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Functional integration, political conflict and muddled metropolitanism in the London region: 1850–2016

Book section

Functional integration, political conflict and muddled metropolitanism in the London region: 1850-2014

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1.   Introduction: framing a London case study

London still is a somewhat 'unique city' as Rasmussen (1937) claimed, in several ways that impact on its capacity for self-governance.   Notable among these is its international orientation – both historically as the power centre of a great trading and colonial empire, and more recently as the most globalised of financial centres – placing powerful demands (beyond those of its citizenry) on its ordering and development. And yet, the organic character of its evolution, which is what particularly struck Rasmussen, might also make it the epitome of a post-industrial metropolis, unique in its early experience of dilemmas that all large and complex city-regions will come to face, if not to resolve.

From a French perspective, at least, this kind of development ('more by fortune than design' in Hebbert's [1998] phrase) might be seen as simply reflecting a particular British cultural bias in favour of 'muddling-through', rather than harnessing state power to a rational ordering of this complexity. There is a flavour of this in applause for Rasmussen's suggestion that "London had benefited from fragmentation, checks and balances in its system of governance", which resisted modernist 'clean sweep' planning and thus preserved a variety in the city's urban fabric that came to be widely valued (Hebbert, 1973, 203)

But, putting aside questions of aesthetic judgement and (for the moment) the wider stakes associated with more/less 'statist' approaches to development, this particular characterisation of post-war London planning exposes some issues which are central to how the discussion of evolving metropolitan governance will be framed in this chapter. The most basic of these is the proposition that *governance* (i.e. literally 'steering') of any social/spatial system, always and anywhere, involves an amalgam of three distinct kinds of process operating in and through:

- *formal authority structures*;
- *decentralised market-type interactions* between individuals pursuing their separate interests; and
- *informal institutions*, involving more/less widely shared norms, senses of identity, trust, habits of co-operation/obstruction and understandings of the context in which they are operating.

Reforming a governance system to cope with changing conditions is generally understood to involve some shake-up of existing divisions of labour (e.g. between ministries, professions, the hierarchy of spatial units and public/private agency). For this to succeed, however, reform processes need to engage with the behaviour/ dynamics of markets and informal institutions, as well as with redesign of authority structures (Gordon, 2006) .

A second proposition is that the *metropolitan* context poses distinct challenges for governance which are now crucially importance but especially difficult because of the internal complexity of these regions. This characteristic is key to their expected contribution to economic competitiveness, but makes them unmanageable through inherited governmental structures. Three basic aspects of this complexity are:

- a high degree of diversity (in populations, skills, economic activities and lifestyles);
- multiplexed patterns of interaction among these (dense, uneven *and* over widely different ranges, from neighbourhood to trans-regional scale); and, as their counterpart
- a potential for much greater areal differentiation, in populations and interests, across territories of politically significant size (for service provision/representation etc.).

A final proposition is that, despite this complexity, some key forms of *structural conflict* are always liable to impact upon the capacity for effective metropolitan governance. These apply whether they are openly recognised *or* repressed, but the consequences in terms of functionality, responsiveness and transparency are expected to be substantially worse in the latter case.

Against the background of this set of general ideas about the metropolitan governance problem, consideration of the London experience has several points of potential interest, both for other metropoles which are coming to share some of its characteristics, and for those with evident differences in their economic, political or cultural attributes. One reason for making this claim is simply that London has (almost certainly) the longest experience of wrestling with the problems of how a large, diverse and spatially extended urban agglomeration can sustain itself, in economic, environmental, social and political terms. This goes back in London's case to the middle of the 19th century, when it was the largest centre within the first modern nation to have a majority-urban population. And the recurring debate as to whether the entire functional

region around a major city could and should be governed by a single authority has a starting point in H.G. Wells' (1903) argument that the delocalising effects of modern transport networks around London meant that one such 'mammoth municipality' should administer the whole territory within an hour's reach of the centre.

A second point of interest in the London case, lies in its sheer size, relative to most other European centres, which both exposes and amplifies the difference that scale and growth can be expected to make to the governance problem. This has encouraged social and political differentiation of neighbourhoods, suburbs and of some broader tracts of the city-region which have acquired distinct political identities. But, as is easily seen in this case, the organic character of development means that the actual territories occupied by specific groups have shifted as the city has expanded, with classic processes of invasion and succession producing periodic points of friction, and various forms of locally defensive politics. These have taken a particular form in outer areas, close to the frontier of development for an expanding city, which (on the traditional Anglo-American model) are occupied by more affluent classes (prioritising space over accessibility) with more political weight to deploy.

A third notable feature, where London's position is even more distinctive – interesting in its difference, more than its anticipation of a general trend – is that of the stop put to this spatial expansion in the 1940s through imposition of an (effectively enforced) Green Belt. This might be better characterised as a London Levée since, after raising the level of development inside its bounds, further residential demand lapped over it, settling in a range of centres/areas substantially further out. That produced a much more extended, complex and governmentally fragmented London region, rather than compacting development within a recognisably distinct capital city.   Debates continue as to whether the outcome was good or bad, though this key episode well illustrates the likelihood of unintended consequences from authoritative planning when the power and responsiveness of the market dimension of governance is ignored. But, and this is the fourth point of likely general interest, despite a failure (over this long term) to satisfactorily resolve the issue of London metropolitan governance, the region now seems more than ever to be an economic success story. There are very evident and worsening problems of housing affordability, exacerbating those of widening social inequality – but overall the metropolitan region seems much less obviously dysfunctional than the irrationalities of its governance structure might lead an outside researcher to expect.

