



Institute for
Volunteering
Research



Famine after the feast?

Infrastructure organisations adapting to a changing funding world.

Andrew Curtis, Institute for Volunteering Research, NCVO



Outline of the talk

- **Background to the research**
- **Definitions, history and current context of infrastructure**
- **Research findings**
- **Implications for local infrastructure**



Background to the research

- Research conducted for a Big Lottery Fund (BLF) project Volunteering for Stronger Communities (VSC)
- A partnership between NCVO and 15 Volunteer Centres. They were awarded a £1.9m grant to help communities affected by the recession to stimulate volunteering
- IVR was funded to conduct research in the areas where the 15 Volunteer Centres operate
- The research **aims to provide a snapshot of formal volunteering now – including challenges facing those involved in volunteering in the current economic climate and strategies adopted to take on these challenges.** The project seeks to inform national policy debates



What the research entailed

- 140 interviews in 15 areas over two years with local infrastructure organisations (volunteer centres and CVSs), local authorities, volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers
- Two case-study areas, Liverpool and Devon
- Visited eight volunteer-involving organisations



Defining local infrastructure

- Volunteer Centres: these have five core functions, including: brokerage, developing volunteering opportunities, marketing, good practice development and strategic development of volunteering, and campaigning (including policy response).
- Council for Voluntary Services: these provide specialist expertise support to local organisations and groups, spread good practice and encouraging joint working. They also look to provide a forum for local voluntary organisations and community groups as well as making sure policy makers understand their needs.
- Also other organisations and individuals providing infrastructure services
- Some debates and programmes around 'demand led infrastructure'



History of local infrastructure

- There are not systematic national funding arrangements for local LIOs and there are significant variations between areas in terms of local authority funding arrangements.

Rochester (2013) highlights how two of the key reports in the last 50 years recommended funding for local LIOs:

- The Aves Report (1969) stated that it was 'easy to see the advantages of having in any area a central source from which all would-be volunteers can obtain advice and comprehensive information' and recommended that 'There should be a comprehensive network of volunteer bureaux'. Significantly, Aves recommended that their major source of income should be local authority grant aid.
- The Wolfenden Committee (1978) also emphasised the importance of local intermediary bodies and discussed how they could be funded by central government, which would have perhaps resulted in more even coverage if the recommendation had been followed.

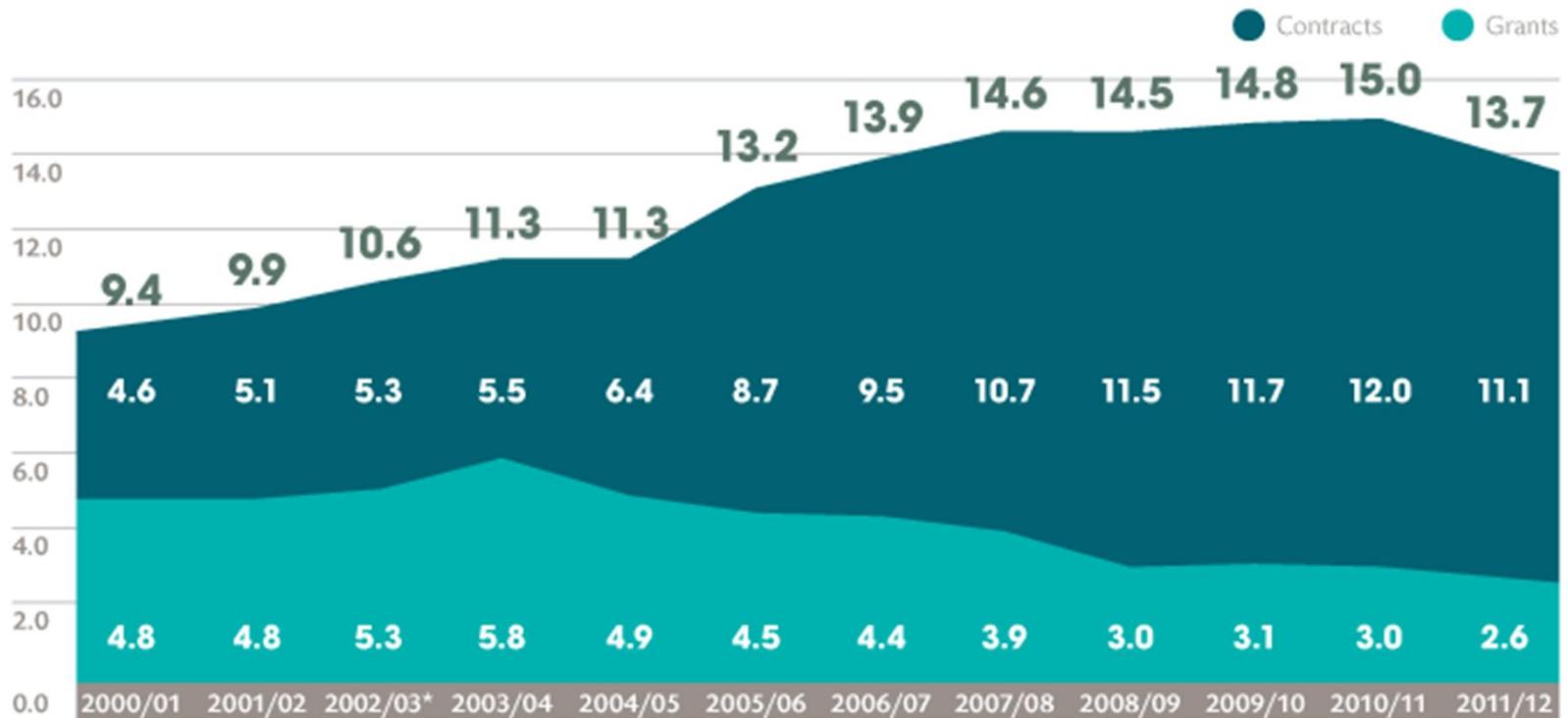


History, the 1990s and 2000s – The ‘golden age’??

