



ISSN: 0308-5147 (Print) 1469-5766 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/reso20>

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To cite this article: Andrew Baker & Duncan Wigan (2017) Constructing and contesting City of London power: NGOs and the emergence of noisier financial politics, *Economy and Society*, 46:2, 185-210, DOI: [10.1080/03085147.2017.1359909](https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2017.1359909)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2017.1359909>



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Published online: 06 Sep 2017.



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Constructing and contesting City of London power: NGOs and the emergence of noisier financial politics

Andrew Baker and Duncan Wigan

Abstract

Existing literature on the City of London has tended to focus on its ‘structural power’, while neglecting political and narrative agency. This paper acts as a corrective by presenting evidence to show that since the financial crash of 2008 the political terrain the City operates on has become more contested, crowded and noisier. The contribution develops a middle course between a positive assessment of the role of civil society in relation to global finance, and a more pessimistic reading. We demonstrate how macro-narratives and public story-telling both construct and contest City and financial sector power. In a new pattern since the financial crash, NGOs have moved from campaigns of limited duration and narrow focus, to a more sustained presence on macro-structural issues. Adopting a supply-demand framework for assessing governance and regulatory change, we look at the emergence of TheCityUK as a new advocacy arm and the strategies of three of the more prominent and focused NGOs that have mobilized in the aftermath of the crash: the Tax Justice Network’s (TJN) use of the ‘finance curse’;

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Positive Money on private endogenous money creation; and Finance Watch counterweight strategies at the level of the European Union. We suggest these mobilizations highlight the need for a more concerted and orchestrated construction of a global institutional civil society infrastructure in finance (a global financial public sphere) to achieve greater access, resources, scrutiny and oversight for a range of specialist expert NGOs.

Keywords: City of London; structural power; macro-narratives; NGOs; noisy politics; civil society.

The City of London has a feted, almost mythical status in contemporary British public life as a source of economic dynamism and crucial wealth generation in the global economy. But how the City organizes and constructs itself politically to promote this message and its own interests has often been overlooked. Since the financial crash, the City in conjunction with the British state has revamped its promotional and advocacy activities. We juxtapose this with a gathering civil society mobilization of organized political opposition to City power, activities and practices, through a burgeoning range of NGO campaigns stimulated by the financial crash. This paper explores these processes, by situating them in a supply–demand framework for understanding transformatory regulatory policy change, arguing that stirring noisy demand-side politics needs to translate into an orchestrated overhaul of institutional supply-side politics if this growing contestation is to have a meaningful outcome.

Existing literature on the City of London has tended to focus on its ‘structural power’ (Cain & Hopkins, 2000; Ingham, 1984; Johal *et al.*, 2014; Talani, 2012).¹ The political and narrative agency surrounding the politics of the City has consequently not always received the attention it might (Bell & Hindmoor, 2015). A literature on financial sector lobbying *has* demonstrated how the financial industry executes political strategy by influencing specific pieces of regulation and legislation, as well as limits to this capacity (Kastner, 2014; Lall, 2012; Pagliari & Young, 2014, 2016; Young, 2013, 2012). Yet formal targeted lobbying is only one element of financial sector power. Agents representing the City of London wield a multi-faceted form of power (Johal *et al.*, 2014). City agents have consciously formulated and promoted society-wide *macro-narratives* concerning the contribution of the financial sector to jobs, growth and taxes, the necessity of global financial competitiveness, as well as the society-wide benefits of financial innovation. This has had the effect of establishing a broadly finance-friendly political arena domestically (in the United Kingdom) and internationally (Baker, 2010; Engelen *et al.*, 2011). The paper presents evidence to show that since the financial crash of 2008 the political terrain the City operates on has become more contested, crowded and noisier (Culpepper, 2010). We look at the emergence of both TheCityUK as a new advocacy arm and the strategies of three of the more prominent and focused NGOs that have mobilized in the aftermath of the crash: the Tax Justice Network (TJN) and the use of the ‘finance curse’; Positive Money on private endogenous

money creation; and Finance Watch counterweight strategies to produce more 'socially useful' finance at the level of the European Union. We conclude by pointing to the need for an orchestrated construction of an international institutional civil society infrastructure in finance that achieves greater access, information, scrutiny and oversight for a range of specialist expert NGOs.

Our contribution develops a middle course between a positive, optimistic assessment of the role of civil society in relation to global finance (Germain, 2004, 2010), and a more negative assessment (Anheier, 2014; Scholte, 2013). We also seek to fill a gap in the literature on City and financial sector power by demonstrating the ways in which macro-narratives and public story-telling both construct and contest City power. Patterns of intensifying NGO contestation of City power and claims matter for two reasons. First, far-reaching regulatory and governance change can be thought of as depending on supply and demand elements (Mattli & Woods, 2009). According to Mattli and Woods's framework for understanding major regulatory and governance change in global politics, challenging a status quo requires demand-side mobilization in which the public at large, in conjunction with policy entrepreneurs, become more interested in and make active demands of policy-makers and governance and regulatory processes. It is here that macro-narratives on the appropriate macro-economic contribution and organizational structures of finance have a role in stimulating public interest and understandings, while also shaping preferences. If there are signs that public demand for change is stirring and being stimulated by NGO alternative narratives, this should be of empirical interest to researchers because it is evidence of mounting political pressure for change. Second, growing NGO activism illustrates how the City is finding itself under increasing public scrutiny, as a consequence of a growing realization that many of its public arguments and claims ought to be regarded sceptically and subjected to careful scrutiny. Nevertheless, NGO campaigns and counter-narratives are unlikely to produce much substantive change unless this emerging scepticism is more effectively institutionalized through the construction of institutional supply-side mechanisms of due process that scrutinize and debate financial sector power and proposals, involving higher burden-of-proof thresholds for City arguments and narratives, internationally and domestically. In this respect, a genuinely more democratic and inclusive global financial public sphere will require macro-narratives that build a case for orchestrating a well-equipped NGO international institutional infrastructure.

The first section of the paper discusses the relevant literature. Section two examines prevailing conceptions of City power and discusses the creation of TheCityUK. The third section presents empirical findings based on six interviews and recurrent discussions with senior NGO campaign strategists, which we treat as confidential. We also cite a confidential telephone interview with a central banker. Our three cases are the Tax Justice Network (TJN), Positive Money, and Finance Watch. A fourth concluding section argues that these developments are indicative of a growing public appetite to debate and rethink the role of finance in the economy as a whole and a growing NGO

capacity to campaign on these issues. However, we also suggest these demand-side pressures will amount to little if they are not harnessed to orchestrate a more extensive institutional supply-side infrastructure.