In the remainder of the chapter, the potential significance of this case is teased out a little more carefully by firstly reviewing the evolution of London's political economy, spatial structure and governmental arrangements since the mid-19th century (section 2), and then taking this as a backcloth to draw out key dimensions of conflict affecting governance of the metropolis   and how these relate to current issues about relations with central government on the one hand (in

terms of fiscal devolution and the idea of London as a city-state), and with authorities in outer parts of its functional economic region (section 3)   A short conclusion then returns to the issue of the need for any reform of metropolitan governance (here as elsewhere) to address all three dimensions of governance (authority, markets and informal institutions) and their inter-relation (section 4)

2.   The Development of the Metropolitan Issue 1850-2015.

In the field of British local government studies, before this was displaced by urban politics and/or policy studies in the 1970s, a strongly historical perspective was associated, on the one hand, with a charting of progress in the development of responsibilities, administrative structures and their legal bases and, on the other, with some nostalgia for days when independent local ways of doing things were less subject to 'interference' from activist, impatient and conformity-seeking central governments. These narratives have generally been overtaken by more analytic approaches of various kinds.   But there are still some strong reasons for taking a long view on contemporary metropolitan governance issues. One involves the sources of path-dependence in them, in the ways that patterns of demographic, social and political differentiation evolve in and around particular metropolitan regions, alongside ideas about identity, solidarity, trustworthiness and interdependence.   Another is because structural dimensions of conflict, and the power resources applied to these, not always evident on the surface or in the particularities of particular episodes, are more clearly recognisable in patterns of behaviour, non-decision-making and outcomes over the long run (cf. Saunier, 2008).

We start then by looking at key changes in the London region since the mid 19th century, when the metropolitan governance issue emerged, in its political economy, spatial organisation and formal government. These are looked at in turn, rather than in a single narrative because they have followed quite different rhythms: with three distinct *eras* in the first case, some evolving long run *trends* in the second, and clusters of *events* in the third.

2a Three eras in modern London's Political Economy[1]

Through the latter part of the 19th century, London's economic role could be characterised as that of an *Imperial City*. Though growing rather rapidly, it lacked the most dynamic sectors of

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[1]   Relevant spatial definitions of the 'London' economy shift between these periods (as section 2b explains). In the first era this is effectively contained within what is now Inner London; for most of the second it is what is now Greater London; while for the third it involves a greatly extended region. For consistency, however, references to aggregate characteristics/changes in this section all implicitly relate to Greater London.

contemporary industry and the kind of factory economy that had developed in northern cities, closer to key mineral/energy resources. Instead it specialised in services and in artisanal forms of manufacture, linked particularly to the processing of imperial imports and to serving the demands of its elite residents. Typically these activities were very competitive and/or at the mercy of strong international trade cycles, so the jobs they offered working class Londoners tended to be insecure (with a substantial minority of casual jobs e.g. in the docks), not conducive to development either of stable lifestyles or solidaristic working class organisations (such as the trade unions, co-operatives and nonconformist chapels of the industrial regions). London's culture and patterns of interaction were more individualist, opportunist and risky. The risks were not purely individual, however: unemployment and housing crises in years of trade recession exposed a potential for social conflict which worried the ruling and middle classes, and prepared the ground eventually for planning/welfare state responses, in the next century (Stedman Jones, 1971).

By then, however, external economic and technological developments had started to transform London's economic role into that of the *Fordist Industrial Capital,* which characterised it through most of the 20th century. With industrial change making access to markets (rather than resources) the key location factor, and with a curtailment of global trade, London's position at the heart of the largest domestic market made it the most attractive UK location for a new wave of light Ford-style industries. As with the city's burgeoning (private and public) bureaucracies, these factories offered (and required) both bases for more stable work/social organisations and support for a more planned approach to urban and social infrastructure (including a much increased role for the local state), as well as greatly extended market relations. During the later part of this Fordist era (from about 1960), a combination of corporate planning, market forces and falling transport/communication costs led increasingly to new spatial divisions of labour (within as well as between firms) in which routinisable functions/jobs were transferred from London to cheaper locations. This transformation essentially reflected success in the city's economy, rather than weakness as often assumed, though it did radically alter its occupational mix (Buck et al., 1986).

That economic role, and the sorts of order associated with it, were in their turn, displaced (after the 1970s) by another round of restructuring in the (inter)national economy, engendering a second shift in London's economic role - to one usually characterised as the *Global City* (though this is a loaded term, as will be explained later). At the aggregate level this was associated with a turnaround in London employment and population trends, plus a sharp increase in the earnings/productivity gap as compared with the rest of the country (Buck et al., 2002). Particular reasons for this included **both** the fact that some old trends had run their course (as the goods-related sectors became vanishingly small) **and** external shocks causing new influxes of overseas immigrants, (firstly from conflict zones, and then from the EU accession countries).

Beyond these, however, a more fundamental global shift in the intensity, scope and form of market competition seems to have brought a revaluation of a broad set of urban assets (including diversity, flexibility, innovativeness, international orientation etc.) in which London and a number of other great cities had traditionally excelled. And the deregulatory response of UK governments to the new competitive environment (under Thatcher in the 1980s, but also New Labour in the late 1990s) intensified these effects, boosting the overall performance of the London economy both directly and via increased levels of personal inequality (from which it was a net beneficiary).

