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Abstract

This paper draws on a study of town twinning in Britain since 1945 to engage with narratives of ‘the new localism’ and ‘the new politics of scale’. It argues that town twinning is often used in technical assistance programmes such as the UK Government’s Know How Fund and various schemes of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. ‘Fast policy’ is a concept that can be usefully applied to these programmes and the broader field of interurban networking, urban policy mobility, and policy transfer. Town twinning plays an active yet overlooked role in fast policy. The paper also argues that town twinning is part of a longer history of bottom-up localism that includes the political arguments of John Stuart Mill, at least two moments of twentieth-century municipal internationalism, the municipal foreign policy movement of the 1980s, and the community development movement of the last three decades. This longer history suggests sources of localism other than statecraft, and problematises the conceptualisation of power and periodisation of history found in regulation theories of devolution.

Keywords

The new localism, the new politics of scale, town twinning, sister cities, fast policy, technical assistance.

1. Introduction

This paper emerged from a study of the history and geography of town twinning in Britain since 1945. For the purposes of the study, town twinning was defined as the construction and practice, by various groups and to various ends, of relatively formal relationships between two towns or cities usually located in different nation-states. The paper seeks to locate town twinning in two prominent narratives of contemporary political geography and urban studies: the new localism and the new politics of scale. This introductory section proceeds by outlining the two narratives, introducing town twinning, and justifying the exercise of locating town twinning in these narratives.

The new localism and the new politics of scale

Over the last two decades, numerous scholars have identified a ‘new localism’. This new localism describes a search for market alternatives to bureaucratic organisation so that local authorities become ‘enabling authorities’ purchasing services from various agencies and regulating those agencies and services (Cochrane 1993). It describes an attempt to secure welfare less through collective consumption and more through economic development – a move from the welfare state to ‘the enterprise state’ of partnerships between local authorities and businesses (Cochrane 2007). For Harvey (1989), this shift has been to an ‘urban entrepreneurialism’ characterised by inter-urban competition, civic boosterism, gentrification, urban spectacle, public-private partnerships, and new ‘security’ measures. For Hall and Hubbard (1998), it heralds a ‘new urban politics’ incorporating both ‘the entrepreneurial city’ and a related move from government to ‘governance’ – from a set of formal procedures and institutions created to express social

interests, resolve social disputes, and implement public choices, to a flexible pattern of public decision making based on loose associations of individuals located in diverse organisations and territories (John 2001). This new urban politics involves trans-sovereign activities of particular interest to scholars in the field of comparative politics. For them: ‘paradiplomacy’ refers to the international activities of non-state actors i.e. cities, regions, non-governmental organisations and so on (Aldecoa and Keating 1999, Duchacek 1990); ‘multilayered diplomacy’ emphasises the interaction between these internationally involved non-central governments and nation-states (Hocking 1993, 1999); and ‘post-diplomacy’ or ‘beyond diplomacy’ specifies the character of this interaction which is more entangled than parallel (Aguirre 1999). It is particularly in this comparative politics literature that discussion of the new localism overlaps with discussion of a ‘new regionalism’ or ‘new federalism’.

For some, the new localism constitutes a response to the economic recession of the 1970s (Cochrane 1993, Harvey 1989). Spending on welfare was reduced at the national level by devolving functions to the sub-national level while making no additional funding available. Sometimes, for example in the case of Reagan’s ‘new federalism’ policy, devolution was pursued to depoliticise certain policy areas (Hocking 1993). Often, however, it followed from genuine disillusionment with a Keynesian welfare state that for the Right had undermined the efficiency of business and for the Left had failed to address class inequalities (Cochrane 2007). Some of this disillusionment on the Left can be found in the new regionalism that arose in Western Europe during the 1960s – a regionalism that drew on anarchist and communitarian traditions, valued regional cultures and dialects, and became aligned with environmentalism and regionalist/nationalist

movements during the 1970s (Keating 1998). Such disillusionment was fed upon, organised, and further generated by the discourse of ‘New Public Management’ that solidified during the 1980s – an incoherent set of ideas about how best to organise the administration of public services that includes: the centralisation of management through mission statements and performance measurement; the decentralisation of functions to micro-agencies; the introduction of quasi-markets in which micro-agencies compete for resources; and the contracting out of services to the private sector (John 2001).

Of course, the economic context from which the new localism emerged was not just one of recession. It was also one of internationalisation and globalisation. These processes placed regions and cities in direct competition with one another for mobile investment capital (Harvey 1989). They elevated certain cities and regions to the status of ‘world cities’ (Friedmann 1986), ‘global cities’ (Sassen 1991), and/or ‘global city-regions’ (Scott 2002). Challenges generated at these new centres, including social polarisation and segmentation, demanded new political responses (Scott 2002, Scott et al 2002). Other new and complex problems such as increased migration and climate change also demanded political experimentation (John 2001). Local authorities accepted responsibility for addressing these problems in part because of declining confidence in the foreign policy capability of nation-states (Hocking 1993). They were also encouraged in this direction by new sources of funding and authority at the level above the nation-state, especially the European level (John 2001, Keating 1999).

This narrative of the new localism has been much considered by regulation and state theorists. Out of this engagement has emerged an alternative narrative – what Cox (2002) has called ‘the new politics of scale’ – in which the political-economic dimensions

of the new localism are emphasised and, for this reason, the term ‘spaces of neoliberalism’ is preferred to that of the new localism (Brenner and Theodore 2002a). This alternative narrative begins in the late 1960s when the Fordist-Keynesian accumulation regime entered a period of crisis (Swyngedouw 1989). In the following years, while existing regulation failed to grow or even to sustain accumulation, neoliberal ideology became increasingly hegemonic (Brenner and Theodore 2002b, Peck and Tickell 2002, Swyngedouw 2005). As a response, state space – the territorial governance of capitalism (Brenner et al 2003) – was restructured both upwards to the supranational scale and downwards to the local, urban, and regional scales. Swyngedouw (1997) has termed this process ‘glocalisation’. He has also identified a further restructuring outwards through privatisation (Swyngedouw 2005). In this literature, what is approached elsewhere as the new localism is approached as the outcome of: neoliberal statecraft; state spatial strategies to unleash the presumed innovative capacities of local economies; post-Keynesian policies that concentrate investments in the most competitive cities or city-regions; and a move from Keynesian welfare national states to ‘Rescaled Competition State Regimes’ (Brenner 2004).

Town twinning

The present paper emerged from a study of town twinning in Britain since 1945 and an attempt to locate the recent history of town twinning – including North-South linking and technical assistance partnerships – in narratives of the new localism and the new politics of scale. Town twinning was invented by local governments and/or their citizens in Western Europe after the Second World War, often to promote peace and local autonomy

in a context of war and totalitarianism (Campbell 1987). It was subsequently used during the 1950s by the Council of European Municipalities in attempts to construct European union (Weyreter 2003), and during the Cold War by governments and social movements alike in attempts to relieve tensions between the USA and the USSR (Lofland 1989). During the 1960s, it was used by French and German cities in attempts to improve local government (Campbell 1987). During the 1980s, it was used by local economic development officers in attempts to facilitate trade (Cremer et al 2001, Ramasamy and Cremer 1998, Zelinsky 1990). The GDR used town twinning in attempts to promote socialism in West Germany during the 1980s (Weyreter 2003). Various groups and organisations used town twinning to support the reunification of Germany after 1989 (*ibid*). Town twinning has also been used since the late 1970s in attempts to construct development in the so-called Global South (Weyreter 2003, Zelinsky 1991).

