

Spaces of Collibration: The Governance and Metagovernance of Failure

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Submitted: October 27, 2023 – Revised version: December 19, 2023

Accepted: December 20, 2023 – Published: March 12, 2024


Abstract

This essay offers a geographical political economy explanation to the failed state of the local and regional economic growth and development in England’s regions. The essay advances the field of inquiry known as metagovernance and increasingly multispatial metagovernance, i.e., how complex problems of economic life and the existence of various failures — market failure, state failure, and governance failure — necessitates a focus on governance coordination and its complex geographies. Taking metagovernance as a point of departure, the term “spaces of collibration”, taken initially from the work of Dunsire (1993, 1994 & 1996) and developed by Jessop (2016a, 2016b & 2020), is deployed to capture how altering the relative balance within and between different modes of spatial coordination through state intervention shapes the governance of local and regional economic development. Collibration critically gets behind how uneven development and state intervention in sub-national economic development is managed by creating an unstable equilibrium of compromise, which in turn helps to explain the governance of failure.

Keywords: Failure; Uneven Development; Multispatial Metagovernance; Collibration.

Acknowledgements

The special issue editors and two referees for helpful comments. Economic and Social Research Council. WISERD. Civil Society: Changing Perspectives on Civic Stratification and Civil Repair. Grant Number, ES/S012435/1. This essay builds on the arguments presented in my 2019 book, *Cities and Regions in Crisis: The Political Economy of Subnational Economic Development*

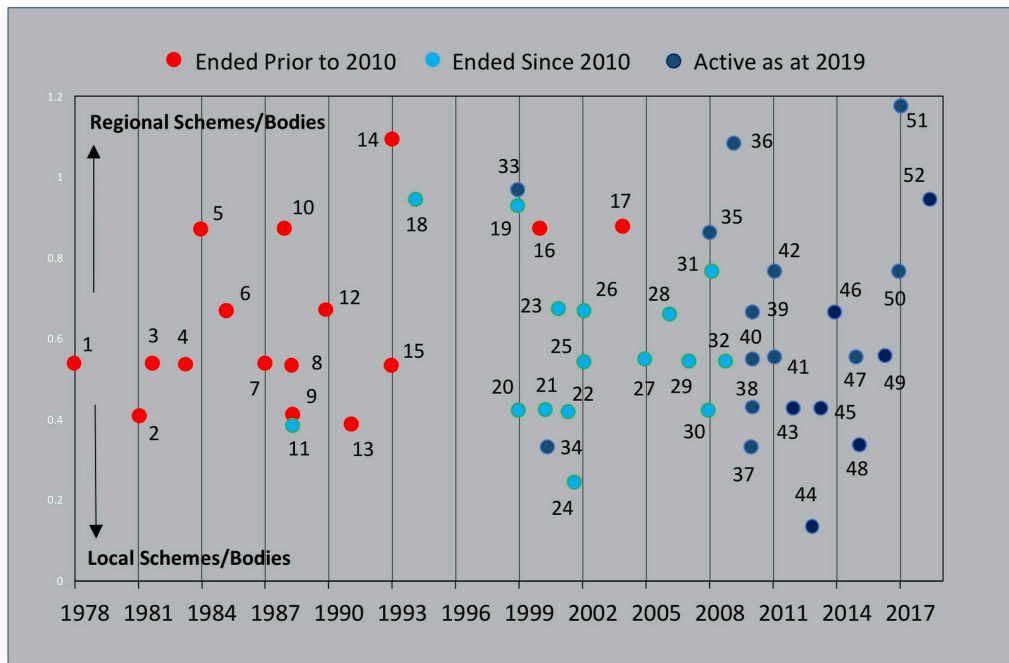
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There has got to be a catalytic role for government, and government is there to provide a strategic lead but that requires consistency from government — not *chopping and changing* — *in the last 40 years we have had 40 different schemes or bodies to boost local or regional growth*. We had the Abercrombie plan in London, the new towns, the economic development committees, the urban regeneration corporations, the new deal for communities, the regional development agencies, and yet none of these initiatives have been powerful enough to deal with the long term secular trends — de-industrialisation or the decline of coastal resorts and that basic half-heartedness has been coupled with an unspoken assumption by policy makers that investment should always follow success — so that to use a football metaphor the approach has always been to hang around the goal mouth rather than being the playmaker. (Johnson, 2021, p. 3, emphasis added)

Can one infer that failures of governance are logically bound to follow from crippling epistemologies or inadequate scaffolding? Not automatically and not always, but as a matter of probability, most certainly. It cannot be expected that an effective apparatus of governance will ensue from a poor knowledge base, and flawed organizational and institutional arrangements. Are failures ascribable to those particular inadequacies, or to other extraneous factors? This cannot be established without a careful look at some case studies. (Paquet, 2009, p. 171)

1 Introduction: Putting “Chop and Change” in Its Place

The first quotation is taken from former Prime Minister and MP Boris Johnson’s speech on the vision to “level up” the United Kingdom. In this speech, Johnson (2021), reflecting on the Covid-19 pandemic and levels of inequality, notes that even before the pandemic began in the UK, there was an “unbalanced economy”, so unbalanced in comparison with European and developed countries that “for too many people geography turns out to be destiny” (p. 1). Numerous examples of geographical failures are cited, ranging from health to social inequalities, with the bridge to the above passage being a “levelling up” commitment to create a strong and dynamic wealth creating economy for all (HM Government, 2022). On this, the institutions and strategies of local and regional economic growth are seen as failing, serially; 40 interventions noted in 40 years, with no game-plan, to use the football metaphor above, for a coordinated team-effort of longevity “playmaking”. Figure 1 captures this “constant cycle of policy churn” (Coyle & Muhtar, 2023, p. 17), with the “sheer proliferation” of schemes and institutions clearly visible at a variety of geographical scales, highlighting the fragmentation of coverage and focus, primarily in England’s regions (Martin et al., 2021; Turner et al., 2023; Westwood et al., 2021).



- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Urban Programme (expansion) | 27. Working Neighbourhoods Fund |
| 2. Urban Development Corporations | 28. Local Area Agreements |
| 3. Urban Development Grant | 29. Local Enterprise Growth Initiative |
| 4. Derelict Land Grant | 30. City/Economic Development Companies |
| 5. Regional Development Grant (revision) | 31. Multi-Area Agreements/City Region Pilots |
| 6. City Action Teams | 32. Future Jobs Fund |
| 7. Urban Regeneration Grant | 33. National Coalfields Programme |
| 8. City Grant | 34. Business Improvement Districts |
| 9. Inner City Compacts | 35. Grants for Business Investment |
| 10. Regional Enterprise Grant | 36. Homes and Communities Agency |
| 11. Action for Cities | 37. Community Budgets |
| 12. Training and Enterprise Council | 38. Enterprise Zones (new phase) |
| 13. City Challenge | 39. Regional Growth Fund |
| 14. English Partnerships | 40. Local Enterprise Partnerships |
| 15. Single Regeneration Budget | 41. Growing Places Fund |
| 16. Enterprise Grant Scheme | 42. Combined Authorities |
| 17. Selective Finance for Investment | 43. City Deals |
| 18. Government Offices for the Regions | 44. Business Rate Retention |
| 19. Regional Development Agencies | 45. Tax Increment Finance |
| 20. New Deal for Communities | 46. Devolution Deals |
| 21. Urban Regeneration Companies | 47. Local Growth Fund |
| 22. Neighbourhood Renewal Fund | 48. Coastal Communities Fund |
| 23. Local Strategic Partnerships | 49. Mayoral Development Corporations |
| 24. Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders | 50. Combined authority Mayors |
| 25. Local Authority Business Growth Incentive | 51. Industrial Strategy White Paper |
| 26. Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders | 52. UK Shared Prosperity Fund |

Figure 1: Proliferation and Churn in Initiatives for Local Growth, 1978–2018.
Adapted with permission from National Audit Office (2013, 2019).

As UK events have demonstrated, Johnson's judgements have been poor elsewhere, but the insights offered above are certainly germane to thinking about repeated economic failure. This is amplified by the National Audit Office's (NAO, 2022; see also NAO, 2013) report on *Supporting Local Economic Growth*, which acknowledges that addressing uneven economic growth between and within regions has been a focus of government policy through governance projects for over 50 years (Figure 1). With £18 billion committed by central government between 2011 and 2020 to support local economic growth in England through dedicated domestic funds, or to put it more starkly £174.5 billion between 1961–2020 (Martin et al., 2021), policy-making has seen a cyclical sequence of initiatives, where structures and funding regimes are frequently replaced by new schemes. With over 50 changes to the landscape of economic development since the inception of urban policy in the early 1970s, again staggering in itself and not explained by the auditors (other than it represents "poor value for money"), the "Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities [...] lacks evidence on whether the billions of pounds of public funding it has awarded to local bodies in the past for supporting local growth have had the impact intended" (NAO, 2022, p. 13). The NAO do not suggest that no impact has occurred, or failure outright and public policy disastrous; calls for robust evaluations and ongoing policy learning are called for (see also Martin et al., 2021; Mason et al., 2023; Welsh Government, 2019).

These shifts in the landscapes of local growth were the subject of an earlier and important Institute of Government (IfG) *All Change: Why Britain is so Prone to Policy reinvention, and What can be Done About it* inquiry, which also claims that considerable damage is being done to economic governance by perpetual tinkering at an "alarming rate", the rationale of which is also startlingly unclear (Norris & Adam, 2017). With 28 changes to legislation and 48 Secretaries of State in 30 years, the IfG looked into the rapid rate of change to government policies and how this had affected many sectors of governance, including regional government, as well as industrial strategy and further education. The reason for the changes, or an "appalling churn" as the IfG called it, could be put down to a number of factors, including poor institutional memory, shifting ideologies and the tendency to abolish and recreate organisations as a proxy for demonstrating progress, disagreement about the purpose of regional governance, and the appropriate spatial level at which to devolve powers. Opinions from research were inconclusive on why a "battle for ideas" was prevalent. In short, the "constant reinvention" in these three policy areas, noted as one of "redisorganisation" — the need to keep everyone confused by instituting continuous centralisation and decentralisation — could not be adequately explained (Norris & Adam, 2017, p. 11). As a political commentator, quoted in this report, claims:

[...] *centralisation creates its own logic*: talent seeks out power. Many of the best people come to the political centre rather than remain in the nations and regions. There is a sense in Whitehall, which is more than a few decades out of date, that local government is staffed by inferior functionaries who cannot really be trusted with power. This is why the perennial response to the demand for devolved power is a panoply of initiatives with strings attached to the funding [...]. (Norris & Adam, 2017, pp. 26-27, emphasis added)

Themes of political agency have been picked up by those with academia commenting on, and seeking to explain, the "chopping and changing" (Turner et al., 2023, p. 4) of policy schemes and bodies. Drawing on the work of Richardson (2018), Coyle & Muhtar (2023) get behind the weaknesses of levelling up policies and the failures to learn from 50 years of

state intervention through economic development, in the context of increasing spatial inequalities. Coyle & Muhtar (2023) highlight that an “impositional” or “pop-up” policy-making practice has dominated economic development thinking for decades, exhibited by Figure 1. Impositional policy proposals originate at the political level, i.e., senior ministers, special advisors, and their civil service staff teams, as opposed to more consensual and networked policy-making styles involving interest groups. Driven by “ad hoc and haphazard” political cycles, or “fast policy” as Peck & Theodore (2015) put it, this environment leads to problems of changes in personality and personnel, fuelling inconsistency, poor coordination, and with an inability to “cultivate long-term institutional capability”, lack of capacity within the local and regional economic growth system to learn. Policy failure is thus witnessed as paths of policy churn, fragmentation, and an ongoing lack of policy co-ordination at a national level, as well as between this scale, local decision making and accountability (Coyle & Muhtar, 2023, p. 5–7). Public policymaking, of course, is always driven by the politics of “muddling through” (Lindblom, 1968) — policies evolve incrementally in the context of success and failure, some resurface from the past and with “small modifications” get used again (Corbett et al., 2020). These journeys though often bring with them elements of tried and tested institutional memory and learning on what to keep, reuse, and how. There is, however, no feedback to inform subsequent policy development in this economic development case-study (Coyle & Muhtar, 2023; Westwood et al., 2021; Turner et al., 2023).