In a series of respects then, this set of qualitative changes - which included a higher degree of volatility (up to the 2007/8 financial crisis, from which London enjoyed unexpected protection) and labour market flexibility - involved some degree of reversion to features of the late 19th century (Imperial City) era as well as extrapolation of trends from that of the Fordist Capital (Buck et al., 2002). Enthusiasm for strategic regional planning also faded, although development control remained (on a more localist basis than in the Fordist era): these were national trends but with particular significance in the London metropolitan context.

2b Spatial Expansion and Metropolitanisation.

The notion of a functionally integrated metropolitan regional system is not a simple one, and became much less so during the course of these three eras. At its simplest it involves a set of areas/activities which are (at the time) strongly linked with those in the urban core - via input-output, information or housing/labour market connections. Subsequently, however, around a major centre such as London, these secondary areas develop their own strong inter-connections and sources of strength, contributing to (as well as drawing from) metropolitan-wide agglomeration economies. Many of the ramifications of this extended region are readily managed through sets of overlapping markets, but their lack of transparency makes effective adaptation much harder for both formal authorities and informal institutions.

The spatial extent of such functional urban regions (FURs) can go well beyond that of the morphological region (of continuous urbanisation), and whether that around London extends out for just 60 kms. *or* twice as far is a matter of judgement. Even taking a conservative view of this, however, growth trends across London's metropolitan FUR have been clearly positive, for both residents and jobs, through the eras just discussed – though its inner areas will have shrunk in these terms over much of this time. Even at the level of Greater London, recorded population numbers fell very substantially over the half century from the late 1930s (and Inner London from much earlier), as did employment for about 25 years from the late 1950s (Buck et al., 2002).

The common driving force behind these decentralising trends, and hence also the key factor in the region's spatial extension, was a demand for lower densities of occupation, both from private residents (as their incomes grew) and from businesses (as labour productivity increased). At a micro-level the processes primarily involved residential moves by young families in/entering owner-occupation, and relocations of goods-related operations or back offices.   But life-cycle factors cancel out in the long run, and most of the net employment shift occurred through differences in the growth rates of (non-moving) firms in inner versus outer areas. What chiefly mattered in both cases was that the supply of space was inelastic in areas closer to the centre.

For 30 or so years, such a dispersal of jobs and housing was consistent with a coherent metropolitan planning strategy developed during the war years, when a National Government favoured radical approaches to both physical and social reconstruction. In particular, Abercrombie's 1944 London Region Plan, provided for relocation of a large number of Londoners to planned settlements beyond the Green Belt, with their balanced development being assured by industrial development controls elsewhere, and via a mover selection scheme. In many ways this functioned impressively, but the scale of development of New Towns was never nearly sufficient on its own to enable the required outward shift.

Fortunately, market forces were working in much the same direction, and a very much larger number of Londoners in search of more space, somewhere within commuting range, moved out independently to private housing in other destinations within the London commuting belt not specifically designated in any plan. Even at the peak of the New Town and town expansion programmes these accounted for just 15% of London's shrinkage in jobs and residents (Buck et al., 1986, 59). Unlike the (planned) movers to these towns who were meant to take up new jobs in self-contained communities, the spontaneous out-movers almost all intended to keep their London jobs.   Fortunately (again), since market forces steered jobs as well as housing to outer areas where land was available, these out-movers eventually tended to find suitable employment opportunities closer to hand, keeping the volume of in-commuting under control, and avoiding substantial local labour market imbalances (Buck et al., 1986).   .

The scale of outward movement from Greater London – involving net migration and job loss rates of around 1% p.a. – became a matter of controversy in the 1970s when GLC planners and other commentators came to see it as worsening social polarisation and concentrations of deprivation, particularly within inner London. There were worries too that policies of managed dispersal were weakening the city's base in ways that threatened an uncontrollable decline. Subsequent research evidence suggested that this view was mistaken, in relation to: the roles of planning versus market forces; the judgement that job losses signified a weakened London economy, rather than spatial adjustments to economic growth pressures; and that areas of

higher unemployment reflected local job losses, rather than simply residential concentrations (in cheaper housing areas) of the population groups most vulnerable to labour market risks (Buck et al., 1986). The fact that overlapping commuting areas across the metropolitan region rapidly diffused the effect of sub-regional shocks was (and is) not readily appreciated.

In the early phases of decentralisation, the economic role of the outer areas was primarily to support the economy of the core through assuring a labour supply: first directly through commuting; and then increasingly through accommodating support functions such as back-offices which employed a growing local labour force in relatively routine jobs. As the process advanced, the mix of activities broadened, the depth of local skill pools increased, with a much enhanced potential for interconnections among businesses outside Greater London, and less simple dependence on the strength of the core. Towns 50 kms or more from the centre now attracted/generated types of highly innovative activity and international offices which needed face-to-face access to metropolitan actors, but less frequently than traditional business services did. Patterns of connection and communication thus became a lot more complex, and hence also the demands for orbital/eccentric travel, in a region whose growth (and spatial extension) had been structured around a radial public transport network with top-down planning. How the collective economic interests of this extended region could be understood and effectively represented also became increasingly uncertain (Gordon and Travers, 2010).

Population decentralisation has had two important political ramifications. At the local level, population shifts alter the social mix of residents, often bringing in people of a lower class into traditionally conservative areas (especially where new social housing is involved). At the 'London' level the corresponding issue is one of increasing under-bounding[2]. In party political terms this means that the core 'city-wide' authority with fixed boundaries becomes increasingly likely to be Labour controlled[3]. In relation to substantive political issues it means that the most obvious areas for new housing development (in accessible but unconstrained sites) are increasingly likely to lie outside the ambit of that authority, in areas with more conservative residents.

