Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications
and other research outputs

In and beyond local government: making up new spaces of governance

Journal Item

Version: Version of Record

oro.open.ac.uk
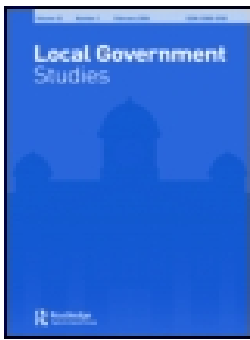
In and beyond local government: making up new spaces of governance

Allan Cochrane

Published online: 02 Aug 2019.

Submit your article to this journal ↗

View Crossmark data ↗

In and beyond local government: making up new spaces of governance

Allan Cochrane

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

ABSTRACT

In the context of austerity, some of the taken for granted territorial boundaries of local government are being stretched and questioned. Here, these issues are explored with the help of two bodies of evidence: the creation of sets of interlocking arrangements on the edge of the London City region (most recently expressed in proposals for development along what has been identified as the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge Arc); and the experience of a Mayoral development corporation in the West of London, seeking to take advantage of the possibilities arising from major national and metropolitan investments in transport infrastructure. In both cases, project-based governance coupled with the promise of infrastructural investment, sub-regional visions and plans offer the basis on which new spaces of governance are being put together to fit with shifting economic geographies and changing political priorities. Instead of being institutionally fixed, the spaces of government themselves turn out to be malleable and contested.

Introduction

The debates that swirl around contemporary local government highlight its position as both a focus of wider (top-down) state restructuring and a site of (local) political agency. In practice since the late 1960s it has provided a terrain across which tensions, and even struggles, around major shifts in political/social settlements have played out, particularly in the wake of the crises of the Keynesian Welfare State and various attempts to resolve it (from new right to new managerialism, from neoliberalism to austerity and beyond).

In many respects, the extent to which important issues of contemporary politics continue to be framed in and through local government is quite remarkable. After all, its very naming seems to consign it to a backwater in the face of global challenges which even nation states struggle to confront

CONTACT Allan Cochrane ✉ allan.cochrane@open.ac.uk ▭ Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, The Open University, Walton Hall MK7 6AA, UK

and manage. But it is important to acknowledge the extent to which the local survives as a point around which alternative political imaginaries may be mobilised. Local government remains a significant site of contestation and local initiative persists in looking for ways of challenging the impacts of austerity. There is continuing evidence of the ways in which councillors and professional as well as community actors seek to respond creatively to the challenges they face (see, e.g. Newman 2014). It is important, too, to acknowledge the extent to which self-activity may generate new political possibilities – so, for example, Duman et al. (2018) explore the emergence of alternative visions of regeneration in London's East End, Neal (2013) discusses the model of transition towns, Slay and Penny (2013) explore how local action has been mobilized towards surviving austerity, Thompson (2015) identifies the potential of community land trusts, while Wills (2016) reviews a series of initiatives in the process of outlining what a fully formed localism might deliver.

In what follows, however, the emphasis is on rather different forms of local governance and local governing practices, even if they may overlap and connect from time to time in significant ways, shaping what is possible and actively defining the politics of the local. This paper spends little time considering the mainstream activities of local government and does not engage with questions of neighbourhood or community planning. Instead the focus is principally on the ways in which policy agendas around property development are put together and new spaces identified within which infrastructure can be delivered, profits can be generated and housing constructed. As well as considering the ways in which local government is being reframed in and through these practices, the paper reflects on what they tell us about sub-national forms of governance, state formation and political processes. Instead of merely providing a passive surface, geography takes on an active role, as shifting political territories and spatial relations are identified, produced and reproduced by a range of actors. The discussion in what follows draws on the English case – as a case of spatialized politics in practice, rather than some universal model. But few of the issues are specific to England, even if matters may be formulated differently in national debates in other countries (Penny 2017).

Whatever happened to local government?

Through most of the twentieth century and particularly after 1945, local government in England could be understood as an expression of the local welfare state – responsible for the provision of mass housing, personal social services (including adult social care and child protection), the oversight of primary and secondary education, libraries, parks and recreation as well as

the management of waste disposal. Responsibility for planning control and traffic management fitted reasonably neatly alongside all this.

It was to become a key political battlefield (see, e.g. Cochrane 1993) as the Keynesian Welfare State was replaced in the search for a different form of settlement, increasingly identified as a neoliberal one, although its precise form remains uncertain. Local government as local welfare state was at the forefront of change – council housing was privatised through right to buy, which has helped to change the tenure mix as private landlords have taken over from councils as lead providers of rental accommodation; a wide range of services was contracted out, from cleansing to leisure services; most schools have moved out of local authority control, into a variety of arrangements – from academies to free schools; adult social care has become a network of private arrangements funded through local government.

