

Public entrepreneurship and the politics of regeneration in multi-level governance

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Abstract

The paper uses a case study of urban regeneration policy in Sheffield, UK, to explore local public entrepreneurship in a system of multi-level governance. Recent analyses of public entrepreneurs have directed attention to the macro-political structural and institutional conditions that enable and constrain these actors, and to their individual characteristics and attributes. The stress has been on the national level and on individual action at the expense of the agency of local networks of entrepreneurs. In order to address this lacuna, we consider how local policy entrepreneurs work across governance levels and develop ideas, institutional structures and support in pursuit of their goals, using Kingdon's notion of policy streams as a vehicle for our analysis. We highlight the contingent and path-dependent nature of such entrepreneurship. In particular, we identify the temporal sequencing of agenda shifts and entrepreneurial actions as a crucial aspect of the policy process.

Keywords

Public entrepreneurship, multi-level policy, policy streams, policy windows

Introduction

The dominant narrative of central–local government relations in the UK has been the power of central government to make and remake the institutional landscape and, in so doing, to erode the institutional cohesiveness, policy competences and autonomy of local political institutions (c.f. Pratchett, 2004; Wilson, 2003). However, the past two decades have also seen the advance of multi-level governance (MLG) (Keating, 2014) and increased opportunities for 'authority migration' (Broschek, 2014) to institutional actors at supra- and sub-national levels, allowing greater scope for the exercise of local autonomy. The UK's institutional regime is currently the subject of rapid restructuring. Examples of this include the rise of city regions (c.f. Deas, 2014; Etherington and Jones, 2009; Harding, 2007;

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Harrison, 2010, 2012; Jonas and Ward, 2007) and institutional innovations such as combined authorities and elected mayors. The implementation of these changes has been selective.

The paper explores one explanation for this uneven distribution of powers: *public entrepreneurship*. While the concept challenges institutionalism's limited treatment of institutional change, accounts often fail properly to locate the actions of entrepreneurs within a context of MLG, restricting our understanding of how such a setting may enable or constrain agency. In a multi-level polity – or more specifically, in policy fields that incorporate institutional actors from many sites – numerous policy processes play out across different levels and are often misaligned. Within the UK, sub-national actors have been firmly subordinate to actors at higher levels and the former are reliant on the latter for resources to devise and implement policies. MLG is a potential alternative source of mobilization by sub-national actors (Marshall, 2005, 2006). Successful entrepreneurship thus depends on how well actors operate within and across governmental levels and the ways in which particular policy ideas are perceived at particular junctures across these levels.

The paper examines the restructuring of the institutional regime governing central–local relations. It presents a case study of Sheffield's entrepreneurial actions in the field of urban regeneration. The study demonstrates the importance of entrepreneurial activities, such as lobbying, policy framing and institutional development, in producing institutional and policy change within a system of MLG. However, while we acknowledge the importance of entrepreneurial actions in explaining such change, we also point to the contingent and path-dependent nature of such entrepreneurship. In particular, we identify the temporal sequencing of agenda shifts across governmental levels as a crucial aspect of the policy process. Overall then, we explore the dynamic relationship between strategic agency and contingent opportunity structures.

The paper has three parts. First, we review the concept of public entrepreneurship, drawing attention to the strategies available to entrepreneurs and to the institutional constraints that limit action. In the second part, we analyze the latter by exploring the implications of MLG from Kingdon's (1995) multiple streams perspective. The third part presents a case study of public entrepreneurship in Sheffield. We describe how a policy for regenerating the city centre was developed; how actors within the council fostered an elite consensus in the city and how they engaged in brokerage, lobbying, and institution building to obtain greater funding. We demonstrate the significance of alignments of national and European policy windows for public entrepreneurs working across levels of governance. We conclude by considering the contingent nature of entrepreneurial activities, stressing that the scope for entrepreneurial agency is tempered by complex interrelations between institutional structures¹ and agent-level factors.

Public entrepreneurialism in MLG

Variants of institutionalism – particularly of the historical or rational choice kind – have been criticized for having only a weak account of how rapid institutional change occurs (Weyland, 2008). Institutional lock-in is assumed to arise from path dependence or dysfunctional equilibria, breaks from both of which are difficult (Sheingate, 2014; Weyland, 2008). Recently, more nuanced explanations have been developed of how processes institutions change over time (Beland, 2007; Lewis and Steinmo, 2012; Orren and Showronek, 2004; Thelen, 2004; Van der Heijden, 2011). However, the role of individual agency within institutional and policy change remains weakly specified (Oborn et al., 2011). Despite this, public entrepreneurs² are seen as important influences on policy

outcomes within MLG. They are a source of variation within policy subsystems and their activities weaken or even undermine deterministic models of analysis (Schneider and Teske, 1993: 725). They disrupt the status quo by offering policy solutions to extant but hitherto neglected policy problems or by pursuing new policy initiatives.

For Ostrom (2005a: 1), *public* entrepreneurship 'is a particular form of leadership focused primarily on problem solving and putting heterogeneous processes together in complementary and effective ways'. Kingdon's (1995: 204) influential perspective sees *policy* entrepreneurship as a form of policy advocacy, with entrepreneurs conceived as agents 'willing to invest their resources in return for future policies they favor' (Kingdon, 1995: 204). Whichever interpretation is adopted, the nature and actions of entrepreneurs may be critical influences on institutional development and policy adoption and change (Ostrom, 2005b). They are involved in various stages of the policy process, from innovating and designing ideas to implementing or institutionalizing them (Roberts and King, 1991: 150).