Taken together, the uses and agents of town twinning over the past 60 or so years and much of the world have been so varied that *town twinning is best conceptualised not as a movement, as it often is in the literature, but as a device*: a device for producing topological proximity between topographically distant places; a device with its own repertoire of formal agreements, trade delegations, joint projects, exchange visits etc. but that is also just one technology in numerous higher-order repertoires (those of peace activists, local economic development professionals, desk officers at the European Commission and so on); and a device that is modular since town twinning has been taken up and used by numerous different interest groups, in numerous different contexts, with numerous different ends in mind.

This conceptualisation informs sections 2 and 3 of the paper. It is necessary because there is no settled definition of town twinning, neither in law nor in culture. There are strong views held on this question of definitions, however, by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, for example, and the Local Government Association of England and Wales (LGA). These are that town twinning describes one modality of international cooperation at the local level – a modality characterised by formal twinning agreements or charters, permanence of relationship, and formal recognition by local authorities. A historical perspective, however, teaches that such organisations are just two of many that have sought to represent, authorise, and discipline town twinning over the last 60 or so years (Clarke In Press). These organisations have included, at the international level, the International Union of Local Authorities, the International Union of Mayors, the United Towns Organisation, and the European Council, Parliament, and Commission, and, at the national level, the Association of Municipal Corporations, the British Council, and the Local Government International Bureau. When these organisations have provided funding for town twinning activities, as with the Rippon Programme (administered by the British Council during the 1970s) or Community Aid for Twinning (administered by the European Commission during the 1990s), they have had some authority over the field of town twinning. At other times, however, this authority has waned. As a result, there exists a variety of interurban partnerships that are more or less formal, long-term, and recognised by local authorities, and a variety of labels attached to these partnerships, including ‘town twinning’, ‘sister cities’, ‘friendships’, ‘North-South links’, and ‘technical assistance’, ‘best-practice’, or ‘good practice’ partnerships.

There is, in addition, little consistency in the relationships between these labels and forms of partnership. Some relatively formal, long-term, and officially recognised arrangements are termed ‘town twinning partnerships’ (e.g. Sherborne and Granville). Other such arrangements may be termed ‘friendship partnerships’ (e.g. Bradford and Mirpur) or ‘sister city partnerships’ (e.g. Portsmouth and Maizuru). There is also little consistency in the way that local authorities conceive of their partnerships. This is evident in the LGA Database of Twinning Towns, accessed by the author in June 2007. The database is maintained between the LGA and local councils who are asked to register and update details of their twinning relationships via the LGA website. Data thus exclude an unknown number of arrangements that are considered by councils to differ from town twinning relationships against some measure or other (e.g. partnership formality) and/or that are administered by organisations other than local councils (e.g. community groups). Data also include, however, arrangements with a variety of labels. Bristol, for example, has registered all seven of its international partnerships including its three town twinning relationships (with Bordeaux, Hanover, and Tbilisi), its three friendship arrangements (with Oporto, Puerto Morazan, and Beira), and its sister city partnership with Guangzhou.

Much of this inconsistency follows from the strategic use of partnership terminology by local authorities in Britain. Some associate town twinning with jollies and junkets taken by council officers and members, or with little more than cultural exchanges between schoolchildren. Such an association has little foundation in the broad history of town twinning (Clarke In Press), but nevertheless has generated alternative labels for what are often activities of the same category. In the end, students of town

twinning are left with a choice between accepting the inconsistent self-identifications of interurban partnerships on the one hand, and developing their own identifications from partnership content on the other. In this paper, the latter choice has been made and the focus is not on arrangements that call themselves town twinning partnerships but on relationships that utilise the town twinning repertoire and thus represent the modular device of town twinning. To be clear, town twinning is defined here inclusively to include relatively formal partnerships between towns and cities usually located in different nation-states; that is, to include partnerships that may self-identify variously as town twinning, sister city, North-South, technical assistance, or best/good practice partnerships.

This definition fits poorly with LGA data collected on town twinning relationships identified by their local authorities. The LGA Database of Twinning Towns is worth considering further, however, because it contains details of over 2500 partnerships covering the period 1920 to 2006. If interpreted following the caveats discussed above, it can be used to indicate general patterns and trends in the history and geography of town twinning in Britain. One of these patterns can be seen in Figure 1 where town twinning is shown to touch settlements across much of Britain, many of which register more than one twinning partnership. Figure 2 brings into focus the other end of these relationships and makes clear that British localities have partners in Western Europe (especially France and Germany), the USA, and elsewhere including China, Nicaragua, post-socialist Europe and Asia, and the Commonwealth countries of Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. More important than these patterns, for the purposes of this paper at least, are the trends presented in Figures 3 and 4. The former

plots all partnerships in the dataset by date of establishment. It suggests that growth in town twinning was exponential in Britain during the second half of the twentieth century. Figure 4 takes account of the likelihood that at least some of these relationships have become inactive over time and instead plots new partnership establishments by decade. A trend of steady growth from the end of the Second World War to the end of the century remains.

INSERT FIGURES 1, 2, 3 AND 4 ABOUT HERE

This is significant because ‘timeframe’ is one means by which town twinning does not fit easily into the related narratives of the new localism, the new politics of scale, the new urban politics, devolution, and neoliberalism. Town twinning is not new and nor did it register a step-change in growth around the early 1970s. Allied to this, while town twinning has been used by states in attempts to regulate uneven development, it was invented and developed initially by individuals and groups interested less in sustaining capitalist accumulation and more in peace and local autonomy (Campbell 1987). That town twinning does not fit easily into these narratives makes the exercise (of fitting it) a useful one. The narratives help to interpret recent developments in town twinning – especially its use in technical assistance programmes (Section 3 of this paper). In turn, the history and geography of town twinning help to problematise and elaborate the narratives – especially their conceptualisation of power and periodisation of contemporary history (Section 2 of this paper).

The research informing this exercise involved analysis of data on town twinning collected by the LGA, relevant correspondence held in the National Archives at Kew in London, newspaper articles generated by searches in Lexis-Nexis, reports and policy documents from various sources, and material archived in local record offices. It also involved interviews with representatives of 12 town twinning associations (or equivalents) and numerous national and international organisations including: the International Union of Local Authorities; the Council of European Municipalities and Regions; the Association of Municipal Corporations; the British Council; the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign; Towns and Development; the United Kingdom One World Linking Association; Oxfam; the Local Government International Bureau; the United Nations Development Programme; World Associations of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination; the Commonwealth Local Government Forum; and the LGA.

The next section argues that town twinning and related forms of bottom-up localism remind us that contemporary localism cannot be fully accounted for by narratives of state downscaling or devolution. With that argued, Section 3 discusses the relationship between fast policy and contemporary town twinning. The final section concludes that town twinning and related forms of bottom-up localism played important roles in preparing the ground for post-Keynesian spatial policies, while town twinning is playing an important role currently in generating and circulating neoliberal (or, better, advanced liberal) urban policy.

