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# Regulation, governance and agglomeration: making links in city-region research

David Beel<sup>a</sup>, Martin Jones<sup>b</sup> and Ian Rees Jones<sup>c</sup>

## ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview and synthesis of debates pertaining to the development of city-regions and their applicability to the UK space economy. The purpose is to make links to advance both international academic debates and realpolitik policy knowledge concerns. The paper, firstly, traces the multifarious and at times disconnected academic discussions around the concepts of regionalism, city-regionalism and localism in the UK. Secondly, it considers the contemporary academic debates on the city-region, focusing in particular on those applicable to the current UK policy context. Given that city-regions are increasingly seen as the principal (and often unquestioned) consolidating spatial scale for economic and social development, the paper, thirdly, probes on the silent and missing aspects of the prescribed city-region approach, connecting and contributing in turn to concerns with building inclusive-growth.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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City-region; regionalism; localism; regulation; governance; agglomeration

## INTRODUCTION

Within the UK and further afield, the concept of localism and spatial delineation of the ‘city-region’ have seen a renaissance as the de facto spatial political units of governance for economic development (Clarke & Cochrane, 2013). In the UK, this has been led by the UK government, which has sought to reshape the ways in which economic development takes place, and although this shift in governmental delivery began under New Labour, it has been much vaunted by the UK coalition government (Deas, 2013) and subsequently by the continuing Conservative administration (New Statesman, 2016). Within the previous parliamentary term (2010–15), there was a dismantling of the former regionalist approach to development (Cameron & Clegg, 2014; Rees & Lord, 2013) in order to create a number of different strategies for unlocking the supposed economic potential of city-regions. This to date has consisted of a variety of different attempts to decentralize power away from Westminster (in rhetoric at least), ranging from local enterprise partnerships (LEP), city-deals, city mayors, enterprise zones (EZ), mayoral development

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corporations from 2017, to new devolution settlements for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Northern Irish Assembly, 2015; HM Government, 2010, 2014, 2015b). In deploying such 'spatial imaginaries' (Jessop, 2016a) and removing others, the shift from a regionalist approach towards a more 'localist' city-regional approach raises a number of interesting and timely questions and tensions, with regards to the governance of UK cities and what strategies for their development should be employed.

Concurrent with this, and historically within geography and the social sciences, there have been a series of parallel debates disputed for the last decade (see Jonas & Ward, 2007a, for one such example). This has revolved around a well-developed series of discussions that consider the ways in which spatial fixes either foster economic development through agglomeration (Harding, 2007) or continue to exacerbate uneven development and spatial disparities (Etherington & Jones, 2009). These have partly followed current city-region developments (such as those in the UK), but have also called upon a longer history (especially within geography; Livingstone, 1992) of trying to unpick appropriately the meaning and construction of governance at different spatial, relational and imaginary scales (Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, & Tomaney, 2016). This ongoing longer conversation within the discipline reflects the differing ontological and epistemological positioning of academics writing on regionalism, city-regionalism and localism that foreground the ways in which we can begin to think about and conceptualize city-regions. These literatures have covered everything from the more bounded thinking of territorial approaches to regions (Keating, 1998), to the open and relational approaches (Amin, 2004), to something in between – whereby the notion of the region is implicated in the 'making, remaking and unmaking [of] territory' (Etherington & Jones, 2009, p. 5; also see Jones, 2009).

By applying these theoretical positions to the ongoing changes in the infrastructural governance patterns of the UK, from the regional to the city-regional (Harrison, 2007), there is then a need to consider the implications of such spatio-structural alterations to governance structures and critically to think through, in a socio-economic context, the ways in which state intervention and the various aspects of public policy are being delivered (Jonas, 2012). The restructuring and emphasis upon economic development (Pike, Marlow, McCarthy, O'Brien, & Tomaney, 2015) raises a series of questions about the impacts city-regionalism can have. These relate to ways in which civil society is purposefully constructed around growth coalitions within city-regions and their apparent social capital to deliver this (Mohan & Mohan, 2002). The means prescribed by the UK government (2010–16) and its inherent ideological approach to city-regionalism also highlight a number of lacunas within such policy directives. These relate primarily to social reproduction, democratic accountability, participation in civil society, and the processes and practices of place-making.

This paper undertakes three tasks: firstly, it traces this longer discussion around concepts of regionalism, city-regionalism and localism beginning with Massey's (1979) seminal work on regional disparity in the UK; secondly, it considers the contemporary debates on the city-region in primarily the UK; and thirdly, it asks what is missing within the prescribed city-region approach, as for the moment within the UK the city-region seems to be the principal (and unquestioned) consolidating spatial scale for economic and social development. The paper is concerned, then, with making links between regulation, governance and agglomeration perspectives. This is both within the academic literatures in geography but also the social sciences more broadly, in order to link these to how this thinking is being applied to realpolitik concerns of city-region building. This applies to both current UK developments as well as having implications internationally. The paper is, therefore, a synthesis of existing research on cities and regions to unravel and reconstruct current academic debate on the context of English devolution to city-regions, in terms of what has been 'missing' in their delivery as new territorialized spaces. In the context of the current climate on English devolution (mid-2016), we see this as a timely synthesis indeed due to the ongoing attempts to move beyond the economic case for devolution towards a more social approach. At the

time of writing, the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), one of the leading and oldest think tank-style learned societies in the UK, charged with enriching society through ideas and actions, is deeply engaged with developing an Inclusive Growth Commission to influence government policy and put in place what we would call 'social devolution' (RSA, 2016a, 2016b). This is principally seeking to identify practical ways to make local economies across the UK more economically inclusive and prosperous, and comes several years after the RSA's City Growth Commission demonstrated how the largest UK cities could drive additional growth by investing in their economic connectivity and skills, with the Northern Powerhouse being one significant milestone of their intervention. The Inclusive Growth Commission's 'Prospectus of Inquiry' notes that the various devolution deals have made a start to some of the economic issues faced by an imbalanced UK economy.

