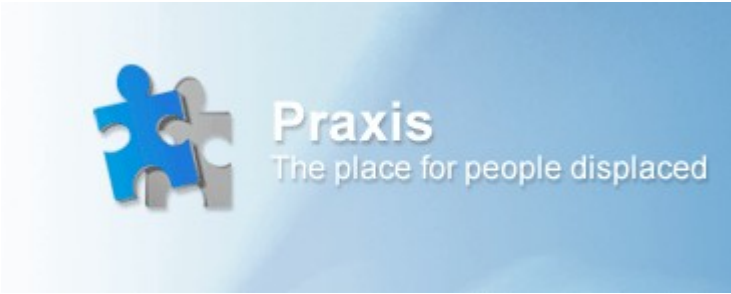


Evaluating the Impact of Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations on Community Cohesion

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About this report

This report is the result of a collaborative project between the Professional and Community Education department at Goldsmiths College and Praxis Community Projects, a medium sized charity that supports migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and their communities in London, with a particular focus upon Tower Hamlets and other parts of east London. The aim was to carry out a literature review on the theme of assessing the effectiveness on community cohesion of a community-based organisation such as Praxis in the area where it works. This was in order to produce practical suggestions as to what steps Praxis could take to evaluate its impact on community cohesion, working with established communities as well as with newcomers to promote human rights and social justice.

It was expected that the report would look at specific examples of evaluating the impact on community cohesion of voluntary and community sector projects and, based on this, recommend tools, indicators and methodologies that had been proven to be useful in the past. However, early on in the project it became evident that at present there is a lack of sufficient publicly available examples of evaluating the effect of the voluntary and community sector on community cohesion.

It is not that the voluntary sector is not perceived as being in a position to have an impact on community cohesion. On the contrary, it is frequently highlighted as a key player in achieving cohesion. This emphasis on the role of the voluntary and community sectors may reasonably be expected to continue, given the coalition government's focus upon these sectors in relation to the aims of the Big Society more generally. However, it is not sufficiently clear how the sectors' impacts on community cohesion can be measured.

This is partly because community cohesion emerged as a government agenda and it has continued to be promoted and implemented primarily by governments. One implication of this is that the oversight and responsibility for cohesion has been laid down primarily on the public sector, especially local authorities. The voluntary sector has often been brought in as a key partner in those areas where it is perceived to contribute best. In other instances, money has been made available from funders for organisations to undertake projects that improve cohesion. In both, cases, the voluntary and community sector has found itself responding to a cohesion agenda coming from outside rather than leading on its development. Similarly, a framework for evaluating cohesion has been most developed at the local authority level and using methodologies designed for evaluating the performance of local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships.

Meanwhile, most of the identified instances of efforts made to evaluate voluntary and community sector initiatives have been based on reflections and self evaluations of

specific projects by the project leaders themselves rather than on more systematic efforts to evaluate impact more generally. There is therefore a lack of available experiences of replicable evaluation of the effect on community cohesion of voluntary and community sector projects.

Community cohesion and the effect of projects on it are in any case themselves difficult to measure and evaluate. Community cohesion is a broad or higher level aim, with a range of different factors influencing it. It is therefore difficult to disentangle these and to assign causality to the interventions of a project from all the other factors external to the project that influence cohesion.

This report looks at existing examples of measuring and evaluating community cohesion, addressing the lack of concrete examples by separately analysing the community cohesion agenda and existing guidance on evaluation of the voluntary and community sector. In the concluding sections the report suggests how these different approaches, experiences and guidance can be brought together to develop a programme specific to Praxis Community Projects.

The emergence of the community cohesion agenda

Community cohesion came to the forefront of public policy in the wake of the disturbances (or riots) in the northern towns of Burnley, Oldham and Bradford during the summer of 2001. Following these disturbances a series of reports were commissioned to analyse the causes of the unrest in each area and to suggest actions to address these causes (Clarke, 2001; Ouseley, 2001; Ritchie, 2001). Simultaneously, the government of the day set up a panel to review the disturbances and make recommendations at a national level. The panel produced an influential report titled *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*, often referred to as the ‘Cantle Report’, which set out the broad parameters of much of the following discussion and action on community cohesion.

The local reports as well as the Cantle Report all highlighted the division between Asian and white populations in many aspects of their everyday lives as one of the main causes of the disturbances. This division encompassed separate residential areas, education facilities, work places, shopping areas and social facilities. The Cantle Report stated that in some areas, including those where there had been disturbances, there was very little contact between communities defined along ethnic or faith lines.

In its best known and most controversial passage the Cantle Report stated that:

the team was particularly struck by the depth of polarisation of our towns and cities. The extent to which these physical divisions were compounded by so many other aspects of our daily lives, was very evident. Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges.

(Cantle, 2001: 9)

The report's authors argued that, despite the many examples of regeneration initiatives and community-based schemes in the areas where the disturbance took place, 'the development of cross-cultural contact and the promotion of community cohesion, was not valued as an end in itself' (Cantle, 2001: 10). In fact, the report suggested that initiatives aimed at reducing inequality and tackling deprivation often foster the separation and isolation of social groups defined along ethnic or religious lines. The authors argued that there was a need to increase the level of contact between the different communities living in the same area. The Cantle Report therefore introduced the idea of community cohesion as an aim that should be actively pursued by public authorities.

The government embraced the findings and suggestions of the Cantle Report and the inter-departmental ministerial group on Public Order and Community Cohesion published its own report on what actions the government should take. Based on the three local reports and the Cantle Report, the group identified amongst the factors leading to the disturbances the following:

- A 'lack of a strong civic identity or shared social values to unite diverse communities.'
- 'The fragmentation and polarisation of communities – on economic, geographical, racial and cultural lines – on a scale which amounts to segregation, albeit to an extent by choice.' (Denham, 2001: 11)

These two elements were to become central themes in the cohesion agenda, although the report also identified other factors such as weak political leadership, youth disengagement, unemployment, the presence of extremist groups, failures in police response, and negative media coverage as contributing factors.

The central recommendation of the then government's report was that there was a need to make community cohesion a central aim of government, and to ensure that the design and delivery of all government policy reflects this. We recognise that in many areas affected by disorder or community tensions, there is little interchange between members of different racial, cultural and religious communities and that proactive measures will have to be taken to promote dialogue and understanding. We also take on board the need to generate a widespread and open debate about identity, shared values, and common citizenship as part of the process of building cohesive communities.

(Denham, 2001)

Thus the government quickly adopted the suggestion of the Cantle Report to prioritise community cohesion as a policy to counteract the divisions between different groups. This was followed by guidance documents (Local Government Association, 2002), the inclusion of community cohesion within official Home Office strategy, the setting up of a Commission on Integration and Cohesion in 2007 (CIC) (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007) and the gradual adoption of the Commission's recommendations (Communities and Local Government, 2008).

In the more recent work on cohesion, two further issues have been added to the question of parallel communities: the integration of recent migrants and religious extremism

(Ratcliffe, no date). Even though the integration of asylum seekers and refugees was high on the agenda at the time of the disturbances it did not figure in the initial developments of community cohesion. The issue of the integration of migrants seems to have arisen, rather, from the impact of the post accession migration from the A8 countries. Similarly, the London bombings of 2005 brought the issue of tackling religious extremism into the community cohesion agenda.

The legacy of 2001: diagnosis and the solution

The different reports on the 2001 disturbances and the government's own review therefore emphasised that in many English towns:

- 1) There was a high level of separation in many aspects of life between members of different 'communities' and that this separation was often voluntary, a choice of the members of the groups.
- 2) Related to this, there was very little contact, communication and understanding between communities.
- 3) Underlying the separation of communities was the lack of shared identities and values that cross-cut across the different groups living in the same area.

The proposed solutions to this have generally been to suggest the need to:

- 1) Increase the contact between different groups: 'We believe that there is an urgent need to promote community cohesion, based upon a greater knowledge of, contact between, and respect for, the various cultures that now make Great Britain such a rich and diverse nation.' (Cantle, 2001: 10)
- 2) Develop shared interests and values, often couched in terms of citizenship: 'It is also essential to establish a greater sense of citizenship, based on (a few) common principles which are shared and observed by all sections of the community. This concept of citizenship would also place a higher value on cultural differences.' (ibid.)

In its early stages, community cohesion thus seemed to be defined in opposition to segregated communities. A community with high levels of social conflict and mistrust is definitely not a cohesive community. However, the absence of conflict and mistrust does not necessarily mean that a community is cohesive in the Cantle approach. Very generally, community cohesion is thus about different social groups on the one hand having frequent contact and, on the other hand, sharing a common set of values.

