

**Advocacy with gloves on:
The ‘manners’ of strategy used by some third sector organizations
undertaking advocacy in NSW and Queensland**

Abstract

This paper examines the strategies used by some third sector organizations in Australia to advocate. The purpose of this paper is to identify the kinds of activities that organizations in New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland use to promote advocacy, the kinds of language that is used to describe these activities, and the reasons given for the particular strategies adopted. The extent to which the organizations adopt “softer” (that is more institutional forms of advocacy) rather than more openly challenging forms of activism is examined, particularly in light of a neo-liberal political and economic environment. In this analysis emergent strategies are identified that are not easily categorised as either ‘institutional’ or ‘radical’ advocacy. The paper presents an exploratory analysis of some of the implications of the strategies adopted, in terms of their democratic effects and potential to strengthen the capacity of third sector organizations. The paper is informed by the findings of a qualitative research project involving interviews with 24 organizations in the community services and environmental fields.

Keywords: Advocacy, strategies, third sector, professionalisation

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the strategies used by some third sector organizations in Australia to advocate. A recurring metaphor in scholarly debates and practitioner talk about advocacy work, both in Australia and internationally, is that third sector organizations are increasingly reticent to ‘bite the hand that feeds them’ (Roelofs 1987; Smith and Lipsky 1993; Alexander, Nank, and Stivers 1999; Epstein 1981; Maddison and Denniss 2005). Others suggest that government funding bolsters agency resources, enabling agencies to advocate (Chaves et al 2004; Kramer 1994). The former position is that escalating threats of public reprisal and de-funding by institutions and governments embedded in the public choice framework have resulted in *advocacy with gloves on*: advocacy that is non-confrontational and incremental rather than traditionally confrontational and demanding. Some have argued that this is a global rather than local Australian phenomenon (Kamat 2004). This paper examines the strategies used by organizations to advocate. It begins with issues of definition and examines the evidence from other studies which frame the traditional debate between ‘radical’ and ‘institutionalized’ form of advocacy. It then introduces the empirical study based on in-depth interviews that form the basis of this paper. It identifies advocacy activities typically undertaken by the sample organizations as well as new ways of speaking about and doing advocacy. In discussing these strategies as responses and reactions to a global as well as local neo-liberal political environment, the implications for strengthening the capacity of civil society will be explored.

We use the term ‘third-sector’ to identify those organizations that may be funded by government, but are legally independent of it. They are also non-profit, being creatures of neither the state nor the market. The study excludes political parties, mutuals and trading co-operatives.

The term 'Advocacy' is defined as active interventions by organizations on behalf of the collective interests they represent (often referred to as 'systemic advocacy'), that have the explicit goal of influencing public policy or the decisions of any institutional elite (Onyx et al, 2008, Casey and Dalton 2006; Salamon 2002). Two aspects of advocacy are particularly noteworthy: first, the emphasis on private, as well as governmental, institutions as the objects of advocacy activity and second, the focus on 'collective interest', that is benefits that in Berry's terms, "may be shared by all people, independent of their membership or support of a given group", rather than private benefits, as the principal goal of advocacy activity (Berry 1977, p. 8).

Issues around advocacy in the third sector are of pressing concern not least because of the ways in which advocacy supports the robust functioning of democracy and a connected civil society. Many scholars argue that third sector organizations are essential intermediaries between civil society and the state and that advocacy enables minorities with limited political power to participate. (Foley and Edwards 1996). By engaging in advocacy, third sector organizations can contribute to a deliberative democracy where contestation and deliberation encourages broad exploration of disparate ideas (Cohen 1996). They do this in two key ways. First, they school those that participate in them in democratic practices and providing an environment where they can learn about political issues and be politically active (Verba et al. 1995). As Warren has expressed it, they "cultivate the habits of collective action, thus producing an active, self-sufficient, and vigilant citizenry" (Warren 2001, p. 6). Second, advocacy ensures that the views and voices of other, marginalized interests are represented in the policy process (Boris and Mosher-Williams 1998; Berry 1999; Sawyer 2002).

The distinctions between private benefits and ‘collective interest’, and who and what constitutes ‘civil society’ are unclear in neo-liberal governance and discourse concerning democratic processes and entitlements. In the public choice paradigm, which underpins neo-liberalist policies, marginalised constituencies who depend on advocates for access to public debate and decision making are perceived as exclusive, and therefore private, self-interest groups (Andrew 2006). This charge “represents a trend towards the privatization of the public sphere” (Kamat 2004, p. 157). Marginalised groups are no longer amenable to special pleading, thus curtailing their opportunities for engagement in a variety of civic and democratic processes. This trend represents a move away from a deliberative model of democracy.

The Australian Context

The last four decades has witnessed a significant expansion of the third sector in Australia. Based on the latest figures available there are perhaps as many as 700 000 nonprofit organisations in Australia, although less than 40 000 of these employ staff. These organisations employ almost 900 000 people and in 2006-07 turned over almost \$75 billion (ABS 2008). Compared with some countries such as the USA, a significant proportion of nonprofits receive the bulk of their funds from government rather than from donations and/or philanthropy, with 34% of the \$74.5 billion being received in the form of government grants. In terms of employment, social services providers account for 27% of all Australian nonprofits. The other group of organisations which we studied in the research, those committed to conservation of the environment, fall within the smaller ABS category of advocacy and development organizations which, in terms of employment, account for 12% of the sector. This does not incorporate the contribution of volunteers).