2. Bottom-Up Localism

The new politics of scale literature approaches localism as an outcome of state spatial restructuring. It does acknowledge path-dependent interaction between neoliberal programmes and inherited institutional and social landscapes (Brenner and Theodore 2002a), but the overwhelming focus is on state spatial strategies. In this section, six vignettes from the history of localism are presented that suggest sources of localism other than statecraft. The argument developed is that, without such bottom-up localisms, state downscaling of the last few decades would have met with little desire or capability at the local level. Not only does bottom-up localism deserve greater attention, therefore, but also it problematises both the conceptualisation of power and the periodisation of contemporary history found in much regulation and state theory.

Six vignettes from the history of localism:

1. In Britain, the political argument for local government, as opposed to the political-economic argument, was made most famously by John Stuart Mill in *Considerations on Representative Government* (1871). Elements of this political argument include that: local political institutions are closer to the people than their national counterparts; local institutions provide public goods that reflect the preferences of people under their jurisdiction; local institutions hold other levels of government open to a plurality of territorial and functional interests; and local institutions act as laboratories or training grounds for government in general.
2. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a new municipalism flowered across Western Europe. In part, this expressed opposition to laissez faire and support for regulation of ‘the private city’ – of mundane utilities such as water, streets, trolley

cars, public baths, gasworks, and housing (Dogliani 2002, Gaspari 2002, Rodgers 1998). It expressed, therefore, territorial restructuring for regulatory purposes. But, rather than being imposed by a capitalist class seeking to sustain accumulation, this municipalism was driven by socialists demanding revolution in the long term and welfare provision in the short term (Dogliani 2002). It gave rise to a municipal internationalism involving local authorities in Western Europe and North America that may have been a search for regulatory knowledge and skill (*ibid*) but was also inspired by the pacifist and Esperanto movements (Ewen and Hebbert 2007, Gaspari 2002). This municipal internationalism consisted of: correspondence between social reformers, progressives, journalists, elected politicians, professional officers, city bureaucrats, engineers, economists and so on; publications such as the *Annales de la Régie Directe*; visits including study tours; and conferences (Ewen and Hebbert 2007, Saunier 2001, 2002). It became organised in the first two decades of the twentieth century through the General Association of Hygienists and Municipal Technicians, established in 1905, and two organisations established in 1913: the International Union of Towns (which became the International Union of Local Authorities in 1928); and the International Garden Cities and Town Planning Association (which became the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning in 1929). It was these early years of the twentieth century that witnessed some of the first attempts to define ways of judging, apprehending, and acting on the city; to create urban expertise and professional legitimacy; to circulate models and impose ways of seeing the city – in short, to universalise urban policy by transmitting it beyond its original

context (Saunier 2001, 2002). This is a theme we return to in Section 3 of the present paper.

3. The First World War refocused political life on the nation-state (Gaspari 2002). Local governments and their associations were gradually suppressed by the Fascist regimes of Germany, Italy, and Spain (*ibid*). After the Second World War, however, another municipalism arose, especially in Europe. This was very much a municipal internationalism that drew on a collective determination to avoid another war (Ewen and Hebbert 2007) and sought to reorient government away from totalitarian states and towards libertarian local communities (Campbell 1987) – communities that were imagined to have thrived in a previous Europe characterised by Catholicism, the Hapsburgs, regionalism, humanism, and peace (*ibid*). This post-war municipal internationalism became institutionalised through organisations such as: the International Union of Mayors, a union of French and German mayors founded in 1947 and committed to official and worker exchanges between towns and cities; the Council of European Municipalities, a council founded in 1951 to advocate local autonomy within an institutionalised and Christian Europe; and the United Towns Organisation, a federation also founded in 1951 to promote French-English bilingualism and, through that, global understanding and peace (Vion 2002). One device in the repertoire of all three of these organisations was town twinning – an invention of this moment of municipal internationalism, at least in its institutionalised form. Peace, local autonomy, international understanding, European union etc. were sought through, among other things, relatively formal relationships between dyads of towns and cities.

4. A fourth moment of bottom-up localism took place in the USA and elsewhere during the 1980s. ‘Municipal foreign policy’ (Bilder 1989, Kirby et al 1995, Shuman 1986-87, 1992, Hobbs 1994) or ‘municipal diplomacy’ (Kincaid 1989) constituted a response to various problems of the period including nuclear war, South African apartheid, wars in Central America (Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador), economic decline, environmental degradation and, more recently, sweatshop labour and historical association between insurance companies and the Holocaust (Guay 2000). It involved, in the categories of Shuman (1986-87): consciousness-raising measures including education, research, and lobbying activity (e.g. peace studies courses in New York high schools); unilateral measures including zoning, contracting, and investing activity (e.g. zoning ordinances banning nuclear weapons); and bilateral measures including agreements between non-central governments (e.g. sister city or town twinning agreements through which aid was shipped from, say, US localities to Nicaraguan localities). This municipal foreign policy emerged from a context of fiscal austerity at the federal level, associated devolution, and plummeting transportation and communication costs (Hobbs 1994, Kincaid 1989). But it cannot be reduced to this context and was also motivated by falling confidence in national foreign policy, rising faith in the capability and legitimacy of local government, and increasing awareness of global interdependence including the way in which global events affect local life (Hobbs 1994, Kincaid 1989, Shuman 1992).

5. What are sometimes called ‘community development initiatives’ (Shuman 1994) will be discussed fully in Section 3 but can be introduced here as a fifth moment of bottom-up localism. Since the late 1970s, non-governmental organisations have

joined forces with community groups and, increasingly, local governments to promote international development. They have done this holding concerns about poverty and the paternalism of large-scale development programmes. They have perceived a process of democratisation in the so-called Global East and South that promises legitimate and accessible local government through which development might best be pursued (Shuman 1994). Community development initiatives have involved project support (e.g. helping to build a sewerage treatment facility), preferences and sanctions (e.g. selective purchasing), regulation (e.g. standards and zoning), technical assistance, international agreements, grants, campaigning, development education, and town twinning or 'North-South linking' (*ibid*).

6. Britain is currently living a sixth moment of bottom-up localism. The LGA was founded in 1997 as a result of local government reorganisation in England and Wales and to promote the interests of local authorities and better local government (www.lga.gov.uk, accessed 9 November 2007). In 2006, it launched 'Closer to People and Places', a campaign through which local authorities demand further devolution. The arguments of this campaign should be taken seriously as political arguments for local government (in the tradition of John Stuart Mill) at least as much as they are interpreted as cover for some political-economic agenda (i.e. state spatial restructuring to sustain accumulation). These arguments include that: local government enables participation in decision-making; it can be less bureaucratic and more innovative than central government; and it responds to distinctive needs that vary between localities and even individuals, especially given increasingly plural societies (LGA 2006).

