Migrant Capital. Networks, Identities and Strategies

Editors: Louise Ryan, Umut Erel, Alessio D'Angelo

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Chapter 5

Migrant organisations: embodied community capital?

Author: Alessio D'Angelo

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Migrant organisations: embodied community capital?

Alessio D'Angelo, Middlesex University

The notion of migrants' social networks has often been juxtaposed – if not conflated – with the role of migrant organisations (Jacobs and Tillie, 2004). These can be broadly defined as non-profit, migrant-led associations aiming to provide practical and social support to specific migrant groups. Sometimes taking the shape of 'community houses', with open spaces for socialisation, migrant organisations can offer a range of services such as legal and employment advice, training, language support, signposting, cultural activities, youth groups, older people clubs and so on. Having attracted a growing interest in recent years (Moya, 2005; Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005; Pries and Sezgin, 2012), migrant organisations are generally considered important means of support and integration for ethnic minorities, and particularly for first-generation and newly arrived migrants and refugees (Zetter and Pearl, 2000; Griffiths et al., 2005). Rex (1987) identified five different functions of such associations: overcoming isolation, providing material help, defending interests, promoting culture, and maintaining links with the homeland. As well as providing tailored services, these organisations have a major role in increasing the civic engagement and in reducing the social exclusion of their users: in other words, in strengthening their social capital.

Most of the literature recognises that migrant organisations are not inherently 'positive' in their effects. Some authors (Taylor-Gooby and Waite, 2013; Crow, 2005) have pointed out the risk that they can reinforce social division, foster ghettoization (Griffiths et al. 2005; Kelly and Lusis 2006) and create a condition of dependency to access services and exercise rights which maintains social disadvantage (Wierzbicki, 2004). In this respect, Schrover and Vermeulen (2005: 825) - in the introduction to a special issue of the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (JEMS) - suggested a distinction can be made between “organisations that aim at enforcing or encouraging integration and those aiming to distinguish organisational members from the host society”. However these two functions are not necessarily in opposition to each other and recent research (D'Angelo 2008; 2010; 2013) suggests that most migrant organisations do – or have the potential to do – both things at the same time.

By focusing on the case of Kurdish community organisations in London, this chapter discusses their role in fostering social capital at individual and community level as well as exploring the factors driving their development, networking patterns and strategies to access resources. The use of mixed-methods Social Network Analysis (SNA) to address these themes reveals the challenges of mapping

and conceptualising ethnic social networks as a complex system of shared-identities and differences, trust and conflicts and, in the case of community organisations, formal and informal practices.

The antecedents of migrant organisations

In 1991 Olzak and West argued that despite the consensus on the importance of migrant organisations "no theory has satisfactorily explained what conditions encourage their founding or what factors support or inhibit their continued existence" (1991: 459). In 2005 Schrover and Vermeulen argued that, although research had progressed, this observation was still largely valid. Whilst Cheetham (1985: 25) had notably explained the origin of ethnic associations in terms of "desperate needs, disillusion with statutory agencies and an increasing wish not to lose ethnic roots and identity", more recently migrant organisations have been conceptualised as "modes of adaptation to new social relationships and norms" (Griffiths et al., 2005: 13), with the suggestion that the extent to which immigrants cluster in organisations is a "measure of collectively expressed and collectively ascribed identity" (Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005: 824). In other words, these organisations would originate from networks of cultural, economic and kinship ties binding migrants together (McLeod et al. 2001) and, in this respect, they can be seen as an expression of both social and cultural capital.
These general theories, however, do not help to explain the different numbers and models of community organisations developed in different contexts and among different ethnic and national groups. As far back as 1964, Breton (1964:204) suggested three main factors behind this: the cultural differences with the native population, the level of resources among the migrant group, and the migration pattern. The first point has been subsequently criticised and, for example, Moya (2005) showed that immigrants who are culturally different from the host society have not necessarily set up more organisations than those deemed culturally similar (though Moya himself points out the difficulty in measuring similarity or difference in such abstract terms). In their above mentioned paper, Schrover and Vermeulen (2005) reaffirmed the importance of the inherent characteristics of each migrant community (including cultural identity, political orientation, education, and demographic and occupational structure) but also, and most notably, highlighted the role of the 'opportunity structure' in the host society. Specifically, they referred to the normative role of public funding which, though having an obvious positive effect on the organisational infrastructure, may "take the sting out of the organisations" (ibid.: 823), when specific conditions are attached to it (e.g. when prohibiting political activities). In an interesting study on migrant associations in three Italian cities (Milan, Bologna and Naples), Caponio (2005) - whilst noting that the size of a migrant group does not have a proportionate influence on the formation of associations - also argued that the

institutional opportunity structure "can favour the formation of immigrants' associations independently of group migratory pattern, cultural background or social capital" (Caponio 2005: 935). Similarly, in a study on Turkish and Surinamese organisations, Vermeulen (2005) discussed the importance of the opportunities offered by the city of Amsterdam to different immigrant groups, in conjunction with "the organisational traditions in the country of origin" (Vermeulen, 2005: 952) and the 'degree of transnationality' of the migration patterns.

