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Facilitating spaces for place-based leadership in centralized governance systems: the case of Newcastle City Futures

Paul Vallance[a] ⓘ, Mark Tewdwr-Jones[b] ⓘ and Louise Kempton[c] ⓘ

ABSTRACT
This paper explores how distributed and relational forms of place-based leadership can be facilitated in environments with constrained local governance capabilities. It is based on an in-depth case study of a university-hosted collaborative platform situated in a city/regional institutional landscape marked by limited local devolution and public sector austerity. The research contributes to a fuller understanding of place-based leadership by analyzing how actors can mobilize interpretive and network forms of power outside formal governance structures to encourage long-term thinking and broker innovative cross-organizational projects. Equally, however, it highlights their continuing dependence on legitimating forms of local institutional and resource authority.

KEYWORDS
place leadership; austerity; devolution; urban living partnership; universities

INTRODUCTION

A growing academic interest in the role of leadership in local and regional development has been accompanied by a broader theorization of the form this takes. Instead of being equated with activities of local political or managerial leaders, 'place-based leadership' (PBL) is now approached as a product of relationships between a range of potential actors, including those from local or regional authorities, but also varied public, private, community, voluntary or civic organizations. Despite this conceptual progress, a fully developed and empirically grounded understanding of the processes underlying PBL has yet to be reached (Beer & Clower, 2014). In particular, it is still unclear how this mode of collective leadership can be reproduced in widely varying institutional systems across different territories, and especially in those regions where inclusive practices of collaborative governance are not already established. Moreover, the potentially complex relationship of newly emergent forms of distributed PBL to existing governance structures raises questions that the literature has only started to address (Beer et al., 2019).

These issues are highly salient to the UK context upon which this paper empirically draws. As in other developed countries, the economic and social transformations that have shaped the UK in the early 21st century are defined by their geographically uneven effects. Most pressingly, cities outside of London and the Greater South East of England face development challenges that have only deepened since the 2008 financial crisis (Hall, 2014; McCann, 2016). Recent studies have emphasized that for these places to adapt to an environment of heightened global competition, there is a need for effective leadership that can articulate a clear vision for economic restructuring and social renewal (Bailey, Bellandi, Caloffi, & De Propris, 2010; Brooks, Vorley, & Williams, 2016; Rossiter & Smith, 2017). However, a comparative weakness of regional and local government in the highly centralized UK state (particularly in England), compounded over the past decade by substantial austerity measures, means that this need for strong sub-national leadership is often not met by conventional actors (Bentley, Pugalis, & Shutt, 2017). This represents a significant barrier to transformative change in many cities, but corresponding

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to a broader conception of PBL, may also create opportunities for this missing capability to be provided from other sources. This will, however, require that this distributed and relational leadership is encouraged to emerge, possibly by actors outside of the formal governance sphere, with only limited institutional or resource powers at their disposal.

This paper investigates this process in Newcastle upon Tyne, the largest city in a region (the North East of England) that is amongst the least prosperous in the UK. Specifically, it is based on a case study of a university-hosted vehicle – Newcastle City Futures (NCF) – that since 2014 has performed a number of functions aimed at identifying and cultivating positive future paths for the city. These functions – all involving engagement with citizens and/or organizational stakeholders – include: researching long-term trends and scenario-building; providing a regular forum for discussion between local authorities, universities and other partners; and acting as a collaborative platform for urban 'test-bed' demonstrator projects. In the paper, we draw on empirical work tracking these activities that was guided by the following questions:

- In what ways has NCF facilitated PBL across its different configurations and what are the related attributes and limitations of its model?
- How has this role in facilitating PBL been enabled or constrained by the wider territorial context of Newcastle and Gateshead?

By detailing the NCF case and situating it in the institutional landscape of its city-region, the paper contributes to the PBL literature by analyzing how spaces for collaborative leadership can be created in environments marked by centralized governance systems and local austerity. A notable feature of the NCF model is that, while it brings together various cross-sector partners, the brokerage role is provided from within an academic institution (Newcastle University). The potential agency of universities as 'institutional entrepreneurs' has been recognized in the recent PBL literature (Benneworth, Pinheiro, & Karlsen, 2017; Raagmaa & Keerberg, 2017). However, Sotarauta, Beer, and Gibney (2017) still identify a shortage of work that elucidates the opportunities and tensions of universities assuming a central position within these processes. A secondary contribution of this paper, therefore, will be in helping to advance this fledgling debate on universities and PBL.