These six vignettes function as reminders that localism has sources other than statecraft. They encourage consideration of alternative theoretical frameworks to that offered by regulation and state theory. One promising alternative here is the social constructivist approach used by those political scientists and scholars of international relations disenchanted with neofunctionalism (see Delanty and Rumford 2005). This framework views society as constructed by multiple social actors and public discourses. It acknowledges roles for disparate and diverse projects, models of society, social imaginaries, principles, logics, values, norms, identities, worldviews, cultural models and so on. One advantage of this social constructivist approach is that it allows for a more sophisticated conceptualisation of power than interpellation – the conceptualisation most commonly used by neo-Marxists writing on neoliberalism (Barnett 2005). As taught by Allen (2003), power is not something that simply gets extended over distances, or radiates out from a central point, or engulfs places in ways that are all pervasive. Power is not the same as resources or capabilities which can be mobilised in the exercise of power but which can also be misused and wasted. Power is a relational effect, an outcome of social interaction between those exercising it and those ‘on the receiving end’. Secondly, power is never power in general (*ibid*). It is always power of a particular kind: domination, authority, seduction, manipulation, coercion, inducement, negotiation, persuasion – some of which proceed via imposition, concealment, threat of force etc. but others of which demand recognition and communicative interaction. From the perspective of social constructivism and this more sophisticated conceptualisation of power, there may well have been a state spatial strategy of devolution in Western Europe and North America over the last few decades, but that strategy could not have ‘taken

hold' and led to the new localism widely perceived without a stock of desires and capabilities already present at the local level – a stock built up over 150 or so years through at least six moments of bottom-up localism.

This last point problematises the periodisation of contemporary history found in the spaces of neoliberalism narrative. Regulation theorists argue for a dramatic break sometime around the 1970s, before which the national scale dominated (at least as far back as the Second World War) and after which the supranational, regional, and local scales were brought back in to join the national scale in a polycentric or multi-scalar formation (Brenner 2004). The vignettes presented above suggest that localisms came and went, rose and fell on either side of this supposed break. For example, alongside the construction of the Keynesian welfare state in the post-war period, an anti-totalitarian localism was being constructed through organisations such as the International Union of Mayors, the Council of European Municipalities, and the United Towns Organisation – just as a new Europeanism was being constructed that had at least as much to do with 'political motivations' such as peace as it did with structural transformations in the capitalist economy (Leitner 2004: 241-2). The social constructivist approach encourages a contemporary history of multiple temporalities in which the periods associated with economic cycles are cross-cut by the moments associated with municipalism and municipal internationalism, not forgetting the linear if not exponential growth associated with town twinning.

A final connection of these arguments is to theories of neoliberalism and advanced liberal society. For neo-Marxists such as Harvey (2005) and Peck (2008), neoliberalism describes a theory of political-economic practices associated with the Mont Pelerin

Society, and neoliberalisation describes the practice of government informed by this theory and/or a political project to re-establish conditions for capital accumulation under cover of this theory. What is perceived or imagined is a critique of excessive government made by the capitalist class. In a response to this position, Barnett (2005) has acknowledged the contemporary existence of a pervasive critique of excessive government but has argued that such a critique has origins in a variety of places and movements including: liberalism, which is not only an economic doctrine but also a serious engagement with problems of freedom and pluralism; and Left-libertarianism, which combines scepticism towards large-scale institutions of government with concerns for equality and social justice. (It is from this perspective that Sennett (2006: 1) was able to begin his Castle Lectures at Yale University in 2004 with a description of young radicalism in 1960s North America that incorporated the New Left, the Port Huron Statement, took aim at big institutions for holding individuals in their iron grip, and contributed to the demise of ‘socialist five-year plans’, large corporations that provided employees with jobs for life, and fixed-form welfare institutions in the areas of healthcare and education). Barnett advances the argument that neoliberalism/neoliberalisation is better thought of as ‘advanced liberal society’ and recognised as a long-term and populist achievement. The arguments of the present section fit with this broader position: *spaces of neoliberalism are better thought of as ‘spaces of advanced liberal society’* and recognised as an achievement with roots in the late nineteenth century (and various moments since that time) and in multiple places and movements.

3. Fast Policy

Three interconnected claims have been made in the previous section: 1) the perceived new localism of recent decades cannot be reduced to an outcome of neoliberal statecraft; 2) the desires and capabilities at the local level on which devolution has relied possess a variety of sources and histories; and 3) the spaces of contemporary localism, therefore, are not best thought of as ‘spaces of neoliberalism’. With these claims made, one insight can still be taken from the new politics of scale literature and used as a productive frame in which to view contemporary town twinning. This can be done without accepting the primacy given by regulation theorists to neoliberal ideology and state spatial strategies in the social construction of contemporary localism. The insight is that such localism is characterised by fast policy (Peck 2002, 2003, Peck and Theodore 2001, Peck and Tickell 2002), a process whereby new public and urban policies are continually generated in localities and circulated between localities so that policy reform becomes normalised, policy turnover becomes accelerated, and policy cycles become shortened. The argument of this third section is that fast policy is one useful frame in which to view contemporary town twinning – one useful frame among others including municipal internationalism, Cold War geopolitics, and geographies of care (Clarke In Press, Clarke Forthcoming) – and, in turn, contemporary town twinning plays a significant yet under-acknowledged role in fast policy.

Urban networks, policy transfer, technical assistance

The concept of fast policy fits into a broader field comprised of interurban cooperation, interurban networking, urban policy mobility, policy transfer, and policy convergence.

The 1980s were characterised by competitive urban strategies that diverted taxpayer revenues from public welfare to private accumulation and led to social polarisation (Brenner 2004, Graham 1995). Because of the problems generated by competitive urban strategies, various cooperative strategies were adopted during the 1990s (Brenner 2004, Graham 1995, Leitner and Sheppard 2002). One form taken by these latter strategies was interurban networking which has been particularly evident in Europe (Benington and Harvey 1998, Leitner and Sheppard 2002, Leitner et al 2002) where, to promote integration and legitimate its policies, the European Union has sponsored numerous networks, from ‘sectoral networks’ such as the Coalfields Community Campaign, through ‘spatial networks’ such as Eurocities, to ‘thematic networks’ such as the European Anti-Poverty Network (Benington and Harvey 1998). Cooperation takes multiple forms in these networks including information sharing, cost pooling, joint lobbying, collaborative planning, joint projects, and the dissemination of ‘best practice’ (Brenner 2004, Graham 1995, Leitner and Sheppard 2002, Leitner et al 2002).

One outcome of such interurban networking has been urban policy mobility. This happens when expertise, policy models, and ‘best practice’ are shared through national and international organisations, interpersonal contacts, and fact-finding visits (McCann 2008). It involves: local policy professionals, politicians, and activists; learning from international experts; conversion of policies into models that travel; mobilisation of international case studies in local politics to win over opponents; discursive readying at the site of import; and framing of debates by various media (McCann 2008, Ward 2006). Urban policy mobility has been much studied by political scientists operating in the broader field of policy transfer – the process by which knowledge of policies,

programmes, institutions, ideologies and so on in one political system is used in the development of policies etc. in another political system (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). During the 1990s, policy transfer became increasingly prevalent – especially between Britain and the USA, facilitated by the liberal character of both welfare regimes, the presence of the New Right in both countries, and the special relationships between Thatcher and Reagan, and then Blair and Clinton (Dolowitz 2000). Policy transfer involves a range of actors – from elected officials to bureaucrats, civil servants, policy entrepreneurs, policy experts, consultants, political parties, pressure groups, think tanks, corporations, philanthropic foundations, training institutes, non-governmental organisations, and governmental international organisations – and a range of forms – from copying to emulation, combination, inspiration, harmonisation, and penetration (Bennett 1991, Dolowitz 2000, Stone 2004). It is often constrained by policy complexity, the compatibility of ideologies or institutional systems, and practical factors such as resource availability or language differences (Dolowitz 2000). It often fails when transfer is ‘uninformed’ in that sufficient information about policy and context is missing, when transfer is ‘incomplete’ in that crucial elements of the policy are not transferred, or when transfer is ‘inappropriate’ as when each context is too different from the other (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). Importantly, policy transfer is conceptually distinct from policy diffusion and policy convergence, the first of which describes patterns of policy movement, the second of which explains these patterns with reference to structural forces such as industrialisation, and both of which overlook political agency – the primary focus of policy transfer research (Stone 2004).