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[2] 'Under-bounding' refers to the tendency for urban administrative units to exclude adjacent areas that are effectively integrated, in physical or economic terms, with the urban core. Such underbounding commonly arises because while *de facto* urban areas continuously expand, *de jure* ones are more rigid, owing to legal inertia and/or politically vested interests.

[3] As with the London County Council, which was controlled by the (conservative) Municipal Reform Party from 1907-1934, but then by Labour right until its abolition in 1985.

2c: Government structures and strategies

London government in a formal sense had two foundations, first with the Roman establishment of Londinium (around 50 A.D.), and then the Norman re-settlement and chartering of the City of London[4] (around 1067). Both involved essentially the same rather small walled area/port, in what is now the primary financial district. In the millennium between these two settlements, the city's population was very greatly reduced, but a range of other centres grew up nearby, including Westminster where the last Anglo-Saxon English kings established a royal seat, and Southwark on the south side of the river. Though areas in Middlesex were subsequently administered with the City for fiscal/judicial purposes, the City Corporation continually resisted an enlargement to incorporate new areas – or later their separate incorporation. After Londinium, there was thus no city-wide government until the end of the 19th century – nor any larger walled area.

The basic local unit of government through this long era was the historic one of the parish (or vestry), with some grouping into district boards still leaving about such 75 entities across London, of varying sizes and forms of organisation, together with several times as many special-purpose authorities. When this fragmented system proved clearly inadequate to the needs of a large and growing city, a Metropolitan Board of Works was established (in 1855) with members nominated by the bigger vestries, or district groupings of them, with responsibility for provision of infrastructure across the contemporary metropolitan area (including roads, sewerage, bridges, river embankments etc.). It carried this out rather effectively, though without the democratic control of new borough and county authorities outside London. London in its turn did acquire an elected County Council (the LCC) in 1889, responsible for providing a full range of services and facilities across this same metropolitan area (that now identified as Inner London, and somewhat under-bounded from the outset). Its scope and the metropolitan ambitions of its Progressive leadership soon aroused antipathy from conservative localists, leading central government in 1899 to create a second tier of Metropolitan Borough authorities, taking over the responsibilities of the vestries (Davis, 1988) . Though restructured in 1965 this borough tier (with populations now around 270,000) remains as the most durable element of London government – apart from the City which still operates, in its own distinct fashion (Travers, 2015).

The LCC was the standard bearer for metropolitanism, however, responsible for the first of the Abercrombie Plans in 1943, and then for both its urban renewal aspects and administration of

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[4] Following common practice, capitalised references to 'the City' in this chapter relate either to the City of London Corporation, which still governs 'the square mile', or to the core of UK financial services activities traditionally located there (though now with overspill into new Docklands developments) – rather than to any wider definition of the city (such as Greater London). The symbolic head of the City is its Lord Mayor, not to be confused with the elected Mayor of London who (since 2000) has been the executive head of the Greater London Authority.

the selection scheme which got Londoners out to the post-war New and Expanded Towns. By that time its boundaries were almost a century out of date, covering just a quarter of the land inside the Green Belt. The outer bounds of that belt were allowed to expand substantially over the next 20 years in response to ad hoc applications from county authorities, turning it into more of a blanket on development across the metropolitan region than just a barrier to sprawl.

From the mid-1960s on, however, some regional planning initiatives started, including:

- a Standing Conference of South East Regional Planning authorities (SERPLAN); established in 1962 as a collaborative research and monitoring venture by local government (and lasting until 2010);
- a 1964 central-government *South East Study*, the first of several addressing the question of how/where this region's growing population was to be housed; followed soon by
- a regional strategy from the South East's Economic Planning Council (SEEPC), one of a set, centrally appointed but broadly constituted, linked to a (Labour government's) national economic planning initiative; and then
- a joint central-SEEPC-SERPLAN *Strategic Plan for the South East* (1970, with a follow up in 1974).

Like their successors under New Labour (in the late 1990s), these cast substantial light on the strategic issues, but had only very limited impact on real development or investment patterns determined in more ad hoc fashion by central departments and/or local authorities.

The more significant development was enlargement of the pan-London authority, with the LCC being replaced, in 1965, by a Greater London Council (GLC), covering about 5 times its area (including the continuously urbanised city-region and a small amount of Green Belt), with the tier of borough authorities also extended across this area. The political effect of adding the outer areas was to produce a much more even competition between the two major parties, with GLC control oscillating - generally at odds with half the boroughs, and often also with the national government of the day[5]. This potential for political disagreement mattered because (in the first case) housing powers/responsibilities were split between the GLC and the boroughs, and (in the second) because the strategic ambitions of the GLC in its later years, with more radical labour leadership, moved beyond physical planning into industrial and economic strategy, where it openly challenged (Margaret Thatcher's) national policy (Buck et al., 1986; Pimlott and Rao, 2002).

Key elements in the GLC's remit were meant to be planning, transport and infrastructure, but preparation, review and approval of the (one and only) statutory Greater London Development

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[5] Each GLC election was actually won by the (then) main national opposition party.

Plan was a very long drawn-out process. This was partly for bureaucratic/procedural reasons, but also because of controversial urban motorway proposals (withdrawn during the Enquiry into the Plan, though without replacement), and shifting judgements about growth trends. By the time it was finally approved (in 1976), GLC leaders were much more concerned about shrinking population and employment. Their representations led a year later to abandonment by central government of the population decentralisation strategy. By the time a New left leadership (under Ken Livingstone) had taken over in 1981, emphasising more interventionist approaches to boosting growth, the GLDP had become an irrelevance.

