

## Multiscalarity and Neighbourhood Governance

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### Abstract

This article deploys a concept of multiscalarity to criticise current theoretical approaches to governance and to make sense of neighbourhood governance. Drawing on Kooiman's distinction between hierarchical, self- and co-governance, it is argued, first, that state strategies need to be re-examined in the light of the multiscalarity of governance. Using the example of the neighbourhood and evidence from the author's own research, the article then provides a detailed illustration of governance multiscalarity. The article has two notably original findings: empirically, only community and residents' associations have sufficient independence to resist governmental forces on the neighbourhood scale (and these associations have to scale up their activities in order to have any chance of success); and theoretically, the societal predominance of hierarchical governance can be explained largely in terms of asymmetry in the conditions for trans-scalar organisation, with coordination from top downwards being typically easier to achieve than from bottom upwards.

Keywords co-governance, governance, hierarchy, multiscalarity, neighbourhood, self-governance  
Multiscalarity

Global trends from 'government' to 'governance' have opened up new questions about the geographical scale of decision-making. Current attempts to explain these trends can be classified into two groups: those that invoke state rescaling

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strategies to improve competitiveness and regulation and those that emphasise 'community'-centred legitimating strategies. This article aims to evaluate these different explanatory approaches using a concept of multiscalarity. It argues that explaining governance requires particular attention to be paid to the scales on which governance occurs.

Multiscalarity can be defined most simply as a property of trans-scalar action, or acting across more than one geographical scale. It refers to a general feature of

social relations whereby they have different spatial reaches of interaction, which are related to one another in different ways. In principle, the number of scales could be infinite but in practice it is constrained by certain characteristics of our social system.

The significance of multiscalarity for this article is that it offers a perspective on theories of governance. The next section will therefore consider the nature of governance and theories of governance. It will be shown that multiscalar governance is produced by complex combinations of different modes of governance operating simultaneously on different scales. This will be followed by a discussion of neighbourhood multiscalarity and neighbourhood governance, which will demonstrate the utility of these concepts for explaining empirical research findings.

#### Governance

Governance can be understood, following Le Gale's (1998: 496), as a double capacity, to shape collectivities (interests, groups, organisations, places) and to represent them in different arenas. 'Shaping' is understood here in a broad sense to include any form of participation, whether as citizens, politicians, professionals, service users, service providers, and so on, that influences or otherwise affects the form or content of a collectivity; 'representation' is taken to mean any process whereby a person or body of people acts on behalf of a defined population. This conceptualisation then enables an understanding of multiscalar governance as involving the representation of a collectivity on one scale in an arena on a different scale.

A further important concept is that of modes of governance, of which Kooiman (2005) has identified three: hierarchical governance, self-governance and co-governance. Hierarchical governance is 'top-down' governance in which a central 'governor' dominates the shaping and representing of a collectivity. Self-governance

is 'bottom-up' governance in which a collectivity is able to shape and represent itself. Co-governance is then where a collectivity works co-operatively with other collectivities, in a process of mutual shaping and mutual representation. In this article, the emphasis is primarily on the governance of places (spaces or territories – where the central 'governator' is typically known as a government), on identifying the problematic character of current theoretical approaches

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to such governance and on finding ways to make policy and practice fairer and more democratic.

One theoretical approach to governance focuses on the increasing involvement of non-state actors in the governance of places and attempts to explain this in terms of state responses, on different scales, to international capitalist restructuring (this approach is exemplified by Jessop, 2002, and Brenner, 2004). Such responses commonly take the form of state strategies, which mobilise communities and citizens as willing partners in providing 'an alternative both to the untrammelled free market (of neo-liberalism) and the strong state (of social democracy)' (Levitas, 2000: 191; see also Rose, 1996, 1999). The theorists argue that this involves communities and citizens in their own subjugation, by linking the community sector to the technocratic apparatus of the state; consequently, 'community organisations are shaped through their relations with the state and/or private foundations, lose their autonomy, and become instruments of state social and economic policy' (DeFilippis et al., 2006: 680). Essentially, then, these theorists explain the shift from 'government' to 'governance' as an institutional change (see, for example, Bevir, 2003), a product of Third Way state rescaling strategies (see, for example, Swyngedouw, 2000,

2004; Somerville, 2004) designed to achieve greater international competitiveness (the 'competition state') and/or more effective regulation of everyday life (the 'regulatory state'). They see the potentially co-governance spaces on a neighbourhood scale as 'captured' by a system of multiscale hierarchical governance.

Much evidence can be adduced in support of this theory. Rose (1999), for example, has described how what Habermas (1974) called 'the public sphere' is constituted and shaped by the state, which draws citizens into new fields of power, opening them up to new forms of disciplinary practice and professional or bureaucratic domination (Barnes et al., 2007: 70). Institutions of representative democracy function not only to legitimate state power but also to transform self-governance into hierarchical governance – notions of representation (among other things) are used to discipline citizens into following pre-determined state rules and norms (Barnes et al., 2007). Citizens are invited to participate not just in governmental structures (such as area committees) but also in new governance spaces on different scales, which arise 'at the interface between a socially differentiated public and public bodies' (Barnes et al., 2007: 164). The terms and conditions of their participation, however, are laid down by state officials and their allies, who have the power to constitute the public with which they engage, to set the rules and norms of engagement, to set the public agenda in many cases, to decide the legitimacy to afford to different voices and modes of expression, and to decide whether or not to take account of the views expressed (Barnes et al., 2007: 190–1). The result is that little significant change takes place (see, for example, Barnes et al., 2007: 96, 130, 131). In some cases, Barnes et al. (2007: 192) report that the institutional rules and norms are so strongly

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entrenched that they effectively imprison all the participants, both officials and members of the public.