Theories of fast policy make three original contributions to this broader field of policy transfer, urban policy mobility, interurban networking, and interurban cooperation. Firstly, they connect rapid and continual policy generation and circulation to strategies of rescaling that attempt to manage the regulatory deficits produced by urban locational policies of the 1970s and 80s (Brenner 2004, Peck and Tickell 2002). This connection can be overplayed, as we saw in Section 2, but it is nevertheless important. Secondly, they extend work begun by students of policy transfer on the role of political agency in policy mobility. This is done through concepts like ‘epicentres of reform’ where policies originate, ‘centres of persuasion’ from where policies are advocated to national and international audiences, and ‘centres of translation’ where policies are converted into acceptable forms on their way to final destinations (Peck 2002, 2003, Peet 2002). Finally, theories of fast policy present two additional reasons for policy transfer failure (Peck and Theodore 2001). Policies travel best as truncated versions of themselves while policy formation and evaluation get truncated to meet shorter and shorter political horizons. At the same time, searches for new solutions to persistent problems are confined to the neoliberal policy repertoire outside of which lie potential solutions to unemployment, poverty and so on. Again, there is a question as to whether contemporary policy repertoires are ‘neoliberal’ in the sense that critique of excessive government from a capitalist class led to their formation. We saw in Section 2 that other commentators prefer the term New Public Management for its acknowledgement of genuine concerns on the Left about public service failure alongside desires on the Right for capitalist accumulation (Cochrane 2007, John 2001). This question is important but not enough to blunt the main point which is that contemporary policy repertoires tend to be narrow and

exclusive, leading to policy importation and churning because variations on the same theme continue to fail and so generate demand for replacement policies.

These contributions, especially the focus on centres and peripheries, intermediation institutions, truncated readings, and narrow policy repertoires, make theories of fast policy useful when approaching technical assistance – a modality of development cooperation that emerged during the 1960s, emphasises (rhetorically, at least) partnership, ownership, participation, exchange etc, and operates through intermediaries including churches, NGOs, community groups, and local governments (Martella and Schunk 1997, Walker et al 2008). When technical assistance has operated through local governments, it has often been termed ‘decentralised cooperation’ (Hafteck 2003) or ‘international municipal exchange’ (Hewitt 1996) and has often operated through twinning of various kinds (Jones and Blunt 1999). Decentralised cooperation through town twinning has been much in evidence recently for a number of reasons including: urbanisation in the so-called Global South; a parallel process of democratisation perceived to incorporate devolution of power to elected local authorities; appreciation among development organisations that markets function best when institutional capacity is high; and appreciation among these same organisations that capacity building at the local level is best done by corresponding local authorities and not NGOs experienced primarily in emergency relief (Hafteck 2003, Savitch 1998).

Many criticisms of technical assistance focus on problems identified and articulated in theories of fast policy. Partnership has sometimes described an equal relationship in which each partner develops a critical consciousness and learns about alternative models of life quality, but has more often described a *centre-periphery*

relationship in which one ‘expert’ partner funds, designs, and manages activity to be implemented by the other ‘client’, ‘recipient’ or ‘user’ partner (Jones and Blunt 1999, Martella and Schunk 1997). Funds have tended to circulate among *intermediation institutions* such as NGOs and consultancy firms which have then provided training and such like to people who would often prefer direct resource transfers (Walker et al 2008). *Truncated readings* of policies have been taken from *narrow policy repertoires* and applied to diverse places facing diverse challenges – not least because standardisation meets the accountancy requirements of development agencies (Walker et al 2008). These criticisms draw from and contribute to the broader post-development critique that emphasises the normative assumptions and practical failures of Development (the uppercase ‘D’ separating Development as Western discourse and project from development as change through time). Where they apply to decentralised cooperation through town twinning, the criticisms connect to the emerging post-development critique in urban studies that takes global and world city approaches to task for the way they identify certain cities as lacking in ‘global’ or ‘world’ attributes (i.e. producer services), position these cities as objects for external intervention, and so limit the imagining and planning of ‘ordinary cities’ (Robinson 2005). Given the background presence of this critique in the technical assistance literature, it is worth recalling as we proceed Corbridge’s (1998) counter-critique of post-development. Among other things, he argues that: poverty is not mainly definitional (basic needs do exist); local customs have their dark side (especially for women in many cases); technology has its light side (it can be labour-saving and even life-saving); and recent development has often been critical and reflexive (approaching development as a dilemma).

Technical assistance and town twinning

The argument of this section so far is that, while the new politics of scale literature problematically reduces the new localism to an outcome of neoliberal statecraft, it also offers the concept of fast policy which adds much to our understanding of interurban networking, urban policy mobility, policy transfer, and technical assistance. In the rest of this section, the relationship between fast policy and town twinning is considered in greater depth. This is important because British, European, and Commonwealth technical assistance programmes of the last few decades have often worked through existing or especially established town twinning relationships. Such programmes have included the UK Government's Know How Fund for Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (incorporating the Local Authorities Technical Links Scheme), the European Commission's TACIS programme for the Newly Independent States of post-Socialist Europe and Asia (incorporating the TACIS City Twinning Programme), and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum's Good Practice and Professional Scholarship Schemes. Local authorities in Britain have been surprisingly willing to participate in these programmes. They have done so in response to demands for assistance made by local authorities in other countries (Baldersheim et al 2002, Furmankiewicz 2005, 2006), and to a discourse of institutional learning that perceives a fast changing world and a corresponding need for continual organisational learning through training courses, study visits, secondments etc. (Jones and Blunt 1999). This discourse is a defining feature of 'soft capitalism' (Thrift 2005) – a set of contemporary economic practices that assume a permanent state of turbulence and vulnerability which is best survived through swiftly

adaptive small organisations populated by swiftly reactive managers ('fast subjects'). The discourse is spread by participants in 'the cultural circuit of capital' (*ibid*) – the terrain of capital accumulation occupied by management consultants, business schools, journalists and so on who produce a continual critique of capitalism to keep it 'surfing along' while themselves constituting a new set of markets for capitalism (p6). In some ways, British local authorities are now participants in this cultural circuit of capital. Following enlargement of the European Union, they have watched Structural Fund money move east and coped with this closure of one funding avenue by exchanging managerial knowledge for income from technical assistance programmes. This is the economic logic that supports the moral logic of responding to requests from needy localities and the managerial logic of learning for turbulent times.