Narratives, NGOs and a financial public sphere

Society-wide macro-narratives about the structures, practices and role of finance in the economy have not been a major focus in either the literature on the City, or financial sector power and lobbying. Yet given the centrality attached to narratives and discourse in producing institutional and socio-economic transformations, there are good reasons to believe this may be an oversight (Roe, 1994; Schmidt, 2010). The importance of narrative arises from seeing people as needing stories to make sense of complex socio-economic processes (Fisher, 1984; Seabrooke & Thomsen, 2016; Stanley & Jackson, 2016). Where the role of the City is concerned, its complex range of activities and processes, and their systemic implications, necessitate simplifying frames and stories to make such processes and their effects intelligible to a wider audience.

In this respect, the use of language and narrative can be more than simply descriptive, but can equally be creative in giving form to, and becoming constitutive of, social reality (Cunliffe *et al.*, 2004, p. 264). Assigning some ontological primacy to language means focusing on how stories are told, attaching significance to and investigating the tenor and tone of language and seeking to understand how actors play language games and with what consequences (Haack *et al.*, 2012, p. 820). Macro-narratives become influential when they become 'habitualized discourse', a recurrent application of a narrative in response to a problem of societal concern, so that consensual collective societal beliefs are fostered and consolidated. For example, in the first half of the 2000s, a combination of regulators, bankers, politicians and some academics both globally and in the United Kingdom largely bought into two overlapping stories about the end of boom and bust and the benefits of financialization. Such stories are best understood as 'liturgies or often repeated forms of words that reassure and create a narrative world' (Froud *et al.*, 2012, p. 43). Accordingly, evidence of an intensification of narrative contestation of a prior 'habitualized discourse' can serve to challenge and reconstruct social realities, eventually resulting in changed collective societal beliefs. As Schmidt puts it, narratives establish how actors conceptualize the world, but also enable them to reconceptualize the world serving as a resource to promote change (Schmidt, 2010, p. 13; Widmaier *et al.*, 2007).

In the field of finance, NGOs have become a significant source of counter-narratives since the financial crash, making arguments for reorganization and re-regulation of finance on a macro-scale, in ways that directly challenge the power and centrality of the City. This is, however, only a relatively recent phenomenon (since 2010). One recent contribution has noted that change-oriented NGOs have remained in the shadows vis-à-vis private financial markets and have failed to stimulate major consequential civil society drives

for the reform and transformation of finance (Scholte, 2013, p. 2). A further account talks of the ‘institutional void’ produced by the ‘evident paucity of civil society institutions in the domain of finance’ (Anheier, 2014, p. 24.)

Historically, NGOs have been active on issues of low-income country debt, particularly during the 1990s and early 2000s, most notably through the Jubilee Debt Campaign. Similarly, the Bretton Woods Project based in London launched a campaign in 1995 for institutional reform of the IMF and the World Bank. Both the World Social Forum and the Occupy movement have covered issues relating to global finance, but this has had a rather fleeting quality in a more generalized critique of ‘neoliberalism’. Other NGOs such as Oxfam and Friends of the Earth have drawn attention to finance-driven land grabs in the Global South (Scholte, 2013). Crucially, the general pattern has been one of small limited isolated campaigns of a limited duration and focus, with little sustained presence on macro- or structural issues relating to the organization, norms, objectives and overall consequences of the global financial industry. Scholte explains this by identifying a number of obstacles NGOs face in the field of finance, including: limited expertise; an uninformed and largely disinterested public; a lack of institutional access and direction; limited transparency; inadequate funding and limited staffing patterns; a splintering of focus and limited co-ordination; a limited willingness by the official community to engage; embedded social hierarchies; the entrenched structural power of financial capital and its permeation of nearly all elites; and dominant hegemonic constructions of ‘neoliberal’ knowledge (Scholte, 2013). Our research uncovers evidence to suggest that this is starting to change, but also, given the above obstacles, that there are merits in an orchestrated effort to directly construct and institutionalize a global financial public sphere.

A more optimistic account of civil society potential has demonstrated how transnational civil society networks successfully instigated international standards (albeit diluted) on consumer protection, through the constructing of a narrative that linked the financial crash to consumers’ own adverse experiences (Kastner, 2014, pp. 1335–1336). The most optimistic scenario of all has been outlined in the work of Randall Germain in his notion of a financial public sphere. Conceiving of a public sphere as an institutionalized arena of discourse and dialogue where specific audiences can engage in social, political and cultural criticism and forms of public reasoning (Bohman, 1998), Germain has argued that features of a global financial public sphere are progressively being realized (Germain, 2004, 2010). In Germain’s analysis three criteria – clear modes of public reasoning, a plurality of participants and a growing critical reciprocity between participants – were all being satisfied (Bohman, 1998, p. 144; Germain, 2004, p. 233). Consequently, ‘a wide variety of agents that span the world’s social hierarchies (political, economic and societal) are now involved in contesting financial governance arrangements and may be taken as constituting, at least in part, a “public” sphere’ (Germain, 2010, p. 504). Others have questioned this view because global institutions have not been particularly

open, while empirical studies have shown that the plurality of participants and the degree of critical reciprocity between them has been limited (Baker, 2009; Lall, 2012).

One framework for studying change that seeks to identify the factors that can constrain powerful corporate actors such as the City of London, and empower counterpositions, specifies two determining conditions (Mattli & Woods, 2009). The first is a demand side, involving an energized, interested and informed public; and the second, an institutional supply side, based on participatory mechanisms that are fair, transparent and open, including clear access points and recurrent oversight and accountability mechanisms (Mattli & Woods, 2009, p. 4). This demand–supply framework suggests that moving from a situation of ‘narrow and limited demand’ (and interest) to ‘broad and sustained demand’ is politically important (Mattli & Woods, 2009, p. 21). An energetic mobilized public on the demand side need to interact with resourceful, expert, well-organized and committed allies at various stages of reform: agenda setting, policy negotiation, implementation, monitoring and enforcement of new arrangements, through open, transparent and accessible institutional supply-side mechanisms (Mattli & Woods, 2009). In this respect a typical criticism of NGOs is that they have been most effective in demonstrating failures of existing practice and mobilizing support for change in agenda-setting struggles, but have lacked resources to develop effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms (Mattli & Woods, 2009; Vogel, 2009). This alerts us to the potential importance of a multi-level civil society with a division of labour between co-ordinated NGOs, performing different niche roles, bringing different forms of expertise and strategy to bear, and engaging publics and elites in different ways.