Inspired by the second quotation above, this essay offers a geographical political economy explanation to the failed state of the supporting frameworks of local and regional economic growth. Impositional readings of failed economic development are deemed unable to fully explain the “fragmented spatial institutional landscapes” (Coyle & Muhtar, 2023, p. 16) and “churn and fragmentation in the evolution of governance arrangement and polices” (Martin et al., 2021, p. 49) collectively identified above. In over emphasising but elevating agency, impositional accounts run the risk of suggesting there is something special, unique, or distinctive about political (ministerial) approaches and ultimately trivialise discussions to issues of personality. Although the oddities of the impositional British state are noted — especially around central-local relations, state power resting with Cabinet government, and processes of democratic accountability (see Rhodes, 2011) — the geographies of policy emergence, aspects of failure and their spatial dimensions, and consequences in terms of combined and uneven development (also acting as a driver for policy development) cannot be adequately explained. By contrast, a political economy approach draws attention to the development and specificity of emergent strategic lines pursued by governments through this time-period, drawing influence from the various circles of political and ideological supporters, highlighting how different elements fit together under changing conditions. In the context of understanding failure, the challenge is one of considering economic development strategy and its geographies of failure as: “a complex and continuing process which evolves: selecting and ordering objectives; deciding on a pattern and sequence of actions deemed appropriate to attaining these objectives; monitoring performance and progress; and adjusting tactics and objectives as strategic interaction proceeds” (Jessop et al., 1988, p. 9).

The essay addresses this by asking questions about the shifting governance of supporting local economic growth. The governance question, as Jessop (1998, 2020, 2023a, 2023b) puts it, is why, and in what ways, particular policy problems are constructed and the processes through which spatial scales and regulatory governance mechanisms become codified as the solution to such problems. It is important not only to explain the inability of state intervention to make a difference, given that academic and popular analysis has highlighted the widening and deepening

ing of uneven development across Britain (McCann, 2016). The further challenge is to offer “explanatory power”, i.e., to draw attention to how seemingly unconnected processes of state restructuring and policy formation, identified as Figure 1, are in fact differentiated outcomes of ideologically infused political decision-making that cannot be separated from the inherent crisis tendencies and contradictions of capital accumulation, state formation, and state intervention (Jones, 2018; 2019). Put simply, public policy failure is not a random or surprising phenomenon, connected to the peculiarities and particularities of British impositional agency; it is increasingly endemic to state intervention in economic life within advanced capitalism and its late-neoliberalism spatial forms.

The essay suggests that the “problem of local growth” has been continually moved around through “crisis spaces” (Hadjimichalis, 2018) as a geographical project. Contradictions necessitate displacement and geographical transformation, but the crisis management strategies of the state themselves are always subject to new forms of crisis tendency, which points centrally to the always unstable nature of economic governance and economic development. The evidence in Figure 1 does not point to either impositional agency or a coherent institutional fix that supports a neoliberal growth project, but is instead best regarded as heterogeneous, mutable, and involving variegated responses and producing unstable uneven geographical outcomes (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015; see also Davies, 2023). Peck (2010) denotes this as governance “failing forward” in that

manifest inadequacies have — so far anyway — repeatedly animated further rounds of neoliberal invention. Devolved governance, public-private partnerships, management by audit, neopaternalism [...] all can be seen as examples of institutional reinvention spawned as much by the limits of earlier forms of neoliberalization as by some advancing “logic”. (pp. 6–7)

To provide a framework for grappling and putting the governance of “chop and change” failure in its place, Section 2 reconsiders the relationship between state, economy, and geography. Building on the work of Jessop and colleagues (see Jessop et al., 2008; Jessop, 2016a, 2023a), Section 3 advances the field of inquiry known as metagovernance and increasingly multispatial metagovernance, i.e., how complex problems of economic life and the existence of various failures — market failure, state failure, and governance failure — necessitates a focus on governance coordination and its geographies “through overseeing, steering, and coordinating governance arrangements” (Bell & Hindmoor, 2009, p. 11) vis-à-vis the wicked problem of economic development discussed above. Section 4 highlights that “there is no Archimedean point from which governance” can be guaranteed to succeed (Jessop, 2020, p. 72) — hence Figure 1. Taking metagovernance as a point of departure, notion of “spaces of collibration”, initially from the work of Dunsire (1993, 1994, 1996) and developed by Jessop (2016a, 2016b, 2020), are explored to capture how altering the relative balance within and between different modes of spatial coordination through state intervention shapes the governance of local and regional economic development. Collibration problematises how uneven development and state intervention in sub-national economic development is managed by creating an unstable equilibrium of compromise, which in turn helps to explain the governance of failure distinctively captured above.

2 Geographical Political Economy: States, Crisis, and Economic Governance

The state responds to and is embedded within the contradictions, dilemmas, and problems of capitalism by creating the general conditions for the production and social reproduction of the capital relation, that is, the environment for economic growth and development (Hudson, 1989). The state does this in part by seeking to promote growth and development and/or by responding to the effects of this, that is, uneven growth, change, and restructuring. The state though is a complex and broad set of institutions and networks that span both political society and civil society in their “inclusive” sense (Gramsci, 1971). Building on this insight, states can be viewed as strategic terrains, with emphasis being placed on strategic considerations and strategic actions. Offe (1984, 1985) discusses this arrangement by drawing attention to the state and its circuits of power and policy implementation, which provides a window on the patterning of state intervention and the everyday nature of policy-making under capitalism. Building on Offe and Gramsci, Jessop’s approach to the state, has significantly moved forward these arguments. For Jessop (1990, 2016b), the state needs to be thought of as “medium and outcome” of policy processes that constitute its many interventions. The state is both a social relation and a producer of strategy and, as such, it does not have any power of its own. State power in relation to the policy process relates to the forces that “act in and through” its apparatus. According to this view, attempts to analyse the policy process need to uncover the strategic contexts, calculations, and practices of the actors involved. This can be summarised as a framework that demonstrates “systems analyses” for the undertaking of “systematic” forms of public policy analysis — drawing attention to the intricate links between actors and forms of representation, institutions and their interventions and practices, and the range of policy outcomes available. The state, then, is both a strategic and relational concern, forged through the *ongoing* engagements between agents, institutions and concrete policy circumstances (Jones, 2018).