Organisational networks as social capital

Migrant organisations often emerge as a 'formalisation' of existing community networks and, when interacting and co-operating with each other, have been described as an embodiment of social capital at community level (Fennema and Tillie, 1999; Griffiths et al., 2006). Although it is widely known that migrant organisations often communicate and cooperate with each other - both within and across ethnic groups - the study of the structures and functions of these networks has been fairly limited. Even more limited has been the investigation of the extent to which organisational networks represent a source of capital not just for the organisations themselves but also for the individual members and users.

One of the few methodologically aware examples is found in a study carried out in Amsterdam by Fennema and Tillie (1999, 2001) within the UNESCO-funded MPMC (Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities) initiative. Here the authors propose an approach to measuring the strength of an ethnic community – i.e. their social capital - through a number of operational concepts such as: 'organisational density' (the number of formal organisations of an ethnic group divided by the number of residents of the that ethnicity); 'organisational filling' (the number of affiliates to ethnic organisations divided by the number of ethnic residents); and 'institutional completeness' (the variety of activities and services provided by the organisations in relation to the needs of the community). Fennema and Tillie's study involved a survey of Turkish community organisations and their interlocking directorates, i.e. the linkages between organisations that come into being when one person serves simultaneously on the governing board of two or more organisations. These were then mapped and analysed using Social Network Analysis (SNA) and integrated with a small number of semi-structured interviews to investigate the rationale of networking strategies. Thus, their research centred on a mainly quantitative approach, with qualitative methods used to support and interpret key findings (this study is further discussed in the chapter by Herman and Jacobs within this book).

Apart from this example, the majority of studies aiming to analyse social capital and social networks in relation to migrant organisations has employed more qualitative methodologies. For example, a UK study by Griffiths et al. (2005) on refugee community organisations deployed semi-structured interviews to interpret the meaning of social capital from the perspective of refugee groups. Their approach considers social capital as fundamentally contextual and argues that "strict notions of measurement and quantification are particularly problematic when applied to the concept of social capital, as they necessarily tend to objectify social relationships and context-specific levels of meaning" (Griffiths et al. 2005:142). In essence empirical research seems to follow the classical dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative approaches. This contradicts the widely accepted interpretation of social capital as a multidimensional concept (Baron et al., 2000; Stone, 2011), made up of two related but analytically separable elements: 'structure' and 'meaning', usually conceptualised in terms of quantitative and qualitative dimensions (Fennema 2004). Hence, as argued in this book's introductory chapter, a holistic approach to social capital would require integrating complementary data collection techniques (Krishna & Shrader 2000; Grootaert and Van Bastelaer 2001; Edwards 2010) to understand not just what a network looks like, but also "what is going on within the network" (Crossley 2010:21).

A case study: Kurdish organisations in London

This chapter uses a specific case study – that of Kurdish community organisations in London – to analyse development factors and networking patterns with a mixed methods research approach. The findings presented here emerge from a number of interconnected studies I conducted between 2007 and 2013[1]. This research process raised a number of methodological issues, in particular on the limitations of 'traditional' Social Network Analysis (SNA) to analyse ethnic communities and organisations. Thus, the development of a specific, multi-method research framework represented a major element of this work. Overall, research included a whole range of methods: a review and analysis of secondary data; a survey of organisations using structured questionnaires; semi-structured and unstructured interviews with community members and officers; and participatory observations.
Kurdish communities were identified as a case study because of several aspects which make them of particular interest and relevance. Estimated at 30 to 40 million people throughout the world (Fornara, 2014), Kurds are widely considered one of the largest nationalities without a state (Bulloch and Morris, 1992; D'Angelo, 2003; Baser, 2011). Kurdistan – literally 'the land of the Kurds' – is

[1] These include D'Angelo 2003, D'Angelo et al. 2010, D'Angelo et al. 2013a, 2013b, as well as my doctoral thesis.

currently split across the political boundaries of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Over the last few decades, the oppressive treatment of the Kurds by the governments controlling their areas of origin (Curtis 2005), together with political conflicts and economic deprivation, have been major push factors in their migration to Europe and the United States. Kurdish people in Europe have often been described as a 'diaspora' (Wahlbeck, 1998) and Van Bruinessen (2000) highlighted the intimate connection between exile on the one hand and the development of Kurdish identity and national ideas on the other. As some authors have argued (Amersfoort and Boutylkova, 2009; McDowall, 1997), the establishment and development of Kurdish organisations abroad has played a major role in this process (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003).

In the UK, and in London in particular, London Kurds have been remarkably active in setting up community organisations serving the needs of Kurdish people as well as more 'main-stream' voluntary sector organisations. On average, Kurds are characterised by high levels of socio-economic exclusion (D'Angelo 2013) and in some instances have faced considerable difficulties in accessing statutory services and exercising rights. Kurds have a strong sense of identity (Curtis, 2005) but, at the same time, are highly diverse, speaking different languages, coming from different states with very different social and political environments, and with significant elements of tribal and political fragmentation. All these aspects are reflected in their community organisations.

