1999). These are, service, innovation, advocacy, expressionism and community building, although the last is more commonly referred to as the social capital role, following the increasingly popular concept (Putnam, 1993, 2000). All of these roles are played out to varying degrees by nonprofit organisations in Ireland but the service role is possibly the strongest and certainly one that has been traditionally associated with the voluntary sector (Faughnan and Kelleher 1993, Mulvihill 1993, Ruddle and O'Connor 1993, Ruddle and Donoghue 1995, Jaffro 1996, Donnelly-Cox and Jaffro 1999). A further paper will provide evidence of the way in which these roles have been carried out by nonprofit organisations in Ireland. The concern of this paper, however, is with two roles specifically, that is, expressionism and community building. Evidence of these in the case of three organisational fields will be given but it is also hoped to indicate the wider relevance of such roles for society.

Indeed, the role of nonprofit organisations in both expressionism and community building has been given prominence in several policy documents in recent years. The partnership process, for example, gives explicit recognition to the importance of participation of different actors and partners in developing social policy in Ireland. The role of nonprofit organisations in partnership has received mention in policy

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documents and subsequent initiatives such as the establishment of Strategic Policy Committees, which are part of changing local governance structures (Department of Environment and Local Government 1996). An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, states in the White Paper, *Supporting Voluntary Activity*, that ‘voluntary activity forms the very core of all vibrant and inclusive societies’, which, he says ‘emerges organically from communities’ (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs 2000). He formally states the need to support such expression of community activity but in a way that does not stymie such activity but enables it.

While historically many nonprofit organisations in Ireland have identified primarily with their service role (Faughnan and Kelleher 1993, Mulvihill 1993, Ruddle and O’Connor 1993, Ruddle and Donoghue 1995, Jaffro 1996, Donnelly-Cox and Jaffro 1999), in more recent decades there has been a development of other roles. These roles are, however, linked to the relationship between the nonprofit sector and the state and to the vexed area of resources (Donnelly-Cox, Donoghue and Hayes 2001). A preoccupation with securing financial resources tended at first to cloud this arena from both practitioners’ as well as scholarship perspectives (Faughnan and Kelleher 1993, Ruddle and Donoghue 1995). More recently, however, links between the three ‘rs’ of roles, relationships and resources have been explored (Donnelly-Cox 1998) in a desire to broaden the scope of enquiry.

It is in that context that this paper will present findings on the expressionism and community building roles from the impact analysis project run as part of the wider Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (CNP). This paper will build upon work done already on volunteering as an expression of the civic self (Donoghue 2002a). It will also explore the way in which community building and expressionism operate in the nonprofit sector and will indicate the intertwining of the historical development of voluntary activity and Irish society. Voluntary action is, in some sense, an expression of who ‘we’ are as Irish citizens, and voluntary activity has contributed to notions of Irishness and to the generation of community over time. As Ireland changes there is now a proliferation of identities, and an attendant desire to express these identities can be found in an increasing number of nonprofit organisations reflecting and articulating changing social norms and values.

## **Methods**

Three organisational fields were chosen for investigation in this part of the CNP study. By focusing on organisations that ‘in the aggregate, constitute a recognised area of institutional life’ (DiMaggio and Powell 1983:148), we were hoping to explore how several different roles are adopted and played. The organisational fields chosen were (i) services for older people, (ii) community development and (iii) organisations promoting the Irish language. These fields were selected for a number of reasons. Services for older people are an important arena in the health field where voluntary organisations have long played, and continue to play, a vital role. Community development organisations have been a feature of Irish society and the Irish nonprofit sector for a long time but have changed from their earlier incarnation as predominantly rural based to urban based dealing with unemployment, drug use and poverty. Community development organisations also include communities of ‘interest’ generated on being in a ‘community’ of lesbians and gay men, travellers, or people with disabilities. Irish language organisations played an important role in the

development of the Irish state but have also encountered difficulties in the transition from traditionalism to modernism.