Impatient of the provocative challenge which the GLC now presented, right on her doorstep, to her personal political project, the Prime Minister (Margaret Thatcher) abolished the Council in 1986, along with the other six English conurbation authorities. Some services were transferred to boroughs, while co-ordinating functions generally passed either to central government or to committees of the boroughs. In particular, responsibility for strategic planning guidance was taken over by a government minister, working from 'advice' prepared by a London Planning Advisory Committee, of borough representatives, with a small secretariat (located in an unfashionable suburb). Unpromising though this sounds, it actually became a high point in collaborative planning within Greater London.

More generally, the years that followed were ones of high activity in relation to (at least) debate about London's development. An unmatched series of high profile consultancy reports were produced, for various clients/sponsors, with a particular focus on London's competitive position vis-a-vis other world cities, but also involving the emergent agenda of balanced development (across environment, economy and equity)[6]. This activity was encouraged by a new (national) sensitivity to the international competitive position of London's advanced services (including City financial services, which had been deregulated in the Big Bang of 1986), notably in the context of the Single European Market initiative (due for completion in 1992). Something like a 'network mode of governance', started to emerge in this era, with the encouragement of central government (under Thatcher's Conservative successor, John Major), which established a Cabinet Committee on London, backed the development of a central-London focused business pressure group (London First), and then a broader London Pride Partnership initiative, involving local authorities and voluntary organisations as well as firms, via local partnerships (Travers, 2004).

A Government Office for London (established in 1994) made some contribution to this, but the wider scheme of introducing such regional foci (with an integrative Single Regeneration Budget)

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[6] including London Planning Advisory Committee/Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte (1991), Llewelyn Davies Planning /Bartlett School of Planning (1996), Llewelyn Davies Planning et al., (1999)

on a uniform basis (and scale) across the country saw the (functional) Greater South East region now divided into three administrative territories, with a London region bordered both by Eastern and South East regions. The divisive effect of this structure was exacerbated after 1997 by the New Labour government's addition of separate Regional Development Agencies, Regional Assemblies (mostly of local authority nominees) and eventually Regional Spatial Strategies in the latter two (rather artificial) 'regions'.

The 15 years after GLC abolition (the inter-regnum period) saw the greatest 'turnaround' in population and employment growth within Greater London, for reasons which are largely coincidental. But (more relevantly) these were also years of increased infrastructure investment - notably in Docklands renewal, driven forward by a single-purpose London Docklands Development Corporation, imposed by the Thatcher government, after the boroughs' prolonged failure to agree on a scheme. And, conceivably, some of this investment boom was boosted by the fact that central government (and its 'market oriented' strategy) could now take the credit for visible (and symbolic) changes in the capital.

One initiative of this period (actually from the Major government) did seek to link development inside and outside London. This (extremely ambitious) Thames Gateway project, involving a 70 km stretch along both banks of the Thames, has however failed (up to now), because of a great tangle of agencies (across three regions), and the lack of a comparably single-minded commitment from central government. Travers (2014) notes that responses to critical reviews of the governance structures were 'consistently inadequate', and observes that:

> 'governments create powerful governance institutions when they want to be confident of delivering on a particular objective or project' (p. 90).

This seems never to have really been the case with Thames Gateway during the past 20 years

During the interregnum (and its years in opposition), the Labour Party retained a commitment to restoring some London authority (if not one liable to challenge central government). The business lobby, in particular, also thought London needed a leadership figure. When the party eventually returned to office in 1997, under the banner of New Labour, it worked to establish a new form of Greater London Authority, of a 'strong Mayor' form (with a one-person elected executive and a weak supervisory Assembly), but with a purely strategic agenda, a limited budget and minimal capacity to finance infrastructure projects on an independent basis. It clearly did not intend to risk the same challenges that the GLC had posed to Margaret Thatcher. The Mayor's de facto power, even at the outset, was rather greater than this implies, because they were also sponsors for several agencies, including the London version of the (newly created) regional Development Agencies (the LDA), and (crucially) of Transport for London (TFL), a more powerful version of the London Transport Executive, which (in various forms) had

operated since 1933. And in the years since the first Mayor - Ken Livingstone, now less radical than business-like - was elected (as an Independent), in 2000, he and his Conservative successor, Boris Johnson, have worked quite successfully to build their powers and financing capacity. Partly through personal projection (and hosting of the 2012 Summer Olympics) the prestige and influence of elected Mayors have exceeded those of earlier London leaders, and the sequence of London Plans/updates produced since 2000 clearly outdoes in efficiency and intelligibility the record of other (peacetime) London administrations. Translating these into action has been less impressive, notably in relation to housebuilding. But a congestion charge was successfully brought in for the central area, Transport for London has made major progress in integrating the system, and (after decades of central government indecision) a massive Cross Rail project is underway boosting the capacity of East-West links through the central business district (CBD).

The Greater London Authority/Mayor survived the transition to a Conservative-led Coalition government in 2010 unscathed, though elsewhere the whole apparatus of regionalism was swept away, to be replaced by a (somewhat ambiguous) principle of localism. It was ambiguous partly because ministers retained a power to intervene, and to prescribe a new (slimmed down) national planning framework; and partly because it was unclear how far this, and removal of regional strategies (outside Greater London), was meant to transfer power to local residents, or to developers.

