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PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12069>

PUBLISHER

Wiley / © Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers)

VERSION

AM (Accepted Manuscript)

LICENCE

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Woolvin, Mike, Sarah Mills, Irene Hardill, and Alasdair Rutherford. 2019. "Divergent Geographies of Policy and Practice? Voluntarism and Devolution in England, Scotland and Wales". figshare.
<https://hdl.handle.net/2134/14593>.

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Divergent geographies of policy and practice? Voluntarism and devolution in England, Scotland and Wales.

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Abstract

Across Great Britain, engagement with civil society is an increasingly central component of public policy and governance rhetoric. However, attention has tended to focus on policy developments emanating from Westminster that relate to England, rather than the policy and governance ‘spaces’ emerging in the devolved administrations, such as Scotland and Wales. It has also tended to focus on the organisations through which voluntary participation takes place, rather than on voluntary participation itself. In this paper we examine the extent to which there are divergent governance spaces with regards to voluntarism apparent at the national levels of England, Wales and Scotland, set against a backdrop of wider debates on devolution, civil society, community, and the Big Society. Given the common driver of public service reform which emerges from our review, we then examine the emergence of sub-national ‘spaces’ through the example of rural Scotland, in which the delivery of public services can be particularly challenging. Overall, we contend that public policy towards volunteering and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Scotland, Wales and England has been shaped by similar drivers, but the rhetoric surrounding their deployment and the distinct governance landscapes in Wales and Scotland have the capacity to influence the deployment of these goals in distinct ways. We also argue that greater attention may need to be paid to emergent ‘sub national’ governance spaces of voluntarism.

Key words: voluntarism; devolution; civil society; England; Wales; rural Scotland

1. Introduction

There is a growing social science literature on divergent public policy and governance across the jurisdictions of the UK (c.f. Greer 2009; Birrell 2009); and on the role of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in public service delivery (for example, Macmillan 2010; Kendall 2009). Alcock (2009; 2012) has suggested that whilst new ‘governance spaces’ have opened up across the devolved administrations, the VCS policy context and trajectories are relatively similar. While research has focussed on the VCS, i.e., the organisational spaces for voluntarism, it has been suggested that less attention has been given to the position of volunteers – and voluntarism – in an increasingly devolved policy and governance context (Woolvin and Hardill 2013).

Therefore, as part of this special issue we critically examine the extent to which ‘governance spaces’ for voluntarism are emerging in Scotland and Wales, relative to England. In doing so, the paper contributes to wider debates on the geographies of devolution (Shaw and MacKinnon 2011; Jeffery 2007), highlighting how far the ‘asymmetric’ character of UK devolution that involves “complex and spatially differentiated forms of filling in” (Shaw and MacKinnon 2011: 23; see also Goodwin et al. 2005 and Jones et al 2005 on this debate) appears visible in relation to voluntarism. We seek to review the approaches to voluntarism governance *across* jurisdictions. We also build on work which has highlighted the importance of being attentive to geographical variations in the nature and extent of voluntarism (Fyfe et al 2006, 635; McCulloch et al 2012; Mohan 2012). Given the shared driver of public service reform which emerges from our review, and the particularly challenging public service delivery context presented by rural areas, we then question how far sub-national governance spaces of voluntarism are developing, using the case study of voluntarism in rural Scotland. Section two now highlights policy and governance divergence in England, Scotland and Wales. Section three contains a detailed sub-national case study of voluntarism in rural Scotland, and section four draws overall conclusions.

2. New national governance spaces? Voluntarism and devolution in England, Scotland and Wales

Divergence in public policy towards mutual aid, voluntarism, philanthropy and civil society did not start with the advent of New Labour in 1997 (see below); moreover some large UK-wide Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations (VCSOs) have had long established devolved governance structures. For example, the governance of scouting in Wales – part of the largest voluntary youth organisation in the world – was devolved from the London headquarters to Wales in 1925 through the formation of its own national governing body with unique policies and practices (Davies et al 2000). In this section, however, we focus on the particularly rapidly evolving picture of devolution which has taken place post-1999 - in England, Wales and Scotland.

