

Navigating Austerity: Balancing ‘Desirability with Viability’ in a Third Sector Disability Sports Organisation in Liverpool, England.

Abstract

Research Question

Adopting a case study approach, this article examines the impact that austerity has had upon a Third Sector sport organisation (TSSO) that specialises in delivering disability sport provision in Liverpool, England.

Research Methods

In-depth qualitative data was collected from 15 semi-structured interviews with senior officials belonging to the TSSO. Data were thematically analysed to explore stakeholders’ perspectives of how the wider fiscal environment has affected the organisation and how such impacts have been managed.

Results and Findings

The findings illustrate the financial challenges faced by the TSSO as a consequence of reductions in available funding. The article then demonstrates how the TSSO weathers such financial challenges and attempts to grow its delivery capability through partnership and network development.

Implications

This article identifies the implications imposed upon the TSSO in a time of austerity and explores the management and growth strategies employed by the organisation to navigate these complex circumstances without compromising a steadfast commitment to its mission values.

Key words:

Austerity third sector organisation disability sport partnership networks

Word count: 7597

Introduction

Following the £81 billion of cuts outlined in the UK's 2010 *Comprehensive Spending Review* (CSR), an increasing trend towards the privatisation, marketisation and commodification of public service provision has, and continues to be, felt at the local government level (Jones and Stewart 2012; Levitas 2012; Parnell, Millward & Spracklen, 2015). In conjunction with these cuts, there have been significant changes to legislation and the delivery of public services, with the 'localism' and 'big society' agendas at the fore (Association of Professional Service Excellence, [APSE] 2012). Evidence suggests that despite entrenched and concentrated social problems, public spending cuts have been disproportionately applied to cities that have traditionally suffered high social deprivation (Hastings, Bailey, Bramley, Gannon & Watkins, 2015). Liverpool is one such city. A city-region in the UK, Liverpool has 'some of the "worst" pockets of deprivation and considerable social exclusion challenges' in Europe (Giordano, 2014, p.4). Indeed, Kennett, Jones, Meegan and Croft (2015) point out that there is a positive relationship between levels of deprivation and reductions in local government spending, and that Liverpool has received the largest reduction in central government funding of all 'core' English cities. Lowndes and Pratchett (2012) highlight that it is those traditionally highly deprived areas that are least likely to be resistant to the economic impact of these cuts, resulting in a greater reduction in public services.

Hastings et al. (2015) contend that the potential impacts of these cuts may go beyond reduced funding for provision in and of sport and job losses for practitioners in the field, and instead lead to the complete withdrawal of local government services in areas like sport. Such local government budgetary constraints have threatened the ability of local authorities (LAs) to provide

and sustain the same level of provision, with sport and leisure services traditionally an area earmarked to be scaled back. As King (2014) expounds, the Big Society perspective champions that services such as sports provision be facilitated or 'co-produced' by intermediary institutions that lie between the state and market; such agencies typically include the community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises that comprise the 'Third' sector (Alcock, 2010). King (2014) adds that where a cooperative delivery of sport between the LA and Third Sector exists, Third Sector Organisations (TSOs) play an important role in negotiating the interests of communities and delivering services.

Austerity has not only affected LAs, as the evidence suggests that TSOs such as charities and voluntary service organisations (VSOs) have had funding/grants reduced or rapidly rundown, affecting their ability to deliver services: this is particularly the case in deprived areas where specific grant programmes have previously targeted, and where there exists higher levels of grant

dependence (Besemer & Bramley, 2012). Research undertaken to measure the impact that austerity has had on statutory public services is growing (see: Lowndes & Pratchett 2012; Metcalf, 2013; Jones & Meegan 2015). However, the literature around the impact of austerity upon Third Sector sports organisations (TSSOs) is relatively sparse. That the state has endorsed the 'mainstreaming' of the voluntary sector as an ideological pillar of the big society (May et al., 2013), and that councils have had to seek efficiency savings – often starving voluntary bodies of much needed funding (Hastings et al., 2015) – there is little extant research that examines how TSOs manage and deal with the repercussions of austerity measures. Even less is known about how disability centred TSSOs withstand such changes to the funding climate.

To this end, the current study explores how government cuts in public funding have been experienced and felt by a TSSO in Liverpool - the Greenbank disability sports academy – one of its kind in the UK. As recorded in 2011, the percentage of 'activity limitations' in the Liverpool LA was 22.4 per cent, a 10.4 per cent higher figure than in the least deprived LA in the country (Office for National Statistics, 2013). In addition, Knowsley, a district in the Liverpool area, is an LA that has one of the highest prevalence rates (14.2%) in the country for people who are limited 'a lot'¹ by their

¹ Someone who usually requires regular and continuing support from family members, friends or personal social services for a number of normal daily activities (Office for National Statistics, 2013).

disability (Office for national Statistics, 2013). Therefore, as a specialist TSSO in Merseyside, Greenbank is situated in an area which indicatively is in high need of such specialist services – services which also have a major role to play in fulfilling the principles of national governing bodies’ (NGBs) whole sport plans to increase sporting participation by people who have disabilities, including the most talented (Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), 2012).