A key issue related to community cohesion is the socioeconomic conditions and processes that underpin cohesion or that are a barrier to it. In this sense two distinct but complementary and often simultaneous approaches appear to have emerged in relation to how to achieve community cohesion. The first aims at actively encouraging and facilitating 'meaningful contact' between members of different groups and contributing

to the formation of a common sense of belonging and identity. This approach has been the subject of considerable controversy, both amongst academics and amongst policy makers, as it will be suggested in more detail subsequently. The second aims at tackling the socioeconomic factors that can contribute to impede cohesion and to improve those that have been shown to correlate with high cohesion levels.

Definitions of community cohesion

Even though the Cattle Report put the issue in the limelight, it did not provide an exact definition of what it meant by community cohesion. Rather, it defined a series of domains that constitute community cohesion. These were:

Domain	Description
Common values and a civic culture	Common aims and objectives. Common moral principles and codes of behaviour.
Social order and social control	Absence of general conflict and threats to the existing order. Absence of incivility. Effective informal social control. Tolerance; respect for differences; inter-group co-operation.
Social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities	Harmonious economic and social development and common standards. Redistribution of public finances and of opportunities. Equal access to services and welfare benefits. Ready acknowledgement of social obligations and willingness to assist others.
Social networks and social capital	High degree of social interaction within communities and families. Civic engagement and associational activity. Easy resolution of collective action problems.
Place attachment and identity	Strong attachment to place. Inter-twining of personal and place identity.

(Cantle, 2001: 13)

Some elements that have shaped the community cohesion agenda are already present here. The first, common values, and the fourth, social networks and capital, have already been identified as the central elements of the concept.

The third domain is a particularly important one. It tangentially refers to what had been the main focus of action before the emergence of community cohesion, namely fighting discrimination and seeking equal opportunities. This issue has subsequently become more important in defining community cohesion.

The fourth domain sets out a strong relation between place, identity and cohesion. It implies that the scale for community cohesion is the local level rather than the regional or the national level.

In 2002 by the Local Government Association (LGA) together with the Home Office, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Interfaith Network jointly produced a guidance document on community cohesion where they outlined the following definition of community cohesion:

Definition of community cohesion used by government 2002-2005

Community cohesion incorporates and goes beyond the concept of race equality and social inclusion.

The broad working definition is that a **cohesive community** is one where:

- There is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;
- The diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued;
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

(Local Government Association, 2002: 6)

There is thus a more explicit reference to equality within the definition, as well as a caveat preceding it that states that the race equality and social inclusion are incorporated in the community cohesion agenda.

The report of the Commission on Integration and Social Cohesion published in 2007 suggested that even the LGA definition was missing some important elements. These were identified as:

- A sense of local specificity, not just a national sense of belonging.
- Recognising that focusing on differences was divisive and the emphasis should be on 'shared futures'.
- The importance of trust in institutions to act fairly and allocate resources fairly.
- A sense of 'mutual hospitality or mutual respect.'

(Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007:41)

The Commission thus suggested the following definition for the government to adopt:

Definition of Community Cohesion Proposed by CIC

An integrated and cohesive community is one where:

- There is a clearly defined and widely shared sense of the contribution of different individuals and different communities to a future vision of a neighbourhood, city, region or country.
- There is a strong sense of an individual's rights and responsibilities when living in a particular place – people know what everyone expects of them and what they can expect in turn.
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities, access to services and treatment.
- There is a strong sense of trust in institutions locally to act fairly in arbitrating between different interests and for their role and justifications to be subject to public scrutiny.
- There is a strong recognition of the contribution of both those who have newly arrived and those who already have deep attachments to a particular place, with a focus on what they have in common.
- There are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and other institutions within neighbourhoods

(Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007: 42)

As mentioned above, the CIC put the notion of integration as necessary for cohesion, bringing the issue of recent migrants into the picture. The government in its response to the CIC's report (Communities and Local Government, 2008) and in subsequent guidance (Communities and Local Government, 2009) adopted the following definition which is the current definition in use:

Current Definition of Community Cohesion used by Communities and Local Government

Community Cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another.

Our vision of an integrated and cohesive community is based on **three foundations**:

- People from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities
- People knowing their rights and responsibilities
- People trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly.

And three key ways of living together:

- A shared future vision and sense of belonging
- A focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity
- Strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.

(Communities and Local Government, 2009: 9)

This definition thus provides a set of necessary conditions for community cohesion to exist and then sets out the elements of cohesion itself. Within this definition equal opportunities are thus a pre-condition of cohesion, alongside a knowledge of rights and responsibilities, i.e. citizenship, and trust in institutions. In addition to the two main elements of contact between communities and common values this definition introduced 'a shared future vision and sense of belonging' which implies attachment to the area in which people live.

The concept of community cohesion and the ideas that underpin it, such as integration, belonging and social capital, have not been free of controversy. Cohesion has been criticised conceptually for a number of reasons. It has been argued that the language of community cohesion, and of community more generally, de-racialises policy, shifting the emphasis away from the realities of racial inequality in favour of the need for common values. Commentators thus fear that the emphasis on community cohesion will imply leaving aside tackling racial, social and economic inequality (Worley, 2005; Cheong et al., 2007). This fear remains despite the inclusion of these issues as necessary conditions for cohesion in some of its more recent conceptualisations.

A further criticism is the possibility that the cohesion agenda, especially its integration dimension, may mark a return to a policy of assimilation, with migrants and ethnic minorities expected to carry the brunt of 'integrating' into a cohesive society. Some authors argue that the discourse of common values and shared norms is not clear about what it should contain and fear the imposition of cultural homogeneity upon an inherently diverse population (Back et al., 2002; Burnett, 2007; Worley, 2005).

Regarding the way that the original cohesion agenda emerged as a reaction to the 'parallel lives' led by some Asian groups, some academics have disputed the levels of segregation in the 2001 riot towns and the influence that this segregation had in sparking the trouble. They argue that, on one hand, segregation in Britain is nowhere as bad as the reports on the disturbances implied. Furthermore, they show that Asian groups in these towns often have similar housing aspirations as white people, but face barriers to achieve them, such as being priced out of the market and fearing crime in certain areas. Where segregation exists, it is often linked to limited availability of affordable housing, economic inequality and high natural growth rates amongst certain groups as much as it is to self segregation (Robinson, 2005; Phillips, 2003).

Other authors are more positive about the need to foster good relations between members of different social groups and to find common narratives and values that extend to all members of society (Cantle, 2008; Rogers and Muir, 2008). Crucially, these authors recognise that economic and social justice are necessary conditions for community cohesion. They argue, however, that equality should not be achieved through interventions that create divisions between social groups and that equality and common values can be addressed simultaneously. Some have gone as far as arguing that community cohesion can lead to more progressive social justice policies. As one report put it, 'progressives are unlikely to be able to secure public support for greater social

justice in the first place in the absence of widely shared norms of citizenship and solidarity' (Rogers and Muir, 2008).

There seems to be, therefore, a level of consensus amongst supporters and critics of community cohesion that there is a continuing need to tackle persistent social and economic inequalities. Critics, however, argued that community cohesion may be a distraction from the struggle against inequality and that it may harbour assimilationist objectives and the imposition of cultural homogeneity. Supporters and the government of the day rejected these allegations, arguing that common values and shared identities do not mean the elimination of diversity. Despite the reservations of some commentators the government moved ahead with rolling out the community cohesion agenda and this now plays an important level for public bodies and, increasingly, for the voluntary and community sector.

Implementation of community cohesion

As we have seen, despite some misgivings on the part of academics, the government decided to press ahead with rolling out community cohesion both as a direct policy and also as a principle informing all of its policies. In 2003 and 2004 the government implemented a Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme through the Community Cohesion Unit of the Home Office. Fourteen local partnerships were chosen and funded to develop community cohesion work from which lessons could be learned and replicated elsewhere. The Pathfinder programme led to the publication of a practitioner's toolkit for community cohesion (Home Office, 2005). This guide identified seven key elements in delivering community cohesion: leadership and commitment; developing a vision and values for community cohesion; programme planning and management; engaging communities; challenging and changing perceptions; links to specialist areas such as health and housing; and sustainability.

In 2005 the Home Office published *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society*, its 'strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion'. In 2006 the newly formed Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) took over the responsibility for delivering community cohesion. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion was formed as an advisory body in 2006 and in 2007 produced *Our Shared Future*, in which it set out a series of recommendations on how to address community cohesion. After having published its response to the commission DCLG published in 2009 its Cohesion Delivery Framework where it states that 'cohesion is not just built by specifically aimed policies, but also by ensuring other policies take account of the impact they can have on cohesion'(Communities and Local Government, 2009: 13).

The government therefore took two approaches with regards to community cohesion: targeted interventions and mainstreaming. The first refers to projects specifically relating to community cohesion, i.e. that aim at directly bringing people together and on creating a sense of belonging. The second refers to introducing the principles of community cohesion to all the work undertaken by government at local, regional and national levels.