The development of Kurdish organisations: reflecting changing needs and policies

Although the 1960s and 1970s saw some activism among the Kurdish students, intellectuals and political refugees who first settled in London, the history of Kurdish 'community organisations' as such began in the early 1980s, when members of this 'elite' set up a number of associations with cultural and political aims. In some cases, like the Kurdish Cultural Centre in South London, these organisations aimed to be - to use the words of one of its founders - an "embassy for a nation without a state". For a long time most 'community leaders' believed the main role of Kurdish organisations should be political, with a strong focus on international issues. However, with the increase in the inflow of Kurdish economic migrants, particularly from Turkey, and, later on, refugees, the Kurdish community had to deal – in the words of another community activist – "with more urgent and practical issues: housing, health, legal problems". Thus, various organisations were set-up with a stronger focus on service provision. The main ones, mostly serving Kurds from Turkey, included Halkevi, established in 1985, and the Kurdish Workers Association, established in 1989 (and soon renamed into Kurdish Community Centre). At the same time Kurdish communities in the UK continued to be characterised by a strong political orientation (Wahlbeck, 1998; King et al., 2008)

and many of these groups were set up with distinct affiliations with – or even as an emanation of – Kurdish political parties. This aspect is still quite visible in some community centres, where it is possible to see in prominent view not only general symbols of national ideals – such as maps and flags of Kurdistan - but also of affiliation with specific parties or political figures.

During the 1990s, with a further increase in the Kurdish population in London - and increased diversity within the community - Kurdish organisations multiplied and diversified. As King et al. (2008: 10) point out, the "progressive hardening of asylum rules", the restrictions in access to welfare and the removal of the right to work, made life increasingly difficult for Kurdish – as well as other – asylum seekers. Thus, housing and welfare needs of migrants and refugees were taken up by voluntary groups (Wahlbeck, 1999). On the one hand there were organisations focusing on specific areas of intervention, such as Kurdish Housing Association (1989) and Kurdish Disability Organisation (1992). On the other hand there were those working mainly at a local level, trying to address the whole range of needs of a specific population, often defined by the country or even region of birth. Notable examples include Day-Mer (1989), the Kurdish Advice Centre (1993) and the Kurdish Association for Refugees (1992). Over time, specific identities within the broader Kurdish population emerged and, for example, in 1994 a group of Alevi people previously active within Halkevi – most, though not all of whom, Kurds – set up a dedicated 'Alevi Cultural Centre' (also known as Cemevi). Those years also saw the establishment of the first major women organisations, some working specifically with Kurdish women, other more generally with women from Turkey or from Iraq. In this respect, the development of Kurdish organisations has been a reflection of the expansion and diversification of Kurdish communities in London, with individual organisations playing the role of 'visible faces' for minorities within this minority. At the same time, the increase in the number and types of Kurdish organisations during the 1990s and early 2000s was part of a broader trend in the UK which saw the strengthening of the so called 'Third Sector' and of migrant and 'Black and Minority Ethnic' (BME) organisations in particular. This reflected the increased prominence of issues of racial discrimination on the national agenda[2] - and effective lobbying by black and minority ethnic (BME) umbrella organisations (McLeod et al., 2001). Many grant making bodies and local policy makers actively promoted the development of organisations which could represent and cater for specific minority groups, de-facto implementing a structured model of 'multiculturalism'. For their part, Kurdish organisations in London were encouraged by

[2] Part of this was due to the impact of the inquiry, led between 1997 and 1999, into the racially motivated murder of black teenage boy Stephen Lawrence in 1993. The inquiry report (Macpherson 1999) highlighted major shortcomings in the conduct of the police during the murder investigation and opened a wider debate on institutional racism in the UK.

local stakeholders to increase their level of coordination and – ideally – to come together in some kind of consortium or umbrella group.