As a final move in this section, let us consider two of these technical assistance programmes in greater detail with a particular focus on the relationship between fast policy and town twinning. The UK Government's Know How Fund was established in 1989 to support and influence transition in post-socialist Poland. Over time, it was extended to all European Union accession countries and other former members of the Soviet Union where it operated as one programme among many with other sponsors including the European Commission, the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Redevelopment, and the World Bank. Know How Fund activities were funded in sectors reflecting the perceived needs of countries in transition and the perceived expertise of Britain: financial services (including banking, accounting, and insurance); privatisation (especially of Czech and Slovak state-owned companies); and public administration, management, and good governance (including the development of

independent media). Individual measures included: the Pre-Investment Feasibility Studies Scheme (for British companies considering long-term investment in the region); the Training for Investment Personnel Scheme (for training of those working on investment operations in the region); the Academic Partnerships Scheme (for transfer of skills between tertiary education institutions); the Joint Industrial and Commercial Attachments Scheme (for attaching managers from the region to British organisations); the Charity Know How Scheme (for transfer of expertise to the region's fledgling voluntary sector); the British Executive Overseas Scheme (for transfer of skills from British businesspeople); the British Books for Managers Scheme (to supply textbooks on finance, business, and management), the Eastern European Partnerships Scheme (to place skilled volunteers with employers in the region); and the Local Authority Technical Links Scheme (for transferring expertise to local authorities in the region).

This last scheme was established in 1991, administered by the Local Government International Bureau, and focused on joint projects between local authorities. Such joint projects were often between long-standing town twinning partners or town twinning partners especially created in response to the scheme. For example, one joint project was between Bristol and Tbilisi (Georgia). These two cities had signed formal twinning charters the year before the Know How Fund was established, but the process of partnership had really begun in the early 1980s when Paul Garland, a former communist who was to become a Labour Councillor and founder of the Bristol-Tbilisi Association, lobbied Bristol City Council for a ‘peace and cooperation’ link with a Soviet City.¹ Civic visits were exchanged between the cities in 1985 and 1987. Twinning charters were signed in 1988 and the Bristol-Tbilisi Association was established. Initial activities

included university exchanges and Georgian choir tours. Then, in 1991, Georgia gained independence from Russia and civil war followed. Twinning activities declined over the next four years. In 1995, an officer in the Environment Department at Bristol City Council received a letter from his counterpart at Tbilisi City Council requesting assistance with reconstruction after the war. Bristol responded positively because Georgia was viewed as: an emerging state needing help to establish local government; an emerging market with opportunities for Bristol businesses; and a different, challenging environment in which Council officers could learn new skills and obtain a ‘global education’. The twinning charters were redrafted in Georgian in 1996 and the Know How Fund was successfully approached for sponsorship of two projects. The first was on waste management and environmental legislation. It began in 1996 with £24,358 from the Know How Fund and a visit by two Bristol City Council officers to assess needs in Tbilisi. The project continued with officer exchanges in 1997 and 1998. It ran for two years in total and involved: sharing of information and expertise on European Union environmental legislation; sharing of air pollution monitoring equipment; and production of a Solid Waste Master Plan for Tbilisi. The second project was on economic development. It also began in 1996, this time with £19,989 from the Know How Fund. Business delegations were exchanged over the next two years. Local companies, enterprise centres, and chambers of commerce were visited, but little came from this project by way of concrete plans, relationships, or contracts.

The second example of technical assistance for consideration here is the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) and its various programmes including the Professional Scholarship Scheme and the Best Practice Scheme. The CLGF was

established in 1998 with support from the UK Government's Department for International Development. It seeks 'to promote and strengthen effective democratic government throughout the Commonwealth and to facilitate the exchange of good practice in local government structures and services' (www.clgf.org.uk, accessed 2 April 2009). It does this through conferences, programmes, and information services for members that include individual local authorities, local government associations, and ministries dealing with local government. What is meant by 'good practice' in local government can be seen in the Commonwealth Principles on Good Practice for Local Government agreed at the 2005 Commonwealth Local Government Conference in Aberdeen. These principles include: constitutional and legal recognition for local democracy; the ability to elect local representatives; partnerships between spheres of government; a defined legislative framework (in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity); the opportunity to participate in local decision-making; open local government (that is accountable and open to scrutiny); inclusiveness; adequate and equitable resource allocation; equitable service delivery; and continuous capacity development. In the next couple of paragraphs, we consider a project that received support from the CLGF Professional Scholarship Scheme and worked through a long-standing town twinning relationship, followed by a project that received support from the CLGF Good Practice Scheme and worked through an especially established town twinning relationship. It should be noted that neither of these partnerships uses the term 'town twinning'. The former, between Warwick District and Bo District (Sierra Leone), prefers the term 'North-South linking' to distinguish it from civic and cultural relationships between Western European localities. The latter, between Cardiff and

Cochin (India), prefers the term ‘international partnership’ to distinguish it from long-term relationships lacking the tight focus of project-specific partnerships. Both, however, fit the ‘device, repertoire and model’ definition of town twinning used in this paper and outlined in Section 1.

The Warwick-Bo link was established in 1980 by individuals associated with Leamington Spa’s Oxfam Office, Third World Information Centre, and World Development Movement group. These individuals wished to improve healthcare, education, and other conditions in Bo District while encouraging development education in Warwick District. They wished to do this in accordance with principles of mutuality, sustainability, diversity, and human rights, and through exchange visits, talks, exhibitions, gift giving, and production/circulation of teaching materials. The link was very active during the 1980s but encountered practical difficulties during the 1990s with civil war in Sierra Leone. In the early 2000s, existing activities were revived and key individuals in Leamington Spa Town Council, Warwick District Council, and Warwickshire County Council were enrolled into new local authority activities. Funding was obtained from the CLGF Professional Scholarship Scheme for officer exchanges and training in the area of waste management. Through these exchanges, Bo’s waste management needs were surveyed and an action plan was devised for Bo City Council. It is important to note that, while CLGF programmes and projects can appear to impose British priorities and practices on overseas governments, Bo’s need for technical assistance in the area of waste management was first articulated by the city’s mayor to one of his long-standing friends, a member of the Warwick One World Link. This leads to the first of two points that follow from consideration of CLGF technical assistance

schemes. The Warwick-Bo project worked through an existing town twinning relationship with a two-decade long history of its own. This relationship was a ‘Development’ relationship informed by the post-development critique. Self-reflexive and critical, members of Warwick One World Link approached development as a dilemma and agonised over potential problems of colonialism, racism, paternalism and so on. It was this consciously self-critical relationship that local authority officers were enrolled into, along with the CLGF, and the character of the ensuing project reflected this stance more than it might have otherwise done.

The second point follows from consideration of Cardiff’s link with Cochin. This was established in 2006 when the CLGF approached Cardiff to take over from Brighton which had withdrawn from a Good Practice Scheme project with Cochin. Brighton had withdrawn when local elections brought new Councillors with new priorities to power in the city. Cardiff had been approached because, at the time, the city chaired the International Working Group of the Society for Local Authority Chief Executives. It responded positively because the project was fully funded, India was perceived to be a developing economy offering future investment opportunities, and projects such as this were perceived to help promote cities as ‘modern’, ‘dynamic’, ‘international’, ‘innovative’, ‘competitive’ etc. The project involved officer visits, presentations, and workshops. Priority areas – negotiated between Cochin (with specific needs), Cardiff (with specific experience and expertise), and the CLGF (with specific eligibility criteria) – included regeneration and waste management. A strategic framework or corporate plan was produced for Cochin along with a Standing Committee Forward Work Programme, an education pack on recycling, and a City Development Plan. In Cardiff’s final report to

the CLGF, officers make recommendations regarding future projects (Cardiff City Council 2007: 7):

Given the period of time required to build understanding and effective working relationships between the cities, any future project needs to be realistic in relation to what can feasibly be delivered within the timescales. There is certainly a period of time which needs to be built in at the beginning of the project to enable the culture differences of organisations to be understood and for an appreciation to be gained regarding the issues facing a particular city. [...] Some consideration also needs to be given to the length of the project visits in that a short time (approximately 3-5 days) is often not sufficient to either gain a grasp of the key issues or enable any new experiences/skills to become embedded within an organisation to enable true ownership of any outcome.