These concerns can be further rolled together through the idea of “spatial fixes” (Harvey, 2011, 2016) and “spatio-temporal fixes” (see Arrighi, 2004; Jessop, 2016a, 2016b), concepts deployed to comprehend the dynamics of state spatiality, state spatial restructuring, and the geographies of state intervention specifically. The state performs the role of securing the relative stabilisation of society by endeavouring to manage the various economic and political contradictions within the state system. This is inherently spatial, as state intervention is articulated through the constructions of spaces (scales, levels, horizons, etc.) of intervention, the fixing of borders, the stabilisation of places, and in short, attempts are being continually made to produce and reproduce a territorially coherent and functioning socioeconomic landscape. This has been referred to elsewhere as state “spatial selectivity” — the processes of spatial privileging and articulation in and through which state policies are differentiated across territorial space in order to target particular geographical zones, scales, and (organised and disorganised) interest groups (Jones, 1997).

The latter dimension forms an integral element of how political structuration occurs within the state apparatus via the creation of territorial coalitions, or what Cox (1998) calls “spaces of engagement”, to mobilise strategically significant actors and exclude others where “spaces of dependency” (interests and attachments) rule out their possibility for incorporation. The tension between engagement and dependency, of course, creates a politics of scale and a scaling of politics, where some localities are either more or less engaged in networks of association beyond their immediate territories than are others (see Jonas & Wood, 2012).

All this means that over time and across space, the state is simultaneously being hollowed-out and filled-in (see Goodwin et al., 2017). Although “hollowing-out” (Jessop, 1994; Rhodes,

2007) has been used as a spatial metaphor to describe the territorial and functional changes affecting the contemporary state, ironically, it suffers from a lack of spatial sensitivity. Its spatial myopia is especially apparent in the context of the processes of denationalisation (see below). This process is characterised by the territorial reconfiguration of state capacities to subnational and supranational bodies. Of necessity, this can enable new scales of the state to develop new institutions, new priorities, and new strategies of governance. However, because the main analytical focus within the notion of hollowing out is, of necessity, the national state, there is less conceptual and empirical space available to examine the differing organisational and institutional settlements that can develop within, for instance, the various regions of the state. To put it simply, the notion of hollowing out can imply a top-down reading of the process of denationalisation, whereas an emphasis on the idea of “filling-in” enables an examination of the sedimentation of new organisations and strategies of governance at other spatial scales. Jessop (2016a) emphasizes that hollowing out is associated with the role of the national state becoming a meta-governor, shaping what goes up, down, and sideways.

As noted previously (Jones, 2009, 2018), Brenner’s (1998, 2019) work on state spatiality offers a useful geo-periodisation bridge to situate the governance of economic development. Brenner draws attention to three periods: “engagement” (1890s–1930s), “entrenchment” (1950s–early 1970s), and “de-nationalisation” (1970s–1990s). This essay notes a fourth period, “city-regional worlds” (2000s–onwards) to further put failed governance in its place. Figure 1 captures this, with an increasingly relativisation of scale and an almost “filling-in” (Goodwin et al., 2017) of all horizons (national, regional, local) of state intervention. For economic development and spatial planning this implies: (1) an increasingly tangled hierarchy of overlapping, continually changing arrangements associated with multilevel interventions; and (2) the systematic lack of any dominant scale, or definite system of governance, that encompasses or subsumes competing scales of political-economic organisation (Jones, 2018). It is understandable, then, that policymakers and commentators frequently describe “swings in priorities and institutional upheaval” (Turner et al., 2023, p. 4) and “none given the time to bed in, in search of a solution to the ‘regional growth problem’” (p. 38).

Figure 2 indicates attempts to consolidate these governance arrangements into two main areas via the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act. The era of building new institutions appears to have slowed down, replaced by new ways of controlling the activities of the local state through integrating governmental funding (Newman et al., 2023; see also Gibson et al., 2023; Sandford, 2023). The extent of such cuts is considerable and increasingly unsustainable: Fransham et al. (2023) calculate that the total amount of funding for the levelling up agenda period is 0.5% of GDP, compared to local authority funding reductions of around 5% of GDP, with local government expected to also pick-up the additional functions of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) from April 2024 (see Figure 1) alongside multiple instances of local government bankruptcy being reported (see Weakley, 2023).

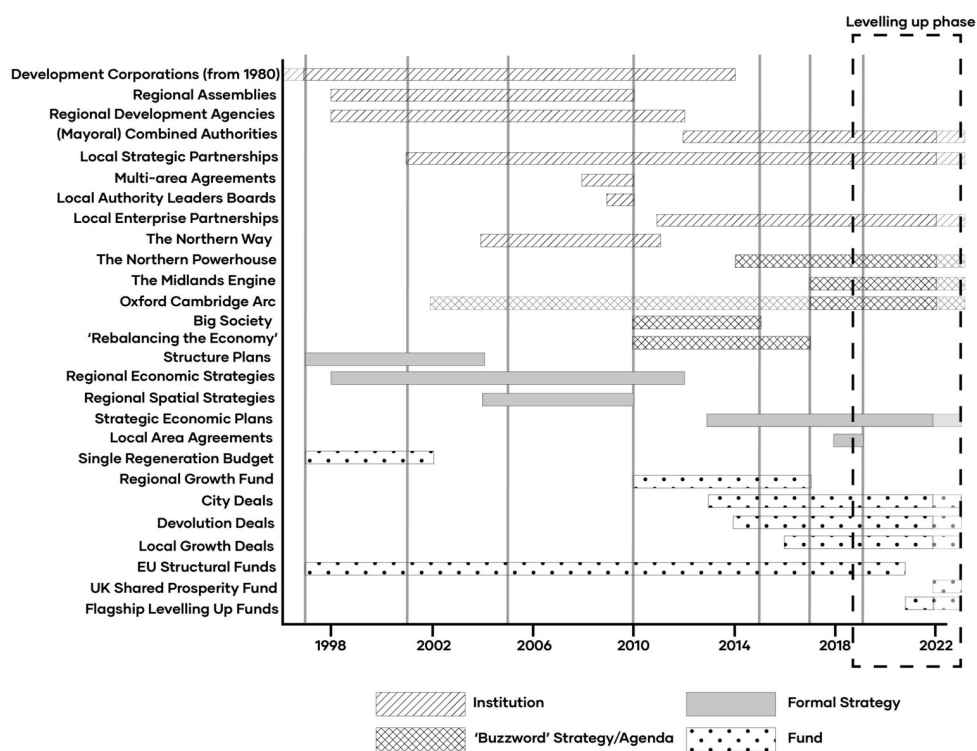


Figure 2: English Subnational Economic Development, 1997–2022.
 Source: Fransham et al. (2023, Figure 2)

3 Reconciling Failed Governance: Neoliberalism and Metagovernance

Applying metagovernance is no guarantee for success. It is not ballistics where you can calculate where and when a bullet will hit the target. We will even never be sure if the right bullet was chosen, not even after a successful hit of a policy target: there could be other reasons for a success, beyond the workings of the governance framework. Besides ambiguity and complexity, sheer luck or trouble is part of public governance in daily life (Meuleman, 2019, p. 15).

