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MAPPING THE DIMENSIONS OF AUSTRALIA'S THIRD SECTOR: THE AUSTRALIAN NONPROFIT DATA PROJECT 1995 – 2000

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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly recounts the story of the Australian Nonprofit Data Project (ANDP), which led to the publication of the first reliable and comprehensive data on the dimensions of Australia's third sector. It outlines previous attempts to derive estimates for parts of the third sector, the options available for pursuing a more comprehensive study and the various sources of data that were used. These were mostly data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), a partner in the project. The ANDP was also part of a major international project seeking to map the dimensions of the nonprofit sector in over twenty countries, and the advantages and challenges of being part of an international project are outlined. But the ANDP was not only a research project. It was also an attempt at institution building, to help build a capacity and commitment within the ABS that would ensure that data on Australia's nonprofit sector was regularly collected and published.

FROM LOCAL TO NATIONAL: ASPECTS OF MAPPING THE WELFARE THIRD SECTOR IN AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper charts the authors' research experiences in various types of sociological mapping of community or third sector organisations. Specifically this was a search for a way of understanding how third sector organisations dealing with welfare issues were operating in Australia in the mid-1990s.

The paper tells the story of how the researchers worked through the implications of being faced initially with a dearth of information about their subject and of how lessons were learnt about the disjunctions between what is formally given as textbook knowledge about research practice and what actually can and does happen: that is, the relationship between the theory and the practice of research.

In discussing the creation of a database of organisations, conducting focus groups and a national sample survey, the paper comments on some of the practical problems facing third sector researchers as well as looking at concept generation and typology building as analytical tools.

RESEARCH ACROSS THE SECTOR: A RESEARCH PROJECT FOR THE AUSTRALIAN TAXATION OFFICE

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ABSTRACT

The Australian Taxation Office commissioned a research project to inform it of the most appropriate ways to communicate tax information to the third sector. The project was to be a conduit for information back to the ATO about the concerns and priorities of the whole nonprofit sector in Australia. The study gathered data from peak bodies representing nonprofit organisations throughout Australia and individual nonprofit organisations of diverse types, sizes and locations. The research design issues arising from the project are identified and discussed.

THE STORY OF SOCIAL CAPITAL RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The study of social capital began in response to a practitioner-driven research agenda, with the political requirement to provide empirical evidence for community development funding. The attempt to explicate the concept of social capital and its relationship to community development began with a series of exploratory workshops, or reflective dialogues. These led to the design of a formal questionnaire survey that was administered, analysed and published in the best of positivist traditions. However, the results suggested a number of further questions, and these questions could only be pursued with more qualitative methodologies, methodologies involving interviews, observation, and the integration of multiple data sources.

GENERATING NEW UNDERSTANDINGS IN CHANGING TIMES: HEARING AND (RE)TELLING PRACTITIONER STORIES OF ORGANISATIONAL RESHAPING

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ABSTRACT

A personal PhD journey provides the medium for exploring some of the complexities of methodological influences and research design in third sector research. It was a journey started from the heart, from a sense that all was not well in the community and health services sector in Australia. The journey was undertaken with the hands through an emergent multi-site case-study research design. The destination was guided by the head and involved a lengthy theory, after reflective synthesis, experience. This account is presented as a chronology of events, decisions and areas of learning.

DOING FEMINIST ACTION RESEARCH: EXAMINING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THIRD SECTOR ORGANISATIONS FOR OLDER PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the issues arising from doing feminist action research. The research aimed to investigate and enhance the participation of older women from three community organisations within their organisations and in government policy forums. In keeping with an action research paradigm, the project followed cycles of reflecting, planning and acting. Nine issues emerged, mostly reflecting difficulties with power. Initially, the participants exhibited a lack of power by being silent, giving too willing consent and attributing success to others. Researchers curbed their own power by limiting their input, their desire for research data, and their power as authors. Considerable empowerment was achieved.

‘GIVING PEAKS A VOICE’ — CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES, MAPPING AND ANALYSIS OF ADVOCACY ORGANISATIONS IN POLICY RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores some of the complexities and challenges of conducting policy research on sector organisations, in the absence of adequate theoretical frameworks and pre-existing baseline data. The research lessons learnt in conducting this project include ethical, practical and methodological ones. One strategy employed to overcome some of these difficulties involved generating empirical, testable definitions in the absence of pre-existing ones. The researcher faced various methodological and practical constraints during the course of the three-year project, which influenced the choice of research instruments used in the study. Political pressures and ethical dilemmas arose during the process of research, which had to be dealt with so the study could proceed.

INTERLINKING THEORY AND METHOD IN AN ANALYSIS OF AN AGED ADVOCACY GROUP

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ABSTRACT

A historical case study of a key Australian aged advocacy organization provides the context for exploring some of the dilemmas for researchers in interlinking a variety of theories and methods. These were used in examining the evolution of one organization over time in a changing socio-political context. This paper addresses the origins of the project, why such an analysis is of contemporary interest, and the key questions to be addressed. It then explores the principal methods utilised and the variety of theoretical frames through which the data are currently being interpreted. Key challenges encountered during the course of the study are summarised in conclusion.

SYNERGIES AND CHALLENGES IN COLLABORATIVE THIRD SECTOR RESEARCH: THE 'CONTRACTING FOR CARE' PROJECT 1995–96

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ABSTRACT

It is critical that the third sector research community develop valid comparable baseline data on a range of issues affecting the sector in this country. The 'Contracting for Care' Project was the first project in Australia to seek such data in relation to the state–third sector relationship. The project's story is told through a chronology of the main research design decisions using quotes from the researchers' meeting notes and project documentation. This article seeks to articulate the possibilities and tensions of collaborative multi-researcher projects focussing on the Australian third sector.

TAKING THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED: A PERSPECTIVE ON THIRD SECTOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a personal narrative of a historian who pioneered research on volunteering, wartime patriotic funds and the voluntary principle in Australian history. It explores the tenacity often required to make inroads into new areas of academic discourse, especially when there are no international studies with which to compare and when there is an apparent lack of primary source material. Finally the article restates the importance of history as a discipline in showing us that many current ideas and theories about the third sector are not new, but rather reshaped and remodelled for contemporary contexts.