Three main types of method were utilised in the fieldwork and supplemented by the nonprofit literature, policy documents and literature from individual organisations. Three focus groups were held, in each organisational field, with representatives drawn from statutory agencies, nonprofit organisations and observers or researchers in the field. The focus groups ranged in size from six to eight participants. In each organisational field, these focus group interviews were complemented by one-to-one in-depth interviews with similar type of respondent, that is statutory representatives, voluntary and community representatives and observers or researchers. About seven one-to-one interviews were conducted within each organisational field giving a total of 22 interviews. Finally, two case study organisations were chosen in each organisational field, providing a total of six case studies. In the organisational field of older people, an organisation established in 1992 focused on advocating for older people and another organisation, established in the mid-1980s, involved in housing provision for older people were chosen. In the organisational field of community development, an inner-city organisation founded in the late 1980s, which is very involved in addressing social problems and in campaigning for social justice, was chosen. This was complemented by one of the oldest nonprofit organisations in Ireland, which is a rural-based voluntary organisation founded in 1937 by a priest and operated on a self-help, self-sufficiency basis at individual parish level. In the Irish language field, the umbrella organisation for all Irish language voluntary organisations was chosen. Established in 1943, this organisation's explicit remit is to advocate for the Irish language and to promote it. The second Irish language organisation chosen has been in existence since 1953 and has been very active in the promotion of cultural expression through the medium of Irish.

This paper will focus on how nonprofit organisation in these three fields have acted as vehicles for expression and as community building agents. As will be seen, different kinds of negotiation are necessary for different types of nonprofit organisations dependent on their constituencies. They also demonstrate a particular slice of Irish history and show how nonprofit organisations are very much interlinked with who and what we are as a society. I will argue that these roles have been expressed in different ways in these organisational fields, which is dependent upon historical paths, relationships with the state, and the peculiarities of the constituencies that they are representing, promoting or supporting. As will be seen there can be tensions inherent in these roles which nonprofit organisations may have to negotiate. These tensions can arise from what has been termed a drawback or vulnerability associated with nonprofit organisations, that is particularism. In other words, by focusing on one community of interest or inhabiting a specific geographic or social locale, nonprofit organisations can be subject to claims of prejudice and discrimination because they are excluding others from their field of concern. I would like to show how different organisations operating in the three organisational fields mentioned above have negotiated this.

### **Expressing the Self**

Nonprofit organisations have been identified as acting as vehicles for individual and group self expression (Smith 1973, Weisbrod 1975). Kramer has stated, for example that voluntary agencies are 'expected to promote citizen participation, develop

leadership, protect interests of social, religious, cultural, or other minority groups' (Kramer 1981:9). Groups form, or individuals form groups, therefore, to give expression to different beliefs, heritages, cultures and sub-cultures. Observers of the nonprofit sector in Ireland have not paid much attention to date to this expressive role except in the context of state failure (Ruddle and Donoghue 1995, Jaffro 1996). O'Regan (2000), however, has noted the importance of the individual's motivation as a rationale for the existence of nonprofit organisations and he regards such expressionism as an important role. There appears to be growing recognition of the importance of this role at policy-making level. The White Paper, *Supporting Voluntary Activity*, notes the significance of an active nonprofit sector for democratic pluralism because nonprofit organisations act as a forum for group expression (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs 2000).

#### *Nonprofit Organisations in the Field of Services for Older People in Ireland*

Voluntary organisations play an important role in service provision for older people. It has been estimated, for example, that about 1,200 voluntary organisations provide services in the community to approximately one-quarter of older people (Mulvihill 1993:104). The main services in which voluntary organisations are active are befriending and social outings but over half of all organisations have also been reported to be involved in practical services such as home help, special and sheltered housing, day centres and meals on wheels (Mulvihill 1993). The provision of services to older people by voluntary organisations has been recognised at policy level (i) through the payment of so-called Section 65 grants under the 1953 Health Act for providing services 'similar or ancillary to those provided by the state'; and (ii) through explicit mention in a number of policy documents on older people such as *The Care of the Aged* (1968) and *The Years Ahead* (1988). Policy on older people in Ireland, therefore, specifically recognises the important role played by voluntary organisations and the need for state agencies and voluntary organisations to work in partnership together. A review of such policy (Ruddle, Donoghue and Mulvihill 1997) concluded, for example, that participation in such service provision by the voluntary sector was essential to the service's existence.

