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Urban regimes, experiments and institutional innovation

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Introduction

How do urban regimes evolve and what role do trade unions play in these processes? Space for this sort of analysis has begun to open up in the field of industrial relations and employment systems as greater recognition has emerged of the internal differentiation within various forms of capitalism (Almond 2011). Whilst core national institutional features may place constraints on institutional experimentation at the local level the way in which local patterns of employment interact with and shape the geographical distribution of job opportunities leads to regions and cities with very distinctive social and economic histories and paths of development. As recent research is uncovering, the result is that the ability of actors to engage locally with institutional experimentation and shape policy outcomes at the local and regional level is likely to vary both within and across capitalisms.

In this paper, we take the particular location of Bristol in the UK as our example. We build a generalizable analytical framework to understand the role of what we describe as ‘urban regimes’. Based on this we show how over a fifty-year period from the 1970s to the late 2010s, the nature of the actors in the local area, and their scale and influence on the politics of the city has changed. We identify three main phases in the development of Bristol in which the role of trade unions gradually changes – the Fordist/Labourist urban regime up to the 1970s; from the late 1970s through to the New Labour victory in 1997, an emergent neo-liberal urban regime characterized by a changing industrial and employment structure and a struggle between the

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local council and the Tory central government over implementing neo-liberal policies; and finally, as the negative consequences of this became clearer to local actors, the emergence locally within a national framework of neo-liberalism and austerity of a networked governance structure where collaboration between public and private organizations gradually developed.

The paper is constructed in the following way. Firstly, we develop our analysis of urban regime and the dimensions across which such regimes can vary. Theoretically we take a broadly pragmatist approach in which urban regimes evolve, as actors face new contexts and new problems, leading to efforts at creative institutional experimentation that never fully close the circle in the sense of producing institutional stability. Rather tensions and conflicts are built into the development of urban regimes as actors seek to negotiate their different interests within the urban space through formal and informal systems of representation and organization whilst all the time being under the pressure of external forces such as outside investors and central government. Secondly, we provide our analysis of how the urban regime evolved in the Bristol context over the period under study. We pay particular attention to the emergence of new forms of governance reflected in forms of institutional experimentation in terms of new partnerships, new organizational structures and new discursive identities. In the final section of the paper, we consider the implications of our example for the wider analysis of the role of trade unions in regional and local forms of experimentation.

Urban regimes and forms of governance

Drawing on Stone's classic study we begin with the idea that an urban regime consists of 'the informal arrangements by which public bodies and private interests function together in order to be able to make and carry out governing decisions' (Stone 1989: 6; 1993). However, unlike Stone, we seek to distinguish between different levels of analysis. Firstly, the concept of

‘private interests’ needs to be more explicitly embedded in an analysis of the range and form of capitalist enterprises in a particular local area. By private interests in this context, therefore, we are concerned with the nature of private sector employment in a particular location and whether it is primarily owned and governed by those in the locality or is it part of a national or international concern headquartered elsewhere. Part of the issue here also relates to the degree to which local ownership leads to the formation of local status orders reflected in shared social relationships amongst the high status group, embedded in particular organizations such as Chambers of Commerce and a particular political party (in the UK, the Conservative party) etc. which articulate a ‘business interest’ either formally or informally. As authors developing structural power theory have suggested with regard to national governments (Culpepper 2011; 2015; Przeworski and Wallerstein 1988; Lukes 2004), we assume that local governments will also broadly recognise that their fate is intertwined with keeping private sector interests committed to their ‘place’ in the local community. Therefore, their policies will be concerned to maintain an environment that is favourable to existing and potentially incoming business interests. Challenge to the priorities of the private sector will be limited but in so far as local democratic governance exist (and the terms under which it exists, i.e. how much power does the local have relative to the national government), becomes salient and relevant for the population, conflicts may arise.

Ownership issues are crucially embedded at the local level with structures of employment. Urban areas are characterised by a mix of employment sites. Certain industry sectors particularly in assembly manufacturing have been characterised by large factory workplaces which in turn offer opportunities for collective trade union organization. Smaller workplaces, retail locations and many professional and technical businesses are less likely to be unionised. Gender and ethnic differences in the workforce can also weaken collective solidarities. Any

analysis of an urban regime and the role of trade unions therefore needs to investigate how this sectoral division of labour in the local area evolves and influences the degree of collective organization that is emergent and the degree to which this organization acts as a counterweight to the structural power of capital.

Alongside the private sector, major public organizations exist representing local government activity (e.g. social care, waste, schools etc.) and other areas such as local health services, transport, universities and local branches of central government departments. The boundaries of the public sector vary over time and are in constant play with actors from the private sector. In the UK case, the shift of many of these activities over to the private sector during the neo-liberal era has been a major change in local areas. Conditions of work in terms of wages, hours of work, and other employment conditions including trade union representation have been fundamentally altered by these processes, particularly through splitting what were once relationships between a single employer and a wider range of different occupations often represented by a single trade union into a series of separate bargaining units where trade unions are weaker if not entirely excluded. One area of conflict which is seen therefore in the Bristol context is the struggle by trade unions based in the public sector to resist privatisation and contracting out of services. The size of workplaces and the collective nature of work in many of these organizations led to relatively high levels of unionisation, supporting collective bargaining. Efforts to privatise or contract out many of these activities have been accompanied by declining trade union membership and an overall weakening of bargaining rights and lowering of wages.

An urban regime is also constituted through collective decision-making which shapes the context in which local economic development occurs. In the UK context, locally elected

councils with distinctive powers delegated by national governments (but subject to continued monitoring, control and change) potentially act as an arena in which on the one hand constraints can be placed on market processes and capitalist development, e.g. through planning law, through control of key infrastructure projects and on the other hand public goods can be created which have positive effects for business, e.g. education and skill provision, the creation of safe, secure, hygienic and healthy urban environments, the provision of adequate housing, support for new business development etc.. How far local governments go in being active in these areas relates to the nature of the underlying forces within the urban area, the powers which they have in general and in particular their ability to raise revenue and articulate a discourse that sustains an electoral coalition giving stability to a particular direction of travel. Beyond the political dynamics of party formation in the local council, important actors in shaping the urban regime are employers and their collective organizations and trade unions working separately or together through institutions such as local Trade Councils. These groups are also key in providing personnel and support for the elected councillors. This terrain is subject to change and in the UK, there have been a number of systems of local government with a division of power between them. Post-2010, larger council electorates have been able to choose executive mayors who have formed cabinets rather than rely on older style committee systems.