Another way of considering demand-side issues is to think in terms of political salience, or the distinction between quiet and noisy politics (Culpepper, 2010). Culpepper argues that political parties have few incentives to invest in expertise and the promotion of reforms for as long as questions are of ‘low political salience’. When voters are not attuned to an issue area, corporate lobbies are expected to prevail. Culpepper contrasts this form of ‘quiet politics’ with noisy politics, and tellingly asks what happens when political salience becomes high and stays high (Culpepper, 2010, p. 145). When political salience becomes high (noisy politics) Culpepper expects political parties once again to become interested and important actors in a particular field. Corporate groups will continue to be important actors under conditions of noisy politics, but they will no longer monopolize influence as a consequence of their expertise, or the deference politicians pay to it (weapons of quiet politics) (Culpepper, 2010, p. 145). In this respect, noisy politics on the demand side can create an impetus and opportunity formally to institutionalize greater degrees of scrutiny on the supply side. Noisy politics is something NGOs can both respond to and actively cultivate through campaigns and counter-narratives, in a dual effect, but this will need political parties to respond by creating mechanisms that give institutional expression to noisy politics.

The city, structural power and the case of TheCityUK

Most accounts of the power of the City of London invoke some notion of structural power. For example, it has long been argued that the City can set the parameters of economic policy in the United Kingdom, due to the centrality and functions of the Treasury and the Bank of England, a generally sympathetic governing philosophy amongst UK political elites, strong historical/cultural relationships between those agencies and the City and the historical evolution of British capitalism based on financial structural dominance (Bell & Hindmoor, 2014; Ingham, 1984; Longstreth, 1979, pp. 161–162; Talani, 2012, p. 19). International projection of City preferences through the pursuit of UK foreign economic policy has also been identified (Baker, 1999, 2010; Blank, 1977). The City itself can be understood as a geographically clustered institutional structure of commercial financial trading, advisory and intermediation practices using ever more innovative techniques to deliver income and fees for practitioners (Ingham, 1984, p. 60; Lysandrou *et al.*, 2017; Talani, 2012, p. 26). Scholars have subsequently drawn attention to the absence of coherent coalitions of opposition to City economic preferences, in part due to financialization of other sectors of the economy and the population as whole, including the disciplinary practices associated with this (Johal *et al.*, 2014; Langley, 2008; Norfield, 2016; Talani, 2012, p. 21). But if financialization is something of a fool's gold as many critical scholars have argued (Engelen *et al.*, 2011; Froud *et al.*, 2006; Johal *et al.*, 2014; Montgomerie & Büdenbender, 2015; Nesvetailova, 2015), that lack of opposition is not necessarily a permanent feature of UK and global political economy. If the gains of financialization for the majority of the United Kingdom and the world's population are indeed illusory, as this literature in part argues, articulation of the problems arising from financialization through campaigning and clear communicative strategy could effectively contest City power, and advance different understandings of how the City and global finance should be governed and for what purpose. Noisy public demands can result in political defeats for the City (Thompson, 2017). In a context of hard Brexit, TheCityUK insiders have already been expressing frustration at a seeming decline of influence in the political party sphere (Interview with TJN campaigner, March 2017).

City power can be understood as having a multi-faceted character, with different faces receding, advancing or combining in different conjunctures (Johal *et al.*, 2014). In their account, Johal *et al.* identify four faces of City power: power over decision (lobbying); power over agenda control or non-decision; hegemonic power (societal narrative); and capillary power – a form of governmentality based on learned self-discipline. Their thesis is that from the 1980s onwards the City relied on a combination of hegemonic narrative and capillary power (the taught self-discipline of financialized citizens). The narrative element of this emphasized UK manufacturing decline, creating a necessity for London as a financial centre to create an alternative economic dynamic and give the United Kingdom a competitive advantage as

a post-industrial service sector with financial services in the City as the motor (Johal *et al.*, 2014, p. 412). This narrative also held that light-touch regulation was a necessity because the City had to compete in a global context. In this account, both narrative and capillary power are highlighted as part of an ultimately unstable and unsustainable regime that lost legitimacy following the crash of 2008, due to a series of recurring scandals, the evident failure of risk management techniques, questionable claims about market efficiency and self-automation and ultimately the failure of an experiment of governmentality based around disciplined financial subjects that lacked basic financial literacy (Johal *et al.*, 2014, p. 404). Consequently, since the financial crash, with both capillary and narrative power damaged, the City has turned to more overt use of decision power and direct lobbying, despite long-term ambitions to avoid this because it involves operating on public and sometimes democratic terrains (Johal *et al.*, 2014).² While the City remains a formidable operator in the decision-making arena, with considerable resources and expertise, the exercise of decision power is more uncertain than either narrative or capillary power, particularly as both narrative and decisional contestation are on the rise.

In the run up to the financial crash, the City's own macro-narrative went largely unchallenged. During the 'great moderation', the demand-side contestation of financial sector claims and the proposal of alternatives were muted, restricted to isolated campaigns and did not produce countervailing public macro-narratives about finance. Stories told about the great moderation were endlessly repeated by politicians, regulators, financial market participants and various financial commentators up to the summer of 2007 (Froud *et al.*, 2012, p. 43).

The narrative about the social value of finance was so potent because it served to align the calculations of different elites (in markets, the core executive, and the regulatory agencies), about the benefits of financial innovation, and because it was congruent with the historically engrained culture of consensus amongst (old and new) metropolitan elites. (Engelen *et al.*, 2011, p. 144)

We would add to this that the absence of society-wide countervailing oppositional narratives was a key condition in producing the ascendancy of City story-telling.

In a possible pre-emptive anticipation of a more contested public and a noisier form of politics emerging following the financial crash, a number of City representatives together with HM Treasury moved to establish TheCityUK as a specific umbrella City advocacy agent in 2009–2010. While the British Bankers Association (BBA) had been in operation since 1919, along with several other industry associations, no body spoke for the City as a whole. The so-called Bischoff Report, a joint HM Treasury–City report, chaired by Chancellor of the Exchequer Alistair Darling in 2009, sought to put this right by calling for a rationalization of existing City promotional activities, with the creation of TheCityUK being the outcome. TheCityUK's primary

mission is to work 'to demonstrate the importance of the UK financial services industry to a broader British audience and to market the City's strengths overseas', consolidating and deepening the City's role as the primary European and global financial and professional services hub (HM Treasury, 2009, p. 50). The report argued that the multiplicity of bodies explaining aspects of the City's work sometimes caused confusion, overlap and duplication, creating a need for more coherence and greater promotional effectiveness. 'A fresh approach, strengthening the quality of promotional work for UK based international financial services', based on 'a single body as a home for all public and private promotional resources', was called for (HM Treasury, 2009, p. 49). TheCityUK was to be a practitioner-led independent strategic body, but with a formal link to HM Treasury's own high-level strategy group (HLG).