The predominantly social service side to many voluntary organisations in the field of older people has historically meant that not a lot of such voluntary organisations have been strongly involved in advocacy or campaigning. More recently, however, that situation has begun to change and, for example, a month-long annual festival, *Bealtaine* (which takes place in May, or 'Bealtaine' in the Irish language), has grown to include many counties in the country. Its activities specifically promote an image of a healthy, happy and active older population. This image stands in stark contrast to that found both explicitly and implicitly in policy documents and promoted to a certain extent by the activities of voluntary organisations in service provision. Such organisations have tended to work 'for' rather than 'with' older people and this paternalism has tended to militate against expressionism. Respondents in the fieldwork noted this predominant tendency in this organisational field and several efforts that have been made to counteract it. The lack of a consumer voice, and therefore the lack of expression of self or community identity, has also been noted at the level of policy making (Ruddle, Donoghue and Mulvihill 1997). Not only have older consumers been excluded from policy arena there has also been a tendency to provide services for such consumers without necessarily consulting them on their needs. This has contributed to the perception of older people as passive recipients of

services (and therefore a 'drain' on society) rather than as active participants in society. While this is a problem wider than the nonprofit field, it has only recently begun to be addressed by voluntary organisations in an attempt to create a more positive view of older life as a time of opportunity and potential for active contribution to Irish society.

The expression of group identity of older people is an interesting role because it can involve some negotiation. There is the expression of the group as 'older people', the expression of the group as older people who are the 'same' as other people (and therefore active contributors to society) and the expression of the group as 'different kinds of older people'. Awareness of the heterogeneity of older people has only recently begun to be articulated by nonprofit organisations and this arose as an issue in the fieldwork. Indeed, differences were expressed about the role of nonprofit organisations in this organisational field, and about whether they adequately served different groups of older people such as working class older people, older rural women and those older people confined to their homes. One respondent in the focus group expressed this in the following terms, drawing subtle distinctions between very similar language and its positive and negative connotations: 'The elderly are always blocked together. Bringing together is one thing but making sure that they are not all lumped together is another thing'.

To summarise briefly at this stage, therefore, the expression of group identity as older people in Ireland is not as developed as it could be. Policy makers and some nonprofit organisations have tended to promote a vision of older people as frail, dependent and passive. In more recent years, efforts have been made by nonprofit organisations to re-dress this image of passivity and dependency and this can be seen in the expansion of a network of active retirement associations countrywide, for example.

#### *Community Development Organisations*

The organisational field of community development on the other hand is specifically concerned with the expression of self and group identity whether that identity is based on a geographic or social locale. Formed on the four principles of empowerment, participation, inclusion and rights, community development organisations although involved in service provision are more strongly associated with advocacy and campaigning. Two strands can be traced historically within community development although it is not clear if either of these strands would regard itself as the same as the other. There has been a long history of community organisation in Ireland on the basis of self sufficiency. Long-established groups like *Muintir na Tire* and *Macra na Feirme* would have roots in this concept of self-sufficiency and community maintenance. Such organisations, however, are not necessarily the same as the more recent community development organisations, which tended, initially at least, to be based in urban areas. These community development groups founded on principles of empowerment, participation, inclusion and rights were galvanised by social problems such as unemployment, drug use and poverty. The community development organisational field also includes communities of interest, formed to give expression to and fight for the rights of people with disabilities, lesbians, gay men, lone parents and Travellers, to name but a few.

While these two strands of community development are based on different principles, there are similarities in that both types are concerned with community empowerment albeit for one type, the older rural type, such empowerment is couched in terms of self-sufficiency. All of these community groups, whether urban, rural or interest based take explicit approaches with regard to the expression of individual and group self identity. Furthermore, as their name implies these organisations are also specifically concerned with the development or building of a sense of community arising from that expression. This will be returned to below in the section on community building.

Community development organisations are more popularly recognised for their role as campaigners and advocates. Such organisations have now an official place in the shaping of social policy through their representation as the community and voluntary pillar in the negotiations on national programmes such as *The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* and on bodies such as the National Economic and Social Council and the National Economic and Social Forum.<sup>1</sup>

A core objective of organisations in this field is to be a vehicle for individual and group self expression and this can be seen most explicitly in the description of such organisations as community *development* organisations whether on a geographic or communities of interest basis. Viewed from the perspective of the principle of either empowerment or self-sufficiency, community organisations are established to act as forums for groups and individuals to express themselves. In fact one respondent stated '[in Ireland]...all interests have started off being expressed at voluntary level'.