2.1 England

The term ‘Third Sector’ became widely used under New Labour, and in 2006 the Office of the Third Sector within the Cabinet Office was created, with a Minister of the Third Sector, initially Ed Miliband MP. The notion of a ‘Third Sector’ that is neither the bureaucratic state nor profit driven business was not invented by New Labour, but it gained official acceptance during their second and third terms; perhaps on account of its verbal echo of Third Way politics (Haugh and Kitson, 2007). After the 2010 election, the Coalition Government quickly renamed the ‘Office of the Third Sector’ the ‘Office for Civil Society’.

Citizenship, and the practice of volunteering became part of the National Curriculum with New Labour, and young people were encouraged to volunteer (Hardill and Baines, 2011). Volunteering through organisations was promoted for working age adults, indeed it became aligned to welfare-to-work policies, supporting the development of skills, contacts and credentials to help connect or re-connect people to the labour market (ibid). Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations

(VCSOs) were supported by a regional network of infrastructure organisations, who, in turn were supported by Volunteering England. This network received financial support from New Labour to provide support to voluntary organisations, for example with the recruitment and training of volunteers (ibid).

The VCS also continued to play an important role in the delivery of public services (ibid). While the 'Big Society' agenda of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government places emphasis on the VCS delivering public services this is within a new regime of budget cuts, service cuts and demands of more for less, including from unpaid volunteers (Alcock, 2012). These cuts have had a profoundly negative effect on VCSOs and infrastructure organisations across England (Ockenden et al, 2012). One impact of the budget cuts has been the merger of Volunteering England with NCVO in 2013, and while the regional network of infrastructure organisations survive, their capacity is much reduced.

Big Society is not just about supporting social action (Cameron, 2010), it is an ideology and a wide-ranging political programme, 'a series of interlocking ideas...a concerted and wide-ranging attempt to engage with the twin challenges of social and economic decline and move us to a more connected society' (Norman, 2010: 210). Its agenda embraces *community empowerment* - giving local councils and neighbourhoods more power to take decisions and shape their area; *opening up public services* - enabling charities, social enterprises, private companies and employee-owned co-operatives to compete to deliver services and *social action* - encouraging and enabling people to play a more active part in society.

The Coalition dismantled the regional tier of government New Labour introduced for England and focus on the local. Indeed localism can be regarded as the ethos of Big Society (Shaw, 2012), with the Localism Act of 2012 setting the framework for shifting leadership and control away from

central government and back to local communities, neighbourhoods and individuals, particularly regarding the delivery of public and community services, to shift assets into community ownership and to support participation in neighbourhood planning by enforcing transparency in local government (Alcock, 2012; Woolvin and Hardill, 2013). But communities are not equally ready to take on the shift of power and responsibility from the public sector (Mohan, 2012), suggesting greater geographical sensitivity in the development of Big Society programmes is required.

While England currently does not have an explicit volunteering strategy, Big Society has a broad understanding of voluntarism, recognising both formal and informal volunteering, social action and community participation; indeed the distinctive theme in Big Society is ‘social action’ at community level. The giving of both time and money is emphasised in the White Paper on *Giving* through identifying and encouraging innovative products and ideas using market-based approaches to support volunteering (Cabinet Office, 2011). The population volunteering through an organisation in England in 2012 has reached levels last recorded in 2005 (45%) (Cabinet Office, 2013) with the rate - especially amongst the young and the unwaged – rising during the recession (Cabinet Office, 2013). Since the Big Society was launched in 2010 it has been fiercely contested, and re-launched (Ishkanian and Szreter, 2012), but it continues to define England’s approach to public service delivery and civil society, as well as providing a useful comparison with other – in our case – devolved nations.

2.2 Wales

As Osmond (2001) charts, the first elections to the National Assembly in 1999 “confirmed that a profound shift had taken place in the way Welsh people view their place in the world...the key reference point is now an autonomous civic institution, embracing Wales as a whole” (2001, 70; see also Paterson and Jones 1999). This outlook, we argue, has been echoed in a series of government policies in relation to the VCS and voluntarism more broadly. The Welsh Government/Llywodraeth

Cymru and the National Assembly for Wales/Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru have been committed to delivering citizen-centred public services and closer engagement with local communities (Day 2006; Williams and De Lima 2006). The creation of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999 cemented an immediate link with the VCS with a Voluntary Sector Scheme for employees protected by statutory force, described as ‘unique in the United Kingdom’ and as helping ‘nurture a close working relationship between the voluntary sector and both the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government’ (Welsh Assembly Government 2007, 1).