What is particularly interesting about the TheCityUK initiative, therefore, is not just that it was to become the primary national and international City advocacy agent, but that this was being directed, organized, co-ordinated and encouraged by a state agency as a matter of strategic national importance. Moreover, the state itself was to play a role in TheCityUK, while TheCityUK would have direct access into the highest levels of the Treasury. In this way the British state was displaying an active interest in shaping the organizational and advocacy structures of a key industry, ensuring the City had a coherent analytical arm and public policy voice that was structurally entwined with the most senior levels of British economic policy-making. While the City's relations with the Bank of England have become more strained since the financial crash due to the Bank's own regulatory activism, the creation of TheCityUK represented an effort to create a more coherent, strategic and focused City-Treasury nexus, which would sit at the heart of British development strategy and economic policy-making. In this sense it was a more effective institutionalization of a long-standing but often unspoken British industrial policy of promoting the City as a strategic industry of national importance. The move also illustrated that, on the institutional supply side, UK financial and regulatory policy-making is not an open transparent process, based on equal multiple access points, but closer to a highly asymmetrical one based on a significant degree of intertwinement between the core executive and the City.

Since its inception six years ago TheCityUK has evolved into a co-ordinated organizational infrastructure for promoting British financial services both nationally and internationally, in multiple ways. Both its board of directors (with 18 members) and its advisory council (with 78 members) read as a *Who's Who* from the City's transnational firms and organizations such as the City of London Corporation and the BBA. In City circles it is now widely considered to be the City's most important and powerful lobbying organization. TheCityUK is now the central co-ordinating mechanism for the City's vast lobbying and intellectual resources. It has a well-resourced specialist committee structure consisting of five primary committees: an economist group of leading City economists to examine how macro-economic issues affect the financial industry; an international regulatory strategy group to engage

governments, regulators and international organizations, and identify research programmes with representatives from HM Treasury, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA); a trade and investment group focused on 'breaking down market access barriers' of a tax and regulatory nature; a public affairs group to maintain relations with governments and regulators by holding revolving seminars with governments, political parties and regulators in the United Kingdom and the European Union; and a Liberalization of Trade in Services Committee focused on Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) issues, which includes a mix of City notables and staff and British government and regulatory officials. In addition, TheCityUK has a number of industry, sector and country advisory groups, covering areas such as insurance, asset management, infrastructure and energy, Islamic finance, legal services and major emerging markets. In short, the response of both the British government and the City to the financial crash was to professionalize and strategically focus the political, organizational, public communication, research and lobbying capacity of the City into a formidable, streamlined and co-ordinated apparatus, while strengthening the linkages with the central British state. The move came at precisely the moment when the City's public standing and legitimacy was at an all-time low in modern times, and was a deliberate effort to bolster political organizational capacity and access to government.

The core macro-narrative propagated by TheCityUK invokes a 'City is indispensable' message consisting of six key claims that feature regularly in TheCityUK reports and press releases. These include: a tax contribution claim that puts the total contribution of financial services at £63 billion, 11.6 per cent of total tax receipts in 2011/2012, making it the largest contribution of any sector (TheCityUK, 2013); a jobs contribution claim, with financial services said to be responsible for generating 2.05 million jobs, 7.2 per cent of total UK employment; a growth GDP claim that UK financial and professional services contribute £194 billion to the UK economy, accounting for 14.5 per cent of economic output (TheCityUK, 2013); a regional benefits claim citing 1.4 million jobs being created outside of London by City activities, with London subsidizing all UK regions in fiscal deficit and exporting money to the tune of £17 billion over the decade to 2008–2009; an efficiency claim that large financial sectors produce liquidity and smooth the circulation and flow of capital around the global economy, putting it to its most effective and efficient use; and a trade surplus current account contribution claiming that financial organizations contributed £47.2 billion in 2011, representing 3 per cent of GDP, making the financial services contribution larger than the combined surplus of all other net exporting industries in the United Kingdom. TheCityUK's willingness to put bold but contestable and simple figures on many of its claims has produced an active powerful narrative of indispensability that still has traction after the financial crash, particularly with political parties, although senior figures privately report growing frustration at their declining influence in the party arena, post-Brexit. Moreover, the indispensability claim is being

increasingly contested, partly by a number of experts, but also by wider campaigning groups and NGOs who are building alternative public narratives. This process began to gain momentum from 2010 onwards.

NGO mobilization and contestation of City power since the financial crash

One of the largely overlooked effects of the financial crash of 2008 has been the mobilization of a range of NGOs who seek directly to contest what they see as the excessive power and privileged position of the financial sector, including the City of London, by advancing macro-narratives about the structural inadequacies and harmful effects of contemporary financial structures and practices. In each of the three cases we consider, 2010 is the crucial start date for this more activist approach. In each case, the NGO in question responded to political demands and public moods, albeit in different ways, while seeking further to stimulate, inform and shape general public sentiment on questions of finance and its organization. Among the groups we do not directly consider here, but that are certainly part of a similar phenomenon, are: Americans for Financial Reform, a cross-cutting coalition of civil rights, consumer, labour, business, investor, faith-based and civic and community groups formed in the wake of the 2008 crash that has had some limited successes on consumer protection regulation, but has little in the way of an overarching narrative; New Rules for Global Finance, which tracks and seeks to call to account global financial governance processes, including the Financial Stability Board, the G20 and the IMF; and the US advocacy group the Systemic Risk Council, a group of former regulatory professionals and officials who have the stated objective of bringing their expertise to bear to ensure that post-crash financial regulatory reform efforts do not lag (Noonan & McLannahan, 2015). The three NGOs we focus on in more detail here all directly contest City power in more focused ways.

The TJN and the 'finance curse' narrative

The Tax Justice Network (TJN) is best known for running successful campaigns on tax issues, including putting country-by-country reporting and automatic information exchange on the agenda of the OECD, the G20 and the European Union, and publishing a financial secrecy index that changed perceptions of financial transparency worldwide (Seabrooke & Wigan, 2015). However, senior figures in the TJN have long been interested in building public narratives that offer a more comprehensive critical assessment of financial globalization. Tax was regarded as 'an effective insertion point for contesting contemporary financial practices as the most conspicuous Achilles heel in the neoliberal policy armoury' (Interview, two TJN members, February 2016).