#### *Irish Language Organisations*

Irish language organisations are also explicitly concerned with self and group expression and, by extension, the building of community from that. The history of the Irish language movement provides a good illustration of the way in which this identity has been expressed. Prior to gaining independence from Britain and the establishment of the modern Irish state in 1922, the responsibility for the revival of the Irish language lay with a voluntary organisation which is still in existence, *Conradh na Gaeilge* (or the Gaelic League, as it is known by its anglicised name). This organisation, associated with many of whom were to become early states people in the newly-formed Irish Free State, was innovative and advocative while providing a service. It also served as a forum in which Irish people could express their identity as Irish and thereby their difference from their English rulers. *Conradh*, therefore, provided a community-building function as well and, in line with the response given by community development representatives above, the need to express group and self identity as Irish speakers encompassing the essence of being Irish was crucial in establishing this organisation.

When the Irish Free State was formed in 1922, responsibility for the Irish language passed from the voluntary sector to the state, and, as written in the 1937 Constitution, Irish became the first official language. This formalisation of the language's status did not lead to large numbers converting from English to Irish usage. In fact, a harsh disciplinary attitude, which accompanied the teaching of Irish in schools and the promotion of Irish by the state, was a strong contributory factor, it was noted in interview, to the continuing decline of Irish as a language. When this decline too much to bear, Irish language voluntary organisations began once more to be

innovative in their approach to advocacy and campaigning and took on, once more, their expressive role with renewed vigour. From the mid-1970s, there have been greater developments in the Irish language arena, such as a new Irish language television station, and an Irish language revival; the summer schools in the Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) areas boast ever-increasing numbers of students. Voluntary organisations have taken the lead role in these innovations. It appears that there is now greater acceptance of the place of Irish and that this has allowed interest in the language to be a reason for its use rather than merely for success in school state exams.

Irish language organisations could be said to encapsulate self expression and, indeed, their very foundation was in order to act as a vehicle for self expression and to ensure that such expression found a place in other parts of Irish society and its polity. Irish is a minority language and the organisations involved are primarily engaged in giving voice to and addressing the needs of this minority. The interests of adults wishing to speak Irish are represented and the interests of Irish speakers are also expressed. This latter occurs through campaigns for their rights to the provision of public services through the Irish language, for example. Meanwhile, voluntary organisations also serve as vehicles for the expression of people who live in Irish speaking, or Gaeltacht, areas through the provision of services, the development of enterprise and cultural tourism and the lobbying for other services or media such as a television station, TG4, and a radio station, Raidio na Gaeltachta. Irish language organisations, according to respondents in interview, have a strong community focus, which was regarded as essential in order to carry out their expressive role and to serve the needs of the community that these organisations sought to represent.

Yet, Irish language organisations have also been seen to act as vehicles blocking pluralist viewpoints. This was most keenly seen in the role that such organisations have been perceived to take in opposing liberal stances. Traditionally, Irish language organisations have been associated with upholding Catholic Irish values that are opposed to divorce, contraception and abortion. For example, one Irish speaker who holds very staunch conservative views, but was also strongly aligned with the Irish language movement, used to use the media in order to promote such views. Over time this caused a good deal of unrest among the Irish language organisation 'community' who felt that damage was being done not only to the language but also to its development, to its ability to be a living entity and therefore to its image and theirs as speakers. Irish language organisations began to express the sense that they wanted to change with the times.<sup>2</sup> Representatives from Irish language organisations said, in interview, that just as Ireland itself was changing, they too wanted to develop and move away from such conservatism. Unease was expressed about the conservative wing of the Irish language movement and with the fact that the movement had not dissociated itself formally or publicly from reactionary perspectives. Attempts have been made by Irish language organisations to address this issue and both of the case study organisations cited efforts that they had made to be inclusive and pluralist.