A classic example on a municipal scale is that of local strategic partnerships (LSPs) in England, where local authorities enter into partnership with representatives of other public services, the private sector and the voluntary and community sectors. It is argued that LSPs do not effectively represent the interests of the different sectors, because their constituencies are ill-defined and the representatives themselves are largely unelected (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004). So, even though these partnerships can be more inclusive (see, for example, Maguire and Truscott, 2006), they can hardly be said to enhance local representative democracy. Indeed, Geddes (2006: 84) concludes that the effect of this shift to local governance is that 'the primacy of party political debate and electoral choice about local policies and priorities will tend to be replaced not by deliberative, agonistic democratic debate, but by negotiation among a cross-sectoral local elite, with an inherent tendency towards a consensual, centrist, "third way" politics'. So the shift to such governance on a municipal scale is to be understood as involving a sideways displacement of state power to ensure more effective 'joining up' of policy and practice on this scale (part of what Peck and Tickell, 2002, called 'roll-out' neoliberalism). This does not in itself mean a diminution in the power of local authority councillors but only that the way in which that power is wielded becomes modified in the light of interaction with other sectors. In particular, it does not mean that local political elites will necessarily become more responsive to community demands, as it has long been established that, in a 'crisis of representation' (Copus, 2004), councillors will generally side with their party group rather than with their constituents.

One problem with this theoretical approach is that it can appear over-deterministic,

in the sense that it allows no room for successful resistance. In practice, what goes on inside the new governance spaces can be complex and the outcomes can be unpredictable. Consequently, not all community organisations that participate in governance become co-opted to state strategies and projects: 'Some community organizations contest, mobilize and politicise, while others... are well adapted to provide services and adjust to the socio-political relations of the neoliberal context' (DeFilippis et al., 2006: 680). Where publicly employed officials or professionals and representatives of community organisations initially have conflicting definitions of purpose, the latter can indeed move closer to the former but, by the same token, the former can move closer to the latter; for example where officials recognise the expertise of citizens/users/community activists or sympathise with their position (Barnes et al., 2007: 193–4). Local councillors, in particular, can act either as representatives of the council or as representatives of their constituents, and the gap between these two positions can range from being very narrow to very wide. Unfortunately, however, the theory does not specify a distinction between these varieties of situation, thus giving an impression, however unintended, that 'resistance is useless'.

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Given the inequality of power between government (and its partners) and most citizen/user/community organisations, it seems more likely that the latter will shift towards the former rather than vice versa. Such a shift results in the constitution of 'insiders' who may be far removed from the experience of the publics they may claim to represent or may be assumed to represent (Barnes et al., 2007: 195; see also Bang, 2005; Skidmore et al., 2006). The public becomes divided between a small group of 'insider' participants (e.g. so-called 'community leaders') and

'outsider' non-participants in governance, with the participants becoming disproportionately involved in a large number of governance activities (Skidmore et al., 2006). Some of them may even get elected to their local council. In order to be considered as election candidates, however, they may already have to give priority to party loyalty over community activism. Their best chance of getting elected is then through being a member of a well-known national party, which is unlikely to give priority to local issues. If they try to maintain a role as representatives of their constituents 'against the system', as it were, they risk finding themselves politically sidelined and relatively powerless – they become advocates rather than decision-makers.

This risk of 'capture' can perhaps be avoided, however, if the representatives are rooted in pre-existing social movements, service user struggles, community activism or other alternative public spaces (for an example of successful community activism, see Boudreau and Keil, 2001, on secession movements in Los Angeles).<sup>1</sup> Barnes et al. (2007: 202) note that where such people 'were invited to participate as stakeholders in a policy or service area, deliberation was more likely to produce challenges to the status quo and some element of transformation, at least in terms of attitudes and orientations of public officials'. For co-governance to be effective, therefore, there need to be thriving 'popular spaces' (Cornwall and Coelho, 2004, 2006) or forums, which are autonomous public spaces, 'clearly bounded from official intervention' (Barnes et al., 2007: 190). Where such spaces exist, there is greater potential for the agenda and rules of deliberation in governance spaces to be jointly constructed rather than imposed by officials (Barnes et al., 2007: 50).<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between citizens/users and the state is not necessarily hierarchical, therefore: it can be one of co-governance (involving power-sharing between state and community actors) or citizens could even take full responsibility

for public decision-making (self-governance). In order to understand better what is going on, however, it is necessary to specify more clearly not only the nature of the relationship (for example, which citizens and what power is shared and how) but also the space in which the relationship is embedded and the scale(s) on which the interactions between citizens and state take place (there is room for considerable diversity of social action and interaction here – see, for example, Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones, 2004). This article therefore focuses specifically on the issue of scale, arguing that hierarchical governance in particular can be institutionalised through a hierarchy of scales, whereby power on so-called

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‘higher’ scales tends to dominate interaction on ‘lower’ scales, and this domination is achieved through the processes of shaping and representation that define governance itself. From this standpoint, state rescaling strategies can be viewed as a way of reconfiguring hierarchical governance as a hierarchy of scales, in which collectivities on lower scales gain representation on higher scales, but decisionmaking on higher scales continues to override that on lower scales. The possibility of self-organised shaping on lower scales explains why resistance is not entirely useless, while at the same time the limitations of this self-organising point to the strengths of this theoretical approach.

A second kind of theoretical approach is commonly known as ‘community governance’. This is more normative, seeking to establish institutional criteria for governance that will be more democratic, more inclusive, more just, more effective, and so on (Clarke and Stewart, 1994, 1999). It requires local authorities in particular to work with citizens to ensure that they exercise collective choice to meet their needs and secure their well-being. It explains governance essentially on



the basis of legitimating strategies, in which the democratising and liberating potential of 'community', on one scale or another, is invoked as a means to transform the economy and society.

At least two versions of this approach can be identified: 'new localism' and 'community promotion'. 'New localism' (Corry and Stoker, 2002) emphasises local authority leadership and 'partnership' between elected representatives and local communities (e.g. Sullivan, 2001; Mossberger and Stoker, 2001; Smith and Sullivan, 2003; Stewart, 2003; Stoker, 2004). The argument seems to be that the 'best' form of territorial governance, at least on a more local scale, involves co-governance of some kind between state and non-state actors. There are, as mentioned earlier, continuing problems with local (not to mention national) representative government, causing a lack of legitimacy (for further discussion, see Geddes, 2006: 82–3). To increase the legitimacy of representative government, therefore, new localism seeks among other things to open up local decisionmaking to a variety of interests that might not normally be represented, such as voluntary and community organisations (Geddes, 2006: 83), to create 'alternative centres of democracy at the local level' (Leach and Pratchett, 2005: 328). New localism also holds to a version of the European Union principle of subsidiarity, according to which the power to make decisions should be devolved to the 'lowest' authorities that are competent to exercise it – which for most purposes means local authorities but, in some cases, neighbourhoods and individual citizens.