In the last few years, a well-organised Manchester metropolitan machine has made considerable progress toward catching up with London in the devolution stakes, securing the first of what are now to be (under the post-coalition Conservative government) a series of City Deals for provincial cities willing to establish elected metropolitan mayoralties (Gordon and Harloe, 2016). Perhaps stimulated by this, and in conjunction with a first long-term Infrastructure Plan, a London Finance Commission carried out a careful examination of how (and why) the city might receive a substantial degree of fiscal autonomy (LFC, 2013) – though without any positive response yet. On the issue of collaboration with (and among) authorities in outer parts of its extended region, there has also been a bit of progress, linked to a growing sense that, with accelerating population growth and stagnant house-building rates, London was very unlikely to meet its housing targets. The independent Inspector of its last round of Plan amendments recommended action in this direction (in late 2014), toward which some steps have been taken, with a first 'summit' of regional leaders, despite a government warning that no form of regional planning was to be resurrected!

3. The Politics of Metropolitan Governance in the London Regions

3a. The Social Access Politics of Spatial Externalities and Specific Issues

The account of the metropolitanisation (or regionalisation) of London, since the 1940s, as sketched above, suggests that - within a radial transport network laid down before then , and the spatial interruption imposed at the start of this period by the London Levée (aka Green Belt), it has been preponderantly driven and shaped by market forces. That might suggest a Williams' (1971) style 'social access' view of metropolitan politics, as simply filling the gap left by the 'failures' of those markets in relation to spatial externalities, by collective action to regulate the more important side-effects of personal/business decisions for others living and/or operating relatively close to them.

This is not so simple in practice, because (for different kinds of effect) 'relatively close' might mean anything between 'just down the street' and across the whole metro region. But imperfect versions of this kind of territorial politics clearly do operate at various spatial scales within the extended London region. Most characteristically, they involve a development scheme of some kind, offering some potential socio-economic benefits across a wide area (e.g. some improvement in housing affordability, or in air services) - but with negative environmental effects of some kind concentrated within a smaller locality, where NIMBYist opposition is easier to mobilise than a more diffuse coalition of prospective supporters. For really major developments, triggering interest from the state and/or major business interests, weightier actors may be involved on either side, but with a similarly contingent kind of social access politics, related to the specific case.

The big current example involves the recommendation by a central-government-appointed (Davies) Commission that regional/national needs for greater 'hub' airport capacity should be met by adding an extra runway to Heathrow airport, located in the western suburbs, right on the edge of Greater London (UKAC, 2015). This is actually the latest episode in a 50 year saga of indecision - including a previous (Roskill) Commission in 1971, with recommendations that were rejected by one government, in favour of a more radical (and expensive) Thames Estuary scheme, only for that to be overturned by the next government, which chose a more incrementalist path. This time round, the elected Mayor vigorously promoted a similar kind of Thames Estuary scheme, which again got short shrift from the experts.   As before, however, the issue remains firmly in the hands of central government, which again faces political challenges from representatives of immediately affected areas.   In this case they include leading Conservative politicians with seats around Heathrow - including the Mayor and 5 other Cabinet ministers, plus another who is a Mayoral candidate for 2016.

3b Continuing Structural Conflict around Key Cleavages in the Metropolitan System

There are other strategic aspect of metropolitan politics in this region, however, which cut across such situation-specific mobilisations, and bring into play more structured forms of alliance, reflecting broader interests in ways the region should develop and in the types of politics that should prevail. These involve a number of dimensions of conflict, which - whether openly expressed or operating in a more repressed / concealed fashion – underlie the continued muddling (through) of metro governance, in and around London, from right back in the 19th century.

First among these (particularly within London), has been that of **'metropolitan' versus 'localist'** forms of politics which differ in their interests, participants, styles and structures (Young, 1975) . Even within the same generic issue area – economic development, environmental sustainability or social cohesion, say – localist politics is addressed to more concrete and specific cases, their outcomes *and* to experiences of these, rather than to broader, more strategic and/or analytically based versions of them.   From a more metropolitan perspective, this way of seeing political issues, can seem short-sighted, narrowly self-interested (even anti-social) and blind to wider processes that more powerfully shape outcomes for local residents or businesses. But it (also) reflects a distrust of remote actors, their interests and ways of doing politics, and a positive valuation of locally-based identities, relations, and the particular features of places where people were born or (more often in *this* region) *chose* to live. In their role as local residents, many people adopting a more distant, abstracted and 'cooler' view in other parts of their lives (and other places, in the case of suburban or exurban commuters) may well share this orientation – particularly where it fits in with their perceived interest as property owners.   But, in general, active participants in *local* politics are likely to self-select in terms of a preference for thinking about issues in concrete, particularistic terms – as well as feeling a stronger stake in local outcomes – with a reverse bias operating at the metropolitan scale.

The particular significance of this cleavage to the 'muddled' development of governance in the region reflects a positive association between strong (and/or strongly expressed) forms of localism and middle class suburbanism.   Indeed one of the classic aims of suburbanism in the British/London context has been to use physical separation to protect a particularly valued form of localism (Young, 1975).   Hence the classic conflicts in the London region have been between a metropolitan authority and one or more middle-class conservative suburbs, resisting some threat to their way of life. These include: the initial reaction to the 'megalomania' of early LCC Progressives, which led to introduction of boroughs as a counterbalance to protect (particularly) suburban localists; and two sets of legal battles between (the outer borough of) Bromley and the Greater London Council, over GLC plans for social housing in the borough, and later their 'Fares Fair' initiative to subsidise Tube travel (Young and Kramer, 1978; Travers, 2004).

Intersecting with this values-based cleavage is another (more conventional) one, in terms of **class and material interest,** notably in relation to property stakes, labour market position and business size. As well as entering openly into politics at all scales, and shaping the outcomes that markets produce, they also clearly contribute to informal governance through 'imagined'

communities (Anderson, 1991) , and constructions of 'their' interests and relations to each other. Though frequently taken as common sense, these are not simply factual, and often quite misleading.