The Government of Wales Act 2006, the ‘One Wales’ programme of government (2007-2010) and a dedicated Minister for Social Justice and Local Government has brought volunteering firmly centre-stage. The establishment of *The Third Dimension: A Strategic Action Plan for Wales* (2007-8; 2010-11) connected volunteering and the VCS with ‘stronger communities’, ‘better public services’ and ‘better policy’ - “a force for improvement - challenging, complementing and extending the roles played by the public and private sectors” (Welsh Assembly Government 2008, 3). The Government also highlighted “the contribution that the vast range of [volunteer] activities... makes to a vibrant, cohesive and self-supporting society. It reflects the fundamental right and desire of people to organise and co-operate in a free society, making voluntary action a powerful expression of active citizenship” (Welsh Government 2008, 18).

Today support for volunteering includes the *Wales Council for Voluntary Action* (WCVA), volunteer centres, local training and development for volunteers, and a dedicated national website *Volunteering Wales/Gwirfoddoli Cymru*. In relation to volunteers ‘on the ground’, the 2010-11 Citizenship survey estimated that 33% of adults in Wales volunteer through an organisation, which equates to 978,460 volunteers (WCVA 2013a). At the beginning of 2013 an estimated 51,000 paid staff work in 33,000 VCSOs, and over 600,000 people are informal community volunteers (ibid). Volunteering in Wales continues to be linked to notions of community, as Local Government and

Communities Minister Carl Sargeant recently said:

“Volunteers make a huge difference to our communities. *Without their help we would live in a very different Wales.* There are many benefits to volunteering to help others, including opportunities to try something different, gain new skills, meet new people, work with our neighbours and have fun doing so.”

(Welsh Government, January 2013, emphasis added)

In suggesting that an alternative perhaps dystopian but certainly *weaker* nation would exist without the contribution volunteers make, and in inviting the population to momentarily imagine that Wales, we argue that the Minister – and the wider government – is positioning voluntarism and its related attributes at the very heart of the nation.

The Welsh government stresses the nation’s historical connections to the Big Society ideas and that it almost ‘already does’ what the Big Society in England advocates. As Johnson (2010) notes, “it has been argued that the traditions of community action, mutual aid and co-operation are part of the social and cultural history of Wales... The former Welsh Government made it clear that they had no plans to undertake any Big Society initiatives, stating that putting people and communities at the heart of public services was already at the core of their programme for public service improvement.” It is still unclear whether in time, any ‘new’ projects under this label will appear in Wales, particularly as the narrative in England appears to be waning. However, the Welsh Government has spoken of a ‘big society ripple effect’, whilst WCVA states that “the rhetoric about ‘Big Society’ is at odds with significant spending cuts for the sector in England, which have also hit organisations working in Wales funded by non-devolved departments” (2011, 2). Finally, the Silk Commission on Devolution in Wales, established by Welsh Secretary Cheryl Gillan is reviewing financial and constitutional arrangements

(<http://commissionondevolutioninwales.independent.gov.uk/>). WCVA supported a move to the reserved powers model of devolution (as per Scotland), but also called for some stability in that “Welsh organisations and citizens are still developing their understanding of the devolution settlement and how to engage with it and major changes through the return of powers at this point could cause confusion and complications.” (WCVA 2013b, 4).

Therefore, in Wales, a clear distinction from England is drawn in relation to Big Society that stresses how the (contemporary) values espoused by the Coalition Government in England, and their focus on local communities, have been part of the cultural fabric of Wales for centuries. Furthermore, the Welsh Government has framed volunteering as a mechanism that can *continue* to strengthen those communities, and by extension, the nation – cementing voluntarism within a number of its policies, through localised VCS support infrastructure and engaging communities and volunteers in the improvement of public services.