The paper is structured as follows. A literature review discusses new conceptions of PBL and their relationship to structural changes in local economies and governance systems. A background section outlines recent institutional change in the territorial context of Newcastle and the North East region. The case study section has three parts: first, the different configurations and functions of NCF are explained; second, the methodology behind the research carried out in parallel with partnership activity is described; and third, the relationship of NCF to the territorial context detailed in the preceding section and its attributes and limitations as a model of PBL are analyzed

drawing on the research. Finally, the conclusion identifies key points of the paper and their contribution to the PBL literature.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: PLACE-BASED LEADERSHIP

A growing strand of the local and regional development literature features an interest in PBL. This reflects a belief that leadership is an important, but largely neglected, factor in explaining why some cities and regions enjoy greater economic and social prosperity than others (Beer & Clower, 2014; Collinge & Gibney, 2010a; Sotarauta et al., 2017). In relation to the predominant focus on structural or institutional conditions within regional development studies, this represents an atypical emphasis on human agency as a driver for sub-national transformation (Beer & Clower, 2014; Sotarauta & Beer, 2017). At the same time, however, this literature is founded on a recognition that PBL is more than just the presence of individual *leaders* who possess exceptional personal traits or competencies (Beer & Clower, 2014). The *leadership* of place is instead reliant on the mobilization of multiple stakeholders from organizations with either a statutory duty (e.g., local authorities) or a civic (as well as private) interest (e.g., businesses, community groups, universities) in the development of the city or region (Sotarauta & Beer, 2017). Therefore, this is a distributed form of leadership achieved through conjoint rather than individual agency (Gronn, 2002).

Hambleton and Howard (2013) propose that responsibility for PBL is shared between three groups: locally elected politicians; managers and other professionals in public service or third-sector organizations (including local government officers); and civically minded individuals from wider business or civil-society sectors. This covers both what Sotarauta (2016b) refers to as 'assigned leaders' (with a recognized mandate or responsibility for promoting regional development) and 'non-assigned leaders' (without this formal role but some other means of influence in local networks). Correspondingly, PBL can involve the deployment of different forms of power, deriving from: official position (*institutional power*); control over funds or other rewards (*resource power*); the ability to articulate visions for change shared by others (*interpretive power*); or personal social capital (*network power*) (Sotarauta, 2016a). Because the prospective actors are from various institutional domains, this mode of leadership is also *relational* in that it requires interaction across boundaries of various types (e.g., organizational/sectoral, professional/disciplinary, territorial/administrative) (Gibney, Copeland, & Murie, 2009; Horlings, Collinge, & Gibney, 2017). As Nicholds, Gibney, Mabey, and Hart (2017) argue, PBL entails a 'complex, large-scale social and economic co-production of activity comprising a range of power and resource-related, community and personal agendas and negotiations across organizations, disciplines and professions' (p. 251). There is still, however, only a provisional understanding of how these cross-organizational coalitions can be

constructed and steered in strategic directions, particularly by actors in 'non-assigned' leadership positions without formal governance authority or resources (Sotarauta, 2016b). Beer et al. (2019) emphasize the role of 'boundary-spanning' individuals, but the possibilities of this function – involving brokering local networks and articulating shared goals – being performed through a collaborative intermediary vehicle remains underexplored.

The co-produced mode of PBL has been associated with the transition of cities and regions to competing in a knowledge-based economy (Gibney et al., 2009; Horlings et al., 2017; Sotarauta, 2016a). For Gibney et al. (2009, p. 10) a 'strategic leadership of place' is needed to respond to the demands of this new economy and its social implications. This is:

> concerned with facilitating interdisciplinarity across institutional boundaries, technology themes, sub-territories and professional cultures in order to promote the development of innovation across the public and private sector domain … [but also] to ensure the comprehensive engagement of local communities so that they can both contribute to and benefit fully from the outcomes.

The scope of economic, environmental and other societal challenges facing cities therefore demands that PBL opens spaces for diverse local agencies to congregate and engage in problem-solving and collective learning processes (Nicholds et al., 2017). This directs our conception of leadership from the exercise of formal authority within vertical administrative hierarchies to a set of more informal facilitation roles where a willingness to participate and share authority in horizontal inter-organizational coalitions becomes imperative (Beer & Clower, 2014; Hambleton & Howard, 2013; Nicholds et al., 2017). Leadership of place (rather than organizations) is enacted through decentralized groups in which 'followers' as well as 'leaders' can exercise a powerful influence (Collinge & Gibney, 2010b). In this respect, the burgeoning interest in PBL is intertwined with widely observed shifts in urban and regional governance towards collaborative network models that involve local governments partnering with private and public actors (Pierre, 2011). In turn, the complexity of these multi-partner governance arrangements requires mobilization and coordination through PBL (Beer & Clower, 2014). The reciprocal quality of this relationship is such that some have explicitly defined concepts of place leadership as a capacity for collective governance (Bentley et al., 2017; Brooks et al., 2016).