Meanwhile the funding regime has become tighter and tighter – as Councils are left to manage dramatic cuts in funding (up to 30–40%) at the same time as demand for services rises, particularly for forms of social care. There is an enforced move away from any of the old school (Victorian legacies of) municipalism of parks, libraries and recreation, which long predated the welfare state (Blanco, Griggs and Sulivan 2014). Lowndes and Gardner (2016) highlight some of the tensions, pointing to the extent to which the promise of devolution to combined authorities after the 2015 general election might be seen as a means of devolving austerity, even as it enables the search for alternatives, while Gardner (2017) charts the ways in which a series of supposedly incremental shifts at local level may come together in ways in ways that diminish institutional capacity (see also Fitzgerald 2018; Webb and Byers 2018). It is hard to escape from a world of scrimping, saving, cutting back and meanness, although it is also possible to identify forms of resistance and the search for alternative ways of maintaining key services (John 2014; Lowndes and McCaughie 2013).

So what are the wider implications of this shift away from local welfare state as defining local government in practice? The promise of space for local politicians and officers to move beyond old style 'bureaucratic' modes and even beyond new public management has emerged alongside the reality of 'austerity' for mainstream services. Sometimes this is summarised in the notion of urban or municipal entrepreneurialism, and there is certainly some evidence of this, not only in the drive to make places 'competitive', capable of attracting business as a surrogate for delivering local prosperity and maybe even generating tax income, but also in the attempts of local authorities to invest in various property development schemes as a means of generating income to support other activity (Beswick and Penny 2018; Local Government Association 2017).

Despite the changed context, the institutions of English local government are undoubtedly resilient. They survive and reproduce themselves, even as

their role is transformed (Stewart 2014). But, while acknowledging this, the challenge is to see beyond the institutions to identify some of the more informal and uncertain ways in which local governance is performed in practice – to reflect on some of the ways in which the local state is assembled and reassembled. In what follows this is done through two related lenses. The first moves away from the existing territorial boundaries of local government to consider some of the ways in which alternative spaces of governance are created, reflecting the uneasy territorialities of urbanisation and economic change. While it may make sense to deliver a range of services through a set of multipurpose local agencies the implicit division of labour between levels of the state makes less sense when attempts are being made to capture the more fleeting and extended processes of economic and extended urban development. Haughton et al. (2010) have highlighted the challenges faced by those seeking to manage the necessarily fuzzy boundaries of development and what they call the soft spaces of planning, and attempting to find ways of governing those soft spaces is one of those challenges.

The second seeks to take seriously some of the implications of governing through projects. The rise of the project as a technique of governance and policy delivery has attracted increasing attention both in and beyond the UK (Mats and Hall 2017; Pinson 2009; Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez 2002). In principle, the use of projects offers a means of focusing activity, setting targets and assessing whether they have been achieved. Once set up, they fit well with a post bureaucratic world in which what matters is delivering agreed outcomes rather than having to face a continuing series of institutional hurdles. From a more critical perspective, as Erik Swyngedouw and his colleagues conclude, large scale urban development projects risk endorsing a set of less democratic and more elitist governing practices (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez 2002, 542). In what follows the role of projectification is considered in the context of wider forms of spatialized governance (beyond the local authority) and it also becomes possible to reflect on the more uncertain negotiations that shape projects as political practices rather than technical exercises.

In considering the experience of delivering particular projects in practice this paper draws on two bodies of evidence: the creation of sets of inter-locking arrangements on the edge of the London City region (from partnership bodies to Local Economic Partnerships to the identification of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc); and the experience of a Mayoral development corporation in the West of London. The former stretches across a sub-region incorporating several local authority areas in whole or part, while the latter is located within a metropolitan area but cuts across existing borough boundaries. In each case a different spatial imagination is being called into play as an element of governing practice in ways that seek to move beyond,

while still incorporating, existing institutions of local government. Both of the cases can be understood as projects and powerful examples of governing by project. And both are also about making up new spaces to fit with and respond to what are identified as the needs of a new economy, even if they fit less easily with the territorial and sometimes community identities of existing local governments.

The next section builds on a long history of work on the outer South East of England in which I have been involved over many years (see, e.g. Charlesworth and Cochrane 1994; Allen, Massey, and Cochrane 1998; Cochrane 2012; Cochrane, Colenutt, and Field 2015), but particularly draws on more recent research undertaken in the context of two projects that were focused on the politics of growth on the edge of London's extended city region. The underlying research has involved extensive documentary analysis of grey and published literature, including planning and promotional documents, which are particularly valuable in seeking to trace the active presentation of different visions as they seek to bringing together place, economy and development. This work has been enhanced by a series of interviews with actors in a range of governance and partnership agencies (such as Local Enterprise Partnerships), including councillors and professionals and others engaged in the development industry, particularly focused on the area of Milton Keynes and the South Midlands. The discussion of Old Oak and Park Royal in the section that follows is informed by the London based research undertaken as part of a third (wider) project exploring the governance of large-scale development projects in Shanghai, Johannesburg and London. That research involved documentary analysis, interviews with a wide range of development, community and governance actors, and participant observation in planning and community meetings. I have had access to the extensive material generated through that research and have been directly involved in some aspects as a member of the research team. Here, too, however, the main direct sources are documents and policy statements, which are particularly rich in illustrating the mechanisms through which new spatial visons and understandings are put together. The three funded projects whose research underpins the argument are more fully identified in the Notes and Acknowledgements at the end of the paper.