Discussion above suggests that this growth strategy project should neither be seen as an all-encompassing, universal and settled entity, nor a binary process of switching one spatial scale with another (local-regional and regional-local). It is important, then, to highlight the contingent “mechanisms” or “processes” in and through which this project is being politically made and contested with “some forms of agency” to avoid “over generalizations” (Le Galès, 2016, p. 168). A “processual” approach is favoured, which seeks out the mechanisms (“cross-scalar relations” as Brenner et al. [2012, p. 60, emphasis original] put it) that generate events and can highlight developmental tendencies and tease out important counteracting tendencies and opportunities for progressive localisms.

Instances of regulatory failure across cities and regions though are becoming apparent, as state policymaking constantly switches economic problems in concerns of state rationality that can be more easily addressed through public policy. State actors appear to be continually re-inventing policy initiatives, often in response to the problems and contradictions caused by previous rounds of state intervention, in a search to get things right. As Brenner et al. (2012), put it,

the practice of neoliberal statecraft is inescapably, and profoundly, marked by compromise, calculation and contradiction. There is no blueprint. There is not even a map. Crises themselves need not be fatal for this mutable, mongrel model of governance, for to some degree or another neoliberalism has always been a creature of crisis. But selectively exploiting the crisis of Keynesian-welfarist, developmental or state-socialist systems is one thing, responding to crises of neoliberalism’s own making is quite another (p. 45).

There is a “pendulum swing” effect in the governance fields of local and regional economic development, whereby UK state strategy, in turn linked to how the policy problem is constructed and its solution articulated, has *moved* and oscillated between national, regional, and local patterns of state projects and modes of state interventions (Pike et al., 2016, 2018). The previous round of state spatial restructuring has been used as the explanation for state intervention failure, with the next round seeking to address this through developing new spatial horizons, also failing in turn. Policy actors, politicians and business leaders are locked into the market model of delivery, neoliberalising modes of representation and subsequent failures in economic regulation. Local and regional economic and social development has a “deficit in local regulatory capacity” and some state forms and functions have clearly become “counter-regulatory” (Painter & Goodwin, 2000). Governance failure (a response to both state failure and market failure), i.e., the “failure to redefine objectives in the face of continuing disagreement about whether they are still valid for the various partners” (Jessop, 2000, p. 18), is occurring.

Several dimensions to governance failure exist, which are embedded in economic development (see Etherington & Jones, 2016, 2018). First, is the apparent tension between devolving

responsibilities in relation to policy formation and implementation and the tendency towards centralisation in decision making, whereby local actors are charged with implementing nationally determined targets and programmes. The challenge here is the adaptation of national programmes to local conditions.

Second is the increasing tendency towards institutional and policy fragmentation at the sub-regional level, with issues of accountability being raised. Governance becomes a new site for conflicts and political mobilisation, as the nature and complexity of partnerships means that involvement of more and more “actors” and “stakeholders” involved in the design and delivery of labour market programmes. Outcomes at one scale may be dependent upon performance at another scale of governance, therefore coordination dilemmas can occur. Furthermore, these coordination mechanisms may have different “temporal horizons” and there may be continuous tensions between short term and long-term planning goals in policy planning.

Third, and related, is the failure of current policies to address deep-rooted problems of labour market inequalities that are integral to market failure. This is exemplified in many localities by the employment gap and lack of sufficient sustainable employment growth to “revitalise” city-region economies.

Finally, governance in the form of economic partnerships, dominated by private sector interests, is continuing to replace elected and representative government in terms of local economic development, which in itself poses a number of problems between government and its elected representation model of democracy and partnerships, and which tend to be elite-forming with blurred lines of accountability, often far removed from those who are disadvantaged and disenfranchised. Depoliticisation is occurring, as opaque representational structure and lines of accountability close down and restrict possibilities of negotiation and contestation (see Griggs et al., 2017).

As noted by Bakker (2010), these processes have been neither “tidy in practice” nor “linear in fashion”: market failures, state failures and governance failures coexist, “exhibit a range of failures”, and are used to justify the “problem” requiring ongoing state intervention (see also Vogel, 2018; Wolf, 1988). It is, therefore, important to consider notions of “crisis metamorphosis”, which:

[...] implies a *change in form*; it does not imply, as displacement does, that the crisis has moved from one sphere of social life to another. A financial crisis that metamorphoses into a political crisis or a social crisis does not necessarily cease to be a financial crisis: it simply becomes something else. It changes form and, in doing so, it becomes something *more* than a financial crisis per se, taking on new characteristics in the process. (Thompson, 2012, pp. 64–65, emphasis original)

Moreover, as forms of governance become more widespread and can constantly change its form (metamorphosis) “the question of governance failure becomes more acute” (Bakker, 2010, p. 45). The state’s answer to governance failure is to develop forms of metagovernance, which involves attempts to manage the ongoing complexity, plurality and tangled hierarchies characteristic of prevailing modes of coordination (see Jessop, 1998, 2000, 2016a, 2016b). It involves, then, continually defining and redefining boundary-spanning roles and functions, creating and recreating networking and linkage devices, sponsoring and redesigning new institutions, identifying appropriate lead strategic institutions to coordinate other partners and continually generating discourses and narratives on the economy (the “shaping of context”, according to Jessop, 2011) to facilitate relative geographical coherence through repetition of the “problems” to be addressed and the solutions to these (metamorphosis played out).