### **Social Capital Formation**

Along with expressing a group's identity, nonprofit organisations can also be expected to perform a unifying role (Smith 1973, Berger and Neuhaus 1996, Kingsley and Gibson 1999). Serving as a channel for group and individual expression, as

already noted, such organisations can encourage social interaction and help to create trust and reciprocity, which leads to the generation of a sense of community. All three organisational fields in this study cited attempts to build community in several ways, some of which, respondents said, were more successful than others. First of all, community development organisations are, by their very nature, expressly involved in community-building tasks. Community development, by definition, means, if not the building of community, the mobilisation of a community on a certain issue or interest (community of interest) or on the basis of locale (geographical community). The role of the community sector in Ireland has been recognised at policy making level as promoting social inclusion (Government of Ireland 1997a, Department of Social Welfare 1997, Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs 2000) and, indeed, several respondents in interview noted that not only did community development organisations serve to mobilise communities but that they had been very successful in politicising a number of issues at community level and taking these onto the wider political agenda (Donoghue 1999). Specific examples of this activity included the role that community development organisations have played in highlighting the damage that drug use was wreaking on inner-city communities. Indeed, the drugs example is one of community organisations playing expressive, community building and advocacy functions. The setting up of Local Drugs Task Forces in 1997 and their expansion and increased funding from 2000 can be seen as one indication of the efficacy of community organisations in galvanising support on this social problem. Other examples of community building at the level of communities of interest, are Travellers groups whose lobbying has not only insured the inclusion of Travellers in recent legislation such as the Incitement to Hatred Bill and the Equal Status Bill but has served as well to give Travellers, themselves, greater pride in their heritage and culture.

Irish language voluntary organisations also provide a good example of community building, and that role has been explicitly acknowledged by the State (Government of Ireland 1997b). Right from the earliest stages of voluntary activity in this field, community building has been an important function. At first, and prior to independence in 1922, community building was mobilised on the notion of community as comprising Irish people who ‘belonged’ to Ireland and vice versa. With independence and the establishment of a 26-county Ireland, the focus changed to building within that state a community of people who wished to speak Irish or to revive Irish as the language of the new state. The designation of Irish as the first official language of the fledgling state might have been seen to bolster that community-building role but, it appears that, in actual fact, the state’s intervention only hampered the community-building efforts of voluntary organisations. After several decades of relative inactivity, these organisations began to address this area anew, and with increased vigour, from about the 1960s onwards. The community-building function of Irish language voluntary organisations has been addressed through various means and most notably in recent times through lobbying for and acquiring a television station in the face of much opposition from a large for-profit media group.

In contrast to the other two organisational fields, community-building among voluntary organisations working with older people has taken a less explicit path. On the one hand, it could be argued that some nonprofit organisations have worked at community-building through providing services specifically for older people such as

day care, home help, meals-on-wheels, which align older people thereby with other groups in society requiring similar services, for example people with disabilities. On the other hand, however, it could be argued that the breaking down of boundaries rather than the building up of communities may be what is required for older people in the attainment of 'grey power'. Indeed, several representatives of nonprofit organisations noted attempts to advocate for the heterogeneity of older people stating that older people were not an homogenous group composed of frail, infirm dependants. The building of community in these instances is an interesting case of negotiation, therefore, because it takes the form of demonstrating that older people are exactly the same as everyone else while at the same time attempting to foment a positive sense of identity among older people themselves. The Older People's Parliament, for example, aims at building community amongst older people where the right to engage in such activity is emphasised. Being an older person is promoted as something positive, and fighting for the right to be heard and to have a consumer's voice are regarded as essential. 'Newer' nonprofit organisations in this field, therefore, are attempting to counter an idea of community by default and to build a different kind of community which emphasises the common links with other communities and the heterogeneity of older people. Organisations working with older people, however, have only begun this community-building role and they have not developed that role to the extent that the other two organisational fields featured in this study have done. For such organisations, in addition, this role requires some subtle negotiation because community building for older people may happen outside of their group, by default as it were and nonprofit organisations need to generate a community image for themselves. It could be argued, however, that all of the nonprofit organisations in these organisational fields have had to negotiate community building in their own terms in order to 'own' their communities and express their self identity.