This focus on governance systems should not obscure the transformative potential of leadership as a form of dispersed agency (Sotarauta, 2016b). PBL is closely related to actions taken by 'institutional entrepreneurs' to alter organizational and territorial governance structures in which they are embedded (Sotarauta & Pulkkinen, 2011). However, reference to broader structural changes in urban/regional governance can help frame these practices and their contemporary relevance. For instance, Collinge and Gibney (2010a) position the new *leadership of place* as representing a shift in practice from the *management of place* by local governments focused on their administrative responsibilities for delivering municipal services. The departure from a bureaucratic, managerial approach to urban governance (Pierre, 2011) is especially associated with private sector partnerships and a prioritization of local regeneration and business growth in response to the rolling back of the Keynesian welfare state nationally and exposure of cities to greater economic competition globally (Jessop, 1997). Networked forms of governance can, however, be interpreted more widely than this entrepreneurial city thesis. For instance, Healey (1998) outlines a perspective in which the integration of community stakeholders as well as corporate interests into collaborative governance builds the institutional capacity for policy and planning processes that can enhance the economic, social and environmental qualities of a place. These multisector partnerships are, however, dependent on leadership that gains legitimacy and support amongst local communities (Hemphill, McGreal, Berry, & Watson, 2006). Few studies to date have provided in-depth analysis of the mechanisms and challenges behind this process.

Civic leadership that can encourage this inclusive approach and cross-sector sharing of resources is, for Hambleton and Howard (2013), key to the contemporary dilemma facing many local governments of having to develop innovate ways of delivering public services and policy in the context of severe reductions in funding at their disposal. Bowden and Liddle (2018) find that public sector austerity within the UK is allowing local community representatives to adopt leadership roles previously dominated by the public sector. However, this austerity may also undermine local leadership capability. Beer and Clower (2014) emphasize that the capacity of actors to contribute to the larger good of PBL is dependent on organizations having sufficient 'slack resources' (in excess of those required to fulfil their own strategic and operational goals) to dedicate to civic interests in common with other local stakeholders. Clearly, for many organizations (in the public sector and beyond) these resources – including individuals' time – become squeezed during a period of retrenchment in government expenditure.

A related determinant of capacity for local strategic thinking is positioning in multilevel governance. Several contributions to this literature have noted that local autonomy necessary for effective PBL will be circumscribed in centralized government systems (Beer & Clower, 2014; Budd & Sancino, 2016). In the UK, for instance, underdeveloped sub-national leadership can be understood as a corollary of a highly centralized state (Bentley et al., 2017). However, the factors shaping patterns of PBL cannot be reduced to this single variable of devolution level. Through a study of Finland and Australia, Sotarauta and Beer (2017) show these factors must encompass other territorially situated institutional and cultural dynamics that affect the formation and functioning of collaborative networks subnationally. Notwithstanding the value of comparative research approaches (Beer et al., 2019), detailed case studies that can capture this local specificity are an

invaluable methodology for examining PBL (Beer & Clower, 2014).

The rest of this paper follows this approach by developing a case study of an innovative university-hosted vehicle to facilitate PBL processes in a territorial setting where the capability for this forward-looking leadership is institutionally constrained. Correspondingly, the next section will outline this context of a governance system being reshaped by a combination of public sector austerity and highly conditioned devolution reforms.

CHANGING CONDITIONS FOR PBL IN NEWCASTLE

The proposition that the system of local governance in Newcastle upon Tyne and the wider North East of England serves to restrict capacity for PBL is not new. An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) territorial review of Newcastle from 2006 identified this issue as a key barrier to the economic competitiveness of the city-region. In particular, it highlighted a limited scope for strategic decision-making, stemming from not only a small number of visible leadership figures across the public and private sectors but also a weak and fragmented governance structure (OECD, 2006). This review is notable for having been conducted during a period in which the Labour government was pushing an 'urban renaissance' policy agenda aimed at reversing patterns of economic decline, social polarization and shrinking population in many British cities (Colomb, 2007). As a major UK city and regional centre, Newcastle was well positioned to benefit from this climate. It formed part of the eight-strong group of English Core Cities outside of London, which were influential in collectively promoting themselves as drivers of national economic growth. Almost concurrently, a culture-led regeneration policy led by Gateshead Council, but focused on the Quayside area shared with Newcastle, helped reinforce an emerging post-industrial identity and outward-looking image for the city-region (Bailey, Miles, & Stark, 2004). However, Vigar, Graham, and Healey (2005) argue that at this time Newcastle City Council was unable to unify the plethora of new strategies and initiatives across different urban-related policy domains (e.g., spatial planning, health, transport) into a distinctive overarching vision for the future of the city.