Additionally, the government created a Public Service Agreement (PSA) — PSA 21 — covering specifically the issue of community cohesion, which is to ‘build more cohesive, empowered and active communities’. This PSA sets out the vision of government with regards to cohesion and communities, a measurement and monitoring framework, a delivery strategy and sets out the key roles for different government departments and authorities. In addition to the PSA, cohesion indicators can also be used by local authorities as part of their priority areas of work in the Local Area Agreements (LAAs)¹. Improving community cohesion is therefore the responsibility of national government and local authorities. However, the government’s approach repeatedly emphasised that community cohesion must be tackled at the local level. It has also emphasised that interventions must respond to local contexts and that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. Local authorities have therefore had significant leeway in the ways they specifically tackle community cohesion in their respective areas.

Local authorities have, in turn, tackled community cohesion in different ways. Some have come up with their own definitions of what constitutes community cohesion and have taken different approaches to implement their visions. Generally the different approaches have varied according to the broad distinction we outlined above, with the emphasis varying between fostering cohesion directly and tackling the necessary conditions for cohesion to be possible. Thus, some local authorities have placed the emphasis on reducing hate crime and promoting equality, with the view that these are necessary conditions for cohesion. Others have emphasised projects where different communities come together and/or developed campaigns around common belonging (Communities and Local Government, 2007).

Evidence of community cohesion on the ground

In this section we will focus in more depth upon what community cohesion means on the ground and what are the main issues that facilitate it or impede it. Several studies have made an attempt to understand the perceptions of community cohesion of residents of several areas of the country. Most point to the complex nature of community cohesion in terms of what it means and how different factors affect it. However, there are a series of common themes emerging from these studies.

Most studies conclude that to ensure cohesion it is necessary to address structural issues, especially deprivation, discrimination and disadvantage as well as simultaneously encouraging interaction, understanding and belonging (Hudson et al., 2007; Hickman et al., 2008). In this sense, most studies validate the official view in emphasising both equality and conviviality. However, the studies tend to emphasise that tackling deprivation and inequality are necessary aims that should not be replaced or watered down by the other aims of the cohesion approach.

¹ LAAs are agreements negotiated between central government, a local authority and other key local stakeholders represented in the Local Strategic Partnership in which priorities for funding in the area and performance targets are agreed.

Pivotal issues affecting community cohesion are deprivation and inequality. Low income and unemployment generally are found to impose constraints on the capacity of individuals to participate in organisations and other places of social interaction (Jayaweera and Choudhury, 2008). The effect of deprivation, however, goes beyond the capacity to participate in local structures. In deprived areas, especially, frustration over issues such as employment and housing can be expressed in racial, ethnic or faith terms, leading to tensions between sections of the community. In these areas there can be a perception amongst some people of unfairness of resource allocation (Hudson et al., 2007).

Similarly, all sections of society tend to share common concerns over problems in their local areas such as crime, drugs and pollution. These concerns are common to settled and new groups and are often important factors in feeling attached to a local area (Jayaweera and Choudhury, 2008; Hudson et al., 2007). These structural issues thus have a significant impact on community cohesion as they impede a sense of belonging to the local area.

A further theme is that of governance. The complexity of governance arrangements and representation structures can make it difficult for many individuals and some communities to effectively engage with policy makers (Blake et al., 2008).

In terms of how different areas respond to social and demographic changes, past experience of immigration and change has an effect on how present residents respond to new communities. Areas with a history of immigration can be more inclusive and welcoming of new residents. Having said that, an efficient response from political and community leaders can make a significant impact on those areas that lack this previous experience (Hickman et al., 2008).

Obviously, some sections of the population have been highlighted as being particularly vulnerable to being excluded and isolated. In terms of ethnic and faith minorities this is generally the result of racism and discrimination. For recent migrants, however, lack of information and language skills as well as labour market position are often the main challenges.

Discrimination and racism are continuing problems for some sections of society, then. These forms of exclusion include faith as well as racial discrimination. For members of some ethnic and faith groups, racism and discrimination are therefore barriers to inclusion and to forming a sense of belonging (Jayaweera and Choudhury, 2008). Discrimination on racial and ethnic lines makes members of certain groups feel alienated and isolated.

Recent migrants are particularly highlighted in some studies as facing multiple barriers to effective integration and to socialising with other sectors of society. They are often isolated and lack information and social support networks that settled communities often find in community organisations (Jayaweera and Choudhury, 2008; Spencer et al., 2007). Lack of English language skills, lack of time because of long hours working and

immigration status are all barriers to participation and interaction common to many recent migrants (Jayaweera and Choudhury, 2008; Spencer et al., 2007; Markova and Black, 2007; Blake et al., 2008). While workplaces are often spaces where migrants meet other migrants, they often have little interaction with British people (Hickman et al., 2008)

Several studies have also found that population turnover makes it difficult to build up the sense of belonging to a neighbourhood. The sense of belonging to a local area increases with time as people live in the area (Hudson et al., 2007; Markova and Black, 2007). In some areas, a sense of community is found in small pockets where populations are most stable (Hudson et al., 2007). With large numbers of migrants, often moving in for a short period of time, this is a major issue for cohesion though. Mobility and population churn is not, however, restricted to migrants.

On the other hand, most studies agree that diversity is not in itself a barrier to community cohesion. Most people value living in diverse areas. This does not necessarily equate with people wishing to interact on a constant basis with others who are perceived to be as different, however. In effect people can appreciate and value diversity, as well as feel that an area is cohesive, without feeling a need to have strong ties to other people: 'many participants in the research were adamant that whether a community is cohesive or not may be determined less by the strength of the ties that bind people together than by the perceptions they have of each other and of the area in which they live' (Creasy et al., 2008).

Similarly, some studies have found significant levels of interaction between new migrants and settled populations but an absence of a sense of belonging to a local area. Therefore, even when there is social interaction and respect for diversity there may be little sense of belonging and community participation (Markova and Black, 2007).

There is also a tendency to focus on ethnic and faith groups, ignoring other forms of social groupings which in some areas can be more significant than ethnic or faith divisions. In some areas, for example, there are as many divisions around age as there are around ethnicity or faith (Hudson et al., 2007). In these cases, there may be tensions between young and older people. In some cases there can be interaction between young people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds at the same time as there is a lack of understanding with older residents.

One positive factor for community cohesion is the role of particular local institutions in bringing people together. These are often spaces in which different groups feel safe amongst other groups. Some of the spaces and activities that have been highlighted in this report are sports and leisure facilities, residents' associations, and schools and colleges (Jayaweera and Choudhury, 2008; Hudson et al., 2007). Other examples include local umbrella organisations, such as councils of voluntary service, social action centres, and settlements.

Factors influencing community cohesion: quantitative evidence

Besides these qualitative reports based on research in specific areas of the country, there is one large national study by Laurence and Heath (Laurence and Heath, 2008) that attempts to link social and economic factors, as well as other perception indicators, to the levels of cohesion as derived from official indicators. Much of the subsequent official guidance has been based on this piece of research.

Laurence and Heath statistically modelled the levels of community cohesion, as measured by the first of the three national cohesion indicators together with a range of other indicators. They used individual level and community level indicators and also used socio-demographic and attitudinal variables. Importantly, their model therefore uses objective data as well as data based on subjective perceptions.

The study compared community cohesion levels with different factors in all local authorities, in order to find out what factors influence community cohesion. The different factors were evaluated according to how strongly they were correlated to community cohesion. This means that a factor with a large score has a 'strong effect on generating (or undermining) community cohesion'. The model thus provides statistical evidence as to what individual and community level, socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics tend to be present in areas that have high levels of community cohesion. It also specifies what characteristic tend not to be related to perceptions of cohesion. However as the authors point out 'the model cannot explain causality. We cannot, for example, say whether perceptions of cohesion cause perceptions of collective efficacy or whether the relationship is the other way round' (Laurence and Heath, 2008: 29).

Laurence and Heath's main conclusions are that:

- Both individual and community level factors affect cohesion.
- Ethnic diversity is in most cases positively associated with community cohesion.
- Population turnover does not have much of an effect, but an increasing number of overseas migrants is a negative predictor of cohesion. However there is no evidence to know whether this is a temporary effect.
- Disadvantage, both at community level and individual level, erodes community cohesion. However, not all deprived areas have low cohesion levels.
- Crime and fear of crime undermine cohesion
- Empowerment is important for cohesion. Feeling able to influence local decisions is a positive predictor while feeling unfairly treated because of race has a negative effect.

Significant conclusions arise from these findings. The first, and this is important bearing in mind the origin of the whole agenda, is that ethnic diversity is a positive rather than a negative predictor of community cohesion. However, Laurence and Heath do conclude that a high proportion of overseas migrants is associated to negative cohesion. Consequently, the cohesion and integration agendas have been brought together in official guidance and in the work of the Commission for Integration and Social Cohesion.