The 'urban regime' concept suggests that the representatives and leaders of these various groups evolve patterns of working together over time that entrench certain powers and certain ways of doing things. This pattern is not necessarily visible in the formal institutions of local power such as the council but lies behind the sorts of decisions which emerge into the public arena. Drawing on Lukes' theory of power (2004), one might argue that power in an urban regime is partly visible when decisions advantage one group at the expense of another but power may also be invisible in the sense that keeping specific issues off the agenda is an

important way to exercise power. Finally, power is exercised in an urban regime by the creation of a hegemonic and unquestioned view of what any particular city or region is about; what are the unquestioned assumptions about how it should develop? The focus on power alerts us also to the idea that urban regimes are not static; they evolve and change as power asymmetries are challenged or reconfigured in order to enable old actors to reassert themselves or new actors to find a place for themselves in the urban regime. As new industries rise and old industries fall, institutions and the actors which control them are subject to change as well as being subjects who initiate change.

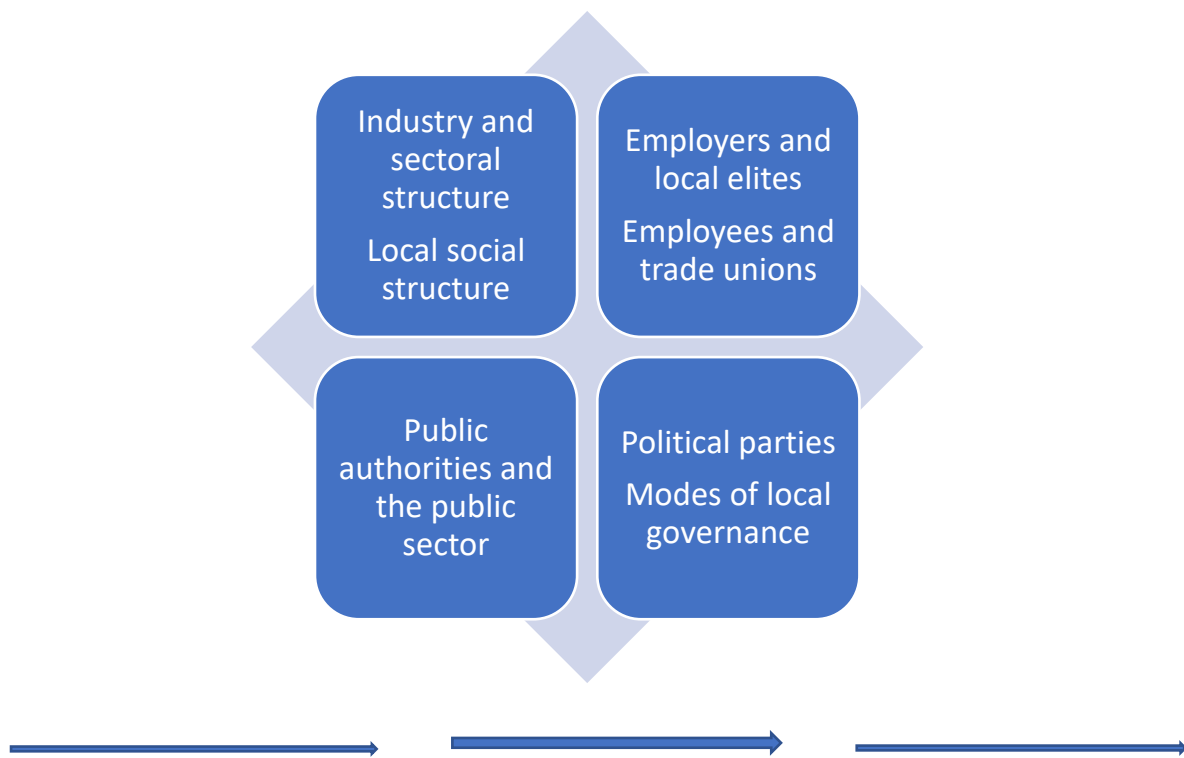


Figure 1: Elements of the urban regime: changing over time

Figure 1 illustrates the key concepts in our extended version of ‘urban regimes’ and the structures and actors which lie at its core. Outside this core but continually interacting with it in various ways, disturbing and disrupting emergent institutional equilibrium lie two main factors – firstly national government and its view of the role of local autonomy/dependence in its wider strategic vision of economic policy and secondly developments in business and

markets which impact on the viability of local economic orders. The result is a continuing challenge to actors in the urban regime to respond to these disruptions by experimenting with and building new institutions. As we shall describe, this is not an easy task and urban regimes can undergo long periods of stagnation and decline from the point of view of employment conditions; whether they are ever able to rebuild and in what ways and with what costs is a key question.

Bristol: Understanding urban regimes

Bristol's origins lie in the fact that from the medieval period it was an important port through which various agricultural, textile and raw material products were exported and imported for the wealthy towns and villages of the Cotswolds and Wiltshire. Because of its easy access to the Atlantic, its importance grew with the discovery of the Americas. It was a central node in the Triangular slave trade, exporting goods and textiles to be traded for slaves in Africa which were in turn traded for sugar and tobacco in the Americas. Bristol's Society of Merchant Venturers formed in the early 18th century was made up of local and London-based merchants that funded these trades. They founded various charitable foundations in the City, built a mansion to house their activities in the fashionable neighbourhood of Clifton and donated part of the open area known as the Downs to the City. Membership of the Merchants is by invitation only— and until very recently only men were allowed —, and the organization remains a self-perpetuating oligarchy of the wealthy in Bristol and the surrounding area, still engaging in educational and philanthropic activities.