An example is the idea that places within the metropolitan region have some clearly discernible economic interest (maybe linked to a prominent industry), which if actively pursued will benefit all in the area, and might allow residents of a less prosperous community to catch up economically. What both theory and evidence show, however, is that neither are likely to be true within a region as closely integrated as this one is. Even the core GL economy is not actually dominated by its 'global city' functions (Buck et al., 2002). And variations in living standards across the metro region almost entirely reflect the varying social and demographic mixes of those who get to live in different places. On the other hand, property values and rents, do vary considerably just on the basis of location. So it is reasonable to expect that promotional/regenerational policies will affect these – and thus indirectly who can afford to live in different areas – much more than the standard of living of those who presently live there. And that such 'territorially competitive' policies will be most actively pursued, shaped and advocated by those with a stake in local property values.

Taking into account some key ways these factors have worked in the London region suggests a need to distinguish between two different kinds of both localist and metropolitan politics, involving: efficiency *or* equity oriented metro politics; and residential comfort *or* territorially competitive localist politics (Figure 1). Commonly, these are treated not as alternatives, but as complementary aspects of single approaches, co-existing in the rationales provided for particular localist or metropolitan policies. But, since they are promoted by different interests, such complementarity is at best a matter of faith, often serving as a disguise for the prime basis of the policy and politics that are being promoted.

Figure 1:   Foci of Metropolitan / Local Politics

METROPOLITAN	LOCALIST
EFFICIENT FUNCTIONING OF THE METROPOLITAN SYSTEM – including infrastructure provision	RESIDENTIAL COMFORT OF (CURRENT) VOTERS/FAMILIES – socially and environmentally
EQUITABLE FUNCTIONING OF THE METRO SYSTEM – including action to reduce incidence of poverty	INTER-LOCAL ECONOMIC COMPETITION – for landed and/or localised business interests

Thirdly, among the structural bases of conflict in the region is the continuing tension between **national government and London's political leadership**, going beyond the normal/natural levels of rivalry between tiers of authority.   Something of this kind seems common with capital cities, perhaps because (as Campbell (2000) suggests) capital cities naturally stand in some way as representations of their nation, while rarely being representative in terms of the social, cultural and/ political values prevailing there. In the 2015 UK general election, for example, most of London (with its unusually high concentration of both university graduates and ethnicities other than 'white British') stood out both in its lack of enthusiasm for the UK Independence Party and the resilience of its Labour vote. When London's leaders disagree with the national government, it is hard simply to ignore their voice. This was notably true when the GLC's County Hall faced the House of Commons across the river, allowing its last regime to advertise their opposition to Thatcher's economic strategy with a large-script banner displaying the latest unemployment figures (Buck et al., 1986, cover). Beside such symbolic / ideological encounters, there is also the simple point that developments in the political/economic capital are much more likely than elsewhere to impinge on important national (and/or class) interests.

Both factors contribute to Roy Porter's observation, looking back (during the interregnum) on "the perpetual tragicomic quarrel between central government and metropolitan powers" that:

> 'from time to time Westminster has judged the capital to require some unified ruling body…. But Parliament has typically lived to regret establishing such bodies, once they proved overmighty subjects'. (Porter, 1994, 367)

The other side of the picture is that, having entered such conflicts with the dominant authority, any capital city's government is likely to rue the outcome. As Campbell notes:
> 'sometimes collaborating with the larger and more powerful national governments when interests coincide, the municipality usually loses battles when local and national interests conflict' (2000, p. 16).

Indeed, the prudent municipality may well choose to collaborate (openly or not), even when local and national interests diverge, in order to secure resources that can be deployed to some of those local interests. In the London case, this is a credible explanation[7] for the switch in strategy (and rhetoric) during development of the first Mayoral Spatial Plan, from the balanced approach of its initial LPAC-based version to one focused single-mindedly on the 'global city' segment of the CBD economy as central to a need to provide for 'inevitable' economic growth – the point being that this was perceived as the one route to Treasury backing for substantial infrastructure investment, for which the GLA had no independent resources (Gordon, 2004). If this was indeed the case, it was never openly argued, nor were alternative development and infrastructural priorities exposed during the planning (or electoral) process. But an *implicit* deal, with a much more powerful partner silently shaped a central plank of the London Plan (Gordon and Travers, 2010).

A last dimension of (actual or potential) conflict to be considered is that between London and the outer regions/areas within the Greater South East. The one running issue in this, since the 1960s at least, has been the question of how provision for meeting future housing need within this super region should be balanced out between areas, including London's share (and potential knock-on effects for attractive or Green Belt areas outside). Since creation of the GLA this has scarcely been a matter of open politics, as it is a given of the London Plan that it is making provision to meet projected housing needs for 'its population'. There are real problems about this, since actual housing completion rates in London have been running well below what is required to meet need targets. But what might appear a fundamental flaw in the planning process is that no explicit regard is paid to the fact that the regions' housing markets are closely integrated, and that where households settle and realise their demands depends essentially on choices which they make (in mostly private markets), rather than planners' allocations. This seems to echo an earlier, broader observation about a recurring failure to recognise the powerful role played by market processes in the actual steering (i.e. governance) of growth within the Greater South East. But the point here is that the Plan has avoided explicitly addressing these factors, and the questions they might raise, so as to avoid the suggestion that encouraging economic growth within London might have any (threatening) ramifications for neighbouring regions (Gordon and Travers, 2010).