A second important conclusion is that both individual and community level factors affect cohesion. This means that interventions that address individual needs as well as those that

address community issues can have an impact on the cohesion of an area. This could be especially important in areas that are internally diverse, with high differences in socio-demographic characteristics within the same area. In these cases, addressing the individual issues of those who are most disadvantaged may have a larger impact than adopting a community-wide approach. Therefore, Laurence and Heath write that: ‘Reducing individual level disadvantage: for example, increasing income or improving an individual’s level of qualifications, can offset the negative impact of high crime rates and high levels of community disadvantage on perceptions of cohesion’ (Laurence and Heath, 2008: 8).

Thirdly, Laurence and Heath’s main conclusion is that deprivation, both at the individual and community level, is the main issue affecting cohesion. With respect to ethnicity and deprivation, they conclude:

‘irrespective of the ethnic mix of the area, as disadvantage increases, its negative effect gets stronger [...] regardless of the diversity level, disadvantage operates in a similar fashion for all communities. It is just that at similar levels of disadvantage, more diverse communities tend to have higher cohesion than predominantly White British communities.’

(Laurence and Heath, 2008: 42)

They also note, however, that there are cases of deprived areas with high levels of cohesion. This last observation has been adopted in the official agenda of community cohesion as an indication that resilience to cohesion breakdown can be built up independently of addressing deprivation issues. Therefore, the Commission for Integration and Cohesion stated that ‘the fact that areas with low levels of deprivation can have poor cohesion shows that deprivation is not the only factor at play’ and that ‘deprivation remains a key influencer of cohesion, but the fact that some areas have high deprivation and high cohesion shows that local action can build resilience to its effect’ (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007: 27).

These are the most important factors relating to cohesion generally. However, because community cohesion is strongly related to belonging and ‘getting along’ in a local area, there is a need to find the way that different variables interact in specific circumstances. Most guidance suggests that work on community cohesion has to begin with a mapping exercise that identifies the key characteristics, actors and issues in an area in order to determine what the cohesion issues are for that area. However, areas with similar characteristics may have similar issues. A piece of research commissioned by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion carried out an analysis of levels of cohesion and local characteristics (DTZ, 2007). They developed a typology that proved reasonably accurate in explaining variations in levels of cohesion. This typology is based on four factors. The first is whether an area is rural or urban. The second is whether an area is deprived or affluent. The third is whether an area is experiencing high levels of international migration. The fourth factor, for urban areas, is whether an area has experienced industrial decline in the past few decades. Thus, applying their typology to the average levels of cohesion as measured by government produces the following results:

Types of communities and average cohesion scores

Type of community	Average cohesion score	Number of local authorities
Changing rural, affluent	83.0	36
Stable rural, affluent	82.9	65
Changing urban, affluent	80.6	47
Stable urban, affluent	80.5	35
Stable rural, less affluent	79.9	49
Stable urban, less affluent without industrial heritage	76.3	32
Changing urban, less affluent without industrial heritage	74.1	29
Stable urban, less affluent with industrial heritage	73.3	20
Changing rural, less affluent	72.2	27
Changing urban, less affluent with industrial heritage	68.2	13
Total	78.73	353

Based on this analysis, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion suggested that targeted action should be concentrated on four ‘family’ groups:

- Changing less affluent rural areas
- Stable less affluent urban areas with manufacturing decline
- Stable less affluent urban areas without manufacturing decline
- Changing less affluent areas urban areas

The role of the voluntary sector in delivering community cohesion

Within the previous government’s strategy for the delivery of its community cohesion objectives the third sector was perceived as a key stakeholder. The participation of the third sector in the delivery of community cohesion was not unique to this agenda and has to be located within the general role that the third sector is increasingly playing as a key partner in delivering the objectives of the public sector. The third sector has in the past decade become increasingly important for the public sector as a means to help it deliver its services more effectively and often at a better cost. At the same time, the nature of funding and service provision has shifted in the past few years. There is a trend for public bodies in their relationship with the voluntary sector to move away from grant funding towards contracting out the delivery of its services through tendering processes (Clark et al., 2009).

The relationship between the public sector and the voluntary sector has also become more formalised through the development of the ‘compact’. This is an agreement between the government and the third sector setting out the parameters under which their relationship should be framed. Local authorities have additionally produced their own local compacts to organise their relationship with local voluntary organisations. The Third Sector Review identified four areas in which collaboration between the public sector and the voluntary

sector should develop: in advocacy and campaigning, strengthening communities, transforming public services, and encouraging social enterprise (HM Treasury, 2007).

In general, the voluntary sector is thus perceived as a key partner of the public sector in delivering some of its services. As the dependency of the voluntary and community sector on public sector contracts grows, it has become more susceptible to the governments' agendas and priorities. Community cohesion has not been an exception to these trends. In most official guidance the voluntary sector is highlighted as a key partner in achieving the aims around community cohesion. Thus, while responsibility on community cohesion has assigned to both local and national government, the third sector is perceived as an important partner in delivering the agenda. The public sector has the power to exert its leverage on cohesion issues through policy-making and service delivery, especially on sensitive issues such as housing and policing. On the other hand the role of the third sector in relation to cohesion agendas has come to be seen more in terms of engaging directly with communities and especially those defined as hard-to-reach communities and communities of interest.

The voluntary sector has been identified as well placed for helping deliver community cohesion for a number of reasons, especially their intimate knowledge of local issues, the trust they command amongst the local population and their ability to reach key sections of the community.

The voluntary sector is perceived as having better knowledge of issues on the ground, then, offering key local expertise: 'an organisation working at the neighbourhood level can offer unrivalled insight into the perceptions of local people about their community. They are generally well placed, given the right support and encouragement, to foster cross-cultural contact' (Local Government Association, 2002: 19).

The voluntary sector is also perceived to be more trusted than the public sector by certain parts of the population, therefore making it better placed to reach and engage these groups: 'these organisations are best placed to understand key issues, and engage communities, especially where trust in mainstream institutions is lower' (Communities and Local Government, 2007: 10; see also iCoCo, 2009).

However, the community and voluntary sectors are also perceived to face some challenges in the delivery of the cohesion agenda. This relates especially to how far the sector has understood the community cohesion agenda and the limited capacity of the sector to deliver projects (Home Office, 2004). It has also been argued that voluntary and community organisations could hamper community cohesion if they act as closed groups. Thus, in a review of different community cohesion initiatives, the Institute of Community Cohesion (iCoCo) stated that 'in some areas, the nature and composition of the local voluntary, community and faith sectors exacerbated, rather than addressed the insularity of individual communities [...] We found in several instances, community leaders from the voluntary, community or faith sectors acting as "gate keepers" rather than "gate ways" between members of their communities or organisations and resources or contact with local statutory agencies' (iCoCo, 2009: 16).

One important issue for the voluntary and community sector if it is to become more involved in delivering and shaping the community cohesion agenda will have to be its ability to demonstrate that it can have a real impact on community cohesion, or at least on some of the elements that shape it. This in turn relates to a wider need for the sector to be able to demonstrate its value, a continuing issue in the current policy context.

Monitoring, evaluation and impact in the third sector

Monitoring and evaluation have increasingly become a key theme for the voluntary and community sector. There is a general agreement that it is important for the sector to be able to demonstrate the impact of its work. Part of the move towards a better capacity to demonstrate impact comes from the changes in the funding environment, especially the move towards commissioning. Many funders now require voluntary and community organisations to undertake monitoring and evaluation as a condition of their grants.

For many voluntary and community organisations this shift has proved challenging. The sector generally is perceived to lag behind the private and public sectors in terms of performance management and demonstrating value. This is partly due to a lack of capacity: monitoring and evaluation require resources and expertise that many small projects and organisations do not have. The necessary resources are not only financial but also in terms of staff and time requirements. The other challenge for voluntary and community organisations is trying to demonstrate their impact on issues that are inherently difficult to measure.

One of the key developments in monitoring and evaluation in recent years has been the shift from measuring outputs towards the measurement of outcomes (Ellis, 2008). This in turn mirrors a similar shift in the public sector. While the measuring outputs concentrates on the activities carried out or the number of people who have benefitted from projects, an approach on measuring outcomes focuses on the change achieved by the project's activities. Thus, rather than measuring what is delivered, there is an attempt to measure the change that has been achieved. Measuring outputs is still important in this process but only as a way of monitoring progress towards achieving a desired outcome. On the other hand, measuring impact, that is the wider effects of a project or organisation, is considerably more difficult, especially in terms of attributing the causality of changes.

Charities Evaluations Services (CES) has developed a series of guides to help voluntary sector organisations to evaluate their work and demonstrate its values. They use the following definitions of outputs, outcomes and impact:

Outputs: Outputs are all the products and services you deliver as part of your work.

Outcome: Outcomes are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of your work. They can be wanted or unwanted, expected or unexpected.

Impact: Whereas an outcome is the change occurring as a direct result of project outputs, impact is the effect of a project at a higher or broader level, in the long term, after a range of outcomes has been achieved. It often describes change in a wider user group than the original target, and many organisations may play a part in achieving impact (Cupitt, 2007: 6).