## IN WHAT SENSE A CITY-REGIONAL SOLUTION?

The UK since industrialization has a long history of uneven development and spatial disparity, which broadly speaking has consistently focused the majority of economic growth and power being within the South East of UK, specifically London (cf. Hudson, 2013; McCann, 2016; Pugalis & Townsend, 2012). This relationship has been further exacerbated through processes of de-industrialization (with areas outside of the South East having suffered more heavily, as well as not seeing the same levels of recovery), which has been coupled with an increased centralization of governmental and financial power in London (Martin, 2015). The apparent regional disparity is often phrased in one of two ways: either as an overheating South East or that the other regions are underperforming, thereby not reaching their full potential (cf. The Northern Powerhouse; HM Government, 2015b). This has been a persistent problem of uneven development in the UK and one which Massey neatly unpicks in her 1979 classic intervention, which still has real relevance to today's current economic and political situation as well as to theoretical thinking on regions (see below). This critique of regional disparity and the changing patterns in UK industry, of course, highlighted how these disparities and imbalances were being poorly conceptualized by aspatial methodologies. For Massey, there was a need to move away from seeing regional problems as related merely to spatial distribution and to think of such inequalities in much more macro and holistic terms. Massey picked out how changes in both technology and the global economy greatly influenced the nature of development in different regions:

Regional inequality is not a frictional or abnormal outcome of capitalist production. As the first example of a spatial division of labour indicated, the process of capital investment has historically normally been one of the opening up of some areas, and the desertion of others. (Massey, 1979, p. 242)

In highlighting this, Massey opened up regionalism to a more attuned critique and one that still plugs directly into discussions surrounding city-regionalism today: this being in terms of how regions, and more specifically city-regions, are positioning themselves in order to capitalize on and gain competitive advantages in the global economy (While, Gibbs, & Jonas, 2013). The city-region for urban elites developing policy then becomes a scale upon which capital investment (both internal and external) can be attracted to and acted on.

### From regions to city-regions in the UK

Since the identification of this disparity there have been a significant number of attempts to address this imbalance and these have often shifted in their scalar focus. Under New Labour (from 1997 onwards), for example, the then UK government attempted to 'modernize' the UK state with a strong regional focus for both democratic delivery and economic development. This led to regional development agencies (RDAs) being created throughout the UK. However, for a

number of reasons this modernization process stalled under New Labour. There was the failure to 'sell' regional devolution to the English regions, although Welsh and Scottish devolutions were hailed as successes (cf. Rallings & Thrasher, 2006; Pike et al., 2015). The then governing Labour Party was also criticized for being overly centralist and not really wishing to cede power to the regions (HM Government, 2011), despite talking the language of decentralism. This was reflected in a strong emphasis upon targets and measures for RDAs. There was also a belief that over time RDAs became bogged down in bureaucracy due to mission creep, as they were consistently being expected to do more with less. Finally, the global economic crisis and the removal of New Labour from office in 2010 saw the end to the UK's then experiment with a specifically regional growth model for development (Imrie & Raco, 2003).

With the supposed failure of RDAs and the 'regional approach' within England,<sup>1</sup> as expressed by the Conservative-led coalition on coming to power (Jones, 2010), the focus then shifted towards a supposedly more flexible and localized city-regional scale for economic development (Pugalis & Townsend, 2012). This meant that in England the RDAs were dismantled and replaced by LEPs, which aim to be more locally strategic for doing economic development. They are also meant to give a more 'naturally' relevant scale upon which economic activity takes place by bringing together different adjoining local authorities (LAs) whereby LAs negotiate which LEP they see as being most appropriately based within. They were given an open remit to begin, with central government not wishing to dictate fully their terms of activity (HM Government, 2010), but LEPs have been expected to respond to the broader issues surrounding transport, planning, housing, local infrastructure, employment and enterprise, and the transition to a low-carbon economy (Jones, 1998). This reflected a new form of institution-building at the city-region level (see Jones, 2013, for prior examples). The boards are largely made up of local business elites, alongside elected LA members – the vision being that such business elites can develop with elected members more appropriate locality-based, functional mechanisms for growth (BIS, 2010).

Building on this growth agenda, a subsequent set of city deals (reflecting the boundaries of some LEPs) have been put in place. These deals have been done on a city-by-city basis and they are not uniform in their scope and reward (National Audit Office (NAO), 2016a). In England, during the first wave,<sup>2</sup> the eight largest core cities outside London all received city deals (HM Government, 2015a). The largest and most broad ranging of these has been the Greater Manchester City Deal. There has subsequently been a second wave<sup>3</sup> of city deals with further deals for other city-regions being progressed (www.gov.uk, 2015). Different processes of negotiation have been applied to the Celtic-devolved territories, set within their different devolution settlements. In Wales, two city-regions have been created: Swansea Bay City-Region and Cardiff Capital Region, with Cardiff only being awarded a city deal in March 2016. Within Scotland there have been two city deals, given to Glasgow and Aberdeen.

The shift to the city-region then represents a changing scalar relationship for both democracy and economic development in the UK, but especially in English cities, with some Welsh and Scottish cities following. The approach is not without its critics and many have raised a series of necessary questions concerning its deployment as an equitable and rebalancing spatial strategy. The following section discusses these in considering why the city-region has become the de facto model for urban and economic development.

