

Amanda Fitzgerald

Querying the resilient local authority: the question of ‘resilience for whom?’

**Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)**

Original citation:

Fitzgerald, Amanda (2018) *Querying the resilient local authority: the question of ‘resilience for whom?’*. [Local Government Studies](#). ISSN 0300-3930 (In Press)

DOI: [10.1080/03003930.2018.1473767](https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2018.1473767)

© 2018 Informa UK Limited

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/89251/>

Available in LSE Research Online: July 2018

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author’s final accepted version of the journal article. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher’s version if you wish to cite from it.

Querying the resilient local authority: the question of ‘resilience for whom?’

Analysis of how English local authorities have fared post large cuts to their funding by the Coalition and now Conservative governments indicates a considerably resilient organisation. Engaging with recent critical strands in the resilience literature this paper, however, queries that resilient local authority account. Better consideration of resilience's repercussions across the landscape of local services provision is needed. The question of ‘resilience for whom?’, drawn from the conceptual literature, is introduced and frames an exploration of the experiences of local authority resilience strategies among small charities in deprived areas of London. Deleterious dimensions of resilience are seen in its distancing and de-coupling effects and associated voluntary provider fading. There are losers and a dark underside to explore. Such perspectives add to the local government and austerity scholarship insight as to the noted ‘austerity puzzle’ and a questioning of its tendency towards a ‘great survivor’ account.

Keywords: resilience, austerity, local authorities, voluntary sector, deprivation, London

Introduction

Local government scholars have recently employed the concept of ‘resilience’ as a tool by which to assess the impacts of austerity on local government (Gardner 2017; Lowndes and Gardner 2016; Fitzgerald and Lupton 2015; Hastings et al. 2015; John 2014; Lowndes and McCaughie 2013; Shaw 2012). The burden of austerity fell heavily on local authorities (LAs). A reduction in its income from central government of over a third during the Coalition years (Innes and Tetlow 2015) was followed by the announcement of further heavy cuts under Conservative ‘super-austerity’ (Lowndes and Gardner 2016). Vis-à-vis these pressures assessments have suggested that this part of the public sector has, nonetheless, weathered austerity well. Change in local services through to the current government has, seemingly, been incremental rather than

transformational; first or second rather than third order change (Gardner 2017). Savings have been realised through the ‘back office’ and ‘efficiencies’ and those delivered alongside programmes of service improvement (Hastings et al. 2015; Fitzgerald and Lupton 2015; PwC 2013). Noted as an ‘austerity puzzle’ (Gardner 2017) – high cuts coupled with an overall appearance of ‘business-as-usual’ – the LA has garnered praise for its apparent resilience through the period. Local government emerges ‘the great survivor’ (John 2014), ‘impressive’ in its resilience through ‘the perfect storm’ (Lowndes and McCaughie 2013, 546).

The purpose of this paper is to make an intervention into this narrative. It takes stock of the resilient LA account in light of aspects of recent critical commentary about ‘resilience’. Existing literature about LA resilience to austerity has been attentive to some key themes in recent conceptual deliberation, notably, the merits of an evolutionary rather than stable state understanding, with the literature approaching resilience as a capacity to adapt, a ‘bouncing forward’ (Shaw 2012; Hastings et al. 2015). Yet, other aspects of recent critical commentary are little referenced. Taking-up the question of ‘resilience for whom’, drawn from that recent conceptual debate and an aspect of it that needs greater consideration, an expanded approach to the reporting of LA resilience is suggested, one which traces experiences of LA resilience beyond the council itself. Attention to such does not much feature in the resilient LA narrative. Where exploration of wider ramifications has appeared, the contribution has largely been to note the intentions of the LA, rather than to trace on-the-ground outcomes for and experiences of other actors (Platts-Fowler and Robinson 2016), or a few examples of external organisations, still partnered with LAs, are captured (Gardner 2017, 156).

In what follows, ‘resilience’ is discussed, along with its application in the local government literature. Prompted by the question of ‘resilience for whom?’ (Lebel et al. 2006), links between LA resilience and other organisations’ experiences through austerity are explored with reference to the local voluntary and community sector (VCS). LA-VCS distancing and de-coupling (Clayton, Donovan, and Merchant 2015) and VCS fading (Kane 2015) are identified. Discussion of ‘for whom?’, which raises some contestations and limitations, prompts a call that wider repercussions of LA resilience be given more detailed attention in writing on LA resilience. An austerity puzzle is less apparent where LA resilience is viewed from a disadvantaged neighbourhood perspective.

Resilience and ‘for whom?’

Resilience was originally a natural and physical sciences term, used in ecology to describe how an ecological system could recover from disturbance (Holling 1986) and in engineering to describe the return of a system to a steady state after a shock. The concept was introduced to social scientific study through the early 2000s socio-ecological studies of Adger (2000). Since, and in a period of heightened environmental, social and economic crises, resilience has come to have considerable purchase as a descriptor of how humans can positively respond to pressures.

With the burgeoning popularity of the term and the proliferation of its application, the term’s meaning has become difficult to pin-down (CARRI 2013; Norris et al. 2008). Several dimensions to the application of ‘resilience’ in the social sciences have been

under debate. These include: how the concept's physical sciences roots render it a more-or-less suitable concept for application in scholarship concerned with social issues (Mackinnon and Derickson 2012; Walker and Cooper 2011; Simmie and Martin 2010; Pike, Dawley and Tomaney 2010; Holling 2001); how it should convey a return to a pre-shock state (bouncing back) or re-stabilisation on an adjusted, improved basis (bouncing forward) (Houston 2015; Harrison 2012); how its spatialities and temporalities should be delimited (Weichselgartner and Kelman 2014, Mackinnon and Derickson 2012) and, how resilience should be understood as derivative of an entity's internal conditions and responses, or contingent on external factors (Masten 2001).