New localism has been criticised, however, for misreading 'Third Way' state strategies (see for example, Cochrane, 2004). In the UK, for example, the New Labour Government had provided rhetorical support for the ideals of new localism but local authorities still do not seem to represent a privileged or even preferred scale of 'community' for public policy decision-making. Moreover, in spite

of occasional indications to the contrary (for example, on the issue of 'double  
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devolution' – Mulgan and Bury, 2006)

), the New Labour Government did not

appear to be committed to any significant strengthening of municipal power. In

other words, where new localists see important opportunities for building cogovernance

on a municipal scale, the nature of this possible co-governance is

insufficiently specified and the reality looks more like the hierarchical governance

perceived by theorists of the first kind; that is, a complex system of multiscalar

governance integrated vertically and horizontally through Third Way rescaling

strategies as described earlier in this article.

Community promotion, as described by DeFilippis et al. (2006: 682), invokes

'community' as 'a form of organisation through which ordinary people can mobilise

their interests in opposition to those of the state, or of larger global forces'

(Bray, 2006: 532; see also Fung and Wright, 2003, on 'countervailing power',

and, for examples of such organisation, Kingsnorth, 2003, and Wainwright,

2003). Community promotion involves seizing opportunities both for alternative

economic development, through a range of forms of co-operative organisation,

and for expanded democratic practice, as a result of autonomous community

organisations challenging and negotiating with state representatives. This could

be described as a movement for community self-governance and against state-determined

hierarchical governance (in short, against government).

Such a movement has been criticised on the grounds that community

participation is bound to be limited, relatively ineffective in solving community

problems, under-focused on structural issues of poverty and redistribution, and

over-focused on local or single-issue solutions (DeFilippis et al., 2006: 683–4).

One could add that, like new localism, it insufficiently specifies the scales on which governance is to take place – for example, the scale on which a community operates is unclear and it is not stated how community promotion is to be scaled up to confront state hierarchies. In the absence of such specification, there is a risk that, instead of legitimating governance change, community promotion might actually reinforce the status quo, as community activists become recruited to local leadership coalitions (Purdue, 2005: 260). Thus, instead of strengthening self-governance on ‘lower’ scales, the representation of communities on ‘higher’ scales might have the opposite effect by increasing the legitimacy of the latter and, consequently, their influence and scope for effective action.

It seems reasonable to argue that, in order to be equal to state multiscalar strategies, community participation or organisation must itself be multiscalar and strategic. Examples of such organisation are unusual but include ones that bridge the gap between community and labour and connect localised manifestations of social issues to larger struggles around the same or similar issues (e.g. living wage campaigns such as ACORN in the U.S. – DeFilippis et al.,

2006: 685–7; or London Citizens in the UK – see [www.londoncitizens.org.uk](http://www.londoncitizens.org.uk) or [www.cof.org.uk](http://www.cof.org.uk)). Such organisations offer examples of community action on a number of scales simultaneously, ranging from a small neighbourhood to a large

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city in the case of London Citizens, with a limited capacity for national (U.S.-wide) action in the case of ACORN.

In spite of their undoubted value, therefore, it can be seen that both types of

theoretical approach discussed in this section have serious limitations as explanations of (territorial) governance. It is not that descriptive theory focuses too much on structure, thereby underestimating the power of action, or that normative theory places too much emphasis on action, so underplaying the significance of structure. Rather, it is that 'structure' and 'action' are both misrepresented by being abstracted from the context in which they operate. Both kinds of theory fail to recognise that the multiscale character of this context is not merely incidental but important for explaining governance. Instead, each opts for an explanans that arbitrarily privileges particular scales – 'higher' scales in the case of descriptive theory, 'lower' scales in the case of normative theory ('top-down' versus 'bottom-up' approaches). Consequently, they miss the point that multiscale governance is produced by complex combinations of different modes of governance operating simultaneously on different scales.

Hierarchical governance on a 'higher' scale, for example, can 'capture' self-governance on a 'lower' scale but, by the same token, self-governance on a 'lower' scale can be developed to offset the power of hierarchy. It is possible, however, as noted by Christopoulos (2006: 773), that those operating on a 'higher' scale have an advantage because they have more political capital (that is, access to more powerful network resources): 'actors with low political capital can only hope to attain prominence by engaging in high-risk opportunistic actions; while actors with high political capital can be more circumspect and invest their more extensive resources in low-risk incremental ventures'. The concept of multiscale governance, as involving dynamic relations between scales, with unpredictable outcomes, is missing from both types of theory. Discussion of this concept, however, is not intended to substitute for a deeper conceptualisation of power and power relationships; rather, it highlights the need for such a conceptualisation. Power is inherently relational, and this relationality is

expressed, in part, through multiscalarity. This point will be illustrated further in the next section.

### Neighbourhood Multiscalarity

In recent years, especially in England, there has been an increasing interest in the neighbourhood as a site or space for urban and social activity, and particularly for governance activity (Taylor, 2000; Kearns and Parkinson, 2001; Sullivan, 2001, 2002; Whitehead, 2003; ODPM, 2005; Purdue, 2005; Robinson et al., 2005; Hilder, 2006; Keil, 2006; White et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2007). This interest has, in part, been stimulated by government initiatives such as New Deal for Communities, now the subject of an increasing amount of critical evaluation

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(Wainwright, 2003; Perrons and Skyers, 2004; Geddes, 2006; Wallace, 2007; Wright et al., 2007). A recent issue of *Urban Studies*, however, suggested that 'the neighbourhood is at best a chaotic concept' (Kennett and Forrest, 2006: 715), with its use, meaning and role varying enormously across European societies. Suttles (1972) was perhaps the earliest scholar to suggest that neighbourhoods might exist on a number of different scales, for example:

1. the scale over which children could be permitted to play without supervision (e.g. a small group of dwellings of some kind, such as a block of houses, part of a street or streets, a group of cottages/huts/trailers, et cetera) – the scale of a 'small' neighbourhood (Liedholm and Lindberg, 1995);
2. the 'defended neighbourhood' or 'turf', defined as the smallest area with a corporate identity distinct from other neighbourhoods (e.g. a housing estate or distinct part of an estate or a hamlet or village);
3. the 'community of limited liability', identified with the smallest area on which

government operates (e.g. a parish council in England, a commune in France, the area of a municipal district office or an area of neighbourhood management, a primary school or primary healthcare practitioner catchment area or a police beat area); and

4. the 'expanded community of limited liability', identified with a sector of a city or a market town (e.g. a travel-to-work area, an area with distinct patterns of production and consumption).