These are all connected in that outputs should produce outcomes and in turn outcomes should lead to impact. Measuring outputs has been a fairly standard practice for some time and this can provide effective information for performance management of projects. However, while providing information on the scope and reach of a project, outputs in themselves do not necessarily refer to the change a project produces. Measuring outcomes, in turn, is more challenging than measuring outputs.

To assess outcomes it is necessary to set indicators that will show whether an outcome is happening. These indicators can be quantitative or qualitative and there are many ways of collecting them, including questionnaires, interviews, case studies, and case records. Indicators are an essential part of the evaluation process as they are the tools that enable the assessment of whether a project is achieving its intended change. Good indicators should fulfil a number of criteria: focus on outcomes and impacts; be clearly defined; be measurable and repeatable; be sensitive to change; be reasonable to stakeholders; be unambiguous; avoid inappropriate incentive (Oldham Council, 2007).

Outcomes can occur at many levels such as individuals, families, communities, organisations, the environment or on policy (Cupitt, 2007). Intermediate or soft outcomes can also be used to track progress towards a final outcome. These are steps along the way to achieve the intended change.

Measuring impact is significantly more difficult than assessing the outcomes of a project. For a start, there is no agreement as to what *impact* refers to and different organisations use the term in different ways. In some cases impact is used to refer to the aggregate of outcomes resulting from a project. In other cases as distinction is made between outcomes and impact, with the latter referring to the wider and longer term effects of a project. However, because impact refers to long term and wider changes it is difficult to assign the contribution of a project to changes that have multiple and complex causes, many of which are beyond the scope or control of a project with limited resources.

There are two main approaches in using quasi-experimental methods to evaluate impact: one is doing before/after comparison studies. However, in this approach it is difficult to disentangle effects of interventions from wider economic, social and political processes. The second one is using a control group to compare to that in which the intervention is made but this method is much less common (Ellis, 2008).

A further difficulty for evaluation in the voluntary sector is how to measure its impact on large-scale objectives such as those set out by national governments. Given the limited reach and resources of the voluntary sector it is difficult to measure its impact in terms of some of these broad aims. In these cases it is often more feasible for voluntary sector

projects to set themselves outcomes that have been proven by independent research to be causally related to the desired impact. Thus CES has argued that there is a need ‘for funded research evidence to establish the predictive links between preventative or intermediate and higher-level outcomes. Once the link has been shown, the third sector organisation can produce data on intermediate outcomes, pointing to research evidence, and the probability that the final outcome they want will occur’ (Ellis, 2008: 45).

Measuring impact

As we saw, in order to assess the impact of specific projects in an area there is a need to move beyond the monitoring of outputs and developing a set of indicators that can provide evidence of outcomes and impact. Outputs are useful for measuring the performance of a project in terms of efficiency in the use of resources. It does not necessarily provide much evidence in terms of the impact that a project is having, however, either on project users or more widely in the community. To do so it is necessary to develop indicators that can relate to the issues that the project is tackling and to monitor those indicators through time.

A complication with this approach is attributing causality. When the aim of a project is to have an impact on issues that are affected by a multiplicity of factors, it is difficult to assign a proportion of success to a specific intervention, when overall change may be affected by a diversity of factors.

This is the case for community cohesion. For example, a research report found that many local authorities find it difficult to evaluate performance of service providers in terms of community cohesion, precisely because it is influenced by so many factors and it is very difficult to determine the contributions of just one type of activity:

Given the difficulties identifying indicators of cohesion that adequately address the breadth and complexity of issues, some stakeholders suggest that cohesion indicators should only be used to inform strategy and budgeting, and not be used to monitor the success of organisations, as it is felt that this could lead to an over-focusing on meeting targets that do not fully reflect the outcomes intended, though many do see value in some targets to support accountability and encourage action as important.

(Communities and Local Government, 2007: 62)

As a result, guidance has recommended the consideration of: ‘a “pick and mix” approach of hard and soft indicators’ prioritised ‘under relevant titles such as sustainability (e.g. economic and social issues), safety (e.g. anti-social behaviour issues) and the strength of communities (e.g. the extent of social investment)’ (Home Office, 2005).

Evaluating impact on cohesion

This section looks at how cohesion has been measured and evaluated in specific instances. It will examine government indicators and whether they are useful for the third

sector. It will also review Oldham Council's toolkit 'Evaluating the Impact of Projects on Community Cohesion', the most comprehensive toolkit that we have found to date for evaluating cohesion.

The DCLG has developed a monitoring framework for community cohesion at a national and local authority level. Progress on community cohesion is based on three main indicators which act as benchmarks. The indicators are based on subjective criteria and are the aggregate of individuals' perceptions of their local area.

The three indicators are:

- The percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area
- The percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood
- The percentage of people who have meaningful interactions with people from different backgrounds.

The first two are measured locally by the Place Survey carried out by Local Authorities, and all three are measured nationally by the Citizenship Survey (Communities and Local Government, 2009). These indicators are the basis to monitor progress on PSA – 21.

These indicators present several challenges however. First, they are based on perceptions which can be influenced by a very complex set of factors, some related, but some possibly unrelated, to community cohesion as it is defined. Second, on their own these indicators are not directly tied to social, demographic or economic measurements which are based on more objective measurements. The relationship between those underlying factors and cohesion has to be derived separately which in itself is a challenge.

We are therefore left with indicators based on perceptions that are related in complex ways to underlying material factors. The CLG acknowledges this complexity:

There is no "magic bullet" which will build cohesion. Cohesion is about trying to influence attitudes and behaviours. These exist within a complex social system in which there are multiple influences, many of which are unpredictable. [...] there is not a simple measurable linear relationship between action and outcome. Instead we have to use both common sense and social psychology to inform what will work to influence attitudes and behaviour. This reinforces the need for locally specific solutions; multiple actions; and case studies which inspire local innovation.

It is therefore difficult to determine what specific actions can be taken to improve community cohesion. On the other hand, it is also difficult to determine the contribution or impact that any specific intervention makes to the levels of community cohesion. Therefore, community cohesion is monitored through the perception of individuals of their immediate area but it is difficult to attribute changes in these perceptions to specific factors.

Further complicating matters, official guidance repeatedly refers to mainstreaming community cohesion, that is, taking it into account in the provision of all services, alongside undertaking targeted interventions to tackle specific issues that may affect

cohesion. Community cohesion is therefore an overarching approach covering all service provision and community work. For this reason it is impossible to determine the specific contribution of a targeted action to the community cohesion of an area, and this becomes a serious challenge to evaluate projects with respect to their impact on community cohesion.

Projects can, however, be evaluated in terms of their impact on issues that are correlated to community cohesion. What this means is that projects can address issues which are related to cohesion in such a way that differences in one issue tend to imply a positive (or negative) outcome on the other. Evaluating impact on factors correlated with community cohesion will in many cases be more feasible than evaluating the impact on cohesion itself. However, this too could be problematic as correlation does not imply causality, i.e. even if one factor is generally found alongside the other this does not mean that one causes the other.

Local authorities can decide to monitor progress on community cohesion with other indicators on top of the national indicators. Home Office guidance from 2003 set out a list of ten main and several secondary indicators already available from different sources that local authorities could use to monitor cohesion. The headline indicator was the first of the indicators referred to above. The other indicators were grouped under five themes that are related to cohesion: common vision and sense of belonging; the diversity of peoples' backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued; those from different backgrounds have similar opportunities; and strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, schools and neighbourhood.

The indicators developed and suggested by central government have a limited usefulness for the voluntary and community sector but provide a useful indication of ways to measure cohesion directly. These indicators are produced by large scale surveys covering areas that, in terms of voluntary sector projects, are fairly large. Furthermore, as stated above, they capture subjective perceptions which are the result of complex processes. These indicators in themselves do not offer a way of disentangling the weight of the specific factors that have an incidence on them.

What experiences, then, are there of approaches developed specifically to measure the impact of voluntary sector projects on community cohesion? As we saw, this is still an emerging agenda that has been implemented by government with a special focus on the public sector. The voluntary sector is perceived mostly as a key partner in the delivery but responsibility remains on local and national governments. There are, however, a number of published examples of evaluations of specific voluntary and community sector projects on community cohesion. Some attempts have been made at evaluating grants programmes and projects that tackle community cohesion. However, these have been mostly ad hoc evaluations rather than concerned with developing replicable tools.

Icarus Collective did an evaluation for Joseph Rowntree Foundation of a project called Local Links, the aim of which was to increase networking between community

organisation and public servants (Icarus Collective, 2008). A large part of the evaluation focused on delivery and management of project resources and outputs but there is a small section on impact. The whole evaluation was based on interviews and focus groups with project participants. Impact was assessed mostly in terms of improved networking, perceptions of the utility of the project and sustainability in future. Thus, impact on project beneficiaries was gathered through interviews and focus groups asking participants to reflect on how they had benefitted from the project. In terms of wider impact, however, the report states that ‘there is not a great deal of evidence at this stage that the programmes have had a significant impact on engagement in local affairs.’ This points to the fact that to measure impact of projects it is often important for a period of time to pass for the effects of projects to take place, especially if these are related to issues such as capacity building.