In the subsequent decade, there has been considerable reform and rescaling of sub-national governance structures and policies in England.[1] It is questionable, however, whether this has helped address the underlying problems of place leadership in Newcastle. A new Conservative-led coalition government following the 2010 general election marked an ideological shift to smaller state localism and implementation of an austerity programme to reduce the national budget deficit. This was exemplified by the political decision to abolish the regional development agencies (RDAs) introduced in England by the New Labour government during the late 1990s (Pike, Coombes, O'Brien, & Tomaney, 2018). The RDAs were funded by central government departments through a formula that allocated more money per capita to those regions with greatest economic and employment needs. Above all, this favoured the North East, a region with a lagging economy of previous industrial centres (including Tyneside) that had undergone decline throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

As a substitute, local authorities and business leaders were encouraged to set up a new sub-national vehicle – local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), but on a voluntary rather than a statutory basis, and without the core public funding the RDAs had received (Bentley, Bailey, & Shutt, 2010). Compared with the strong steering of RDAs by central government, the introduction of LEPs in theory represented an opportunity for more collaborative, devolved forms of local economic development strategy and governance. For Brooks et al. (2016) these new arrangements are potentially conducive to the kind of civic leadership highlighted above. However, as Bentley et al. (2017) argue, this capability for mobilizing PBL is constrained by the limited statutory and financial power under which LEPs operate. The 39 LEPs in England also exhibit a marked diversity in terms of organizational constitution and geographical coverage. In the North East, this fragmentation was manifested in the breaking away of the southern part of the region (Tees Valley) to form its own LEP, leaving the remaining seven local authorities (including Newcastle and Gateshead) to create a reconfigured North East LEP area.[2]

A localism project has also been evident in the post-2010 approach to devolution. In the form of City Deals and combined authorities this has allowed larger cities and their surrounding localities to assume extra policy and funding powers, but only on a case-by-case basis negotiated with central government (Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2017). The first wave of City Deals, agreed in 2012, covered all eight English Core Cities. In Newcastle, this agreement included a commitment by the city council to work towards further devolution with the six other local authorities in the North East LEP, laying the foundation for the formation of the North East Combined Authority (NECA) in 2014. NECA did not replace the seven local authorities, but provided a framework for coordination between them relating especially to economic development and employment (with the LEP) and transport.

These devolution reforms have reinforced city-regions as a focus of sub-national governance in the UK (Harrison, 2012). A strong rationale for this already existed in the Newcastle metropolitan area: a main recommendation of the aforementioned OECD (2006) review was that consolidation of local authority functions at a city-region scale should be pursued to improve weak and fragmented governance capabilities. However, the piecemeal and uneven nature of post-2010 devolution in England means that this aspiration has only been partly realized (Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2017). The type of collective city-region project that has developed in Greater Manchester (Ward, Deas, Haughton, & Hincks, 2015), for example, has not emerged around Newcastle. This is despite a precedent for city-region governance having existed in the form of

the Tyne and Wear County Council, one of six such administrations covering metropolitan counties in England between 1974 and 1986. However, Shaw and Greenhalgh (2010) argue this council and subsequent cross-authority relationships in the city-region were marked by an absence of collaborative political leadership.

All post-2010 English devolution reforms have also occurred alongside very substantial reductions in local authority budgets under the UK government's austerity programme. The scale of these cuts (certainly in monetary terms) overshadows any gains for localities from City Deals or combined authorities. For example, between 2010 and 2016, Newcastle City Council made savings of £221 million and reduced its employees by one-third. Further planned cuts mean it is preparing for the core grant from central government to be completely removed by 2020, leaving it reliant on local council tax and business rate revenues (Newcastle City Council, 2017). This situation is not exceptional, particularly amongst local authorities in relatively less-affluent parts of northern England which are more dependent on funding from central government (Gray & Barford, 2018). The extent of this funding squeeze has forced councils into severely reducing services across a range of local government functions (e.g., transport, culture, housing) and placed increasing pressure on their ability to meet statutory duties in areas such as adult social care (Crewe, 2016).

This combination of highly conditioned devolution within a centralized state and severe cuts to local authority budgets has only reinforced the limited capacity for formal sub-national political leadership in England (Hambleton, 2017). As suggested in the introduction, however, this trend may have the compensatory effect of creating space in which other more distributed forms of PBL are allowed to emerge. The rest of this paper is a case study of a university-driven initiative in Newcastle and Gateshead that will explore how such a process has been occurring in the territorial context described above.

FACILITATING PBL: NEWCASTLE CITY FUTURES

Case study background
Newcastle City Futures (NCF) originated in 2014 as an offshoot of a national Foresight programme on the Future of Cities sponsored by the UK Government Office for Science. This Newcastle University-led project provided a specific local setting to apply methodologies developed to forecast future trends for cities (Tewdwr-Jones & Goddard, 2014). It also emphasized engagement of the public and other stakeholders within this process. A pop-up NCF exhibition was held during May–June 2014 on Newcastle Quayside that, through multimedia displays (including models, films, photographs) and public talks, encouraged visitors to reflect on past change in the city and possibilities for future transformation (Tewdwr-Jones, Sookhoo, & Freestone, 2019). An invited workshop for stakeholders from public, private and academic sectors in the city was also organized to begin mapping longer

term priorities for the city. These different strands were brought together in the report *Newcastle City Futures 2065* (Tewdwr-Jones, Goddard, & Cowie, 2015) and used to present three detailed scenarios for the city and its inhabitants 50 years into the future. These scenarios were predicated on, respectively: a continuation of present socioeconomic trends; London implodes – rebalancing the national economy; and Newcastle finds its niche as a test-bed. The third of these options represented a more proactive, positive change that, building particularly on research capabilities of the cities' two universities, envisions Newcastle as a 'demonstrator platform for a range of scientific and technological future-facing public/private projects and programmes that are socially inclusive' (p. 78).