Neighbourhoods on each scale therefore have distinct geographical boundaries and subsets of attributes distinct to that scale.

This conceptualisation is supported by evidence in the U.S. (Birch et al., 1979), but research is lacking in other countries. It seems plausible to suggest that the form and content of the areas on each scale will vary from one country to another and maybe, to some extent, within individual countries. The general accuracy of Suttles' typology, however, seems to be widely assumed.<sup>4</sup> It is not an aim of this article to assess this assumption but rather to use the typology to illustrate the arguments in the previous section about the nature of territorial governance, to show how different scales can be mutually constitutive.

Galster (2001) suggests that the specification of a neighbourhood is tied to the value of its attributes for those located in a defined territory: where a group of people all derive value (but not necessarily the same value) from the same attributes of the same area, we can call that area a neighbourhood. This suggestion implies that it may be possible to distinguish different scales of neighbourhood according to different sets of attributes valued by its residents (see Table 1). The nature of the attributes characteristic of each neighbourhood scale would therefore appear to be an issue that is deserving of more attention. On scale 1, for example, attributes might possibly include housing design and layout, road traffic, children's play spaces, small amenity areas, immediate neighbours themselves and

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other visitors to the neighbourhood or village, since all of these correspond to Suttles' scale of unsupervised play. Physical attributes could be valued by individuals in terms of their quality, safety, convenience, cleanliness, and so on (see, for example, Hastings et al., 2005; Worpole and Knox, 2007), while the attributes of other people could be valued in terms of their friendliness and willingness to help (without being too intrusive), and generally pro-social behaviour (on neighbouring and neighbourliness generally, see Bridge et al., 2004; Buonfino and Hilder, 2006).<sup>5</sup> Interactions on this scale do not appear to require any formal day-to-day co-ordination or regulation,<sup>6</sup> though they are premised on what might be called a valued infrastructure of land use planning, landscape design, building control, highway engineering, environmental services (refuse collection and disposal, street cleaning, et cetera), social trust, and so on. The attributes on this scale, and their underpinning infrastructure, then form a background against which interactions occur on 'higher' neighbourhood scales.

On scale 2, interaction among neighbours becomes mediated through groups, usually based on kinship and friendship networks, and through identities, usually related to status, class, race/ethnicity and age. A key attribute on this scale is the identity of the neighbourhood itself. There may be an element of organisation, such as a community association, tenants and residents association, neighbourhood watch group, co-operative enterprise, pub, small church or mosque or temple, small sports club or amenity group.

On scale 3, there is a clear escalation of the possibilities of more institutionalised interaction, because it appears that key human services of health, education, policing and government can be delivered on this scale (for example, primary

schools and nursery schools – Jupp, 2000). Certain private services could be added to this list, such as some retail services (for everyday needs) and financial services. Valued attributes could also include doctors’ surgeries, public transport, parks and gardens, neighbourhood police officers, post offices, and local council offices, as well as larger community organisations, religious organisations, clubs and amenity societies. Tims and Mean (2005, cited in Buonfino and Hilder, 2006: 37) suggest that car boot sales, allotments and supermarket cafes are key sites for public interaction, although in some cases these will be scale 4 attributes.

On scale 4, a wide range of new attributes could come into play, including workplaces (ideally, with decent, well-paid jobs), retailing (for occasional needs),

Table 1 Neighbourhood scales

Scale Identity

Nos. of residents

(Hilder, 2005)

Nos. of residents

(this research)

1 Small group of dwellings, e.g. street/block 50–300 Less than 500

2 Smallest named settlement 500–2,000 500–3,000

3 Smallest governed settlement 4,000–15/20,000 3,000–15/20,000

4 Smallest sustainable settlement Over 20,000 Over 20,000

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secondary schools, professional sports, concert halls, night clubs, swimming pools, universities, and so on. This scale, however, is usually considered to be more ‘urban’ than ‘neighbourhood’. Above this scale it is possible to identify scales of city, city-region and region, but a consideration of these is beyond the



scope of this article.

### Neighbourhood Governance

Since a neighbourhood is a kind of place or territory, neighbourhood governance can be conceptualised in terms of the capacity to shape the attributes of a neighbourhood and to represent that neighbourhood, at least partially, in interactions with others. If, as argued in the previous section, neighbourhoods can be described as multiscalar, the possibility then arises of multiscalar neighbourhood governance.

On scale 1, it seems that there is significant shaping of the neighbourhood but little or no representation of the neighbourhood in other arenas. Shaping is carried out in three main ways: spontaneously, by the everyday interactions of individual residents with one another and with more or less powerful people and organisations outside the neighbourhood; by a variety of residents' organisations within the neighbourhood, such as housing co-operatives, small community associations and tenants' and residents' associations – for example, for managing a block of flats (Liedholm and Lindberg, 1995; Somerville and Steele, 1995: 274 – the so-called 'Helsingborg model'); and by organisations from outside the neighbourhood, operating on a 'higher' scale, in which, in some cases, it may be possible to identify actors who are willing to champion the neighbourhood's cause (for the concept of a 'local champion', see White et al., 2006: 245–6). On this scale, both the number of organisations/interests within the neighbourhood and the capacity to integrate them are typically low, but the task of integration and representation is also correspondingly small.

