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# Australian adaptation of UK dealmaking: towards state rescaling?

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## ABSTRACT

Place-based funding deals are inter-governmental contracts focused on boosting economic growth and productivity. Informed by policy adaptation scholarship, we compare the policy and practice of City Deals and dealmaking in the UK and Australia to consider the implications for scalar power relations. In the UK, local government is compelled to engage in dealmaking and the rescaling to the supralocal, city-regional level it incentivises. Thus, central-local state relations have been upscaled whilst city-regional powers are highly constrained. In Australia, deals enable the federal government to engage in the ostensible policy domains of state government, but purposive state rescaling is absent. However, the Australian case indicates an appetite for more formalised forms of supralocal governance, should the state tier concur, revealing that dealmaking has opened up alternative ways of working and that local as well as higher tiers of government play a role in shaping rescaling.

**KEYWORDS** City deals; policy adaptation; state rescaling; governance

## Introduction

Understanding the ways in which policies move between places, shaping and being shaped by their contexts – including governmental system and scalar distributions of state power – is a core empirical concern for policy mobilities scholarship (Temenos, Baker, and Cook 2019; McCann and Ward 2013). By examining Australia's adaptation of the UK's City Deals we provide new insights into the operation of urban policy mobilities at the local as well as national scales through examining the policy's implementation in practice and its implications for horizontal as well as hierarchical scalar power relations, particularly in terms of the creation of supralocal (multi-local government area) governance arrangements.

Place-based funding 'deals' - inter-governmental contracts between national, regional (state) and local governments – are promoted as a policy

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instrument to boost productivity and address uneven growth (Barca 2009). They provide a mechanism to channel investment and infrastructure provision, in combination with securing improved strategic planning and policy coordination, vertically across different tiers of government and horizontally across neighbouring local government areas. Thus, deals can incentivise the institutional realignments to co-ordinate planning and policy and stimulate economic development that are envisaged under competitive city-regionalism (Brenner 2019; Ward and Jonas 2004). Herein, the state engages in rescaling – reworking state scalar structures to realise political projects (Brenner 2009) – in order to realise the city-region, perceived as the most efficient state space for economic growth. In turn, as place-based instruments with the potential to reflect local conditions and priorities (Barca 2009), deals may also be accompanied by normative claims about devolution, in broad terms referring to the transfer of political and fiscal authority from national to subordinate levels of government.

In 2011 City Deals, a type of place-based deal, were introduced by the UK central government to be deployed down the vertical state hierarchy. Their introduction heralded a subsequent decade of different types of dealmaking, combining incentives (such as devolved powers and funds) with conditions (including formalisation of integrative governance arrangements across groupings of local government). This has culminated in the creation of a new, supralocal government tier of ‘combined authorities’ with some devolved powers. Thus in the UK, dealmaking has been used purposively to further a state rescaling project formalising the supralocal city-region and its governance structures (Pike et al. 2016; Hodson et al. 2020).

In 2016, the Australian federal government announced its adaptation of the UK’s City Deals. In both countries, deals are presented as supporting the boosting and spatial rebalancing of the economy, in the UK since fuzzily framed as ‘levelling up’ (Tomaney and Pike 2020). But in Australia dealmaking has been absent with an emphasis on devolution and formalised supralocal governance. Rather, it has been used to enable the federal government to insert itself into the lower state and thus local tiers due to its ability to fund transformative infrastructure. Examination of the governance implications arising from implementation is lacking.

We first review policy adaptation scholarship to establish our analytical framework to assess Australia’s adaptation of City Deals. We then examine City Deals in the UK to establish what was ostensibly ‘transferred’, before considering Australia’s adaptation. Comparison of governance arrangements, rationales and underlying ideology underpins the assessment of how deals are deployed across the two countries’ state scalar hierarchies. This, combined with a focus on the practice of enacting City Deals in Australia from the perspective of local government, informs consideration of the vertical and horizontal state scalar relations entailed and the implications for these. We find that in both countries deals are a hierarchical instrument deployed by

national government in tandem with its pivotal role in infrastructure investment, but that there are important contrasts related to context and scalar relations in how deals have been designed and enacted.