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[7] Alongside some direct pressure from the CBD interest group, London First

The likelihood that they would be seen as threatening 'out there' was increased by the creation of separate Government Office Regions for the South East and East (1994-2010), since internally these regions (particularly the former) had little coherence beyond the fact that they abutted on London, and sent many of their residents to work there, but didn't want London to impinge on them further by exporting additional residents who might stimulate further housing development. This particular version of 'imagined community' was in part an artefact of the regional structure that existed until 2010, and there are indications since then that the government's new localist regime (with its 'duty to co-operate') may be diffusing the issue somewhat as groups of authorities explore ways of addressing the relation between needs and housing market responses.

4. Looking for a Way Forward

After more than a century and a half London still presents a metropolitan governance problem with important implications for its capacity to continue growing, sustaining its economic role and addressing the needs of its poor – though both the geographic scale and substantive priorities have changed. From the provision of basic infrastructure to a compact core city with a radius of some 10 kms., the central issues are now ones of affordable housing and a sustainable transport system across a region with a radius more than 10 times as great – as Wells (1903) had envisaged it would now be[8]. Though he was right (indeed remarkably prescient) about that, Wells was mistaken both in believing that a (rational) metropolitan perspective could simply overwhelm localism, and that a massive municipality for this region would be a viable and acceptable basis for its governance. What he missed in his forward-look was the complex, polycentric way in which the super-region would evolve (rather than simply expanding), *and* the fact that (as argued at the start of this chapter) that territorial governance always has involved market-type interactions and informal institutions, as well the intended rationality of formally authoritative.

Indeed, interactions between each of the three types of governance process have been key to the way in which the Greater South East, as London's extended functional region has evolved since the mid-19th century, and particularly since Wells' first appreciation of its potential scale. Most of the dynamic has actually come from market forces (responding to

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[8] In principle Wells' bounds are set by a feasible one hour commute to central London at the peak speeds he expects to be eventually reached around 2000, i.e. 100-115 kms. radius – yielding an area   comparable to Peter Hall's (1989) Greater South East

changes in the forces/relations of production), rather than directly from the state. But the socio-spatial impacts across this region evidently reflect the way they have responded to state initiatives: quite directly, in the case of the development of infrastructure networks across the region; but more perversely, in reaction to the 'green blanket' spread over much of it during the last half of the period. How regional and local authorities have engaged with these market forces has also been conditioned by powerful informal institutions, in terms of understandings of community - where interests are shared (or not) and co-operation/ mobilisation is worthwhile (and not) - and beliefs about the relative roles of local versus social forces in shaping the varying prosperity and life-satisfaction of residents in different areas. In some key respects too these have been affected by the particular ways in which British local authorities have been funded over recent decades, with a very large (formulaic) contribution from national grants, intended to secure equitable service provision independent of local conditions and to discourage economically wasteful forms of territorial competition between areas – though these are now subject to radical change, in the names of localism and national competitiveness.

Given the fact that (against Well's rational expectations), local relations and localist values have continued to be salient within this mature metropolitan region, his proposed single tier ('massive municipality') governmental solution might simply be adapted - as the LCC was – by adding on a second tier of local governments, to deal (on the subsidiarity principle) with issues free of substantial spatial externalities. But two immediate political problems remain with this neo-Wellsian kind of regionalist solution for the Greater South East. One is that of legitimacy, in that (at the present time) very few people are likely to identify with such an extended region as (even one of) their 'imagined communities'. The other is that - within an integrated UK, but still more within one eaten into by devolution/defection - the Greater South East simply represents too large (and too strategic) a fraction of the national territory and its competitive economic sectors for central government ever to allow it autonomy in relation to core policy areas such as those already passed to a devolved Scottish parliament. These are barriers not only to a purely governmental (Wellsian) approach to the governance issue, but also need to be taken seriously in thinking about broader approaches attending to the other two sides of the governance triangle.

In the case of the legitimacy problem thee is some reason to think that this may substantially ease as other forms of integration grow. After all, it was only some time after the abolition of the GLC that a majority of outer borough residents came to see themselves as Londoners - with time, institutional deprivation and experience of voluntary collaboration all apparently playing a part (Hebbert, 1998). In relation to legitimating

governance over a much wider region, the point is to work at building habits of co-operation, mitigating the downside costs of more active collaboration, developing a clearer understanding of (market) interdependences, the irrelevance of internecine competition to resolving (shared) structural problems etc. – *by any means possible*. In other words, to pursue adaptation of all three of the component governance processes in an integrated way, over a long run (rather than the artificial timescales of ambitious national politicians), via demonstrably useful collaborations, and accumulation of real achievements. This would include, for example initiatives such as the current London-Stansted-Cambridge consortium – not because corridors are *the* key geography for managing economic development, but because the growth potential of this one provides a really good test-bed for developing habits and appreciation of co-operation. Perhaps the other key consideration would be to look for issues where repressed/ concealed conflicts are seriously distorting the way in which strategic issues are addressed, and seek ways of releasing these. The Green Belt issue, though generally seen as the most intractable example, might now actually be such an example, given the crisis state which the housing supply issue has reached across the GSE.

In relation to the other problematic interface, between the (capital city) region and the central state, the key may not simply be to argue for closer integration of government *within* the GSE as crucial for securing national goals (with side-benefits for the prestige of national politicians). Mobilising regional actors around strategic priorities to secure more effective governance of this core region needs leadership resources – in terms of a credible capacity to commit behind key initiatives – that only high level central government participation (and kudos sharing) may be able to secure, preferably through an open process, rather than another implicit deal.

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