The power of a metaphor: from arc to corridor and back again

There is a long history of attempts to build governance and planning regimes extending out into the wider London city-region, which go back at least as far as Abercrombie's *Greater London Plan 1944* (Abercrombie 1945). In the first years of the 21st Century these attempts were translated into the vision of a growth region whose success would underpin wider

growth in the UK economy. In policy terms, the South East of England became a space across which a more prosperous future might be built in the period after the Keynesian Welfare state. The *Sustainable Communities Plan* (ODPM 2003), identified a series of growth corridors stretching out from London (Thames Gateway, Milton Keynes and South Midlands, London-Stansted-Cambridge Corridor). Various hybrid governance forms were invented in this context – from partnerships to development corporations. In some ways, this was a highly ambitious project, framed by the belief that the fundamental challenge was the need to deliver housing for those feeding into local labour markets, but it relied on forms of market utopianism, in which it was imagined that if only a framework were there housebuilders would build the houses required. In practice the targets were never met (see, Cochrane, Colenutt, and Field 2015).

The failure of this set of initiatives, with its planning documents, networks and infrastructural investment, has not brought an end to the political approach embedded within it. But the particular spatial framing has shifted – rather than stretching out from London, now the emphasis is on connections across the edge of the London city region, picking up on a vision first articulated by a range of locally based Economic Partnerships and Regional Development Agencies in the late 1990s. The Oxford to Cambridge Arc (O2C Arc) was at that stage identified in a report commissioned by consultants as a knowledge economy cluster somehow stretching between the two cities (and passing through Milton Keynes, whose Economic and Learning Partnership was particularly instrumental in supporting it) (SQW 2001).

According to the South East Economic Development Agency at that time the Arc was said to contribute: 'significantly to the UK economy, accounting for over 5% of national GVA (£50.3 billion in 2004)' (SEEDA 2006, 24) but, above all, it was claimed that:

'There is scope for further enhancement of the Arc as one of the world's leading centres of the knowledge economy, given its assets including world class universities, high-tech spin-outs, innovation networks and highly skilled workforce … .This provides a unique opportunity to combine its innovation assets and development potential, thereby strengthening its position and spreading the benefits of success more widely across the Arc and beyond' (SEEDA 2006, 24–5).

The extent to which the Arc had any material reality may have been questionable, but this was a spatialised vision not ashamed to reach out to draw in global imagery to frame or assemble a localised politics.

More recently, the Arc – sometimes described less poetically as a Corridor – has been reinvented through the prism of infrastructure and housing development alongside a continued set of rhetorical claiming around the possibilities of the knowledge economy (NIC 2016, 2017). The continued hold of the Arc's two end points on the imagination of governing

elites – with Oxford and Cambridge being identified as 'two of the country's intellectual powerhouses' (DfT et al. 2018) – is an essential aspect of the vision with the area in between being less clearly specified (except as part of an 'arching sweep'), as reflected in the recurrent naming of Milton Keynes both as a mid-point and an expression of modernity between the two historic poles (MHLG 2019).

In the National Infrastructure Commission's Interim Report, the underlying argument is that this area 'could be the UK's Silicon Valley' but that a 'lack of sufficient and suitable housing presents a fundamental risk to the success of the area' (NIC 2016, 6), and the need for a 'joined up plan for housing jobs and infrastructure across the corridor' is emphasised (NIC 2016, 5). A target of one million new homes in the area by 2050 is set (MHLG 2019). The overall approach is predicated on the fundamental role of publicly provided infrastructure as a key contribution of the state in underpinning the possibility of profitable development, with a particular emphasis on transport infrastructure in the form of the east-west rail linkage and the development of the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway. This is summarised in the government press statement issued to celebrate the initiative: 'Corridor announced to unlock full potential of England's economic heartland' (DfT et al. 2018). In other words, if this is a neoliberal world, it is one in which the state is an active participant.

But it also highlights the perceived importance of remaking local governance in ways that encourage 'partnership' and a shared focus on a wider spatial vision, defined through forms of economic growth, and particularly through the prism of knowledge-based industries. An alternative 'local' is being imagined that goes beyond the place-based assumptions of traditional local government. Tensions are recognised, if only to be resolved in somewhat bland language. 'The aim should not be to undermine local authorities' role as leaders of place, but to allow for formal collective decision-making at scale, and to enable the development and delivery of a cross-corridor strategic plan without the need to have this ratified by each local authority' (NIC 2016, 39).

This is a project which places new governing arrangements at its core. If the Arc is to reach its 'full potential' (a phrase frequently drawn on in the government's statement of ambition – MHLG 2019), then it is argued that existing local agencies must buy into the vision and find ways of working together. The public sector is given a significant role, in undertaking land assembly and masterplanning and infrastructural investment, but also in 'driving the pace of delivery' (NIC 2017, 41). The need for an Arc wide planning framework (and Arc wide 'strategic partnership board', NIC 2017, 84) is stressed, along with the need below that to develop plans at '"larger than local level"'. Proposals are made for 'enhanced' growth boards to operate in similar ways to combined authorities, locking in partners to

visions and plans (NIC 2017, 82). And the Government response echoes the broad framing of the report, promising to work with local authorities on housing, to consider the possibilities of development corporations and garden cities, and making a commitment to a version of the Expressway in the years 2020–25 with links between the M1 and Oxford by 2030, as well as some Network Rail funding to link Bicester to Bedford and Milton Keynes to Princes Risborough by 2023/24. Meanwhile Local Enterprise Partnerships are encouraged to develop industrial strategies and local authorities to develop joint statutory plans. 'The government invites stakeholders from across the region to work with it over the next 12 months to turn this high-level vision into a strategy that is capable of being delivered through an integrated programme of infrastructure investments, housing and business growth' (Treasury 2018).