On scale 2, insofar as the neighbourhood is large enough to have a distinct identity, there is scope for it to have its own representation in the form of a governance body. For self-governance, such a body could be a fully participative and deliberative assembly or forum in which decisions affecting the neighbourhood

are made. This seems feasible because evidence indicates that residents' attachment to their neighbourhood (which obviously requires the neighbourhood to have a distinct identity) is the most important factor associated with their participation in neighbourhood life generally, and in neighbourhood governance in particular (Somerville et al., 2009). The decisions involved would presumably include those concerning the neighbourhood's identity (e.g. its boundaries, name, and key attributes) but also decisions on all the attributes on scale 1. Members of the body might also represent the neighbourhood to other neighbourhoods and on 'higher' scales. Such representation might involve participating in decisions on

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neighbourhood infrastructure and, more generally, acting as a voice and advocate for their neighbourhood.<sup>7</sup>

On scale 3, neighbourhood governance bodies are widespread (though by no means universal) in most countries, in the form of primary tiers of local government (e.g. parish and town councils in England; communes in France). With a few exceptions (e.g. the famous New England assemblies – Mansbridge, 1980), these are bodies elected by local people rather than ones in which all citizens participate directly. Such representative government, however, often limits legitimate citizen participation in governance to the act of voting and excludes the bulk of citizens from decision-making processes; the link between an elected politician and her/his electorate is typically weak and mediated (especially on 'higher' scales) by the interests of party, large corporations and the state itself (see Somerville, 2005). To the extent that this is so, what is potentially a form of selfgovernance becomes transformed into a species of hierarchical governance in which the elected representatives become an elite governor that dominates the

shaping of the neighbourhood – in short, a typical form of (local) government.

A variety of other neighbourhood organisations exists on this scale, which might claim to be governance bodies. Most of these, however, cannot count as neighbourhood governance bodies because they do not represent the neighbourhood as a whole. For example, a primary school governing body contains representation from a range of stakeholders, including parents, teachers, local business and its local education authority, but not from its wider neighbourhood community (and not usually from its pupils either!). Even a neighbourhood community association cannot genuinely claim to represent the whole of its neighbourhood unless all sections of that neighbourhood are represented in the membership of the association. In recent years, the number of neighbourhood bodies on this scale (particularly those involving partnerships between government and non-government organisations) has grown, in a variety of countries (see White et al., 2006).

These bodies are typically complex insofar as they involve elements of both hierarchical governance (e.g. the role of the local education authority in relation to primary schools) and self-governance (e.g. the schools are self-managed).

In each case, however, the collectivity that is being governed is not the neighbourhood as a whole but a collectivity within that neighbourhood, or else the governing body is not adequately representative of the collectivity it purports to govern.

The distinction between urban and neighbourhood governance seems to be no more than a difference of scale.<sup>8</sup> What is perhaps distinctive about the urban scale (scale 4), however, is the articulation of an economic dimension. This does not mean that economic factors are not significant on the 'lower' scales – of course they are – but it would appear to be the case that the urban scale is in some sense crucial for the organisation of capitalist production and consumption (Harvey, 1982). Recent commentators have argued that this is related to the growing

importance of state-sponsored competition among cities in a global market

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place (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Brenner, 2004).

A consideration of such issues, however, particularly in terms of citing examples of hierarchical, self- and co-governance on this scale, takes us beyond the concerns of the present article.

Each mode of governance, therefore, can operate both on a single scale and across scales. Neighbourhood self-governance, for example, operates most clearly on lower scales (particularly across scales 1 and 2), where those who live or work in a neighbourhood shape that neighbourhood through their everyday activity and represent that neighbourhood to one another and to the world beyond. In contrast, on higher scales (3 or 4), hierarchical governance is more in evidence, with established institutions of government and civil society holding sway. This can be seen in the management of functions such as childcare, schooling, policing and the management of public spaces and community facilities.

Much of the self-governance on lower scales is indeed conducted in the shadow of these hierarchies. For example, a community association on scale 2 or even a parish council on scale 3 may have little room for manoeuvre in relation to their local or district council and its partners. A clear strength of hierarchical governance is its capacity to cut across scales (downwards), achieving vertical integration through a single hierarchical organisation; in contrast, self-governance has to achieve a certain degree of horizontal integration or coordination (of governance bodies in different neighbourhoods) before it can build across scales (upwards) to produce a vertically integrated or coordinated federation.

What the argument in this section suggests is that a focus on the governance of

places or territories can be useful for improving our understanding of the relationships between scales, and even of the construction of the scales themselves.

This is mainly because of the way that such governance functions to represent a collectivity on one scale to a collectivity on another scale. Scales, and the links between them, are therefore forged, at least partly, through forms of representation.

For example, a community forum on scale 2 might determine the identity of its neighbourhood on this scale<sup>9</sup> and also make representations as appropriate to bodies on scales 3 and 4, such as parish councils and district councils (which are themselves representative bodies, so creating opportunities for co-governance).

Understanding multiscalarity is therefore also important for understanding how neighbourhood governance works.

This discussion has implications for our understanding of theories of governance.

A consideration of neighbourhood governance alone reveals that each scale has its own distinctive attributes and its own articulation of modes of governance.

Analysis of the dynamics of interaction within each scale and across different scales supports the argument made earlier in this article against the assumption of the explanatory primacy of interaction on any one particular scale. Having said that, however, it does seem that institutions operating on urban, metropolitan or national scales determine much of what happens on neighbourhood scales, whereas it is not clear that the reverse is the case. This may be

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because we do not understand enough about the dynamics of neighbourhoods or neighbourhood governance and how this dynamics affects outcomes on 'higher' scales (see Somerville et al., 2009, for further discussion).

Neighbourhood Multiscalarity in England

In order to improve understanding of some of the issues relating to community or neighbourhood governance in England, the Policy Studies Research Centre at the University of Lincoln carried out research in 2006, with the assistance of a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council. The research was particularly interested in co-governance and had three strands or stages relevant to this article. The findings from the first stage were reported in Somerville and Haines (2008) – this article covers findings from the second and third stages.