The Greenbank Project, Liverpool, UK

The “The Greenbank project” is a registered charity and is comprised of two elements: one is the college of 600 students and the second is Greenbank Sports Academy. The charity is 34 years of age, the college established in 1983, and the sports academy was built in 1999. The key mission for the charity is to enhance opportunities for disabled people and other disadvantaged communities through education, training, employment, transport, sport and recreation. The Greenbank College offers education, training and employment services. Greenbank Sports Academy, on the other hand, is a recognised and one-of-a-kind social enterprise that, as well as providing sport and recreational opportunities for people with disabilities, is also a centre dedicated to the development of elite performance pathways for disability sport in Northern England. Greenbank offers its services to the local community but is particularly focussed on the provision of relevant opportunities for disabled people and other disadvantaged groups to engage with sport at various at all levels of participation. The organisational structure entails a management committee that consists of the chief executive officer (CEO), a senior management team (SMT) for the College, an SMT for the Academy, and an elected board of councillors who are involved in the strategic decision making process. The Greenbank Project employs a total of 92 paid staff and 18 regular volunteers. Of the paid staff, 26 are part-time and only nine occupy senior positions in the organisation.

Literature review

With LA provision for sport originating in the welfare statism of the 1970s, LA sport services were set up to be directly provided by LAs under what has been defined as an ‘ensuring’ council model (King, 2014). However, the ‘era of austerity’ ushered in by the CSR under the former Coalition Government has led to major cuts in public spending which have been disproportionately felt at the local government level (Lowndes & Pratchett, 2012). As outlined by Lowndes and Pratchett (2012), the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has seen 27 and 51 per cent cuts to their local government and communities budgets, respectively, over the four year period from 2011 to 2014-15. In-line with such fiscal decrements, King’s (2014: 353) research indicates that modes of LA governance and delivery of public services are changing, and shifting away from the traditional ‘ensuring’ organisational framework wherein LAs aim to directly provide sport ‘services for all’. Instead, many English councils are adopting a market-orientated ‘commissioning’ model of sports services in which external providers are sourced to deliver local services (APSE, 2012). To elaborate, the ‘commissioning’ framework marks a move away from councils as providers of sport and recreation, to purchaser of services. This shift to a commissioning approach sees LAs procure increasing numbers of services from private and Third Sector bodies. King (2014) also documents alternative emerging service-orientations that have been adopted by a number of LAs through which residents and communities ‘co-produce’ sport and recreation services.

This shift away from the direct provision of sport services by LAs sits alongside budgetary cuts as well as ‘big society’ and localism agendas of the government to devolve state responsibility and harness the capacity of the voluntary sector, charities and social enterprises to play a more prominent role in the running of public services and encourage communities to be the source and resources of their own leisure, sporting and welfare provision. The rhetoric around this policy change is to encourage LA’s to be innovative in their solutions to the commissioning of public services, examples include: public/private partnerships, asset (facility) transfer to community

