

## Changing Landscapes Workshop

# Participation: Why get involved when we are all exhausted and it makes no difference?

1 May 2014

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# The session

- What the context is
- What the research found
- What the organisational data tells us
- What you have experienced
- What the individual data tells us
- What you think
- What the main implications are

# The bigger picture

## Key policies shaping participation

- Big Society (social action)
- Localism

## Key assumptions

- Army of local volunteers ready and willing to step in and take action
- Volunteers as 'free' resource
- Organisations open to all

## Key challenges

- Austerity measures – increased demand, reduced resources
- Civic core – small group of people give disproportionate amount
- Access to participation is not even – but is widespread
- Volunteering is not cost free

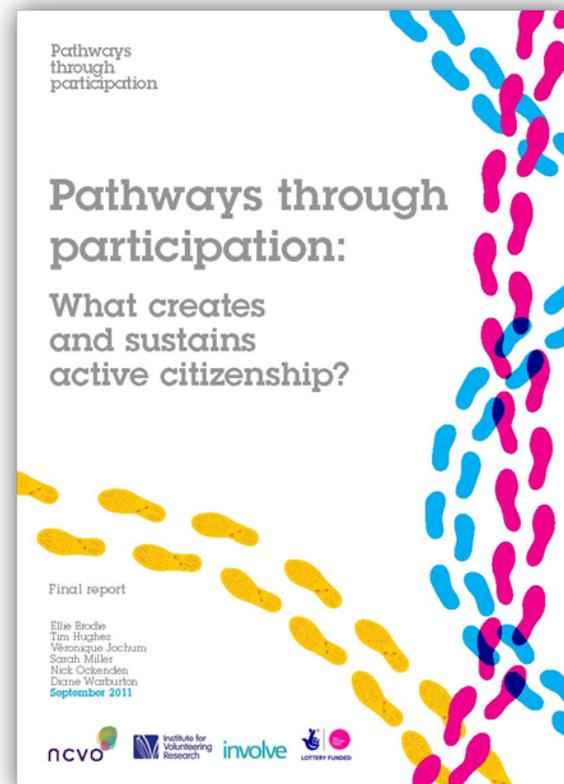
# The research: Pathways...

## Research questions

- How and why does participation begin and continue?
- Can trends and patterns of participation be identified over time?
- What connections, if any, are there between different forms and episodes of participation and what triggers movement between them?

## Methods

- 3 localities
- 101 in-depth interviews
- Individual life stories – using timelines as aide memoire



# The research: Real Times

## Research questions

- What happens within, and to, third sector organisations over time and why?
- What matters to third sector organisations over time and why?
- How might we understand continuity and change in third sector activity?

## Methods

- Qualitative longitudinal research – five waves over four years
- 15 core case study organisations
- Wider group of associated, ‘complementary’ case studies
- Over 200 interviews



# Sharing insights: Changing Landscapes

## Questions

- What are the changing hopes, trajectories and demands on those taking on unpaid roles in the sector?
- How are these roles understood and negotiated within varied organisational contexts?
- What are the opportunities and constraints on the drive to increase participation?



## Methods

- Secondary analysis:
  - 32 Pathways interviews (volunteers)
  - 3 Real Times cases: 1 org, 2 villages
- Identifying new and cross-cutting themes...

# Noticeable by their absence?

## Real Times

- Volunteers not systematically included in the **organisational** case study samples
- Volunteers/volunteering does not feature highly in the unfolding stories of the fortunes, challenges, strategies and performance of organisations

## Pathways

- The dynamics of group structure emerges as an important factor in shaping participation, but the detail of organisational and community context is obscured
- ‘Dominant model’ of volunteering as unpaid work within staff-led organisations with work-based volunteer management practices, appears far from dominant in individual’s participation pathways
- **Can new insights be gleaned by analysing the two datasets together?**

# Telling tales: Organisational insights

## The organisation

- a large, local information, rights and advice organisation based in an urban area in the north of England

## Key developments

- relatively new CEO and business plan, in light of funding uncertainty;
- funding crisis, restructure and redundancies ; increasing demand;
- short term focused funding success; long term uncertainty

## Tales of participation over time

- recognition of challenges for (and created by) trustees
- recognition of potential to 'skill up' volunteers , but not enough paid staff to support the volunteers;
- drive to involve more volunteers, in less complex roles. Concern about getting the 'right' volunteers;
- funding for volunteer support. Hints of division and demotivation

# Community insights

## The community

- Relatively affluent village in the south of England. Population of approx. 1,200, with a village hall, shop, pub, school.

## Key developments

- Parish plan endorsed by the Parish Council in 2009. Action group set up to implement priority actions. Efforts to set up youth forum. Parish council elections for the first time in 25 years. Proposed development.