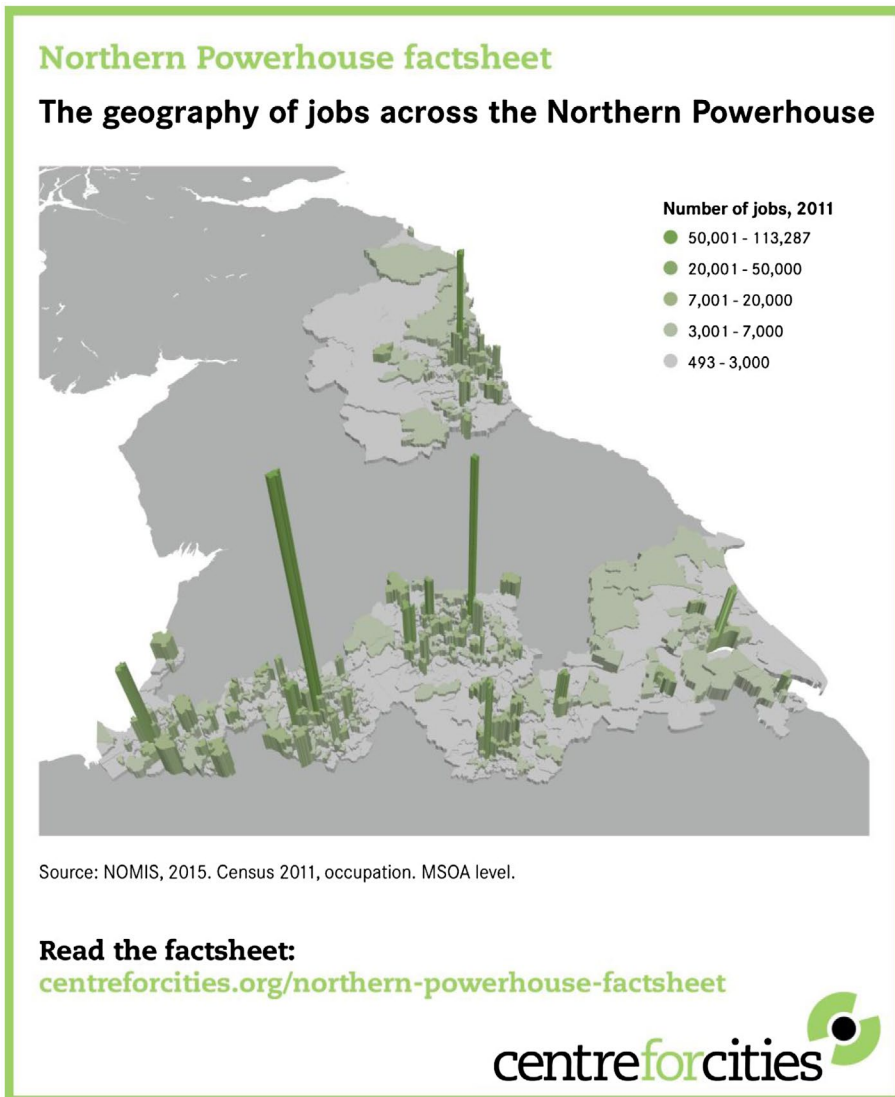
### The city-region growth machine

The development of regional disparity in the UK is one based upon historical precedent; it is also one which is further perpetuated into the present by specific UK governmental policies (McCann, 2016). At all scales, but especially those based upon the consolidation of London as a world city (Smith, 2003), it has meant that this disparity has perpetuated overtime and is continuing. This, as SPERI (2015a, 2015b) has shown, is very much backed by UK government policy whereby

London, despite being celebrated as a capital of world economy and the free market, is also subsidised heavily in comparison with the rest of the UK. Therefore, there is a paradox in play with regards to current economic development and policy being implemented within the UK. Despite there being an awareness that London is way ahead in terms of economic development and that the North of England but more broadly the rest of the UK is in some way ‘lagging’, there is still not the change in policy direction to create a greater sense of balance (see Office of National Statistics (ONS), 2016, figures for further evidence). This is due to a variety of reasons, but it predominately is ideological and relates to application of those theories of agglomeration that have become dominant in developing neoliberal city-region building whereby the ‘golden goose’ needs to be protected and allowed to grow at all costs (Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, Tomaney, Torrisi, & Tselios, 2012). It is, therefore, the model that is laid down by London’s ‘success’ that should then be developed elsewhere in the UK. This has led to the metropolitan city-region becoming the dominant scale upon which urban policy and development is being enacted (Neuman & Hull, 2013). Work by Scott (2001) is a prime example in delineating the emanate positions world cities find themselves in as signifies to the success city-regions can have. The focus upon scale is important as a key feature of their success has been for their urban centres’ ability to dominate the region surrounding them. This allows for a suitable supply of labour, as well as the space to spread, as city agglomeration grows (Storper, 2013). This points towards the concept of agglomeration in urban theory whereby an urban centre enlarges by engulfing more land, labour and infrastructure into its region (Rigby & Brown, 2013).

Agglomeration at the city-region scale, then, is the current ideological discourse that is dominant within the neoliberal growth model of urban development thinking (Houghton, Allmendinger, & Oosterlynck, 2013). Its proponents (such as Fujita & Krugman, 1995; Harding, 2007; Nathan & Overman, 2013; Scott & Storper, 2003; and Florida, 2014) all purport to a model that celebrates the development of the urban whilst ignoring the structural inequality it creates. There has also been a strong influence on UK policy-makers from North American accounts on urban development, where a focus upon the ‘metro’ areas approach (Barber, 2014; Bruce & Katz, 2014; Glaeser, 2012) has had a strong influence upon structuring UK urban policy (RSA, 2014). This is done by often focusing solely on ‘successful’ metro/regional case studies (Harrison, 2006) which are highly spatially selective, highlighting only a narrow narrative of economic success through agglomeration (Lovering, 2007). The proponents of this approach conceptualize the city-region as the focus for generating growth (Harding, 2007) in which the city should be mobilized to pull in capital as best it can. The city-region is constructed as a ‘growth machine’ (Logan & Molotch, 1987), which aims to develop a critical mass of investment so that such growth can then lead to a trickledown effect for the city-region as a whole (Overman, Rice, & Venables, 2007). Figure 1 vividly represents this agglomeration thinking by attempting to show how urban centres and their peripheries within the ‘Northern Powerhouse’ can create and centralize employment. The ‘spikiness’ focuses attention on how such urban cores are key in generating growth for cities. Manchester, for instance, is seen as the central ‘power’, as the UK government attempts to deliver a Northern Powerhouse by agglomerating selected cities together. At the centre of this is the belief that despite issues caused by uneven development, in overall economic performance terms it is better to ignore economic and historical imbalances and concentrate on continuing growth. In the words of one interesting commentator on this perspective:

Investing in more successful cities to either enhance the economy or reduce cost of living clearly exacerbates uneven spatial development. But I have tried to argue that this may make for good economic policy in a world where who you are matters more than where you are and the government can’t do much to offset the market forces that make some places perform worse than others. Of course, adopting such a course, and prioritising growth over rebalancing makes for very difficult politics for constituency based politicians. (Overman, 2012, p. 1)



**Figure 1.** Agglomerating Northern cities (Centre for Cities, 2015).

Success creates success, and the city-region is thus seen as a tool for economic growth, which focuses upon building an economic mass, the skills base and the transport links of the region (City Regions Task & Finish Group, 2012). It has a very specific spatiality in play whereby the city-region's projected territorially looks to harness surrounding areas in order to serve the economic growth of the centre. The political project of city-regionalism is, therefore, to rescale the central city into a much larger territory and to bring surrounding territories under its purview. It pushes the dominant centre's identity and politics onto its hinterland (Vainikka, 2015) through an economic rationalism for growth. Due to this, everything else becomes secondary concerns (Peck & Tickell, 1994, 2012).