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3 organisations, and the commissioning of the voluntary sector to deliver more widely (Lowndes &
4 McCaughie, 2013; Nichols, Forbes, Findlay-King & MacFayden, 2015). As a result however, some
5 sections of the community are likely to become increasingly marginalised as they may not have the
6 capacity to take advantage of such innovations and opportunities (Kisby, 2010; Lowndes &
7 McCaughie, 2013). Stoker (2011) also adopts a more cynical view, suggesting that communities are
8 susceptible to being coerced into delivery rather than through consensus. This approach is arguably
9 going to hinder partnership delivery instead of liberating communities.
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11 According to Collins and Haudenhuyse (2015), the fiscal environment experienced by sport
12 services under the current austerity measures is considerably more stretched than in previous
13 recessions, and the situation is likely to worsen. As APSE (2012) expound, many LAs were
14 unprepared for the scale of the recent cuts to their financial resources, resulting in operating sport
15 services coming 'under threat'. Moreover, the political commitment to LA sport services is
16 progressively limited as the influence of government reduces (King, 2014). To this effect, Lowndes
17 and Squires (2012) recognise a 'survival narrative' that is reflected in local government operating
18 procedures in times of austerity and which enable LAs to cope with increasing financial constraints
19 by changing how they deliver services. Hastings et al. (2015) emphasise that as well as new
20 partnerships and models of delivery, councils have strategically reacted to austerity by devolving
21 accountability for many activities to other public bodies and TSOs. Indeed, the Third Sector is
22 becoming increasingly involved in certain localities in the structuring of community sport delivery by
23 way of developing 'community sport hubs' (APSE, 2012: 20).
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25 Hastings et al. (2015) concur that there has been a trend toward innovative entrepreneurial
26 and commercial solutions by TSO's. In their research, Hastings et al. (2015) cite that the perceived
27 benefits of this 'entrepreneurial shift' allows TSOs more freedom within which to work as they are
28 less bound by the conditions that are often tied into grants due to the decline in funding from public
29 bodies, and this encourages them to pursue alternative income streams that present fewer
30 bureaucratic constraints. Additionally, many TSOs have had to respond to a climate of austerity by
31 adapting and evolving how they operate. A survey by New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) found that
32 75% of charities that responded now measure some or all of their work, and that almost three
33 quarters have increased their investment in impact measurement over the past five years (Ógáin et
34 al, 2012). The trend towards public service delivery contracting in the past two decades has been
35 experienced by many TSOs as an increasingly competitive environment exerts pressure to
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37 demonstrate that they can outperform other potential private or Third Sector bidders (Metcalf,
38 2013). Therefore, there is a perceived pressure on TSOs to become more 'business-like' and to adopt
39 commercial practices synonymous with Private Sector companies. TSOs have had to adapt and
40 innovate both to be able to measure, evidence and extend 'impact', as current and future funding is
41 typically contingent on these organisations making 'a difference' to the vulnerable groups that they
42 set out to support; and as a bi-product of implementing measurement procedures, TSOs often
43 perceive that their services become enhanced (Ógáin, Lumley & Pritchard, 2012).
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45 On the other hand, there are concerns for TSOs that the scale and speed of cuts and
46 subsequent reductions in public funding streams can restrict their reach, function and innovation
47 (Lowndes and Squires 2012). One associated problem with this is that many TSOs are having to
48 deploy much of their resources into applying for alternative sources of funding, and this pulls
49 personnel away from their core roles and responsibilities, or requires the hiring of grants consultants
50 that incur further expense (Hastings et al., 2015). As TSOs expend more resources on these
51 tendering processes and take on more commercial activities, they are frequently forced to reorient
52 their services to the strict specifications of funding briefs, and this can lead to a 'mission drift' away
53 from the key values and core purposes of the organisation, regardless of whether they are in a
54 position to provide the service outlined (Hastings et al., 2015). Where there is a growing tendency to
55 'chase' funding, the innovations and long-term impact of the TSO become increasingly limited
56 (Hastings et al., 2015). Consequently, Hastings et al. (2015) state that councils and LAs have reduced
57 the level or range of services they are able to provide, either to local communities or to targeted
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‘hard to reach’ groups, as well as their ability to award grants to the TSOs that support them. Hastings et al. (2015) contend that due to the large decrease in grants, closure or transfer of facilities, a reduction in experienced staff, and in many cases the complete withdrawal of local government services such as sport, traditional ‘at risk’ and ‘hard to reach’ target groups like disabled people, young people and disadvantaged communities, are at risk of becoming increasingly marginalised. King (2014) warns that the cuts in funding for community and grassroots sports provision are likely to threaten the ideals of ‘sport for all’ and impair a widespread desire to increase sports participation across the UK population.

That there have been sharp and sustained cuts to council budgets, cost saving measures have meant that gaps in provision have widened more quickly than many TSOs had anticipated (Hastings et al., 2015). Due to this shortfall in resources, TSOs and voluntary organisations have had to plug more and more of the service gaps that lie between public sector and market provision, whilst council retrenchment strategies have focussed on developing community capacity to empower individual citizens and collectives to fill voids in provision (Hastings et al., 2015). According to research by APSE (2012) there are widespread concerns at local government level about the financial capacity and long-term sustainability of the Third Sector management of sport services without greater support from the Public Sector.

Methodology

This case study research utilises qualitative data captured from senior officials and paid employees of the Greenbank Sports Academy. Adopting a constructivist approach, the study set out to gain an understanding of how austerity measures have been experienced by this disability centred TSSO. To do this, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to select senior figures in the organisation responsible for running the charity. Participants (n=15) were drawn from the Project’s SMTs, service delivery staff and from the elected board of councillors. All participants had worked with the charity for at least one year. Although the sample size is a modest one, this unit of analysis has been explored through not one, but rather seven individual perspectives of participants within the TSSO, as Baxter and Jack (2008, p. 544) advocate that this strategy ‘allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and explored’. As a single case study, the generalisability of these findings is limited, yet the researchers feel that an exploration of the experiences and meanings of austerity upon a TSSO, as encountered and perceived by its senior staff and decision making personnel, is of significant worth and interest to the sport development community for investigation.