Growing out of this project, in early 2015 a City Futures Development Group (CFDG) was formed by Newcastle City Council to be an ongoing forum for discussion and support of this emerging agenda. The remit of this group includes the building of capacity to identify technological, societal and economic trends that will affect the city, and the cultivation of a pipeline of interventions drawing on local academic capabilities that respond to these changes. In governance terms, the CFDG reports to the Newcastle Science City Partnership Board, which oversees a shared investment between Newcastle University and Newcastle City Council in the redevelopment of a large brownfield site – Science Central (rebranded in 2018 as Newcastle Helix) – bordering the city centre. Correspondingly, this group consists of various members of the university and officers from the city council, but has evolved to include representatives of Gateshead Council, Northumbria University, the North East LEP and select other organizations in the city-region.

NCF took on a new purpose between August 2016 and July 2018 as one of five UK Research Council-funded Urban Living Partnership (ULP) pilot projects (here covering Newcastle and Gateshead). This ULP project included a programme of diagnostic work that used similar urban foresight methods as the *Newcastle City Futures 2065* report to extend and update its findings. However, another objective during this stage was to function as a collaborative platform that facilitated cross-sectoral demonstrator projects addressing challenges and opportunities in the city-region. These projects, which were endorsed by the CFDG, continued the approach of prioritizing engagement with the public and organizations across public, private and community/voluntary sectors. In this respect it was successful in brokering a number of multi-partner coalitions to progress innovative or digitally enabled ideas for transformation in the city relating to themes including housing, transport, and health and well-being. Through the process of convening these projects, the number of organizations that interacted with NCF expanded considerably beyond the 14 non-university partners formally named in the ULP application. Although outcomes of many of the demonstrator projects remained unresolved at the end of the ULP pilot, the relationships and activity generated through them helped affirm the vision of Newcastle becoming a 'test-bed city'.

Methodology

As part of the ULP project, a parallel stream of research tracked the collaborative process of the demonstrator projects and helped reflect on the emerging NCF model of supporting urban innovation. The following analysis of this from a PBL perspective is based on qualitative material collected from three sources. First, notes and observations from the project researcher being embedded within NCF activities for the duration of the ULP pilot. For instance, this included attending every meeting of the CFDG over this period, as well as numerous demonstrator project meetings. Second, regular progress reviews amongst the core ULP project team, which included feedback from individual activities and discussion of issues arising. Third, 16 semi-structured interviews with a total of 19 participants in NCF activities (between October 2016 and November 2017). These interviews were with representatives of partners from different sectors and, for instance, covered regular attendees of the CFDG and key figures in several demonstrator project consortia. Questions were tailored to specific interviewees, but given a consistent structure around the respondents' experiences of NCF-related activities and (informed by the research questions for this paper) their views of the model in the local context. The interview material was coded together with the meeting notes to identify key themes from the research that form the basis of the findings below.

Findings and analysis

This section presents findings and an analysis of the research in reference to the questions stated above:

- In what ways has NCF facilitated PBL across its different configurations and what are the related attributes and limitations of its model?
- How has this role in facilitating PBL been enabled or constrained by the wider territorial context of Newcastle and Gateshead?

These questions are closely interrelated. The model of NCF outlined above is founded on principles of addressing future societal and economic challenges in the city through collaboration across organizational, disciplinary and territorial boundaries. This strongly resonates with the conception of a distributed and relational PBL reviewed above. However, the actual leveraging of this model as a collective strategic capability within Newcastle and Gateshead has been profoundly shaped by the territorial context of limited and fragmented governance against which NCF emerged. A general thesis supported by the research was that this institutional deficit has opened a space that NCF – a semi-formal, university-hosted collaborative platform – has partly been able to occupy within the city-region. Some interviewees traced this to the post-2010 closure of the RDA and failure of subsequent devolution to replace this with an economic development body able to deploy equivalent resources:

> The RDA would have come up with all of these [NCF demonstrator projects], and it would have provided the funding. So I think there's been a huge vacuum, to get the network groups re-established, and methodologies and funding and people in place to fill the vacuum of the activities that used to spit out of the RDA with having three hundred staff and a big budget to do these things.
>
> (interviewee, private sector 1)

The closure of the RDA had the additional effect of encouraging closer collaboration between Newcastle University and Newcastle City Council. This has particularly been focused around the joint project of developing Science Central, in which the RDA had originally also been a partner following the shared purchase of the site in 2005. NCF is not directly involved in the planning or delivery of this major regeneration project, but is informing its relationship with the wider city through support of innovative projects with a geographical focus on and around the site in the disadvantaged West End of Newcastle. For instance, as part of a wider residential development on Science Central, one of the most advanced NCF demonstrator projects – Future Homes – will build 48 housing units to trial innovations in intergenerational flexible living, energy systems and digital technologies. This project, which is led by a consortium of partners from the academic, community and private sectors, aims to take a leading role in co-producing potential solutions to future housing challenges that can inform policy in Newcastle and beyond.