From early on, Bristol was a divided city not just in terms of the contrast between rich and poor but also in terms of the physical structure of the place. The Harbourside area of the city first developed large warehouses for storage and then began to be the site of processing as tobacco

factories, sugar refining and chocolate production were established as well as a range of ship building, dry dock ship repair and ships stores. Working class housing in crowded and insanitary conditions down by the docks contrasted with the mansions of the Merchants and others up on the hill where the graceful village of Clifton characterized by Georgian mansions and squares developed. The dock area and the processing factories were, however, constrained by the tidal nature of the access to the harbor and as larger ships developed, a new dock was established directly on the Severn at Avonmouth with easy access to the Atlantic from where materials could be taken into the city in smaller vessels for processing. By the late 19th century, a series of ‘spin-off’ industries had developed in light engineering production sites, e.g. to provide machinery paper and packaging to the tobacco and chocolate factories. Related to this, Bristol was also an early innovator in producing cars and buses and most importantly aircraft. By the inter-war year, Bristol’s industrial structure was based on the docks, on tobacco, sugar and chocolate manufacture and on mechanical engineering with particular expertise in aircraft and buses. This was the legacy Bristol carried into the second half of the 20th century.

The Fordist/Labourist Urban regime 1950s-1970s

In the post-war period, Bristol experienced a period of growth driven mainly by its manufacturing sector. Boddy et al. report that ‘in 1961 the manufacturing sector in Bristol accounted for 44% of total employment, with 64% of this employment concentrated in three major sectors’ (Boddy et al.1986: 10) – Vehicles (mainly aircraft), Food, Drink and Tobacco, and Paper, Printing and Publishing, often concentrated in relatively large Fordist workplaces with strong trade union presence (especially in aircraft manufacture: Danford et al. 2005). During much of this period, economic conditions were relatively positive for many of these groups of workers. Boddy et al. argue that ‘the long history of relative prosperity in Bristol, together with the welfare paternalism of some of the traditional employers, helped to sustain a

tradition of “cordial” labour relations’ (Boddy et al. 1986: 11). Trade unions in the area were well organized but in general were not seen as particularly militant. Employers responded to tight labour market conditions during these prosperous years by agreeing the moderate wage demands made by the trade unions and although tensions existed within the aircraft sector, in particular, regarding piecework rates, industrial disruption was relatively rare.

The largest companies in the area were British-owned and there were few foreign multinationals in the locality. In his study of ‘local notables’ in the Bristol area conducted in the mid-1960s and published in 1969, Clements pointed to the ‘often close personal and social relationships between members of sample [of local notables]; according to one informant ‘all the prominent businessmen live outside Bristol and know each other – they can’t disentangle their business and private lives’ (Clements 1969: 115). Clements also identified a sense amongst this group that they were highly influential in the city even if they were not councilors. ‘The sources of this influence and superiority in the social hierarchy are manifold and complex. Amongst them is the fact that they possess social prestige and important friendships and many are endowed with a kind of traditional legitimacy based on family descent... They also often feel themselves and are acknowledged to fill representative roles as spokesmen of important associations, firms, societies, industries, interest groups or trades which gives them weight, authority and receptive audiences... Many are closely associated with the leadership of institutions of real economic power’ (Clements 1969: 120).

At the level of the local Bristol City Council itself, the Labour Party was mainly in control throughout this period. It had strong links to the local trade unions and to the Trades Council. The agenda of the council through much of this time was with rebuilding Bristol from the severe impact of bombing in World War Two when its manufacture of aircraft had made it a

major target for the German air force. The old centre of the city had been severely damaged, reducing retail space but also impacting on housing. The Labour Council and the trade unions were united in supporting a rapid modernization of the city and, from much of the 1950s and 1960s, this involved bulldozing many areas of old Bristol and replacing them with new concrete buildings and road systems in the centre and creating large public housing estates on the edge of the city or in tower blocks nearer to the centre. The lead taken by the council and the fact that being in Labour hands was supportive of collective bargaining enabled trade unions to spread their membership further into the local government sector. The private sector, the 'local notables' and the Conservatives on the council were broadly part of this consensus supporting the redevelopment program, both for its social effects and for some of the business opportunities it opened up for building contractors and later property developers. Clements argues that, in this phase, 'the typical relationship between notables and the local political system... was commonly one of business-like cooperation, 'give and take', in enterprises in which both or all sides are recognized to have legitimate, if somewhat differing, interests' (Clement 1969: 137). Finally, it is noticeable that this Fordist reconstruction of Bristol in both production and consumption terms was accomplished with little direct input from central government and/or multinational capital. It reflected the long-term development of a particular combination of capitalist development and local political and social hierarchies that gave Bristol distinctive advantages and strengths stretching back to its early insertion in global value chains and mercantile capitalism in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Bristol and the neo-liberal revolution 1970s-2000s

From the 1970s, this model of Bristol's urban regime was put under pressure both from outside and inside. Outside pressures were of two main sorts. Firstly, the manufacturing industries which had employed so many people in Bristol were becoming increasingly uncompetitive as

old markets declined (such as tobacco) and new competitors entered traditional markets. In the period 1971-1978, manufacturing employment in Bristol fell by 14.3% with more than 78% of the losses being in the three main sectors of Food, Drink and Tobacco, Vehicles and Paper and Print. Reflecting the gendered division of labour that existed in Bristol where men were over-represented in manufacturing, the result was the loss of significantly more male jobs than female jobs. Secondly, as the UK's competitive position deteriorated more generally against other countries, government finances became increasingly constricted. By the late 1970s and in particular during the Thatcher years of the 1980s, central government began firstly to impose a series of restrictions on the revenue raising powers of councils, then on what they could spend on and, finally, on what services they could provide in-house as opposed to privatizing. For councils traditionally run by Labour, the Thatcher years posed particularly hard choices about spending and services and whilst Bristol's conflicts with Whitehall were not as well known as those which gripped cities such as Liverpool and London, they were nevertheless highly consequential for the city, for Labour politics and for the influence of trade unions.

