RISK AND THE BIG SOCIETY

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Acknowledgements

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Foreword

Could popular dissatisfaction about risk management 'gone mad' be transformed into popular – citizen-up – forms of risk management? That's the intriguing possibility raised by Ben Rogers in this provocative and timely paper. For at least the last decade, our national conversation about risk has been marked by frustration. Academics have probed the causes and consequences of our increasing wariness; the media has lambasted our timidity while fanning our fears; politicians have promised to step back while assuring us that they are fully in control; and yet little seems to have changed. This paper sets out reasons for thinking that substantive change may now be possible – at least in some policy areas – and may indeed be essential if the devolved and diversified models of public service ownership and delivery envisaged by the Coalition are to become the norm. In a Big Society, or anything resembling it, the management of risk will also need to be devolved and diversified.

When the Conservative-led Coalition came to power, the Big Society was promoted as its vision for a fundamentally different set of relationships between the state, services and citizens. The detail might have been elusive, but the broad-brush characterisations were clear enough: a Nanny State had weakened our capabilities for self-help and mutual assistance; in its place, a Big Society was needed that would enable individuals, families and communities to take greater ownership of their own well-being, and that of others. And a key reason why Nanny's care had proved enervating was her overly-cautious attitude to risk. A Big Society would be more risk tolerant, and more grown up. In the words of Jesse Norman: 'Policies that increase the scope for human self-expression and risk-taking will reduce social frustration and increase well-being.'[1] So the Big Society set out to enable more risk taking. More fundamentally, it set out to change the ownership and control of public services so the control and responsibility would sit closer to service users.

Of course, as we enter mid-term, few would claim that the Big Society has made great headway. Fundamental issues around accountability and financial risk – let alone questions about equity and capability – are still unanswered (Big Society Parliamentary report).[2] Conceived in optimistic times, but launched into a world defined by economic storms and public spending cuts, it has floundered, badly compromised by basic design flaws.[3] Nevertheless, Ben Rogers is surely right when he argues that the Big Society should not be seen as a solitary expedition, but as just the most recent attempt to leave behind the delivery state and lay down a course for the post-bureaucratic state. These are ambitions

1. Norman, J. (2010), *The Big Society: the Anatomy of the New Politics*. Buckingham: University of Buckingham Press, p.76

2. See, for example, the Public Administration Committee's recent disquiet over accountability for the expenditure of public money: PASC, (2011) *The Big Society*. London: Stationary Office www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmpubadm/902/902.pdf

3. Kippin, H and Lucas, B, (2011), *From Big Society to Social Productivity*. London: RSA – 2020psh.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/RSA_BigSoc_A4_04.pdf

that are shared across the political spectrum, springing from critiques of traditional welfare models that are becoming more, not less compelling as the economic storm clouds darken. In their broadest terms, they set the direction of much of the public service policy making we see today. So whatever the Big Society's ultimate fate, top-down models of service design and delivery will continue to be challenged by localised, co-productive approaches, and this process will inevitably push questions about risk to forefront.

As agency, authority and modes of production change, so too will our models of risk. If localism and service diversification mean that the buck will stop less frequently in Whitehall, stopping instead in town halls, community centres, public service mutuals, or even with personal budget holders, how are these new risk owners likely to react? What will be their risk tolerance? And what techniques for risk management – avoidance, sharing, or mitigation – might be available to them? Ben Rogers focuses on a particular sub-set of risks – what he calls 'risks that keep managers awake at night' – and concentrates on what new, 'bottom-up' ways might be developed for managing them. He offers no silver bullet, but instead makes the case for further experimentation at a number of different levels, ranging from adapting design of public spaces in order to encourage greater mutual responsibility, to greater training or mentoring for volunteers in charge of services, to greater use of social media to enable reporting of concerns or assessment of quality.

Such experiments may be controversial. Their critics will, with some justification, point to a further dilution of the state's responsibility to its citizens. But that would be to assume that our expensive, top-down model, bound up with 'the risk management of everything'[4] has delivered good outcomes for citizens or could do so sustainably in the future. Ultimately, public services should be judged on the extent to which they enhance the autonomy, capability and resilience of citizens and communities. By these criteria, services that do not involve citizens and communities more actively in understanding and managing risk will have failed in one of their primary purposes.

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4. Power, M. (2004) *The Risk Management of Everything*. London: Demos

1 Introduction

The coalition government has committed itself to rolling back bureaucracy, and handing more power to local services, charities and citizens. But this policy shift brings risks. Reforms to the Vetting and Barring Scheme, for instance, which have curtailed its planned reach, or the lifting of reporting burdens on social workers, could expose children and vulnerable adults to abuse. Moves to encourage people to get involved in policing their local neighbourhoods and taking a stand against crime could expose them or the people they 'police' to attack. There are clear risks in devolving local services to volunteers, including health and safety risks and risk of fraud.

While decision-makers in public services and voluntary groups take these risks very seriously, there has not been much systematic exploration of them or creative thinking about them among policy makers and service providers.

Yet managing these risks and addressing perceptions of risk is important if Big Society policies are to succeed. This paper explores the nature of the risks, real and perceived, courted by Big Society-type reforms, and the potential of practical 'bottom-up' strategies to help in addressing them. What can be done, for instance, to address the dangers of paedophiles abusing the opportunities opened to them by the rolling back of the intended scope of Vetting and Barring Scheme? What reasonable steps can we take so that volunteers in charge of local services keep buildings and service-users safe? What can public servants do, short of keeping control of funds themselves, to prevent publicly funded community groups misusing funds? This paper is asking, in effect, to what extent can some of the key risks associated with the civil renewal or Big Society 'agenda' be addressed in a way that is true to the bottom-up spirit of this agenda?[5]

Looking forward to my conclusions, I argue that there is, of course, no simple recipe that will allow bottom-up handling of these risks. It is hard to be precise about which work when, or which are most effective. Policy in this area is much more of an art than a science. And even the best laid plans and approaches are far from fail safe. We need to combine top-down with bottom-up approaches, while also learning to recognise that risk itself is a fact of life.