From 2010 onwards the TJN began promoting a diagnostic narrative, the 'finance curse', drawn from development literatures which highlighted poor economic performance in mineral-rich countries, the 'resource curse' (Karl, 1997; Ross, 1999). The key document outlining the finance curse concept was published as an 89-page e-book on the TJN's website in 2013 (as well as a later piece in an academic political science journal) (Christensen & Shaxson, 2013; Christensen *et al.*, 2016). The e-book systematically presents evidence in an effort to illustrate many of the symptoms that countries with large offshore global financial centres display and share with resource curse countries. The basic message of the finance curse narrative is that finance can become too big and too powerful with deleterious social and economic consequences, and that too much finance and too much dependence on it is not necessarily good for a country's economy as a whole. This is not a new observation in the UK case due to an extensive literature on the role of finance capital in British decline (Coates, 1999; Gamble, 1985; Glyn, 2007; Ingham, 1984; Kennedy, 1987; Shonfield, 1958). What is new is the simultaneous packaging of the finance curse as a dynamic process displaying similar traits to the resource curse, a populist, political narrative and a conceptual apparatus/research agenda. It is this combination that makes it potentially potent.

Through the use of a finance curse narrative, TJN explicitly sets out to contest the narrative of 'the City is indispensable', systematically working through TheCityUK tax, jobs, growth, regional and balance of trade arguments and disputing each one in terms of numbers, highlighting and quantifying the costs of many financial activities to tax, growth, competitiveness and jobs in other sectors (Christensen & Shaxson, 2013). This is a long-standing TJN tactic of telling alternative stories that seek to 'flip' dominant narratives, by presenting a reverse image (Confidential interview, two TJN members, February 2016). The aim of the finance curse narrative is to reconfigure the terms of the public debate about finance and the role of the City, and alter the political and cognitive terrain on which public discourse about finance and the City is constructed.

The finance curse concept draws attention to six prominent dynamic symptoms that are frequently missed in conventional economic data and crude aggregations thereof. (i) 'Dutch disease' is where financial sector growth raises local prices, particularly the exchange rate (and, in London, property prices), making it harder for alternative tradeable sectors to compete in world markets. (ii) Brain drain sees higher salaries in finance suck the most skilled and educated people away from other sectors. In the UK context, the Bank of England's chief economist Andy Haldane has made similar claims referring to a 'vacuum cleaner effect' in which the financial sector sucks in both financial and human capital (Haldane, 2012, p. 4). (iii) 'Financialization' means that financial activities take precedence and start to damage genuine productive activities, generating their own endogenous growth including money creation, rent extraction and enormous systemic risks and macro-economic costs. In this respect, research at the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) has indicated that once bank

assets start to exceed annual GDP in size they start to act as a drag on growth (Checchetti & Kharroubi, 2012). This notion is integral to the concept of the finance curse because the core claim is that above a certain level and size finance starts to become harmful to wider economic performance, by combining with Dutch disease and brain drain to produce a 'crowding-out effect'. (iv) Uneven geographical and spatial development occurs when major global financial service centres concentrate resources, activities, investment and people in an urban hub at the expense of underdevelopment and neglect elsewhere. This in turn leads to arguments that the City's operations entail the metropolitanization of gains and the nationalization of losses (Leaver, 2013). (v) Rising inequality and social stratification sees a small metropolitan elite accumulate vast resources, inflating asset and property bubbles, producing financial instability and making asset ownership difficult for large sections of the population (Galbraith, 2012; Piketty, 2014; Rajan, 2010). (vi) Political capture occurs where the financial sector becomes disproportionately influential in politics as state resources, policies and institutions are directed towards financial promotion, weakening alternative sectors and creating disincentives for government officials to take corrective action due to easy rents (Baker, 2010; Christensen & Shaxson, 2013; Johnson & Kwak, 2010). These six features of course divide nicely into a series of more detailed research programmes. In December 2016, the TJN secured five years of research funding from the Ford Foundation to work with academics to pursue research in each of these streams and add rigour to the narrative's constituent claims. From the TJN perspective developing the finance curse analysis and gaining political traction for the narrative is seen as a 10-year undertaking and the central plank of the TJN's work for the next decade, the importance of which is intensified by Brexit (Confidential interview, senior TJN figure, October 2016).

This sixth symptom of capture is central to the analysis and purpose of the finance curse as the objective is to challenge the political dominance of the City in the United Kingdom, as well as something that can be used internationally by other states. The TJN intention is to use the narrative to build a powerful cross-cutting oppositional coalition of technocrats, regulators, disillusioned former industry voices, academics, trade unionists, NGOs, start-up venture capital small and medium enterprises (SMEs), members of the public and eventually parliamentarians. As the brief summary above indicated, the finance curse concept draws on strands of research from some of the world's most eminent technocrats and policy economists. In this sense, although it is intended to act as a populist slogan and rallying call, it also acts as a unifying umbrella concept for many of the individual symptoms identified in detailed technical financial research. Again, this is a fairly typical TJN tactic, in which authoritative expertise, knowledge and data are harnessed to build authoritative narratives and policy templates that can effectively be subcontracted to others for deployment in different contexts (Seabrooke & Wigan, 2015). This has enabled the TJN in the past to exert a disproportionate influence as a low-budget, small-staff operation in technical fields such as corporate tax populated

by vast corporate lobbies with deep resources (Seabrooke & Wigan, 2015). Narrating is a core strategy for 'a fast, flexible, expert-led, activist think tank' and involves providing consistent storylines that give actionable alternatives (Seabrooke & Wigan, 2015). These language games have become an increasingly important mode of operation for the TJN, with a growing number of staff trained journalists for precisely this reason. The finance curse is an element of this approach and was chosen as the umbrella concept, because 'it does what it says on the tin. Simplicity is a strength. We wanted something that could fit on a placard' (Interview, two TJN members, November 2015).

While work in comparative and international political economy has highlighted how ideas make coalition building and collective action possible (Blyth, 2002; Widmaier *et al.*, 2007), the processes of active public narrating to make ideas and analysis intelligible to the public at large have received relatively little attention.³ Public narration involves the creation of persuasive stories and imagery that are plausible and recognizable to large sections of the population. This can in turn create demand-side pressures and noisier politics in an issue area, intensifying the scrutiny of the behaviours and claims of particular sectors, increasing public scepticism and demands for increased regulatory and governance oversight and even structural overhaul. It is in this context that the potential potency of the finance curse narrative should be understood. Our aim here is not to demonstrate the influence the finance curse narrative has had. The TJN are after all only at the beginning of what they see as a 10-year process. Rather our concern is to draw attention to the emergence of this narrative campaign, while asking what the implications of the finance curse gaining political traction might be. A more negative, and jaundiced, popular reading of financialization brought about by widespread public usage and recognition of the finance curse narrative will create not only greater public and political scepticism towards the City's own claims but also demand-side pressures for greater oversight and scrutiny in the field of financial governance. This in turn creates potential rationales and pressures for cultivating an institutional supply-side infrastructure capable of delivering that enhanced scrutiny. Of course, the United Kingdom moved in exactly the opposite direction following the financial crash, bolstering City advocacy through the creation of TheCityUK. The TJN reading is that this is precisely why a finance curse narrative is urgently needed, further enhanced by Brexit and fears of a regulatory race to the bottom to protect the City's status at all costs (Interview, senior TJN figure, October 2016, January 2017).