## Tales of participation over time

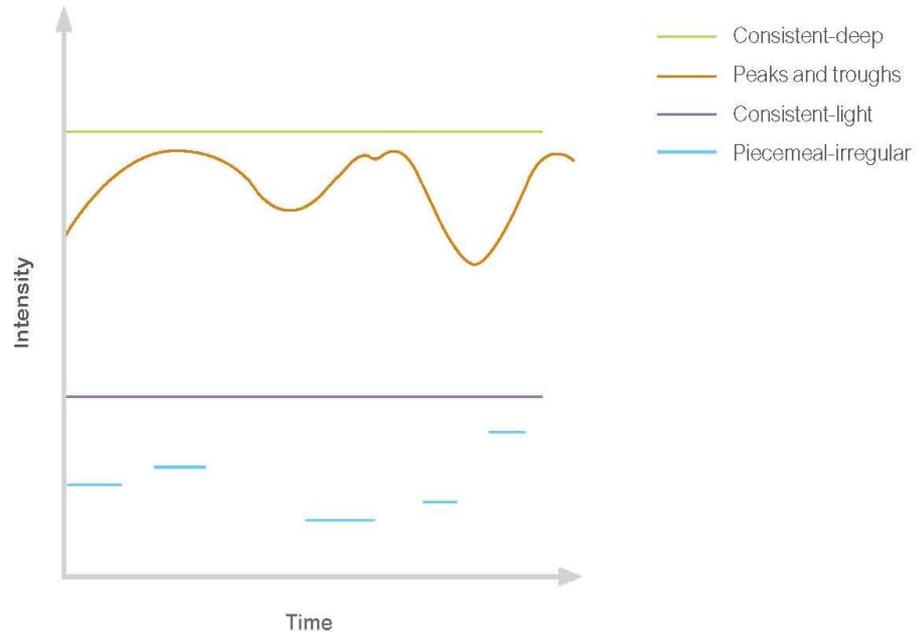
- Continuity and change...
- Vibrant range of community and voluntary groups
- Sustained involvement of a particularly active small number of people, connecting together different groups
- Larger group participate on less intense basis
- Divisions within the village shaping participation

# What's your story?

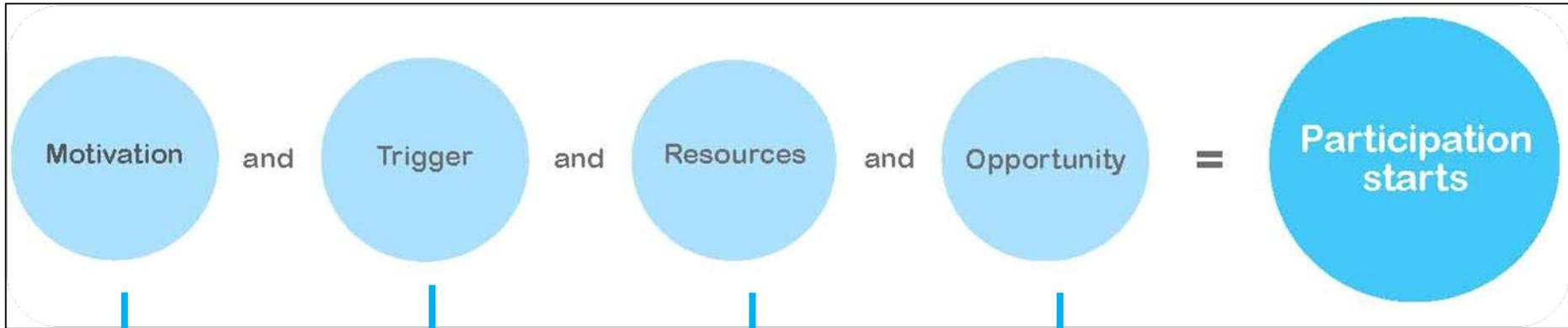
- How has the involvement of volunteers evolved in organisations you are connected with?
- What questions has this raised for you?

# Participant insights: Changes over time

- Not one linear pathway
- Participation affected by changes in life stage, priorities and 'critical moments'
- Making connections across different activities and through them



# Participant insights: Why start?



- Helping others
- Developing relationships
- Exercising values & beliefs
- Having influence
- For personal benefit
- Being part of something

- An emotional reaction
- A personal life event
- An external influence

- Groups and organisations
- Local environment and place

- Practical resources
- Learnt resources
- Felt resources

# Participant insights: Why continue?

Efficacy

Impact

Life event

Enjoyment

Friendships

Relationships

Good quality experience

and

Resources

=

Participation continues

Health

Time

Poor quality experience

or

Lack of resources

or

Life event

=

Participation stops

Energy

# What's your experience?

- What have you found be effective at starting sustaining engagement in organisations you are involved in?
- What factors seem most significant?

# Key messages and implications

- Changing 'space' for and position of participation:
  - throughout an organisation's development over time
  - across individual's life courses
- Relationships are central – and they are not always easy!
- Issues of power and equality are linked to why and how people get and stay involved