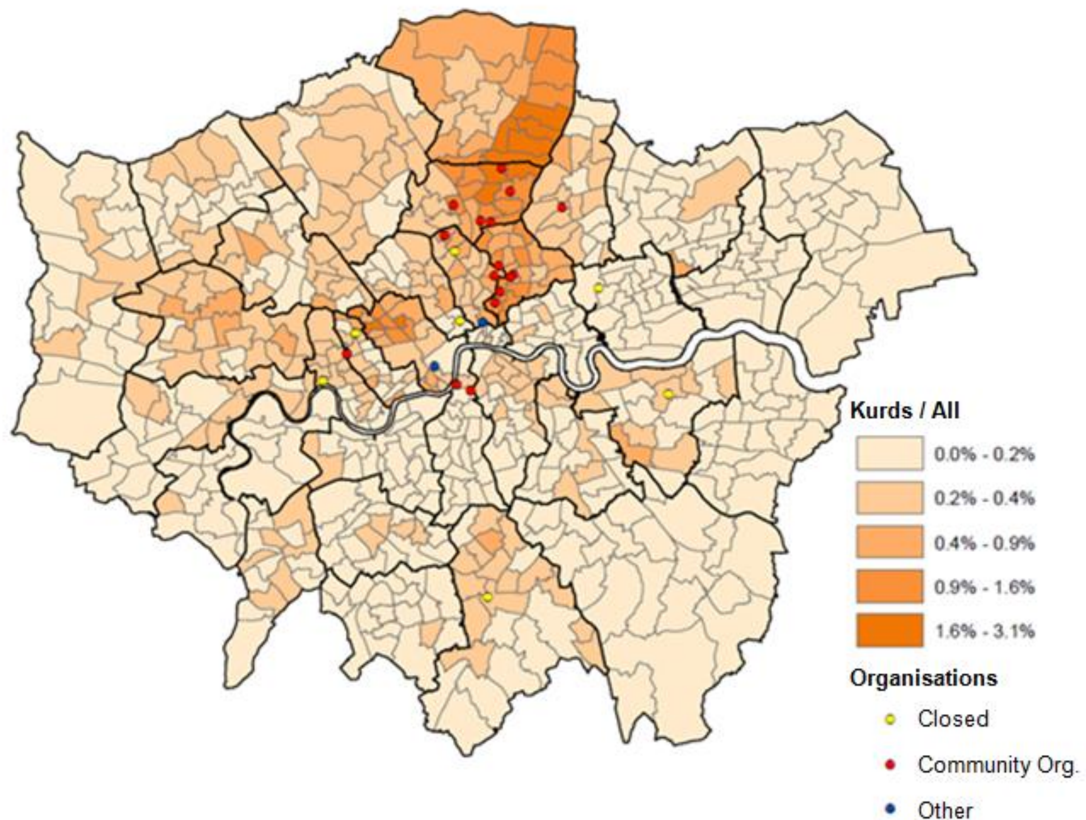
The 2000s, however, marked the beginning of the progressive reduction in the number of active Kurdish organisations. This was partially due to changing needs and dynamics within this particular community but, much more significantly, to the changing policy and funding environment within which they operated (Craig, 2011; D'Angelo, 2013). The first external factor was the trend towards the professionalisation and marketisation of the UK Third Sector. This included the shift from public 'core funding', which could be used with a certain discretion to sustain a whole range of organisational costs, to 'commissioning' of public services, which required to meet increasingly stringent criteria to receive funds tied to a very specific type of work identified within planning strategies set by the State. The second factor was the emergence - following the so called 'race riots' of 2001[3] and the alleged 'failure of multiculturalism' - of the so called 'social cohesion' agenda, with an increased emphasis on integration and the criticism of minority organisations for reinforcing divisions and resentment (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007). This shift in the public discourse – further reinforced after the 'London Bombings'[4] of 2005 - was marked by a major reduction of public and charitable funding for ethnically-defined organisations. The third factor, emerging almost in parallel, was the worsening of the UK economy since 2008: the impact of the recession among migrant and ethnic groups was disproportionately severe and was accompanied – through the Government's Spending Review – by cuts to welfare provisions and further reductions to funding for the Third Sector (D'Angelo, 2010; LVSC, 2011). As a consequence – and despite increased needs among the local population - several historic Kurdish organisations had to close or undergo major 'restructuring'.

Eventually, in 2013 there were about 10 medium to large Kurdish organisations left active in London, plus a number of smaller and more informal ones. Still, this number is relatively high and shows a considerable level of 'organisational density' (Fennema and Tillie, 1999). Using available estimates (GLA 2009) of around 50,000 Kurds living in London, it is possible to work out a density of up to 5,000 potential users per organisation. The map in figure 1 shows quite clearly, and unsurprisingly, how these organisations are mainly clustered in the London areas with a higher concentration of Kurdish people.

[3] The term refers to a short but intense period of tensions erupted in Bradford, Oldham and other parts of Northern England in Summer 2001. The riots represented the apex of tensions between British Asian communities and the White British population and escalated with the involvement of far right groups and the Anti-Nazi league. Some commentators saw the riots as the result of ethnic segregation and an indication of the failure of the British model of multiculturalism.

[4] On July 7th 2005 a group of UK born Islamist men carried out a set of coordinated suicide terrorist attacks in central London: 52 people were killed and over 700 were injured.

Figure 1 - Geographic distribution of Kurdish organisations and Kurdish residents*



Note (*) Concentration of people stating 'Kurdish' as write-in, ethnicity in the 2011 Census form. These data-set largely underestimates the actual size of the Kurdish population, but it offers a good indication of the main areas of residence.

The role of community organisations in the life of London Kurds

Organisational density per se gives little indication of how many Kurdish people actually use or are involved into these organisations – i.e. the 'organisational filling' (Fennema 2004). However local surveys undertaken within the London Kurdish community (e.g. D'Angelo 2013) confirm that large numbers of people still rely on such organisations to receive front-line services as well as to be able to access statutory provision and deal with the welfare system.

One of the most obvious reasons to explain the high uptake of these services is the limited English language proficiency among a significant part of the Kurdish population – not unlike other first generation migrant groups. Moreover, even for some members of the community who speak English perfectly well, there may be a lack of knowledge of the UK system, together with a more general sense that statutory services are not 'welcoming' and culturally appropriate. Quotes from individual service users make this lack of trust towards the public sector and 'the state' quite clear.

> *"I prefer our community centres. Language is not the only reason. I also trust them. I believe they will show their people the best way. They give the best advice to us. They never direct us to the wrong decision".* [service user, female, 55 years old]

Of course not all Kurdish people need or prefer to use these local organisations as service providers. On the other hand, also for many of those respondents who presented themselves as 'well integrated', Kurdish organisations played an important role in their social life. Indeed, for a large part of the Kurdish community, local organisations are first of all a space to meet other people with a shared background or identity.

> *"It is very important for me, at least I can say 'I have a place', you know there is a traditional saying 'there is a village somewhere far away and that is our village' but our village is right here"* [service user, female, 50 years old]

Related to this role in enabling socialisation – and inter-ethnic social networks - many respondents emphasised the specific function of Kurdish organisations in promoting and maintaining Kurdish culture and language(s) – counteracting the cultural alienation due to the migration experience. This confirmed Holgate et al.'s (2010:23) description of Kurdish organisations as 'repositories of Kurdish identity', both for first and second generations. The role of these organisations as hubs of community networking goes well beyond that of cultural reproduction. In fact, Kurdish organisations are used in many tangible, very pragmatic ways to establish connections, access resources and initiate activities. It is common for individuals to use well established community centres to look for a job, to seek informal advice from peers, and also as a forum to set up groups of common interest: political circles, music and arts groups, even businesses. Finally, organisations can be used as mediators in personal or business conflicts.