2.3 Scotland

Although Scotland gained its Parliament in 1999 and is now governed by a majority Scottish National Party (SNP) government, there is a much longer history of Scotland-specific policy and governance (Birrell 2009; Keating and Midwinter 1983). With regards to social policy, Mooney and Poole (2004, 459) reflect that many perceive Scotland as a ‘happening place’ for social policy innovation however note limited evidence for any ‘radical departures’ (ibid, 473); and others (such as Curtis, 2013) have critiqued the extent to which this distinctiveness is the case. When focussing on the Scottish VCS Birrell (2009, 75) argues there are ‘some lower-level differences [which] have emerged...subtle differences...in administrative structures, strategies and action plans, [that] reflect differences in local needs, priorities or well-established practices’, echoing the findings of Alcock (2009; 2012). More recently the Christie Commission (2011) was tasked by Scottish Government to undertake an independent review of public service delivery in Scotland. It identified a need to

maximise ‘scarce resources by utilising all available resources from the public, private and third sectors, individuals, groups and communities’ to provide services that are ‘delivered in partnership, involving local communities, their democratic representatives, and the third sector’ (Christie 2011, 81). In so doing, the role of voluntary participation is clearly central.

Indeed, regarding volunteering, Fyfe et al. (2006, 630) observe that, ‘it perhaps says something about the political significance of the third sector in Scotland that in September 1999 one of the first major debates in the newly established Scottish Parliament focused on voluntary organizations and volunteering’, with the government at the time developing its ‘own approach to the compacts, the social economy and volunteering’ (ibid, 632). Thirty percent of Scotland’s population volunteered in 2011ⁱ (Scottish Government 2012a: 128), with an estimated 45 000 voluntary organisations (SCVO 2012). It has been highlighted elsewhere that voluntarism in Scotland has shifted from the support of volunteering as an act in and of itself (directed through formal organisations), to wider community empowerment. The 2004 Volunteering Strategy emphasised the benefits of volunteering to both the volunteer and wider society (Scottish Executive 2004), compared to the 2009 Scottish Community Empowerment Action Plan (Scottish Government 2009) which ‘is about local people identifying ‘creative and successful solutions to local problems’ and empowering ‘communities to deliver their own services’, with ‘all of us recognising that communities doing things for themselves can sometimes be the best way of delivering change’ through ‘locally owned, community led organisations’ acting as ‘anchors’ (Scottish Government 2009, 6). This pre-dates the Big Society language of ‘empowerment’, with the ‘community’ (rather than individual) as the beneficiary of ‘community action’ (for a fuller review see Woolvin and Hardill 2013).

First Minister Alex Salmond has made claims for Scotland’s distinctiveness, “much has been said about the Big Society. I am more concerned by the Fair Society... in the rush to adapt, good things will be lost” (BBC 2010), whilst a senior figure within the Scottish Council for Voluntary

Organisations (SCVO) has been extremely critical of 'Big Society' rhetoric (Syme 2011). Referring back to Mooney and Poole (2004) the extent to which such rhetoric is being translated into truly distinctive policy requires further critical examination and research.

Turning to VCS infrastructure, Woolvin and Hardill (2013) highlight that Lee (2012) suggests that around the time of the Community Empowerment Action Plan (2009) a 'step-change' occurred from 'interventional' national volunteering policy framed mainly around a social justice discourse of removing barriers, towards a more localised 'infrastructural' approach with less emphasis on volunteering at the national level, but continued investment in local organisations and the emergence of Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs). TSIs bring Volunteer Centres, third sector agencies (through Councils For Voluntary Service (CVSs)) and Community Planning Partnerships together in each of the 32 Local Authorities in Scotland. This suggests the capacity for a spatially sensitive approach to the governance of voluntarism, relatively consistently and formally engaged with wider governance structures.

Therefore, in Scotland, there appears an early engagement with 'volunteering' specifically through policy and governance, which has more recently shifted towards 'empowerment': first through the Community Empowerment Action Plan's emphasis on tackling social and economic challenges and latterly with regard to public service reform. Further, there appears a particularly 'localised' voluntary sector infrastructure – relatively consistently and formally built into wider governance structures – through which volunteering might be supported.

2.4 Discussion

As Shaw and MacKinnon have observed, "the geographies of governance under devolution are more complex and multi-scalar in character" (2011: 24). As outlined in this section, the three nations share some of the same *drivers* shaping volunteering and VCS policy, in particular the

reform of public services against a challenging economic context. The *rhetoric* surrounding their deployment, however, is different and the distinct voluntarism infrastructure landscapes in Wales and Scotland have the capacity to influence spaces of governance and the ways in which such ambitions develop. We note: i) there appears to be stronger localised VCS support infrastructures in Scotland; ii) in Scotland and Wales, there is a mobilisation of political rhetoric *against* the Big Society of the Coalition Government with regard to voluntarism and iii) there appears a particularly strong specific policy and governance engagement with voluntarism in Scotland and Wales, whilst initiatives to directly support voluntarism in England appear less explicit.