## Policy adaptation

Political science scholarship on policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000), policy mobilities literature (McCann and Ward 2013; Peck and Theodore 2015), and the critical conversation between the two, inform our analytical framework for Australia's adaptation of the UK's City Deals and the implications for state scalar relations.

Despite critique of the 'national state-centeredness' (McCann 2011, 112) of the longer-standing policy transfer literature, as a concept referring to the practices of national policymaking elites (Stone 1999) it is pertinent to our analysis of a policy introduced by two national states. Further critiques, of its 'implicit literalism' given that 'the form and function of . . . policies is prone to change . . . within and between different institutional, economic and political contexts (at the local and national scales)' (Peck and Theodore 2001, 449; 427), and of its related lack of engagement with questions of politics and spatiality, validate its combination with mobilities approaches in undertaking our analysis. But elements from it, particularly in relation to the nature of governance relations (explained below), prove valuable.

The mobilities turn engaged a range of social science disciplines, including geographers and planners, who in examining the movement of policies between places have focused on three inter-related issues which form the basis of our analytical framework for the Australian adaptation of City Deals: the making and promotion of policy ideas; how policies change as they move; and an emphasis on practice. The first issue encompasses the social processes of constructing policy ideas, or how policy ideas 'that work' do not spontaneously arise but are consciously made and promoted (McCann 2011; Peck and Theodore 2015). Experts, including global consultancy firms motivated by potential contracts, professional reputation, and the belief they can help improve cities (Stone 2004; McCann 2011), may package policy models with explicit attention to their mobility despite territorial differences (Temenos and McCann 2013). The power of such expert knowledge varies depending on the political, geographical and historical context and whether there is a receptive audience (Robinson 2015), related to perceptions of and relations with the territory where the policy model originated.

The second issue, key to examining Australia's adaptation of deals, is how policies mutate as they move from 'sites of invention to sites of emulation' (Peck and Theodore 2015: xxiv). Urban policy mobilities scholarship conceives of policies and their spatial contexts as co-constructed (McCann 2011; Baker

and Temenos 2015), leading to a focus on which elements of seemingly mobile policies remain fixed and which are mobile:

Even within the most 'mobile' of policies there are elements of immobility, not least the institutional and physical infrastructures through which they travel and are conditioned ... Furthermore, since policies do not move fully formed from place to place, some parts move while others prove less mobile and remain fixed in place  
*(McCann and Ward 2015, 829).*

Thinking in this way refines understanding of how the policy is adapted in its new context, as it draws attention to which aspects or features of the policy, beyond its name – such as its governance arrangements, rationales and underlying ideology – have moved and which have not. These elements are considered in turn in our empirical analysis, with a refined approach taken to the underlying ideology element. This aspect is key – given that urban mobilities scholarship conceives of policy and context as mutually constitutive, and policies are the means through which political-ideological projects are realised – but requires unpicking to avoid overly broadbrush understandings, especially of neoliberalism. It is clearly of normative appeal to posit that policy mobility is likely to be heightened between contexts that seem to share a political ideology. Certainly where neoliberal ideology is dominant to varying degrees, policy ideas that align with neoliberal preferences (such as 'small government', market allocation mechanisms and self-reliance) are likely to have a greater chance of uptake than those that do not (Temenos, Baker, and Cook 2019). But to refine understanding it is necessary to recognise the variegated nature of actually existing neoliberalism, 'not as a singular, circulating, encompassing hegemonic force, but as a contingent set of translating logics that have to be enacted in practice' (McFarlane 2011, 379). These understandings inform our approach to assessing Australia's adaptation of a policy from the UK where both countries ostensibly share a neoliberal ideological underpinning.