From that perspective, it is interesting to examine why respondents thought that nonprofit organisations were effective in such a role. In the Irish language and community development fields, it was generally attributed to the maintenance of close contact with the grassroots. Among older people nonprofit organisations, however, as already noted the presence of a consumer voice is weak. The traditional focus on the provision of services 'for' rather than 'with' older people, or, paternalism, has been recognised as contributing to the stereotyping of older people as passive recipients of care. This has also served to work against the building of community, for who wants to belong to a community that is signified by 'lack' (de Beauvoir 1980). Yet it could be argued that older people are a community in which each one of us has a vested interest because we are all getting older and, therefore, at any age we are all potential members. The community building role, therefore, is quite a challenge for these voluntary organisations and may be one which most organisations in this field have not developed to any sophisticated extent. Indeed, paternalism, traditionally associated in the literature with voluntary organisations (Donnelly-Cox and Jaffro 1999), has militated against both expressionism and community building. While nonprofit organisations in the field of older people are not any 'older' than nonprofit organisations in the other two organisational fields in this study, they appear to conform to a more traditional type of voluntary organisation (Donnelly-Cox and Jaffro 1999) and it is notable that in this field those organisations seeking to expand their roles are younger in age.

### **The Management of Self Expression and Community Identity**

The literature has noted that what may be referred to as the ‘flipside’ of community building and the expression of self and group identity can lead to charges of elitism from outside the group. Particularism (Smith 1973, Kramer 1981, Salamon 1987), can result where the building of a community or the expression of group or self identity leads to the exclusion of others and possibly prejudicial behaviour. Respondents from two of the organisational fields in this study noted that they had encountered shades of this and had developed their own responses. Respondents from the third organisational field denied its occurrence on any great scale but, at the same time, admitted that there were occasions when it could occur. Indeed, although recognition of this role has not been developed in the Irish literature, there are some observers who have noted its effects. The lack of an umbrella organisation for nonprofit organisations in Ireland, for example, has been attributed to particularism (Hayes 1996) in the sector, which has been seen as detrimental for the sector's development. Hayes (1996) has also noted that particularism has given rise to uneven provision of services by the voluntary sector. She, like Acton (1997), mentions the need for interest groups to co-operate at regional and national level in identifying and working together on issues of common interest.

Respondents from among organisations providing services to older people noted the conundrum that can exist with regard to particularism and which has already been described above in the section on social capital. For organisations in this field seeking to address this issue, respondents stated that there was a thin line to negotiate in order to build community while attempting to avoid the isolation of being in a community which could reinforce the inequality of older people.

Irish language organisations demonstrate another example of particularism where elitism or snobbery may be levelled at them from ‘outsiders’. Indeed, Irish language voluntary organisations have been at pains in recent years in order to counter particularism and to encourage openness within the field and to not treat non-Irish speakers as pariahs. For such organisations, therefore, sophisticated negotiation is required in order to be open and inclusive while still attempting to promote the Irish language.

Interestingly among community development organisations, particularism was noted by some respondents as a feature but not necessarily as a problem and it has certainly not been addressed to the same extent within that organisational field as it has by Irish language voluntary organisations. This may be because as ‘community’ development organisations there may be a perception that ‘community’ embraces all. Respondents in the fieldwork were quite aware, however, that community was not a catch-all term and that some elements in a community were likely to be promoted at the expense of others and that this had the potential to lead to further and future problems for an organisation concerned with building ‘community’.

### **Conclusion**

Across all organisational fields the ability of nonprofit organisations to be expressive and to build communities was attributed by respondents to: a) the proximity of voluntary organisations to their client group or community; b) their flexibility because they were not tied to bureaucracy; and c) their relatively smaller size (when compared to statutory agencies). As for -profit organisations do not, in the main, operate to any

great extent, if at all, in any of these organisational fields, the efficacy of nonprofit organisations tended to be compared by respondents to statutory agencies. Statutory agencies were perceived to be more effective than nonprofit organisations in their ability to gain access to resources which could be put to greater use in the provision of services, although respondents were quick to point out that voluntary organisations were more effective in identifying the need for services. It is interesting, therefore, to note that O'Sullivan has disputed these attributes (O'Sullivan 1999) and claims that larger nonprofit agencies are no more flexible, adaptable or innovative than the state.

A separate study of the relationship between nonprofit organisations and a large statutory organisation has revealed, however, that statutory grant aid to nonprofit organisations can be contingent upon such organisations being innovative. In other words, the state, mindful of constraints as a result of its size, will depend on nonprofit organisations to be innovative in identifying need and in piloting services. Nonprofit organisations can receive state funding on this basis (Donoghue 2002b). Whereas larger nonprofit organisations may adopt characteristics more usually attributed to statutory organisations, as O'Sullivan (1999) has argued, this may be a function of their size, or their age (Donnelly-Cox and O'Regan 1998) and not necessarily their nonprofit status.