The building of the Arc is a political or governing process as much as a practical engagement aimed at the delivery of infrastructure or housing. It can be understood as a project, even if it is not directly focused the practicalities of delivering clearly specified material outcomes. Instead it seeks to set out an enabling agenda for a range of agencies and developers, supported not only by infrastructural investment but also by the vision of constructing – or assembling- a new sub-regional governance space.

While the proposals around the Arc could be seen as just another example of multi-level governance, they imply a more uncertain institutional melding, in which new arrangements are promised that enable (following the language of John Allen 2016) central government to reach in and act as a local player, while local actors are expected to work across a wider geography. Alongside coordination groups bringing together political leaders and chief executives, an independent business chair is to be appointed to lead an advisory board, while each of the four LEPs in the area is expected to develop its own economic strategy (MHLG 2019).

In its most recent iteration (MHLG 2019) the Arc incorporates 'the ceremonial county areas of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire', that is 31 local authorities and 4 Local Enterprise Partnerships (MHLG 2019, 9). This is not a space which is widely understood as economically or socially coherent. It includes Fenland and South Buckinghamshire as well as Milton Keynes, Luton and Daventry. As a result, the governance task is not straightforward and a consultancy firm has been commissioned to generate 'a rich and deep economic evidence base and ensure the strongest possible footing for the Arc going forwards' (MHLG 2019, 12) – or to provide evidence that the Arc is more than an imagined geography defined by the project of delivering new homes in London's wider city region.

The extent to which the initiative will be successful remains uncertain (as it does in the case of other spatial imaginaries such as the Northern Powerhouse or

the Midlands Engine) but it does reflect the extent to which the formal territories of sub-national (local) government fit uneasily with emergent economic and social geographies. The question remains whether the Arc can generate a shared governance space drawing in existing public agencies as well as private interests, particularly those active in the development of housing.

The tension between wider visions and more localised ambitions is apparent. Even as attempts are made to build a sub-regional governance space, local actors focus on the opportunities presented to them. Interviews with senior actors within local authorities and LEPs in the core of the area confirmed their readiness to work with aspects of the vision while seeking to mould it to reflect their own priorities. So, for example, one emphasised the opportunity being created for his locality to grow a knowledge-based con- tribution and become the service centre for the region. Oxford and Cambridge, he said, were very constrained and the priority was to 'suck out' academic expertise and turn it into business propositions. 'All sorts of things come into play if we can get the infrastructure right'. A senior LEP official emphasised the ways in which they worked through and responded to a series of spatial initiatives (from Midlands Engine to Arc to England's Economic Heartland), while always seeking to maintain a focus on their locality. Even as they played the game, another expressed scepticism about the process, arguing that the 'increased focus on devolution and governance is potentially becoming a distraction from delivering on the growth agenda'. For a senior local government officer, while the possibilities associated with the Arc were identified as positive, the stress on linkages to London remained fundamental for the achievement of the authority's own growth agenda. Stress was placed on the need to be 'to be strategically promiscuous'.

The extent to which such approaches involve a commitment to any wider sub-regional vison, particularly one whose ultimate focus is on housing remains uncertain. The visionary nature of the various documents generated around the Arc initiative is both one of their strengths, and a reflection of their weaknesses as policy levers. The attempt to steer a line through a complex and overlapping institutional context is in its own way highly impressive and the grand ambitions are powerfully articulated, even if the promised infrastructural investment currently remains limited to road and rail connections.

Visions of urbanism: making up a new economic space

If the narrative of the Arc sets out to assemble an extended governance space, stretching across a wide area and incorporating a range of local authorities, the narrative around the area of Old Oak and Park Royal in West London is rather a different one, although it, too, offers the vision of

a new (local) geography and governance arrangements around it. In some respects, those arrangements look relatively simple with the creation of a special purpose vehicle (the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation, or OPDC) set up as local planning authority with the responsibility of overseeing and fostering the development of the area. In practice, matters are more complicated – as reflected in the range of 'strategic' partners identified at an early stage, the Department of Communities and Local Government (now the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), the Greater London Authority, the local boroughs, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (now the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy), Network Rail, Transport for London, HS2, the Canal and River Trust, London and Continental Railways, the Department for Transport, Crossrail (OPDC 2016, 8)