This research utilised semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth understanding of how staff members perceive the impact of the austerity measures upon this TSSO and the context within which they operate. Related studies have adopted similar methods (see: Lowndes & Pratchett, 2012; King, 2014; Hastings, et al., 2015 ; Jones & Meegan 2015; Kennett, et al, 2015) as they offer a useful mechanism by which to explore the contemporary challenges faced by TSSOs, such as Greenbank, and in turn by those individuals who have the task of managing them. Selecting semi-structured interviews as opposed to structured interviews offered for greater flexibility in the interview schedule, and this was important as it allowed the researcher to respond to key points or unclear information that arose by probing for further elaboration or clarification (Cargan, 2007).

To access the participants, the CEO of the charity was approached by the research team to request permission to undertake the study. The CEO then served as a gatekeeper in accessing further senior employees within the organisation – and those individuals who are specifically involved with the management, financing and strategic delivery of the TSSO, and who therefore are directly aware of the fiscal realities acting upon the organisation. The CEO shared the names and contact details of the further six participants, and these individuals were then sent an email outlining the study and inviting them to take part in the research. All invitations were accepted and interview

arrangements were subsequently made. The interviews were undertaken at the Greenbank centre as it offered a convenient and safe environment for the participants. On meeting the study's recruits face-to-face, and prior to the interview, they were given participant information sheets and asked to provide their written consent to take part.

The research team consisted of two members. One researcher performed all interviews for consistency of interview technique and specific lines of questioning that may have emerged from one interview to another. The interviews lasted between 20 and 120 minutes. All interviews were

digitally recorded so that all data were retrievable. By utilising digitally stored files it meant that interviews could be listened to as many times as necessary and that the data were able to be transcribed verbatim. For confidentiality, all participants used in this study were assigned pseudonyms.

The Interview data were then analysed thematically, and this was done openly and manually as the study was carried out by a research team rather than one individual. As guided by a methodological component of a study by Bruening et al. (2015), the data were coded by the two researchers. Both researchers independently coded two transcripts before meeting to compare codes and to discuss and agree on key themes and subthemes. The same process was performed again on one further transcript and discussions took place until consensus was reached that: a) data saturation was evident and, b) how the data were to be coded. The remaining transcripts were then divided by the two researchers and coded individually by the coding framework that had been

established. To this end, emergent coding initially had allowed the researchers to pull together general yet consistent and common features across the data. The subsequent stage in the data analysis process was to undertake axial coding to facilitate the linking together of a number of codes and concepts, before concrete thematic categories were pinpointed and agreed upon. These specific categories were illustrative of, and therefore subsumed within, a core category that encompasses the data.

To check that the study's participants' comments and contributions were accurately interpreted, and that the resulting coding structure suitably portrayed the context within which Greenbank both finds itself in and operates, respondent validation was undertaken. Bryman (2012) and Peachey, Borland, Lobpries and Cohen (2015) recommend undertaking such post-analysis follow-ups with interviewees in order to corroborate the results and conclusions emanating from the data and to ensure the credibility and dependability of them. To this end, two of the study's

participants were approached to 'check' the accuracy and acceptability of the research findings – all participants within this sample agreed that their comments had been accurately reflected in the findings.

Findings

The challenges faced by the Organisation

As with any TSO/TSSO, most of the challenges faced by Greenbank can be reduced to the financial. Recurrent and explicit across a number of the interviews with members of the Greenbank SMT is the constant struggle that the Project faces in balancing 'desirability' with 'viability' in the services that they offer. The threats to Greenbank's financial viability are twofold, first, and as the CEO alludes to, is an unwavering commitment to the mission of the Project:

As a charity, we have two concepts. One is to be desirable and one is to be viable, and they are very difficult to balance at times... The real thing is to make sure that the charity's mission statement never drifts, especially when there are difficulties with financing. I see a lot of charities and organisations chasing the money, and we've tended never to do that. So, it's to ensure that we have a sense of purpose, a sense of future (CEO).

The CEO is resolute in his commitment to the mission and purposes of the organisation, and he is adamant that his staff will not ‘chase the money’ in the case of available funding that cannot be used to fit the cause of the charity. The finance officer (FO), whilst further echoing an absolute and unerring organisational commitment to mission values, highlights the increasing pressure that this philosophy places upon the Project in a sector experiencing widespread reductions in funding (and funding term):

The money doesn’t come as freely as it used to. And we’re up against people chasing money – people who would never have gone for the money for disability beforehand... The thing is with us, we are specific in who we deal with so we can’t change our focus that much because we’ve got our aims and objectives. So, it’s a lot harder to win the grants, and nowadays there’s not very many long term. It’s short term grants. I mean we’ve got one for three years which is mega, really. But it’s usually twelve months then you have to go through the process again of trying to do bids. It’s really a lot harder to get funding (FO).