The variety of formal and informal functions played by Kurdish organisations indicate - to use Fennema's (2004) terminology - a very high level of 'institutional completeness', with organisations covering virtually every aspect of the social, economic and cultural life of the Kurdish community. Such a well developed system can be interpreted as an indication of a strong sense of 'community solidarity' and an effective formalisation of social capital.

However, this is not necessarily to say that all Kurdish organisation in London share the same agenda or act collaboratively with each other. Indeed, in order to assess the extent to which these organisations can be seen as an overall set of networks and trust that "enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam 1996:56) - in other words the extent

to which they represent and embodiment of community level social capital - it is necessary to analyse their networking patterns and practices and the effects of these on individual members and on the wider Kurdish community.

Mapping the organisational network

As noted in the introduction to this book, traditional Social Network Analysis (SNA) is based on the identification of ties between nodes using a rather positivistic approach: ties are either present or not (Crossley 2010). The fieldwork I conducted with Kurdish communities clearly showed how establishing the presence or absence of ties in a clear-cut and 'objective' way was not possible – and not even appropriate. In an initial pilot study (D'Angelo 2008) organisational ties were measured through established SNA techniques, in particular with a matrix-based questionnaire. Respondents where presented with a list of organisations from which to select those they have ties with, specifying the type of relationships from a set of given options (e.g. regular communications, shared staff, referred clients, formal partnerships, etc.). The differentiation between typologies of ties proved to be not easily understood by many respondents, who often ticked either none or most boxes. Likewise, community officers tended to report ties with as many other organisations as possible, though in some cases, when probed, could not give details about such links. In subsequent conversations, some participants pointed out that who their 'main contacts' are would vary in different circumstances, in relation to different activities and at different times.
An analysis of interlocking directorates was also conducted by reviewing official records from the Charity Commission, checking whether any trustee of Kurdish organisation was also on the board of any other organisation. The results of this analysis revealed that only a limited number of trustees sat in more than one board and mostly in non-Kurdish organisations. Overall, such 'directorate' links appeared to be mainly a projection of the social networks of a few active voluntary sector professionals rather than telling anything meaningful about networking between Kurdish organisations. On the other hand, the role of 'overlapping staff', beyond board members, later appeared as highly relevant. According to some interviewees, many individuals operate in more than one organisation at the same time or, for example, work as paid staff in one organisation and as volunteers in another. However these links are very difficult to map systematically. Organisations' coordinators and managers are not necessarily aware or up-to-date about these aspects, which a very high staff turnover makes even harder to grasp. In this respect, it is important to highlight that ties between organisations are developed not so much as formal organisational links, but rather as connections between individual actors within organisations. Nonetheless these affect circulation of

knowledge and even cross-organisational collaboration quite significantly. This highlights the limitations of SNA approaches that treat each organisation as an individual actor. As organisational studies from other academic areas indicate, organisations are 'messy entities' (Swanson and Holton, 2005): complex, dynamic and open. Thus, identifying one key informant who can respond on behalf of each organisation can be challenging and often misleading. Kurdish community organisations, in particular, are characterised by multi-layered structures, with conflicting agendas among different members and tensions between 'entrepreneurial', social, cultural and political activities.

Eventually, for all these reasons, I decided to explore the nature of organisational links resorting to increasingly less structured interviewing techniques and, more importantly, repeat interviews, observations and triangulation of information. In this sense, the sociograms presented later in this chapter are not the result of a strictly quantitative mapping – as widely done in formal SNA literature. Rather, they represent a descriptive tool, informed by the researcher's understanding and interpretation of networking processes and structures. The production of these charts encompassed an iterative process, with structural patterns informing questions about 'meaning' and with the results of qualitative research being used to interpret, but also to enhance and amend sociograms[5].

The structure and patterns of the network

Generally accepted (e.g. Field's 2008) definitions of social capital see it as networks underpinned by shared values and constituting a resource for the network's members. In other words, for social capital to exist the following elements are necessary: a group of actors connected to each other (i.e. a network); ties established and maintained on the basis of trust; resources embedded into the network and accessible by its members. Too often actors sharing same characteristics – particularly ethnicity - are equated to a 'community', with an equally untested assumption that they would operate through a tight system of reciprocated links of mutual support. Conversely, research of social capital through social network analysis should entail the assessment of each of its constituting elements, beginning from the investigation of whether the group of actors being researched - i.e. the study's population - can be treated as one network meaningfully.

The sociogram in figure 2a plots the main Kurdish organisations and their reciprocal ties as identified during the fieldwork. The ties in the graph are an overall summary of the strongest, most stable and frequent connections between organisations around the year 2012. A lack of ties does not mean that two organisations have no contacts with each other, but these may be less regular or not

[5] For other approaches to mapping and visualising social networks at individual and group level, cf. the chapters from Herman and Jacobs, Ryan and Mulholland, and Molina et al. within this book.

related to significant levels of cooperation or exchange of resources. By looking at the sociogram it appears that the 'Kurdish organisational network' is characterised by a moderate but significant level of 'density', i.e. the proportion of 'potential connections' in a networks that are actually in place (Nooy et al., 2005). Beyond the somewhat simplistic statements given by a few respondents – *"we all know each other"* - it actually emerged that several people within key organisations communicate with each other on a regular basis.