As well as providing a clear, intelligible narrative, the finance curse also has interesting political arithmetic. In a UK context it speaks to the concerns of the country outside London, in relation to brain drain, crowding out and uneven development symptoms, as well as many within the capital hit by growing property prices inflated by astronomical City salaries and wealth flows. It also has appeal to commercial coalitions concerned with longer-term investment. For example, TJN have launched a well-received road show of public events in London, Bournemouth, Southampton, Burton on Trent and Bradford to a

mix of audiences including community organizations, ex-financiers and academics, with little or no 'push back'. The finance curse also has sympathizers in surprising places, including at the Bank of England, but also a team of four to five journalists working on the *Financial Times* capital markets desk (Interview, senior TJN figures, January 2017; Caulkin, 2016).

Finance curse symptoms and the City's role in generating them internationally have also been noted outside of the United Kingdom. Symptomatic is the observation of New York Democratic representative Carolyn Maloney at a House Financial Services Committee 'that every big trading disaster happens in London'. Gary Gensler, former chairperson of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, has also spoken about how London trading activities have detrimentally affected US commerce (Gensler, 2013). The broader point here is that displeasure with UK financial practices and presence has grown amongst US elites, and noisier politics surrounding the City has potential internationally, as well as domestic dimensions. If the United Kingdom's international reputation as a systemic risk super spreader grows, particularly in a context of an increasingly internationally salient finance curse narrative, the United Kingdom can be expected to come under growing international pressure to govern the City more effectively. This could be fuelled by a geopolitical climate of growing EU hostility, in a context of acrimonious Brexit negotiations and an unpredictable but nationalistic and protectionist President Trump in the White House. Moreover, critical academic voices in the United States have identified the costs of their own oversized financial sector, with Gerard Epstein most notably arguing that the financial system will impose an excess cost on the US economy of over \$22.7 trillion from 1990 up to 2023 (Epstein & Montecino, 2016). TJN staff view this as part of the evidence base that the finance curse is a global phenomenon blighting both developed and developing worlds. They also take a view that the finance curse can provide a diagnostic for some of the United States' own economic problems, which can in turn increase US pressure on British authorities for greater oversight of the City. The current TJN intention is to promote the finance curse narrative to US audiences, as well as to a wider range of international NGOs, as part of the TJN's strategy of sub-contracting concepts (Interview, senior TJN figure, October 2016).

A recognition of the validity of the finance curse also necessitates greater vigilance to curb its symptoms. It therefore contains a rationale for creating an active institutionalized sphere of experts and organizations capable of scrutinizing and contesting financial sector power claims and narratives as a point of principle. Despite this, the size of the task facing the TJN is illustrated by the fact that the least responsive group are senior politicians from mainstream UK parties, due to a deeply engrained City indispensability mentality. Fear and reluctance to talk about the City means that noisier politics is yet to make the crucial breakthrough into the party-political arena (Interview, two TJN members, November 2015). Recent TJN policy discussions with Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell have been characterized by a willingness to talk about revenue-raising measures, but a reluctance to consider behavioural and

regulatory issues (Interview, senior TJN figure, January 2017). Without traction in the party-political arena as the ultimate test of noisy politics (Culpepper, 2010), the capacity to build the kind of financial public sphere capable of subjecting finance and the City to sceptical scrutiny will likely remain limited. Public, media and technocratic interest in the concept is, however, rising, and TJN are planning a decade-long international campaign.

Positive Money

If the TJN's effort to promote a new macro-financial narrative, and to get a combination of experts, journalists and the public to coalesce around it, was an isolated instance it would barely warrant further attention. However, it is part of a broader phenomenon of NGO activism, noisy politics and public demand and appetite for alternative narratives stimulated by the financial crash and the search for intelligible stories that illuminate the problems of existing structures. Evidence of this deeper public mood is provided by the case of Positive Money. Positive Money offers a critique of a system of private money creation by licensed banks and other financial institutions. It calls for the creation of an independent, arms-length technical public body to perform this important function directing money creation to 'real economy' activities, particularly environmental investments. This member-based movement has eight full time staff and a network of activists consisting of 28 local groups throughout all parts of the United Kingdom, organizing events to raise public awareness about the nature of private money creation. Sister organizations in 23 countries across four continents share a similar analysis. Positive Money argues that 97 per cent of money is created by private banks, most of it electronically, and only 3 per cent by governments. It sees this as entrusting excessive power to private agents and City institutions, which has in turn generated excessive debt and financial instability, but has not served society as a whole well. The case for creating what Positive Money calls a sovereign monetary system is further outlined in 'Positive Money' (Dyson *et al.*, 2016a), with such intellectual influences cited as Jackson & Dyson (2013), Werner (2011), the work of Irving Fisher and Huber and Robertson (2000). Friends Provident and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have provided financing, with another 40–50 per cent coming from member donations. Positive Money is in this sense a genuine social movement but one based on analysis drawn from a body of intellectual and academic work, which seeks to build public support for public money creation.

Positive Money has had its credibility called into question by heterodox post-Keynesian economists for paying too little attention to the financing needs of capitalist economies, displaying 'an inherent deflationary bias' with 'monetarist overtones', potentially limiting the stabilization role of fiscal policy by contributing to a form of monetary policy dominance and focusing too much on commercial banks at the expense of non-banking institutions and shadow banks (Fontana & Sawyer, 2016). Positive Money has written its own response

(Dyson *et al.*, 2016b) and engaged with a variety of experts and authorities in outlining its position. The advisory board has a heavy academic complexion including: Victoria Chick, renowned scholar of Keynes and monetary economics; Herman Daly, an ecological economist who formerly worked for the World Bank; Joseph Huber, an economic sociologist who has written on environmentally informed monetary reform; Richard Werner, a former economist at a City finance house and professor of international banking at Southampton; a range of former financiers and regulators and business people as well as individuals from the Bank of England, RBS, Lloyds Banking Group, the BBC and the IMF, who prefer to remain anonymous. While shifting from a system of fractional reserve banking to full reserve banking any time soon is deeply unrealistic, that Positive Money has stirred public interest in and greater public debate on monetary and financial structures is symptomatic of a growing thirst for knowledge of alternatives. As one Bank of England official reflected in discussions with Positive Money members, 'it is incredible that the wider international movement you are part of have managed to get hundreds of thousands of people worldwide talking about monetary policy' (Confidential interview, two Positive Money members, November 2016).