In this passage, the FO describes the crowded space within which Greenbank now operates as it increasingly finds itself competing with organisations who are seen to be ‘chasing’ the same funding pots – sources of finance which, in previous times, would not have interested other TSOs or aligned with their organisational rationales. The SDM elaborates further on the associated pecuniary challenges acting upon the organisation and the difficulties that they encounter when looking to secure further funding:

We’re having to work harder for it and we’re also having to put a lot more applications in to get your value because of the competition, whereas before they may have been up to £50,000, now a lot of them are up to £10,000 or less. Also in terms of grants, we’ve had to rely a lot more on the smaller charitable trusts and organisations, but the problem with that is because of lack of funding, there’s much more of the Third Sector organisation going for the same grants and there’s only so many of them (Sport Development Manager (SDM)).

As a consequence of increased competition across the Third Sector for diminishing sums and sources of money, more of Greenbank’s staff resources are occupied with scoping out, building and submitting funding applications.

The second major threat relates to the binary structure of The Greenbank Project itself, and this shares a symbiotic relationship with the Project’s mission. To explicate, The Greenbank project consists of Greenbank College and Greenbank Academy. Greenbank relies on its core funding to survive and it is the college which receives the bulk of the core funding. To this end, the Academy is seen as ‘desirable’ and the college as ‘viable’:

There are two elements: the College and the Sports Academy. The college has a mixture of young people on the EFA and adults on the SFA funding. That’s the Education Funding and the Skills Funding Agency. The Academy doesn’t get any core funding whatsoever, so we have to generate every single penny. So we don’t get any core funding that you can rely on for three to four years, so you have to be looking constantly for your three year programmes of what you need to be doing to keep, what you might class as, your core activities (FO).

The College provides a mainstream function and consistently makes a surplus, whereas the Academy has only made a profit once in the last 12 years, and therefore makes a loss annually. As outlined by the SDM below, the college runs on 80% core funding, whereas the Academy receives none. Combined, the Project as a whole just breaks even:

From the College, 80% of our funding would be core funding. In the Sports Academy, core funding or grant funding is probably only about 10%. So 90% has to be funding generated... If

you were a business and you were looking at it terms of the profit that you would never go twelve years with only once making a profit and not do anything about it. I think we look at that social value, rather than making a profit. So, I think one thing is we're really great at making the charity and the things that we do desirable but we're not really good at making it viable (SDM).

Here, the SDM places into context the finely balanced nature of the finances across the two centres that make up the Greenbank Project, reiterating how the 'desirable' mission of the Project places pressure on the overall viability of the organisation. Below, the CEO highlights that the income differential between the Academy and the College, combined with the current fiscal climate that the TSSO operates within, offers a very real threat the extent and range of services that they can provide:

In reality, the College this year will make a surplus and the Sports Academy will make a deficit. So, as long as overall we are able to make a surplus. That's been the case probably for the last three years. And unfortunately the surpluses get more difficult as you're trying to absorb your cuts... But for a project like the Sports Academy, austerity means that you are going to be either running further as a deficit, or you're going to cut your activity. And at the moment, I haven't cut any activity. I don't think we can continue to do that... You either make cuts and make your sinking fund, or you just don't have your reserve. And guess which way we've gone (CEO).

Despite the income the College receives for the education programmes that it runs, core and previously steady streams of revenue are increasingly being squeezed for the Greenbank Project. Generally, there is an increasing lack of educational funding available, and these cuts mean that student numbers at the college have been capped, therefore reducing the income recovered per learner:

For the College, because of the restrictions on educational funding coming through, our numbers have been capped in terms of the amount of learners that we get paid for. That has meant that our income has massively reduced in terms of what we can deliver and it has a big impact on the charity because we're still doing the same amount of work but getting less money for it... we've been seeing cuts for the last few years. They generally were 3 and 4 percent cuts. But in our adult provision from the Skills Funding Agency – that's for people who are 19 plus – we got a 24% cut for this year (Education Officer).

However, as a charity, the College is still performing the same work for less money, and this has repercussions for operations elsewhere across the organisation. From the perspective of the Academy, the effects of austerity and recent changes in the political and economic landscape have certainly been felt indirectly in terms of the external funding it receives – due to declining levels of grant funding and the increasing competition for it. Additionally however, Greenbank's internal revenue streams have also been adversely affected:

From the Academy's point of view and over the last few years, indirectly we have suffered but directly we haven't because we don't get any money from local authorities. It's been markedly notable that when we've had conferences, weddings, funerals, bar mitzvahs, 21sts, 18ths – which you need in order to keep a sports centre running, and viably – you need alternative funding coming in. But we had this regular income stream coming in and it was friends of the charity, so the police force, social services, NHS and business. They would come and use our facilities so they'd have a conference or an away day and the restaurant

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takings were up. And then with austerity, then you’ve got less and less and have to stop coming (CEO).