An important thread of discussion to emerge recently is the literature's critical vein. Resilience tends to be viewed in a positive light, with a benign and desirable quality assumed. Challengers to this perspective are raising concerns and cautions as to recent proliferation in resilience's usages (White and O'Hare 2014, Mackinnon and Derickson 2013). Joseph (2013) and Walker and Cooper (2011) highlight how resilience is a discursive apparatus of the neoliberal ideology now embedded within diverse governmental programmes, of which austerity is one (Joseph 2013). Walker and Cooper's (2011) genealogy of the concept, from its ecological origins, identifies the discourse's negative functioning. It may be viewed as a vehicle by which to transfer responsibility away from the state through an implicit suggestion that the organisation or individual should stand 'on one's own two feet'; 'self-reliance' is endorsed (White and O'Hare 2014, 946). Though it has been argued that resilience might be 'redeemed' from such associations (DeVerteuil and Golubchikov 2016), an alignment of 'resilience' with neoliberal ideology is yet apparent (Mackinnon and Derickson 2013).

The identification of the discourse of resilience with a project of economic governance that does not have social justice at its heart, should prompt scholars concerned with the social dimensions of the recent financial crisis to engage critically with the work ‘resilience’ is doing vis-à-vis austerity (White and O’Hare 2014). The context of austerity and the social strains it produces raise questions as to who is to be resilient, how, and in whose interest that resilience works; its winners and losers. Whilst resilience has proven a popular framework through which to approach the social strains of austerity on individuals, neighbourhoods and organisations (e.g. Platts-Fowler and Robinson 2016; Andres and Round 2015; Harrison 2012) and whilst critical reflection on how the concept is fitted to analysis of the socio-economic crisis of austerity and the distribution of the burden of that does feature in parts of the literature (e.g. Clayton, Donovan, and Merchant 2015; Vacchelli, Kathrecha, and Gyte 2015; Harrison 2012), it could be more widely apparent.

In respect to the local government literature, writing on the eve of large cuts to LA funding, Shaw introduced the concept of resilience to frame an optimistically toned discussion of how LAs could ‘dig deep’ (2012, 291) in response to threatening crises, among them austerity. Realising their adaptive capacity – identified in innovation, managing risk, strategic leadership and enhancing the involvement of civil society (Shaw 2012, 289-90) – LAs had opportunity, it was emphasised, to bounce forward. Retrospective analysis of resilience in subsequent assessment of adaptation to cuts suggested that local government had ‘weathered the storm’ well (Lowndes and McCaughie 2013). Their resilience was to be lauded, being in the interest of local

communities (Shaw 2012) and no mean feat to have demonstrated. Whilst commentators recognise the need for consideration of a critical hue (Fitzgerald and Lupton 2015; Hastings, et al. 2015; Lowndes and McCaughie 2013) and though Shaw acknowledged, ‘a key feature of a resilient LA is to allow space for others to develop their own resilience’ (2012, 294), the above critical concerns have still to be given sustained attention in discussion of LAs, austerity and resilience.

The question of ‘resilience for whom?’ presents a means of expanding critical treatment of resilience vis-à-vis austerity in respect to its wider ramifications. A notable theme in the critical appraisal of the resilience concept, raised originally over a decade ago in the study of ecosystem management (Lebel et al. 2006), ‘resilience for whom?’ was highlighted then as a necessary theme in resilience analysis relating to social systems. The question has re-emerged in several, recent social science discussions of resilience and in connection with the development of critical threads in that literature. Cretney (2014, 627), reviewing the recent applications of the term ‘resilience’ in socio-ecological analysis states, ‘need has arisen to question what is being maintained, for whom and by whom through these discourses of resilience’. In addition to Cretney’s (2014) field of engagement, socio-ecological resilience, the question has met with interest in other areas, such as spatial planning (White and O’Hare 2014) and economic geography (Pike, Dawley and Tomaney 2010).

‘Resilience for whom?’ prompts consideration of wider repercussions. It recognises that the resilience of one actor may have implications for other actors and invites

attention to those (Cretney 2014; White and O'Hare 2014; Lebel et al. 2006). As is recognised among socio-ecological and other applications of resilience, there may be wider social costs to assess (Brewington 2016; Crespi 2015). Attention to where any burden of resilience falls, such as in identification of winners and losers, or whom it privileges (White and O'Hare 2014), should feature in applications of resilience. The question of 'resilience for whom?', applied to LA responses to funding cuts, requires that the LA be recognised as one player among others within an interconnected landscape of local services provision. The question invites greater reflection upon how the resilience of the LA has disrupted and implicated other local actors, and that by their own account.

The case of the VCS

Repercussions of LA resilience strategies are examined below using a case study of small, locally-focused charities working in deprived neighbourhoods of London. With overlap in the purposes of the LA and the local VCS, to support their local communities, and with their associated history of working together to that end (Osborne and MacLaughlin 2004; Gastor and Deakin 1998), the local VCS is an important candidate for the focus of an expanded analysis of LA resilience intended to give attention to wider implications. The interconnections between these two actors are several, comprising a range of financial and consultative links. Important in recent governments have been: the awarding of grants by the LA to local charities; LA commissioning of the sector to deliver aspects of its statutory and discretionary services and consultation with the VCS about local need. Less obvious connections, such as a landlord-tenant relationship and LA support for a second tier Charity and Voluntary Services (CVS) organisation, are likewise examples.