At the same time, I suggest there are a number of promising avenues by which we could do more to manage risk bottom-up. These include doing more to skill-up the public to manage risk themselves; continuing to improve the way we plan and design our environments; and harnessing

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5. Though New Labour used the language of 'civil renewal' and 'active citizenship" and the Conservatives 'the Big Society' there are strong continuities between the two government's approaches in this area.

the power of the internet, which, as well as making it easier for us to connect with each other, also allows us to share knowledge about the trustworthiness of the people with whom we connect. Much has already been written about internet enabled 'peer review', but, I argue, we need to do more thinking and experimenting about its application to managing risks in public services and voluntary organisations.

More systematic investigations of these approaches could contribute to supporting civic renewal and public service reform.

2 Focus

This paper has two distinct but related aims. First, it seeks to draw attention to what seems a neglected set of questions in an otherwise familiar debate about risk and regulation. In short, it argues that thinking about regulation, at least as it applies to public policy, is too often framed as a simple choice between risk and regulation, with little thought given to non-regulatory ways of managing risk.

At the same time, this paper also seeks to understand the potential in managing a particular set of risks – the risks associated with the Big Society – in a more bottom-up, participatory way.

For the sake of manageability, the project will focus on risks associated with three key Big Society policies

- **Volunteering**: risks associated with encouraging greater volunteer involvement in running public services
- **Safeguarding**: risks to children and vulnerable adults in rolling back the Vetting and Barring scheme as it applied to volunteers
- **Policing**: risks associated with encouraging people to play a greater role in policing crime and ASB (Anti-social Behaviour)

Moreover, among the risks associated with these policies, we are particularly interested in risks that would result in serious harm to individuals or serious reputational damage. Examples include:

- Volunteers harming children and vulnerable adults
- Volunteers stealing and defrauding
- Volunteers endangering lives and property through disregard of health and safety
- Civilians who 'intervene' getting hurt or even killed
- Civilians taking the law 'into own their hands' (vigilantism)

Though these risks might at first sight appear fairly heterogeneous, they do in fact share a certain underlying feature. One way they might all be addressed would be through the fostering of greater vigilance and engagement on the part of citizens and volunteers. If the volunteers running a local community project could be relied upon to take the proper steps to make sure premises were safe and secure or other volunteers trustworthy, for instance, or if citizens knew better how to handle conflict and respond to crime, risks associated with the Big Society-type policies would be significantly lessened.

I focus on these risks because it is clear that they loom particularly large in people's calculations about how far to push the Big Society, and animate some of their reservations about it, and because (relatedly)

these risks are particularly hard to manage. These are the risks most likely to keep managers in the public sector and charities up at night.

The two aims of this paper are intended to be mutually supporting. The focus on one particular set of risks is intended to serve as a case study that will help in exploring the broader question about the possibilities of managing risk bottom-up. The reason for thinking afresh about risk and regulation is to help us better understand the possibilities and limits to civil renewal or Big Society agendas.

The Big Society agenda

While the Big Society policy agenda is closely associated with David Cameron's Conservative party, the concerns and values underlying have, I would argue, had champions in all parties. Despite its reputation for statism, New Labour showed a sustained if not always very effective interest in fostering 'active citizenship' and 'civil renewal', with David Blunkett and his mentor Bernard Crick leading the way. More recently both the RSA and 2020 Public Services Commission, have emphasised the importance of engaging and empowering citizens, service users and voluntary groups.[6] Sir Peter Hall, to take another example, has drawn attention to the extent to which Big Society agenda echoes ideas of Labour thinker and social entrepreneur Michael Young.[7]

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6. Commission on 2020 Public Services (2010) *From Social Security to Social Productivity: A Vision for 2020 Public Services*. London: 2020 Public Services Trust, Available at clients. squareeye.net/uploads/2020/documents/PST_final_rep.pdf

7. Hall, P. (2011) 'The Big Society and the evolution of ideas', *Town & Country Planning*, 80 (2) pp.59–60

3 Policy context

Against the background of perhaps the most dramatic spending cuts the welfare state has ever known, the search is on for less bureaucratic ways of doing things. Since its creation, the coalition government has committed itself to a range of policies aimed at shrinking the 'dead hand' of the state and fostering more participatory approaches to local services, including 'free schools', additional encouragement for voluntary action, the rolling back of the Vetting and Barring scheme, and encouraging greater citizen participation in policing local communities. Even the Labour Party, the most state-friendly of the mainstream Westminster parties, has long-shown a strong interest in 'civil renewal' and active citizenship, though this has arguably sharpened since the party's defeat last year (see for instance the revived interest in mutualism and community organising).

Yet not much thought has been given to exploring the nature of the risks the Big Society will run, or how they might be managed. David Cameron asked Lord Young to identify unnecessary health and safety regulation, not less burdensome ways of doing the job that this regulation does.[8] Nick Clegg launched a "Your Freedom" website inviting people to give their ideas on laws and regulations that should be repealed, but he did not invite them to suggest ways that any risks that will result might be managed.[9]

It is important however to stress that this way of understanding regulation and risk is not limited to the present government.