Several explanations for this growth have been offered. Some commentators have focused on how the contraction of the welfare state and demands for greater flexibility and efficiency in

service delivery has simulated the expansion of the community sector through outsourcing of government functions (Quiggin 1999). According to Lyons (2001), however, the growth of the community services sector in Australia in the 1970s and early 1980s was not so much the result of the spread of outsourcing. Indeed historically the Australian Governments did not provide much in the way of community services (Lyons 1994; Ohlin 1998). Rather, the community services industry was a beneficiary of the effective advocacy of a key group of nonprofit organisations, their clients and other activists. Lyons writes, “It was advocacy work by a few provider organisations and, later, feminists and other community activists, along with organisations of disadvantaged people themselves, ‘consumers’ in today’s terminology, that prompted the Commonwealth government to begin funding accommodation and then services for older people, people with disabilities, children, the homeless and so on to create the complex fabric of community services we have today.” (2001: 37)

While the sector has been growing it has also been changing. Many of these changes have been driven by an increasing preoccupation among government executives, politicians and employees with New Public Management, an interest which in turn has dramatically changed government’s approach to funding the provision of services in health and community services. In particular from the 1990s onwards, governments sought to create ‘competitive markets’ and ushered various contracting and project-based funding regimes (Lyons and Passey 2006).

There has been a significant amount of analytical work on how these changes have affected the ability of organisations in Australia to lobby and undertake advocacy work on behalf of their members (Melville, 2001; Wagner & Spence, 2003; Spall & Zetlin, 2004). In general the finding is that of the organisations that grew out of earlier social movements many have lost their strong activist orientation and collectivist work practices and instead adopted more

bureaucratic and professional structures, and a focus on seeking out stable and secure funding sources primarily from government. Others scholars have gone further and attributed government with a more deliberate and coercive attempts to silence dissent (Maddison, and Denniss 2005) In sum. the existence of constraints on advocacy work by community organisations has been a familiar theme since the effects of NPM began to be felt.

Advocacy strategies: from radical to institutional

Advocacy activity involves a wide repertoire of strategies that deploy different processes of democracy and engage particular stakeholders. This can include generating support in the electorate or market place, invoking a moral argument, putting forward a research-based case for or against a particular policy proposal, and/or demonstrating that the public interest is best served by a particular course of action. Some strategies may be to advocate a case directly to government ministers and staff, others will focus on cultivating relationships within the public service or with elected representatives outside of executive government, while yet others will seek to influence public opinion, and in that way persuade the government (or another institution) of the efficacy of a particular course. From the more radical activist tactics such as staging protests and sit-ins, to increasingly common institutional tactics such as responding to government policy developments (such as through green and white paper processes) and participating in government committees and enquiries, advocacy strategies carry clearly defined risks and trade-offs in terms of their democratic effects.

In political science and third sector literature more generally the democratic outcomes of different advocacy strategies are for the most part analysed through taxonomies that separate ‘radical’ from ‘institutional’, although most approaches are said to fall along a spectrum between the two. Radical advocacy is associated with external democratic processes that are

overtly political and therefore open to contestation. The benefits of radical advocacy are that grass-roots support and participation enable mechanisms for legitimate representation as well as political education within civil society. Radical advocacy's oppositional distance from government can be perceived as a strategy to maintain independence and resist the co-optation of the third sector as a government utility. However, the tension between the concept of an independent third sector and the reality of dependency on state resources, poses problems for radical advocacy from "a public choice perspective on policy-making" (Maddison and Denniss 2005, p. 381). According to this perspective, radical advocacy on behalf of minority groups risks accusations of anachronism or irrelevancy, exclusivity and unaccountability to tax payers more broadly. Exclusivity is also the risk associated with 'institutional' advocacy, in that it is enacted within internal structures and relationships between third sector organizations, governments and institutions. This model of advocacy may ensure access to key players and deliver policy change, but is considered limited in terms of its wider democratic effect. Now, we argue, more institutional participatory mechanisms are of a 'closed door' nature rendering some of the "chosen few" within the third sector vulnerable to co-optation, in effect creating an elite group, which is in effect a part of the state's machinery of participation (Dearden 2006), and the professionalization required to lobby at elite levels risks alienating advocates from memberships and constituencies (Skocpol 2003).

A clear distinction is made between lobbying and advocacy in the literature (Melville and Perkins, 2003, p. 88). According to Hopkins (1992, p. 32), advocacy is the active espousal of a position or course of action. Lobbying is defined as attempting to influence legislators and their congressional votes (Hopkins cited in Boris and Mosher-Williams, 1998, p. 501) and requires a high level of access to key government players, by for instance professional corporate lobbyists. Donaldson categorizes direct lobbying as an *elite* strategy distinguishing it from "grassroots lobbying": a *mass* strategy which involves communicating with, and

calling to action, the general public on policy issues. A mass strategy, while maximizing deliberative democracy and constituent involvement, is also more likely to be identified as 'radical' and therefore at risk of reprisals from the neo-liberal state. Donaldson's US study on advocacy strategies of non-profit organizations revealed a move away from mass advocacy involving 'civil society' and *empowerment* strategies that involve the participation of user groups, to elite measures aimed at key decision makers (Donaldson 2007, p.142). Similarly, Schmid, Bar and Nirel (2008) note the movement toward elite advocacy strategies in Israel, but make the interesting point that Israel's nonprofit sector does not share the same restraints on advocacy activity imposed by tax laws in the US and Australia.