To buoy its revenue, the Academy is reliant on sales income generated through the hiring out of the sports hall, the conference facilities, accommodation and the concomitant use of its wider amenities in the process. However, as many of these facilities were previously regularly used by public sector ‘friends’ of the organisation, the indirect effects of austerity has led to a heavily diminished use of and revenue accrued from Greenbank’s facilities.

Still Moving and Moving Forwards

As the Greenbank Academy has traditionally not received LA funding, its senior staff have constantly had to explore and apply to a wide variety of potential funding sources, particularly to secure core funding:

The Academy is run like a social enterprise... We have to seek additional funds to do different things. So we will seek European money, we will seek some charitable money, we will seek things like doing pilot studies (CEO).

As outlined above by the CEO, Greenbank Academy has for some time looked beyond national funding pots and towards accessing European funds: “Greenbank have been getting European social funding for the last twelve years, so they’re experts at getting it” (Board Member). Indeed, the SMT at Greenbank are particularly savvy at sourcing and bidding for funding: “As it is really important to provide opportunities for our client groups we plan effectively each year and have become even more focused and experienced in grant applications from key funders” (MO). To strengthen bids to both European and national sources of funding, the Greenbank SMT work hard to develop and grow partnerships to pool resources and bidding power – and in this sense, Greenbank has become a ‘leader’ amongst other related and local TSOs:

The Chief Exec is very keen in terms of European funding because there are big pots out there and we don’t always make good use of that. In terms of the Third Sector, it’s working in partnership a lot more because a lot of the tenders that are out there now, we have to rely on working with other Third Sector Organisations to go for those. So, we need to be working a lot more with other organisations to make sure we can apply for some of those bigger tenders and grants and maximise what we can get (SDM).

Greenbank does not only form collaborative partnerships with TSOs, it also helps to set up, partner with and support different charities and clubs, and the interviewees stress the importance of pooling all the resources together and sharing expertise. This allows a collective group of organisations to target more funding pots more often and use money more efficiently. This is of further salience as individual charities are restricted in the number of times they can apply to the same funding source:

Because as a charity you can only apply once to things like awards from Sport England. We’ve worked with clubs to get them constituted on their own back, so that they can apply for their own grants and then work with us as a coordinating body to maximise the amount of income we get in that way.

Obviously, a big thing for the Academy is the clubs that we work with. We’ve got clubs that we’ve established but we’ve also got a number of partners that come and use us, Wheelchair Rugby Club, Wheelchair Basketball, Cycling and that. And through having core funding come in, we’ve been able to offer them massively reduced hire rates. Also we’ve