The parameters for the LA-VCS relationship under the Coalition at a national-level were somewhat ambiguous (Williams, Cloke, and Thomas 2014; McCabe and Phillimore 2012). Austerity clearly heralded hard times for the sector (Levitas 2012). In theory, such pressures were coupled with new opportunities. Within Coalition policy the VCS was to have a more prominent role in the supply of services to communities (Alcock 2010). With much made in the early days of the Coalition of the Big Society, the policy context appeared favourable to growth of grass-roots initiatives (Conservative Party 2010). The parallel development of the Open Public Services agenda (HM Government 2011) signalled the development of a larger market for commissioning and procurement, in which the VCS, at large, would be expected to compete. In the context of the promotion of greater capacities for decision-making at the local-level, articulated in localism, scope for the VCS to enhance its position in shaping local decision-making was likewise suggested (Williams, Cloke, and Thomas 2014). VCS commentators cautioned, however, that these policy developments could require a great deal of change on the part of the VCS (Dayton and Wells 2013; Alcock 2010), likewise in the thinking of commissioners (Jones and Liddle 2011), to be to their advantage.

Funding cuts to LAs were a probable, sizeable limiting factor here. By the close of the Labour government, the VCS had embedded significant parts of its activities within a financial and institutional infrastructure supplied by the LA (Hogg and Baines 2011; Di Domenico, Tracey and Haugh 2009). With the restructuring necessitated in local government because of Coalition cuts, that infrastructure was unsettled. The VCS stood to lose more than £3.3 billion in income over the Coalition's spending review period,

with a significant portion of that resulting from contraction in local government sources (NCVO 2011). A high proportion of LAs had made, by 2011, a disproportionate cut to VCS funding vis-à-vis the size of the cut experienced in its own income (NCVO 2013). Compounding this, the current Conservative government dealt LAs further funding cuts and set about shaping a policy context more explicitly focused on efficiency and the ‘smarter state’ (Lowndes and Gardner 2016), an operating environment, it has been argued, no more favourable for the sector (Sloccock 2017).

In the VCS literature the related notions of distancing, de-coupling, and fading, have been employed to describe the experiences of the VCS vis-à-vis this austerity-framed operating environment. Clayton, Donovan, and Merchant (2015) apply the notion of ‘distancing’ to conceptualise the changing relationship between the public sector and the VCS during the recent period of government funding cuts. Traced to the work of Georg Simmel (1950), in respect to social distance within social groups, ‘distancing’ is used by the authors in reference to a withdrawal of state support for related actors, with state ‘repositioning’ altering the proximity between those actors. The term denotes ‘the character of both affective and institutional proximities and distances’ (Clayton, Donovan, and Merchant 2015, 5), thus covering the nature of the relationships between organisations as well as operational and strategic collaborations across them.

An adjunct to the exploration of ‘distancing’ (2015) is ‘de-coupling’. Following Macmillan (2013), and in reference to the third sector and the state during austerity, ‘de-coupling’ describes a loss of connection, or line of severance, between the two actors.

Macmillian (2013) identifies that ‘the third sector and state have been increasingly “de-coupled”’ (Macmillan 2013). ‘Fading’ is a term employed in third sector commentary (for example, Kane 2015) to describe how VCS organisations tend to experience gradual erosion in the scope of their activities before becoming dormant, or closing. Incremental reductions in activity under increasing resource constraints mark decline and diminishment, eventual closures occurring (Ainsworth, 2018; Kane 2012). Below, these three notions organise a discussion of the changing connections between LAs and local charities, providing, overall, a neighbourhood-informed lens on the question of ‘resilience for whom?’.

Method

The above conceptual queries are addressed below using a qualitative study of small, local charities based in high-deprivation London neighbourhoods. Coinciding with the latter years of the Coalition government, twelve charities were each twice interviewed about the changing nature of their relationship with the respective LA. In total, twenty-four interviews were conducted: twelve first-round interviews in early 2014 and twelve follow-up interviews in summer 2015. The follow-up interview was an opportunity to explore the charity’s position at the close of the Coalition government. The second interview was incentivised by entry into a draw for a £200 donation. Interviews, typically lasting one hour or more, were with a Director or Chairperson.¹ Interviews were recorded, subject to agreement, transcribed and coded.

¹ The team member best positioned to comment on the charity’s operations and operating environment; the same individual for both rounds in most cases.

The charities were all located in London, in one of three high-deprivation neighbourhoods (wards). The neighbourhoods were located across different boroughs, that to reflect the capital's geographical diversity: one neighbourhood from each of Brent, Camden and Redbridge. They also had in common that they targeted one or more of three client groups: families with under-fives, young people 16-25 and older people 65+. Decisions as to geographical focus and charity type followed from the interests of a funder of this work. Inequalities in the capital were a particular concern of the funder, as were vulnerable groups within the population.

The charity-focused fieldwork reported on here was one among other projects commissioned by the funders.² The location of the neighbourhoods was influenced by that wider work. An earlier project sought to explore LA responses to funding cuts.³ It was in the design of that part of the work that the case study boroughs were decided upon. The VCS study used the same boroughs. The sampling method involved allocating all boroughs to one of three groups – those groups defined by key differentiating variables: political leadership; geographical location and amount of cut in funding – and then securing the participation of one borough from each, as officer and Member participation were needed. Willingness to participate largely drove the

² Social Policy in a Cold Climate investigated, through principally policy reviews and quantitative analyses, the changing nature of UK social policy and its outcomes from the Labour government forwards (Lupton et al. 2016). For details: http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/_new/research/Social_Policy_in_a_Cold_Climate.asp.