Even beyond Science Central, Newcastle City Council has looked to deepen its existing collaboration with Newcastle University to maintain its policy-making capacity which is threatened by funding reductions from central government. A city council commitment to partner with research and educational institutions to meet its sustainability and smart city goals was, for example, written into the 2012 City Deal agreement with government (Newcastle City Council and North East LEP, 2012). NCF provides one means of connection to these interdisciplinary-knowledge capabilities,[3] and its aim of fostering innovative solutions to urban problems has become highly salient to local authority partners (including Gateshead Council) pushed into finding new ways of working strategically and operationally with fewer resources. The principal vehicle through which the two councils together engage with NCF is the CFDG. This is a voluntary partnership rather than part of the formal governance structures of the city-region, and therefore itself has no executive leadership power. For the local authority partners, however, this separation from these responsibilities is central to its distinctive function:

> One of the big differences for me is City Futures can take a longer-term perspective. And that's helpful in that almost no other forum that I'm a member of really is able to do that. … It doesn't have major direct delivery roles … but when those [demonstrator] projects go through to delivery, I wouldn't want to see the City Futures group being clogged

up by governance around individual projects. It's important that it takes a more strategic approach.

(interviewee, public sector 4)

The capacity to encourage longer term thinking is a key feature of NCF's PBL role, and recognized as an attribute not just by members of the CFDG but also by many of the partners who have become engaged in its wider activities. This especially applies to those affected directly or indirectly by government austerity measures, including community and voluntary organizations that have lost grant funding from local authorities (Meegan, Kennett, Jones, & Croft, 2014). As a result, these actors have fewer 'slack resources' to devote towards more strategic PBL activities within the region. The exploratory fora and project development activities supported by NCF are aimed at counteracting these pressures towards withdrawal by providing collaborative spaces specifically dedicated to envisioning future possibilities for the city:

> We have the challenge of needing to do things that make a difference in the here and now. … And to me what City Futures brings is forward-thinking, horizon scanning, innovation, taking risks – doing things that really challenge your thinking.
>
> (interviewee, community and voluntary sector 1)

This forward-looking dimension of NCF began with the 2014 pop-up exhibition and ensuing *Newcastle City Futures 2065* project report. The scenario-building section of the latter document had in particular come to be valued by a number of interviewees for signalling the potential impacts of prospective demographic, environmental and technological trends on the city-region and, therefore, also the need for proactive change from current economic and political trajectories. Significantly, this provocation did not come from the public sector leadership of the city or region, but from a project team in Newcastle University in consultation with over 100 stakeholders. As Dixon, Montgomery, Horton-Baker, and Farrelly (2018) also find, the use of these participatory urban foresight methods can stimulate PBL through co-production of city visions where these have not been developed via more conventional political leadership or urban planning routes. This type of intervention in interpretive leadership was continued in the subsequent ULP pilot. One key output of the diagnostic side of this project was a 'system of systems' report commissioned by NCF and independently prepared by a local consultancy (with input from Newcastle City Council and other public bodies). This report mapped existing and planned elements of Newcastle's emerging 'smart city ecosystem' and outlined how these could be more effectively embedded across varied local public services and infrastructure (Urban Foresight, 2018).

The ULP project also allowed NCF to extend its activities into a broker of projects for multiple organizational partners guided by the *Newcastle City Futures 2065* vision of Newcastle as a test-bed city. The construction of cross-sector consortiums around these projects illustrates the possibility

identified above of a more decentred form of PBL emerging in which the local authority shares responsibility for shaping future paths with other stakeholders:

> Newcastle City Futures will be able to come up with that ambitious vision for the city, and be able to depoliticise it in many ways, so it isn't [Newcastle City] Council driving it – it's actually the city itself that's driving it, which takes some of the pressure off the Council. … I think what Newcastle City Futures allows the public sector to do is come into a safe space, to be able to test out some of these ideas, but not have to lead on everything.
>
> (interviewee, private sector 2)