It is clear that advocacy organizations in Australia and internationally are "abandoning traditional templates of activism and advocacy to participate as legitimate experts in policy discourse" (Grundy and Smith 2007, p. 298). This participation at the policy table requires a degree of professionalisation that is often conflated with depoliticization in the literature (Kamat 2004). However, research also attests to the high level of political consciousness of third sector, community based organizations (Schmid, Bar and Nirel 2008) and suggests that what constitutes the term 'political activity' is being reconfigured in that sphere (Donaldson 2007). The pressing question is, to what extent and how does that reconfiguration involve the contributions of the most vulnerable in society? The challenge for third sector organizations is to maintain the participation of their constituencies on the ground while attending to managerial imperatives and contractual constraints imposed from 'the top'. Whether advocacy takes the form of resistance or influence, is soft or openly challenging, claims of accountability and a legitimate mandate to represent marginalised voices depend on activities that include those voices (Maddison and Denniss 2005).

In analysing the democratic effects of third sector advocacy strategies in NSW and Queensland, rigid distinctions between types of advocacy have proved inadequate. This paper identifies emergent forms of advocacy within the third sector that are neither in themselves 'radical' or 'institutional' but rather more sophisticated responses to the neo-liberal agenda. Within these emerging strategies, both 'grass-roots' and 'elite' approaches are taken. Our findings pose the question, is it possible to develop advocacy strategies which include the mobilisation of particular constituencies and the wider society, but which also engage the professional elite, and if so, what are the implications? In order to explore this question in some depth, we identify the kinds of activities that participant organizations use to promote causes, the language that is used to describe these activities, and the reasons given for the particular strategies adopted. In particular, the extent to which the organizations adopt softer, more institutional forms of advocacy rather than more openly challenging forms of activism is examined. The paper presents an exploratory analysis of some of the implications of the strategies adopted, in terms of their democratic effects and therefore potential to strengthen the capacity of third sector organizations to influence the policy process.

The paper is informed by the findings of a research project involving interviews with 24 organizations in the community services and environmental fields. The study focused on systemic advocacy aimed at the organizational and institutional-political levels, pleading for a collective interest or cause rather than the cause of a specific (disadvantaged) individual. While the two may be linked, it is systemic advocacy that attempts to remedy the underlying cause of disadvantage, rather than ameliorating its effect in a particular case.

METHOD

The paper presents an analysis of in-depth interviews with senior executives of 24 third-sector organizations, 16 in NSW and eight in Queensland, from across the human services and the environment 'industries'. The research team included both academics and industry partners. The industry partners included a national advocacy organization and a state based peak body representing social service organizations. To maximise coverage of diverse organizations, four organization clusters were selected to represent distinct service fields. Our industry partners were actively involved in determining these fields for our case study sample selection, as well as the specific organizations. The four fields identified and targeted by the research team included: housing/ homelessness, disability, child and family welfare and the environment. Two of these fields (disability and child and family welfare) were also used for sample selection in Queensland. These four fields are major sites of community sector institutional reforms, social and political stress, and political contestation.

Within each field cluster four organizations were identified, reflecting a range of large and small organizations, and those reputed to use more 'institutional' or 'non-institutional' approaches. The purpose of this distinction was to capture potential differences by size and organizational type on forms of advocacy, as well as potential differences between State jurisdictions. In all cases the organizations were selected on the basis of receiving state government funding. However, in practice most organizations also received (or used to receive) a variety of other funding including from Federal sources and from a variety of fees and services.

While our sample concerns advocacy rather than service delivery, there is no easy way of delineating between service oriented and advocacy oriented organizations. This reflects broader research in the field where estimating the exact proportion of organizations with advocacy as their main objective has proved difficult. Figures vary widely between researchers

(Knoke 1990; Van Deth 1997; Melville 2001). All of our respondents, regardless of the degree of service orientation, identified their organizations as advocacy organizations – that is they all claimed that seeking to influence government policies for the improvement of their constituents was an organizational goal. However, most were careful to explain that government funding for service delivery was not directly used for advocacy.

To inform the analysis we adopted a case method approach of the 24 organizations in NSW and Queensland. The case studies involved some observation as well as the identification of relevant minutes, correspondence and other secondary documentation, as well as in-depth interviews with key informants (ten Have 2004). While the larger case material informs this paper, the focus here is on the interview material. All informants were asked to complete an advocacy checklist identifying specific advocacy activities carried out by the organization. These checklist categories were derived from an Australian Taxation Office (ATO) list of activities considered ‘not inconsistent with’ charitable purposes (ATO, 2005). The ATO checklist is organized into five categories: *Elections/Electoral Politics*, *Law Change*, *Advocacy for Clients*, *Dealing with Government* and *Raising Public Awareness*. Within these categories, activities are listed that range from advocacy work that is identified in the literature as ‘institutional’, for example ‘*Participate in government sponsored consultation/ advisory process*’ to ‘radical’; ‘*Organize or promote a demonstration/ rally*’. Interviewees also responded to a series of standardized, but open-ended questions. While the interview data was initially analyzed in terms of this ATO checklist, a deeper reading revealed several emergent discourses, not included in the original checklist. These included patterns of language concerning de-radicalization, relationships and sector co-ordination, which appeared to be constitutive of new and potentially subversive ways of doing advocacy work in response to government restrictions. This discourse analysis provided a triangulation to the initial quantitative checklist analysis. The responses reflect the perception of

these key informants, based on their direct experience in their organizations. The responses were de-identified to protect the identity of individual organizations.