³ This was as part of a relatively small qualitative component to the research programme, focused on local government funding cuts and their local impacts.

selection. On approach several Chief Executives declined. Brent, Camden and Redbridge agreed, achieving the desired diversity: at the time of recruitment, Brent and Camden were Labour-led councils, Redbridge Conservative-led; Brent and Redbridge are Outer East and West London boroughs, respectively, Camden an Inner London borough.

For the VCS project, selection of one case study neighbourhood from each borough involved the ranking of each borough's wards by Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2010 score and selection of one of the most deprived from each.⁴ The case of deprived areas should be of particular concern, the populations they serve having been relatively exposed to recession and austerity (Jones et al. 2015, Beatty and Fothergill 2013).

Charities were then recruited from the sampled wards. This involved drawing-up as comprehensive a list of charities as possible for each neighbourhood: through Google map; on foot exploration and consulting the LA's charity directory or CVS. Charities serving one or more of under-fives, young people and older people were approached, in person, by letter, e-mail or phone. No more than half a dozen to a dozen charities serving these groups were identified in each case and it became apparent that not all of the charities contacted were operating. Others declined for reason of time.

Eventually four charities per neighbourhood were recruited, that figure determined by what seemed a feasible sample size given the volume of charities in each ward and

⁴ Participants were promised anonymity at the request of the respective University Ethics Committee. The wards are therefore not named.

project resources. For this paper the sample is narrowed to eight of the twelve organisations working as small local charities.⁵ Five of those eight were black or minority ethnic (BME) founded and run organisations. These high-deprivation London wards had relatively high proportions of BME population. All eight concentrated their provision on their immediate locality and, typically, had one or two full-time staff, in two cases unpaid, with additional resourcing from volunteers and part-time or casual workers.

In addition to discussion of the material gathered from the charities, some reference to earlier work with the LAs features below. Completed in 2013, LA officer interviews explored LA strategies to cope with funding cuts. The LA-VCS relationship was not the focus of those interviews and the intention here is to foreground the VCS position. Where the material can add insight about the LA perspective on the charities' reported experiences, it is incorporated.

A distancing and de-coupling

Financial implications of LA resilience for the local VCS were starkly apparent in the studied neighbourhoods. Interviewed in early 2014 most of the directors reported a fall in their LA income. By 2015 all did. For three charities this equated to the complete withdrawal of an LA grant that had represented a principal income stream for key operational costs. Two other charities had similarly seen all of their LA income cut,

⁵ Four of the charities recruited were distinct, all working at borough-level. These were larger organisations, recognisable as medium-sized charities. Their exclusion here is to the end of achieving in-depth analysis of the organisations focused on serving their near locality.

though in these cases that representing 10% or less of their income. The further three charities had seen their LA per annum income drop substantially, for example, from £85,000 to £57,000 and from £63,000 to £49,000.

Changes under discussion in the Councils, such as the level of rates the sector should pay and the terms of tenancies and leases, presented probable further erosion of financial support. Anxieties about the use of these mechanisms were commonly expressed, for example:

The Council's almost certainly going to change the way it calculates who gets money and how much they get. There are five different options on the table. They're all bad... I think that the point of it is about disguising the cuts, because they could, for example, keep our grants the same as they are and change rent relief. At the moment we've got a peppercorn rent, which might disappear... the Council's got a very good fiscal way of disguising the cuts.

These 'backdoor cuts' were materialising. A 20% discretionary concession, allowed by central government to the levy of the business rate from the sector, was, reportedly, increasingly, not being granted: 'they've been tightening up the criteria and gradually reducing it, so it's now almost impossible to get discretionary rate relief, so it's been another backdoor, sort of large backdoor cut to the sector.' A tenant of Brent Council had been asked to contribute more towards utility costs and up-keep of the council property it worked from. A Camden tenant had been asked to move site, to an area more peripheral to the neighbourhood, though compensation given. There were anxieties as to potential changes in the terms of leases for council-owned property or on council-owned land: 'They're trying to impose a standardised lease on all organisations

which will certainly impede most organisations' ability to function...they want, in every one of their leases, is effectively a three year break clause.' Clear from the charities here is that substantial de-coupling in financial ties was occurring and in a context in which they would find securing of replacement funding especially challenging. Examples of retraction of financial support and with that some of the protections it had offered added-up, across the cases, to a picture of pronounced de-coupling.

There was distancing and de-coupling also in well-established, once reliable, LA-VCS connections, in which trust and understanding had existed. Council teams providing the interface between the LA and the sector locally had been impacted by 'back office' efficiencies in the form of redundancies or other restructuring. Strong and supportive affective links – the individuals who 'had fought tooth and nail for us', 'were incredibly good to us' or were just 'brilliant', in the early stages of the cuts – were at risk, or lost relationships. Wider restructuring in the councils was having an impact, for example, 'you speak to someone and the next day the person is gone'. Channels of communication between the VCS and the LA were, in cases, no longer reliable. For a director in Brent, deletion of posts in the social services and families departments was translating, it was argued, into a reduction in referrals to the organisation. Knowledge of the charity and the value of its services were being lost.

A few directors were needing to deal with different parts of the council than they had previously. In connection with the transition for a portion of the charities from being grants recipients to being providers to the council of commissioned services, some were now dealing with procurement staff. A reluctance to engage with the local VCS and an

unhelpful inability to approach local charities differently to the larger corporate organisations those procurers worked with were perceived:

...other people in the Council took on that role and they carried on in their own world and when we meet them they are very alien to us, you know. They're suits who do their best not to meet the sector...The people in the Council who we used to work with; I think that they are largely sidelined as a department now.

There was a sense of exploitation. Two directors in Brent who had moved from being grants recipients to supplying services to the Council on a contracted basis spoke of the difficulties experienced in trying to secure an adequate price for the service offered: 'I'd like to see them supply that for the same money'.