Critiques of this position have been varied and there have been a variety of heated debates in the academic literature which have opened up discussions with regards to city-region development. This will be developed further below, but with regards city-regions and agglomeration, Haughton, Deas, and Hincks (2014) neatly point out the failure of agglomeration to develop even growth

due to its boosterish potential. In discussion with Overman (2014), Haughton et al. (2014) detail how a desire to relax planning constraints in urban areas for 'growth' suffers from 'short-term' thinking that focuses upon the centres of successful agglomeration examples whilst ignoring the uneven growth this creates within in the city and its surroundings (Etherington & Jones, 2009; Massey, 2015). Such approaches fail to counter this evidence with empirical work from other less successful locations, therefore not taking into account the way in which such processes although potentially good for one city-region could be highly constraining for another (Henderson & Ho, 2014; Lovering, 1999). Harrison (2007) argues that this represents a shift in terms of the spatial scale upon which economic competition takes place as 'New Regionalist' thinking (Brenner, 2004; Keating, Loughlin, & Deschouwer, 2003) is then rescaled to the city-region. As mentioned previously in the UK context, by moving from the region to the city-region, the system of city-regional development only serves to increase the competition between urban areas rather than breaking it down or it attempts to create uneasy growth coalitions such as the Northern Powerhouse which is a fractious as it is cooperative. The need to compete in a relentless globalized economy and with the city-region being seen as the appropriate scale on which to do this (Scott, 2001), as Harrison (2007) suggests, forces city-regions to compete for growth and territory (in some cases) in an attempt to secure their position of dominance. Lovering's (1999) critique of 'New Regionalism' as the policy and theoretical forerunner to city-regionalism is exceedingly valid at this point as it offers perhaps the most stinging critique whereby he distils such approaches down to 'a set of stories about how "parts" of a regional economy might work, placed next to a set of policy ideals which "might" just be useful in "some cases"' (Lovering, 1999, p. 384).

Finally, although this paper is taking a more 'urban' focus to the city-region agenda, there is also a need to think critically about the ways in which such an agglomerative approach impacts upon areas outside of or disconnected from a metropolitan centre. Due to the piecemeal process by which city-regions are being delivered, whereby only certain cities are given a city deal, this raises a series of questions with regards to those places outside the deal-making process. This includes a number of cities and provincial towns but also rural areas that do not fall within the hinterland of a city-region (Pemberton & Shaw, 2012). The 'city-first' approach to sub-regional economic governance, whereby growth is delivered via agglomeration, not only has the potential to exacerbate uneven development in cities but also further entrench it in places external to the city-region (Harrison & Heley, 2014). Harrison and Heley (2014) go on to suggest that this is particularly acute within rural areas due to the geopolitical and spatial imaginaries being created, whereby the city-region is constructed as an urban-led and controlled 'growth machine'. For them and Ward (2006), if not addressed this will only serve to perpetuate an existing rural development problem via the reproduction of place hierarchies that marginalizes non-urban centres.

To date, then, there have been both theoretical and empirical literatures, operating at a variety of scales, arguing both for and against the practices of city-regional development. What becomes apparent, though, is that there is a pressing need to contextualize, comprehend and place the current economic developments and growth-orientated agendas of city-regions (in the UK) within the broader processes of state spatial restructuring. This point has been made on several occasions by MacLeod (2001) and Jones (2001), who, *contra* Lovering (1999), remain sympathetic to the new regionalist project, but note a conceptual void around the geographical political economy of city-region-making. We turn to this in the next section.

## THEORIZING THE CITY-REGION

Within geography there have been a series of debates and discussions that have ran in parallel with this with regards to how regions (and cities) are theorized. These have wrestled with and attempted to conceptualize the spatiality of the region as both bounded and unbounded entities of social construction (Keating et al., 2003). These discussions have real significance to positioning



the city-region, especially in terms of how we epistemologically and ontologically place regions, city-region and cities. This section gives a brief consideration to these positions in geography and their relevance to looking at the city-region.

Massey (1979) began to pick a key issue in the way regions are now comprehended within contemporary geography, though without using the language of current geographic debates that we are now familiar with – a sign that she was indeed years ahead of her time. This revolves around two different broad approaches to conceptualizing regions by looking at them either territorially or relationally. By taking the territorial approach first this places an increased sense of boundedness upon the region and comprehends it within more structural terms, both those internal and external to the region. Strongly influenced by a Marxian political–economy approach (Harvey, 1973), this comprehends the ways in which the state and economy shape the way in which the region is produced and made manifest in territorial terms (Goodwin et al. 2005). Therefore, a strongly structural approach to the development of state and territory is taken in terms of how ‘regionality’ (Painter, 2008) is shaped and deployed. This position puts strong emphasis upon the workings of the state and the ways in which governance is scaled to implement economic policy across a territory (Jessop, 2013, 1990; Peck, 1998). Institutions play a central role within this process (Jones, 1998) as such proponents highlight how technocratic actors within the state begin to enact policy that shapes the territorialization of the state (Jones, 2011). Key to territorial approaches is also to scale up from the region to consider how macro-economic or globalized flows then also shape and constrain how economic development within regions takes place (Harvey, 1982). For those involved within this project this allows them to look across different regions and places in order to see how processes of globalization are manifested in converging and differing ways. The territorial approach from a critical Marxist positioning is one that seeks to show the ways in which the dominant capitalist logics of neo-liberalism acting at different scales and through different institutions constrain the ability of regions to act in an autonomous fashion leading to a repeating pattern of uneven development across different regions (Harvey, 2005).

The relational approach has developed as the somewhat critical opposite to the territorial approach. If the territorial account looks at the world from a structural, top-down perspective, relationalism seeks to invert this and open it up, stressing that space should be seen ‘as an open and ongoing production’ (Massey, 2005, p. 55). Extending upon this, Allen, Massey, and Cochrane (1998, p. 5) suggest that regions should be seen as ‘a series of open, discontinuous spaces constituted by the social relationships which stretch across them in a variety of ways’. From this perspective, the region is seen to be uncertain and always part of processes of making and unmaking through a series of networked social relationships (Allen & Cochrane, 2007; Amin, 2004). The aim is to stress the openness and complexity of different regions in order to pick out the specificity of place (Amin & Thrift, 2007) by looking out from the ‘bottom-up’ to think about how it is not just the political or the economic that are shaping regions and cities. In the relational perspective, economic interests are only but one actor shaping places and regions through a series of relational webs (Amin & Graham, 1997). Strongly influenced by post-structural thinking, this approach attempts to move away from bounding territory around cities and regions and to think more reflexively in terms of how they do not always sit within (just) economic processes of globalization. Amin and Thrift have consistently attempted to integrate a cultural–economy perspective which highlights the way in which the two are entwined within each other:

It is theory of a partial, assembled, and provisional nature; one that rarely aspires to grand design or total view, therefore too easily attacked by adversaries committed to reading the world from thought abstractions that expect systemic order and consistency. (Amin & Thrift, 2007, p. 145)

As is mentioned above, a shying away from meta-narratives is central to their perspective on the urban and is similar to what was earlier developed by Amin and Graham (1997) when highlighting

the importance of looking at ‘ordinary cities’. These are cities that do not necessarily sit within the global economy as neatly as world cities. For them the focus needs to be upon ‘a new perspective on the city based on the idea that contemporary urban life is founded on the “multiplexing” of diverse economic, social, cultural and institutional assets which may not all come together in the city’ (p. 412). The focus upon the ordinary wishes to stress the need to pull back from thinking about cities and developing policies from a world-city perspective. This stresses an understanding that most cities around the world do not sit within such an economic position. Added to this, Robinson (2006), from a post-colonialist perspective, suggests how different historical experiences of colonialism and subsequent trajectories of development means there is a need to deconstruct universalistic accounts of global models for urban development.

In attempting to bring these positionings together, Peck (2014) has wrestled with trying to find a way forward (for geography and urban studies) to deal with these counter-posing stances. The desire, on the one hand, to highlight the unevenness of neoliberal development across different locales is set against an understanding that cities are different and unique to some extent:

The restless exploration of comparative cases can be especially valuable in this ongoing mobilization and modification of (urban) theory. Yet these very practices, of revising always-provisional theories across cases, are impeded by unilateral declarations of local particularity. (Peck, 2014, p. 178)

Despite an apparent appreciation towards more relational accounts, Peck is largely critical towards the post-structural and relational accounts that have developed. For Peck, this is due to what he calls an ‘anything goes’ attitude to empirics by those purporting this perspective, suggesting it lacks any testable empirical rigour due to its specificity on individual places and an in-built reflexivity. For Peck, due to ontological epistemological differences, it is somewhat impossible to reconcile fully these two strands; relational (post-structural, post-colonial) approaches will always deflect attention away from the more important actors and flows within urban areas.

This impasse within the literature between the territorial and relational suggests that despite the attempts of many to move towards more relational accounts of regions, there is something about the notion of territorial-fixed regions that is hard to shake, as suggested by Allan and Cochrane that:

It would seem that the language of territorial politics is not only stubborn, but equally that it cannot simply be wished away by some conceptual wand, since it is itself a powerful political construction. (Allen & Cochrane, 2007, p. 1162)

This notion of a powerful political construction is useful because it reflects the everyday experiences in which regions are often encountered and the ways in which they are constantly being remade through policy and reinvention. Jones (2009, p. 497) attempts to develop more directly a position between the two theoretical schools of thought with the deployment of ‘phase space’: an ensemble (cf. assemblage) ontology that balances structure and flow whilst it acknowledges the evolutionary and developmental nature of spatiality. In applying this to the city-region, this becomes a very useful way to position the ongoing making of these new metropolitan regions as they take place on the ground and find shape in both territorial and relational terms. It allows the city-region to be taken forward in order to think through the fuzziness of territory with rigidity of the state (Hudson, 2007; Macleod & Jones, 2007; McFarlane, 2010; Peck, 2014) whilst considering the spatiality of flow, porosity and connectivity of a city-region (Allen & Cochrane, 2007).

## MISSING LINKS WITHIN THE CITY-REGION FIELD

The paper so far has highlighted the development of the city-region discourse (primarily in the UK) detailing current policy developments and theoretical underpinnings, and it has also placed these developments in relation to the wider discussions within geography and cognate literatures. As Ward and Jonas (2004, p. 2120) have previously highlighted, it 'appears to leave a lot out in terms of what actually drives regional economies in any given context' and similarly we would argue that city-region discourses appear to leave out far more than they actually contain. We accordingly consider missing links and suggest some connections can be made to advance these bodies of work. In total a series of six missing links are identified. It is from these we suggest that engaging with them can provide useful insights for moving beyond economic reductionism readings of agglomeration towards understanding better the more-than-agglomeration dynamics of city-regions, which aims towards an inclusive city-region approach.

### Assembling those city-regions

In attempting to comprehend the regional development of the South East of England, Allen and Cochrane (2007) describe how this region constantly reinvents itself through purposeful state policy (not just neoliberal global market forces) and how it stretches beyond its loosely defined territorial area. The focus upon the notion that this is an intentional set of policies enacted by actors at all scales/levels of governance is central to their argument. Assemblage in this context wishes to express how multiple actors, institutions and geographies are deployed to coalesce into making possible this region. They highlight how these actions have impacts beyond the supposed territory of the South East and how areas external to the region impact back. They suggest that scale should not be a precursor for identifying the ways in which regions develop:

At worst, scale is used to pre-define the boundaries of institutional activity before the political relationships and connections have been traced and understood. In trying to capture and understand something like the development of fast policy transfer, for example, where ideas are brokered between agencies and institutions in ways that belie regional boundary markers, a scalar ontology of whatever kind would produce a rather fore-shortened version of events. (p. 1167)

For an assemblage approach, scale is merely one 'actor' and that when thinking through the city-region discourse there is a need to think beyond the scale of an individual city-region and its potential for growth alone. Within the literature of agglomeration, there is strong attempt to present city-regions as autonomous units harnessing the global economy in order to expand the capacity of the city towards a critical mass (Ellison, Glaeser, & Kerr, 2010). However, as Allen and Cochrane (2007) suggest, such activities cut across such scales, meaning we need to think about whom is enacting power or the 'politics of scale' in order to produce the region:

To recognize that an ongoing 'politics of scale', where politicians and professionals mobilize around a particular spatial representation of the region and act upon it, does not mean that the actual spatial forms of governance are also contained within the boundaries of the reinvented region. (p. 1167)

Central to this is, then, thinking through who gets to mobilize such policy discourses and in what ways they coalesce to produce the city-region. We return to this point below.