Political economists conceptualize public entrepreneurs in terms of market actors who are 'alert' to extant opportunities or opportunities that can be created within existing structures (Holcombe, 2002; Schneider and Teske, 1993: 725; Schneider et al., 1995: 44, 48; Wohlgemuth, 2000). Such actors anticipate changes already in development or seek to generate them themselves or with others (see below). While profit is the predominant motive of private sector entrepreneurs, the drivers of public entrepreneurship are different. The primary aim of a politician may be reduced to vote maximization, but bureaucratic and executive entrepreneurs are generally claimed to have more dispersed and ambiguous motivations. They may wish to advance the 'public interest' or they may focus on more direct organizational imperatives, such as increasing or diversifying their funding streams (Perkmann, 2007: 867) to gain greater autonomy and less uncertainty for their organizations (Carpenter, 2001; Klein et al., 2010; Lowndes, 2005). Entrepreneurial activities are hence likely to occur in response to changes in the external environment, such as '...basic knowledge, available technologies, social conditions, or performance of the existing repertoire of private and public institutions' (Oliver and Paul-Shaheen, 1997: 747–748; see also Morris and Jones, 1999; Zerbinati and Souitaris, 2005). But personal motivations such as career enhancement may also influence behaviour (Bernier and Hafsi, 2007: 490).

The unit of analysis for public entrepreneurship ranges from the individual up to the organizational or even inter-organizational level. Early studies of entrepreneurship were focused on the actions of heroic 'individuals who change the direction and flow of politics' (Schneider and Teske, 1992: 737). But such a role could also be performed by groups or teams within organizations (Morris and Jones, 1999: 73; Phillips and Tracey, 2007: 315; Teixeira and Silva, 2012: 335; Wenger, 1998), or entire organizations that are trying to win advantage across levels of governance (see Hederer, 2007; Perkmann, 2007; Roberts and King, 1996). A more organization-focused approach to entrepreneurship underscores the importance of group learning (Roberts and King, 1996: 165) and the succession of entrepreneurial actors over time. Oliver and Paul-Shaheen (1997: 746) describe public entrepreneurship as an 'internal team process' whereby policies are developed by weaving existing ideas together rather than by appropriating a prototype offered by external policy entrepreneurs.

While public entrepreneurs are similar to economic entrepreneurs in some respects – for example, opportunity recognition, risk taking, networking and social skills, reputation, providing a strategic vision, and so on – actors within state structures operate in fundamentally different institutional contexts (Carpenter, 2001; Christopoulos, 2006; Fligstein, 2001; Hederer, 2007; Scellenbach, 2007). They face a number of distinct

obstacles. Their activities are governed by political and electoral cycles and are subject to other forms of political interference (Morris and Jones, 1999: 79). They are also confronted with a fragmented system of governance, which offers both challenges and opportunities. In a system of MLG, resources are distributed between many actors. As issues grow more complex 'we expect [entrepreneurial] groups to supplant individuals as the primary unit of analysis' (Roberts and King, 1996: 162). In this context, (individual) leadership involves brokerage across governance levels, fostering the development of innovative ideas within organizations and 'setting priorities, undertaking interorganizational initiatives where appropriate, and encouraging and rewarding actors for their contributions' (Bernier and Hafsi, 2007: 494). Our case study illustrates this interaction between individual and group public entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial strategic action at the local level

Local-level public entrepreneurs engage in numerous activities that resemble those of economic actors: institutional strategy making, opportunity discovery/recognition and anticipatory action (i.e. timing), as well as advocacy and/or brokerage (Pollitt, 2008: 127; Roberts and King, 1991: 148). Public entrepreneurs hence engage in forms of institutional bricolage, drawing together resources from diverse sources to produce unexpected results (Lowndes, 2005; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Phillips and Tracey, 2007). They may seek to mobilize collaborative action around their policy, which may help to resolve collective action problems (Bernier and Hafsi, 2007; François, 2003; Hederer, 2007; Holcombe, 2002; Ostrom, 1990; Schneider and Teske, 1992).

Local-level public entrepreneurs employ numerous, often complementary strategies.³ First, they may try to change the 'rules of the game', by creating or implementing 'new laws, administrative procedures, informal norms' (Klein et al., 2010) and other forms of lobbying (Klein Woolthuis et al., 2013). They may also engage in institution building (Bernier and Hafsi, 2007; Lewis, 1980; Perkmann, 2007) or institutional transformation (Fligstein, 1997). This entails constructing formal and informal networks or organizational structures (e.g. building bureaus) (Roberts and King, 1991: 151). Entrepreneurs may also seek to engage in institutional adaptation, conversion and layering or recombination (Beland, 2007; Thelen, 2004; Van der Heijden, 2011).

Beyond formal institutions, entrepreneurs may try to mediate ideas and discourses within and between policy communities across tiers of government and epistemic communities (Bakir, 2009; Broschek, 2014). Entrepreneurs can engage in discursive agenda setting by seeking to frame policy debates around particular ideas (Beland, 2007; David, 2015; Schmidt, 2010). For example, they may try to build a coalition and facilitate cooperation around a specific vision (Carpenter, 2001; Klein Woolthuis et al., 2013: 94). Alternatively, as Keddie and Smith (2009) emphasize, subnational actors may seek to influence policy agendas at higher levels of government by offering alternative formulations of the problem-policy relationship (policy images, *pace* Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). Finally, they may engage in 'venue shopping' (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993) for their favoured ideas: a search across levels of governance for the most receptive arena within which to pursue their policy objectives (c.f. Beyers and Kerremans, 2012; Coen and Thatcher, 2008; Guiraudon, 2000; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009; Princen and Kerremans, 2008). While a particular policy image may be accepted in one venue, it may be rejected in another, affecting the success of a policy initiative (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 31-32).