Regarding LA consultation with local charities, in Brent and Camden, the majority of directors recalled being invited to feed into consultations relating to LA savings strategies. A lack of confidence in this process was apparent. An interviewee with two decades' experience in working with the respective LA said courses of action were, in the current climate, being worked out in detail and settled by officers aside of consultation findings. One Council's approach to consulting the sector was described as 'patronising' and 'time-wasting'. A connected claim was that the Council was bypassing local charities in wider public consultation.

Directors were waiting for decisions from ongoing reviews: of funding to the sector in Redbridge; of funding to community centres in Camden and as to the contracting out of children's centres in Brent. Under resourcing pressures the directors were much challenged to find time to plan for potentially unfavourable outcomes; '...can't really say I can see beyond that at the moment, all we're doing is constantly fundraising'.

Frustrations at an absence of givens were clear. A Brent-based charity who, in 2014, spoke of an expected renewal to an existing one year contract with the council for its services reported, in 2015, that the renewal had not been granted. The charity was left ‘a rabbit in the headlights’ trying to generate replacement income.

VCS fading

The distancing and de-coupling experienced by the charities as the LAs reacted to austerity had translated into a gradual erosion of the charities’ support for their local communities. The capacity of the charities to offer their services had reduced. Half had made one or more redundancies. The organisations had modified what was delivered, in most cases involving a reduction in their level of service delivery. Examples of service changes in a single neighbourhood included: the cessation of a free under-fives drop-in; a reduction in a youth club’s opening hours and a remodelling of a long-established lunch club from offering a hot lunch using paid staff to being a volunteer-run sandwich club. Additional examples from the other two neighbourhoods included: the introduction at a lunch club of a weekly charge and annual membership fee, along with the cessation of a number of activities and support services; the level of engagement with clients of a troubled families-focused charity had been reduced and due to the relocation of one organisation, on-the-doorstep advice services for an ethnic minority group had ceased.

The charities had been working hard to try and avoid these contractions, but with limited success. Three charities who had managed to secure an agreement with their council for referrals or a quota of purchased places, reported that the new arrangement was not fully substituting the original income. In Brent it was argued that the price per

referral was not sufficient to cover the full cost to the charity of the placement. These were loss-making agreements, tiding the charity over for a time with staff and volunteers unsustainably stretched to do the same, or more, for less. Further, income from the council now being allocated to delivery of a particular service to a particular individual, two of the charities were no longer working with their wider communities, something they had been able to do previously. The service offer of these providers was diminishing.

Six charities who had bid for funding from non-LA sources had had some success. Two had secured project funding in connection with a Big Lottery grant, in both cases as part of bidding in partnership with larger charities, both in Camden. A Brent-based charity had secured a contract with a housing association for delivery of a youth outreach project and of sufficient value to off-set the loss in its LA funding that year.

Difficulties, immediate or long-term, as well as compromises, were nonetheless apparent. Loss or reduction of non-ring-fenced funding through the LA meant organisations needed to run increasingly on time-limited grants for whatever projects or commissions they could win, a precarious model with noted limitations:

So we had to be more project-based...smaller project, run for two or three months.
So that's where we had to be a bit more creative...It will be short-snap you
know...It's very difficult to get core funding...has to be specific project-based...

Interviewees voiced frustration at having to work, for reason of needing the project income, within project frameworks set-down by funders which they did not, from their grassroots experience, view as appropriate: 'there was a black boy's mentoring project, which, you can imagine, stigmatised a whole lot of the young people that needed the

service. But this was a top-down project, so we delivered according to those regulations.’ The scope to be self-determining and responsive to needs identified at the grassroots-level was being eroded. Directors noted an added pressure with this model of needing to regularly reinvent services. Projects which had proven successful would need repackaging and presenting as something different to interest funders next time.

A shift towards greater reliance on building in bits of core funding across a few projects was not viewed as a sustainable strategy and was, reportedly, not well-liked by funders. Interviewees noted the challenge of finding match-funding when applying for many such grants. The grants-winning process had become more competitive, in the view of most directors, and more time-consuming, ‘they ask so many questions you know. One question wrong and it’s [the application] gone’ and:

My hit rate used to be...I’d do five applications, I’d get two grants, now I do 20 applications and I get two grants. I think I’m probably...a reasonably skilled fundraiser. There’s so many areas I’m trying to raise funds for and I’m also trying to completely reorganise the centre...there just isn’t time to be doing 10 or 20 applications.

With loss of LA funding there was concern as to diminished kudos. That a LA considered a charity worth investing in was viewed as helpful in securing further funding. These factors taken together, the organisations were waning. The gradual fading of these local charities was indicated.

Attempts to boost income through selling services were delivering modest successes. Only one charity had added a new income stream post-2010, the sale of youth mentoring services to local schools. Approaches to local businesses had secured, in a few cases, small amounts of support, for example, one-off donations of food for a lunch

club, but nothing more substantial. Several approaches by the charities to local branches of national supermarkets and banks had yielded one successful outcome. Charities, whilst identifying partnership working as a possible future funding avenue, through raising funding as consortiums, noted challenges: ‘partnerships don’t happen from one day to the next.’ There was, further, geographical unevenness in the potential for developing consortia. Though in Camden two partnership bids had been successful, there was a history of the sector working collaboratively there. In Redbridge there was less of a VCS presence and community. The Directors, typically committed to riding out these hard times, were clear that the existence of their charities, distanced and decoupled from the LA support once available, was now of a different, diminished nature. They had been fading as charity providers.