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3 been able to have a core team of support staff around that help in terms of coaching, after
4 school clubs, even as much as helping with applying for some of the small grants that keep
5 the clubs going. Because of that structure as well, it's enabled us to tap into a pool of
6 volunteers (SDM).
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8 It is apparent that an insulating and facilitating factor for Greenbank and its partners is the
9 collaborative network that it supports. To develop and sustain these partnerships offers mutual
10 benefits to both Greenbank and their affiliate charities and sports clubs. In a climate of increasing
11 fiscal constraints, Greenbank's position and service provision is strengthened and supported within a
12 habitat of affiliate and reciprocal organisations.
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14 Helping to grow this network infrastructure further, in 2013, and for the first time in
15 Greenbank's history, Sport England approached the organisation to undertake a funded pilot
16 initiative to take multi-sports activities to mainstream and specialist SEN schools and to form after
17 school clubs. The funding for this pilot scheme is now coming to an end, however the project that
18 the organisation has delivered is of critical importance to Greenbank's future:
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20 Fortunately, there was a sea change and we've now got Sport England who, for the first time
21 ever, came to us and said 'we'd like you to pilot something'. So, we started to pilot some of
22 the satellite clubs and that was successful and they increased it, and they've now increased
23 it again... So, we have been able to set up six hubs, every local authority has a hub, and it
24 might have five different satellite clubs. And we do five sports in them... and the intention
25 then eventually, is those hubs will have mini teams. So, now you've got competition on each
26 side. So you've got six hubs that will compete against each other and hopefully that will take
27 place in a central venue which will be the Greenbank Sports Academy. So, we are
28 concentrating on trying to create a club structure... so once the Sport England grant runs
29 out, then you will find that there's an interest. And at the end of it, some of the schools will
30 buy into it. So, if it wasn't for that short bit of funding from Sport England, I think we would
31 have been seeing cuts. We would have had no choice... So, the fact that we're doing the
32 activities within the satellite clubs and the fact that we're doing the activities in the hubs
33 gives me solace. Now that will last beyond austerity (CEO).
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37 The critical aspect here, as set out by the CEO, is that once Sport England funding has ended, the
38 schools sport network that remains has the infrastructure to continue. As Sport England funding is
39 phased out, to continue their participation, the schools themselves will be required to buy into the
40 initiative to enable the Academy to continue to manage and deliver the service. The key here is for
41 Greenbank to create an interest in and demand for their services whilst they have funding available
42 so that schools buy into the multi-sport project as the original funding ceases to pay for Greenbank's
43 costs.
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45 There is a feeling amongst the staff at Greenbank that how they are seen by the wider
46 community and sports development network is changing, and that organisations seeking services in
47 disability sport are increasingly viewing Greenbank as a delivery agent that offers more than just a
48 facility for adapted sport and physical activity. Yet, the SMT are acutely aware that they need to
49 more widely promote the array of services that they offer, to do this more often and in more
50 contemporary and innovative ways to ensure that their reach is as potent as it can be, maximising
51 revenue. To achieve this, senior staff at Greenbank are aware that the need to increase marketing to
52 enhance their brand recognition and their visibility across not just Merseyside but the wider region:
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54 Because of our work now with hub centres and just getting out there, I think people are
55 starting to see us as deliverers. We're not just a building; some people think we are just a
56 facility. We are a deliverer and we are a community deliverer, not just for Liverpool but for
57 the whole of Merseyside and the wider North West region really... So that we're not just
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thought of as Greenbank, a facility in South Liverpool; we are thought of as a sporting entity as well. It is working more with national governing bodies, but also disability sport and Third Sector Organisations to make sure they understand what we do. The more we promote the hub and pilot clubs, the more head teachers understand what our role is; the more that local authorities understand how our role and what we do is changing. So, I think that that will keep evolving with the organisation... We only have a small marketing budget of £10,000, and most people hear about the academy through word of mouth, so we still have a lot of work to do to build that brand recognition; of building that brand recognition in what we do and putting more resources into people actually knowing what we do (SDM).

In this quotation, the SDM describes Greenbank as a ‘brand’ and emphasises the salience with which the organisation need to promote and market this brand more widely and powerfully. The SDM also stresses the importance of providing a clearer message about the structure of the Greenbank project: its raison d’etre, how it works in the context of the academy-college binary and the services it provides. Conscious of the ‘small marketing budget’ at their disposal, the SDM recognises that the traditional word-of-mouth medium for disseminating the work done by Greenbank limits their visibility and reach to the extent of its existing network. To this effect, the SDM is receptive to utilising a wider suite of marketing tools. When interviewing the marketing officer (MO), she highlighted the expensive realities of advertising in the more traditional media formats, before extolling the virtues of social media. However, the MO leaves perhaps Greenbank’s most valuable form of marketing to her last point:

It is really expensive to advertise in the press and written media so we have to be very selective where we advertise. We also try to use free marketing wherever possible, e.g. word of mouth or press releases celebrating the work we do. We have also made sure our website is current and we use our twitter feed lots to promote what we do. Social marketing is more of a focus than it used to be as it is free! We also utilise existing vast networks we have such as schools, clubs, or Disability networks and forums (MO).

As mentioned in the passage above, networks, or more specifically, Greenbank’s existing networks and partners offer a potent medium for propagating their services and provision. What is more, and as alluded to by the SDM when he stated ‘I think because of our work now with hub centres and just getting out there’, demonstrate that Greenbank’s sustainability and growth is partially parallel to its relationship with its network, and as its network expands, so too does the services it can provide. The denominator in all of this, as hinted as by the SDM, is finance, as an injection of funding concomitantly augments the network/s in which Greenbank operates within.

Conclusion

As Milbourne (2013) outlines, major cuts to funding streams for Third Sector services, and increased need among service-users resulting from government driven ‘austerity’ and welfare reform policies, are combining to increase pressure on TSOs to ‘do more with less’ – The Greenbank Project is no different. However, where many TSOs are dependent on state funding and might therefore have to surrender their autonomy to the terms and conditions of such grants (Clifford, Rajme & Mohan, 2010), Greenbank has rarely relied on financial support from the Public Sector and is able to maintain a relatively strong degree of self-determination to stay its mission’s course. Although, the Greenbank Project, and in particular the Academy, is impacted more indirectly as a consequence. Due to the austerity cuts and retrenchment of the state and public funding, there is increased competition for funding from both public bodies and also smaller charitable organisations (Hastings et al., 2015) – organisations whom would have previously relied on state funding to boost their own coffers, and whom Greenbank had targeted with good success in the past. Indeed, members of Greenbank’s SMT concur with the comments of Hastings et al. (2015) that more and more of the