Impact has also been assessed through case studies of projects that achieve a certain outcome that is pre-determined as an indication of impact. A review of bridging projects (Harris and Young, 2009a) for example mapped out issues of organisation and management (e.g. number of staff, funding, types of activities) in quantitative and comparative terms. However, when it came to reviewing impact it relied on case studies to highlight three issues: creating networks, developing people’s skills, and influencing policy. This piece of work goes a long way in mapping out what sort of cohesion activities are being carried out by the voluntary sector at present. Their survey found that the most common activities were social, training and learning activities and facilitated dialogue, followed by sport and visual arts. They found few faith based activities or examples of facilitated conflict resolution, however. (Harris and Young, 2009b) The majority of activities they found were started by committed people or local third sector organisations rather than government initiatives. This is a useful start to mapping out the contribution of the voluntary and community sector, but has little to say about impact itself.

The Community Development Foundation has undertaken an evaluation of a programme of grants for small community organisations called Connecting Communities Plus. This was a funding programme from Home Office designed for local groups to foster racial equality and community cohesion. The programme was aimed at small voluntary and community sector organisations with less than £50,000 annual income and mainly volunteer led. Amongst their overall findings were that:

- Organisations thought it was difficult to have an impact on ‘meta-issues’ such as community cohesion with a limited amount of money over a short period
- Even though some organisations worked with several ethnic groups, most generally worked with one main ethnic group and found the grants useful to consolidate this work but even when open to other communities they found it difficult to attract users from other groups.
- Groups formed bonds more commonly with other groups similar to themselves than with those that were different.
- Organisations facilitated empowerment of communities by providing information on local services but found it more difficult to influence those local services.

The grant programme was evaluated through an assessment of how many ethnic, faith, gender and user groups benefitted from the organisations. The success of the projects was

rated by the organisations themselves through self-administered questionnaires. Some of their detailed findings were that:

- The main barrier to access to services is language, especially for older people and women.
- Most impact was on empowering local communities where individuals were not being able to access services. This was primarily assessed through self reporting of success together with examples.
- Creating safe spaces for interaction was highlighted as an achievement.
- Celebration of different faith and national festivals was also highlighted.
- Fewer groups worked with other VCS organisations than with local service providers. Relations to similar organisations were more common than to different ones.

However, once again, the study had little to say about the wider impact of the programme. One of the recommendations of the study is ‘there should be further research into how ‘cohesion’ is measured’ (Spratt, 2008. 62).

The last example is a piece of research that looked at several projects that worked with dispersed asylum seekers and refugees (Temple and Moran, 2005). The research used participatory action research methods to generate data, mainly through focus groups and interviews led by members of the activities and projects. This research again highlighted the absence of evaluation tools. They also highlighted the fact that published examples of good practice do not generally state how these examples are chosen and identify the problem that these examples have hardly ever been systematically evaluated. Most guidance also does not indicate who selects good practice examples and based on what criteria.

Some of their findings were similarly:

- That participants valued having spaces and activities where they could mix with people from other ethnic and faith groups.
- The report also found that exclusion precludes asylum seekers from meaningful participation in their local areas (excluded from employment, choice of housing, limited welfare).
- The report highlighted the importance of building internal capacity of communities to enable them to link with other communities more effectively.

The activities evaluated by this piece of research were mostly small in scale, consisting of two community networks, a women’s project at a museum and a footballer’s guide. The focus groups and interviews allowed the research to show the complexity of people’s attitudes to cohesion but they also provided a strong case for demonstrating the change brought by the projects on its users. However, even for evaluating small projects, these research methods proved to be resource and time intensive. As this was a participatory project, getting community researchers to transcribe and analyse interviews was particularly challenging and time consuming.

These examples show that the evaluation of voluntary and community sector initiatives in terms of their impact on community cohesion is still at an early stage of development. Some of the main issues that can be identified are:

- Lack of replicable outcome indicators. Indicators have been developed for national public bodies and public authorities but there are too few examples of useful indicators for smaller voluntary sector organisations.
- Continued measurement of outputs rather than outcomes. Some evaluations rely on describing activities and beneficiaries rather than analysing the change produced by projects.
- Reliance on project deliverers rather than on beneficiaries to judge what works and what does not. Especially evaluations of public bodies and grant programmes too often rely on the expert opinion of key players rather than on data from beneficiaries themselves.
- Over-reliance on illustrative case studies without outlining the selection process. Most of the official guidance is illustrated with examples of good practice. But there is too often no reflection on how these case studies are selected or what the criteria are for judging them as examples of good practice.

The Oldham council toolkit for evaluation community cohesion

A notable exception to these trends is the toolkit developed by Oldham Council for evaluating the impact of projects on community cohesion. The toolkit provides a comprehensive review of different approaches to evaluating small projects, describes the methodologies that can be used in the process and suggests a list of possible indicators that can be used. The toolkit is not prescriptive and in that sense it offers a range of possible methods and approaches that project evaluators can use rather than describing a single evaluation process.

The Oldham toolkit refers to the impact on community cohesion as including the project's effects on several of the issues that either constitute or underpin community cohesion. Broadly speaking these refer to the two aspects of community cohesion that we have highlighted throughout this report, the necessary conditions for cohesion and cohesion itself:

- Inequalities.
- Community relations across various domains of difference.
- Opportunities for meaningful social interaction between people from similar and from different backgrounds.
- Engagement in local democracy.
- Involvement in social, political and cultural life.
- The actual and perceived fairness and transparency of service provision, access to services and resource allocation.

The Oldham toolkit divides the evaluation process into three broad stages:

- Strategic evaluation: where project leaders evaluate the extent to which a project's activities and outputs contribute the desired outcome. This is basically about connecting activities to the desired aims of a project.

- Developing evaluation indicators: indicators are collected and monitored during the project's delivery and can help identify change when carrying out an evaluation.
- Evaluation research: in-depth activities carried out to evaluate the results of a project. These can include focus groups, research interviews and self-completion questionnaires.

The toolkit suggests that project records and self-evaluation questionnaires are the best ways of collecting information for the relevant indicators. Several types of indicators that should be collected include: attendance measures, output measures, opinion measures and impact measures.

They have grouped indicators by type of project using the following categories:

- Festivals, performances, open days, seminars and conferences;
- Sports, arts and cultural projects;
- Projects focused on education;
- Projects focused on supporting vulnerable people;
- Projects focused on the environment.

Each indicator is in turn related to a particular strand within Oldham council's local definition of community cohesion. These strands are:

- People share a sense of belonging and a common identity;
- People are strong in their own identities and respect others;
- A more equal borough;
- People relate to each other;
- People play their part;
- Resilience to threats and conflict.

Rather than a prescriptive methodology to evaluate community cohesion projects, the Oldham toolkit is therefore a guide with a wide range of suggestions for project's to design their own evaluation projects. It is, nevertheless, the most complete evaluation package specifically related to community cohesion that we have been able to find up to date.

The current situation of Praxis and how to develop an effective evaluation strategy

Praxis community projects is a medium sized charity that for 26 years has been supporting and working with vulnerable migrants, refugees and asylum seekers throughout London but with a special emphasis on the east of the city. Praxis is probably the largest community based organisation working in the field. Its business plan states that it 'provides services and support which enables effective settlement in the UK of vulnerable migrants and their families [...] Praxis also works within the communities in which they settle to promote cohesion.'

The starting point of the work of Praxis is that as a consequence of the migration process migrants experience multiple disadvantages. These include disadvantages caused by the

psychological impact of flight and culture shock, disadvantages arising from immigration systems, limited entitlements and rights within the health and welfare systems, personal limitations in terms of shaken confidences, lack of English language skills, lack of recognition of previous qualifications and experience, and direct racism in terms of discrimination and media hostility.

Praxis places its work within a framework of social justice rooted in human rights, rather than on meeting the needs of individuals. It works with a model of social transformation that includes several steps for individual and community development. These steps are:

- Personal empowerment — enabling the individual to overcome trauma, gain a knowledge of UK systems, acquire new skills including English language for those who need to and attain full democratic rights of a citizen.
- Positive action — creating opportunities for new communities to self organise in an open and transparent manner, to affirm their cultural heritage, work collectively to overcome specific and real barriers to representing themselves to local, regional and government institutions.
- Community relations — building broader relationships within the society through wider understanding of diversity, opportunities for exchange between communities, reducing tension, opposing discrimination and racism and positive images.
- Participation and voice — ensuring strong democratic arrangements within the refugee and migrant sector, enabling knowledge of effective citizenship, creating opportunities for representation and genuine consultation in relevant planning policy making and service bodies, and having mechanisms to raise awareness and influence attitudes of decision makers and service providers.