The last Labour government set up a series of commissions designed to help legistators, ministers and civil servants achieve a constructive balance between regulation and freedom. These included The Better Regulation Task Force (1997–2005), The Better Regulation Commission (2006–7) and the Risk and Regulation Advisory Council (2008–9).[10] In a related initiative, the RSA itself set up a major Risk Commission, chaired by Sir Paul Judge, with the aim of exploring risk in the round and 'fostering a more informed, rational attitude towards risk both in the UK and internationally'.[11]

These various bodies found their context in what many people felt were increasingly problematic attitudes toward risk, regulation and responsibility in the UK. On one hand, there was and is widespread concern that we have become too risk-adverse and over-regulated, that the health and safety industry had somehow got out of control; that we are too quick to blame someone for everything that goes wrong; that children's

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8. Young, D. (2010) *Common Sense, Common Safety*, HL, HM Government, Available at www.barbour-ehs.com/media/94937/lord%20young%20report.pdf
9. yourfreedom.hmg.gov.uk/
10. www.thersa.org/projects/past.../risk-commission
11. *Ibid*

lives in particular, have become over-managed and danger-free. For some thinkers – Frank Furedi, author of *Paranoid Parenting* and *Culture of Fear,* is an example – almost everything that is wrong with our culture is expressed in the way bureaucracy has taken over our lives and undermined freedom and responsibility.[12]

At the same time, however, as politicians, the media and the public complain about over-regulation and intrusion, they continue to respond to serious accidents or crimes – especially crimes against children – with a demand that someone must be to blame and that government do something to stop anything similar ever happening again. It is telling that two of the most common complaints made of Gordon Brown's government were that it had failed to do enough to regulate the City and avert the banking crisis, and that it was too interfering. Complaints that government has failed to strike a proper balance between risk management and freedom, and is unnecessarily bureaucratic and/or authoritarian, have been made in reference to an extraordinarily wide range of issues, including workplace health and safety policy, child protection, employment legislation, public service reform, crime and terrorism policy and of course, the regulation of financial services.

The Better Regulation Task Force, its successors and associates produced good and constructive work, helping improve the quality of government regulation, challenge 'regulatory creep' and foster a wider public understanding about the trade offs between freedom and control. Yet their interest in and thinking on bottom-up non-regulatory ways of dealing with risk was limited. Indeed, they scarcely explored this terrain at all.

Academic theorists of risk and experts specialising in risk in different domains – crime, child protection, transport, etc – have similarly not tended to show much interest in non-regulatory or non-legalistic approaches to managing risk. My survey of academic and specialist writing on risk didn't reveal any very extensive research in this area. My interviews with experts in crime, child protection and volunteering similarly suggested that there was little work or thinking of a systematic kind on how to manage risk in a more participatory way. (The one partial exception to this is road safety, of which more below).

In short, debates over risk and regulation seem to be played out between three positions of a standard kind.

The pro-regulator. The pro-regulator points to all the good things that regulation can secure. People tend to complain about red tape and intrusiveness, he points out, until something goes wrong, when their instinct is to complain that authorities should have done more to prevent it. There are many examples of new regulation that were fought bitterly, only to become widely accepted (motorcycle organizations fought legislation to make riders were helmets, but no-one is currently fighting for its repeal). Regulation is the price we pay for living in a safe and civilized society. It has a particularly important role in protecting and helping less powerful individuals and groups.

The risk enthusiast. The risk enthusiast, by contrast, argues that we have become too risk adverse. We have developed an infantile, paranoid culture

12. Furedi, F. (2008) *Paranoid Parenting* 2nd ed., London: Continuum

that see risks everywhere and takes the view that all risk exists to be eliminated. As a result our freedoms and independence are being eroded. This is a particularly British phenomenon – only in Britain do schools ban children from playing conkers; only in Britain do we encourage children to look at all strangers as potential abductors, only in Britain do we demand that anyone organising a street party or an office away-day undertake a 'risk assessment'.

The risk sceptic. The risk sceptic is less tolerant of risk than the risk enthusiast. At the same time, he is sceptical about the benefits of regulation. He points out that we tend to over-estimate risks – the public famously exaggerate the chances of being murdered or assaulted by a stranger, for instance. He also points out that government regulation can be counter-productive, promoting complacency and irresponsibility among those regulated. He might invoke the 'risk compensation' phenomenon – a now well-established phenomenon whereby agents respond to interventions that make a given course of action less risky, by changing their behaviour so that their conduct is as risky as before. John Adams and Gerald Wilde have suggested that we all have built-in 'risk thermostats'.[13] In building sites where everyone wears hard hats, builders are less careful to avoid accidents. Climbers who are roped up are less cautious than those that aren't. Children banned from climbing trees in parks will find other risky things to do. The risk sceptic sometimes argues that we should put less effort into lessening risk and more effort into building up individual and organisational 'resilience' to it. Instead of trying to prevent flooding, for instance, we should look to places where flooding is common and adapt to live with it. Instead of protecting children from all risks we should teach them manage risks and survive the blows that life inevitably deals.

Seat belt laws provide an example of how the debate between these three positions plays out in practice.

The pro-regulator defends seat belt laws on the apparently common sense ground that the small intrusion into people's liberty is more than off-set by the benefits in terms of reduced accident-related injuries. The risk enthusiast objects to seat belt laws on the grounds that the state should not tell people what to do, where their own safety and wellbeing alone is at stake – if people chose to take risks so be it. The risk sceptic points at that driving is not nearly as risky as most people assume, so if the burden of having to wear a seat belt is slight, so are the gains. They also argue that regulation appears to have little effect – the balance of the evidence does not show that seat belt laws have saved lives, as drivers, knowing that they and their passengers are safer wearing seatbelts, simply drive faster, so transferring risks from cars to cyclists and pedestrians.[14]

Of course these are caricatures. Most of us will recognize the merits in all of these positions. Our support for one or the other will vary, depending on the issue at hand. Indeed, many of us will veer unreliably between them, feeling the pull of the position of the pro-regulator, then the anti-regulator or the regulation sceptic.