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3 Third Sector are having to 'chase' funding that is incongruent with their organisational objectives in
4 order to survive. Greenbank's commitment to its mission is unyielding and the senior figures within
5 the SMT are loathe to loosen its strategic focus nor reign in its provision, and such values have
6 implications for the Project's financial viability. Due to the binary structure of the organisation, it is
7 the Academy – the active sport development arm – of the Project which rests on the most
8 precarious financial footing of the two systems. The Academy therefore relies on the continued
9 efficacy of the College to sustain the scale of work that it performs, and to deliver the desirable

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11 social value that the project can offer the wider community in terms of disability sport provision and
12 opportunity. However, core College funding is beginning to reduce and the financial implications of
13 always striving to deliver the 'desirability' agenda are brought into sharp relief in the CEOs
14 comments that there is no 'sinking fund' – no financial reserves – as all income is used up to absorb
15 cuts and deliver services akin to the mission. On the face of it, the Academy operates on perilous
16 financial grounds, yet Greenbank's board of elected council members serves as a protective
17 mechanism which has the ability to veto operations when deficit and risk are perceived to reach an
18 untenable status. Both the challenges to the services and the reach that Greenbank provides, as well
19 as the rhetoric used by members of its SMT to describe 'desirable' objectives of bringing sport to
20 people with disabilities, are telling. To ostensibly rely on an education centre to 'prop-up' a sport
21 development focussed academy that holds people with disabilities at its heart, and that it is
22 'desirable' and not 'the norm' to provide such services, presents key questions of not only sport

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24 policy, but sports position within social policy more broadly (Palmer, 2012).

25 The interview data provided by Greenbank's SMT portrays the non-stop nature of working in
26 the Third Sector, how Greenbank's staff work relentlessly to source and submit funding bids, create
27 partnerships, support local clubs and organisations, not to mention the day-to-day delivery of their
28 sport development work. As is the norm amongst TSOs, Greenbank staff are having to spend more
29 and more time writing bids and grant applications for funding (Hastings et al., 2015). This has
30 enabled the organisation to become more astute in how and where it sources funding (Ógáin et al.,
31 2012); a main example of this is the regularity with which Greenbank takes advantage of perceivably
32 underused European funding. In addition, and although Greenbank's steadfast commitment to its
33 mission values ostensibly presents a vulnerability within their 'business' approach, their boldness
34 and determination to not only maintain a level of service but expand their reach to more areas of
35 need has, so far, proved fortifying of its organisational rationale and strategy. Greenbank's approach

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37 and philosophy is seemingly the inverse of the survival narrative adopted in many LAs and TSOs of
38 financial retrenchment and service consolidation/reduction (Lowndes & Squires, 2012). Key to this
39 has been Greenbank and its senior officials' determination to grow the Project, and this has meant
40 expanding its networks and developing partnerships, which in turn has helped to increase demand
41 for its services and widen its reach. To do this, Greenbank has not only approached existing TSOs,
42 but has also helped voluntary clubs and bodies establish themselves as social enterprises in their
43 own right. This has enabled collaborations of multiple partners to emerge, which increases the
44 resource pool of the network. Milbourne (2009) would argue here that by supporting other TSOs in
45 this manner builds informal and trust-based relationships which are often precluded between TSOs
46 due to the competitive funding environment, and that have previously proven difficult to establish in
47 TSO-Public body collaborations. Together, these integrated partnerships can better absorb
48 isomorphic pressures experienced within the Third Sector, cut costs, and therefore, provide more

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50 innovative and impactful services of social and sporting value to communities that desire them
51 (Rees, Mullins & Bovaird, 2012; Trade Union Centre (TUC), 2012). Greenbank's growth, particularly
52 for the Academy, is proportionate to the demand for its services, and the wider public knowledge of
53 what functions the Project actually performs. That the Project has, in its recent history, received a
54 package of medium-to-long term funding from Sport England to roll out its multi-sport pilot
55 programme across six LA hub sites in Liverpool, has helped expand its network, increase demand for
56 its services and added a further self-sustaining strand to its suite of provision. This is key to
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Greenbank’s future growth, success, and indeed, survival. The impetus gained from this public funding is of vital significance and cannot be overestimated here.

Considerations for future research emerge from the current study. First, to examine whether users’ experiences of Greenbank’s services have remained consistent, and also to explore how the economic climate has directly influenced stakeholders’ ability to access these services. This would provide further insight into challenges to participants in a time of austerity, as well as the indirect impact upon public engagement with the project. Lastly, to gain a sense of how the wider staff team at Greenbank are managed and their perceptions and possible concerns surrounding the project’s ultimate commitment to its mission values.

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