3. Are there sub national geographies of voluntarism policy and practice? Examining the case of rural Scotland

Section two demonstrated that whilst drivers for contemporary policy engagement with voluntarism are similar, rhetoric and infrastructure regarding this is more distinct across the jurisdictions. One of the common drivers highlighted has been the reform of public services, which has resulted in an emphasis on the 'local' and on community level voluntary participation. Here we engage further with these themes, asking how far 'sub national' governance spaces are emerging, and then examine rural patterns of volunteering with reference to public service reform by focussing on empirical work undertaken in rural Scotland.

There are a number of reasons for exploring rural governance spaces of voluntarism. First, the very nature of rural areas - dispersed populations, distinct demographic profiles, smaller settlement sizes, less comprehensive service provision, transport challenges and higher per head costs of service delivery – can directly shape the role and extent of the VCS (Grieve 2007). This matters because – as highlighted earlier – one of the key areas in which volunteers are increasingly expected to contribute is public service reform. Therefore, in a context in which the delivery of public services can be

particularly challenging, rural volunteering may be engaged with in specific ways. Second, higher rates of volunteering in rural areas are evident in Scotland (Scottish Government 2012b, and even when controlling for diverse social and economic characteristics (Harper and Rutherford, 2012)), England and Wales (DCLG, 2011) and the USA (Musick and Wilson 2008, 330-332). It is therefore important to understand the drivers and implications of these patterns, and the policy implications/engagements.

Third, whilst *rates* of volunteering are higher, there is evidence to suggest that the *nature* of activity is also important to consider. Hardill and Dwyer (2011) highlight the challenges that drawing on a small population of volunteers in a rural context to contribute to the delivery of services can present. Further, the distinction between third sector activity which is ‘substitutional’ – bridging the gap between service provision and service need – and additional activity which is over and above what might be expected to be delivered by the state in rural areas has been made (Pickering 2003). This analogy has been extended to volunteering by Timbrell (2007) who argues ‘substitutional’ activity may be less empowering and therefore perhaps less sustainable than ‘additional’ activity. Further, formal volunteers in rural Scotland (ibid) and rural England (Grieve 2007) may – overall – participate across a larger number of organisations (albeit for a smaller amount of time in each) than urban volunteers. This has led to formal volunteering in rural areas being characterised as ‘broad’ while in urban areas as ‘deep’ (Timbrell 2007). These issues are important to examine if geographically varying capacities of volunteers to participate (further) in a context of public service reform are to be fully understood.

Finally, volunteering in rural areas is often described as essential. In England, it has been argued that ‘...community capacity building and volunteering are disproportionately important in rural areas, both in their own right and as a significant underpinning to service delivery (Defra 2003, 7), with these sentiments echoed in rural Wales (Heley and Jones 2013) and Canada (Joseph and Skin-

ner, 2012). It is clear then, that there is something unique about the rural dynamics of volunteering that warrants further attention. We examine how far this has been reflected in rural policy and governance ‘spaces’ through the case study of rural Scotland and what new analysis can tell us about the implications of rural volunteering patterns for public service reform.

3.2 Volunteering, rurality and policy in Scotland

The Scottish Government define rurality on the basis of population size and travel times to other settlements, with six categorisations: i) large urban; ii) other urban areas; iii) accessible small towns; iv) remote small towns; v) accessible rural; vi) remote rural’ (Scottish Government 2012d). On the basis of this, 94% of Scotland’s land mass is rural, including 18% of its population (ibid). The Volunteering Strategy (Scottish Executive 2004), outlined in section 2.3, identified spatial variations, including rurality, which led to the Scottish Executive committing to consider ‘factors such as differing needs of rural and urban areas’ (ibid, 5), and that additional ‘learning on specific issues such as the impact of rurality on patterns of volunteering’ was required (ibid, 19). Finally examples of ‘everyday practical volunteering which contribute in some way to the achievement of public policy objectives’ were identified, including ‘the delivery of transport services for hospital patients, which is particularly important in rural areas’ (ibid, 12). However, there appear to have been few specific policy outcomes.