The third, related issue that informs our analysis is local enactment. Policies are put into practice in particular, grounded ways as policy is made 'actionable' when it is territorialised in its specific social, spatial and institutional context (McCann 2011). Thus, valuable insights can be gained from the local level – a level which may be discounted as less important when examining a policy introduced by two national governments. Our local government focus aligns with policy mobilities' empirical concern with how policies and their contexts are co-constructed, and particularly how policies can 'remake relational connections across an intensely variegated and dynamic socio-institutional landscape' (Peck and Theodore 2015, 29). We are interested in how these connections are remade from the perspective of local government. A refinement to the policy transfer literature yields useful insights for this purpose. In considering the interplay of policy transfer with modes of

governance – typically distinguished as via hierarchy, market mechanisms or networks - Marsh and Evans (2012) posit that where hierarchy dominates, policy transfer is more ‘top-down’; whereas when networks predominate, the process is more negotiated and contested. Therefore we can equate hierarchy with vertical relations (and thus national state priorities) and networks with horizontal relations (and thus more localist determination). Certainly, the hierarchy is evident in both countries as the policy instrument was introduced by the national state. But central to our focus on the implications for scalar power relations is the extent to which in practice City Deals entail horizontal (network) as well as vertical (hierarchical) relations – in terms of the governance arrangements which have resulted, and local actors’ experiences of these. Our refinement augments policy mobilities’ emphasis on the scalar distributions of state power (McCann and Ward 2013) by specifically examining the policy’s local, grounded expression in practice and the implications for remaking horizontal as well as vertical state relations.

## Data and methods

Our approach to assessing Australia’s adaptation of the UK’s City Deal policy model responds to the call that ‘while maintaining a focus on wider forces, studies of urban policy mobilities must engage . . . in fine-grained qualitative studies’ (McCann 2011). In our empirically rich analysis, combining documentary review and interviews, we deploy an interpretative strategy to assess both policy adaptation and perceptions and experiences of implementation. In doing so, we seek to refine the assumptions of accounts quick to assert the salience of neoliberalism without understanding its variegation (Baker and McGuirk 2017) and recognise the need for multi-scaled, local as well as national appreciation of policy adaptation (McCann 2011; Peck and Theodore 2001).

We undertook a policy documentary review, an important element of ‘following the policy’ (Bok 2015) as documents act ‘as texts that reveal particular ways of thinking and acting’ (Baker and McGuirk 2017, 434) to understand processes of policy mobility. Key documents preceding, announcing and progressing the deals and dealmaking were reviewed. The review combines with the findings from 25 semi-structured interviews conducted between December 2018 and April 2019. UK interviewees comprised five academic and practitioner experts well placed to comment on the progression of dealmaking, including two officials of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) which provided the City Deals ‘template’ for Australia (KPMG 2014, 12). Australia, as the empirical emphasis, yielded interviews with 20 key planning, infrastructure, and economic development informants with state government and/or specific local government area experience and expertise. The latter were key to our analysis of local

government experiences of policy implementation and the implications for scalar power relations in terms of horizontal as well as vertical modes of joint working. The empirical focus was the Western Sydney City Deal (WSCD), including interviews with local government officers in four of the WSCD's eight constituent local government areas. Eliciting 'ordinary', everyday practices at micro-level is typical in mobilities approaches (Cochrane and Ward 2012; McCann and Ward 2013; Temenos and McCann 2013), providing insights into the actuality of place-based dealmaking. Semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis, aligned with the interview guide themes which covered experiences of negotiating and the early stages of implementing deals and the governance challenges faced in seeking vertical and horizontal co-ordination.

## City deals and dealmaking

### *In the UK*

We first examine UK dealmaking, including the 'Manchester model' directly cited in Australian policy documents, to establish what was ostensibly 'transferred' to Australia. When City Deals were introduced the promise of devolution was to the fore, with deals described as entailing:

new powers for cities, enabling civic and private sector leaders to influence the key decisions that affect their economic competitiveness; and/or innovative projects to unlock growth in each area (Cabinet Office 2011, 6).