Positive Money claims to have shaped the tone, tenor and terrain of debates about quantitative easing (QE), particularly proposals for forms of people's or green QE, either as a means of creating funding for an investment bank, or helicopter money (Interview, senior Positive Money figure, December 2015). Adair Turner, while sceptical of the ultimate Positive Money prescription, takes the view that the movement has forced open a debate about the appropriate proportions of money creation, raising the possibility of greater degrees of public money creation and a case for overt monetary financing (Interview, senior Positive Money figure, December 2015; Turner, 2015). Positive Money claims its most tangible influence to date has been stimulating the Bank of England to write about private money creation (Interview, senior Positive Money figure, December 2015; McLeay *et al.*, 2014). It orchestrated a mass public letter-writing campaign to the Bank of England from members and believes this provoked the publication of a Bank Quarterly Bulletin paper that contained an historical first central bank public admission about the nature of money creation by licensed private banks (Interview, senior Positive Money figure, December 2015; McLeay *et al.*, 2014; Tily, 2016). Positive Money has also had supportive discussions with a number of Bank of England officials 'interested' in its ideas, with the identity of those officials remaining closely guarded, and it also reports positive discussions with the research department of the IMF and some staff at the BIS (Interview, senior Positive Money figure, December 2015). These are important developments because, irrespective of whether the prescription of full reserve banking is credible, they are indicative of noisier, more crowded politics in the sphere of financial and monetary governance. Positive Money narratives certainly represent and stoke increased levels of public scepticism about existing financial behaviours, structures and practices. In this sense, both the TJN finance curse campaign and the

emergence of Positive Money are symptomatic and constitutive of this deeper phenomenon of noisier demand-side politics. However, like the TJN, Positive Money has also found the least responsive group to be politicians because of short-term horizons, a taste for topical issues and a difficulty with long-term thinking (Interview, senior figure, Positive Money, December 2015). For the time being, the British party-political arena has remained insulated and immune to gathering demand-side campaigns.

Finance Watch

Our final case reverses many of the patterns noted above in the two other cases, and emphasizes the importance of developing a multi-layered civil society, characterized by a co-ordinated division of labour between different specialist NGOs, with different capacities and expertise. Finance Watch was in the first instance an initiative of MEPs in the European Parliament, reflecting a wish to establish a counterweight to financial sector lobbying and expertise. Finance Watch was effectively an orchestrated attempt by European parliamentarians to increase the pluralism surrounding the formulation of financial legislation and regulation in the European Union. In this sense, while the British state responded to the crash by orchestrating a consolidated and strengthened City lobbying capacity, MEPs have moved in the opposite direction, seeking to establish a counterweight to this enhanced capacity. As with the other two cases, Finance Watch began to emerge in 2010, at the instigation of a cross-party group of 22 MEPs, in response to a perceived political and undemocratic imbalance that was skewing financial legislation. Finance Watch has since received funding through a 1 million euro EU grant and charitable donations from member organizations. There is now a permanent expert secretariat and Brussels-based offices. Many senior Finance Watch personnel (like at the TJN) are disillusioned former financial sector employees who now work to hold their former industry to account.

The overall stated objective of Finance Watch is to ensure finance is brought to productive uses, without causing detriment to society as whole. The organizational motto is ‘making finance serve society’ based on ‘investment not betting’. The aim is banking systems that direct finance into productive uses without extracting economic rents or transferring risks to society, thus encouraging long-term investment rather than ‘harmful speculation’. Despite these grand pronouncements and guiding principles, Finance Watch makes much less use of the narrative construction favoured by Positive Money and the TJN. Stated objectives include: reducing the overall level of financialization; reducing the costs of intermediation; limiting excessive speculation, commodity speculation and high-frequency trading; channelling savings into sustainable long-term investments; protecting the interests of the general public and consumers. Finance Watch sees itself as a hybrid between a think tank and an association of members, or a trade association (Interview, Finance Watch staff

member, June 2016). It operates as a detailed expert arm representing a wider network of member NGOs (for example, Oxfam), acting as a hub of expertise, an information clearing house and specialist resource centre for those members. A particular focus for Finance Watch is increasing the 3 per cent of deposits in the European banking system that is used to fund business loans, by shaping precise legislative clauses and regulatory adjustments through a form of attritional legislative keyhole surgery (Interview, Finance Watch staff member, June 2016). The down-side of this is that Finance Watch has focused on a series of short- to medium-term battles, but has had more difficulty identifying longer-term priorities and vision (Interview, Finance Watch staff member, June 2016).

Finance Watch staff think that their counter-lobbying has produced some notable victories, given their relatively small budget and total financial expenditure of 8 million euro (Confidential interview, Finance Watch staff member, June 2016). Four main areas where legislation and regulation look different due to Finance Watch arguments and presence can be identified. First, in the area of consumer protection Finance Watch argued for the introduction of comprehension alerts in the key information document given to consumers prior to purchase of a financial product. These now have to contain a warning if a product contains complex features associated with previous mis-selling, as well as clearer information on adviser fees and on the social and environmental implications of certain products. Such requirements were inserted into the draft Packaged Retail Insurance-based Investment Products (PRIIPs) legislation. Second, mandatory position limits restricting the amount of speculation allowed on food commodity markets were inserted into the revision of Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID II) in 2012–2013, through the tick-size regime limiting excessive forms of micro-arbitrage undertaken by high-frequency traders. Such a move requires continuous monitoring, so since 2014 Finance Watch has been monitoring the calibration of limits, pressuring MEPs and building a coalition in the Parliament to pressure the Commission to tighten rules further. Third, Finance Watch argued for a 33 per cent reduction in the risk weighting to loans to SMEs, to stimulate real economy lending, with MEPs eventually agreeing to apply a 24 per cent reduction, with this affecting the implementation of Basel III in the European Union (Greenwood & Roederer-Rynning, 2015). Fourth, Finance Watch has pressured for the extension of the Commission's January 2014 proposal on securities financing transactions to move beyond transparency and include haircuts and repurchase limits on such transactions, reflecting the Financial Stability Board's (FSB) recommendations in October 2014. In this particular instance, the Commission decided to wait until FSB positions had been developed in more detail, and included a provision that they would consider haircuts and repurchase limits in 21 months' time.