### Social reproduction and infrastructures

The development of the city-region discourse has largely followed a neoliberal discourse (this does not mean it is by definition a neoliberal project per se; see discussion between Harding, 2007; and Jonas & Ward, 2007a, 2007b), based upon the notion of a trickle-effect economy (Overman,

2012). This has meant that within this, any form of social policy of redistributive justice within the city-region discourse is often either missing or kept quiet. Ward and Jonas (2004, p. 2121) (also Jonas & Ward, 2007a) highlight this and suggest that this has significant impacts for city-regions due to what is being missed in the building of city-regions:

City region institution building contributes to the supply side of global–regional economic development. We feel this shifts the entire explanatory emphasis towards treating city regions as sites of exchange, innovation, development, and competition, and, correspondingly, away from issues of redistribution, conflict, counterstrategies, and politics. Accordingly, city regional institutional capacities are explained in terms of a functional need for urban–regional agglomerations to network, collaborate, create, and compete, if not globally, then at least internationally within supranational economic regions. Given this emphasis on exchange relations and strategic competition, corresponding attention to the social relations of production, consumption, and redistribution and their underlying geographies of conflict are, at best, limited.

The above quotation highlights the agglomeration-focused discourse within city-region development, whereby an unrelenting focus upon economic growth means that other areas of possible development for the city-region are closed down. This for Ward and Jonas (2004) is due to the focus upon being competitive city-regions in a global economy (Harrison, 2007; McCarthy, 2000; Cisneros, 1995) and the influence of the ‘New Economic Geography’ school in terms of pushing agglomerative strategies. Hence, the city-region is unable to deliver and the policy discourse surrounding it has failed to consider a number of functions. They call for the following to be addressed:

the economic and social conditions under which the city regional scale is politically constructed as a particular space (or scale of territoriality) for class and political alliance formation and struggle [and] the ways in which conflicts around production, social reproduction, and collective consumption with in and around city regions are managed and, consequently, the variety of struggles around state territorial structures in city regions. (Ward & Jonas, 2004, p. 2130)

This succinctly captures part of what is missing within the current deployment of the city-regional discourse – this form of state rescaling is fraught with tensions and conflicts that are often marginalized and this needs to be brought into the matrix of city-region building. Tensions between economic, social and political governance, labour control, service provision, welfare policies, democracy, the politics of the urban environment, and sustainability are the unfinished aspects of this research agenda. This begins to dig down to the ‘lived’ experience of the city-region and the ways in which policy begins to impact upon the daily lives and institutions within the city-region state space. Etherington and Jones (2009, 2016) have picked out some of these tensions within the UK city-region agenda using the Sheffield city-region as an example of how the local state attempts to ‘fill in’ the city-region (Goodwin, Jones, & Jones, 2005) with regards to employment, skills and welfare policies. These papers highlight how as part of the then ‘new urban renaissance’ the city still struggles to deal with the macro-economic changes that have taken place (historically) with regards to shifts from the industrial to the post-industrial. This has meant Sheffield’s labour market has been ill-tuned to a ‘new’ knowledge-based economy and the competitive city-region agenda has only further exacerbated this problem. Etherington and Jones (2009, 2016) highlight what Jonas and Ward (2007a) and Ward and Jonas (2004) posit in terms of how the capitalist logics defining city-regionalism can reinforce pre-existing patterns of uneven development, as well as creating further socio-economic disadvantage.

### Accountabilities – post-political and depoliticization geographies

With the development of new ‘spatial imaginaries’ (Jessop, 2016a) at the city-region scale but with a whole mixture of different LAs and institutional setups in the UK, there opens up the

possibility for an accountability gap to develop between the local state and civil society (Purcell, 2007). On this, Swyngedouw (2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011) has suggested that contemporary city governances have moved towards a 'post-political' condition. This is with regards to the ability to challenge conventional democratic forms of decision-making. In moving from a conflict-based decision-making system, this is replaced with, firstly, more a pluralist form of political engagement and, secondly, with the enrolment of corporate forces supportive of neoliberal approaches to economic and social development that seeks to build a 'consensus'. This post-political practice can be viewed across UK city-regions with combined authorities being created out of LA leaders' boards, coalesced into new institutional partnering arrangements with LEPs and with no formal direct representational elective members to cover this new spatial scale. Therefore, making such systems of governance and the institutions that are created directly accountable for their actions (in an elective sense) becomes very difficult as they become removed from this process (NAO, 2016b).<sup>4</sup> Haughton et al. (2013, p. 217) refer to this as producing soft spaces of governance that are 'in between' spaces of governance that exist outside, alongside or in between the formal statutory scales of government, from area master plans to multiregional growth strategies. For Haughton et al. this further represents a shift towards more advanced forms of neoliberal governance whereby decisions are made by individuals who hold key positions that are then deployed to serve their particular strategic interests and objectives. McCann (2007) highlights how similar processes in Austin (Texas) have taken place where discourse focused upon 'liveability and competitiveness' sorts to 'transform' Austin's inner city by extending the city's political reach beyond its territory:

Its smart growth initiative engaged territories that were simultaneously more extensive (the city region) and more localized (individual neighborhoods) than the municipality itself in order to legitimate and facilitate new modes of policymaking and accumulation. This suggests that city-regionalism frequently turns on the development of selective, strategically directional, and politically and historically contingent geographical imaginations, rather than on a singular, stable and unitary understanding of what a city region is. (p. 195)

Here, the city's growth discourse and ability to mobilize a variety of actors that allowed it pushed through the policies it sought as most appropriate for growth, regardless of the social reproductive issues (see the previous section) this created. For commentators, this represents a managerial and entrepreneurial turn in urban governance (Harvey, 1996), though in post-political terms, towards consensus politics at the same time (Rancière, 2004). For Rancière, this represents the negation of democratic practice in order for elite groups to develop with respects to their specific interests:

Consensus is thus not another manner of exercising democracy ... [It] is the negation of democratic basis for politics: it desires to have well-identifiable groups with specific interests, aspirations, values and 'culture'. (Rancière, 2004, p. 125)

The defining and reproduction of the democratic framework becomes the very process then by which the 'political' is pushed out. The ability or lack of ability to have voice within such a framework allows a consensus to be developed by those who have the right to access such spaces. Therefore, policy development and the implementation of state governance becomes a closed system which suggests that alternatives developed externally are unviable or 'undemocratic' even. In a Foucauldian sense of governmentality, consensus politics pushes a 'conduct of conduct' whereby 'the mode of assigning location, relations and distributions' (Swyngedouw, 2009, p. 606) is dominated by actors who are based within the state apparatus. Deas (2013) in the context of Manchester follows a similar series of patterns with regards to neoliberal governance at the city-region scale suggesting that:

Policy decision-making based on conventional democratic mechanisms is rejected as obsolete, cumbersome and at odds with the kind of fleet-footed, adaptable and non-bureaucratic governance – management rather than politics – seen as best able to facilitate urban competitiveness. (p. 18)

For Jones (2011), a key point to deal with is the depoliticization of state and purposefully to trace and engage with those tasked with implementing such strategies. This is done by following the tensions and contradictions actors face in order to suggest that such activities do not exist without actors implementing them on the ground. This begins to highlight who is implementing such activities, what agency they have within the state to do this, and it allows for the unpicking of strategies of governmentality that are in play. The city-region discourse, though, deploys a series of governmental strategies in order to ensure a specific policy agenda is implemented (as Haughton et al., 2013; Purcell, 2007; and McCann, 2007, have highlighted), hence these need to be fully integrated into an understanding of how city-regionalism(s) are being made and brought into a stronger representational regime for the city-region.

### Central/local: city-region spatial interrelations

The city-region is the latest in a long line of territorial fixes for delivering economic and social development and instilling competitiveness (Deas, 2013), and within this, a series of inbuilt tensions develop between the differing spatial scales and levels of regulation and governance. Without wanting to place any form of hierarchy between scales, we would simply like to point out that the city-region discourse purposefully ignores the tensions it creates when redefining political boundaries by purposefully creating multi-authority territories (Jones & Macleod, 2002). In a very simple sense, the conflating of the city with the region or the local with the regional to produce the city-region creates a series of spatial mismatches between policy intentions and scalar possibilities (Harrison & Growe, 2014). At the (supposed) centre of the Localism Act (HM Government, 2011) was a return to local politics which would place citizens in control of their neighbourhoods and communities. In reality much of this focus has been with regards to giving greater 'autonomy' to LAs through multi-authority agreements and devolution which in many ways centralizes power away from the local level and places it more firmly in the local state (HM Government, 2015a). There are, therefore, rhetorical gaps between what policy on one level proposes to do with regards to localism and what it actually does with regards to city-regionalism. It is also built upon a series of previous policy interventions to construct multi-scalar agreements as well traversing onto the policy intentions of other governance institutions (Etherington & Jones, 2016). This to a large extent reflects the neoliberal intentions that lie at the centre of these policies in terms of talking the language of participation and autonomy, but in reality finding ways in which to place power and participation within less democratic institutions. The development of LEPs is a prime example of this; as those invited to participate are primarily either from business or are already elected officials (see above). This narrows the interests of the local state towards more market-led and consensual interests, but one which is primed to fail due to the complexity of the actors, scales and levels of governance involved:

These problems were acknowledged in attempts to build networked governance through Local Area Agreements and Multi-Area Agreements. ... Nonetheless coordinated implementation is hampered by an inherited inflexibility of the state apparatus, due to the fragmented legacies of individual departments and policy initiatives and their scalar interpenetration and/or interference. (Jones & Jessop, 2010, p. 1143)

This is what Jones and Jessop (2010) refer to as 'multi-scalar metagovernance', and later multi-spatial metagovernance (Jessop, 2016b), and as Jones and Jessop suggest, current interventions only offer more of the same with regards to city-regions and LEPs: they represent a 'rolling forward existing centrally-orchestrated policy regimes, deploying limited levers and mechanisms to influence the business community, and ultimately being unable to correct deep-rooted market failures' (p. 1144). The construal that this presents means that the city-regions of the UK will be largely unable to access the global market as presumed due the failure to implement any real autonomy in the context of being constrained by a deeply centralist state, which defines the shape that devolution and localism has (Martin, 2015).

## City-regions as place-making

Central to the development of the city-region is the ways in which space, place, territory and identity are to be constructed in order to build city-regions. In many respects, the production of the city-region produces great tensions between potentially divergent LAs and local state institutional interests. The process of *poiesis* (Calhoun, Sennett, & Shapira, 2013) is, therefore, central to building a sense of collaboration across a city-region and inherent within this is the production of new institutional spaces (Jones, 2013), which can facilitate and foster a new and collective sense of identity (Vainikka, 2012). Within this process, questions are raised with regards to what this potential sense of city-regionalism means to everyday life, and added to this, in what ways is it being defined. Due to the agglomeration rhetoric of city-regionalism, the identities that are primarily being built and supported frequently reflect the interests of the major urban centres (Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield, Cardiff etc.), which are seeking to increase their geographical spheres of influence. As Jones (2015) highlights, the shift from a broader and more pluralist and diverse South East Wales Capital Regions to the metropolitan-specific and nationally symbolic Cardiff Capital Region is emblematic of the processes that are taking shape.

City-region *poiesis* then needs to be thought through in both its 'hard' material form (names, institutions, infrastructures) as well as in less tangible or 'soft' cultural forms (everyday life); however, within the agglomerative discourses that focus on neoliberal growth models, the focus appears to be entirely one of (hard) centralization upon an urban core. Jackson (1991) represents this neatly by discussing this in terms of how 'economic resources are culturally encoded, their significance depending on such subjective appraisals as much as on any intrinsic material value' (p. 227), suggesting the importance of how a what we would now call 'cultural political economy' (Sum & Jessop, 2013) and how this is always written into the economic demands of place-making. This in turn reflects how:

[P]olitical agendas always become activated through constellations of representations about people, places, and processes that circulate through daily life. People come to understand the world of [local economic] growth – its prospects, possibilities, who gains, who loses – through significations rather than by interacting with a 'brute reality', de-bunking the notion of an always revealing preinterpreted reality. (Jonas & Wilson, 1999, p. 8)

Place-making, therefore, highlights the important intra-local politics of policy implementation, as both national and local policy discourses come together in city-region development. This represents the ways in which 'various interest groups – from neighbourhood activists, environmentalists and social activists to business coalitions – struggle over how and in whose interests local space economies are developed (McCann, 2002, p. 387).

This poses questions as to whether such city-region building of the 'hard' kind will ever filter to the 'soft' everyday and whether it will spread to the peripheries of city-regions, or if more localized identities and politics will remain. There is currently an almost trickledown set of expectations for democratic and identity-rich localities that, like its sibling of laissez-faire market economics, never materializes.