Limitations

It should be noted that the interviews took place during 2006-2007 and therefore were affected by the neo-liberal political landscape of the day, both nationally, and at state level. Nonetheless, the emerging themes suggest a more generic phenomenon that is explained as third sector responses to global capitalism rather than to particular national and local governments (Kamat 2004). The generalisability of the sample is limited, as it was limited to 24 organisations across only four of many potential industry segments. However, the informants reflected on the wider advocacy context in which they worked. In addition, recent studies which specifically survey advocacy strategies in the third/community sectors (see Donaldson 2007; Schmid, Bar and Nirrel, 2008), and literature that discuss emerging themes more generally, have been drawn on. Together, these provide sufficient material for an exploratory analysis which raises interesting questions rather than provides definitive answers.

RESULTS

Respondents in the study were asked to identify the types of **advocacy** activities their organizations undertook by filling in the ATO checklist. The results of the responses to the checklist are summarised in Table 1 below. This table includes an additional category that was formed in the analysis of the interview data, where respondents gave fuller accounts of their advocacy work. It was found that advocacy work was being both explained and performed in ways not always captured by the checklist. The table thus combines responses from both checklist and interview. After an overview of advocacy activities identified in the

quantitative data, the sixth emergent category *Sector Co-ordination* is explained in depth.

These findings are organized into themes based on patterns of language use about advocacy contained in the interview data.

Table I about here

The table demonstrates several overriding trends. First, organizations are much more likely to undertake institutional than radical advocacy action. Many organizations say that they never take part in direct election related activities, though a minority do so often. They are unlikely to directly organize demonstrations or direct protest action, though again a minority do so. Relatively few organizations directly engage with the media except to express an opinion during media interviews (when approached by the media). On the other hand, almost all organizations participate in government sponsored consultations or advisory processes, prepare submissions for government enquiries, work directly with government departments and advisors in support of a particular issue, and advocate on behalf of specific clients (individual advocacy which may have systemic implications). Interestingly, almost all organizations sometimes or often contribute to research, conducting research, contributing data, writing research reports which support a particular issue.

Secondly, a number of organizations in the interviews expressed a further strategy for conducting advocacy, one not identified in the ATO categories (ATO 2005). These referred to forms of sector co-ordination, identified by the respondents as advocacy. The majority of organizations sometimes or often attended and resourced conferences and workshops with other third sector organizations, joined advocacy campaigns often under the leadership of peak organizations, and encouraged their membership to take various forms of participatory action.

Sharing information and resources in order to build strong networks within the sector was often cited as supporting advocacy work. A unified, knowledgeable sector was reported as enabling advocacy. Many interviewees discussed the value of organizing united media responses to government policy. Smaller organizations were less likely to engage with explicit, systematic advocacy work due to lack of funding, relevant skills, and the fear of government reprisal. Smaller organizations showed a trend of joining advocacy campaigns of larger organizations or tapping into their resources and good standing with the government in order to do advocacy. Some organizations saw that engaging and strengthening their own constituencies was a valuable way of doing effective advocacy work. Rather than traditional lobbying within a 'top down' approach, mobilizing user groups to advocate on their own behalf was sometimes referred to as important work. This approach requires consultation with constituents as well as providing training for them, for example, public speaking and media training.

While almost 100% of respondents stated in interviews that they consulted their memberships and constituencies, and enabled participation as an important form of advocacy work, overall averages from the checklist suggest that more focus was given to mainstream, institutional forms of advocacy such as *Dealing with Governments* and *Law Change*. While many organizations engaged in *News Media Outreach*, interviewees qualified that this involvement was usually self-censored in terms of criticising government. Somewhat contradictorily, less advocacy activity occurred in categories that would presumably involve participation with their user groups and the attention of the wider public, such as *Education/Educational Outreach*, *Demonstrations*, or *Protest/Direct Action*.

The qualitative data drawn from interview discussions reveal more about the specificity of advocacy action, and the language used by organizations in conceptualizing advocacy. This material is presented below.

The language of advocacy

“Of course the Minister and bureaucracy here have squashed that sort of language”

(Disability cluster).

“We have very interesting language and I think that language is very powerful in changing paradigms or reflecting change to paradigm” (Families cluster).