Government plays an increasing role in metagovernance: providing the ground rules for governance and regulatory order in and through which governance partners can pursue their aims and seek to ensure the compatibility or coherence of different governance mechanisms and regimes; seeking to balance and rebalance power differentials by strengthening weaker forces or systems in the interest of social cohesion or integration; and providing political responsibility in the event of governance failure (Etherington & Jones, 2016; Whitehead 2003, 2007). These emerging roles means that networking, negotiation, noise reduction and negative as well as positive coordination occur “in the shadow of hierarchy”. It also means that, as Jessop reminds us, there is “the need for almost permanent institutional and organizational innovation to maintain the very possibility (however remote) of sustained economic growth” (Jessop, 2000, p. 24). Economic development initiatives are thus frequently produced through a combination of political fiat, central government diktat and local state opportunism.

Effective governance and metagovernance, in turn, depends on displacing (via the metamorphosis of the problem and its solution) certain governance problems elsewhere and/or on deferring them into a more or less remote future. This is possible because the state can transform its own internal structures and patterns of intervention spatially in an attempt to temporarily reconcile the contradictions inherent in its involvement in economy and society (Hudson, 2001). Whereas the positively charged policy-context of government policy points to a can-do “steering optimism”, where there is deemed to be a capacity to engage fruitfully and with purpose to produce temporary spatio-temporal fixes, Figure 1 demonstrates a “steering pessimism” and a “crisis of crisis-management” (Offe, 1984). State intervention has come to operate not only as a political strategy for promoting local economic development, but also as a form of crisis-management designed to manage the regulatory deficits, dislocations, and conflicts induced through earlier rounds of state spatial restructuring. In short, “a crisis-induced recalibration has been unfolding since the mid-1990s whereby a rescaled layer of state spatial projects and state spatial strategies has been forged whose purpose is to confront some of the major regulatory failures generated through state intervention” (Brenner, 2004, p. 266).

In turn, there are structural economic obstacles to effective governance and metagovernance, that, “by virtue of the simplification of the conditions of action, so often lead to the “revenge” of problems that get ignored, marginalized, displaced, or deferred” (Jessop, 2011, p. 117). Figure 3 summarises the key dimensions of this conceptualisation of crisis and contradiction theory and points to the importance of the accumulation of, and inescapable intensification of, the unresolved contradictions of doing local and regional economic development. Brenner (2004) neatly summarises these as the outstanding problems of: inefficiency and waste; chronic short-termism; regulatory undercutting; increasing uneven spatial development and territorial conflicts; problems of inter-scalar and inter-territorial coordination; democratic accountability and legitimation problems (see also Fuller & Geddes, 2008).

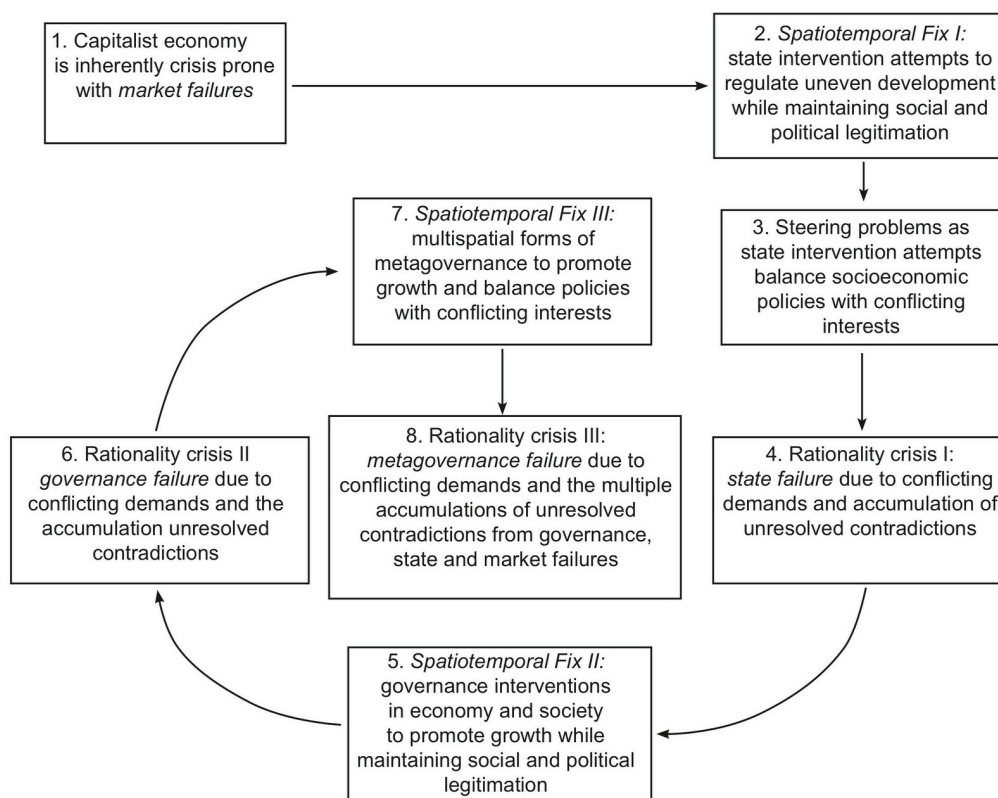


Figure 3: The Geographical Political Economy of Crisis Spaces.

Source: Updated from Jones (2018, p. 36, Figure 2)

4 Coda: Collibration Geographies and the Survival of Capitalism

[...] Collibration is defined as an intervention by government to use the social energy created by the tension between two or more social groupings habitually locked in opposition to one another to achieve a policy objective by altering the conditions of engagement without destroying the tension — unless deliberately (Dunsire, 1993, pp. 11–12).

Unfortunately, since every practice is prone to failure, metagovernance and collibration are also likely to fail (Jessop, 2020, p. 73).

The considerable review of metgovernance literatures by Gjaltema et al. (2020) points to the needs for deeper conceptualisation and operationalisation, notably around the fields of the use by the state of different instruments, methods, and strategies to overcome governance failures. Without this, “meta-governance risks becoming a catch-all phrase and solution for every complex problem” (Gjaltema et al., 2020, p. 1760). Drawing on the empirics above, the essay’s point of departure is the *meta-governor* “activity of balancing different modes of governance” (Gjaltema et al., 2020, p. 1767) and the ways in which different modes of governance “are creatively combined and implemented to change the rules of the game” by constantly creating

tensions between different forces to maintain levels of instability in through which to exhort influence and control (Newman et al., 2023, p. 2).