13. See Adams, J. (1995) *Risk*, London: Routledge, and Wilde, G. (2001), *Target Risk 2*, Toronto: PDE Publications

14. Adams, *Risk*, but see also Adams' website www.john-adams.co.uk for more up to date arguments that seat belt legislation has been pointless at best.

This purpose of this paper, however, is to explore a fourth relatively neglected position – what I call, for want of a better term, **The Risk Communitarian**. The risk communitarian is wary of regulation but interested in non-regulatory and bottom-up ways of diminishing risk. It is true that not all non-regulatory ways of diminishing risk are bottom-up – or at least some are more bottom-up than others. It is possible for instance, to imagine approaches to risk that use financial incentives rather than regulation, or various types of behavioural nudge. These might well appeal to the Risk Communitarian, but he will be particularly keen on approaches that succeed in encouraging and enabling individuals and communities to manage risk themselves.

When it comes to our seat belt example, this risk communitarian will be interested in non-regulatory ways of getting people to wear seat belts, or – if he is not persuaded that seat-belts advance road safety – non-regulatory ways of encouraging people to drive more carefully. Examples that will appeal to him include (from the least bottom-up to the most):

- legislative and financial policies that incentivise but don't compel drivers to drive carefully (tougher penalties for people who cause accidents, or lower taxes for drivers with a clean record, for example)
- liberal paternalistic options that 'nudge people' to wear seat belts or drive slowly (eg fitting car with an alarm that sounds when seat belts are not use, which has to be turned off manually)
- information and educational campaigns to encourage safe-driving
- environmental cues which foster careful driving (eg, road signs, varied road surfaces, speed bumps, sculptures and planters, lots of pedestrians and cyclists on the roads)

4 Handling-risk bottom-up and top-down

This section, elaborates on the distinction made several times now, between managing risk top-down and bottom-up.

Top-down approaches look to manage risk through regulation and oversight by authorities – or, perhaps, through the sticks and carrots of the law and taxation. Bottom-up approaches seek, by contrast, to manage it through engaging ordinary people and communities in managing the risk themselves. Perhaps the best way of articulating this distinction is through examples, with some of the best coming from the field of crime prevention and policing.

Writers on crime have often drawn a contrast between two different approaches to policing a group of people.[15] One relies heavily on top-down instruments of the police, penal system and security services (state surveillance, forensics, the sanctions of the law). The other relies on community self-policing, with the public working with the police and other services to address crime together. Clearly the top-down approach has its place. It works well in airports, where there is no 'public' or 'community' to fall back on, and on motorways, where the scope for citizens stepping forward is fairly limited (though you could easily imagine a country in which speeding was met by horns being sounded). It is also, perhaps, well-suited to identifying foreign terrorist cells at work in a country – these cells will have few ties into local networks, meaning that these can't play much of a role in tackling them. Nevertheless many of the crime and security challenges we face can only be addressed through active engagement of the civilian population. This is true of every-day theft, burglary and assault, but is also true with respect to homegrown terrorism and gang crimes. Tackling these is much easier if the police and related services can rely on the cooperation of the public.

The first chapter of Jane Jacobs' *Death and Life of Great American Cities* provides a well-known account of role the public can play in discouraging crime.[16] Jacobs began by noting that 'the public peace – the sidewalk and street peace – of cities is not kept primarily by the police, as necessary as the police are. It is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves'. She then went on to describe the role that busy streets,

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15. Crawford, A. (2007) 'Crime Prevention and Community Safety' in Maguire, M., Morgan, R. and Reiner, R. (eds) *Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

16. Jacobs, J. (1964), *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Harmondsworth: Penguin

'owned by' and over-looked by shopkeepers, workers and residents play in keeping fairly anonymous city neighbourhoods safe:

> Under the seeming disorder of the old city, wherever the old city is work-ing successfully, is a marvellous order for maintaining the safety of the streets and the freedom of the city. It is a complex order. Its essence is the intricacy of sidewalk use, bringing with it a constant succession of eyes. This order is all composed of movement and change, and although it is life, not art, we may fancifully call it the art form of the city and liken it to a dance – not to a simple-minded precision dance with everyone kicking at the same time … but to an intricate ballet in which the individual dances and ensembles all have distinctive parts and miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole.[17]

Jacob's herself understood that the 'ballet of the sidewalk' only occurs, in large crowded cities. Smaller communities rely on different methods of self-policing, depending more on controls spread through 'web of reputation, gossip, approval, disapproval, and sanctions, all of which are powerful if people know each other and word travels'.[18] But her account of urban self-policing is in fact a classic description of managing security risks 'bottom-up'.

Child protection provides another illustration of the contrast between more top-down and more participatory approaches to managing risk

Child protection provides another illustration of the contrast between more top-down and more participatory approaches to managing risk. A good example of a top-down approach is provided by the government's Vetting and Barring scheme. This was set up in the wake of the 2002 murders of Soham children Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells by local school caretaker Ian Huntley. The scheme requires that all adults who have sustained contact with children and vulnerable adults, either in a work context or as volunteers, need official clearance, with clearance conditional of a thorough central government review of criminal records, employment history and other intelligence. In the form initially proposed by the Government in 2009, around 11 million people – one in four adults – were expected to have to submit to the scheme. This was widely criticised for being disproportionate: the scheme would inevitably have hampered voluntary activity, yet almost all child abuse takes place in the home context, and cases of people employed in children's services or vol-unteers abusing children are relatively very rare.[19] The Brown government responded to public outcry by relaxing these rules on who is required to register, and the Coalition has loosened these still further, especially as they apply to volunteers. Early estimates suggest that under the new rules, about 4.5 million adults will need to apply for clearance.