The first stage involved telephone interviews with spokespersons for 43 local authorities or local strategic partnerships to identify and explore those where co-governance structures and processes were most developed. The spokespersons were senior officers and senior councillors with responsibility for developing co-governance (including some council leaders and chief executives), and chief executives and relevant officers working for local strategic partnerships.

In the second stage, telephone interviews were conducted with spokespersons for 19 parish and town councils<sup>10</sup> (together with spokespersons for their 23 principal councils) that appeared to be at the ‘cutting edge’ of co-governance or seemed to be occupying an unusual position (e.g. in terms of their isolation or relationship with their principal council). These councils and their spokespersons (who were parish/town council chairs and clerks) were identified through the first stage of interviews and also on the basis of research conducted by the National Association of Local Councils (2003–5).

Finally, spokespersons for 39 community-based organisations of different kinds were contacted that appeared to offer some prospect of assuming the mantle of a ‘recognised neighbourhood body’ (Hilder, 2006) for governance purposes. These organisations were identified through the initial stages of the interviews and secondary data analysis (see Hilder, 2006; Sullivan and Howard, 2005). They included New Deal for Communities projects (NDCs) (6),

Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders (NMPs) (6), other neighbourhood management and partnership initiatives (6), community housing organisations (8), tenant management organisations (4), community/residents' associations (6) and development trusts (2). The spokespersons were chief executives or other responsible officers.

On scale 1, as expected the research did not identify any neighbourhood governance bodies but did find a variety of organisations that might be described as having neighbourhood governance potential. For example, in relation to recent government policy on anti-social behaviour, there was the potential for Public Policy and Administration 26(1)

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community groups on this scale such as tenants' and residents' associations to take on an integration and representation role (for example, to make neighbourhoods 'cleaner, safer and greener' by 'taking a stand' – Home Office, 2006), and to create 'a framework of conditions that help residents to be neighbourly when and if they want to be' (Buonfino and Hilder, 2006: 29). The research also identified a number of primary housing co-operatives, which were vertically integrated with secondary co-operatives (for example, Coin Street Community Builders – CSCB – and Redditch Co-operative Homes). These arrangements provided interesting examples of co-ordination across scales, but did not appear to amount to neighbourhood governance. Indeed, the Group Director of CSCB categorically confirmed this in an email: 'We are clear that the job of each Board [of Directors] is to ensure that the organisation effectively meets needs as opposed to representing the community.'

On scale 2, a number of self-governing bodies were identified, which appeared to be mobilised when the neighbourhood community experienced a serious external

threat, for example, of demolition or destruction of local amenities (CSCB in Lambeth, The Eldonians in Liverpool, Walterton & Elgin Community Homes – WECH – in Westminster or Witton Lodge in Birmingham). These bodies were largely community-based housing associations or community associations, plus a few tenant management organisations (TMOs). Such bodies, however, as in the case of CSCB, do not necessarily represent the neighbourhood in which they operate, so may not be neighbourhood governance bodies. The best candidate for a neighbourhood governance body on this scale (and increasingly on scale 3) is probably The Eldonians (see [www.eldonians.org.uk](http://www.eldonians.org.uk)) because of the breadth and depth of its activities on behalf of the neighbourhood of Vauxhall, covering not only housing development and estate management but launching initiatives such as neighbourhood wardens, a sports centre, a children's centre, a village hall, intermediate labour market projects, and an increasing variety of consultancy work – in particular, representing the neighbourhood in arenas on higher scales (urban, regional and national). WECH and Witton Lodge, however, would also count as neighbourhood governance bodies in that they have significantly shaped their respective neighbourhoods and represent them elsewhere, in particular on an urban scale.

On scale 3, four main types of governance body were found: governmental authorities such as town and parish councils; national and municipal governmental initiatives such as New Deal for Communities projects (NDCs), Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders (NMPs), Sure Start, and neighbourhood partnership initiatives; multi-purpose community/residents' associations; and single-purpose housing organisations such as tenant management organisations (TMOs).

Of these four types, the governmental authorities are most easily classified as neighbourhood governance structures. Parish and town councils are classic



instances of neighbourhood self-governance, shaping and representing the

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collectivity of residents in a parish or town. Their scale was actually found to vary from 2 to 3. Typically, town councils operated on scale 3, while parish councils operated on a scalar continuum from 2 to 3 – many parish councils were larger than what local residents regarded as their home neighbourhood (scale 2) but smaller than what principal councils regarded as suitable for neighbourhood governance (scale 3). Parish/town councils were also involved in a wide range of forms of co-governance ('partnerships') on scale 3, in which parish/town councillors and officers interacted on a more or less equal basis with other interest groups and organisations in the area. Partly due to their democratic legitimacy, council representatives expressed a certain frustration that they had so little control of major services such as health, education, highways and youth services. This was particularly the case with those councils that already provided a wide range of services of their own.<sup>11</sup>

Scale 3 organisations that did have responsibilities for managing or at least influencing major services were all governmental initiatives but many were not run by democratically elected boards and, where they were, it was not always clear how close the elected representatives were to their electorates. A particular problem here was that these bodies had been created by national government and did not necessarily correspond with the perceptions, needs, aspirations, diversity of those living in their areas in terms of their boundaries, objectives, modes of working, and so on. They were neighbourhood governance bodies only in the sense that they were set up to shape the neighbourhood and represent it to government, perhaps for the purposes of containment (Lepine et al., 2007: 13).