Our Rural Future (Scottish Government 2011) sees rural Scotland as composed of ‘confident and diverse rural communities [that] take control of local assets and provide local services to generate income and employment’ (Scottish Government 2011, cited in Scottish Government 2012c, 7). The transfer of community assets – particularly in more rural areas – has been a long-standing strategy through the Scottish Land Fund (2001-2006), the Growing Community Assets Fund (administered by the Big Lottery Fund between 2006 and 2010), the Growing Community Assets 2 Fund (2010 onwards) and the recent reinstatement of the Scottish Land Fund (Skerratt 2011: 4). In addition, the

SCVO managed ‘Scottish National Rural Network’ (SNRN) also provides support and information regarding rural voluntary organisations in Scotland, as well as signposting toward rural-specific funding (SNRN 2013).

The SNP has also recently linked rurality and civil society (plus broader public and private stakeholders) to ‘make sure the rural voice is heard’ and ‘take forward proposals for a rural Parliament’ (SNP 2011, 38). Recent reports identify that such movements in Europe have often emerged from a broader ‘rural movement’ with involvement from VCS organisations, alongside the public and private sectors, with ‘grassroots’ involvement essential (Skerratt et al. 2012; Woolvin et al. 2012). While there has been engagement with the rural VCS in Scotland, voluntarism in rural areas has received less attention. Greater emphasis has been placed on organisations as sites of volunteering (often multi-issue based) or the uses to which it might be put (public service delivery).

3.3 Volunteering and public service reform in Scotland: a case study.

In a recent study of rural volunteering Woolvin and Rutherford (2013) draw on two Scottish datasets. The first dataset, gathered by Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS), is based on a representative sample of 1,000 charities from the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator’s (OSCR) ‘Scottish Charities Register’, with a 59% response rate.ⁱⁱ It found that almost 56% of participating charities in remote rural Scotland reported that the ‘local community’ was their ‘primary beneficiary group’. This declines to just over 31% of charities in accessible rural areas, and 24% in the rest of Scotland. This raised several possibilities: i) that rural charities – as with volunteers –are ‘broad’ in their remit, given that charities were not able to select more than one purpose; ii) that volunteers in rural areas are more likely to be responding to areas of unmet need at a local level rather than volunteering with national organisations; iii) rural charities are less likely to be service providers with such charities based in more urban areas or iv) that the ‘local’ is more easily identified in a rural context.

Furthermore, 34% of charities in both accessible and remote rural categories reported involving paid staff compared to 49% in the rest of Scotland. The median annual financial turnover of charities in the most urban areas (£31,416) was over 3.5 times greater than those in the most rural areas (£8,865). Rural charities are therefore smaller, and rely more heavily on volunteers than urban charities. Rural charities were more likely to report that volunteering rates had remained the same in the last 12 months but were least likely to report that they were hoping for more volunteers (53% compared to a rate of 59% for the rest of Scotland). Whether this is a positive indicator of social capital and a vibrant civil society, or a reflection of a less positive picture requires further examination.

Data from the Scottish Government's annual Scottish Household Survey (SHS) were also analysed for the period 2007-11ⁱⁱⁱ. Unlike the previous survey, this data is reported by individuals rather than organisations, and so gives a different perspective on voluntary activity. Analysis shows the roles of volunteers vary in urban and rural areas; with activities of a 'service' nature found in more rural areas (such as "Helping organise, run events, activities", "Providing direct services", and "Providing transport, driving"). These 'service' oriented roles may be analogous to 'substitutional' activity, which previous work suggests may be less sustainable than 'additional' activity. Rural volunteers were also more likely to undertake 'general' roles, indicating they do "Generally helping out" or "Whatever is required". The high prevalence of general roles suggests smaller rural charities with fewer staff may be more reliant on a greater number of volunteers who 'multi-task'. Volunteers in rural areas are also more likely to undertake a greater number of activities. This continues to suggest rural volunteering is more 'broad' – spread across a number of roles – while urban volunteering is 'deeper'.