Public entrepreneurs hence work across levels of governance, seeking to shift and/or frame policy images which resonate with the preoccupations of relevant institutional actors

(see Bakir, 2009; Beeson and Stone, 2013; Daviter, 2009; Oborn et al., 2011; Riker, 1986). They try to build coalitions around their framing(s) and engage in lobbying strategies to achieve their objectives (David, 2015; Klein Woolthuis et al., 2013). Successful entrepreneurs are likely to have ‘political know-how’ and ‘persistence’ (Beeson and Stone, 2013: 4).

Recent analyses of public entrepreneurs have directed attention to the macro politico-institutional conditions that enable and constrain these actors, as well as to their individual characteristics and attributes (Christopoulos, 2006; Pierson, 2004: 155; Scellenbach, 2007). What has been given less attention is the potential agency of local networks of entrepreneurs within a system of MLG. In order to address this lacuna, we focus on the relationships that enable and inhibit entrepreneurship. In particular, we consider how local-level public entrepreneurs – both individuals and groups – work across institutional levels and weave together agendas, institutions and policy at a local level (see also Lowndes, 2005: 305). Because of the complexity of this institutional setting, we use Kingdon’s (1995) notion of policy streams as a vehicle for our analysis of this aspect of MLG.

Policy streams and MLG

Within MLG, urban governance is an important intersection where competing policy preferences, styles and processes must be integrated by local actors to produce coherent, implementable policies. However, the greater interconnectedness of policy networks does not mean that policy goals are shared. Differences between actors’ interests and priorities, and between problem definitions and solutions, may exist (Kokx and Van Kempen, 2010). It is here that local public entrepreneurs are important, but their scope for action is affected by the opportunities and constraints posed by operating in a system of MLG.

In trying to understand how policy agendas are formed, Kingdon (1995) sought to avoid the reification of policy problems and specified a logical (temporal) ordering for how these problems are addressed. There is an excess of issues that could conceivably be the subject of policy, yet few can receive attention. This led Kingdon to set out three ‘policy streams’ that may influence the selection, definition, development, sorting and matching of problems and policies.

1. **Problems:** Flowing through the ‘problem’ stream is a series of ‘conditions’ that policy makers want to address. However, not all conditions become problems (Zahariadis, 2007: 71). Some issues are not considered problems until they are perceived as such by policy makers when indicators (e.g. school league tables, murder rates, unemployment figures) are published and political entrepreneurs, academics, interest groups or the media (among others) frame the issue as a ‘problem’, explain its causes and, thereby, make it actionable.
2. **Policies:** In this stream, various ideas for resolving social problems are generated by policy specialists operating in policy communities (including academics, think tanks, bureaucrats, etc.). It is here that policy entrepreneurs (see below) are active. Adopting an evolutionary perspective on policy development, Kingdon (1995) argues that emerging policies will only be adopted if they fit with dominant values and the national mood, attain political support (or avoid opposition), prove technically feasible and are affordable.
3. **Politics:** This stream consists of factors such as changes in government or legislation, the effects of interest group lobbying and changes in national mood. Exworthy et al. (2002: 84) state that these factors ‘are influenced by bargaining, consensus building, coalitions and compromises’.

Kingdon argued that these three streams, while not completely autonomous, have a degree of independence until they are ‘coupled’ when a *policy window* opens. It is at this point that choice is made in a political system. Such opportunities may be prompted by – or prompt – ‘focusing events’ or the actions of public entrepreneurs. While there may be no shortage of potential entrepreneurs in a policy environment, their success is contingent on a mix of connections, negotiating skills and expertise (Oborn et al., 2011: 328).

Kingdon’s insights were originally focused on the Congress and the apex of the American political system. The past decade has seen an increased interest in adapting and applying Kingdon’s insights to levels beyond central government.⁴ For example, Exworthy et al. (2002) in their analysis of health policy within the UK demonstrate that policy windows open (and close) independently at central and local levels of government. Such accounts argue against simplistic top-down analyses of policy formation, offering the potential for local-level actors to influence the development of policy agendas (see also Exworthy and Powell, 2004; Greenaway et al., 2007: 723–724; Oborn et al., 2011; Petchey et al., 2008).

Applied to public entrepreneurship within MLG, success in changing the policy agenda is more likely when the three policy streams are joined across three institutional dimensions: ‘the vertical (central-local) dimension; the central horizontal dimension and the horizontal (local-local) dimension’ (Exworthy and Powell, 2004: 268–269; and the European level of policy introduces added complexity). Oborn et al. (2011: 328) note that the complexity of multiple policy streams across MLG means that a coalition of entrepreneurs is required spanning different levels. Similarly, we argue that local actors can be more than shapers of policy handed down from above, but to a degree that is dependent on the entrepreneurial skills of such actors. We therefore examine the capacity for local public entrepreneurs to operate ‘strategically within a system which offers a range of possible locations to pursue their objectives’ (Laffin, 2009: 24).