If a top-down approaches to child safety look to provide state over-sight of adult interaction with children, bottom-up approaches will look to engage children, people who work with children, and the public at large in preventing abuse. Again the first chapter of *Death and Life of Great American Cities* provides a good, if possibly rather idealized, example of child-protection bottom-up. Jacobs described seeing a 'suppressed

17. *Ibid*, p.60
18. *Ibid*, p.45
19. Rogers, B. (2010), 'Why child protection has gone too far' *Prospect* 169

struggle going on between a man and a little girl of eight or nine years old. The man seemed to be trying to get the girl to go with him…. The girl was making herself rigid, as children do when they resist':

> As I watched from our second floor window, making up my mind how to intervene if it seemed advisable, I saw it was not going to be necessary. From the butcher shop beneath the tenement had emerged a woman who, with her husband, runs the shop; she was standing within earshot of the man, her arms folded and a look of determination on her face. Joe Cornacchia, who with his sons-in-law keeps the delicatessen, emerged about the same moment and stood solidly to the other side. Several heads poked out of the tenement windows above, one was withdrawn quickly and its owner reappeared a moment later in the doorway behind the man…. Nobody was going to allow a little girl to be dragged off, even if nobody knew who she was' (pp.48–9).

One final example of the contrast between top-down and bottom-up approaches to managing risk comes from the field of road safety.

The dominant approach to managing streets and roads over the last century has been top-down. As the motor vehicle spread, and the accident rate increased in the first half of the 20th century, the authorities responded by doing ever more to regulate our streets, and separate pedestrians and cyclists from motor vehicles. Our streets, packed with signs, traffic lights, and barricades, became some of the most regulated spaces on earth.

Over last few decades however, urban planners and traffic engineers have begun to experiment successfully with alternative, more bottom-up approaches, through encouraging sharing of streets and roads. Amazingly these shared space schemes turn-out not only to be more attractive but at least as safe or safer than the schemes they have replaced.[20] It appears that we behave more considerately when we find ourselves face to face with other road users and have to make decisions for ourselves, than we do when guided by signs and lights.[21] Again, shared space principles don't work everywhere. Top-down traffic management has its place. Where pedestrians are hugely outnumbered by motorists, for instance, shared space principles have only limited application. Nevertheless they remain a good illustration of the potential of more participatory approaches to handling risk.

I have suggested that we can distinguish between two approaches to managing certain sort of risks – one more top-down one more bottom-up.

20. While it is very difficult to demonstrate conclusively that shared space schemes are safer than traditional approaches, a recent Department of Transport appraisal of shared space cites the example of a study of the Newlands Avenue Mixed Priority Route scheme in Hull. This 'identified an 18 percent increase in pedestrian activity at crossings and a 100 percent reduction in pedestrian casualties. Similarly the same scheme recorded a 48 percent increase in cycle use with a reduction in cycle casualties of 21 percent in the same period, indicating that at this scheme the risk to vulnerable users had declined sharply, simultaneous with significant proportional increases in activity', DfT Shared Space Project, Stage 1, Appraisal of Shared Space, 2009, p.27, available at www.tap.iht.org/objects_store/200911/DfT%20Shared%20space%20project%20-%20Stage%201%20Appraisal%20of%20shared%20space.pdf C:\Users\paul.buddery\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.Outlook\GK5OGYQL\webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk\20110509101621\http:\www.dft.gov.uk\pgr\sustainable\sharedspace\stage1\pdf\stage1.pdf

21. Hamilton-Baillie, B. (2008), 'Shared Space, Reconciling people, Places, and Traffic' *Built Environment* 32 (20), Available At www.hamilton-baillie.co.uk/_files/_publications/25–2.pdf

Both have their place, but for rest of this paper, I want to explore options for strengthening bottom-up engagement. After all, there is every reason to think there are steps we can take that will encourage or alternatively discourage, more participatory ways of managing risk. Jane Jacobs might have written about the 'miraculous' quality of the urban ballet she described, but she was under no impression that it was 'spontaneous' – the creation of some invisible hand. On the contrary, she saw it as the product of good urban planning and city management that encouraged a mix of uses, busy, pedestrian friendly public spaces, and buildings that looked on to the street.

Likewise, shared space streets don't come about all on their own – it's not enough simply to take down the signs, barricades and traffic lights so beloved of conventionally-minded traffic engineers. Hans Monderman, the Dutch planner and road safety expert who pioneered shared space approaches, put great care into his designs, experimenting forensically with how best to promote the vigilance and interaction on which successful shared spaces depend.[22]

The next section then begins to explore ways of fostering more participatory approaches to managing risk.

One last general point however about the scale of the sort policies and interventions on which I am focusing. My interest here is very much on the sort of strategies and policies that people responsible for designing and managing public services and voluntary enterprises might be able to adopt in the here and now, with the aim of securing results in the short to medium term. A society's or group's social capital is shaped by a very wide array of factors. Social scientists like Robert Putnam have suggested differences in different nations or regions social capital can often be traced back centuries and have deep religious and cultural roots.[23] We also know that there are things that a government can do at a macro-level that can shape community ties for good or ill. Inequality appears to weaken social capital.[24] People are much more likely to co-operate with government, security services and each other, for instance, where they feel they treated fairly by them.[25] But even these sort of policies are, from the point of view of this paper, contextual. Its focus is on relatively quick fixes – steps that can be taken here and now that will deliver relatively immediate benefits and don't cost a lot.