The OPDC's creation as local planning authority and development agency reflects the absence of any currently shared identity for the area – there is no 'local' there, so one has to be actively assembled through the project itself. Like the Arc, the promise of new transport infrastructure is fundamental to the development promise, but in the case of Old Oak and Park Royal that infrastructure is expected to deliver linkages to elsewhere, as the area becomes a new hub. It is currently dominated by industrial and transport uses (including a network of railway tracks), with only 2% used for housing. It has been identified in the London Plan as one of London's Opportunity Areas and is the second of London's mayoral development corporations (the first being the London Legacy Development Corporation, covering the old Olympics area in the East of London). It has been identified for development in large part to take advantage of projected growth associated with the building of two major infrastructural projects – the first is HS2 (Old Oak Common is expected to be the location of a station that links London to a new high speed railway line – HS2 – to the North West of England) and the second is CrossRail (or the Elizabeth Line), which will link the area directly into an underground line cutting across London. Neither of the projects was initiated as part of a wider strategy for the area, but the proposal to set up a development corporation in 2015 (along lines enabled by the Localism Act 2011) is justified as way of taking advantage of the opportunities generated by them.

This is made explicit in the development corporation's initial Strategic Plan. 'Old Oak,' it is said, 'is set to become one of the most connected parts of the capital. Much of the land surrounding the superhub station site is brownfield and the lynchpin of the regeneration will be the massive, vibrant new commercial centre around the superhub station which will catalyse new jobs and homes across the wider development area, West London and beyond. The site presents a unique opportunity for the new Mayor to use his/her strategic oversight and planning powers to provide the vision, direction and leadership to deliver on the ambitions for Old Oak and Park Royal' (OPDC 2016, 2). In language that echoes

the claims made for transport related infrastructural development in the Arc, it is asserted that, 'This significant rail investment presents a once in a life time opportunity to catalyse the comprehensive regeneration of Old Oak' (OPDC 2016, 17). In the local plan prepared by the OPDC, the role of transport in the vision is reinforced: 'Transport is the catalyst for the comprehensive regeneration of Old Oak and plays an integral role in protecting, strengthening and intensifying the Park Royal industrial estate. The transport network at Old Oak and Park Royal must be planned and delivered to support the needs of existing and future communities living, working and visiting the area' (OPDC 2018 para 7.1).

Unlike the Arc, the area concerned may already be contained within the territory of an existing strategic authority (the GLA) and be under the leadership under of the London Mayor (Boris Johnson when the development corporation was set up and Sadiq Khan since his election in 2016). 'The Corporation is the statutory local planning authority for its area, and as such it is responsible for preparing and maintaining a Local Plan in addition to producing planning documents such as the Supplementary Planning Guidance. The policies in the Local Plan are the basis for making decisions on planning applications in the area. The Corporation is the Community Infrastructure Levy setting, charging, and collecting authority and guides Neighbourhood planning. The Corporation is responsible for advising on pre-application discussions and for determining planning applications in its area' (OPDC 2016, 9).

But this masks the extent to which – like the Arc – it has not previously been imagined as unified space. On the contrary, it sits at the edges of three London boroughs (Ealing, Brent, Hammersmith and Fulham), which means that historically it has not had a coherent identity of its own. The transport networks that are now being called on to provide a means of bringing the area together have until now played the role of separating communities, acting as boundaries as they connect other places together, but disrupt potential local connections. A different form of connectivity is promised, which will make it possible to create a new and more coherent locality, cutting across the old boundaries, and integrating the area more fully into London. In that context, it is perhaps hardly surprising that there is an emphasis on the need to ensure 'that the development of land at Old Oak be delivered in a comprehensive and co-ordinated manner, overcoming the barriers to development presented by fragmented land ownership, and high up-front preparation costs typical of large scale regeneration projects on brownfield land, owing to the need for significant new social and physical infrastructure as well as environmental clean-up, as a result of historical contamination' (OPDC 2016, 22).

The focus on housing development that is reflected in the local plan and elsewhere promises a dramatic change to the area and is articulated both in the policy language of the Mayor, with its emphasis on the delivery of affordable housing to meet the perceived needs of Londoners and in the

plans of those who will be delivering that housing. What is promised seems to combine the possibility of meeting housing needs and creating a space within which new investment opportunities will be created. The emphasis of the OPDC's strategies and plans is on delivering affordable and social housing along the lines expected by the Mayor, but in practice in early developments the demand for affordable housing has been heavily mediated by the need to be able to deliver development in the short to medium term – viability arguments have been mobilised and accepted in several cases (Colenutt, Cochrane, and Field 2015). In most of the early proposals the target of 48% affordable housing has been negotiated down to 20–30%. Alongside global companies that are 'locally' embedded, or present in that way, at this stage of the main development players seem to be those with some sort of local or at least London based connection, because it is they who are able to use their 'local' knowledge to take advantage of the opportunities being presented. As one developer put it they did not do research to check out market opportunities because 'we can feel' what is happening, operating more with 'gained knowledge than actual research'.