These four instances illustrate the importance of contesting financial decision power, but also the enormity of the task and the need for NGOs to build further capacity. Scrutinizing and developing evidence-based proposals on legislation

and regulation requires enormous amounts of time and resources. Such activity is a never ending task that requires specialist, focused, well equipped and well-staffed organizations to provide an effective counter-balance to industry lobbies, given how focused, well-connected and well-resourced bodies such as TheCityUK are. Indicative of the problem is that financial lobbyists see the successes of Finance Watch as a lucrative business opportunity, with successes leading to an increase in client fees to unwind Finance Watch achievements (Interview, Finance Watch staff member, June 2016). Finance Watch personnel acknowledge that they have stimulated an intensification of industry efforts and expenditure, with some estimates suggesting that the industry has trebled its Brussels-based lobbying expenditure to the tune of an additional 20 million euro in response to the existence of Finance Watch (Interview, Finance Watch staff member, June 2016). This picture is compounded by recent studies that show non-business respondents such as trade unions, consumer protection groups, research institutes and NGOs represent less than 6 per cent of the overall responses received by policy-makers around financial regulatory policies on aggregate (Pagliari & Young, 2016), while globally only 2.5 per cent of International Non Governmental Organizations are concerned with the financial sector, relative to 4.4 per cent with health, and 10 per cent education (Anheier, 2014, p. 30). Such data indicate that the global financial public sphere remains underdeveloped and only thinly pluralist, suggesting the kind of decisional contestation undertaken by Finance Watch should be expanded, possibly through endowment foundation funding (Anheier, 2014, p. 33). In this respect, narrative contestation has a vital role to play in highlighting the wider deleterious social and economic consequences of some financial activities, and thereby creating recognition of the potential wider societal benefits of constructing an adequately resourced and equipped NGO infrastructure to campaign on macro-financial issues. Policy-makers, as in the case of MEPs, could also respond to such narratives by actively supporting and orchestrating initiatives such as Finance Watch to act as a precautionary counterweight. Indeed, the case for the creation of versions of Finance Watch in the United Kingdom is arguably strengthened by Brexit.

Conclusions: institutional supply-side reform and capacity building

Structural power is a major part of how the City of London constitutes and sustains itself. The many existing rich and valuable accounts of this have, however, often come at the expense of accounts of how political agency can both construct and contest City power. This paper has sought to partially rectify that. First, by showing how Treasury and City notables instigated a rationalization and strengthening of City promotional agency in the creation of a new body, TheCityUK, strengthening the City-Treasury nexus, as a direct response to the financial crash. Second, by demonstrating that there has been an intensification of narrative and decisional contestation by NGOs on macro-financial questions

since the financial crash and arguing this phenomenon represents noisier demand-side politics. To be meaningful, however, noisier demand-side politics will require a more extensive institutional supply-side response. This would mean a concerted effort to orchestrate, fund and build the capacity of expert NGOs capable of subjecting the financial sector and its lobbies to closer scrutiny and oversight, as well as enhancing access to key decision-making processes globally and nationally. The financial crash and its vast economic and social costs provide a rationale and impetus for such a process, but creating the necessary public and political mood to sustain it will depend on the degree of acceptance for longer-term narratives like the finance curse. In this vein, a range of NGOs have been coming together since 2013 in a 'transforming finance' initiative to build ideas on what such transformation might involve, including The Finance Innovation Lab, ShareAction, Positive Money, New Economics Foundation, Finance Watch, Move Your Money, Robin Hood Tax Campaign, Oxfam UK, Friends of the Earth and Community Investment Coalition⁴. The construction of a denser more tightly organized and co-ordinated multi-level global financial public sphere could aim to ensure that finance curse symptoms are minimized, irrespective of whether we accept the veracity of all of the concept's individual claims.

The complexity of the field of global finance means that creating such an infrastructure would likely require the creation of 'thousands of structural folds' (multiple insider networks that cross policy domains and professional boundaries) as part of a 'social engineering project' that in turn would require substantial investment in organizations and people (Anheier, 2014, p. 35). Such a process would require creating ties between those with expertise in global finance and other fields and domains, so that the influence of global financial practices are more keenly understood and contested by wider coalitions of activists and experts. Finance Watch's capacity to make arguments calling for limits to be placed on commodity speculation, which chimed with Oxfam's concerns about development, provides an example of the kind of linking processes that are already underway, but that would need to be cultivated, multiplied and extended. In this respect, the three NGOs we have considered here are more specialist NGOs that effectively offer products such as expertise, ideas or narratives on finance to broader groups of campaigning NGOs whose primary focus is not finance.

In Finance Watch's case it has enjoyed privileged institutional access precisely because the European Parliament and the Commission played a role in creating the organization. Such proactive initiatives could usefully become a model for other regulatory and legislative jurisdictions in the quest for greater institutional supply-side pluralism in the domain of finance. While Finance Watch is a useful initiative, Finance Watch officials already complain they cannot cope with demands and cover everything, not least because of their limited resources relative to the industry. However, early evidence suggests such counterweights can help to generate more socially useful regulation and governance. Creating many more specialized and focused versions

of Finance Watch might therefore be desirable, but, for that to be politically feasible and appealing, narratives such as the finance curse will need to achieve greater degrees of political prominence and acceptance. With the institutional supply side in the United Kingdom remaining heavily skewed towards City access, one of the most important impacts that narratives such as the finance curse could aim for is to motivate a wholesale construction of a precautionary NGO institutional infrastructure in the domain of finance, nationally and globally, as the basis for a more pluralistic and inclusive financial public sphere.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to record their gratitude for the helpful and constructive comments of three anonymous reviewers and the editors of this journal. Earlier versions of the paper were presented at the SPERI Bi Annual Conference, University of Sheffield, 4–6 July 2016, and International Studies Association Annual Convention, Baltimore, 22–25 February 2017.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

Duncan Wigan's research was funded by the European Commission Horizon 2020 Framework Program 2015–2018 [#649456-ENLIGHTEN].

Notes

- 1 On structural power more generally see Andrews (1994); Block (1977); Culpepper & Reinke (2014); Lindblom (1982); Quinn & Shapiro (1991); Strange (1988).
- 2 A similar point was made in passing in an interview with a City lobbyist, with direct lobbying of politicians and political parties becoming a greater focus after the financial crash.
- 3 With the exception of the recent everyday narrative turn (Stanley & Jackson, 2016; Seabrooke & Thomsen, 2016).
- 4 <http://transformingfinance.org.uk/>

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