This role in facilitating PBL is, however, in many ways limited by its 'non-assigned' nature. NCF's activities were aligned with, but not strongly determined by, the strategic priorities of core partners such as Newcastle and Gateshead councils, the North East LEP, NE1 (the business improvement district for Newcastle city centre), Nexus (the Passenger Transport Executive for Tyne and Wear), and Newcastle International Airport. The fostering of demonstrator project ideas and consortia was instead an open and bottom-up process, responding to emerging opportunities that in some way addressed one or more broader themes (e.g., ageing, sustainability, economic development) accepted by the wider NCF partnership as representing priorities for the city and its inhabitants. This approach was effective in stimulating collaborative activity within the short timescale of the ULP, but was sometimes in tension with the capacity of large public-sector organizations to participate in more ambitious and potentially risky projects that may be disruptive of their existing practices. Even within the more decentred model of PBL represented by NCF, active collaboration of the local authorities in particular was still vital to the realization of shared multi-partner demonstrator projects due to their significant decision-making and regulatory role in areas such as planning, housing and transport. This indicates that, despite the declining resources at their disposal in a context of austerity, the forms of institutional power retained by local authorities means that they remain crucial gatekeepers within urban innovation processes. As well as facing bureaucratic barriers, these organizations are constrained by the austerity-magnified need to prioritize development projects with more certain, shorter term returns in economic growth.[4] The PBL role of local authorities is also distributed amongst multiple individuals, including elected councillors and officers at different hierarchical levels. This meant that separate NCF demonstrator projects often had to gain support from new people within the local authorities. These would, for instance, typically not have been the representatives of the two councils on the CFDG, and may have been relatively unfamiliar with the NCF model. Notwithstanding these challenges, the two councils, along with other key local agencies and 'anchor institutions', were core partners in a number of NCF projects (Table 1).

Another limitation of NCF as a model of facilitating PBL is that involvement in demonstrator projects is dependent on exploratory activities that (at least initially) may not

Table 1. Newcastle City Futures projects involving local authorities and other anchor institutions

Demonstrator project description

Future High Street: working with Newcastle City Council, NE1 and other partners to integrate innovative digital and blue–green sustainable infrastructure elements into plans for redevelopment around the main shopping street (Northumberland Street) in Newcastle city centre

Gateshead Riverside Park: exploring new uses for a riverside sculpture park that can generate economic and health benefits for local communities, whilst also helping to preserve its natural, artistic and industrial heritage with the diminished maintenance budget available to Gateshead Council

Last Mile: developing plans for a freight distribution centre that can reduce traffic congestion and air pollution by coordinating deliveries to large organizations in Newcastle – including the city council, universities and National Health Service (NHS) hospitals

Metro Futures: brokering a relationship between Nexus and a Newcastle University computing research group (Open Lab) to conduct an in-depth, digitally enabled consultation with a public co-research group into redesign of Metro train carriages

Pitchside: supporting the charitable foundation of Newcastle United Football Club in integrating digital technology into the development of a new centre for community sport, education and well-being next to Science Central and in an area of high social exclusion amongst young people

Tyneside Crowd: with support from Newcastle City and Gateshead councils, creating an online crowdfunding platform (Tyneside Crowd) to support varied community projects after the Urban Living Partnership (ULP) had ended

have a clear outcome in view. For many of the very small voluntary and community organizations in Newcastle and Gateshead even the relatively modest time commitment needed to participate in this model is challenging in the current funding climate. This has mainly restricted representation from this sector to larger community organizations or charities with existing links to the university. Similarly, while there was outside interest in the activities of NCF from larger technology companies, the growing community of digital sector small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) based in the city were harder to reach and keep engaged:

> I think that's where things fall down. … There's some really good ideas put forward, then what happens? … There's a lot of value in what Newcastle City Futures is doing – bringing people together, and being that kind of honest

broker – but it still needs someone to drive those ideas forward. And because people are just busy doing their normal day-to-day stuff, unless you're really pushing it, things fall off the agenda.

(interviewee, private sector 5)

NCF's activities have continued (albeit on a reduced scale) following the July 2018 end of the ULP. The position outside of formal institutional structures does, however, make NCF vulnerable as a funding-contingent partnership vehicle. Its future may also be tied up with wider devolution reforms in the region. During the research, a deal with central government was agreed by three of the local authorities in the region (Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland) to create a new, smaller combined authority. From May 2019 this will include an elected mayor to lead the new 'North of Tyne' authority. As well as adding to the geographical fragmentation in regional governance (Gateshead, for example, is not part of these arrangements), the introduction of a mayoral model has the potential, along the lines of other recently devolved combined authorities, to transform the dominant mode of PBL in English city-regions (Beer et al., 2019). The findings of this research are supportive of a vehicle along the lines of NCF, that can help facilitate cross-boundary collaboration and leverage academic capabilities for local strategic formation, continuing to have value within this new landscape. It remains an open question, however, whether and how this vehicle could work in conjuncture with a new mayor's office and combined authority.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has been concerned with the ways in which distributed and relational forms of PBL can be facilitated by actors outside of the formal governance sphere. The preceding case study has identified the combination of ways in which NCF has done this within Newcastle and Gateshead. These include foresight research and scenario building (the *Newcastle City Futures 2065* project); providing a regular forum for discussion between local authorities, universities and other partners (the CFDG); and acting as a collaborative platform for urban 'test-bed' demonstrator projects (the ULP). This case study has positioned these developments against a territorial context in Newcastle and the wider North East region characterized by limited and fragmented sub-national governance capacities. A main finding of the research is that NCF has only become established as a local PBL capability due to the institutional deficit generated by the post-2010 abolition of the North East RDA, the limited capacity of the LEP that assumed its responsibility for economic development strategy, and the pervasive effect of austerity measures on local authorities and other public, community or voluntary sector organizations in the city-region.