‘For whom?’, some contestations and limitations

‘Resilience for whom?’ reminds that there may be different experiences and wider costs to identify within assessment of bouncing forward. In the case of the resilient LA, the decisions made and actions taken by the LA to ensure it ‘weathered the storm’ severely impacted and compromised the functioning of the organisations examined above. The picture overall is of charities struggling greatly in the wake of the distancing and decoupling effects of LA resilience strategies. The charities were working hard to bounce forward, but were fading. At the time of leaving the field, uncertainty loomed over the sampled charities’ futures. The outlook appeared to be towards further fading: ‘I don’t know how much longer we can go on as a charity... We’re just surviving’.

Similar empirical findings are readily located in the VCS literature. Davidson, Goldstraw, and Packham (2014), surveying small charities in Manchester, in 2011 and 2013 – a city in which a high proportion of VCS organisations were receiving more than

half of their funding from the LA – found a significant number had disappeared between those points. LA funding cuts, they argued, were being directly passed onto the VCS. In a similar vein, Rees and Rose’s study of the engagement of the VCS in local-level decision-making in Greater Manchester concludes, ‘VSOs and the community are considered to be part of an external environment, as subjects to be manipulated rather than as potential partners’ (2015, 89). Alcock, Macmillan and Bulloch (2012) refer to a ‘great unsettlement’ to the VCS in the recent period. Recent sector reporting highlights the plight of small charities, closing in notable numbers (Ainsworth 2018).

In the account of the resilient LA, the LA perspective has been foregrounded and with that the extent of deleterious impacts, indicated when looking at associated local organisations, has, arguably, been underexplored. Considering wider ramifications through attention to related organisations beyond the council who were also involved in supplying services to the local community, the dark underside to LA resilience is highlighted. Short of much connection of these wider experiences of LA resilience with LA-focussed reporting, the picture of ‘the resilient LA’ (Shaw 2012), or the LA as ‘great survivor’ (John 2014), is, arguably, skewed. Experiences across the wider landscape of local service provision, a landscape of interconnections and feedbacks, are glossed over and obscured.

There are complexities, nonetheless, to addressing the question of ‘for whom?’. Firstly, excerpts from interviews, completed in 2013, with senior officers and Members in the case study boroughs indicated a sense that a good job was being made in respect to protection afforded the VCS. A view to be treated with the caution that council

representatives may present their actions in best light, and a view captured early in the research, such perspectives had their justifications. Officers tended to speak from, and stress, a high-level view. Acknowledging local cases and losses, those disruptions were somewhat deemphasised. Pursuing the end of resilience, through ‘efficiencies’ and ‘more with less’ (Lowndes and Gardner 2016; Fitzgerald and Lupton 2015; Hastings et al. 2015), the detail of means had to be approached pragmatically by officers. An officer in Brent, for example, acknowledging that ‘smaller charities will say they have had their funding cut’ added that funding had been re-diverted through new competitive tendering processes, to the end, ostensibly, of its more efficient use; ‘smaller organisations may have lost out in the procurement process.’

Such is indicative of the tensions which may present when seeking to weigh-up resilience’s more and less desirable effects (White and O’Hare 2014; Lebel et al. 2006). From an LA perspective, the end of needing to find ‘efficiencies’ within which services would continue to be delivered had, it was argued, been suitably realised. The means to the end of the resilience achieved seemed defensible and relatively sound given the challenging level of funding cut. For stakeholders external to the Council, the means used did not always appear in their interests. Stakeholder experiences locally evidenced the hard end of Council austerity responses. LA resilience had been detrimental, the above charities being compromised or undermined through a distancing and de-coupling in their financial and relational links with the LA. With that the tailored support and rich local networks typically offered by such local charities, and difficult to replace, were being diminished (Ainsworth 2018). It is around such tensions in perspective that identification of an ‘austerity puzzle’ may be more or less contradicted.

Secondly, there are limitations to identification of ‘losers’ and ‘winners’ here. Whilst the costs of LA resilience were being spread to other local organisations, without the means to absorb them themselves, there was acknowledgement among LA interviewees as to a possible boomerang effect. Officers expressed concerns that current strategies, presented as trimming and tinkering with services, would come back to bite them. The ‘squeezing’ of partners in local service supply, officers recognised, would likely accentuate need locally, with gaps in provision opening-up. The burden of deeper and wider-felt need could ultimately retransfer to the council with, for example, eligibility thresholds being reached in greater numbers. A framing of the LA as ‘winner’, the VCS as ‘loser’, may thus be somewhat crude (Grant Thornton, 2013).

Conclusions

When ‘resilience’ was suggested in the local government literature as a framework through which to approach LA responses to a range of crises, among them austerity, it was noted that attention to other local actors should form part of such assessment (Shaw 2012). In the detailed treatments of LA resilience and austerity that have since followed, the focus has been foremost the nature of LA approaches, wider experiences of those being less well considered. The LA has been praised for its resilience (John 2014), but perhaps not enough has been reported of the disruptions and repercussions instigated in the wider landscape of local services provision. It was posited above that this may follow from a limited engagement with aspects of recent critical discussion of resilience, in which the question of ‘resilience for whom?’ is raised.

Foregrounding ‘resilience for whom?’, the resilient LA account has been revisited here in light of the experiences of other local organisations with similar public service-oriented

goals. Local perspectives have been highlighted and connected with discussion of the resilient LA. A dark underside is recognised, with once partner organisations suffering the effects of de-coupling and distancing, precipitating a fading of those providers. The ‘austerity puzzle’ noted in the LA commentary (Gardner 2017) was, from a neighbourhood, partner sector examination, not so apparent. The challenge the Coalition and later Conservative government presented to the LA, to stand resilient in the face of austerity, has been deflected and transferred, not simply absorbed. Its success has been contingent on costs readily apparent locally, including in deprived areas. Findings here speak somewhat critically to a celebratory tone in the ‘great survivor’ narrative.