Officers knew little if anything of India in general and Cochin in particular before becoming involved in the project which only lasted for 12 months. In contrast to the Warwick-Bo project (embedded in a long-standing town twinning arrangement through which personal relationships of trust and understanding had already been generated), the Cardiff-Cochin project suffered from short timeframes in which to build understanding and working relationships, to negotiate cultural differences, and to learn about the specific challenges facing specific communities. It is in these circumstances that technical assistance risks becoming inappropriate, paternalistic intervention – though in the case of Cardiff and Cochin this risk was avoided for the most part because little was

actually achieved over the course of the year. For example, the Corporate Plan template devised by officers in Cardiff was never filled out by officers in Cochin.

These brief case studies of technical assistance projects involving town twinning provide three conclusions to the present section. The first is that technical assistance and town twinning can be usefully interpreted using the fast policy conceptual toolkit of intermediaries, narrow policy repertoires, and truncated readings and processes. Secondly, technical assistance programmes sometimes depend on existing town twinning relationships which have their own histories. This connects back to the argument in Section 2 that regulation approaches to the new localism give too little credit to bottom-up localism. Thirdly, when technical assistance programmes do work through existing town twinning relationships, the character of those relationships is important and can influence the character of related projects. In summary form, the fast policy framework furthers our understanding of town twinning while town twinning research works to problematise and elaborate the fast policy framework.

4. Conclusion

This paper emerged from an attempt to place the history of town twinning in Britain within narratives of the new localism and the new politics of scale. Three points became clear during that exercise. The first is that certain concepts in regulation and state theory work to interpret the recent history of town twinning. Technical assistance programmes have used already existing or especially created town twinning relationships. Through town twinning, these programmes have generated fast policy – policy taken from a narrow policy repertoire, transformed by truncated readings and processes, advocated by

intermediation institutions, and transferred from centres to peripheries. Secondly, the recent history of town twinning helps to elaborate these concepts. It demands an acknowledged role for town twinning in fast policy and related processes of interurban cooperation, interurban networking, urban policy mobility, and policy transfer. This role is an active one since town twinning relationships can be long-standing and have independent characters that ‘rub off’ on technical assistance projects and programmes. Finally, the longer history of town twinning problematises certain other moves in the new politics of scale narrative. The new localism is not simply an outcome of neoliberal statecraft. Devolution was dependent on desires and capabilities at the local level which have their origins in previous state strategies but also in social movements and other sources of bottom-up localism. The new localism is not straightforwardly ‘new’ either. It is not simply a product of the regulatory crisis of the 1970s and responses to that crisis. Some of its history stretches back through moments of bottom-up localism to at least the late nineteenth century. Some of its history stretches back through graphs of town twinning growth to at least the late 1940s. From these perspectives, the term ‘spaces of neoliberalism’ appears ambiguous at best. It casts some important things in light, such as the geography of fast policy, while casting other important things in shadow, including the history of bottom-up localism.

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Notes

1. This account of the Bristol-Tbilisi link and its involvement in the Know How Fund, along with subsequent accounts of other links and their involvement in other programmes, is based on conversations with representatives of relevant local authorities and town twinning associations (or their equivalents), and documents held by these organisations and in local record offices.

Figure 1: Town twinning relationships by British locality, June 2007

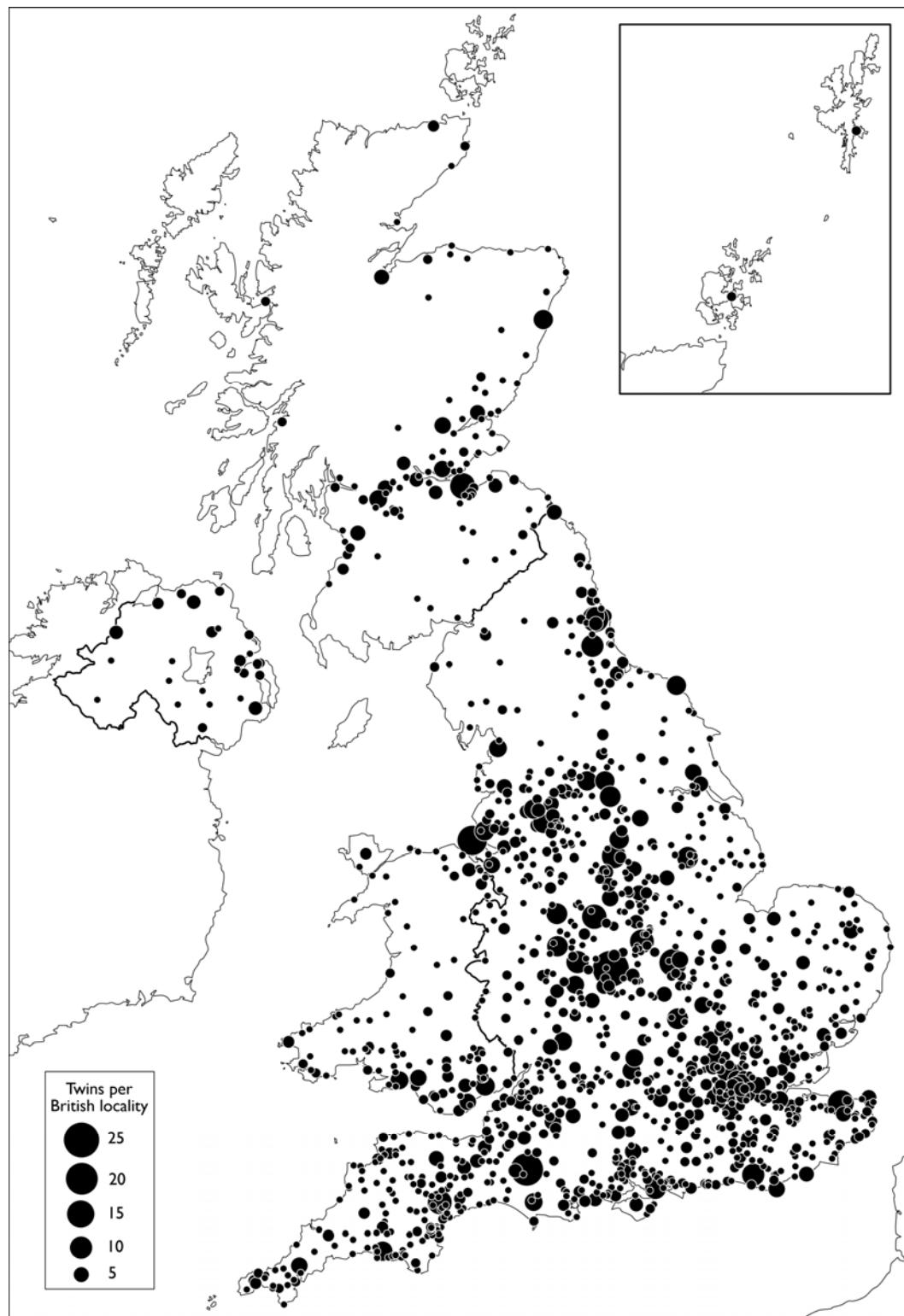


Figure 2: Town twinning relationships involving British localities by overseas country, June 2007