On the other hand, an in-depth investigation of the daily activities and practices of Kurdish organisations revealed a high level of fragmentation, the tip of the iceberg being the existence of two main 'components'[6]. The smaller one comprises the Kurdish Cultural Centre and the Kurdish Association, as well as smaller though very active associations such as the Western Kurdistan Association and (until 2012) the youth association KANGA. These are all organisations based in West London and working primarily with Arabic-speaking Kurdish people, from Iraq and Syria in particular. The second, larger component is made up of those organisations mainly working with Kurdish communities from Turkey, and involves both organisations which are exclusively 'Kurdish' - such as the Kurdish Advice Centre and the Kurdish Housing Association - as well as others which define themselves as 'Turkish and Kurdish' - such as Halkevi and Day-Mer - or 'Turkish-speaking' - such as IMECE. This component is characterised by a high degree of 'centralisation', in other words, there is a clear set of central nodes surrounded by a periphery of other organisations which are not linked to each other very much, but are connected to the centre.

[6] In SNA 'components' are sub-graphs where any vertex can be reached from any another (Nooy et al., 2005)

Figure 2a - Network of Kurdish organisations in London: main ties and location (circa 2012)

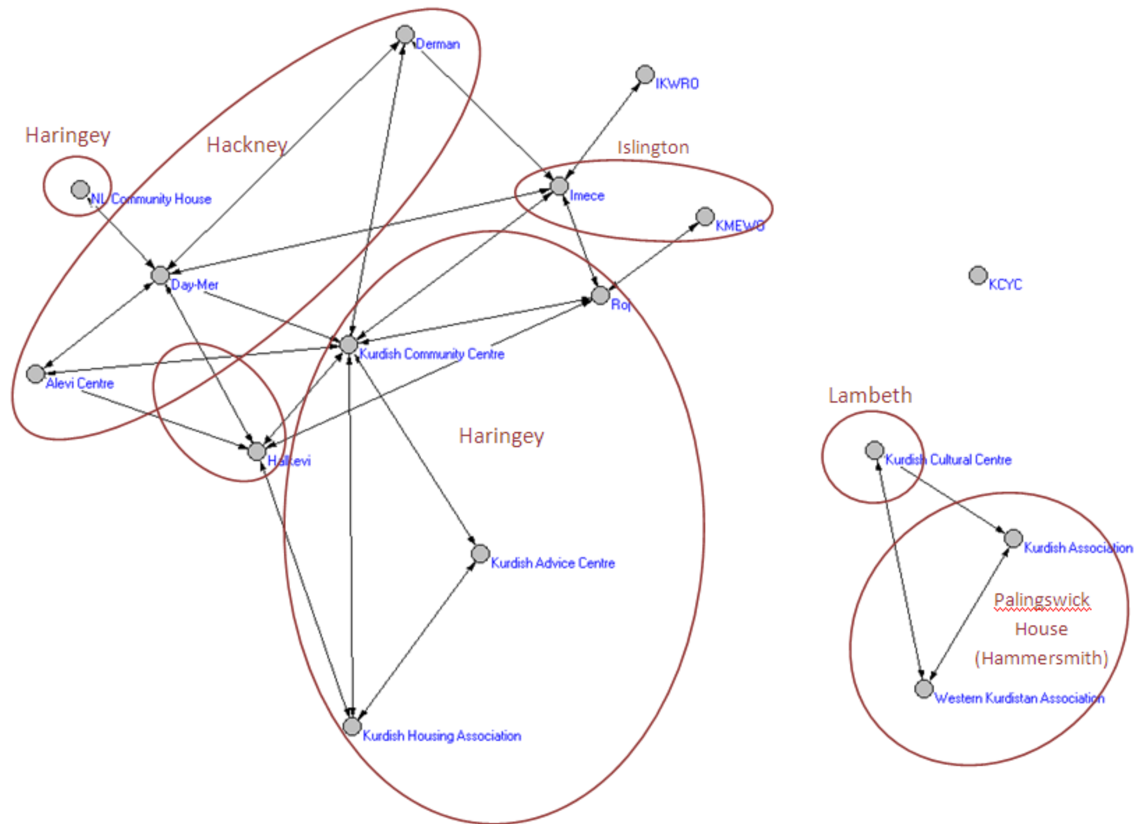
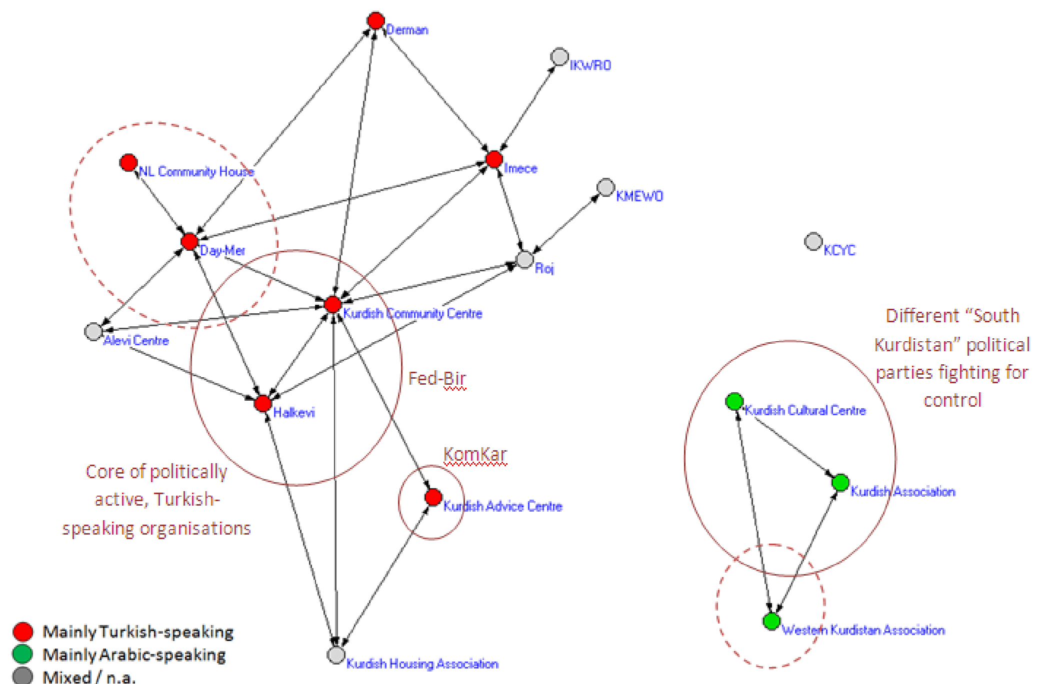