Praxis is organised into four areas of work, each with a strategic objective and a team in charge of its delivery:

- *To enable vulnerable migrants to overcome the barriers they face through high quality advice and information.* Migrants are helped to overcome barriers through advice, advocacy, information and policy shifts in areas such as immigration, the criminal justice system, housing, income, health and rights and entitlements.
- *To support migrants in accessing the labour market through both generic job preparation services and specialised support to industries employing significant numbers of migrant workers.* Delivered through advice and guidance, vocational training and job brokerage programmes in partnership with mainstream providers.
- *To enable effective communication through interpreting and English language acquisition* through a public sector interpreting service and provision of English courses.
- *To promote the participation of new communities in civic and community life* through forums, leadership development programmes, inter-cultural celebrations, capacity building and neighbourhood interventions.

Praxis is funded by a mix of grants from charitable sources, partnership work with agencies that hold service provision contracts with public bodies and by direct contracts with public bodies including the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

Praxis has a well developed monitoring and evaluation system based on key performance indicators (KPI) that monitor progress towards achieving project targets. On a month by month basis it therefore has the capacity to track progress and determine what projects are performing better than expected and which need changes if they are to meet agreed targets. This system allows Praxis to ensure that it delivers its projects according to agreed targets and with quality provision. Each specific project has its own KPI and the four teams in themselves have their own KPIs. This system of monitoring and evaluation is above all a performance management system. That means that there is control and monitoring of project delivery. In the language of project evaluation reviewed earlier, it monitors mainly outputs: the activities and services delivered by Praxis. It does not, however, in itself evaluate the *outcomes* of the services and activities in terms of changes for beneficiaries.

Praxis also carries out research projects and has within its structure a specialist project lead who has responsibility for research. This research enables Praxis to determine what it believes the best intervention to be in relation to particular issues. For example, Praxis has undertaken research into models of communication support which led to it developing innovative approaches to the provision of local interpreting and English language acquisition. This is a key issue for cohesion in which Praxis is taking a lead. An independent evaluation of Praxis interpreting gave strong positive feedback to the organisation on both outputs and outcomes.

Many of Praxis' projects already address issues that are part of the community cohesion agenda. While some of the projects at Praxis undertake work that address community cohesion directly, in the sense of bringing people together or creating a sense of belonging, other projects address some of the necessary conditions for cohesion to exist: i.e. addressing inequality and exclusion.

As we have seen there is no one single approach to achieving community cohesion and much less to measuring it and the impact of projects on it. Therefore there is some space for Praxis to design its own strategy for assessing its impact on community cohesion.

Following from the previous chapters, there are several strategies that Praxis can pursue. These are not mutually exclusive and can therefore be carried out simultaneously.

The first challenge lies in adopting a definition of community cohesion. As we have seen the definition of cohesion at the national level has changed through the years and even now local authorities set out their own definitions that respond to their local challenges. It is important, however, that the adopted definition reproduces some of the elements of the official definition, given the importance of government policy leads in this field. It is up to Praxis, nonetheless, to decide whether it emphasises some of the elements of the definition over other elements. Given the key partnership that Praxis has built up with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets it would be useful to relate to their definition as well.

A further important decision is whether Praxis aims at emphasising the 'cohesion' elements of the current definitions or whether, as some local authorities have, it aims to

give an equal or greater weight to the ‘foundation’ elements, those that are necessary for cohesion to happen.

At first sight Praxis’ projects seem to address all the elements in the present national definition of community cohesion. For example, the three foundations in the national definition:

People from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities; this is especially addressed by the Praxis objective that aims at helping migrants overcome barriers. Supporting vulnerable migrants in accessing the labour market also addresses this element.

People knowing their rights and responsibilities. Again this issue is especially addressed by the Praxis’ advice projects.

People trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly. By helping vulnerable migrants access services, the advice and translation projects play key roles in ensuring institutions reach hard-to-reach residents. Advocates and advisors also ensure that public workers make decisions fairly by providing vulnerable clients with information on their rights and entitlements and by scrutinising decisions and challenging them if they are not fair.

Praxis projects also address some of the cohesion elements of the definition, those relating to ‘ways of living together’:

A shared future vision and sense of belonging.

A focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity.

Strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.

The language and participation elements of Praxis’ work contribute to these elements by helping new communities improve their communication skills and providing spaces for different groups to come together, such as the Tower Hamlets New Residents’ and Refugee Forum and the New Voices festival.

What, then, are some of the options that Praxis has in terms of assessing its impact on cohesion? Because community cohesion is a goal that is complex with multiple factors influencing it, finding a single indicator or outcome to measure the impact of Praxis on cohesion is not feasible. What is proposed here is to rather build up a picture of the contributions of Praxis and its projects towards improving community cohesion at different levels: i.e. individuals, families, specific migrant communities and the whole community.

As a starting point to developing a framework for evaluating the impact of Praxis on community cohesion, in annex 1 the Praxis’ model and all its current projects are linked to the constitutive elements of the community cohesion definitions of the Department of

Communities and Local Government and of Oldham council. The table links specific projects to specific elements or strands in the definition of community cohesion. It is more feasible to determine the outcomes of Praxis' projects and the impact on these strands than to develop a single outcome and indicator for community cohesion as a whole.

This report proposes three ways to build up this picture: developing indicators that monitor work done on specific factors that affect cohesion; developing a monitoring and evaluation programme focused on evaluating outcomes based on some of the elements of the definition of community cohesion; and undertaking research projects that look specifically at the wider impact of Praxis' projects.

1. Developing indicators that monitor work done on specific factors that affect cohesion.

A first step that could be taken would be to carry out what the Oldham toolkit calls a strategic evaluation. The aim here is to try to identify causal links between the outputs of projects, their desired outcomes and the wider impact on community cohesion.

Assessing the impact of a project on community is a difficult task given the difficulty of demonstrating the share of contribution of the project on a phenomenon that is multiply caused. As we have seen, however, there are studies that have established a correlation between community cohesion and other factors on which it may be more feasible to demonstrate an impact. For example, there is a correlation between deprivation and negative cohesion and there is also a positive correlation between being able to influence local decisions and community cohesion, both at the individual and community levels (Laurence and Heath, 2008). Praxis has projects that tackle both deprivation and empowerment. If Praxis can develop indicators that demonstrate an impact on these intermediate outcomes (deprivation and empowerment) then it can be shown, based on quantitative studies, that this work should have an impact on cohesion.

Some of the indicators used by Praxis may already be showing impact on some of the intermediate outcomes that have an effect on community cohesion and the task then will be to support with published studies the link between those factors and community cohesion.

2. Developing a monitoring and evaluation programme focused on evaluating outcomes based on some of the elements of the definition of community cohesion.

As we have seen, measuring cohesion becomes more feasible if it is disaggregated into its component parts on which it is possible to measure impact. Praxis could define a series of outcomes related to the projects it carries out and derived from the definition of community cohesion it adopts and then develop a method for assessing progress on these outcomes.

This would involve going beyond monitoring outputs, i.e. number of clients, activities etc. Rather, it would have to be designed to measure change in the lives of beneficiaries

and users of projects. In this sense, it would require extra resources in times of staff time to collect and analyse data. Methods for collecting information, depending on the specific projects, could include: attendance information, self-completion questionnaires and follow up interviews. Suitable indicators and methods of collecting data would have to be designed specifically for each project. Annex two lists some of the questions suggested in the Oldham toolkit for use in questionnaires for evaluating impact of projects on community cohesion.

3. Undertaking research projects that look specifically at the wider impact of Praxis' projects.

This would probably have to be a specific project in itself, rather than an ongoing process of monitoring, with considerable staff financial requirements. It would be academically oriented and include more complex methodologies. A project of the sort would probably analyse directly the impact of Praxis on community cohesion by studying in depth the complex factors, including but going beyond project interventions, that affect community cohesion. It would probably also involve undertaking research not just with Praxis users and beneficiaries but with other people either by studying a different location or looking at local residents who are not direct users of Praxis' services and interventions.

Recommendations for Praxis and PACE

This study offers Praxis and other community-based organisations tackling some of the core issues which create or undermine community cohesion an opportunity to contribute to determining a framework for measuring impact vis-a-vis community cohesion. The framework would equip community based initiatives with an assurance for themselves, their beneficiaries and stakeholders that their work has a long term impact upon the positive interaction between people and their communities. As an organisation with a long standing commitment to human rights and community development, this is central to Praxis' core strategy, value base and commitment to the highest quality interventions.

Working in partnership with PACE and other research partners Praxis should:

- Use the concepts contained within this paper to create a toolkit for community based, voluntary sector organisations working in areas vulnerable to factors which cause breakdowns in cohesion. This toolkit should include:
 1. Indicators that monitor work done on specific factors that affect cohesion e.g. exclusion from public services, worklessness, health. It can do this by using previous research to justify the connection between the project's outputs and cohesion (referred to as Strategic Evaluation in the Oldham Toolkit).
 2. Incorporate a customised monitoring and evaluation programme focused on evaluating outcomes. This would go beyond measuring project outputs and performance to actually evaluating the effect of projects on beneficiaries' lives.