As 'bespoke packages of funding and decision-making powers negotiated between central government and local authorities' (Ward 2020, 4), deals involved agreements between central government and, for the most part, groupings of rather than single local government areas in England, along with tripartite agreements also involving the devolved national administrations of Scotland and Wales. They have therefore been deployed by central government to incentivise local governments to work together to develop strategic plans and priorities, especially regarding infrastructure, and latterly (in combination with subsequent types of deal) to formalise supralocal governance structures. By 2017, 31 City Deals had been signed (Ward 2020, 5), covering 51% of the population, 45% of the Gross Value Added (GVA, the productivity measure deployed in dealmaking), 51% of the jobs and 45% of the enterprises in Britain (O'Brien and Pike 2019, 1461).

Subsequently, and in contrast to Australia, a further range of (Growth and Devolution) deals has been introduced in England, described as 'transfer[ing] powers, funding and accountability for policies and functions previously undertaken by central government' (NAO 2016, 5). These deals tend to be combined on the ground – for example, Greater Manchester has a City Deal,



a Growth Deal and a Devolution Deal. UK experts described this bundling of different deals as a 'progression', forming part of a 'wider narrative' of devolution, with elements of political decentralisation, in which some central political functions are undertaken at lower governmental levels; and to a lesser extent of fiscal decentralisation, wherein the centre cedes some autonomy over tax, spending and public finances (Pike et al. 2016, 11).

Dealmaking in the UK thus entwines negotiated funding agreements with purposive state rescaling, as it has encouraged groupings of local authorities to become more formalised as a tier of the state. National legislative change (the Local Democracy Act 2009, amended by the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016) enabled creation of 'combined authorities', legal entities which give groupings of local government legal authority to make collective decisions. The 2009 Act restricted powers to economic development, regeneration or transport functions, but the 2016 Act removed these limitations, heralding the potential transfer of a wider range of statutory functions from national government. To date, ten combined authorities have been established in England, covering 12 million people (nearly 20% of England's population). Nine of these, including Greater Manchester, have political leadership provided by a directly elected 'metro mayor' (Roberts 2020).

UK experts interviewed regarded deals as increasing and improving the nature of relations between central and local government, acting as a 'log jam breaker' to enable central government to push reform with local authorities to 'speed up and streamline'. In turn, experts agreed that 'deals are making localities think differently', encouraging local actors to work together more strategically. However, experts cautioned that strategic planning, core to the horizontal co-ordination logics of deals across local government areas, has been downgraded in its ability to guide development priorities relative to the provision of major infrastructure, one commenting that 'spatial plans (now) serve as infrastructure plans'.

Greater Manchester was the first city-region to sign a City Deal in 2012 and is regarded as the most advanced realisation of UK dealmaking. Development took much pre-City Deal joint working. It comprises 10 local government areas (population 2.8 million) which had worked together voluntarily since the 1990s on transport, regeneration and inward investment (Harding, Harloe, and Rees 2010). Political oversight of the GMCA, created in 2011, is provided by its local government leaders jointly with (since 2017) a metro mayor, evidencing some political decentralisation as dealmaking has progressed and governance arrangements have been formalised. The GMCA has a range of powers and associated budgets, including strategic planning, transport, housing, police, fire, skills, justice and health. But experts interviewed emphasised the 'slippage and backtracking' entailed in negotiations regarding fiscal decentralisation, when seeking to operationalise the 'earn-back' model proposed by the GMCA in its initial City Deal (Ward 2020, 7). And the GMCA's reliance on financialised

commercial and residential property development, already concentrated in the city centre to align with developer demand (Manchester City Council 2017, 11), has led to critiques of its limited ability to widely distribute social benefits (Moran, Tomaney, and Williams 2018, 213). Related delays in adoption of its strategic plan, with statutory public consultation revealing resistance to proposed patterns of development, further underline the distributive challenges it faces (Hodson et al. 2020).

### *In Australia*

The 'UK City Deal model' was first introduced to Australia by the global consultancy KPMG in a report launched in partnership with the Property Council of Australia. The report describes the model as 'the British Government's innovative strategy for building stronger urban and regional growth via smarter strategic planning, infrastructure investment and local governance' (KPMG 2014, 2).