This paper set out to demonstrate if nonprofit organisations have made a difference and what kind of difference they have made following on from earlier work in this area (Salamon, Hems and Chinnock 2001). In Ireland, within the organisational fields of services to older people, community development and Irish language organisations, the presence of nonprofit organisations carrying out different roles is the first sign of the difference that such organisations have made. Paying specific attention to the roles of expressionism and community building that have been identified in the literature, these organisational fields demonstrate the performance of these roles to varying degrees. Both Irish language and community development organisations have been more explicit about their roles as expressive and community building entities. They also appear to have been more successful at these roles although they are both open to charges of particularism or elitism; this is especially the case with Irish language organisations. They have promoted group identities effectively and this can be seen at policy-making level in several ways such as representation on the community and voluntary pillar and in a number of policy documents on the Irish language.

Nonprofit organisations working in the field of older people, however, have more difficult terrain to negotiate. While involved traditionally in the provision of services to older people and, in so doing, building a community of older people in Irish society recognised as deserving of such services and, therefore a 'good' cause, more recently-formed nonprofit organisations have tried to address the effects of having been attributed a community that has not necessarily been self-determined. Paternalism in older traditional voluntary organisations and a lack of consumer voice (evident in policy documents) have contributed to an image of frail, dependent, passive older people who are a drain on society (a 'good' cause indeed). Yet the majority of older people in Ireland are active, empowered citizens and the newer nonprofit organisations are concerned with spreading the message of heterogeneity rather than homogeneity. They are more focused, therefore, on the elision of boundaries between different age communities rather than the reinforcement of such boundaries. Such

nonprofit organisations demonstrate an example of attempts to combat particularism even if such particularism has been inherited with the territory (older people) or attributed from outside.

The organisational fields participating in this study demonstrate the way in which nonprofit organisations can and do play the expressive and community-building roles in Ireland. Two organisational fields, in particular, community development and Irish language, demonstrate the historical importance of such roles. The Irish language movement also shows the intertwining of state-nonprofit relations in conducting such roles. Certainly, any exploration of these roles in Ireland has to be understood in the context of state-nonprofit relationships (Donnelly-Cox, Donoghue and Hayes 2001). A recent study on the relationship between the state and nonprofit organisations has shown that statutory support of nonprofit organisations can contribute to their impact, as well as their legitimacy in the eyes of other funders (Donoghue 2002b). This relationship can, however, have its own problems because, as Mullins *et al.* (2001) have argued, a resource dependency can occur. Furthermore, where the state only supports certain kinds of nonprofit organisation, or particularly kinds of activity, the impact of such organisations is bound up with perceptions of the role that they can play (Donnelly-Cox, Donoghue and Hayes 2001).

This paper, short as it is, only begins to explore what Anheier has referred to as the 'so what' question (Anheier 1998). As a contribution to this panel session, this paper has aimed to provide a qualitative picture to add to the quantitative profile that has started to be built up in the Irish case (Donoghue, Salamon and Anheier 1999, for example). The adoption of an organisational field approach (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Mullins *et al.* 2001) is a method that is worth taking further and is one that my colleagues and I in the Centre for Nonprofit Management in Trinity College Dublin are interested in developing to conduct ecological niche studies to deepen the area of nonprofit scholarship in Ireland. This paper gives us greater impetus to build up our study of habitats.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Economic and Social Council was established in 1973 as an independent advisory body with tripartite representation. The NESC has provided strategic underpinnings of five National Programmes including the most recent *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*. Such Programmes have been a feature of Irish policy life since 1987 and influence wage growth, macro-economic and social priorities. In 1994 the National Economic and Social Forum was formed to address problems of unemployment and social policy on the basis of a wider, structured consultative process (including third sector representation). In 1997, this body proposed changes in partnership institutions, including NESC and proposed closer working relations between NESF and NESC. The third sector has been represented on NESC since that time.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that this same person appeared on a national chat show in the early 1970s and then ten years later. Her latter appearance sparked many angry calls because of her illiberal and conservative views. By contrast, similar views expressed in the early 1970s had resulted in responses of support from the public.