Consequently, hierarchical governance could tend to dominate unless residents offered sufficiently strong resistance – as in the case of resident-controlled NDCs with strong roots in community activism (e.g. Marsh Farm, Luton, which is attempting to run workplaces and enterprises democratically – see Jenkins, 2006; and Bradford Trident, which is transforming into an urban parish council).<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, community and residents' associations tended to be grassroots organisations with inclusive memberships, occupying autonomous spaces outside of governmental structures. Like town and parish councils, they were instances of self-governance, but were part of the third sector rather than the public sector. They were mainly focused on the economic development of their neighbourhoods and finding ways by which such development could be sustained. To this end, they worked in partnership with a wide variety of organisations, including local authorities, NDCs, NMPs, and so on. Most of them were concerned with neighbourhood governance, but mainly as a means to this end. Some of them, such as Royds in Bradford and The Eldonians in Liverpool, enjoyed a national profile, with far-reaching effects in representing and shaping their neighbourhoods, particularly in regenerating them and reducing worklessness among their residents.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, there were examples of resident-controlled housing associations (where the majority of the board are elected by the residents) and larger TMOs

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on scale 3, which were also forms of self-governance. Like the other bodies on this scale, they worked in partnership with a variety of organisations and, like other housing associations, they could play an important role as 'community anchors' (DCLG, 2004; Wadhams, 2006). Although specialising in housing management,

they were capable of representing the concerns of the neighbourhood as a whole. For example, Beechdale Housing Association in Walsall is controlled by its tenants and the association works with other organisations in improving and regenerating the neighbourhood. As a spokesperson said: 'We think of Beechdale as a neighbourhood, represented by Beechdale Housing Association.' The Chair of the association represents the neighbourhood in other arenas such as the local regeneration partnership and the local authority.

Working across scales was an interesting feature of some organisations. The research uncovered several organisations (all community associations and resident-led bodies) where a scale 3 territory was divided into a number of different scale 2 areas, each of which had its own representation on the scale 3 board, in proportion to the size of its population. This federated structure seemed to be an effective way to ensure that governance was democratic across scales by preventing elected representatives from being 'captured' by power on 'higher' scales.

Federation therefore appeared to be an important tool for 'scaling up' self-governance, potentially to scale 4 and above, and achieving new forms of co-governance on these 'higher' scales. The research also identified examples of areas where smaller parish councils (on scale 2) were clustering, or being encouraged to cluster, to form governance bodies on scale 3, to achieve improved delivery of public services and to enter into co-governance arrangements.<sup>14</sup>

All scale 3 neighbourhood governance bodies in the research, therefore, either had in place, or were in the process of developing, co-governance arrangements with other bodies operating on the same scale. Their relationships with bodies on 'higher' scales (particularly municipal, regional and national), however, were often characterised by hierarchy rather than by co-governance. This can be seen most clearly in the case of the governmental initiatives, which are of course accountable to their relevant government departments, but it appeared

that parish and town councils too operated largely in the shadow of decisions made by their principal councils, and the activities of the housing organisations had to accord with detailed guidelines set by legislation and regulator bodies. It appeared, therefore, that only the community and residents' associations, positioned and organised outside of governmental structures on any scale, had sufficient freedom of manoeuvre to resist governmental forces. This is perhaps only to be expected, considering the general persistence of oligarchy that pervades governmental structures, which has been noted by many political theorists (see, for example, Somerville, 2005).

Returning to the literature discussed earlier in this article, we can now see that one of the key features of the relationship between state and non-state actors, between 'professionals' and 'laity', 'policy makers' and 'citizens', 'officials' and

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'the public', 'government' and 'communities', and so on, is that the two sides operate largely on different scales. The commonly found asymmetry between the two sides occurs not just because the non-state actors in many cases lack their own separate power base in popular spaces but also because they are not organised on 'higher' scales. Community and residents' associations are typically organised on scales 2 and 3 and may lack representation on scales higher than this (the most successful ones have been active on a national scale). In contrast, professionals and politicians are typically organised on municipal, regional and national scales. Greater symmetry is required, therefore, to ensure that forms of co-governance or even self-governance do not degenerate into hierarchical governance.

To this end, non-state actors have to be supported to integrate horizontally as

well as vertically, by forming alliances with similar groupings on the same scale but in other neighbourhoods, and then ensuring representation of all the groupings in these neighbourhoods on higher scales. Attempts have been made to achieve such integration on scale 4, for example, through government-initiated Community Empowerment Networks (CENs). If successful, this could mean the possibility of co-governance on scale 4 in which CENs work together with other organisations in a Local Strategic Partnership in a process of mutual shaping and representation. In practice, however, the price of governmental support tends to be a certain loss of independence.

A final question concerns the point in the process of scaling up at which self-governance through representation becomes transformed into hierarchical governance.

An important lesson from the research reported here, as well as from the literature more generally, is that the power of hierarchical governance comes from its capacity for (top-down) vertical trans-scalar integration: the fragmentation of action on 'lower' scales makes it continually vulnerable to domination by action on 'higher' scales. In contrast, vertical integration across scales from the bottom up is far more difficult to achieve, mainly because a degree of horizontal integration is required on each scale before action can be 'scaled up' to the next.

Consequently, when, for example, a set of self-governing community groups on scale 2 elect representatives to a body on scale 3, there is always a risk that the scale 3 body will make decisions that are subsequently imposed on the scale 2 groups unless all these groups have already formed their own separate collectivity (e.g. a federation). Self-governance on the 'lower' scales is therefore safeguarded by such forms of horizontal integration organised separately from governance bodies on the 'higher' scales. The result is that the latter governance bodies co-operate with the federations of scale 2 groups in forms of co-governance (see, for example, Somerville and Haines, 2008, on the embryonic co-operation

between scale 2 parish councils and their principal councils on scale 4). In the absence of such safeguards, of course, it is likely that the representatives of the 'lower' scale groups will become 'captured' by the more powerful forces operating on 'higher' scales.

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One of the referees of an earlier version of this article raised the interesting question whether this 'capturing' is a matter of size rather than scale. As this referee pointed out, however, small groups can be very powerful while large groups can be very weak. The greater power of 'higher' scale organisation appears to come not from its greater size but precisely from the greater capacity, and possibly 'efficiency', of its scale of operations. Hierarchical governance on a 'higher' scale simply presumes or orders a coordination of activity on 'lower' scales, whereas scaling up self-governance requires that activities on 'lower' scales be first coordinated with one another before they can be represented effectively on 'higher' scales.

Conclusion

Research findings and arguments used in this article from a variety of countries, but particularly from England, indicate that, far from being a simple, taken for granted feature of everyday life, neighbourhoods are complex and multi-layered. Specifically, they are not monoscalar but multiscalar. Recognition of this multiscalarity prompts a rethink of current theories of neighbourhood and also of governance.