The empirical base of this paper is a case study of Sheffield City Council. Sheffield was chosen because it is a local authority that has successfully developed novel regeneration policies and secured resources from a range of sources to fund them. It has been widely cited in urban regeneration and planning practice as an exemplar of entrepreneurial leadership (Booth, 2005; Crouch and Scott Hill, 2004; Dabinett, 2004, 2005; Lyons Report, 2007). This reputation has seen other cities in the UK seek to emulate its approach to regeneration. This makes an examination of Sheffield’s experience significant, not least because it demonstrates how its success was critically shaped by the timing of agenda alignments across levels of governance.

Our research aim was to explore local agency within the context of MLG. The overarching research question was: ‘To what extent are local actors, in particular local authorities, able successfully to coordinate different policy frameworks following the advance of MLG?’

To address the complex nature of this question, a semi-inductive (Eisenhardt, 1989), grounded approach was adopted to construct a case study. Our goal was to understand how actors developed a specific problem frame and then sought to mobilize resources for action across multiple levels of government. We do not claim strong external validity for our findings because our study was principally exploratory in nature, with the findings contributing to theory building (Gerring, 2004; Stake, 1999; Yin, 2009: 17). The initial focus was not on entrepreneurship or policy windows; these emerged as themes from our interview data.

The case study draws upon interviews with more than 70 actors in Sheffield and in regional organizations over two phases: 2002–4 and 2008–9. The interviewees were identified via a mixture of purposive (selecting individuals on the basis of their

organizational role, such as directors of regeneration), chain-referral ('snowball') and convenience approaches (Kapiszewski et al., 2015; Lynch, 2013). The lead researcher used his judgement when he felt that saturation point had been reached. The interviewees included actors in the local authority (including leading members of the council from the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties; the then Chief Executive, Bob Kerslake; and other senior Council officers and members), businessmen, community representatives from across the voluntary sector and officers from the then Government Office for Yorkshire and Humber, the Regional Development Agency (Yorkshire Forward), and the South Yorkshire Objective 1 Directorate. Interviews varied in length (the shortest lasted 40 min, the longest over 3 h). The interviews took place at the offices of the individuals being interviewed.

All the interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed to identify common themes and emerging issues, prior to further analysis and interpretation (see Charmaz, 2001; Guest et al., 2012). The study was also informed by analysis of policy documents from European, national, regional and local levels such as programme documents, local 'vision' documents, strategies and plans. Our data analysis strategy was similar to that adopted by Oborn et al. (2011), which was to utilize applied thematic analysis to identifying the existence of policy windows and the actions of entrepreneurs. Consistent with a grounded theory approach, open, axial and selective coding techniques were employed to begin the process of labelling phenomena, developing categories and assembling data in new ways after coding, before then establishing connections between categories (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Axial coding helped establish the context and causal conditions while selective coding established the final key themes.

The findings from the initial phase of research were presented to practitioners (including the key public entrepreneur, Kerslake, at a dissemination event in 2007 before the second round of interviews commenced). This enabled the researchers to consider the reliability of the initial findings.

Regenerating the heart of the steel city

The problem: City centre decline

As part of its response to post-industrial decline, Sheffield sought to foster closer links with the private sector through public-private partnerships (Harding, 1991) after a period of radical policy experimentation in the early 1980s (see Catney, 2009; Lawless, 1990; Seyd, 1990). This reconciliation between public and private actors was reflected in various institutional innovations, the first being the Sheffield Economic Regeneration Committee (SERC), established in 1987. SERC was comprised of representatives from the local authority, the private sector, trade unions, higher education and the regional offices of government departments. In response to the financially disastrous World Student Games, the then Leader of the City Council, Mike Bower, pushed for further collaboration through the launch of the City Liaison Group (CLG) in 1992 (see DiGaetano and Lawless, 1999: 563–569; Henry and Paramio-Scalcines, 1999: 648–649). Compared with SERC, the CLG, while still led by the City Council, was more of a genuine partnership with the private sector. The significance of these institutional developments was that they facilitated the construction of a coalition within the city in pursuit of a pro-growth policy agenda. More concretely, it was through the CLG that the idea of a strategic masterplan for the city centre would be adopted (see below). Analytically, SERC and CLG were examples of early forms of institutional entrepreneurship and were forums within which ideas and support for regeneration focused on the city centre could be cultivated.

The emphasis on property-led regeneration by the UK national government was to play an important – if unintentional – part in (re)defining the ‘problem’ of city centre regeneration in Sheffield. The creation of an Urban Development Corporation (UDC) in the late 1980s was of particular significance.⁵ Initially, relations between Sheffield City Council and its UDC were problematic because the Council felt that it was being undercut by an unelected quango inserted into local development by a hostile national (Conservative) government (Booth, 2005). Consequently, Sheffield Development Corporation’s (SDC) initiatives were not properly embedded in city-wide regeneration plans. In particular, the £240m invested in the Meadowhall shopping development, which opened in 1990, accelerated the decline of the city centre’s retail sector (Lawless, 1994: 1307). This presented the nascent CLG with a clear problem to address: the decline of the city centre.

An early response to this problem was the *Sheffield Central Area Study*, which analyzed the retail and office base of the city, in 1992 (Lawless, 1994) and was sponsored by the City Council and the Sheffield Chamber of Commerce. Later, in 1994, the Council and the SDC commissioned a retail study that informed the revision of the Sheffield Unitary Development Plan. Both studies argued that Sheffield’s growth was hampered by an inadequate supply of modern retail and office space and that the city centre had failed to secure its share of new investment (Sheffield City Council, 2002). Their findings were crucial in shaping the definition of the problem and solution in Sheffield: that to promote economic growth it was necessary to redevelop the city centre. However, the Council did not have the resources to do this. A clearly worked out policy that addressed this key issue had to be developed by policy entrepreneurs in Sheffield.