As said earlier, for reasons of space and practicality, this discussion is limited to risks associated with a small number or related policies, namely policies to:

- devolve more services to voluntary groups
- role back government checks on volunteers working with children and vulnerable adults
- encourage greater public engagement in tackling crime and incivility, especially through encouraging people to take a stand and defuse conflict

22. Hamilton-Baillie, B. (2 February 2008), 'Hans Monderman' obituary section, *Guardian*
23. Putnam, R. (1993), *Making Democracy Work*, Princeton: Princeton University Press
24. Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K (2009), *Spirit Level*, London: Allen Lane
25. Pearce, N. (2007), 'Fair Rules: Procedural Fairness and Public Services', *Politics for a New Generation*, London: Palgrave Macmillan

As also set out earlier, I am particularly interested in risks associated with these policies that might result in serious harm to individuals or serious reputational damage (ie newspaper headlines) to those responsible for administering these policies. Examples include the risk that volunteers abuse children or in neglecting basic rules of safety, permit fatal accidents, and the risk that civilians, in intervening to prevent a crime, get hurt or take the law into their own hands.

Stepping back, these risks have a lot in common in that they all arise from the fact that managers can't always rely on volunteers, service users and the public to behave with due diligence. The commonality can be seen even more clearly through a focus on type of dispositions and behaviours that are required of people if they are to address these risks. They all demand relatively skilled and conscientious citizens and volunteers – people who are alert to what is going on around them, and are willing and able to speak up or intervene, either on their own behalf or others.

5 From concept to practice

The rest of this paper sets out and evaluates a number of possible practical approaches to promoting more participatory ways of managing of these risks.

The first things to say here is that, as the RSA itself has argued, research on social psychology has a great deal to teach us about how to foster the sort of pro-social vigilance and engagement on which bottom-up risk management depends.[26] This research tells us, for instance, that people are much more likely to intervene to prevent a crime, or alert the authorities to their concerns about a child, where they have made a commitment to do so (the 'commitment principle') or where they see others behaving similarly (the principle of 'social proof'). I have drawn on some of this psychological research below, but there would be merits in further exploring its application to the risks under discussion here.

Being clear about roles and responsibilities

Perhaps the first and most basic step that can be taken to encourage people to be more conscientious is simply to be clear in articulating roles and responsibilities. Asking or encouraging people to commit to these roles and responsibilities verbally or in writing can further increase the likelihood of their adhering to them. Social psychological experiments, for instance, have shown that members of the public are much more likely to intervene to prevent a strangers possessions being stolen, where they have been asked, by the stranger, to keep on eye on the possessions.[27]

This has clear implications for sort of issues this paper is discussing. Volunteers who have been told clearly that it their responsibility to look after a building, or safeguard children in their care and report concerns are much more likely to do so. Citizens engaged in Neighourhood Watch schemes or similar are more likely to keep an eye out for their neighbours properties and personal safety.

> *Perhaps the first and most basic step that can be taken to encourage people to be more conscientious is simply to be clear in articulating roles and responsibilities*

26. For a discussion of these principles and techniques of persuasion see Cialdini, R. (1993) *Influence, The Psychology of Persuasion*, New York: William Morrow and Company, and Thayler, R. (2008) *Nudge*, New Haven: Yale. See also Institute for Government & The Cabinet Office (2010) *Mindspace, Influencing Behaviour Through Public Policy*, Institute for Government, Available at www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/MINDSPACE.pdf
27. Cialdini, *Persuasion*.

Teaching 'Big Society' skills

One basic approach that could be adopted in all of these cases involves building people's capacities to manage risk. The most obvious way of doing this is through teaching and training. This is hardly a new idea. We already promote teaching of a wide array of basic life and civic skills including skills in first aid. More recently focus has extended to teaching citizenship to new citizens, and parenting skills to parents. Yet much more could, arguably, be done. There could be great gains in programmes, especially short easily accessible programmes, aimed at teaching children, and adults, especially adult volunteers, skills with which to manage the risks that come with devolution and deregulation – for instance, training people in managing incivility and delinquency,[28] or in the basic principles of running a small organisation. There are similarly strong arguments for exploring if and how we might teach child-protection skills.

Case studies

Dfuse, a young charity set up by Jane Aitkinson, aims to equip people with the skills needed to tackle anti-social behaviour, defend themselves from attack and defuse social conflict. Training is provided by experienced police trainers and hostage negotiators, though more recently, the organisation has begun to experiment with training 'non-professionals' to teach the skills. Training has been provided to a wide range of people, including public service staff, young people, young offenders and ordinary members of the public.

The U, or 'Citizens' University', a series of pilots being run by Nesta and The Young Foundation, aims to offer member of the public short face to face training sessions in a wide variety of core social and civic skills, including defusing skills, first aid, healthy living, community organising, and parenting. The training sessions, which can be as short as 10 minutes, are offered by local volunteers, working on high streets, supermarkets, pop-up shops, school gates, colleges, GP surgeries and work-places.

Streetwatch is a fast growing programme of civilian patrols, supported by the police. It was created by an enterprising police officer and a local volunteer in the town of Four Marks in Hampshire, in response to local disquiet about perceived anti-social behaviour by some of the town's young people. The initiative proved successful in defusing concerns – in part through building relationships between the generations – and the model is being adopted by many police forces. The civilian volunteers who join the patrol currently receive some on the job mentoring from the local police, though this could arguably be strengthened.