- Relative economic stability from the late 1990s and increased government funding for the voluntary sector under New Labour meant that the sector had something of a boom in the 2000s.
- Funding came from a myriad of sources –funding for national infrastructure, monies distributed to local authorities and various national programmes for volunteering infrastructure:
 - With Capacity Builders providing over £230 million
 - Big Lottery funded programme Building and Sustaining Infrastructure Support (Basis) over £150 million
- Danger of portraying this era simply as a ‘golden age’ for the sector.
- Criticisms of the sector’s closeness to government (see Rochester, 2013; Pritchard. 2014)



Voluntary Sector income from government (NCVO data)





Implications for local infrastructure

Unsettlement

- ‘The field of capacity building and infrastructure is experiencing a significant unsettlement as existing public funding streams are withdrawn or re-directed, and new models of organising voluntary sector support and capacity building are in development’ (Macmillan 2013).

Lottery view on infrastructure

- ‘...we need to be realistic about where we spend our limited resources to achieve the best effect. It is not sustainable in the present situation to use limited Lottery investment specifically to maintain the current structure of voluntary sector infrastructure bodies at national, regional or local level.’ (BLF, 2012)



Research findings: local infrastructure

- Experiencing cuts, like most of the voluntary sector
- Most were reeling from cuts, many rebuilding. One interviewee termed this 'survival mode'
- It seems in some cases infrastructure organisations particularly struggle to attract funding
- Despite cuts local authorities remain key source of funding
- In the Annual Return of Volunteer Centres 2013 (2011/12 financial year) more than one-in-five overall had a reduction of 50% or greater
- Difficult to make money by charging for services previously offered for free



‘Narrative’ of infrastructure

- Common assumption that it is in some need of reform
- An acceptance that the funding situation will worsen along the rest of the voluntary sector
- Innovation, innovation, innovation – Reform and change often uncritically promoted
- NAVCA Independent Commission on the Future of Local VCS Infrastructure:

‘The Commission will use evidence-based, creative and radical inquiry into the current and future support needs of local voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations and the implications for infrastructure provision. The Commission’s task will be to propose practical actions by a range of actors to secure high quality support for local voluntary and community action throughout England.’



Case-study – Volunteer Centre Merger

- When study engaged with the Volunteer Centre it was independent
- The local authority stopped funding volunteering activities
- The VC ceased to be viable without the core grant, despite having a number of smaller projects
- Merged with CVS
 - '[We have gained] small, short term pots of funding for part of a member of staff and it's quite specific funding rather than general. **The main problem that we've got after losing the initial grant funding is that there's nothing there to support just general people, we've got some funding to support young people, disabled people, BME people, people with mental health issues, with homelessness problems but everyone that doesn't fit those criteria, there's nothing there to support that.'**



Infrastructure funding: The third party problem

- **‘We can change the physical being of our car, great, that’s what we’ll use the Transforming Local Infrastructure money for. But then somebody says, well who’s putting the petrol in the car? And it’s as fundamental as that.... So you either had a relationship with your local authority or you didn’t. ...Because without you know third party investment, whether it comes through the health side, the local authority, you can’t fund a CVS, you know, ...for me that’s the biggest reality of how the sector financially works...’**

Integrated VDA Chief Executive



What constitutes success?

- Is it all about money and expansion?
- Is it about survival at all costs?
- The concept of organisational resilience has some relevance. Stewart and O'Donnell (2007) define organisational resilience in the following way:
 - ‘Resilience is the term used to describe an organisation’s capacity to respond positively, or at least, adaptively to disruptive change. Resilience implies, not just the ability to withstand external shocks, but also suggests a capacity for adaptation and learning.’



Mission versus survival

- ‘What a CVS basically is here to do is help grow community and voluntary organisations, so many ways. But also if there is a gap in an area, the CVS will endeavour to create a new organisation or a partnership of organisations, but if that doesn’t happen then legitimately a CVS can come in and be responsible for frontline ... **at what point does diversifying your income and sustaining your social impact actually [let] your mission drift.**’

CVS Chief Executive



Implications of the research

- **Importance of local authority funding, both core funding for additional services.**
This is not to give the impression that it is the only show in town, however, it is often the MOST IMPORTANT one. Furthermore, the level of agency in this should not be underestimated.
- **Volunteers increasing important brokerage services.** If not always in the actual numbers then in ratio to paid staff and are key to certain services, such as brokerage.
- **Mission: Should infrastructure organisations provide frontline services?** Should it work outside its usual areas? Should it refuse to advertise volunteering opportunities that were previously paid roles? Should it get involved in something like the WP?



Discussion

- Is local infrastructure viable without some “third party” investment?
- Can LIOs maintain their current missions and diversifying funding?
- Is it even possible to keep referring to ‘local infrastructure’ with increasing local variation?