In defining advocacy, activities additional to the ATO checklist emerged that are not usually ‘named’ as advocacy in the traditional sense, but were interpreted as such by interviewees. Most interviewees talked about the political nature of the term ‘advocacy’. They avoided using it in negotiations with the government, but used it freely in the interview. As one organization explained, *“We don’t always shy away from the word. We want to celebrate and be supportive of advocacy as much as we can. We just don’t want to be unnecessarily stupid about the use of the word” (Environment cluster).*

New explanations of advocacy appeared under the emergent theme *Sector Co-ordination*. It was within this category that the involvement of user-groups and memberships often occurred. Sector co-ordination involves partnerships and coalitions formed across the sector to include peak bodies as well as service providers. Academic research was increasingly undertaken in partnership with organizations, sometimes directly involving constituent participation, and was described as strengthening the sector’s capacity for advocacy. Sector co-ordination was perceived as fostering a culture of advocacy at all levels of the sector, as well as enhancing collective ‘industry’ power and the ability to achieve support more broadly

in society. A common perception was that sector co-ordination could only be operationalized by a process of professionalization and de-radicalization.

De-radicalizing/professionalizing

“We don’t throw chicken’s blood at them” (Housing cluster)

“We are still Bolshi, but in a nice, I say professional way” (Housing cluster).

A strong consensus in the data was that advocacy strategies were predominately shaped within the context of an organization’s relationship with government. There was concern that the sector should contribute to *mature*, professional relationships with government where they could develop influence: *“I think really, you have to be an advocacy organization. That doesn’t mean throwing Molotov cocktails. It means constantly putting yourself in situations where you have the capacity to either inform public opinion or influence government policies” (Families cluster)*. This approach was a reflection both of a desire to establish constructive working partnerships with relevant departments and Ministers, but also a fear of punishment and government intent to repress overt political activity. The general belief was that organizations could not bring people’s views to the policy table without a seat. Developing or maintaining access requires *“advocacy with gloves on” (Families cluster)*, which is less about caressing government than *not* being bitten.

Most organizations were keen to distance themselves from historical ‘radical’ stereotypes of community activists: *“Those services that live and struggle and resist anything new and feel they have to justify their resistance on a regular basis, they are not providing the same outcomes for people and they are doing themselves a disservice” (Disability cluster)*. Part of

the process of de-radicalizing seems to be a concerted effort to regulate and professionalize the sector so that organizations and their leadership can communicate with government on an equal footing. An important aim was to gain the trust of government but also draw support more widely from the public: *“We have to be really cautious about public image and we have to keep working with these people” (Families cluster)*. There was a strong emphasis on developing solutions rather than confrontations in order to balance relationships with policy players: *“It is about being able to promote a contrary view in a way that doesn’t immediately create an oppositional environment” (Families cluster)*. However, it was also acknowledged that the government/sector relationship was in reality not equal and that the government took the patriarchal role.

Relationships with government

“The last thing I want non-government and government relationships to be like is like a bloody marriage” (Families cluster).

“We are always the poor cousin” (Families cluster).

The language used to describe relationships with government was rich in family metaphors where children do not speak unless they are spoken to. As it was explained, *“You know who’s been good” (Families cluster)*. A non-radical image and mode of behaviour was perceived as a protection against accusations of petulance and tantrum, which would undermine sector advocacy more publicly: *“I organize my sector and put something together that they will have to listen to. Behave like an adult, not like a child” (Disability cluster)*. It was generally agreed that working toward an independent, smarter, *grown up* sector would make it possible to take a position of authority in relationship with the government. While the parent/child relationship

was regarded as foundational, it was also considered temporary, in that the sector's knowledge was surpassing the generation that produced it.

There was a sense that organizations felt confident as 'experts' in their fields in comparison to governments' reactive and crisis oriented policy making skills: *"They must know at one level that they have less credibility, less experience, less content knowledge than the people they are dealing with and having to lord it over in some way"* (Families cluster). A belief that authentic expertise and knowledge of 'what works' has steadily developed in the sector through service delivery and research was apparent, and remarks about the sector's accumulated knowledge were many, *"I often see the NGO sector as an endless supply of expertise which they (the government) don't need to buy"* (Environment cluster). Comments such as this and, *"If we pulled out, the government would be in a pickle"* (Families cluster) imply awareness that knowledge is marketable. Confidence in knowledge growth was most evident in medium to larger organizations and within executive positions, but there was a concern that frontline workers and small organizations do not have adequate opportunity for professional development. Enabling access to 'professionalization' through training and education for those positioned further from 'the elite' was regarded as essential for effective systemic advocacy. Opportunities also seemed to be opening for interest groups to participate in skill building programs and were both implicitly and overtly cited as systemic advocacy.

A focus on more formalized production and distribution of knowledge across the sector was strong in the data and considered crucial in bargaining a more equal relationship with government. The overall consensus was that while government freely used and relied on sector expertise, it would only be acknowledged respectfully in the context of a professional relationship. That was not considered achievable if the sector retained its radical image. As one interviewee explained *"It is a natural part of social change movements that as they are*

taken more seriously, they have to talk to people quite in depth and help them through it if they can, as opposed to sitting on the sidelines and throwing rocks” (Environment cluster).

Sector Co-ordination

“So through the forums where we bring all the sector together – recently they decided that they would be advising all their boards not to...sign next year’s agreement unless the sector was involved in a process to ensure that the funding formula was going to be OK” (Housing cluster).

“You have to be in touch. One of the things I think about with advocacy agencies is that they need to keep in touch with service delivery and service delivery agencies need to be advocates because it very much puts a face on what is happening out there” (Families cluster).