Fainstein (2001) develops a fine-tuned understanding as to the mechanisms, institutions and actors that build cities focusing on New York and London. With a fascination in the way that entrepreneurial private property (real-estate) has driven change in both cities, Fainstein critiques these practices in terms of the type of city they build and who they usually displace. With the building of city-regions and the focus on growth that attempts to entrain business interest from a pro-development perspective, there is a need to consider what is being built or created and for whom this is intended? Within the existing policy and literature there is clear direction of travel, but how this will lead to a strong sense of city-regional identity remains to be seen. Engaging with these perspectives from urban geography and applying them to city-region-building contexts

is critical to understand the dynamics at work and how civil society is being repositioned with agglomeration concerns.

### Social capital and beyond

Building on the above, the production of city-regions as both a territorial and an ideological exercise of state craft has a focused set of parameters with regards to what a city-region should be and who should be involved within this process. The UK government has been keen to involve local, national and international business actors within these processes; as noted already, this can be seen in the make-up of LEP boards in city-regions (Deas, Hincks, & Headlam, 2013). This poses further interesting questions as to which actors in society are empowered or disempowered by these processes (deeply related to what has been said above) and how certain 'citizenship regimes' (Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003)<sup>5</sup> are made active by their positioning within society.

The coalescing of urban elites into growth coalitions, of course, is not a new phenomenon within the city-development literature (Harvey, 1973); however, within the city-region and agglomeration literature the role of urban elites and their 'empowering' is something that has not been connected in terms of how social capital is deployed within governmental strategy. UK government strategy with regards to city-regions is highly pro-business, despite talking the language of localism, and it focuses upon engaging business elites to become involved with the development of city-regions alongside elective representatives. Via this strategy it intends build networks than can harness a particular model of (neoclassical) agglomeration growth and little more. Mohan and Mohan, (2002) describe this with regards to the work of (Putnam, 1993) in terms of how the policy hopes to build social capital among business elites:

Networks of civic engagement are said to: foster norms of 'generalized reciprocity' ... increase potential risks to those who act opportunistically that they will not share in benefits of current or future transactions. (Mohan & Mohan, 2002, p. 193)

The aim is to have business invested in the city-region from the start, so that partly in a world of globalized markets companies may be less willing to relocate if they are heavily integrated into a city-region. Here is an attempt to build 'civic capital' via inclusion in decision-making.<sup>6</sup> The building of social capital among business elites is, therefore, central to this process and the policy around city-region development and the deployment of LEPs deliberately intends to embody such individuals as active citizens (Kearns, 2013) 'paternally' developing the city-region. This is about connecting business into and with other parts of the local/city-region state, especially LAs, but also education and health. What is interesting about these processes is that with a pro-business approach and the attempts to redefine active citizenship and participation, who does this purposefully leave out or disenfranchise from such processes? Business is not the only actor within the city-region, but with the development of UK government policy they become the primary embodiment of new localism. This not only actively represents a depoliticization of city-region development in terms of citizen participation, but also it sidelines other collective voices within society, especially those from civil society, such as trade unions, volunteer groups, charities and welfare services, who may have a different understanding as to how a city-region should develop (Jonas, 2012; Pugalis & Shutt, 2012).

## CONCLUSIONS

'Society is always and everywhere spatial and temporal. Easy enough concepts, perhaps, but the implications are only now being thought through' (Thrift, 1983, p. 49). As Thrift states, the spatial and temporal concepts of city-regions are 'easy enough', but thinking them through is the difficult



part. In following the arguments in this paper, if devolution is to 'grow up' and potentially flourish, it needs to go further than its current settlement. The process needs to continue and both combined authorities and central government need to address the concerns of the six missing links detailed here if an inclusive growth model it to be found. Hence, for 'grown up' devolution to take shape, the spatial, social and representative concerns raised here need to be better thought through or integrated, so that better, more balance governance structures can be found.

The above-mentioned RSA's Inclusive Growth Commission (2016a, 2016b), which we see as being timely, suggests the beginning of a series of strategies that may have the potential to address some of these issues raised in this paper. But, as they themselves state, 'we fool ourselves if we believe the work is done', as devolution 'must be socially and economically inclusive if it is to be the key to resilient, dynamic places (RSA, 2016, p. 3). We echo this assessment and further suggest that engaging systematically with the six missing links and connections outlined in this paper raises the potential of devolution. Hence, we wish to see this paper as a guide towards thinking through what needs to be addressed for a more inclusive city-region to be built. As the RSA continues, 'integrated governance structures will be needed to link the layers of identity and activity that make up a place, from individual streets and neighbourhoods to the town and city centre and its surrounding regions' (p. 4). This said, historical and geographical specificity matters and needs to be brought into the analysis of city-region building. All historical periods are marked by ideological and social struggles, which has given rise to particular modes of statehood, statecraft and modes of state intervention; situating these historically is critical for understanding their emergence and potentials. Even as the pendulum of UK economic development (Pike, 2015) may have shifted away from the 'city first' strategies of city-region devolution (Coombes, 2013) towards the more national approach of an 'industrial strategy' post-Brexit (Berry, 2016), these issues still need to be addressed in order to foster a more inclusive UK economy.

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## NOTES

1. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland since devolution have followed different policy trajectories.

2. Wave 1: Greater Birmingham, Bristol Region, Greater Manchester, Leeds City-Region, Liverpool City-Region, Nottingham City-Region, Newcastle Region and Sheffield City-Region.

3. Wave 2: Black Country, Greater Brighton, Greater Cambridge, Coventry and Warwickshire, Hull and the Humber, Great Ipswich, Leicester and Leicestershire, Greater Norwich, Oxford and Oxfordshire, Plymouth and South West Peninsula, Preston, South Ribble and Lancashire, Southampton and Portsmouth, Southend-on-Sea, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, Sunderland, Swindon and Wiltshire, Tees Valley, and Thames Valley Berkshire.

4. The limits of this model are being partially recognized and from 2017 there are expected to be directly elected mayors as part of the devolution deals allowed by the Cities and Local Government Act 2016.

5. The concept of 'citizenship regime' captures 'the institutional arrangements, rules and understandings that guide and shape concurrent policy decisions and expenditures of states, problem definitions by states and citizens, and claims-making by citizens' (Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003, p. 80). A key dimension of the citizenship regime is the expression of basic values about the

'responsibility mix'. This defines the boundaries of state responsibilities, differentiating them from those of markets, of families and of communities.

6. There is also, of course, a strong perception that business 'knows best' in terms of how to develop economic strategy.

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