The policy: City centre regeneration

The concept of an integrated regeneration strategy, called the ‘Heart of the City’, was developed by actors within the urban development team of the City Council in 1994. Its focus – to stimulate economic regeneration through a comprehensive city-centre redevelopment strategy – was initially met with scepticism by political actors and senior managers within the council, not least because it came only a few years after the financially crippling investment in the World Student Games in 1991 (see Henry and Paramio-Scalcines, 1999). One former council officer (interview, 2008) outlined the reaction of senior officers and politicians:

We showed it [an outline proposal for the scheme] to senior members and they said to me “Who gave you permission to think of this?” [...] because they were frightened. Confidence was at rock bottom, the city was virtually bankrupt, they weren’t interested in any big scale schemes. So they said to us “You can do it [Heart of the City] as long as it doesn’t cost us any money. You can spend everybody else’s money, but none of ours,” which is not a very easy sell to outside funders.

To develop the concept the City Council again engaged in institution building, establishing a special purpose body called the Sheffield Development Agency, a small group operating within the local authority. In conjunction with the SDC, it produced *A New City – Sheffield’s City Centre Strategy*, a report which put forward the concept of a comprehensive city centre focused redevelopment strategy (Webster and Howard, 1996). In many respects, the work of these actors anticipated the development of urban regeneration companies (URCs, see below). The concept of the ‘Heart of the City’ underpinned Sheffield’s bid (SCC, 1995) to the second round of the National Lottery-funded Millennium Commission grant scheme. The city was awarded £20.5 million in 1997 in contrast to its first round bid that was rejected for being ill-defined and speculative (Webster and Howard, 1996).

A key group of public entrepreneurs in the early stages of the initiative was the Council's City Development Agency. It identified three projects for the first phase: the Peace Gardens, the Millennium Galleries and the Winter Gardens. These developments would create a high-quality public realm and support the 're-branding' of the city. However, the supply of finance necessary to meet the scale of these ambitions was lacking. Between 1995 and 1997, apart from the Millennium Commission grant, Sheffield obtained only relatively small-scale funding from national sources such as the Single Regeneration Budget to support initial development work.⁶ However, the Council was concerned that the discrete, ad hoc nature of such monies would inhibit an ambitious integrated development scheme for the whole city centre and risk a reversion to isolated, small-scale projects. Public entrepreneurs within the city needed an individual who could lead and co-ordinate their activities and enter 'the market for financial funds' (Hederer, 2007: 10), brokering agreements with an array of actors across governance levels.

The politics: Exploiting a window of opportunity

In 1997 two critical events occurred. In April, Sheffield City Council appointed a new Chief Executive, Bob Kerslake, and a month later the (New) Labour Party came to power at Westminster. These changes in the local and national 'politics streams' created the potential for aligning policy windows at both levels and, ultimately, they played a decisive role in Sheffield's regeneration strategy. We analyze these developments in turn.

Leadership and consensus building. Interviewees from across the public, private and voluntary sectors agreed that it was Kerslake's leadership that provided the focus around which all the various initiatives could be related. The co-ordination of urban policy in the city was essentially delegated to him and his officers. Kerslake was an effective boundary spanner and consensus builder at the local level and in national policy networks. Apart from being the Chief Executive, Kerslake had many other roles in the city region, including those of director of the sub-regional passenger transport executive, vice chair of the Sheffield local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and member of South Yorkshire Partnership. Nationally, he also became a non-executive Board member at the Department for Communities and Local Government.⁷

Kerslake's ability to act as a public entrepreneur was, however, contingent on the support of politicians on the City Council. Interviewees pointed to the importance of the Labour Leader Jan Wilson's support for Kerslake's activities, given the reservations of some Labour Members (Catney, 2009). Following the fall of the Labour administration in the city, the leader of the Liberal Democrats on the council also supported the emerging policy agenda and institution building within the city. A number of interviewees (including Liberal Democrat councillors) stated that the strategy was maintained in part because of central government policy pushes, but also because of Kerslake's close association with the project. A community activist in the city supported this view (interview, 2008):

[...] it's easy to say with hindsight that he did more what government wanted, but that's where you get your resources from. If he hadn't, you know, there'd have been no money and he wouldn't have been able to do anything. I mean I have heard criticisms that he was in charge of running the council and not elected members. [...] but, you know, I remember Jan Wilson saying to me "Well, he brings home the bacon," you know.

Kerslake was generally considered to have three key qualities. First, he was a modernizer of the local authority and significantly altered the structure and staff of the City Council. One senior business actor in the city (interview, 2008) argued:

The influence of Bob was incredible in turning the council round from a pretty dull, inward looking, dying organisation that was skint into a much... [better] functioning organisation, a lot better, but also much more attuned to regeneration and there's been quite a culture change. [...] Bob's leadership and, you know, one or two other people around within the city ... was absolutely vital.

Second, he strengthened the elite consensus within the city around the development agenda, essentially depoliticizing regeneration. Third, he built central government confidence by working across government levels. A broad sweep of interviewees pointed to Kerslake's importance in providing leadership. Indeed, the quality of local leadership provided from Sheffield City Council had an important influence on the effectiveness with which these initiatives and governmental units were woven together, as the final evaluation of Sheffield One made clear (Evans et al., 2007: para 11.43 and 11.44). In Sheffield, the engagement of organizations such as English Partnerships, Yorkshire Forward, Network Rail and so on, was essential in providing the resources necessary for the successful delivery of a complex set of redevelopment projects. Interviewees described the key role played by Kerslake in creating a strong sense of trust between network participants.