One participant made the point that to the public, the lines between the community sector and the government are blurred both materially and conceptually. The independence of the sector appeared for the public to be constrained by government attitudes and operations. An increasing will to differentiate the sector from government and yet hold it responsible for public good was typified by comments such as “If they (the non government organisations) learned to play that game *and say when it doesn’t work to the government ‘Well of course it’s your fault because it’s your policy’*” (Families cluster) and, “*Let government own the decision they make and explain it rather than the advocate*” (Families cluster). In order to maintain independence, whilst holding government accountable for its decisions, strategies were to collaborate and organize across the sector, and to work toward the recognition of it as an important ‘industry’.

It was acknowledged by most participants that the sector is “*pretty split on some fundamental issues*” (*Families cluster*) and that competition for funds eroded a more unified response. However, a prevailing attitude, particularly of larger organizations in the sample, was that sector partnerships could be achieved despite the impact of the market environment on the sector and value-based differences about policy: “*One of the tricks is to find your coalitions and your alliances without wanting to buy everybody’s business and maintain your separate identity, but work together*” (*Families cluster*). Interestingly, coalitions were formed in order to undertake more effective ‘institutional’ strategies such as lobbying government and dealing with the media. In talking about institutional strategies, an interviewee explained that they aimed to engage government by “*putting proposals at the higher levels as opposed to simply sitting on a committee or talking to the bureaucracy. We will do that, but we would really see that as a point of departure for the process. The other aspect is that we try to get coalitions of groups together and get political pressure happening at that level*” (*Environment cluster*). One participant from the Housing cluster explained that, “*Public housing has such a bad reputation that usually the one story the media wants to run is undeserving tenants. Now, that’s not the story we want to contribute to, so very often there has been instances where between us and (other organizations) we work to pull a story, no-one contributes to it, and it goes dead*” (*Housing cluster*).

Appropriate accountability of the sector was cited as crucial to its sustainability and matched demands made by external supporters and detractors. Interviewees often commented on issues of accountability to the government and their constituencies. It was perceived that accountability required a strong sector and consultation with wider constituencies: “*Recognition of the independence and the importance of the non-government sector needs to be highlighted in that a real partnership is being of equal value and taking direction from community*” (*Disability cluster*). An awareness that smaller organizations required an

advocate was evident on the part of larger organizations: *“We are not advocating or lobbying on behalf of any individual but an industry. A part of the sector”* (Disability cluster).

There appeared to be a strengthening awareness that in a market driven environment, government reliance on the sector to deliver services and implement policy afforded the sector growing bargaining power: *“I think the sector sells itself short on how much power it actually has”* (Disability cluster). One participant explained that this awareness was only at the stage of inception in smaller organizations and that it was the responsibility of larger, more financially secure organizations to take leadership in fostering it, *“I think we are in a quite different paradigm and I think the non-government sector hasn’t woken up yet”* (Families cluster). There was a trend toward unified and organized responses to government exploitation and silencing of service providers. In particular, larger organizations were prepared to refuse contracts that stifled advocacy work and support smaller organizations to do so. Larger organizations in the sample were increasingly taking leadership roles in organising the sector. Alternately, participants discussed the need to strengthen the sector’s expertise and the government’s reliance on it through collaboration and coalition across a unified sector with credible professional knowledge and sound reputation.

Sector co-ordination was predominantly seen as an important way of sharing and generating resources as well as creating internal and external networks. For many organizations, delivering training and education generated funds which could be sequestered for advocacy work: *“So we do want to quarantine that money so we can say with confidence, this is our voice, nothing to do with you [the government]”* (Families cluster). One interviewee cited research, and education and training of members, business and the public as *“core business”*. This supported a *“healthy and robust social change movement that hasn’t been captured by the system [which] spends most of its time sitting on committees or inside bureaucratic*

structures, because it is able to take advantage of the opportunities for advocacy offered by the democratic system – the opportunities to create networks, and they are the systemic opportunities” (Environment cluster).

DISCUSSION

Much of the interviewees’ discussion was framed in terms of what they considered to be “successful” advocacy. There was an overwhelming consensus in the qualitative data that ‘elite’ strategies of advocacy; direct lobbying, participating in government controlled committees and preparing submissions was only moderately successful in changing policy. This view is reflected in other, similar, studies (Donaldson 2007; Schmid et al. 2008). Instead, the most effective advocacy strategies cited by participants were described as ‘campaigns’. Those perceived to be successful campaigns relied heavily on interest group participation and visibility to the wider public. At the risk of identifying organizations within a small sample, specific projects will not be named in this paper, however the strategies they employed included: initiating meetings between Ministers and clients in both public and private settings, helping clients to prepare and submit their own policy recommendations, including client groups in sector conferences, workshops, and seminars, training clients in self-advocacy skills, facilitating media space for clients to speak about their experiences, and partnering with universities in participatory research projects that included clients as co-researchers. These campaigns often involved partnering agencies and organizations and combined elite, empowerment and also mass strategies (Donaldson 2007).

A distinction needs to be made between participant definitions of effective advocacy and our concern with effective strategies. In the view of most interviewees, effective advocacy meant policy change; however we were also interested in the extent to which strategies involved the

participation of their constituencies and the generation of accessible democratic processes, as noted in the literature. An important observation is that these definitions do not compete in the analysis, and that advocacy resulting in policy change also consistently utilised the participation of memberships. This overlap represents a blurring between the binary debates of radical versus elite advocacy tactics.