Despite being the product of a particular time and place, the NCF case can deepen our more general understanding of how PBL may be facilitated in environments where it is not well supported by institutional or cultural

features of the formal governance system. Specifically, the analysis pointed to two attributes of the NCF model that together helped constitute a strategic leadership resource for the city by opening up new spaces for collaborative dialogue and action (Nicholds et al., 2017). First, NCF, across its different configurations, can take a longer term perspective on social, economic and environmental futures that is not restricted by the pressures of responsibility for shorter term public service delivery or revenue generation faced by its individual partners. Second, NCF provides a capacity to broker collaborative fora and projects otherwise undersupplied in the city-region, and as an intermediate vehicle with a degree of autonomy from the local councils and parent organizations (including the institutional management of Newcastle University), it is perceived by some participants to have a neutrality that supports this function.

Both of these attributes can be related to NCF's distinctive institutional feature of being directed from a university, which responds to the need identified by Sotarauta et al. (2017) for work that elucidates the position of higher education institutions within PBL processes. Universities can supply the interdisciplinary expert knowledge that is a foundation of interpretive forms of PBL (Sotarauta, 2016a). In this case, however, NCF played a necessary function in mobilizing these diverse intellectual resources to help address challenges facing the city. Significantly, the attributes of the model identified above suggests that university-based actors may perform a distinctive PBL role that relies more on independence from the formal mechanisms of local governance than embeddedness within these arrangements. This will especially apply in periods of austerity, when actively engaged universities can provide an auxiliary PBL capability while other public sector organizations are hamstrung by a shortage of 'slack' resources to dedicate to this civic task.

The NCF case has, however, also shown that separation from these formal governance arrangements can restrict the ability to facilitate PBL. The realization of most initiatives in the city-region brokered by NCF was dependent on the effective support of local authorities and/or related public or private agencies. This illustrates that while NCF has been able to leverage what Sotarauta (2016a) refers to as interpretive and network forms of power, its role in facilitating PBL is still dependent on tapping into the legitimating forms of institutional and resource power that (even during periods of austerity) remain the preserve of organizations with 'assigned' local leadership functions. These organizations have been core participants in the various NCF activities described above. However, the findings indicate that the disruptive nature of these activities, aimed at altering the current trajectory of development in the city and advancing novel solutions to urban problems, can be inherently challenging to established practices of public sector partners. A longer term requirement for an intermediary vehicle such as NCF, therefore, will be helping to engender cultural change inside (as well as between) these organizations to support local innovation.

This paper has deepened our understanding of PBL by demonstrating how it can be actively cultivated through the facilitation of cross-organizational and interdisciplinary activity that addresses the current and future needs of cities. It has indicated that a centralized government system, as well as inhibiting local leadership in many ways, may also create opportunities for new modes of more decentred PBL to be introduced. The growing literature on PBL should, therefore, be open to effective place leadership assuming varied forms in different places. However, the tensions identified through this case study also raise a number of wider questions that can guide future research. First, are the more distributed and relational forms of PBL focused on in this paper present in other territorial contexts marked by constrained sub-national governance capabilities and what are the institutional or intermediary mechanisms through which they are enabled? Second, what are the implications for PBL, in terms of the nature of its collaborative practice and its effects on local development, of non-assigned actors such as universities, community groups or businesses assuming a more central role in its facilitation? Third, how can we better understand the coexistence and complex interplay of emergent forms of distributed PBL and more traditional local governance processes?

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NOTES

1. This section focuses on recent developments in England that relate directly to the ensuing case study. For the wider UK context against which these changes have taken place, including diverging devolution processes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, see MacKinnon (2015).
2. This covers the polycentric Tyne and Wear urban conurbation (containing the neighbouring city of Sunderland), but also the largely rural counties of Durham and Northumberland.
3. The ULP project, for example, had 10 co-investigators from Newcastle and Northumbria universities covering fields including architecture and planning, ageing and health, engineering, human–computer interaction, and digital humanities. These and other university members

contributed to the project in various ways, including acting as 'academic champions' for demonstrator projects.

4.   Local authorities, in particular, are under considerable pressure to increase their tax revenue from local business (property) rates to compensate for the removal of funding from central government.

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