On the other hand, Bristol did not turn into the wasteland that many British cities did during the 1980s. Instead it became hailed as a 'boom city'. In the first instance this reflected the growing importance of services in the city's economy. Its mercantile past had meant that it was always well served by professional groups such as lawyers, accountants and bankers and a thriving retail sector serving a wealthy clientele as well as a more mass market set of consumers. In turn, these groups had encouraged the development of a range of highquality private schools in the area and, eventually, a civic university and, later, a large polytechnic which turned into a university. By the 1960s, these institutions were involved in a range of large science projects together with local businesses, e.g. on the supersonic Concorde project. This provided both a business and a social attraction for services companies wishing to move

out of high rent London and for new start-ups. Even by 1971, Bristol had a higher proportion of service sector jobs than the country as a whole (57.3% compared to 54.2%: Boddy et al. 1986: 14) and this area of employment continued to grow particularly in Insurance, Banking and Finance where the sector's employment grew by 73% between 1971-1981. Four UK insurance companies and the insurance subsidiary of one of the major clearing banks relocated to Bristol between 1972 and 1983, according to Boddy and Lovering (1986: 229).

Another area which became increasingly identified with employment growth in Bristol from the early 1980s was high technology electronics. Boddy and Lovering (1986) describe early predictions made in the Sunday Times in 1981 that 'Bristol is on the way to becoming the high technology centre of Britain... set to become Britain's Silicon Valley of the 1980s' (Boddy and Lovering 1986: 218). In their evaluation of these claims, Boddy and Lovering note that by far the most important sector has been aircraft manufacture and although this had stimulated a number of small sub-contracting companies, many of these were involved in low level processes, not high technology. They found some evidence of advanced electronics companies often working in growing defense industries' cluster in the Bristol area including participating in developing new weapons systems for the British military. In terms of employment and labour market impact, these sectors provided a range of opportunities at semi-skilled, technical and managerial levels.

These changes in the industrial structure impacted differently on employers and employees. The era of 'local notables' declined as larger companies from London moved in bringing managers without long-term connections to the Bristol area or the networks embedded in family, school and social ties that had linked together and solidified the status and position of the earlier groupings. Although old organizations like the Merchant Venturers, the Chamber of

Commerce, the Rotary Club etc. continued to exist, they no longer carried the same long-term sense of entitlement to influence that had characterized the earlier era. Bristol's business community was becoming more diverse; there remained some substantial and important local companies but many of them were starting to headquarter themselves in the City of London and orient themselves to London Stock Exchange and international shareholders, whilst London-based firms were moving some of their activities to Bristol and gradually a small number of foreign multinationals were beginning to enter.

These changes were having consequences for the trade unions. Expansion of service sector employment in private companies was often less helpful to trade union membership whilst some traditional manufacturing areas of strength were rapidly declining. Legislation in the Thatcher years made it more difficult to organize as did the impact of major trade union defeats such as the Miners Strike. Government pressures on local government also had an impact. Council house sales and restrictions on public sector house building was soon followed by regulations forcing councils to privatise and contract out many services such as waste collection, direct labour organizations, highway maintenance services, managing leisure centres etc.. Although EU-backed TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) regulations reduced some of the changes to employment conditions which private sector employers might have wanted to impose, over time the worsening of wages, work conditions and employee benefits was occurring.

In Bristol, trade unions supporting the Labour group on the council found themselves fighting a number of battles over specific privatisations in part because the council during the previous era had invested in infrastructure projects to help build the city's economy. Two of these were the Royal Portbury Dock and Bristol Airport. The Docks project had begun in the 1950s when

Avonmouth, built in the 19th century itself (and owned and controlled by the Council), had seemed to be becoming obsolete for the size of ships that were emerging as the container revolution began to take hold. In 1971, the city managed to get the relevant legislation through Parliament to allow it to build new docks. There was to be no government subsidy and the council would have to finance the development itself. Work was completed by 1977 and, as Bassett states, ‘to the Labour majority on the council the new dock was a triumph of municipal socialism; to the Conservatives on the council who were equally enthusiastic, it was a triumph of municipal entrepreneurialism’ (Bassett 1993: 259). Unfortunately, however, it soon became obvious that with the UK becoming more integrated into the EU, ports on the West Coast like Bristol were less in demand (Bassett and Hoare 1984). When the world economy stalled in the early 1980s, demand and revenues at the port fell further. To the dismay of the unions, the number of port employees was cut from around 2000 to 704. The annual financial deficit grew, and the gap had to be met by the City Council placing a burden on rate payers at a time when the Thatcher government was already constraining spending and council revenue raising. By the late 1980s, the Conservatives on the council who briefly held power, had decided to restructure the Port in order to make it ready for privatization – effectively by taking its debt off the books and placing it in the council’s accounts directly. A private company named First Corporate made an approach to the council in 1990 to buy the port. At first there was little opposition from the workforce which had had to endure a long period of uncertainty. However, after the deal was done, Bassett reports that there was a political backlash when First Corporate announced that it had made a deal with National Power to build a facility at the port which would enable it to import millions of tons of coal. ‘This provoked strong opposition by the small group of left-wing councilors who had opposed the sale and also alerted the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) to a major threat to its members’ (Bassett 1993: 263). The controversy that followed did nothing to change the outcome and subsequent to this, First

Corporate made further deals including becoming the main site for the import of Japanese Honda cars into the UK and later importing liquid natural gas.

A second privatization struggle took place over Bristol airport which had been owned by Bristol City Council since 1929 even though it has been located at Lulsgate in North Somerset since 1957. In 1986, the Thatcher government passed a law empowering the Secretary of State for Transport to ‘order airports under complete or partial municipal ownership and with annual turnovers exceeding £1 million to be reconstituted as limited liability companies’ (Hoare 1997). The Council was forced to reconstitute the governance structure though in the early stages it retained full control. In 1997, a majority shareholding in the airport was sold to FirstGroup and then in 2001, the airport was sold to a joint venture of Macquarie Group and Cintra (a subsidiary of Ferrovial) which in turn sold it in 2014 to the Ontario Teachers Pension Plan (which had been building up its holdings since 2002). In 2018, Bristol airport reported that 3,978 employees were working at the airport for a range of companies including airlines, concessions, support and operations. The Council was unable to hold on to its control of the airport under pressure from central government to privatise. Instead, the ultimate ownership of the airport is currently vested in a Canadian public organization, again undermining any sense of a set of ‘local notables’ coordinating the urban regime. The diversity of employers also militated against unified employee action even if some groups did pursue their own interests through various forms of collective activity.