In employing the conceptual toolkit of resilience in local government and austerity scholarship, broad engagement with debate of the concept is to be endorsed. As the commentary on resilience continues to be developed, for example, with recent discussion of how resilience may be redeemed from its neoliberal associations (DeVerteuil and Golubchikov 2016), local government scholars should stay engaged with, and add their contributions to, those debates. ‘Resilience for whom?’ is a part of the conceptual toolkit that could more routinely be engaged.

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the valuable input of Research Assistant, Anne Marie Brady and Project Support Assistant, Alice Belotti.

Funding

This work was supported by Trust for London [6076] and the Titmuss Meinhardt Research Fund.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest is reported.

References

- Adger, W. N. 2000. "Social and Ecological Resilience: Are They Related?" *Progress in Human Geography* 24 (3): 347–364.
- Ainsworth, D. 2018. "Small charities closing faster than they open, BBC programme hears." *Civil Society*, January 15. www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/small-charities-closing-faster-than-they-open-bbc-programme-hears.html
- Alcock, P. 2010. "Building the Big Society: A New Policy Environment for the Third Sector in England." *Voluntary Sector Review* 1 (3): 379–389.
- Alcock, P., R. Macmillan and S. Bulloch. 2012. *"The Worst of Times?" Third Sector Futures Dialogues*. Birmingham: Third Sector Research Centre.
- Andres, L., and J. Round. 2015. "The Role of 'Persistent Resilience' Within Everyday Life and Polity: Households Coping with Marginality Within the 'Big Society'." *Environment and Planning A* 47: 676–690.
- Beatty, C. and S. Fothergill. 2013. *Hitting the Poorest Places Hardest: The Local and Regional Impact of Welfare Reform*. Sheffield: CRESR, Sheffield Hallam University.
- Brewington, S. D. 2016. "The Social Costs of Resilience: An Example from the Faroe Islands." *Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 27 (1): 95–101.
- CARRI. 2013. *Definitions of Community Resilience: An Analysis*. Washington: Community and Regional Resilience Institute.
- Clayton, J., C. Donovan and J. Merchant. 2015. "Distancing and Limited Resourcefulness: Third Sector Service Provision Under Austerity Localism in the North East of England." *Urban Studies* 53 (4): 723–740.
- Conservative Party. 2010. *Building a Big Society*. London: Conservative Party.
- Crespi, B. 2015. "Cognitive trade-offs and the costs of resilience." *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 38.
- Cretney, R. 2014. "Resilience for Whom? Emerging Critical Geographies of Socio-ecological Resilience." *Geography Compass* 8/9: 627–640.
- Davidson, E., K. Goldstraw and C. Packham. 2014. *Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis: An Exploration of the Effects of Austerity on Small Voluntary Organisations in the UK*. Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University.
- Dayson, C., and P. Wells. 2013. "Voluntary and Community Sector Policy under the Coalition Government People." *Place and Policy* 7 (2): 91–99.

- DeVerteuil, G. and O. Golubchikov. 2016. "Can resilience be redeemed?" *City* 20 (1): 143-151.
- Di Domenico, M., P. Tracey, and H. Haugh. 2009. "Social Economy Involvement in Public Service Delivery: Community Engagement and Accountability." *Regional Studies* 43 (7): 981-22.
- Fitzgerald, A., and R. Lupton. 2015. "The Limits to Resilience? The Impact of Local Government Spending Cuts in London." *Local Government Studies* 41 (4): 582-600.
- Gardner, A. 2017. "Big change, little change? Punctuation, increments and multi-layer institutional change for English local authorities under austerity." *Local Government Studies* 43 (2): 150-169.
- Gastor, L., and N. Deakin. 1998. "Local Government and the Voluntary Sector: Who Needs Whom – Why and What for." *Local Governance* 24 (3): 169-94.
- Grant Thornton. 2013. *2016 Tipping Point? Challenging the Current*. London: Grant Thornton.
- Harrison, E. 2012. "Bouncing back? Recession, Resilience and Everyday Lives." *Critical Social Policy* 33 (1): 97-113.
- Hastings, A., N. Bailey, M. Gannon, K. Besemer, and G. Bramley. 2015. "Coping with the Cuts? The Management of the Worst Financial Settlement in Living Memory." *Local Government Studies* 41 (4): 601-621.
- HM Government. 2011. *Open Public Services White Paper*. London: Cabinet Office.
- Hogg, E., and S. Baines. 2011. "Changing Responsibilities and Roles of the Voluntary and Community Sector in the Welfare Mix: A Review." *Social Policy and Society* 10: 341-352.
- Holling C.S. 1986. "Resilience of Ecosystems: Local Surprise and Global Change." In *Sustainable Development of the Biosphere*, edited by W.C. Clark and R.E. Munn, 292-317. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holling, C.S. 2001. "Understanding the Complexity of Economic, Ecological and Social Systems." *Ecosystems* 4 (5): 390-405.
- Houston, B. 2015. "Bouncing Forward: Assessing Advances in Community Resilience Assessment, Intervention and Theory to Guide Future Work." *American Behavioral Scientist* 59 (2): 175-180.
- Innes, D., and G. Tetlow. 2015. "Delivering Fiscal Squeeze by Cutting Local Government Spending." *Fiscal Studies* 36 (3): 303-325.