Inspired by the work of Dunsire (1978, 1993, 1994, 1996), notions of “collibration”, previously phrased “co-liberation”, can be helpful to consider how the state manages an “unstable equilibrium of compromise” not only through building new institutions of economic development, but through how such projects links to the redesigning of markets and the re-regulation of the relationship between the levels of governance in an increasing multispatial environment. The goal here is the manipulation of balancing social and spatial tensions to ensure that the state maintains, and can continue to exercise, some influence (Jessop, 2020). In short, creating “contradictory objectives” is a public policy goal and these are desired to always be “kept in tension” (Hood, 2016). The key point being made in this essay is that collibration is enacted via the state’s ability to further undertake, through spatial movement and geographical displacement, interventions and projects under the auspices of what Jessop terms multispatial metagovernance (MSMG).

According to Jessop (2016a, 2016b, 2023a), MSMG recognises the complex, reciprocal, and independence of several spatio-temporal social fields that the state can draw on to frame its modes of intervention and policy-making capacities. The basis of this rests on earlier work with colleagues on the TPSN schema (denoting the concepts of territory, place, scale, and network), which sought to go beyond analysis of the state in one-dimension, instead focusing on the polymorphic nature of state spatiality. Jessop et al. (2008) explored the interaction between these four spatial moments of social relations, considered both as structuring principles and as fields of socio-spatial organization. The socio-spatial embedding of TPSN configurations of the state apparatus and of state power was deployed to capture the ways in which state institutions are mobilised to regulate, govern, and reorganise social and economic relations. The changing geographies of state intervention in economic processes are, therefore, collibration moments of TPSN socio-spatiality, which can be combined in hybrid ways to produce more concrete-complex analyses of socio-spatial configurations, which are articulated in different kinds of state spatial strategy. Each socio-spatial organising principle has its own forms of inclusion-exclusion and entails differential capacities to exercise state powers. This opens a strategic field in which social forces seek to privilege different modes of socio-spatial organisation to privilege their ideal and material interests. There is a scale and scalar differentiation of society, in and through which the state is concretised and acts (Collinge, 1999; Jones, 1997). Gough’s (2003, 2004) work on the genesis and tensions of the regionalism in general, and Regional Development Agencies in particular, is illustrative of this and the ways in which changes in the scalar relations of governing economic development have been associated with shifts in social class relations. Such spatially selective governance landscapes, or “spatiotemporal envelopes”, though can also used by marginalised and overlooked actors to mobilise for resources (see Fisker et al., 2022). In both cases, strategies of crisis resolution involve, through collibration, attempts to reorder the relative importance of the four dimensions and their associated institutional expressions and, hence, to modify the weight of their role in displacing crisis tendencies and contradictions — moving them around” as Harvey (2011, p. 11) put it — ultimately in the pursuit and exercise of state power by maintaining contradictory objections and spatial tensions.

Table 1 accordingly summarises how all the spatial combinations have been used as sites for doing local and regional economic and social development over the past 40 years — spaces of collibration. This clearly demonstrates that just “as the weight of different modes of governance varies with objects of governance, spatiotemporal horizons of action, the identities of actors, and the conjuncture, so does the weight that is attached to its spatial dimensions” (Jes-

sop, 2023a, p. 23). A discernible shift can be noted, whereby: place-place state spatial strategies of the Victorian’s localist era existed; territory-place strategies of the spatial Keynesian welfarist era replaced this regulatory fix; place-network and scale-network forms of neoliberal state intervention were dominant the new localism and new regionalism; and network-place state spatial strategies are suggested to be the game-face of the new new localism (Jones, 2019).

		← Structuring principles →			
Structuring fields	Territory	Place	Scale	Network	
		Territory	Territorialisation of local authorities, creation of local state new institutions (e.g. TECs, LSCs, LEPs)	Management of uneven development, integrating places into a territory (e.g. Urban Programme, Levelling Up, UKSPF)	Spatial Keynesianism, coordinating different scales (e.g. Regional & Urban Development Policy)
Place	Land-based agencies with zonal-extent (e.g. UDCs, EZs, English Partnerships, URCs, IZs, Freeports)	Designating towns and cities, contiguous regions and city-regions (e.g. Towns Fund)	Glocalisation, glurbanisation, urban-global inter-relationships	Local, urban, regional governance partnerships (e.g. Single Regeneration Budget, City Challenge, LSPs, LAAs, MAAs)	
Scale	Filling-in of administrative functions: Unitary District, Borough institutions	Twinning arrangements, local-global linkages	Soft or Fuzzy spaces, non-contiguous City Regions (Core City and Key City networks)	Nested or tangled scalar projects (e.g. RDAs, Regional Assemblies)	
Network	Spatial Imaginaries, virtual, relational, and cross-border regions (e.g. Northern Way, Northern Powerhouse, Midlands Engine)	Polycentric cities and multi-city regionalism, deal-making economic policy (e.g. City Deals, Sector Deals, Devolution Deals)	Private international regimes, providers of state services (e.g. Work and Health Programme, Transport Infrastructures)	Fast-policy transfers, networks of networks (e.g. Business Improvement Districts)	

Table 1: Multispatial Metagovernance Collibration and Economic Development.
 Source: Updated from Jones (2018, p. 38, Table 1)

In terms of metagovernance, competing and rivalled socio-spatial strategies have existed and coexist, and this is a deliberate policy objective of producing an unstable equilibrium of compromise (Jessop, 2020), exhibited by “the constant churning of local and regional structures and strategies” (Jessop, 2023a, p. 23). Attempts to collibrate the relative weight of the socio-spatial configurations, illustrated by the state project descriptions in these cells, have though “intensified uneven development, especially when declining regions are blamed for their own decline, required to make themselves attractive to capital based on mobilizing their own resources, or left to rot” (Jessop, 2018, p. 7). Figure 4, which is a journeyed annotation of Figure 1, illustrates the intensity of policy experimentation and rescaling over the past decade in the pursuit of an almost “appearance of activity” policy dynamic. The consequences of maintaining an environment of instability are important to consider, as there is a deeper disjunction tension that can trigger legitimation crises if the “authority of the state to act in particular ways in called into question precisely because state policies fail to meet their stated objectives” (Hudson, 2004, p. 7). The 2016 vote in Britain to “Brexit” the European Union was in large part driven by those in distressed rust-belt post-industrial areas, seemingly trapped within an “accumulation of crises” (Clarke, 2023, p. 111) geography of discontent, lacking confidence in Metropolitan politicians and policy-makers to manage the economy — through the various rounds of industrial restructuring-induced economic development projects and governance endeavours over the past 40 years — and society.