3.4 Discussion

In this section we have shown that whilst there has been some policy support for rural volunteering through national strategies, funding made available for rural VCS institutions and - with regard to wider civil society – rural forums, targeted policies have been lacking. The delivery of public services is more challenging in rural areas, those in rural areas appear more likely to volunteer; to be fulfilling service oriented roles, to be fulfilling multiple roles but in so doing also to be at risk of undertaking activity which is less sustainable and empowering. It is therefore important to examine what actions might be put in place to support rural volunteers, and also to recognise where capacities to volunteer might have already been reached. This means that public service reform governance – and the expectations of additional participation which are intrinsic to this – must take a geographically sensitive approach. Sub-national spaces of governance regarding rural volunteering therefore generally appear absent, but are essential in the current context. Given the structure of volunteering and voluntary sector support in Scotland highlighted earlier, it is possible that such an approach could be developed.

4. Conclusion:

The scope and scale of devolution in the UK are changing at a rapid pace, and these changes are stimulating a lively debate, as illustrated by the contributions in this special issue. In this paper we have highlighted the similarities and distinctions in the ways that voluntarism is being articulated across the three jurisdictions, suggesting that newly emerging governance spaces of voluntarism are becoming evident as these non-reserved policy areas continue to develop. While the three nations share some of the same drivers shaping volunteering and the VCS policy the rhetoric surrounding their deployment is distinct. In addition, using rural Scotland as a case study, drawing on recent empirical data we have identified a rationale for the presence of sub-national spaces of voluntarism governance in a context of public service reform and assessed the extent to which this appears evident.

These specific geographies are complex and necessarily bound up with the wider geographies of devolution, including the impending referendum on Scottish independence in 2014. In addition, it appears there are also cracks beginning to show in debates over decision-making powers in Wales. In response to the Silk Commission mentioned earlier in this paper, First Minister Carwyn Jones recently called for more control over public services, policing and energy, and for devolution in Wales to be “enhanced and restructured” (BBC 2013a). In response, the UK coalition government rejected these claims and stated these areas would remain under their purview and that no ‘radical’ changes to Welsh devolution were needed (BBC 2013b). Following the publication of the Commission’s first report, Kirsty Williams the leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats stated that “we need a new model of devolution which clearly defines what is devolved and what is not, as in Scotland” (BBC 2013c). This suggests that the boundaries of devolution are still being stretched, tested, challenged and for some, pushed too far – but that new comparisons and connections are being forged between Wales and Scotland. There is a pressing need for continued academic scrutiny of the emerging geographies of devolution and policy in relation to voluntarism over the next few years. Over a decade ago, contributors to an edited volume entitled *Celtic Geographies: Old cultures, New times* (Harvey et al 2001) called for a wider ‘geohistory of celtic devolution’ (MacLeod 2001) and renewed focus on civic identity in the context of Wales (Osmond 2001) and Scotland (Lorimer 2001) in the twenty-first century. Whilst the utility of ‘celtic’ has been critically debated, including in the aforementioned volume, we suggest such a conceptual framework may aid understanding of these divergent visions in the future (Shaw and MacKinnon 2011; Jeffrey 2007). We also hope that this paper will act as a point of departure from which to examine the possibility of policy and governance able to support the commonalities and distinctions in voluntarism *within* national borders.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the constructive and insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper by two anonymous reviewers. We also acknowledge the support of SRUC's Rural Policy Centre which funded the empirical work presented in in the latter part of this paper (www.sruc.ac.uk/ruralpolicycentre).

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ⁱ Differences in methodology inhibit comparison of Scottish data with England and Wales data.

ⁱⁱ All charities based in Scotland must register their details with OSCR, and the database currently holds 23,650 charities. The second is a Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS) administered postal survey to a representative sample of 1000 charities in Scotland, with a response rate of just over 59% (592 responses). This survey sought to provide a picture of the ways in which volunteers are involved in charities in Scotland. The responses were matched to the Scottish Government's six-fold urban/rural classification system, leaving 574 charities to be analysed here.

ⁱⁱⁱ The SHS is a continuous survey, sampling around 31,000 households in Scotland over a two year period. The data analysed were gathered between 2007 and 2011. A module including questions on volunteering is asked of half the SHS sample. Individuals who confirm that they have volunteered in the past 12 months are asked a number of questions about their volunteering.