3. Develop tools or research that tracks progress of users. There are several methodologies for achieving this, including quantitative and qualitative methods.
 4. Incorporate baseline data with which to identify changes. Questionnaires, case studies, and focus groups can be used.
 5. Develop clear methods and processes for measuring impact for example through collating monitoring and evaluation data from the different projects and building up a picture of the overall impact.
- Once a prototype toolkit is produced, Praxis should test it in its own practice and work with PACE and other research partners in enabling other community based organisations to use it as a comparator and widen the learning.
 - Disseminate the outcomes within the sector, academia, local and central government agencies.

Annex 1

Definitions of cohesion, national indicators and their relationship to current Praxis projects

DCLG definition	Oldham definition	National indicator
1. People from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities.	1. A more equal borough.	Multiple indicators on equality, including educational achievement, employment rates, income, and health indicators.
2. People knowing their rights and responsibilities	2. People play their part.	
3. A shared future vision and sense of belonging.	3. People share a sense of belonging and a common identity.	The percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood.
4. A focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity.	4. People are strong in their own identities and respect others.	The percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area.
5. Strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.	5. People relate to each other.	The percentage of people who have meaningful interactions with people from different backgrounds.
6. People trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly.		
	6. Resilience to threats and conflict.	

Praxis model	Praxis projects	DCLG	Oldham
Personal empowerment	Advice with undocumented migrants	2	
	Supermarket voucher exchange	1	1
	Doctors of the world	1	1
	Somali support service (advice and mental health)	1, 2	1, 2
	Generic advice	1, 2, 6	1, 2
	Stop it now! Child protection programme for new communities	1	1
	Praxis family care	1	1
	Tower Hamlets employment access	1	1
	Working neighbourhood fund (ESOL)	1	1, 2
	Migrants in supported employment	1	1, 2
	Migrants probation advice service	1, 2, 6	1
	Policy forums on NRPF	1, 6	1
	Somali health access project	1, 2	1, 2
	Your health matters	1, 2	1
	Esol learning circles	1, 2	1
Positive action	Moving into work	1, 4	1, 2, 4
	Mother tongue classes	4	4
	Music/dance/theatre activities	4, 5?	4, 5?
	Vamos juntos prison visiting		4
Community relations	New Voices Festival	3, 4, 5	3, 4, 5
	Moslems for democracy	5	5
	Shaping services, questionnaires with Eastern Europeans	3, 6	3
	Your Health Matters (workshops for service providers in Westminster)	1, 6	1
	Interpreting	1, 6	1
	Praxis 3 rd Party reporting centre	6	6
Participation and voice	New residents and forum	2, 3, 4, 5, 6	2, 3, 4, 5
	Rayne Fellowship	3	2, 3
	Reach Out (NVQs for activist women and faith organisations)		2

Annex 2

Examples of Community Cohesion Indicators of Impact in the Oldham Toolkit

The Oldham Toolkit has an extensive section on indicators for evaluating the impact of projects on community cohesion. They suggest collecting attendance and demographic data in order to evaluate the access to a project of different communities or different sections of a community. They also suggest collecting output measures to evaluate the performance of the project. Finally they have suggestions for questions that can be used in questionnaires to evaluate the impact of projects and events. The examples of questions are tied to the six elements or strands of the definition used by Oldham for community cohesion. These are as follows:

1. A more equal borough.
2. People play their part.
3. People share a sense of belonging and a common identity.
4. People are strong in their own identities and respect others.
5. People relate to each other.
6. Resilience to threats and conflict.

The following are selected questions suggested by the Oldham toolkit to be used in questionnaires for evaluating the impact of project on community cohesion. It is important to note that the toolkit suggests questionnaires as one option amongst others for evaluating projects. Other options are focus groups and case studies. The questions are organised by types of projects.

Festivals

Strand 5 (People relate to each other)

- I talked with people whom I did not already know before this event
- I talked with people that I would not ordinarily meet
- I talked with people from a religious background other than my own
- I met and talked with people from social backgrounds other than my own
- I met new people today who I'd like to meet up with again
- I plan to meet again with at least one of the new people that I met at this event
- I made new professional contacts today
- I made new friends today

Strand 4 (People are strong in their own identities and respect others)

- I learned a lot about a culture other than my own
- I learned a lot about my culture
- I learned a lot about another person's religion
- I learned a lot about another country
- I learned a lot about my country
- I learned a lot about the different groups of people living in this area

- I learned about the history of my community
- I learned about the history of another community
- I learned about different people's experiences

Arts, culture and sports projects

How many people participate in arts, culture and sports projects? How many volunteer? How many people attend events? What is the demographic breakdown of participants/volunteers?

To measure impact two approaches are suggested:

Longitudinal: individual change over time is measured and used as evidence of impact.

Aggregate approach: a group change over time is measured and used as evidence of impact. (NB will not be able to measure change at individual level).

Strand 3 (People share a sense of belonging and a common identity)

- Overall, how involved do you feel in your local community?
- To what extent do you agree or disagree: I feel more involved in my local community since joining the project.
I feel more involved in the X community since joining the project.

Strand 4 (People are strong in their own identities and respect others)

- To what extent do you agree or disagree:
 - I developed more confidence in myself
 - I have learned new skills through being involved in the project
 - Through being involved in this project...
 - I learned a lot about a culture other than my own
 - I learned a lot about my culture
 - I learned a lot about a religion other than my own
 - I learned a lot about another country
 - I learned a lot about my country
 - I learned a lot about the different groups of people living in this area
 - I learned about the history of my community
 - I learned about the history of another community
 - I learned about different people's experiences

Strand 5 (People relate to each other)

- How many good friends, excluding family, live within a 15-20 minute walk or 5-10 minute drive of you?
- How many good friends have you made through the project?
- In which of the situations below would you say you regularly meet and talk with people who are of a different age group to yourself?
- In which of the situations below would you say you regularly meet and talk with people who are of a different ethnic background to yourself?
- In which of the situations below would you say you regularly meet and talk with people who are of a different social background to yourself?

- At local shops; work; place of study; place of worship; my or someone else's home; around my neighbourhood; on public transport; at fitness centres/community centres; in other public places (restaurants, cinemas, pubs, etc.); in clubs or sports groups; spending time with friends; somewhere else; I do not meet with anyone different.
- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Through being involved in this project...
 - I have made new friends
 - I have met more people in my neighbourhood
 - I have met people of different ages
 - I have met people from different ethnic backgrounds
 - I have met people from a different religious background
 - I have met people from a different social background
 - I have met people with different life experiences than mine

Projects focused on supporting vulnerable people

Strand 3 (People share a sense of belonging and a common identity)

- How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your neighbourhood as a place to live?
- Do you think that over the past two years your neighbourhood has got better or worse?
- Overall, how involved do you feel in your local community?
- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
I feel more involved in my local community since joining the project

Strand 4 (People are strong in their own identities and respect others)

- Do you think it is possible for people from different social backgrounds to get on well together?
- Do you think it is possible for people from different ethnic backgrounds to get on well together?

Strand 5 (People relate to each other)

- How many good friends, excluding family, live within a 15-20 minute walk or 5-10 minute drive of you?
- How many good friends have you made through the project?
- In which of the situations below would you say you regularly meet and talk with people who are of a different age group to yourself?
- In which of the situations below would you say you regularly meet and talk with people who are of a different ethnic background to yourself?
- In which of the situations below would you say you regularly meet and talk with people who are of a different age/ethnic/social background to yourself?
At local shops; work; place of study; place of worship; my or someone else's home; around my neighbourhood; on public transport; at fitness centres/community centres; in other public places (restaurants, cinemas, pubs,

etc.); in clubs or sports groups; spending time with friends; somewhere else; I do not meet with anyone different

Strand 6 (Resilience to threats and conflict)

- How safe do you or would you feel walking alone in your neighbourhood...
During the daytime?
After dark?
- How safe do you or would you feel alone in your home...
During the daytime?
After dark?

Projects focused on increasing community involvement and engagement (such as consultations or forums)

Strand 3 (People share a sense of belonging and a common identity)

- How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your neighbourhood as a place to live?
- Do you think that over the past two years your neighbourhood has got better or worse?
- Overall, how involved do you feel in your local community?

Strand 4 (People are strong in their own identities and respect others)

- Do you think it is possible for people from different social backgrounds to get on well together?
- Do you think it is possible for people from different ethnic backgrounds to get on well together?
- In which of the situations below would you say you regularly meet and talk with people who are of a different social background to yourself?
At local shops; work; place of study; place of worship; my or someone else's home; around my neighbourhood; on public transport; at fitness centres/community centres; in other public places (restaurants, cinemas, pubs, etc.); in clubs or sports groups; spending time with friends; somewhere else; I do not meet with anyone different

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