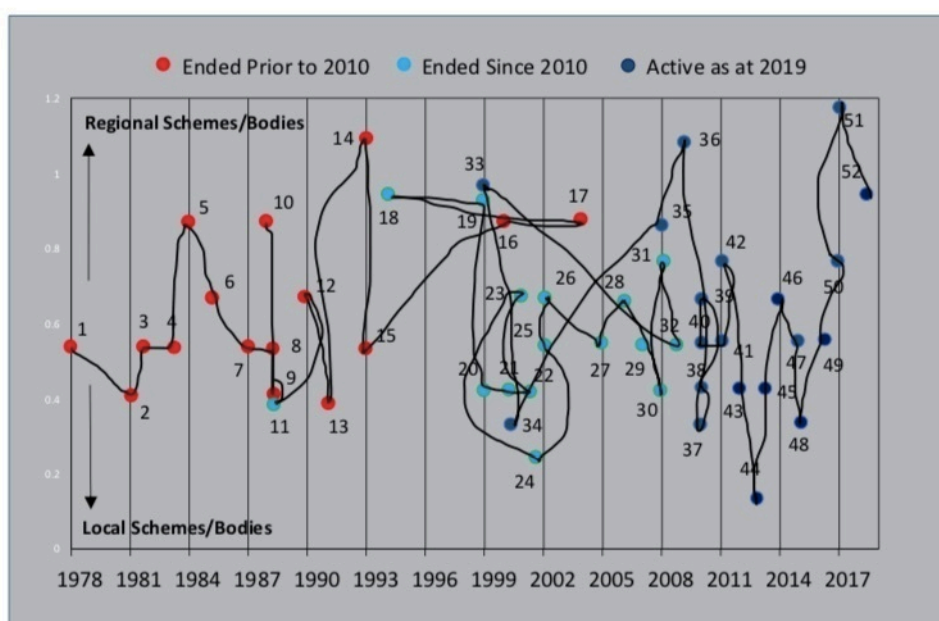


Figure 4: The Pathways of Spatial Collibration, 1978–2018.
Source: Adapted with permission from National Audit Office (2013, 2019)

Given that collibration is predicated not on the desire for stability but on maintenance of instability through holding tensions in check, more fundamental questions of “failure” are at stake. Failure exhibited by a “crisis governance evolutionary logic” (Seibel, 2023, p. 137), always “tendential and inevitable” (Jessop, 2023b, p. 237), can be construed as a form of suc-

cess, especially when the state is faced with the unresolvable problems discussed in this essay. Failed economic development moreover can act as a “policy chameleon” (Pickvance, 1981), i.e., a shift away from the original aims of this form of state intervention, which was to secure a more balanced spatial distribution of economic activity in the context of uneven development and inequalities. Public policy initiatives can enable other (intended) effects.

Three historical trends are at play here. First, Farnsworth (2015) exposes a “corporate welfare” machine of wage subsidies and grants to privately owned companies that both socialise business risks and help to maintain a level of surplus value — in the context of searching for “frictionless market rule” (Peck, 2010, p. 16). As previously highlighted by Campbell (1993, p. 305), commenting at that time on Enterprise Zones, “all this is secret” in terms of costs to government and benefits to the private sector. More recently, the *Financial Times* exposé into the Teesside Freeport initiative — highlighting “cronyism, corruption, secrecy and poor value for money levelled at the project” — shines light on how economic development can be a key arena of capital in and through which economic and social interrelations are being continually forged and the “survival of capitalism” continues, as Lefebvre (1976) would put it (Williams, 2023). The prevalence of “collaborative governance” (Griggs et al., 2020; Newman, et al., 2004) for the past two decades — where consensus building is achieved by civic, community, and predominately private sector interests coming together through partnerships and other coordination mechanisms purporting to endanger “smart” (Donahue & Zeckhauser, 2011) public policy — have provided a smokescreen for concealing this. Collaborative governance gives the appearance of place-based “solidarity” (Jessop, 2020), but as noted above, this can ultimately through the selective incorporation of agency and the normalisation of behaviour, act as a critical pathway for depoliticising economic and social conflict.

Second, and related to this, paraphrasing Peck & Tickell (2002), “rolled-forward” shifts with the geographies of economic governance have been occurring along “rolled-back” changes to the local state over the 40 years period captured in this essay. Gibson et al. (2023) highlight the 55 occasions through which “initiativitis” has been inflicted upon local government, particularly via the competitive allocation process for funding and constrained discretion modes of governance. This has intensified over time in a “glacial and incremental” manner under the auspices of accountability, but with the outcome of layering central-local regimes of centralisation and control (Gibson et al., 2023, p. 3). The creation of an Office for Local Government (Oflog) in 2023 to provide authoritative and accessible data and analysis about the performance of local government and its improvement reinforces this ongoing surveillance trend.

This has, third, occurred alongside the “sedimentation of social relations” discussed above via the techniques of political and policy management for social policy, naturalising relations of domination and control over the labour market and labour process (Howarth, 2009, p. 309). One notable ingredient in this political endeavour has been escalating of welfare-to-work, through Universal Credit (UC), which aims to secure a new relationship between the state and its subjects by requiring work or active labour market activities in return for unemployment benefit and welfare assistance. The operability of this “economic governance/social regulation” (Jones, 1998) dichotomy, which has been intensifying in the period since 1995 when the Jobseeker’s Allowance was introduced (see Griggs et al., 2014), is causing hardship and misery for thousands (see Etherington, 2020). To adequately situate these shifting forms of local agency, there is urgency around researching the local state as a conjunctural arena of capitalism (Blanco et al., 2014).

The challenge for progressive forces is to develop a better alternative — a far from easy task (see Thompson, 2021). Clearly, local economies need to be transformed by realigning

economic and social relations, as well spatial relations in the context of levelling up narratives (compare Brown & Jones, 2021; Das et al., 2023; Eisenschitz & Gough, 1993).

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