Finally, a crucial area of conflict which occurred in the 1980s and 1990s was over the Council’s role in city planning (Punter 1992; 1993). As the industrial structure of the city changed, demand grew for more office space. Under long standing legislation, the City Council had the right to zone various areas in particular ways – residential, retail, office, manufacturing etc..

Any planning applications for new buildings had to be considered in the light of these zoning decisions and further criteria established regarding the nature and quality of buildings. During the period of the Fordist urban regime as described earlier, all groups were committed to speedy reconstruction and construction of housing and retail space with relatively little concern for aesthetic or other considerations. However, Bristol was a city with a long tradition and a number of areas in which architecturally distinguished residential, factory, port and administrative buildings from the 18th and 19th centuries had retained a place even if they had fallen into disuse. By the 1970s, therefore, there was an emerging conservation movement in the city that was beginning to challenge what they saw as the unnecessary destruction of the City's building heritage. By the 1980s, this was building into an area of conflict in part because property developers were starting to buy up old parts of the city particularly in the docks area (an emerging trend globally) in order to provide office space for the new entrants. The old docks in the centre, in particular, were a major area of contention. A combination of war damage and then decline in their use had led to them being derelict but given their location in the heart of the city and the growing example of other dockland-led city revivals in the US and the UK this area became the heart of the conflict (Punter 1992; 1993). The Labour Group supported by trade unions were against the emerging property speculation and property boom and sought to operate a more balanced planning agenda in which there was mixed usage of inner city space and conservationist criteria were taken into account. However, the city was refused any central government assistance for inner city regeneration on three separate occasions – 1978, 1980 and 1983, reflecting, firstly, a widely held view that Bristol was a wealthy city and did not need government money and, secondly, during the years of the Thatcher government, an unwillingness to support a Labour Council particularly one like Bristol which was so hostile to the Tory project. Property developers became increasingly frustrated by the council's efforts to stymie their projects, claiming incompetence inside the

Council's planning department for long delays in reaching decisions. As such decisions could be overturned by inspectors sent from Whitehall who supported the government line that property development was generally positive, the Labour council were losing the battle. However, it was a long and arduous process in which the gap between Bristol's Labour Council and its trade unions supporters on one side and the Thatcher government on the other side was all the time growing. All round the Docklands area, struggles took place between the city planners and property developers about new buildings. As these heightened in intensity, the national government decided to try to wrest control of property permissions from the council by setting up Urban Development Corporations (UDC), the borders of which were to be carefully demarcated to take the most important areas of land in the city under the planning control of the UDC rather than the council. Within the UDC, property developers could expect to more quickly win permissions to build offices and to build in ways which might have contravened the city's zoning and quality specifications.

The most emblematic of the struggles was the conflict over a new office development right next to the water on a piece of land named Canon's Marsh. A group of property developers had purchased the land and buildings in the area and had entered into negotiations with Lloyds Bank to design a major new building to allow large relocation of staff from London to Bristol. The Council was concerned that the original design would block access to the water as well as turn what was meant to be a large public open space combining different retail, entertainment and housing uses with a restrictive private office building acting as a barrier along the harbourside. Concerned that if the decision was left to the UDC, the property developers might win everything they wanted, the city entered into a speedy set of negotiations which in their view, reduced the worst of the consequences of the plan whilst allowing the basic office building to be built. However, the UDCs went ahead and further exacerbated conflict between

local government on the one side and property developers supported by the UDC and central government on the other.

The period under discussion saw a fundamental change in the nature of the industries and sectors which dominated Bristol. The shift from manufacturing to services and the emergence of some high technology industries was crucial to weakening trade unions on top of the active efforts of the government to reduce their power and influence. These same shifts also saw a decline of the system of 'local notables'. Firms from outside Bristol came with executives and leaders that had little knowledge of the city, few networks and even fewer social connections to each other and the city. New actors arise seeking to develop new businesses particularly in finance and in property. On the council itself, conflicts between Labour and Conservatives deepened as ideological struggles at the national level translated into specific conflicts locally over privatisations, over cuts and over property and planning. The urban regime was pushed by the power of central government down a neo-liberal policy route but actors in the council sought to resist this. However, their traditional allies in trade unions were weakening and new forces were growing that were using the Thatcherite changes to their own advantage in terms of restructuring the landscape of Bristol as a city. Nevertheless, there was a sense in the mid 1990s that these conflicts were actually holding the city back as a whole. In the early 1990s, the city again failed to receive funding for regeneration under the City Challenges initiative. Partly, that was down to the council. As Malpass, for example, argues that in Bristol, the message given to officers was that 'nothing should be done to compromise certain basic principles' (Malpass 1994: 306) even if meant that the bid failed. In particular, bids were more likely to succeed where they could show sustained partnership between different groups and particularly between the private sector and the council, but over the 1980s this had dwindled

in Bristol. By the early 1990s, therefore, there was a growing recognition that these gaps needed to be bridged if the City was to move forward.

From neo-liberalism to partnership and networked governance?

