

# REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORY OF ANZTSR IN AUSTRALASIA

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The Australia and New Zealand Third Sector Research (ANZTSR) 10th Biennial Research Conference of 2010 provided members with an important opportunity to pause, reflect on past achievements and current challenges, and determine a path forward. To this end, some of us met at Cairns in June 2010 to explore some of the key issues facing ANZTSR, ‘Scaffolding the Third Sector Field of Research’, and to plan a plenary panel for the second day of the conference in November. As part of that plenary panel, I took the opportunity to look back on our history as an organisation, and as a community of scholars.

We have, over the past twenty years, created a vibrant and productive community of scholars. But we have now reached a crossroads as a community and as an organisation. It is time to find a new way forward. As part of this process, we need to remember the historical context that has led us to where we are now. I have been concerned at how quickly our corporate history has been lost. Many of our current members, even the more active ones, have little idea of how ANZTSR started, or who was involved in developing it, and the creation of a vibrant third-sector research community. I think I am the only person who has attended every ANZTSR Conference to date. So I want to spend a few minutes reflecting on our collective journey to this point.

The early work of developing a research agenda for the third sector in Australia occurred within a few individual universities. The first research centre to develop was CACOM (Centre for Australian Community Organisations and Management), formed at UTS in 1990 by Mark Lyons and me. At KuringGai, a forerunner of UTS, we developed a set of training packages for third-sector managers, as well as an undergraduate teaching program. We became increasingly aware of the lack of resource materials suitable to the third sector. What little was available was mainly American, and targeted to the corporate or public sector. So we began a series of working papers at CACOM, presenting basic information concerning the third sector.

In the meantime, our efforts at UTS were closely followed by colleagues at QUT, notably Myles McGregor-Lowndes and Catherine McDonald.

They too began a series of working papers. Other colleagues had also been involved in similar work at Deakin University (Sue Kenny and Kevin Brown). We gradually became aware of each other's work and started to talk about a shared agenda.

In 1992, we at CACOM decided to hold a national conference. This occurred in April 1993 at UTS. I was the convenor of that conference, which was called 'Power, Politics and Performance'. ANZTSR was formally launched on 15 April 1993, as one outcome of that initial conference. ANZTSR was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee; it later became an association under NSW legislation. The initial board was chaired by (then) Associate Professor Mark Lyons and included Catherine McDonald (QUT), Associate Professor Myles McGregor-Lowndes (QUT), myself (UTS) and David Robinson (NZ). We held the next conference, the first under the aegis of ANZTSR, at QUT in July 1994. Since that time, we have held conferences every two years, with one in New Zealand for every two in Australia. This conference is the 10th biennial conference of ANZTSR.

So far, we have held conferences at UTS in Sydney (1993 and 2010); QUT in Brisbane (1994 and 2004); Victoria University in Wellington (1996); Deakin in Melbourne (1998); UWS in Sydney (2000); Flinders University in Adelaide (2006); and ITEC in Auckland (2002 and 2008). Each conference was chaired by a (different) active member of ANZTSR from the hosting university.

While the intention was that the chair and secretariat would move every two years, following the conference, that proved too difficult. The secretariat remained with CACOM in Sydney for several years, moved to Deakin in Melbourne for a while, and then back to Sydney (UWS). We have had a number of chairs: Mark Lyons was the founding chair, followed by Sue Kenny at Deakin, Rosemary Leonard at UWS, Kevin Brown at Deakin, and Jo Balderstone at Flinders. The retiring board in 2010 consisted of Jo Baulderstone (chair), Ruth Phillips, Suzanne Grant, Anne Abrahams, Garth Nowland-Foreman, Roumen Dimitrov and Rosemary Leonard. Membership of ANZTSR has remained relatively constant over the years, hovering at around 100.

The formation of ANZTSR provided the support and impetus for a number of major national research projects and ARC grants by our members. These included the Nonprofit Data Project (a move to database creation) as part of the John Hopkins project, involving the ARC and ABS, led by Mark Lyons. Other ARC projects have concerned various aspects of volunteering,

community development and advocacy, involving many different researchers and universities across Australia.

### **Newsletter**

An early challenge was how to maintain communication across such a diverse and dispersed community of scholars. We achieved this first by establishing a newsletter, to be published four times a year. I was the initial editor of this publication, followed later by Rose Melville (then at Wollongong), Wendy Earles (at James Cook) and Suzanne Grant (at Waikato). The *ANZTSR Newsletter* continues to be welcomed by members. It provides comments on current events of relevance to third-sector researchers, such as Productivity Commission enquiries, notices of national and international conferences, book reviews and summaries of the contents of recently published journals relevant to the sector.