The initial expression of work of the OPDC is to be found in a series of visions powerfully expressed in images, presentations and models shared with politicians, potential investors and local communities. In a sense, these are orientated towards making up a new place and creating a new set of future identities. The local plan draws on images from across London to show what might be possible (OPDC 2018). A similar strategy is adopted by those tasked with developing a masterplan for the biggest site in the area. The Cargiant site is currently a space occupied by thousands of second hand cars awaiting sale. In the local plan it is projected to be the location of 5,300 new homes over the first 20 years – around a fifth of the overall stated target. The change of use to housing has, of course, the potential to generate huge returns for the owner of the land and their development partners but conflicts over the funding to cover development and relocation costs led Cargiant (temporarily at least) to call a halt to their plans in 2019. Initially, however, the private masterplanners were as visionary as the OPDC: 'Old Oak Park will not just be a wonderful place to live and create new communities, but also a destination for people to come to as well. Our masterplan delivers for the communities around us, knitting into the fabric of this part of West London, as well as for people who will live here in the future and for those stopping off on their way to the new rail connections, visiting the cultural quarter, enjoying the canalside parks, cafes and restaurants or coming to Old Oak Park as a place to work.' (Cargiant 2016).

Unlike the Arc, this is already an active process of negotiation, as developers are drawn into the planning application process. In a sense the very identification of the Opportunity Area and the creation of the OPDC has given the message that those seeking to undertake development in the area

will find a sympathetic response from planners, as well as reinforcing the message that there will be gains to be made from the huge investment in transport infrastructure that has been promised – the connections may be new but (unlike the case of the Arc) they are along familiar lines. But in many respects similar issues arise. The new forms of governance remain underspecified and underdeveloped. The different players retain a strong autonomy. So, for example, patterns of land ownership present significant challenges. Large parts (at least 40%) of the Old Oak area (i.e. not including Park Royal) may well be in public ownership, potentially sites for up to 12,000 homes, but that ownership is spread between Network Rail, the Department for Transport, HS2 and the London Borough of Hammersmith of Fulham. Despite the promise of an early Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Department for Transport, it has become clear that each of these has its own property based (effectively privatised) agenda, and has little interest in simply following the agenda set by the OPDC. An early report commissioned by the new Mayor after his election in 2016 confirmed that the land deal incorporated into the MoU might require significant funding from the Mayor and emphasised the need for additional infrastructural investment to underpin the development – without such investment, it is suggested, the amount of affordable housing that could be delivered will be limited (particularly if the expectation is that it should be paid for from the development, through CiL or other means). The need for more funding from central government is identified (GLA 2016).

The extent to which the OPDC project will be a success in terms of the ambitions that have been set for it may remain uncertain. And they are not entirely in the gift of the organisation which has been allocated leadership in the project, both because major players have their own powerful agendas and bargaining positions and because it is clustered around major national investments and their delivery, over which they have no control (and which are regularly subject to delay). But what matters for the argument here is that the tensions around governing processes and the attempts to manage (and assemble) different understandings of the local are apparent in this case as they are in the case of the Arc. The complex interweaving of a range of governing agencies, including private sector actors, highlights the need to open up thinking around local government and local state in a moment of major economic repositioning, helping to define how contemporary forms of neoliberal governance may be understood.

Drawing some conclusions: thinking through the spatial politics of development

Each of the experiences discussed above is highly specific but each also raises questions about the role of projects as well as the territorialities of

sub-national government. Focusing on them makes it possible to reflect on some of the directions of change in local politics. Governing through projects does not necessarily mean that the stated aims of those projects will be achieved, but it does highlight the ways in which governance is being reworked, drawing in a range of agencies and redefining the boundaries of local states, both in terms of their authority and their uncertain territories. It is possible to identify a longer history – none of this is strictly 'new' – but what is emerging is a very different world of local government, one in which the old hierarchies have less power; one in which what matters is the building of networks beyond the town hall and its traditional democratic structures; one in which it is the negotiation of deals with local (and not so local) actors that determines success and failure.

The rise of the project as a focus in place of the direct provision of services or the regulation of private actors reflects wider shifts in the role of the local state. Governing through projects offers an alternative to the increasingly difficult task of delivering collective goods in the context of marketised social relations (and in a period of austerity). Instead it becomes possible to identify some more narrowly specified set of tasks and targets which can be used to provide a framework for action and imagination. An overarching ambition – whether, sustainable development, economic growth and competiveness, or meeting housing targets – is translated into some more particular interconnected set of activities, defined through place. In the cases discussed above, projects also become the means through which wider governance visions can be introduced and developed, even where the targets to be achieved may remain elusive.

Both of the cases confirm the extent to which new spaces of local governance are being generated in response to changed political and economic expectations – in one case across an imagined sub-region; in the second creating a new locality on the margins of three others. Instead of focusing on the delivery of welfare and other services funded through taxation, and delivered through a more or less clear-cut governmental hierarchy in which local government is allocated a specific role, these spaces reflect more complex patterns of partnership, negotiation and leverage. In neither case are they defined through existing local government boundaries, even if in each local governments retain a significant role. In each case, too, what is emerging goes beyond any straightforward notion of multi-level governance as a complex and overlapping set of quasi-corporatist relationships is constructed around the project.