In the 1990s and 2000s, the city's economic structure began to change again in ways which enabled various actors to develop new bridge building and partnership initiatives and experimentally and pragmatically create a new urban regime. At the level of employment and industrial structure, manufacturing employment continued to decline. The main exception to this was the continued importance of the aerospace and defense industries and their evolution through various corporate forms. At the ownership level, the internationalization of the sector as a whole and its development towards global supply chains within integrated multinationals led to a series of changes in the local aerospace and defense industries. British Aerospace became BAE Systems in 1999 and, in 2001, spun off its business building aircraft wings based at Filton in Bristol to a new company, Airbus UK, which in turn became part of what was initially EADS and is now Airbus SE, a company registered in the Netherlands owned in part by the German, French and Spanish states and in part by private funds. Being part of Airbus and its efforts at competing globally with Boeing and other suppliers of passenger jets has provided trade unions in Filton with a continuing source of members and power. Upskilling and implementing high performance work systems has been accompanied by efforts at developing a more partnership-oriented employment policy with trade unions (Danford et al. 2005), whilst at the same time leaving the workforce potentially vulnerable to relocation decisions made by a management based outside the UK, a vulnerability increased by Brexit pressures. At present, the Filton site remains the key producer of wings for Airbus and the main site for manufacturing-type employment in the Bristol area. The Airbus model also comprises a complex network of contracted out suppliers and service providers though detailed data on

employment impact is not available. Overall the 2011 census identified 6.5% of the employed population in manufacturing. Financial and professional services have continued to be of importance in the area, constituting over 15% of people in employment in the 2011 Census. However, three trends have emerged that were not so obvious in the earlier period. Firstly, there has been a significant growth in the creative industries in the Bristol area. Historically, the BBC has had a significant program making presence in Bristol which, post the Birt reforms, led to a spinning out of many creatives into setting up their own companies locally. The result was the emergence of a cluster of media firms, best known being Aardman Animations. Linked to the extension of the creative economy has been the dynamic nature of the 'Bristol sound' in terms both of recording artists and live performance venues in the area. All of these have come together more as digital technology has opened up the space for developing new artistic ventures, a process in which the Watershed Media Centre has played a major role, not just locally and nationally but also internationally, in leading the way to facilitating open access creative experiments through a mixture of public and private funding (Griffiths et al 1999). Secondly and related to this has been the development of many new business ventures. In 2016, Bristol had more than 2.5 times more jobs in visual arts, such as programming and broadcasting, than the English average (ONS 2016), and it was also the third city in the UK with the largest growth in the number of SMEs, just behind London and Birmingham (Centre for Economics and Business Research 2017). In the first half of 2017, there were around 3,500 new business start-ups in the region, mostly located in the professional, scientific and technical activities sector (Bristol City Council 2017a). By 2025, SMEs in Bristol are expected to contribute around £5 billion to the UK economy (Centre for Economics and Business Research 2017). Bristol has been listed as both a creative and a high-tech economy hotspot by NESTA (Bakhshi et al. 2015), the UK global innovation foundation. It was also awarded a leading UK SMART City in May 2016, and in 2017 overtook London as the UK's leading SMART City

(Woods et al. 2016). The 2016 report considered Bristol ‘a leader in open data access, energy innovation, and imaginative forms of community engagement’ and highlighted the role of Bristol is Open as ‘a unique project that can put the city among the global leaders in urban innovation projects’ (Woods et al. 2016: 7). Bristol is Open is a joint venture between the Bristol City Council and the University of Bristol focused on developing an open programmable city.

Thirdly, it is worth noting also that many of these new businesses have been developing with a strong social mission often around sustainability objectives. The Local Enterprise Partnership’s last survey was undertaken in 2012 and identified around 600 social enterprises in the region, employing 10,000 people and with a turnover of 378 million pounds (Social Enterprise Works 2013). Research by Roger Tym & Partners in 2006 assessed the demand and supply of social enterprise business support in South West England and identified 5,500 organisations with potentially 2,200 of them generating at least 25% of their income from trading (Social Enterprise Works 2013). As for Bristol’s region, the most recent report is from 2004/5 and covered the broader social economy, including trading social enterprises, as well as voluntary and community groups. According to the report, the social economy in Bristol was worth 240 million pounds, with 70% of the income coming from trading. It employed 15,000 staff and 20,000 volunteers. As for the organisational forms, 35% of the organisations identified themselves as social enterprises and 10% as co-operatives. With regard to location in the city, 47% were based on deprived areas (Social Enterprise Works 2013). More recent numbers are found in the Co-operative UK database, which shows a turnover of more than 24 million pounds for co-operatives in Bristol, accounting for 43 co-operatives with around 12,500 members (Co-op UK 2017). In Bristol and region there are 8 B Corps (international certification for mission-led businesses), 6 Social Enterprise Mark organisations (national

accreditation for social enterprises) and 12 social enterprises that are members of Social Enterprise UK (national membership following certain criteria).

In September 2013, Bristol was awarded as one of the UK's first Social Enterprise Cities, by Social Enterprise UK (SEUK), which is the national body representing social enterprises in the country. The award is part of the Social Enterprise Places initiative by SEUK, which was supported by Santander Bank for the first three years and is aimed at building awareness across the country and helping grow the impact of social enterprises. Currently, 20 regions have been awarded the title of Social Enterprise Place. The increase in the number and participation of social enterprises in local economies has been led in recent years mainly by the impact of austerity in public spending with social services and governmental funding for local charities. Consequently, local councils have been forced to contract out their services and in this process, existing workforces have sometimes won the new contract creating employee-owned organizations with a social mission. Others have arisen because of the strength of the networks and discourse within the city around sustainability. Here the City Council has been instrumental. On the environmental sustainability side, the city is also an important hotspot receiving the European Green Capital Award (EGCA) in 2015 (following on from Copenhagen in 2014). This status is awarded by the European Commission to one city each year and recognises and rewards local efforts to improve the environment, the economy and the quality of life in cities. The EGCA is given to cities which are leading the way in environmentally-friendly urban living and that can thus act as a role-model to inspire other cities. The campaign in Bristol to win this award involved many organisations from different sectors including the social enterprise sector working closely with the City Council. The city has also been listed as a Resilient City, employing a systems-led approach to build capacity, flexibility and learning towards becoming future-proofed by 2020 (Bristol City Council 2017b).