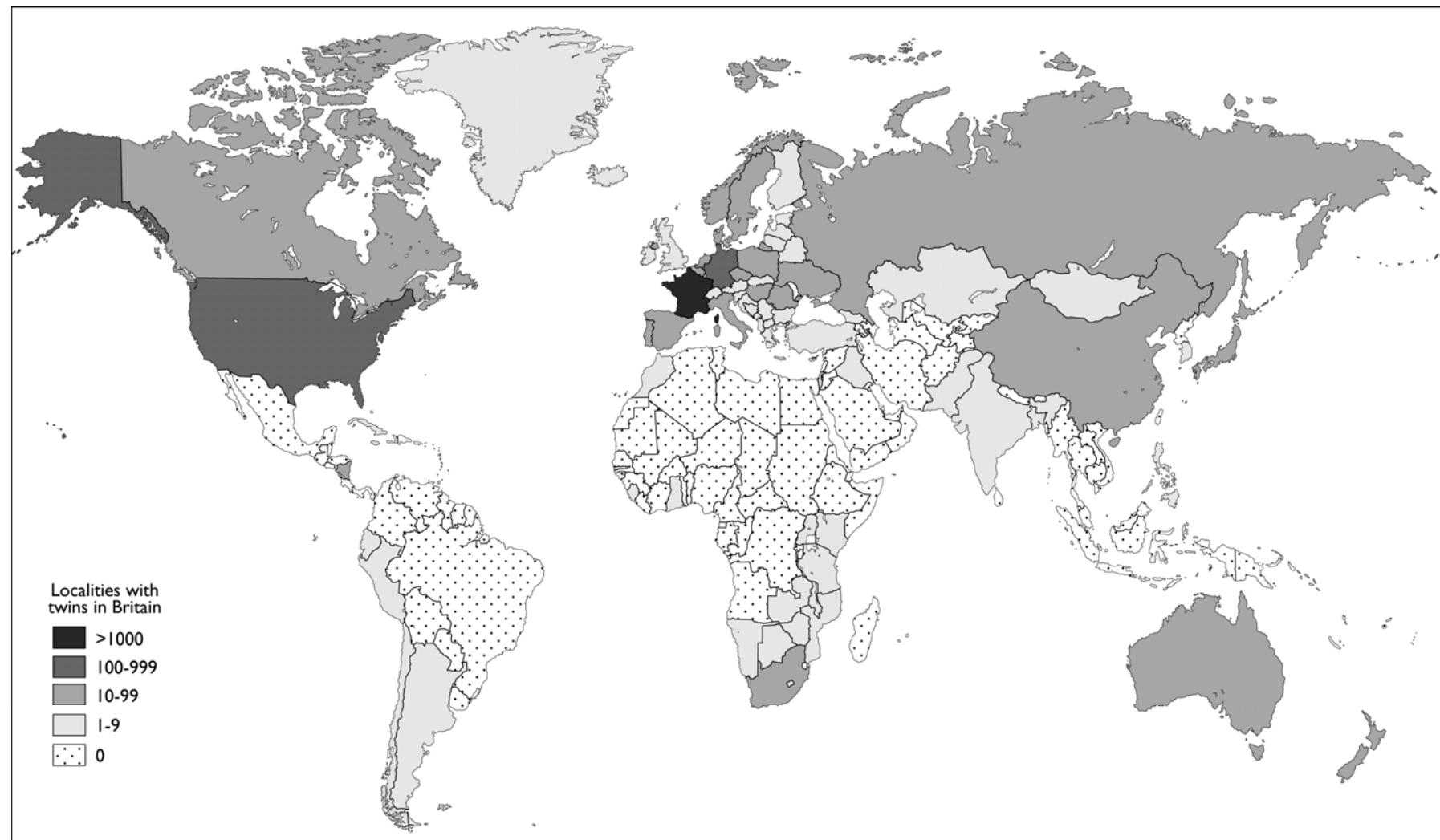


Figure 3: Total town twinning relationships involving British localities over time

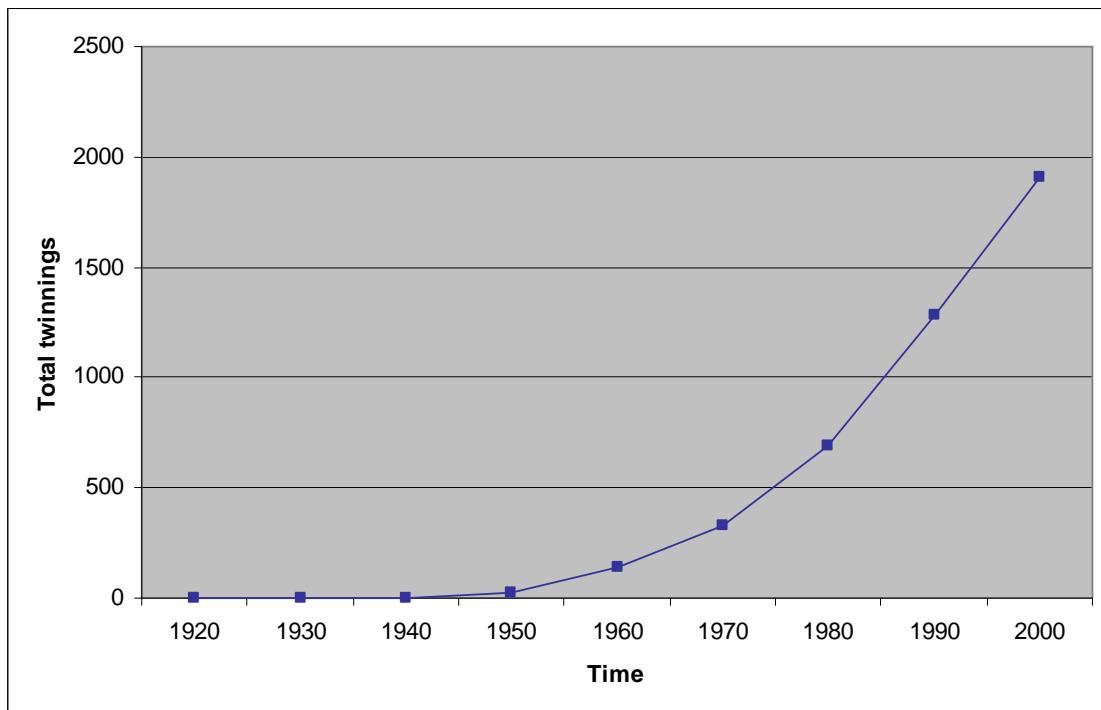


Figure 4: New town twinning relationships involving British localities by decade