Both cases confirm the continued significance of the state as a local player, enabling and setting the terms on which development takes place. Without the promise of infrastructure and even the wider spatial vision reflected in planning statements the possibility of any large scale development is very distant – the investment model for most new private sector led

house building is rooted in incremental change that is able draw on already existing networks of transport and social infrastructure (Adams and Leishman 2008). However, the key underlying principle is an emphasis on partnership working beyond local government, looking for ways of drawing in institutional investors and real estate actors to deliver on the vision articulated in the plans. Meanwhile, of course, those plans are themselves set up in ways that are designed to fit with the perceived priorities of wished for partners – the glossy pictures may be for community and political audiences but they are also directed towards potential development partners. And, of course, because targets can only be achieved through the actions of builders, developers and other agents within the property sector, there is an implied readiness to make the necessary deals that will ensure development takes place.

Each is focused on finding ways of overcoming widely recognized problems of housing supply, particularly the supply of affordable housing, both as an end in its own right but also in order to meet the perceived needs of the labour market in a growth region. At the same time each is concerned with creating space for profitable investment for a range of actors in and around the housebuilding industry. Each is also underpinned by a belief in the power of state led infrastructural investment as a lever in encouraging private actors to become involved. The role of transport infrastructure is particularly significant in this context, both because it is a taken for granted as a legitimate activity of the state and because it is understood to open up new areas for private investment, particularly in housing. The apparently neutral language of connectivity is inescapable in both cases.

It is tempting, and often productive, in the analysis of local government to search for some underlying and consistent understanding of the 'local' that might define it (whether in some sort of administrative or scalar hierarchy, or in in place based terms of social relations emerging from community or neighbourhood). And, the administrative territories of local government are generally taken for granted, even as they are undermined by commuting patterns and peripheral development, which requires negotiation between neighbouring authorities. Here, however, a different approach has been taken. The emphasis has been placed on space as an active and malleable aspect of the governing process, as attempts have been made to (re)shape local identities to fit with shifting political and economic strategies and priorities. In this context, the focus shifts to the processes of assembling governance spaces, with an emphasis on the ways in which localities are defined and redefined, stretched and bounded. In other words, rather than a search for some sort of structured coherence capable of defining the 'local' or the 'regional' what matters are the practices of contemporary spatial politics, in what might be seen as forms of territorial promiscuity, rather than a commitment to fixed territories of government.

Acknowledgments

Disclosure statement

Funding

Notes on contributor

Allan Cochrane is Emeritus Professor of Urban Studies at the Open University. His research is focused on the politics of, and life in, cities and regions. Recent publications include: *Lived Experiences of Multiculture* (with Sarah Neal, Katy Bennett and Giles Mohan) (Routledge 2018), and *The University in its Place* (with John Brennan, Yann Lebeau and Ruth Williams) (Springer 2018).

References

Abercrombie, P. 1945. *Greater London Plan 1944*. London: HMSO.
Adams, D., and C. Leishman. 2008. *Factors Affecting Housing Build-out Rates*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government and University of Glasgow.
Allen, J. 2016. *Topologies of Power. Beyond Territory and Networks*. Abingdon: Routledge.
Allen, J., D. Massey, and A. Cochrane. 1998. *Rethinking the Region*. London: Routledge.
Beswick, J., and J. Penny. 2018. "Demolishing the Present to Sell off the Future? the Emergence of 'financialized Municipal Entrepreneurialism' in London." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 42 (4): 612–632. doi:10.1111/1468-2427.12612.

Blanco, I., S. Griggs, and H. Sullivan. 2014. "Situating the Local in the Neoliberalisation and Transformation of Urban Governance." *Urban Studies* 51 (15): 3129–3146. doi:10.1177/0042098014549292.

Cargiant. 2016. "Cargiant's Old Oak Park Masterplan Revealed in Model and CGI for First Time." Accessed March 20 2019. http://www.oldoakpark.co.uk/news-article13.aspx

Charlesworth, J., and A. Cochrane. 1994. "Tales of the Suburbs: The Local Politics of Growth in the South-East of England." *Urban Studies* 31 (10): 1723–1738. doi:10.1080/00420989420081601.

Cochrane, A. 1993. *Whatever Happened to Local Government?* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Cochrane, A. 2012. "Making up a Region: The Rise and Fall of the 'south-east of England' as a Political Territory." *Environment and Planning C* 30 (1): 95–108. doi:10.1068/c1149r.

Cochrane, A., B. Colenutt, and M. Field. 2015. "Governing the 'ungovernable': Spatial Policy, Markets and Volume House Building in a Growth Region." *Policy and Politics* 43 (4): 527–544. doi:10.1332/030557315X14253035075835.

Colenutt, B., A. Cochrane, and M. Field. 2015. "The Rise and Rise of Viability Assessment." *Town and Country Planning* 84 (10): 453–458.

DfT. et al. 2018. "Corridor Announced to Unlock Full Potential of England's Economic Heartland." Corridor B chosen for the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway. Press release forDepartment for Transport, HM Treasury, Highways England and Jesse Norman MP. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/corridor-announced-to-unlock-full-potential-of-englands-economic-heartland

Duman, A., D. Hancox, M. James, and A. Minton, eds. 2018. *Regeneration Songs: Sounds of Investment and Loss from East London*. London: Repeater.