This has created a new economic base for the city building on existing skills but moving away from reliance on big international companies (which though still present create vulnerabilities for local employees) towards smaller scale businesses and start-ups based on high levels of skills in digital and creative industries and drawing on a young educated workforce initially attracted by the two strong universities in the city and then looking for ways to settle in the area (Work Foundation 2006). In some ways, however, this does exacerbate problems of inequality as this economy is lop-sided and unequal. The city's current Labour Mayor, Marvin Rees, has already stated that 'there is another Bristol, one that tourists and even some of our citizens never see – the city of poverty and inequality' (Bristol City Council 2017b: 6). A significant number of areas in the city, 42 in total (mostly on the outside of the city in areas of large post-war council housing estates), are among the 10% most deprived in England. Moreover, 16% of its residents live in poverty (1 in 4 children and 1 in 5 elderly), and there is gap in life expectancy of 9.6 years for men and 7 years for women between the most and least deprived areas (Bristol City Council 2017a).

Nevertheless, it is worth asking how the city moved from the situation of conflict that characterized the 1980s and early 1990s to the current state of dynamic growth even under conditions of austerity and uncertainty. Bassett points out that in the early 1990s in Bristol there was 'the rapid emergence of new forms of public-private partnerships in the city'. As described earlier, the Labour Group in the 1980s had 'maintained much of its traditional suspicion of the local business community' (Bassett 1996: 543). However, the failure of the Council to win regeneration funds, the seeming vulnerability of the aircraft and defense industry (when the end of the Cold War led to reduced spending on weaponry and a loss of 23% of employment in this sector in the Bristol area), the inability of the council to make

progress on infrastructure projects led to the emergence of new organizations aimed at overcoming some of these problems. Bassett described the formation of The Bristol Initiative (TBI) in 1991 as an example. Sponsored by the local Confederation of British Industry (CBI) employers, TBI reached out to involve the trade unions and the Labour Party and, building on developments in the creative sector, created a Bristol Cultural Partnership which became central to the effort to broaden the base of the city away from a reliance on aerospace and financial services (Griffiths et al. 1999). Another partnership was the Western Development Partnership (WDP) which brought together businesses, employers' organizations and local councils to apply for EU funds. A new revived Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Initiative also emerged in the early 1990s together with the Bristol Regeneration partnership. Bassett argues that these initiatives were led by a new and more active elite, 'mostly high-ranking executives in the regional offices of large firms in aerospace, financial services and privatized utilities' (Bassett 1996: 547). Such activities were also encouraged by the Blair government from 1997 with its focus on bringing together public and private actors to solve problems.

From the early 2000s, these partnerships became increasingly entangled with an emerging constituency within the professional middle-class population of Bristol that, building on earlier conservationist trends in the city, began to press more strongly for developing an environmentally sustainable city. Boddy et al. in their study of Bristol published in 2011 argued that 'the complex proliferation of partnerships and networks is weakly integrated and is lacking in collaborative capacity and strategic direction' (Boddy et al. 2004: 65). In our view, however, over the decade since their research, these networks have become more established and whilst the network form per se means that these structures do not have the same capacities for quick authoritatively coordinated action as organizations, they nevertheless can become effective as the basis of an urban regime which is relatively inclusive. For example, Malpass et al. in their

study of the spread of Fair Trade in Bristol noted that whilst this was initially taken up by the local councils, ‘the steering group quickly brought together a range of other activists and interests from around the city, including faith-based activists from Christian Aid, Traidcraft and Oxfam; ethical business interests representing local firms such as Café Unlimited (a fairtrade café) and Equop (an organic fair trade clothing company); and locally based national interests such as the Triodos Bank and the Co-operative; and representatives from school and university groups’ (Malpass et al. 2007: 636). Interestingly, they also note that trade union representation was not part of this configuration of interest.

A key partnership that solidified the role of sustainability in the Bristol context was the Bristol Green Capital Partnership (BGCP). This was initially formed in 2007 with a mission to making Bristol a ‘low-carbon city with a high quality of life’ (Brownlee 2018). It was an outcome of a vision set by The Bristol Partnership – an outcome of Labour government to create Local Strategic Partnerships – which brought together the main public sector bodies, representatives of the business and voluntary sectors, creating a plan for the city called the Community Strategy 2003. It put forward a vision of Bristol becoming ‘a green capital in Europe – creating sustainable communities and improving the quality of life’ (Brownlee 2018). Based on this vision, a debate was organised in 2006 to discuss Bristol as a ‘green capital’ and, in 2007, Bristol City Council took the lead by bringing organisations across sectors together to form the foundations of BGCP. When the European Commission launched the European Green Capital Award in May 2008, Bristol City Council led a bid for the city to become Green Capital. The city was shortlisted in the first round but got no further and decided not to apply again until they felt more prepared to do so. A couple of years later under the Independent mayor, George Ferguson, well known in local and national circles for his commitment to sustainability, they applied and got selected in 2013 for the 2015 award. Bristol Green Capital Partnership became

a Community Interest Company (CIC) in 2014 and another company was formed for the year, Bristol 2015 Ltd., to support the delivery of the award, with George Ferguson as a director. One year later the company was dissolved and BGCP continued to lead the sustainability agenda in the city, entering on a new phase in January 2016 with funding from nine strategic partners of its Board of Directors and a new business model, which aims ‘to enable, help deliver, and lead the efforts of organisations in Bristol to achieve the changes needed to realise an environmentally sustainable city’ (Brownlee 2018).

BGCP currently have 836 member organisations coming from different sectors (such as, 56% private, 28% third sector, 11% voluntary and 5% public sector). Among the nine key organisations supporting its activities are Bristol City Council, the two universities in the city, Business West (the leading private sector network), Triodos (which advertises itself as an ethical bank and states that ‘By lending exclusively to organisations who put people and the planet before profits, our savers' money works to create a positive impact and real returns’) and Resource Futures (both B Corps), SusTrans, Centre for Sustainably Energy and Avon Wildlife Trust (three UK charities focused on mobility, energy and wildlife, respectively).

BGCP is recognised as ‘the largest partnership of its kind in the world’ and has in its network the main resource to drive change through the ‘power of collective action’. As they describe it, ‘Our unique network enables collaboration across public, private, and third sectors in and beyond Bristol, to realise the change needed to address the environmental sustainability challenges we face’ (Bristol Green Capital Partnership 2018).