It's Not Fair. The government recently supported publication of a book, *It's Not Fair,* aimed at helping young people recognise if their friends are being forced into marriage. Aneeta Prem, the author of the book, who sits as a magistrate in London, said 'most existing efforts to combat forced marriage were targeted at victims. Her book is intended to "fill the gap" by using their friends to tackle the problem instead'.[29]

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28. Rogers, B. (2010), *The Woolwich Model, Can Citizens Tackle Anti-social Behaviour?* London: RSA

29. Bentham, M. (28 June 2011) 'Teenage friends can help to save victims from forced marriages, according to new book' *London Evening Standard*, Available At www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23965007-teenage-friends-can-help-to-save-victims-from-forced-marriages-according-to-new-book.do

Advisors and mentors

Another ways of building people's capacity to manage risk is through the providing them with experienced advisors or mentors. This will not be applicable in all of the risk scenarios under discussion here. But there could be potential in ensuring that volunteers charged with running a local amenity or service are properly mentored – this will often be cheaper and otherwise preferable to imposing costly oversight and regulation.

Encouraging people to come forward with concerns

A fourth way of encouraging people to act as conscientious citizens, thereby reducing risks of harm to others, is by simply giving them permission and making it easier for them to step forward with concerns. ChildLine for instance and the communications around it, has proved a very successful initiative, in both encouraging children and adults concerned about children to talk up, and making it easy and safe for them to do so. Since its launch in 1986, it has advised over two and half million children. Eileen Munro, professor of social work at the LSE, has argued that extra investment in initiatives like Childline would probably be more effective in protecting children than more intrusive schemes.[30]

Pro-social design

The way environments are designed can have a profound influence on how we relate to each other, and our disposition to behave civically. Jane Jacobs, quoted earlier, was one of the first critics to make this point, highlighting the benefits that come from designing public places in ways which encourage neighbourly interaction and ensure that there are 'eyes on the street'. Shared space approaches to managing traffic provide another illustration: they show how the simple step of removing signage and encouraging interaction between drivers and other road users fosters careful driving.[31]

Design-led approaches can of course be expensive and slow to produce results. But they don't have to be. A series of studies have shown that heavy traffic on residential roads connections between neighbours – traffic calming measures in turn can quite quickly encourage social interaction and the 'collective efficacy' that this brings.

To take another example an architect friend recently told me about his experiences designing a new municipal swimming pool. He initially proposed an open and informal approach, with a café and seating near edge of the pools. His local authority clients, however, worried that in some way they could not quite pinpoint, this posed a 'safeguarding' risk and insisted on the insertion of a glass partition between the café and seats, and the pool. Yet the changes introduced were almost bound to discourage parental vigilance. As the architect commented, 'I'd rather trust the attentiveness of parents than a 17 year old life guard'.

Unfortunately the quality of recent planning and design, especially housing design, leaves a lot to be desired. Official audits of housing design quality, found that only around a third were good, and third

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30. Ash, T. G. (7 December 2009) 'This parody of the nanny state helps neither children nor adults' *Guardian*
31. Halpern, D. (2004), *Social Capital*, Cambridge: Polity Press

were unsatisfactory. We are still building too many housing developments without real pavements, play space or the other things that encourage neighbours to interact and form strong relationships.[32]

Organisations like CABE, RTPI and RIBA have long argued for and provided guidance on 'designing out crime' and designing in social capital. And there is a much deeper appreciation than there was among design professionals of the role of design in fostering safe neighbourhoods and strong social relations. But if government is really committed to strengthening neighbourhood ties and civic life, it will want to ensure that its design and planning policies promote 'pro-social' design – especially as the present government is intent on a radical overhaul of the planning system.

The internet as a tool for managing risk bottom-up

What role could the internet play in helping us manage the risks that are our focus here in a more bottom-up way?

The internet is, of course, reshaping social networks, culture, wealth and power quite significantly, and this will in turn affect the sort of risks we are discussing here and our ability to handle them in a more participatory way – though your view on how this will play out will depend on your view of the nature of the internet more generally. If the net is, as its boosters argue, a democratising force, it could strengthen our ability to handle risk bottom-up. If the net works, as the pessimists insist, to erode social capital and civic life, then it will likely weaken our ability to manage without increased bureaucratic regulation.

For the purposes of this paper, we can sidestep these debates. We are interested in immediate, practical ways the internet might be used better to handle risk bottom-up. Even here, however, there are many possibilities. The internet makes it easier, for instance, to teach civic skills; match volunteers with mentors; engage users and communities in development of local, pro-social plans and designs; or simply allow people to 'speak up'. ChildLine is now an online service as well as a telephone one. In 2010/11 its website was visited by 950,000 people looking for help and advice.[33]

There is one way, however, in which the internet could, perhaps, make a particularly significant contribution to handling risk in a more participatory way. Just as the internet makes it easier for us to interact and share, so it can make it easier for us to share knowledge of other people's reliability and trustworthiness. The net in short, would seem to promise the possibility of bottom-up peer assurance lessening the need of top-down state assurance in our dealing with one another.

A now classic example is provided by eBay rating system, which encourages buyers to rate the quality of the service they receive from sellers, so quickly highlighting and marginalising unreliable or dishonest ones. Other perhaps more relevant examples are provided by web services which bring strangers together in an intimate, face to face, often 'home' setting. Examples include web dating sites, car sharing sites (Liftshare, Whipcar), and house, flat or 'couch' sharing sites, (that is sites that match

32. Rogers, B. (2010), 'The Home of Bad Design' *Prospect* 177
33. This figure comes from www.childline.org.uk

travellers looking for a place to stay with locals with a spare room like CouchSurfing.org) and sites that create local face to face markets in goods and services, including many inside service users' homes (for example Taskrabbit.com). Through all of these types of service, the internet has made it much easier for people to connect, while at the same time, offering ways of managing the risk associated with these connections.