- John, P. 2014. "The Great Survivor: The Persistence and Resilience of English Local Government." *Local Government Studies* 40 (5): 687–704.
- Jones, M., and J. Liddle. 2011. "Implementing the UK Central Government's Policy Agenda for Improved Third Sector Engagement." *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 24 (2): 157–171.
- Jones, G., R. A. Meegan, P. Kennett, and J. Croft. 2015. "The Uneven Impact of Austerity on the Voluntary and Community Sector: A Tale of Two Cities." *Urban Studies* 53 (10): 2064–2080.
- Joseph, J. 2013. "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism: a Governmentality Approach." *Resilience* 1 (1): 38–52.
- Kane, D. 2015. "Are More Charities Closing?" *NCVO blog*. Available at: <https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2015/08/19/are-more-charities-closing/>. Accessed January 22 2018.
- Kane, D. 2012. "Behind the headline: why '7,000 charities close' doesn't tell the full story." *NCVO blog*. <https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2012/08/17/behind-the-headline-why-7000-charities-close-doesnt-tell-the-full-story>. Accessed January 26 2018.
- Lebel, L., J. M. Anderies, B. Campbell, C. Folke, S. Hatfield-Dodds, T. P. Hughes and J. Wilson. 2006. "Governance and the Capacity to Manage Resilience in Regional Social-ecological Systems." *Ecology and Society*, 11 (1), www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol11/iss1/art19/.
- Levitas, R. 2012. "The Just's Umbrella: Austerity and the Big Society in Coalition Policy and Beyond." *Critical Social Policy* 32: 320–42.
- Lowndes V., and A. Gardner. 2016. "Local governance under the Conservatives: super-austerity, devolution and the 'smarter state'." *Local Government Studies* 42:3: 357–375.
- Lowndes, V., and K. McCaughie. 2013. "Weathering the Perfect Storm? Austerity and Institutional Resilience in Local Government." *Policy and Politics* 41 (4): 533–49.
- Lupton, R., J. Hills, K. Stewart, T. Burchardt and P. Vizard (eds). 2016. *Social policy in a cold climate: Policies and their consequences since the crisis*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Macmillan, R. 2013. "De-coupling the State and the Third Sector? The 'Big Society' as a Spontaneous Order." *Voluntary Sector Review* 4 (2): 185–203.
- Masten, A.S. 2001. "Ordinary Magic: Resilience Processes in Development." *American Psychologist* 56 (3): 227–238.

- MacKinnon, D., and K.D. Derickson. 2012. "From Resilience to Resourcefulness: A Critique of Resilience Policy and Activism." *Progress in Human Geography* 37 (2): 253–270.
- McCabe, A., and J. Phillimore. 2012. *All Change? Surviving Below the Radar: Community Groups and Activities in a Big Society*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.
- NCVO. 2011. *Counting the Cuts: The Impact of Spending Cuts on the UK Voluntary and Community Sector*. London: NCVO.
- NCVO. 2013. *Counting the Cuts: The Impact of Spending Cuts on the UK Voluntary and Community Sector*. London: NCVO.
- Norris, F.H., S.P., Stevens, B., Pfefferbaum, K.F., Wyche and R.L. Pfefferbaum. 2008. "Community Resilience as a Metaphor, Theory, Set of Capacities, and Strategy for Disaster Readiness." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 41 (1-2): 127–50.
- Osborne, S.P., and K. McLaughlin. 2004. "The Cross-Cutting Review of the Voluntary Sector: Where Next for Local Government-Voluntary Sector Relationships?" *Regional Studies* 38 (5): 571–580.
- Pike, A., S. Dawley and J. Tomaney. 2010. "Resilience, Adaptation and Adaptability." *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 3: 59–70.
- Platts-Fowler, D. and D. Robinson. 2016. "Community resilience: a policy tool for local government?" *Local Government Studies*, 42 (5): 762-784.
- PwC. 2013. *The Local State we're in: PwC's Annual Local Government Survey 2013*. London: PwC.
- Rees, J., and N. Rose. 2015. "New 'New Localism' or Emperor's New Clothes: Diverging Local Social Policies and State-voluntary Sector Relations in an Era of Localism." *Voluntary Sector Review* 6 (1): 81–91.
- Shaw, K. 2012. "The Rise of the Resilient Local Authority?" *Local Government Studies* 38 (3): 281–300.
- Simmel, G. 1950. *The Sociology Of Georg Simmel*. Wolff, Kurt H., Trans. New York: The Free Press.
- Simmie J., and R. Martin. 2010. "The Economic Resilience of Regions: Towards an Evolutionary Approach." *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 3 (1): 27–43.

- Sloccock, C. 2017. "A Shared Society? The independence of the voluntary sector in 2017." *Civil Exchange*, www.civilexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/A-Shared-Society-2017final.pdf
- Vacchelli, E., P. Kathrecha, and N. Gyte. 2015. "Is it Really Just the Cuts? Neo-liberal Tales from the Women's Voluntary and Community Sector in London." *Feminist Review* 109: 180-189.
- Walker, J., and M. Cooper. 2011. "Genealogies of Resilience: From Systems Ecology to the Political Economy of Crisis Adaptation." *Security Dialogue* 42 (2): 143–160.
- Weichselgartner, J., and I. Kelman. 2014. "Geographies of Resilience: Challenges and Opportunities of a Descriptive Concept." *Progress in Human Geography* 39 (3): 249-267.
- White, R., and P. O'Hare. 2014. "From Rhetoric to Reality: Which Resilience, Why Resilience, and Whose Resilience in Spatial Planning?" *Environment and Planning C* 32: 934–950.
- Williams, A., P. Cloke and S. Thomas. 2012. "Co-constituting Neoliberalism: Faith-based Organisations, Co-option, and Resistance in the UK." *Environment and Planning A* 44 (6): 1479–1501.