### **Journal**

We launched our refereed academic journal, *Third Sector Review*, in 1995. I was the founding editor, working with co-editor Catherine McDonald. The lead article was a modified version of the 1994 ANZTSR Conference (held in Brisbane) keynote address by Margaret Harris, then at the pioneering UK Centre for Voluntary Organisations at the London School of Economics. She reflected on the importance but difficulty of maintaining interdisciplinarity. She commented that:

*Specialist journals on third sector research like this one have a crucial role to play in this respect. Not only does the publication of articles facilitate interchange of ideas, but also . . . people who submit manuscripts based on one discipline can be made aware of others who have tackled their subject area from a different base or using a different framework.*

She commented also on the importance of trying to bridge the traditional gaps between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ and between ‘academia’ and ‘the real world’. She talked about the dilemmas faced by third-sector researchers in seeking or accepting funding. She discussed some serious moral questions raised by her own experience in the UK, questions which continue to reverberate in Australia today. For example, she asked, ‘Would you accept funding to study the “capacity” of self-help groups from a funder who wished to see such groups take on responsibility for delivering mainstream welfare services?’ and ‘Would you conduct a study of the training needs of third-sector organisations if the funding came from a corporate sector donor known to favour the application of business-management skills to

third-sector organisations to make them more efficient and effective?’ and ‘Would you accept a request to do research from a government department which would give you no guarantees that they would allow the results of your research to be published?’

Initially, the journal was published annually, then twice a year. Over the years, other editors have joined the editorial group, many becoming managing editor. These have included Rose Melville, Melanie Oppenheimer, Wendy Earles, Rosemary Leonard and Ruth Phillips. Importantly, we have always strived to be inclusive of other disciplines and approaches within the third-sector research field. To this end, we have developed a series of special issues with guest editors to explore such areas. Examples of this are ‘Charity Law in the Pacific Rim’ in 2002 (guest editor Myles McGregor-Lowndes); ‘Co-operatives, Co-operation and the Social Economy’ in 2004 (guest editor Judy Johnston); ‘Sport and the Third Sector’ in 2006 (guest editor Russell Hoye); and ‘The Third Sector and Communication’ in 2008 (guest editor Roumen Dimitrov). Other special issues focused on key topics such as ‘Researching the Third Sector: International and Australian Perspectives’ in 1998 (Mark Lyons); ‘Third Sector as Voice’ in 2001 (Jenny Onyx) and ‘Doing Third Sector Research’ in 2003 (Wendy Earles, Kevin Brown and Sue Kenny). We have also attempted to reserve the bulk of one issue for the publication of papers that have arisen out of the previous ANZTSR Conference.

To date, *Third Sector Review* has involved literally hundreds of authors, reviewers and other contributors. Journal articles are increasingly cited in other publications and in government reports. The journal is recognised by DEST and is listed within *Ulrich's International Directory of Periodicals* (from 2003). From 2005, the journal was available online in full text (via the APAIS database). *Third Sector Review* now has agreements to be included on the following databases: Informit, GALE and EBSCO as well as APAIS. This has made our journal material available for use in online teaching, which is essential in, for example, courses run in New Zealand.

## **ISTR**

One other aspect needs to be mentioned. We at ANZTSR have been in the forefront of developing an international association. The International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR) was formed in 1992, with Mark Lyons on the foundation board. When he retired from that position in 2002, he was replaced by me for the period 2003–2006, and then by Wendy Earles for the period 2007–2010, Wendy also being named president elect for 2011–2012. So we have taken a very active role in promoting third-

sector research across the globe. For example, I was academic co-chair of the 2004 ISTR conference in Toronto and the 2006 ISTR Conference in Bangkok. More recently, Wendy Earles was academic co-chair of the 2010 ISTR Conference in Istanbul. We have also been very active in forming (under the leadership of Mark Lyons) and developing the Asia-Pacific regional network of ISTR. We have held biennial conferences in Bangkok, Osaka, Beijing, Bangalore, Manila, Taipei and (next year) Bali . Under the leadership of Sami Hasan, we have assisted in the development of an Asian network of scholars, established a database under APPIN and completed a major piece of research into *Comparative Third Sector Governance in Asia* with Ford Foundation funding and published by Springer. So we have had a high-profile developmental role in international third-sector research, especially for the Asia-Pacific region.

In documenting some of this history of ANZTSR, I am in awe of what we have achieved. From nothing, we have become a vital force for the promulgation of cross-disciplinary research in the third sector. This has been achieved by the combined energy of many people. Apart from those mentioned in this reflection, there are many others who have contributed in one way or another to the development of this field of research. However, we are now at a crossroad. Many of our early pioneers are now dead or retiring. We have commemorated the contribution of Mark Lyons at the ANZTSR Conference. Many of us need to move on, to hand over the reins of ANZTSR to a new generation of researchers. At the working lunch on the second day of the conference, many useful suggestions were made for future action within the organisation, suggestions that have been passed back to conference participants and the board. At the AGM, a new group of ANZTSR leaders was elected. There are many serious challenges to face. We need to find a way to maintain this community of scholars, but also to develop greater recognition for the third-sector as an important field of research. We need to seek new solutions, bring new ideas to the table and set new directions with a new group of lead researchers, both in academia and in the field. We need the wisdom and direction of those outside academia who both generate understanding and make use of the knowledge created by research. We are lucky to have so many dedicated researchers who are passionate about the importance of civil society and its organisations, and its vital role in a democratic society, and who recognise the importance of a sound knowledge base to underpin that role. The coming decade promises new opportunities and new achievements within this vibrant field of research.

**About the Author**

Jenny Onyx (PhD) is Professor of Community Management in the School of Management at University Technology, Sydney (UTS), and Co-Director of Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Research Centre. She is particularly concerned with issues of social capital and civil society, and has published widely in these fields, with over 100 refereed publications.