In examining the effective advocacy strategies, changes to traditional modes of ‘campaigning’ emerge that mark a distance from a “culture of immediate action” (Cumming 2008, p. 383) in the third sector. More apparent is a propensity toward a model “of active (rather than radical) advocacy” where “incremental pressure and argument [is used] to achieve the desired outcome” (Dalrymple 2009, p. 188). For most interviewees, the acquisition and production of legitimate knowledge and expertise is crucial to this approach. Whilst “advocacy does not have any developed education and training” (Dalrymple 2009, p. 186), the successful advocacy campaigns identified in this study exhibit a sophisticated level of collaborative skill building, educative practices, and public relations expertise. It could be argued that the development and sharing of professional skills within coalitions across the sector enables new types of advocacy that are constituted through sector co-ordination, and which enhance both the development of democratic processes and the likelihood of successful policy outcomes.

Implications for relationships

“A lot of our advocacy has been around - Why don’t you come and have lunch with us Minister and see what people’s lives are like and hear some stories?. That is very powerful”
(Disability cluster).

It is important to note that successful advocacy campaigns evident in this study, for the most part, complied with the tacit rules of professional conduct and non-adversarial relationships with government that emerged in the qualitative data. Interestingly, it was explained by one participant that the ‘manners’ required to deal with government were followed even when no contractual constraints or resource dependency were at play. While the successful campaigns considered here often involved public challenge, advocates emphasised the importance of influence over attack. Dalrymple explains that “the radical advocate will challenge oppressive structures and therefore not necessarily use the mechanisms provided to promote radical change” (2009, p. 186). In terms of this study, the question is whether the mechanisms provided structurally are in fact efficient levers for social change, and whether those mechanisms are accessible to those in need of advocacy.

It is clear that while the most successful advocacy strategies emerging in this study involve relationships between various stakeholders, developing professional relationships *with government* was cited as primary advocacy work. On face value, concentrating advocacy efforts on elite strategies that involve professionalization could be interpreted as “a process that brings NGOs closer into line with the systems and workings of the state” (Cumming 2008, p. 374), threatening the independence of the sector and its capacity to advocate. In this analysis, it is theorized that while third sector organizations increasingly adhere to bureaucratic forms of professional accountability that may reinforce structure, they are at the same time attempting to develop an independent, professional community of practice through a process of internal sector structural change. Sector co-ordination, interpreted here as organizing, relies on mechanisms of professionalization that signify a “turn to knowledge production [that] may also be exploited by marginalized groups seeking entry into policy discourse” (Grundy and Smith 2007, p. 295).

Dalrymple explains that “a power based analysis of professionalism” can influence advocates to resist demands to professionalise. Distinguishable from statist, “technical”, processes of professionalization of the kind that Cumming defines (2008, p. 374), Dalrymple offers an alternate concept of professional advocacy with the potential to “create a new set of values through dialogue and a *community of practitioners* rather than impose a false commonality of purpose and values” (2009, p.186, original italics). Dalrymple’s comments are particular to child and youth advocacy as an emerging profession; however it is acknowledged more widely that the complexities of “knowledge production and professional expertise” as it relates to advocacy are not accounted for in traditional “narratives of professionalization and neoliberalization” (Grundy and Smith 2007, 312).

It has been shown in this paper that sector co-ordination is an emerging movement in the third sector with implications for representative and deliberative advocacy. Sector co-ordination entails the formation of coalitions and partnerships that are both internal and external. It appears that sector-co-ordination, which relies on a process of de-radicalisation and professionalisation, engages both open and closed advocacy strategies. Within the movement of sector co-ordination, the importance of maintaining access to ‘elite’ players behind closed doors is not abandoned, nor is the organization of often disparate and competing views. It seems instead, that sector co-ordination is about creating forums in which these negotiations can be openly discussed.

Through this study it can be posited that partnerships between third sector organizations that are specifically formed for ‘collective lobbying’ may ameliorate the risks of co-optation and corruption, because the coalition itself is where oversight, contestation, and negotiation of multiple interests can occur. It could also be argued that processes of professionalization and political education may not always be at odds with each other, if they are made accessible to

internal memberships and wider constituencies who may be connected through sector co-ordination. Optimally, these connections and interactions may enhance “a culture of advocacy which accepts non-conventional models of professionalization [that] may be the way forward” (Dalrymple 2009, p. 192). Sector co-ordination can be seen to work at multiple levels. Organizations undertaking advocacy in this study overwhelmingly referred to partnerships between the sector, governments, constituents, and academic institutions as having the potential to achieve an independent identity of the sector in the eyes of the public, increase bargaining power through collective knowledge production and solidarity and provide forums where deliberative democratic processes may be enacted.

Implications for scholars

Featuring prominently in both the checklist of advocacy activities completed by participants and in the interviews for this study, was the formation of research partnerships with universities, a pattern evident beyond the Australian third sector. Similarly, in a study that examined the tensions between militancy and professionalism in non-government organizations (NGOs), Cumming (2008) reports that over half of all French NGOs assert collaborative links with both national and international research organizations. It is possible that this trend may denote new claims and shifts in the research agenda, or alternately the reproduction of an elite mode of knowledge production that “requires the adoption of specific assumptions about how truth is produced” (Grundy and Smith 2007, p. 298) and excludes the views and experiences of the disadvantaged. In exploring the possibilities and risks of engaging with formal social scientific processes and claims, Grundy and Smith ask “In what ways does the use of such methods pose a challenge and help make visible a world that otherwise would not be visible?” (2007 p. 298).