The successful delivery of regeneration projects in the city resulted in the growth in the confidence of both the public and private sectors. This confidence was part of a positive feedback cycle which reinforced the policy agenda and strengthened the linkages between levels of governance. As the projects took shape, Yorkshire Forward and other public organizations started to have more faith in the ability of the city to deliver its increasingly ambitious agenda for the city, particularly with regard to public realm improvements (interview, councillor, 2008).

In essence, Kerslake assumed the role of a 'credible' local public entrepreneur (Schneider and Teske, 1993: 725). Sheffield's policy had already been developed by a group of entrepreneurs before Kerslake's arrival. However, these actors lacked resources. The extent to which Kerslake and Sheffield City Council were successful in drawing down resources from other levels of government is a critical factor here. Sheffield proved adept at anticipating (and partially shaping) national regeneration policy and then at exploiting opportunities at supra-local levels as they arose. It is to these activities that we now turn.

New labour and the 'Urban Renaissance'. Developing a local policy consensus and building institutions only goes so far in explaining Sheffield's success. Without a change in the national politics stream, it is unlikely that the scale of the regeneration achieved in the city would have been possible. The election of Tony Blair's Labour government provided a window within which to align local/national/supra-national policy. Labour was committed to regenerating Britain's cities, particularly what was termed the 'core cities'⁸ most of which were in the party's heartlands. But the focus on cities was not simply a political calculation but was part of broader policy learning about cities' contribution to national economic competitiveness. National government under Labour was extremely receptive to a policy image that advocated large-scale and concentrated investment in cities.

The change in the policy image was evident at both national and European levels by 1999. It was in that year that the Urban Task Force (DETR, 1999) recommended the development of URCs to spearhead regeneration. Its report integrated strands of thinking inside government and parts of the regeneration community (both academic and practitioner)

about the physical (re)development of city centres, something with which the actors in the City Council were fully attuned. The proposal to establish URCs dovetailed with the emerging policy practice in Sheffield where the focus on city development and partnership structures was already emerging (see above and Catney, 2009). As one senior council officer (interview, 2008) stated:

I think like many of those things it's *all in the timing*, I suppose. The first catalyst was the new Labour government had come in and it commissioned Richard Rogers to do a report – you know, the urban renaissance task force [...] and that recommended area based [...] dedicated bodies and the city was already fairly content with that sort of model because the city had realised probably a number of years... well, quite a few years before... (emphasis added)

Sheffield One was launched in February 2000 as one of three initial URCs. For Sheffield, it was a natural extension of the work undertaken by the CLG and the Sheffield Development Agency. The URC was essentially a partnership between Sheffield City Council, English Partnerships and Yorkshire Forward. There was also significant private sector representation on the board. It had a fixed life of seven years. Its remit was to concentrate resources on the redevelopment of the city centre and to integrate regeneration activities, an approach Sheffield had been advocating for several years. Sheffield One worked with already established themes and initiatives in the city (such as the 'Heart of the City') developed by the City Council and, successively, SERC, the CLG and the Sheffield City Development Agency (SCDA). Consequently, there was a substantial degree of continuity in the city's agenda; an agenda that had anticipated shifts in national government policy.

One of the first acts of Sheffield One was to commission a baseline study of local economic conditions (property markets, transport, land use and so on), from which a 'Masterplan' was developed in conjunction with the City Council. The plan, launched in February 2001, focused on the implementation of a series of strategic projects that became known as the 'magnificent seven'⁹ (Evans et al., 2007: para. 1.9). Its lineage – building on the City Centre Strategy of 1994 and the 'Heart of the City' – was clear. The Masterplan provided the framework for the regeneration of the city centre over the next decade and beyond. In terms of public entrepreneurship, the masterplan was helpful in building the confidence of the private sector and performed a useful function as a marketing device (Evans et al., 2007: para. 3.22), as well as providing a similar role within state organizations.

...with some justification, Sheffield was [considered] a bit of a butterfly. You know, sort of "Can we have money for this? Can we have money for that?" and what the Masterplan did – all the masterplans do – is set out a coherent picture. (Senior manager, Sheffield One, interview, 2008)

Sheffield's anticipation of changes in national policy¹⁰ and its exploitation of the opportunities that subsequently arose were not entirely serendipitous. The first regeneration minister in the Labour government was a Sheffield MP, Richard Caborn, who provided signals to local public entrepreneurs that enabled Sheffield to anticipate and to influence national policy:

Richard's office was right next to Sheffield City Development Agency's office [...] and he used to tell us what was going on and obviously he contacted the city council and he said "This is the big thing and we want to be going for it," and we were saying the same thing. (Senior council officer, 2009)

Entrepreneurial success is greatly aided by recruiting influential insiders who are involved in agenda building (Oliver and Paul-Shaheen, 1997). Here, the insider helped local actors by

providing information on the direction of national governmental agendas and the potential opportunities that might arise for the city. But Sheffield also benefited from the activities of the lobbying of the Core Cities network, which kept the interests of cities like Sheffield on the policy agenda. Public entrepreneurship was not, however, an activity confined to central–local relations; the European level was also an important focus of Sheffield’s activities.