Figure 2b - Network of Kurdish organisations in London: languages and political affiliations (circa 2012)



The presence of a ‘Turkish’ and an ‘Iraqi’ sub-network is in contrast with the diasporic ideal which some community leaders declare to adhere to and to work for. It is interesting to note that the network structure in 2012 is significantly different from what emerged in a previous 2007 study (D’Angelo 2008), where some formal links between these two sub-groups were present. One explanation for this progressive fragmentation can be found in the weakening of ‘pan-Kurdish’ ideals among Kurdish activists, with the political debates increasingly concentrating on the ‘Peace Process’ in Turkey on the one hand and the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq on the other.
Political affiliations and orientations – though not an ‘official’ element of organisations’ identity anymore – still resonates quite highly among senior members of staff and have a considerable importance in determining contacts, levels of trust and cooperation (or lack of it) within each of the two components. (Figure 2a reproduces the sociogram highlighting the main political groupings as well as the language spoken by most users). On the other hand, a larger part of the networking patterns are driven by more pragmatic contiguities in relation to the work as voluntary sector service providers. Specifically, some Kurdish organisations have strong links with each other simply because they provide similar kinds of services, operate in the same borough or serve the same client-base – again a sign of the ‘professionalisation’ of the voluntary sector.

Cooperation and conflicts over access to resources

It is widely recognised – though not necessarily brought into empirical analysis – that it is not the presence of ties that matters, but what they represent and what resources flow through them (Wallman, 2005). Although many Kurdish community officers regularly communicate with each other - either formally or informally - this does not automatically translate into joint activities, coordination or shared resources. In some cases interviewees reported frequent exchanges of information and advice (mainly by telephone) on organisational issues, for example on how to deal with a new piece of legislation or how to conform to new requirements from funders. However, the activity more often mentioned by interviewees when talking about organisational links was the signposting of clients to each-other’s advice services. In terms of actual joint work, one of the few very successful areas of collaboration was that of cultural events such as the Newroz (New Year) Festival or the London Kurdish Film Festival, also through the sponsorship of local ethnic businesses.
Apart from this, relatively little is done in terms of structured partnership work, for example joint service planning and delivery, coordination on local interventions or shared use of material resources. This lack of cooperation is widely lamented by many community activists, who provided

two main explanations. Firstly, they pointed to lack of time and the fact that most senior members of organisations work part-time or on a voluntary basis. Secondly, they highlighted the resistance of some members of management boards to cooperate with other groups or individuals because of personal or professional enmities. Indeed, the interactions between Kurdish organisations appeared to be strongly marked by conflicts on a whole range of levels: political differences, divergent visions or interests, personality clashes, competition for external representation and resources and so on. Officers would sometimes refuse to cooperate with other organisations or with particular individuals with the reasons given ranging from divergent strategies to negative personal experiences in the past (this can sometimes mean 20 or more years in the past). Many of the partnership initiatives unsuccessfully attempted in recent years failed because of discussions on who should take the lead – e.g. as the many applicant for a funding application. This phenomenon - not unusual in other ethnic communities - is particularly pronounced among Kurds and was often attributed to the cultural and historical characteristics of the Kurdish diaspora. Inter-organisational conflicts do not just lead to lack of cooperation: some organisations have been openly obstructive with each other - e.g. trying to influence elections for board of directors or even taking legal actions against each other, such as reporting irregularities to the Charity Commission[7] or funding bodies. Some of these divisions are also found among users, who would not trust or 'like' the services of particular organisations because they are seen as ideologically distant, or because of the bad publicity they may have heard within their personal networks.