There are, inevitably significant differences in the way these sort of peer to peer services handle risk, depending in part, on the intensity and riskiness of the sort of relationships they facilitate. They all rely, at their core, on peer evaluation. Service users – buyers, sellers, traders, daters, – are scored by others who have engaged with them in the past. Some, like eBay rely almost exclusively on this sort of scoring. Others however, go further. In most cases, the service user is encouraged and expected to provide information about themselves, their past lives and career, and in some cases they are expect to provide formal references from teachers and employers. In some cases, the website managers will undertake their own quality assurance – verifying, for instance, that the person lives where they say they or has the employment record they say they have. Moreover the websites encourage their users to act responsibly and advise them how to do so: if you are going on a blind date, check out your date's profile first, meet in a public space, let your friends or family know where you are going, etc.

We can't of course, eliminate all risks from our dealing with other people, especially with relative strangers, but these internet services are extremely helpful in assessing and limiting these risks. Or as the CouchSurfing site puts it:

> With CouchSurfing, you have a lot more information about new people than you do in most circumstances. Think about when you meet someone at a hostel or on a train. What information do you have? Just your own first impressions. Through CouchSurfing, it's more like meeting a friend of a friend. You have the chance to read all about other members' experiences with that person, whether positive or negative. You have a full profile's worth of information about their interests and perspectives. You can see who their friends are and how they know them. And you have the ability to correspond with them as much as you want before you meet them.[34]

To what extent can this net enabled peer evaluation be applied to managing the risks being considered here – risks in asking people to take a more active role in maintaining social order or running services and community groups?

There are of course some real limits to the applicability of the eBay or even the CouchSurfing model to these risks. While there are many ways in which the internet can empower people to manage crime and foster local collective efficacy, internet enabled peer evaluation will only have a limited role in dealing with the sort of 'signal crimes' and anti-social behaviour that concern people most – theft, muggings, burglary, drug dealing.[35] This

34. www.couchsurfing.org
35. For signal crimes see Innes, M. and Fielding, N (2002) 'From Community to Communicative Policing: 'Signal Crimes' and The Problem Of Public Reassurance' *Sociological Research Online*, 7(2), Available At www.socresonline.org.uk/7/2/innes.html

is in part because much of this crime is anonymous. A burglar might score poorly on a web-profile, but this hardly helps you from preventing him burgling your house. Just as importantly, we don't and would not want to live in a society where we and our neighbours were all scored online. It is one thing to share your experience of a restaurant, a plumber, even a local NHS surgery online, quite another to share your suspicions about your neighbour's trustworthiness. Community safety, even in internet age, has largely to be maintained through real world rather than virtual processes.

Moreover, many of the people for whom public and voluntary services are designed are vulnerable: children, and some ill and disabled adults aren't able to handle risk as well as ordinary, fully competent adults or alert people when they are hurt or abused – extra-precautions need to be taken.

Nevertheless, web-enabled peer review or peer vetting clearly has great potential in managing risk bottom-up. And many public services third sector groups are already making use of it. The Japanese scheme Fureai Kippu, for example, which has now been running for over 15 years, enables people to earn credits for caring for elderly people which can then be used to "buy" similar care services for their relatives in another part of the country, or even save them for their own retirement. The scheme makes extensive use of peer review.

In short, net-enabled peer review can help deal with issues of trustworthiness and reliability that arise in any social enterprise, and can do so in a relatively participatory, bottom-up way. As Philip Colligan of Nesta has written; "The way networked technologies are providing new platforms for establishing trust between strangers can surely be harnessed to help make the Big Society real, but we need to move quickly to take these approaches to scale".[36]

Despite the clear potential of the internet in this respect however, there does not seem to have been much systematic thinking about how it might be used to as an alternative or supplement to more top-down approaches to vetting and regulating people who work in public services or community groups. On the contrary, the British state has shown itself inclined to expand its reach in regulating adult interactions with children and vulnerable adults at exactly the same moment as the internet was developing more participatory ways of doing this.

It is true that the role of government in promoting peer review is far from obvious. But a government committed to rolling back regulation on community enterprise and civic activity should at least be exploring the potential of peer review, for instance, through supporting public sector and voluntary sector bodies in developing peer review tools and training people in how to use them.

36. Colligan, P. (2010), 'What's Mine is Yours – Re-imagining public services', *Public Servant*, Available at www.publicservice.co.uk/feature_story.asp?id=15459

6 Conclusion

We urgently need to do more to flag-up the existence of alternative, more participatory ways of managing risk

There are limits to the sort of participatory approaches to managing Big Society risks that I have explored here. Community spirit and civic endeavour are very hard to 'grow' – and too much or the wrong sort are almost as dangerous as too little. Of course, no approach is watertight – we do need to learn, as the risk enthusiast says, to live with a good deal of risk. And bottom-up approaches are perhaps particularly 'leaky'. Top down approaches will always have their place.

It needs to be acknowledged finally that while the idea of managing risk bottom-up has not been very well articulated, it is widely grasped at an intuitive level, and there are endless examples of those responsible for running public and voluntary services and voluntary groups adopting bottom-up rather than top-down approaches.

However, there appears to be widespread agreement that fears about the risks involved in devolving power and rolling back bureaucracy is putting a brake on reform and frustrating attempts to develop a more participatory, socially productive way of doing things. We urgently need to do more to flag-up the existence of alternative, more participatory ways of managing risk, and to invest more time and energy into researching and developing the approaches I have began to explore here.

The 2020 Public Services Hub is a research and policy development hub created from the legacy of the 2020 Public Services Trust in early 2011. It specialises in developing practice-based research on social productivity in public services. Based at the RSA, the Hub works collaboratively with local public service organisations, national sector leaders and other national partners to develop social value and social productivity thinking into local and national practice.

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