Objective 1: A European policy window opens. In the late 1990s a second supra-local window opened at the European level at the same time that local institution building and shifts in policy agendas were taking place. In July 2000, the European Union designated South Yorkshire as an area qualifying for Objective 1 structural funds. Over a six-year period, the sub-region would receive £700 million. Sheffield’s city centre was identified as an engine of growth for the wider region. It was given its own Objective 1 measure (‘Measure 28’) and a funding allocation of around £35 million (Sheffield One, 2001: 3) to stimulate investment and to create regional competitiveness and growth through support for major capital projects in the city centre. Several interviewees claimed that Measure 28 was the result of the European Union’s receptivity to Sheffield’s framing of the city centre as the core of the sub-region’s economy.¹¹

...if your city centre, which is your biggest, single economic driver, isn’t driving, then by default your city and your city regions are not going to perform as well economically. *That’s the argument we were pushing and, interestingly, the European Commission were pushing that as well.* [...] Sheffield had to fight very hard for that within South Yorkshire and the European Commission were saying on the early stuff that had gone in to them, “But where’s your city centre, your biggest economic driver?” and “You are ignoring it.” [...] that argument was bought. (interview, regeneration officer, 2009; emphasis added)

There is also evidence in the Objective 1 negotiations that European and local actors operated together to redefine the policy image and persuade national government to accept the measure:

At the same time [as we were working on the Sheffield One Masterplan] we wrote an integrated development plan, which was required by the Objective 1 programme, and we were successful in persuading Brussels. ... In fact, in some ways it was Brussels persuading the UK government that we should have a dedicated measure for Sheffield centre itself. (Senior regeneration manager, Sheffield City Council, 2008)

This echoes Princen and Kerremans’ (2008: 1139–1140) insight that ‘...political actors can “jump scales” by constructing a new scale for a given issue. In doing so, they [...] open new opportunities for themselves ...’ A similar redefinition of the policy image took place within the Objective 1 programme to the benefit of Sheffield. In short, a significant aspect of Sheffield’s success was its ability to exploit the opportunities offered to align European, national and local policy images in the policy window that opened in 1997–2000. As a result of the local public entrepreneurs’ activities, Sheffield One was able to draw funding from Objective 1 and use it in conjunction with capital funding from Yorkshire Forward and various other sources: a form of entrepreneurial bricolage.

However, the EU was not just a source of finance. Objective 1 allowed Sheffield to be more innovative and adventurous in its approach to urban design and regeneration in the city centre.

...some of the things we’ve done around public realm we had more support from our European colleagues who saw the benefit of that, knowing what had been done in other European cities,

than we did necessarily from UK bodies who were very reluctant to think money should go into public spaces – because [they would ask] “where’s the direct economic output from doing X square”? (senior regeneration manager at Sheffield City Council, interview, 2008)

Objective 1’s role was widely acknowledged by interviewees as crucial to the success of the regeneration of the city centre. In the early phases, Objective 1 (as well as National Lottery and Single Regeneration Budget) funding was critical in providing support for projects where the private sector felt that the investment risks were too high (Evans et al., 2007: 3.31).

2008–2010: The closing of policy windows. In pursuing their activities, public entrepreneurs within the city were conscious that the window of opportunity to align local, national and European policy was temporary. This reinforced their desire to coordinate funding streams in support of city centre redevelopment in an effective and timely way. The opening and closing of policy windows is not always obvious and is sometimes only evident after the fact. The ending of some opportunities – such as the termination of a specified funding stream like Objective 1 – is predictable (Howlett, 1998). The closing of other windows by economic and political factors is more difficult to foresee. The credit crunch, the subsequent recession and the change to a Coalition government in 2010 fundamentally altered the policy context. And Sheffield’s agenda changed.

Kerslake left the Council and Sheffield One came to the end of its operational life in 2007. The latter was replaced by a new city development agency, Creative Sheffield, that framed the problems of regeneration in the city more widely than its predecessor, both in terms of geographical scale (it has a broader focus than just the city centre) and in terms of ‘solutions’ that focus more on the development of the skills of the local workforce and on environmental sustainability.

Conclusion

Public entrepreneurship is a critical aspect of the explanation for variation in the policy process because it reintroduces notions of agency into institutional theory where equilibrium and path dependence have been stressed (Garud et al., 2007; Weyland, 2008). Public entrepreneurs operate reflectively and strategically within the governance structures that frame their actions. They must be alert to opportunities: opportunities presented by extant circumstances, opportunities to create new organizational structures, opportunities arising from changes in the external environment and from preparation for or anticipation of such changes. Public entrepreneurs work on the identification of policy problems, the development of policy solutions and their linkage in policy images that attract political support and, hence, capture resources. However, such activities are not in and of themselves sufficient to explain success. Agency must also be set within the context of the wider structural and institutional context in which public entrepreneurs are located (Sheingate, 2014). In the context of this paper, we have highlighted the importance of MLG as a source of constraint but also of opportunity. Would-be public entrepreneurs seeking to achieve policy change have to engage with actors and institutions with different ideas and interests to either champion a particular idea and/or opportunistically await the coming of a particular idea’s time (*pace* Kingdon). Through an adaption of Kingdon’s approach, it can be claimed that success is most likely when the three policy streams are joined across vertical and horizontal dimensions between and within local, regional, national and supra-national levels of governance (Exworthy and Powell, 2004: 268–269).