Fitzgerald, A. 2018. "Querying the Resilient Local Authority: The Question of 'resilience for Whom'?" *Local Government Studies* 44 (6): 788–806. doi:10.1080/03003930.2018.1473767.

Gardner, A. 2017. "Big Change, Little Change? Punctuation, Increments and Multi-layer Institutional Change for English Local Authorities under Austerity." *Local Government Studies* 43 (2): 15–169. doi:10.1080/03003930.2016.1276451.

GLA. 2016. *Review of the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation. High Level Findings*. London: Greater London Authority. https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/opdc_review_findings_-_final_31.10.16_0.pdf

Haughton, G., P. Allmendinger, D. Counsell, and G. Vigar. 2010. *The New Spatial Planning. Territorial Management with Soft Spaces and Fuzzy Boundaries*. Abingdon: Routledge.

John, P. 2014. "The Great Survivor: The Persistence and Resilience of English Local Government." *Local Government Studies* 40 (5): 687–704. doi:10.1080/03003930.2014.891984.

Local Government Association. 2017. *Enterprising Councils: Supporting Councils' Income Generation Activity*. London: Local Government Association.

Lowndes, V., and A. Gardner. 2016. "Local Government under the Conservatives: Super-austerity, Devolution and the 'smarter State'." *Local Government Studies* 42 (3): 357–375. doi:10.1080/03003930.2016.1150837.

Lowndes, V., and K. McCaughie. 2013. "Weathering the Perfect Storm? Austerity and Institutional Resilience in Local Government." *Policy & Politics* 41 (4): 533–549. doi:10.1332/030557312X655747.

Mats, F., and P. Hall. 2017. "A Projectified Public Administration: How Projects in Swedish Local Governments Become Instruments for Political and Managerial Concerns." *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift* 119 (1): 185–205.

MHLG. 2019. *The Oxford-Cambridge Arc. Government Ambition and Joint Declaration between Government and Local Partners*. London: Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

Neal, S. 2013. "Transition Culture: Politics, Localities and Ruralities." *Journal of Rural Studies* 32: 60–69. doi:10.1016/j.jrurstud.2013.04.001.

Newman, I. 2014. *Reclaiming Local Democracy: A Progressive Future for Local Government*. Bristol: Policy Press.

NIC. 2016. *Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Corridor: Interim Report*. London: National Infrastructure Commission. https://www.nic.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Cambridge-Milton-Keynes-Oxford-interim-report.pdf

NIC. 2017. *Partnering for Prosperity: A New Deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc*. London: National Infrastructure Commission. https://www.nic.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Partnering-for-Prosperty.pdf

ODPM (2003). *Sustainable Communities: Building for The Future*. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

OPDC. 2016. *OPDC Strategic Plan 2016-2019*. London: Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation. https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/strategic_plan_2016-2019.pdf

OPDC. 2018. *OPDC Local Plan: Second Revised Draft for Regulation 19 (2) Consultation*. London: Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation. https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/opdc_local_plan_2018.pdf

Penny, J. 2017. "Between Coercion and Consent: The Politics of 'co-operative Governance' at a Time of 'austerity Localism' in London." *Urban Geography* 38 (9): 1352–1373. doi:10.1080/02723638.2016.1235932.

Pinson, G. 2009. *Gouverner la Ville par Project: Urbanisme et Gouvernance des Villes Européenes*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

SEEDA (2006). *The Regional Economic Strategy 2006-2016. A Framework for Sustainable Prosperity*. Guildford: South East England Development Agency.

Slay, J., and J. Penny. 2013. *Surviving Austerity: Local Voices and Local Action in England's Poorest Neighbourhoods*. London: New Economics Foundation.

SQW. 2001. *The Oxford-Cambridge Arc. Final Report to a Group of Partners from Across the Arc*. Cambridge: SQW.

Stewart, J. 2014. "An Era of Continuing Change: Reflections on Local Government in England 1974-2014." *Local Government Studies* 40 (6): 835–850. doi:10.1080/03003930.2014.959842.

Swyngedouw, E., F. Moulaert, and A. Rodriguez. 2002. "Neoliberal Urbanization in Europe: Large Scale Development Projects and the New Urban Policy." *Antipode* 34 (3): 542–577. doi:10.1111/1467-8330.00254.

Thompson, M. 2015. "Between Boundaries: From Communing and Guerrilla Gardening to Community Land Trust Development in Liverpool." *Antipode* 47 (4): 1021–1042. doi:10.1111/anti.12154.

Treasury, H. M. 2018. "Helping the Cambridge-Milton-Keynes-Oxford Corridor Reach Its Potential." https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/661401/Helping_the_Cambridge_Milton_Keynes_Oxford_corridor_reach_its_potential_digicomms.pdf

Webb, C., and P. Byers. 2018. "Austerity, Rationing and Inequity: Trends in Children's and Young People's Services Expenditure in England between 2010 and 2015." *Local Government Studies* 44 (3): 391–415. doi:10.1080/03003930.2018.1430028.

Wills, J. 2016. *Locating Localism: Statecraft, Citizenship and Democracy*. Bristol: Policy Press.