In order to make sense of the multiscalarity of neighbourhood governance, this article has drawn upon Kooiman's (2005) distinction between hierarchical, selfand co-governance. This distinction has made it possible to explain established

scalar hierarchies by reference to the dominance of hierarchical governance on 'higher' scales. Indeed, it could be that the recurrent assumption of scales as 'higher' or 'lower' is itself produced by the increased power of vertical co-ordination that is associated with 'higher' scales of operation. In contrast, where self-governance may predominate on 'lower' scales, the task of vertical integration is considerably more daunting, requiring as it does an initial Herculean labour of horizontal integration. In other words, scaling up is far more difficult than scaling down, a finding that may also help to explain the persistence of oligarchy (Somerville, 2005).

Once this is recognised, so much else that is otherwise perplexing seems to fall into place. The limitations of current theories of governance can be traced to their failure to take full account of neighbourhood multiscalarity, whether this be because they over-emphasise the hierarchical governance on 'higher' scales or the self-governance on 'lower' scales or whether it be simply because they misunderstand the complex relationship between different modes of governance on different scales. With this insight, state rescaling and legitimating strategies can perhaps be seen as different kinds of 'modernising' response to current global changes in the economy and society, with the former focusing on renewing hierarchical governance, while the latter is more concerned with developing self-governance.

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On a slightly less negative note, this article has suggested that forms of co-governance are indeed possible, where forms of self-governance can develop federated structures, through iterative processes of scaling up, even to the 'highest' scales, and where these federated structures can be strategically linked to corresponding governmental structures on each scale. More thought now needs to be

given as to how such federated structures can be built on scales higher than 4 or 5.

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#### Notes

1. This is perhaps an exception that proves the rule because this was a movement of the rich and privileged, whereas most of the literature is concerned with poor and deprived communities.
2. Interestingly, in the case of Sure Start, Barnes et al. (2007: 191) suggest that tensions between the different professions involved 'provided the space for new developments in parent engagement to emerge, as community and user-oriented workers established ways of interacting with parents and managing meetings in a more inclusive way, while key professional groups battled with each other about professional codes and ways of working'.
3. 'Double devolution' is the term given to a process whereby powers are devolved to local authorities in return for those authorities devolving more power to communities.
4. For example, a recent report on neighbourhood governance in the UK (White et al., 2006: 12–13), following Hilder (2005), identified what appear to be the first three of the four scales: streets and blocks of about 50–300 residents; 'home neighbourhoods' of about 500–2,000 residents; and public neighbourhoods of 4,000–15,000 residents (or 5,000–20,000 for neighbourhood partnerships). The fourth scale, however, was not considered, because populations beyond 15–20,000 were not deemed to be suitable for neighbourhood management. As the national evaluation of the then government's neighbourhood management pathfinder programme expressed it, 'economies tend to peter out for populations larger than 15,000' (ODPM, 2006: 4). It should also be noted that the numbers quoted here suggest that the scales are discrete when in fact there is a continuum of scales from the 'lowest' to the 'highest', and there is bound to be a certain degree of overlap between one scale and the next.



5. These attributes could of course vary according to social class, gender, age, ethnicity, et cetera.

6. Buonfino and Hilder (2006: 31) argue that families with young children are 'a key neighbourhood connector' here because of the interactions between children from different families that occur on this scale.

7. It is commonly assumed that neighbourhood governance on this scale must always be concerned only with matters internal to the neighbourhood, so it may be salutary to point out that the territory of the Vatican City State exists on such a scale – an exception that perhaps proves the rule, since this is a 'home neighbourhood' (only 558 citizens) of global importance.

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8. Melo and Baiocchi (2006: 591), for example, offer at least four different meanings of urban governance, none of which theoretically distinguishes it from neighbourhood governance: 'the configuration of interactions between public and private actors with a view to achieving collective (not private) goals in a particular territory'; 'a particular configuration in which local political authority plays a less central role and much of the coordination and goals are achieved through public-private partnerships and interaction'; 'the "good" management of city resources'; and 'a complex of local practices and collective actions at the city level'. In the last two cases, 'city' could be replaced by 'neighbourhood', indicating a change of scale only.

9. This shows that attributes of a scale can be socially constructed, but this consideration takes us beyond the purposes of this article.

10. Currently, there are about 8,500 such councils, and a further 2,000 parish meetings, differing considerably in size, resources, aspirations and activities (Jones et al., 2005: 6). Together they employ about 25,000 staff and serve at least 15 million people,

or about 30 per cent of the population in England ([www.nalc.gov.uk](http://www.nalc.gov.uk)). They are found in nearly all rural areas but hardly at all in major cities or conurbations, though the number in urban areas has grown very slightly in recent years (Bevan, 2003).

11. Apart from longstanding services of allotments, cemeteries, open spaces, play areas, public conveniences, street cleaning, lengthsman schemes (according to which local councils direct a highways maintenance team to do certain tasks from a set menu, e.g. cut hedges, clean signs, unblock drains) and so on, new services being provided included street wardens, activities and facilities for young people, winter gritting, litter collection, tourist information centres, pre-school education, developing children's centres, mobile handyperson ('man in a van'), and outreach youth work.

12. The argument in this paragraph should not be interpreted as a wholehearted endorsement of NDCs. Robinson et al. (2005: 16–17), for example, concluded that, although community representatives on NDC boards were probably more representative, by ethnicity and gender, than local councillors, 'they often do not really represent the diversity of the local community. In our experience, most partnership boards include few people in full-time employment, while younger people are noticeable by their absence. Isolated and marginalised groups – the so-called "hard to reach" – are often not represented, not reached and their absence goes unnoticed.'

13. Royds, for example, relied on three sustainable income sources: its asset base, managed by a development trust (consisting of an enterprise park, healthy living centre, shops, office block, et cetera); public contracts (for employment and training support, neighbourhood wardens, healthy living programme, et cetera); and its residents' consultancy programme, through which it sold its expertise to other community groups across England.

14. The situation is, unfortunately, even more complicated than stated here. One reason for this is that the principal councils do not operate only on scale 4 (that of a district council) but also on scale 5 (that of a county council).

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