The institutional framework within the UK has traditionally strongly mitigated against local agency. However, forms of public entrepreneurship can and do exist. Local entrepreneurs have sought to build their institutions' capacity and autonomy. But the success of such endeavours is influenced by their timing. Entrepreneurial agents utilize the resources at their disposal to exploit the opportunities offered by the opening of policy windows (Mintron, 2000; Princen and Kerremans, 2008: 1131). But the extent to which such endeavours are successful is to a large degree contingent on the wider political and institutional context being amenable to the idea being proffered; the ability of the same public/policy entrepreneur to exert influence can vary considerably across time and different policy issues (Beeson and Stone, 2013).

The paper describes how public entrepreneurship was exercised in Sheffield over two decades. The process was emergent and contingent but nevertheless demonstrates some fundamental aspects of local policy agency. Within the local area, institutional layering was evident with the development of local institutions such as SERC (1987), CLG (1992) and, especially, SCDA (1994), which paved the way for Sheffield One (2000), a pathfinder URC. Similarly, Sheffield One's Masterplan (2001) was based upon the SCDA's 'Heart of the City' proposals that were, in turn, underpinned by a consensus for city centre regeneration between political and business elites and senior bureaucrats (a local-local action initiated by CLG). Thus, the groundwork was undertaken by a group of local policy entrepreneurs. However, the installation of an effective individual public entrepreneur (Kerslake) was essential for further progress.

Most studies of public entrepreneurship assume a top-down policy process and focus on individual actors. Our analysis of Sheffield demonstrates how agency was exercised by both groups and an individual through anticipatory action, inter-organizational networking, lobbying and the acquisition of knowledge through central government linkages. The Sheffield case illustrates the recursive nature of public entrepreneurship: The city's success in defining a clear, widely accepted policy image, in building institutions and in accessing funds facilitated further rounds of effective action as national government actors' confidence grew in the capability of Sheffield's local institutions. It also demonstrates how public entrepreneurs may exploit the European perspective to shape the prevailing policy image in a way that fits with their own strategic goals. Public entrepreneurship has elements that are reflective and strategic, on the one hand, and serendipitous and uncontrollable, on the other. But without the former, the opportunities presented by the later may not be exploited.

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Notes

1. Recent institutional theory (e.g. Bakir, 2013) distinguishes between structures – the broader contexts within which institutions and agents are embedded – and institutions – formal and informal rules that guide the behaviour of agents through the logic of appropriateness and instrumentality. In this paper, we adopt a simpler framework that focuses on agents' actions within (mainly formal) institutional/organizational structures.
2. Taxonomies have proliferated in the literature, reflecting the capacious nature of the concept. François (2003) contrasts political entrepreneurs (politicians) with 'state producers' (bureaucrats) whereas Scellenbach (2007) distinguishes between political entrepreneurs, who are individuals who promote non-incremental changes in political paradigms, and policy entrepreneurs, who are concerned with implementing novel policies. Roberts and King (1991: 151) distinguish between 'policy entrepreneurs', 'political entrepreneurs', 'programme entrepreneurs', 'bureaucratic entrepreneurs', 'administrative and executive entrepreneurs' and 'issue entrepreneurs'. Campbell (2004) and Fligstein (1997), among others, add the term 'institutional entrepreneurship'. These are important distinctions. In this paper, we focus on 'bureaucratic' or 'executive' entrepreneurs. However, for the sake of clarity, we use the general term 'public entrepreneurs' throughout as an encompassing category as the lines between political and policy entrepreneurship (and indeed political and bureaucratic motivation and action) are often porous (see Bernier and Hafsi (2007: 491)).
3. It is important to stress that such strategies are rarely envisaged *in toto*. Rather, strategies are developed as part of an incremental process of trial and error or imitation.
4. There have also been attempts to extend the analysis to the European Union. For an overview, see Ackrill and Kay (2011).
5. UDCs were single purpose agencies, financed by central government, with a remit that focused upon the physical renewal of land and buildings. UDCs were given extensive planning, compulsory purchase and financial powers to support site assembly and to promote investment in their areas.
6. Following Zerbinati and Souitaris (2005: 48) we see the targeting of national and European funding sources as a form of entrepreneurship in a Schumpeterian sense: identifying, generating and combining resources in a 'new combination'.
7. After his departure from Sheffield and a period with the Homes and Communities Agency, he became the Permanent Secretary for the Department of Communities and Local Government and, in 2012, the Head of the Home Civil Service.
8. Sheffield, alongside seven other cities: Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Nottingham. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, these cities formed a network that lobbied for more attention to be given by national government to England's leading urban centres outside London (Power et al., 2010: 161). The Core Cities group co-produced the document 'Cities, Regions and Competitiveness' (2003) with the Regional Development Agencies and several central government departments, which underscored the importance of the regeneration of cities as a means of enhancing national competitiveness.
9. The Heart of the City, the New Retail Quarter, City Hall/Barker's Pool, the Digital Campus in the Sheaf Valley, Castlegate, Sheffield Station and an Integrated Transport Strategy (Evans et al., 2007; Sheffield One, 2001: 1).
10. As well as creating a proto-URC before they became official policy, Sheffield had also established a form of LSP (Sheffield First) in 1998, before it too became national government policy. Sheffield First was developed in response to the proliferation of partnership initiatives in the city and the Local Government Association's *New Commitment to Regeneration* initiative, in which the Labour government had shown an early interest. Mike Bower, then leader of the City Council, led the creation of Sheffield First as he wanted to get Sheffield's LSP in place early in the hope that it would benefit the city's chances of maximizing the amount of regeneration funding it received from the new government's developing urban policy agenda (see Catney, 2009).
11. See Dabinett (2010) for a detailed analysis of South Yorkshire's Objective 1.

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