Ideologies aside, it is access to funding which often represents the main driver of organisational strategies. In this respect, the multiplication of Kurdish organisations during the 1990s and early 2000s which, as discussed above, could be seen as a reflection (some respondents talked about 'embodiment') of the identities of different sub-groups, was also an opportunity for specific groups or individuals to attract and compete for grants. Overall, this challenges the argument (Fennema and Tillie 2001) that the number of ethnic organisations is directly correlated to the level of community social capital. As one respondent argued:

> *"We've got so many organisations because we are divided. It's a waste of resources!"*
> [Kurdish organisation coordinator]

[7] The Charity Commission is the official body which regulates registered charitable organisations in England and Wales.

The reduced availability of funding in most recent times made such a large number of groups unsustainable. The effects of this scarcity have been complex, in some instances sharpening competition, in a few others calling for collaborations. Indeed, the early 2010s have been marked by a limited but growing number of successful partnership initiatives, including the submission of joint funding applications for the provision of professional services such as welfare advice and educational support – mainly under the initiative of younger generations of Kurdish community officers, often less embedded in political ideology and long-standing 'feuds' and keener on a more ‘professional’, if not entrepreneurial, approach to community work.

Another aspect emerged quite clearly from the fieldwork is that, for most of these organisations, connections with other Kurdish groups are certainly a source of organisational social capital, but not necessarily the main one. Strategic links with ‘non-Kurdish’ voluntary sector organisations, statutory services and local authorities emerged as a fundamental asset in terms of access to information and resources – and more generally to achieve organisational objectives. In fact, the relative position of individual organisations within the broader ‘Kurdish network’ is strongly correlated to their ability to establish, maintain and use bridging capital (cf. this book’s introduction). Organisations rich in bridging capital are more able to navigate the mainstream system, being ahead of the game in terms of changing policies and funding opportunities. In this way, they can secure a margin of advantage and exercise a leadership role, attracting other organisations around them in partnership activities, running campaigns and more generally setting the ‘Kurdish agenda’. Their position of dominance also allows them to act as gatekeepers for other organisations which want to benefit from the same weak ties (for example preventing or helping access to public funding or participation in meetings with public sector officers); a role which in Social Network Analysis is usually conceptualised as 'in-between centrality'.

Whilst on the one hand this quest for legitimacy and external recognition is a major element in the competition between Kurdish organisations, on the other it forces community officers to ‘think networks’. Ideas such as 'social networks' and 'cohesive communities' have become so popular in the public and third sector discourse and practice, that individual organisations are constantly expected to provide evidence of their ability to pull together and lead on a network of organisations; for example, when applying for funding, by providing a long lists of partners. Such ability to demonstrate membership - or ownership - of a network becomes a sort of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) which has value in its own right, often completely separate from any flow of actual resources. This represents an interesting exception to Anthias (2007) argument that social capital

should be recognised only in presence of mobilisable resources, whilst discarding the relevance of 'ties for ties sake'.

Rethinking community organisations

As this case study clearly exemplifies, although migrant organisations can emerge as the formalisation of ethnic-based social networks and a direct response to community needs, the central role of the opportunity structure challenges the idea that they are just the direct product of cultural specificities and pre-determined and coherent collective aims. In particular, once an organisation is established, it tends to become an actor in its own right, taking 'a life of its own' and aiming to become self-sustained, expand and develop. This can happen in cooperation or in conflict with other organisations and can be more or less compatible with the general needs of the broad community of members and potential users. Likewise, the structures and patterns of organisational networks are not merely driven by abstract shared values and idealistic trust, but are largely due to common objectives and personal links, as well as being influenced by the expectations and direct pressures of external actors such as local policy makers and funders.

It is undeniable that Kurdish community organisations play a major role in fostering the social capital of individual users and, for many, represent one of the key places where support can be obtained, social links are established and resources can be mobilised (Anthias, 2007). However, the role of inter-organisational networks is more complex. Tillie (2004) theorised that members of a highly connected organisation can access the resources of the whole network and therefore assumed that organisational social capital impact positively on individuals. In relation to the Kurdish case study, this appears to be true only to an extent. Indeed individual users are signposted by one organisation to the other, thus benefiting from a broader range of services even when initially accessing only one community centre. Moreover, the circulation of information and other resources among organisations creates stronger organisations better placed to support their users. On the other hand, the conflicts between organisations may have a negative impact on individual users and on the wider community, creating dispersion of resources, duplication of services and, crucially, reproducing and enhancing divisions and conflicts between different subgroups within the broader Kurdish population. Since resources embedded in the organisational network flow in a complex and unequal way, conflating ties with resources can also be misleading. These are also the structures through which conflicts are developed and channelled. In other words, Kurdish organisations are

embedded in a tight network producing both resources and constraints - and characterised by both trust and conflicts.

Thus, in general terms, whilst ‘organisational social capital’ - i.e. the ability of an organisation to mobilise resources embedded in its network - has the potential to benefit individual users and the community as a whole, this is not necessarily the case and requires to be assessed on a case by case basis. In this respect, research conducted with London Kurdish communities has also highlighted the limitations of traditional and highly formalised Social Network Analysis techniques in capturing all the complexities and nuances of the life of migrant organisations and clearly showed the advantages of a mixed-methods approach which combines the exploration of network ‘structures’ with a highly contextualised investigation of their deeper and sometimes contradictory ‘meaning’.

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