Social enterprises which clustered around BGCP described their social values mainly in terms of issues of sustainability rather than poverty and deprivation. Their business models were therefore often forward looking in terms of how to overcome issues of energy dependence on

fossil fuels, how to encourage greater recycling, how to make the economy more local in order to avoid ‘food miles’ and dependence on outside corporates for key decision making. This perspective drew in younger people, often connected to the universities, building new hybrid social enterprises through innovative ideas linked both to technical expertise in fields like computing, internet, web design, the management of local currency systems such as the Bristol Pound[†], and also to reforming supply chains and production processes in food, coffee, craft beer, etc.. It is also a narrative that has particular appeal to politicians as it can fit neatly into the vision of an open Bristol, pushing forward internationally and locally, and developing an environment that is encouraging to innovation, entrepreneurship and mission-led businesses. It is relevant to note, however, that trade unions, although supportive of such moves, were generally not centrally involved.

In political terms, the changes in the city had led to new electoral outcomes and Labour domination of the council declined, with the growth of the Liberal Democrats resulting in a number of minority administrations during the 1990s and 2000s. Thus, at the same time that the city was creating more networks, building more businesses and generally developing for itself a new identity, the City Council appeared to be a drag on this process (Sweeting et al 2004). Not surprisingly, then, when offered the opportunity to have an elected executive mayor for the city, the electorate voted in favour. This organizational change seems to have created a stronger leadership inside the Council (Hambleton and Sweeting 2014), though party conflicts remain. Under the Labour mayor, Marvin Rees, elected in 2016, the council has played an increasing role in seeking to facilitate coordination and cooperation between the various actors and networks in the city by providing a common framework for activities built up after months

[†] The Bristol Pound is one of the largest local currencies in Europe with over 700 places in the City where it can be used. Its publicity situates it firmly as part of an alternative financial system; its latest 2018 Directory headlines one page with ‘The financial system is broken – we can fix one part of it’ and one of the articles is entitled ‘Local Currencies are a Rebellious Act’.

of consultation. Known as the Bristol One-City Plan and published in January 2019, this sets out a vision for the city in 2050 by specifying 6 priority areas in turn linked to UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development. Each area is discussed in relation to what needs to be done and what are the challenges to achieving the vision.

If we discuss this in terms of our 'urban regimes' concept, this phase of the city's development has seen a change in the employment structure towards a more skilled and diversified labour force, a newly dynamic start up and small firm sector associated with creative and digital industries (linked into global consumption chains) and with the social and green economy, the maintenance of a skilled manufacturing sector vulnerable to global trends in trade and technology and a financial and professional services sector associated with highly skilled qualified graduates. These changes have created an environment in which there are increasingly activist movements, organizations and individuals seeking to combine business goals with a commitment to sustainability and social accountability. These objectives are increasingly managed not within a council dominated by a single party but through an extended and collaborative set of networks. In terms of our interest in trade unions, their influence has dwindled because of these changes though it has not disappeared. They are one group of actors – now increasingly dependent on public sector memberships with only a few pockets of significant private sector members (mainly aerospace). The urban regime has characteristics of post-Fordism, being decentralised and networked, with a focus on building the technology of the future as the basis for further economic development. The network and partnership model in the city has involved a series of experiments and institutional innovations that have in turn been successful in embedding more deeply these new forms. Inequalities persist within the city though the language in which this is discussed is increasingly in terms of creating an inclusive and diverse economy through increasing skill levels, dispersing technological resources,

encouraging new businesses and social enterprises in deprived area. An aspect of this has also been a growing detachment from central government since 2010, reflected in part by the squeeze on funding exercised under the UK austerity plans, making it futile for the council to think in terms of significant assistance in combatting the worst consequences of these policies by gaining extra funds from government. Instead this has been seen as an opportunity for the city to strengthen its own identity not just in the UK but in various global forums for cities in which Bristol is now heavily involved.

Conclusions

The objective of this paper has been to consider how urban regimes evolve, experiment and innovate. In order to achieve this task, we argue that studies need to proceed through four steps. Firstly, it is necessary to understand the basic employment and industrial structure of an urban context. It is out of this that, secondly, a certain pattern of class and status groups emerge and become embedded in organizational forms. These actors then, thirdly, influence the policies and actions that are taken regarding key aspects of local economic development. These influences can be exerted in a variety of ways that can be illuminated by drawing on theories of power developed by authors such as Lukes (2005) and Culpepper (2011: 2015). Such theories have been predominantly applied to the national context but they are also relevant in the local context so long as they are analysed – and this is our fourth point – in terms of the particular organizational structure which exists at the local level and the capacities embedded there arising from the delegation from the central government.

Crucially, our case study reveals how the actors change over time as the industrial structure itself changes. The business elite in the early days of our analysis of Bristol was primarily local, socially connected and embedded in certain organizations such as the Merchant Venturers. By

the 2010s, the business elite was very different, partly international through membership of multinational companies, and partly local but embedded in new industries and with technical skills rather than the old form of social and cultural capital that characterized Clement's 'local notables'. Some of the old elite survived and transferred their social capital into the new era but others, particularly small manufacturers of standard goods and owners of local retail outlets were less prominent. Similarly, whereas trade unions had been central participants particularly in the Fordist era of modernizing the city and later in the conflicts over privatization in the 1980s, by the 2000s they were relatively insignificant. Instead a range of new public/private partnership organizations had risen to prominence building a new identity for the city through their activities. Just as the actors had changed, so had the key institutions and sites in which decisions had taken place. Shifting from on the one hand the privacy of the boardroom and the electoral bearpit of the council chamber, the 1990s had seen the beginnings of a process of networked governance and a slow gradual coordination of key actors around a new set of themes such as digital and creative industries, such as sustainability and the green agenda.

More broadly, our approach emphasizes that in order to understand the viability of institutional experimentation at the local level, we need to embed our approach in an understanding of the history, sociology and politics of the context and how this has evolved in response to the dynamics of global capitalism and the transformations of national states as they in turn respond to the uncertainties of markets and geopolitics (e.g. Bristol's development cannot be understood without noting the role of the world wars and the Cold War on the development of its aerospace sector). In this way, we may be able to understand better the conditions of possibility for past innovations and as crucially the capability for future institutional experimentation.

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