Mapping the distribution of charities in Scotland

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Key Findings

- At a time of increasing policy focus on the role of the third sector in designing and delivering services, particularly in light of the public service reform agenda, this research investigates the geographical distribution and activities of charities in Scotland, and begins to identify possible explanations for this.

- At the Local Authority (LA) level there are clear geographical variations in the distribution of those charities with offices that could be mapped within Scotland. As might be expected, as a percentage of all charities the largest proportions are located in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Perhaps more surprisingly these were not necessarily characterised by head offices for national charities, with 86% of charities in Edinburgh also reporting having their main operating area in Edinburgh.

- The largest proportion of charities per head of population is in the Shetland Islands, with 97% of them also having their main operating area there.

- Mapping at a smaller geographical scale reveals that more rural areas tend to have more charities per head. This is supported by statistical analysis which reveals a significant positive relationship between the degree of rurality of an area and the number of charities per head.

- Further statistical analysis suggests that the distribution of charities can vary by other factors. For example, more deprived areas have fewer charities per head of population located within them, even controlling for the influence of rurality.

- Charities can also be mapped – at a general level – by their function. The data allows us to identify charities which 'carry out activities', compared to those that give grants to organisations and individuals. In general, the proportion of charities which carry out activities increases with degree of rurality.

- The scale at which charities operate can also be mapped. Of all 21,551 charities included in this analysis, 37.2% can be described as charities that provide services and work ‘locally’, which increases to 56% when those working at LA level or below are included. Furthermore, this percentage generally increases with degree of rurality.

- Finally, reported charitable purposes also appear to vary to some extent across the urban/rural categorisations, however more work needs to be undertaken to clarify how and why this varies.

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Introduction: In the UK there has been a renewed interest in the third sector and voluntary activity amongst policymakers. This has been signified in Scotland in large part by the findings of the Christie Commission, which places a strong emphasis on the role of the sector in public service reform. The third sector is often regarded as having the capacity to support ‘hard to reach’ populations, and as an innovative service provider. It is important to remember that voluntary activity is often characteristic of charities, suggesting that where there are particularly significant numbers of charities, there may also be a large number of opportunities for volunteers. However, little work has been undertaken to map the distribution and function of charities in Scotland.

Data and Method: The analyses were undertaken on the basis of Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) data. The dataset includes 23,360 charities. Following exclusion of those which could not be mapped due to data error or their location overseas, 21,551 charities were included in the overall analysis. Smaller numbers were used for the examination of particular types of charities, such as those that provide services/undertake activities, or those that operate locally. The data was collected through OSCR’s Annual Returns 2009 process, and reflects the location of the head office of the charity. For the purposes of mapping and analysis, the 2009-2010 6-fold Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification and the 2009 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) were used. In addition to the mapping work, statistical (regression) analysis was also undertaken to establish the capacity of variables to explain the patterns uncovered.

Conclusions and Implications

• There are pronounced geographical variations in the number of charities (both absolute and per head), as well as in their purposes and characteristics.
• The number of charities per head of population increases with degree of rurality. This may suggest that charities are particularly characteristic of rural areas.
• The number of charities providing services also varies geographically, with a greater number per head in rural areas, whilst charities in rural areas also appear more likely to operate at the local level than those in more urban areas.
• Whilst this may suggest that there is a particularly strong role for charities in rural areas in bridging the gap between service provision and service need, and that charities in rural areas are more likely to provide services to the local population, this may also be a function of urban head office locations. Further analysis is required to understand the services provided by these charities, and those working beyond the ‘local’ level.
• It is also possible to map charities alongside socio-demographic variables such as deprivation. For example, it appears that the less deprived the area, the higher the number of charities per head.
• Therefore, public service reform may need to be aware of the geographical variation in the number and function of charities, and the associated implications with regard to their potential capacity to contribute to this agenda.

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5 Further information on this work can also be found in Rural Scotland in Focus 2012, which is available here: http://www.sac.ac.uk/ruralpolicycentre/pubs/thrivingcommunitiespublications/rsf2012/