These questions need to be answered by scholars concerned with the third sector's capacity to represent their constituencies via grassroots advocacy. Claims to representation are also challenged in the academy as they are in the third sector. Research that focuses on the relationships between 'elite' organizational and political players, at the expense of analysing their engagement with civil society, may counteract the potential for such engagement. Third sector organizations claim that participation in formal research is an important element of a unified, co-ordinated 'industry' with bargaining power. This involvement offers an opportunity for researchers to develop and implement participatory research practices in order to enhance the inclusion of the views of those who depend on advocacy and access to representation.

CONCLUSION

In the last decade, government push for partnerships between third sector agencies has been strong in Australia and overseas (see Cummings 2004). It would be interesting to speculate that this push has had unforeseen consequences of empowering third sector organizations toward an independent industry. It could also be that alternate ways of talking about advocacy have been shaped in response to government oppression, and that this talk in fact constitutes new and innovative ways of doing advocacy. New advocacy strategies may not be a move away from radical intent, but rather the image of radicalism constructed in neo-liberal discourse. Within the operations of sector co-ordination, spaces seem to be forming for both organizations and their constituencies to speak out. It is not possible to know from this study the extent to which sector co-ordination includes the voices of those they represent however, and therefore more attention and support needs to be directed to both understanding and enhancing it.

It is clear from this study and third sector literature more generally that overt political advocacy is repressed and in decline. An emphasis on forming relationships with government and the professionalization of the third sector as an ‘industry’ would seem on the surface to draw organizations away from grassroots advocacy work that could be defined as ‘activism’. A disavowal of radical tactics for the ‘manners’ of compromise and negotiation could be interpreted as selling out. The important question though, is not whether the third sector seat at the policy table is an honourable, legitimate, or effective one, but what is it, and whose views, are being brought to that table? It is important to understand how the expertise and professionalism of the sector is being developed rather than position it at odds to representative advocacy. It is also important to problematise the notion of government stakeholders as ‘elite’, however practical the term, and therefore separate to civil society. It appears this challenge is in some way being taken up by the sector.

Notes

^a According to Australian Taxation Office (ATO) guidelines organizations with a political purpose i.e. those whose primary purpose is to advocate for a political party or cause, to change the law or government policy, or to promote a particular point of view are defined as non-charitable organizations and thus are not eligible for tax exempt charity status. Organizations undertaking incidental advocacy activities to support a charitable purpose do not jeopardize tax exempt status. The ATO states that: “Charities can carry out political, lobbying and advocacy activities, where they are only carried out for the sake of, or in aid of, or in furtherance of the charitable purposes.” (ATO, 2005). **Charities - Political, Lobbying and Advocacy Activities.** <http://www.ato.gov.au/print.asp?doc=/>

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Table I

<p style="text-align: center;">ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES (Based ON ATO categories and emerging themes)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Total affirmative responses (percent of organisations)</p>
<p>1. ELECTIONS/ ELECTORAL POLITICS</p> <p><i>Encourage people to vote for or against a particular issue, candidate or party; organize elections forums/ discussions or information, or inform about party platforms/ policies to express support or opposition</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">13%</p>
<p>2. LAW CHANGE</p> <p><i>Provide expert evidence for policy related law suit; promote legal action for or against a particular issue</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">43%</p>
<p>3. ADVOCACY FOR CLIENTS</p> <p><i>Seeking policy change on behalf of clients/ users</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">90%</p>
<p>4. DEALING WITH GOVERNMENT (Federal, State or Local)</p> <p><i>Participate in government sponsored consultation/ advisory process; prepare submission to government enquiry/ review, or contact government staffers/ advisors or elected or appointed officials in support or opposition of a particular issue; seek support from government for innovative projects</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">98%</p>
<p>5. RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS</p>	
<p>5.1 Education/Educational Outreach</p> <p><i>Organize lectures/ presentations, prepare or print materials, use art or cultural activities, or distribute literature for or against a particular issue</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">35%</p>
<p>5.2 Background Research</p> <p><i>Research a specific problem or solution in support or opposition of a particular issue; provide data to illuminate a specific problem or solution; write a research report for or against a particular issue</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">69%</p>
<p>5.3 News Media Outreach</p> <p><i>Prepare opinion piece for print or visual media; send letters to Editors for or against a particular issue; express opinion during media interviews for or against a particular issue</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">56%</p>

<p>5.4. Demonstrations/ Protest/ Direct Action</p> <p><i>Organize or promote a demonstration/ rally; organize or promote campaign; contact parliamentarians; organize or promote boycott or petition</i></p>	<p>36%</p>
<p>6. SECTOR CO-ORDINATION</p> <p><i>Attend and resource conferences, workshops with other sector organizations; join/support advocacy projects of other/larger sector organizations; consult membership and constituencies, enable participation; organize unified responses to government and media; deliver sector training</i></p>	<p>67%</p>