In 2016, two federal government plans sought to 'tie the provision of additional funding for infrastructure to the delivery of a range of city-based reforms, focused on improving the quality of planning, development and infrastructure' (Infrastructure Australia 2016, 33). The Smart Cities Plan (DPMC 2016) centred around the core aim of growing the economy through strategic planning and investment in infrastructure, and announced Australia's adaptation of City Deals. City Deals have since been described as federal government's primary policy instrument to fund 'catalytic infrastructure investments' while driving 'urban governance and land use reform' (DPMC 2019: 24). Deals are described as a:

genuine partnership between the three levels of government and the community to work towards a shared vision for productive and liveable cities. City Deals work to align the planning, investment and governance necessary to accelerate growth and job creation, stimulate urban renewal and drive economic reforms  
(DITRDC 2020).

By March 2022, nine City Deals had reached tripartite agreement between federal, state and local governments. The deals cover state capitals (with the exception of Melbourne and Canberra) plus three other cities. All share an emphasis on infrastructure and innovation to enable the primary goal of economic growth. All involve some form of infrastructure project, comprising major transport infrastructure such as airports to enable international connectivity (Western Sydney, Hobart); a metro system to enhance internal connectivity (North South Rail Link in Western Sydney, METRONET in Perth); digital infrastructure (Geelong, SE Queensland); or magnet infrastructure to attract people and activities (North Queensland Stadium in Townsville). Innovation is represented through collaborations with universities and

research and development institutes (Western Sydney, Adelaide, Geelong, Darwin).

The City Deals are articulated across a variety of different state arrangements for strategic planning, with associated governance ‘a mix of voluntary arrangements and imposed structures’ (Burton 2017). This is because within the Australian federal governmental system, state government wields substantial power as the tier ‘directly responsible for all the key elements of planning and major infrastructure and service delivery’ (Sansom, Dawkins, and Tan 2012, 5) thus determining any supralocal governance arrangements.

### **Australian adaptation**

In applying our policy adaptation framework to Australia’s City Deals we consider: the making and promotion of policy ideas, including the role of experts; how policies change as they move, including which elements move and which do not; and finally local-level practice, informing consideration of the implications for scalar power relations. The analysis underlines the inter-related nature of each of these elements, emphasising the overarching importance of context in shaping policy adaptation and its implementation.

### **The making and promotion of policy ideas**

City Deals’ Australian adaptation encapsulates several ‘tendencies in fast-policy development’ (Peck 2011), notably presenting policies as modelled on a formative approach that works elsewhere. In fulfilling the role of international expert, KPMG deployed an expedient political strategy in partnering with Australia’s powerful property development industry lobby to produce its formative report. The receptiveness to such expert knowledge was boosted by the longstanding tendency of Australia to look to the UK for policy models, evidencing the path dependencies of colonialism despite Australia’s federal rather than unitary system of government (Robinson 2015; Burton 2017).

The report sought to make the UK City Deals model mobile ‘through the codification and packaging of ostensibly reproducible features’ (Peck 2011, 177) with specific reference to ‘the Greater Manchester deal ... provid[ing] a template’ for ‘what the more ambitious cities [in the UK] are seeking to replicate’ (KPMG 2014, 2, 10). In packaging City Deals, formalised supralocal governance structures were emphasised, with the (pre-metro mayor) GMCA described as ‘in effect a new tier of government’ (KPMG 2014, 12), the report explaining:

the governance structures employed to implement a deal are just as important as the mechanical details of the deal itself. It is important to establish a suitable structure for the specified geography, to ensure that all stakeholders are held accountable to responsibilities and that benefits from the deal are realised and shared across the combined region. It is important that any governance structure employed to deliver the deal within a region should hold statutory power (KPMG 2014, 17).

That adaptation not only relates to packaged expert knowledge is clear as Australia's version of City Deals lacks the creation of such formal governance structures. But its influence is evident in the read across between the KPMG report and the federal government's Smart Cities plan, both of which detail the Manchester model as 'a demonstration of what can be achieved' (DPMC 2016, 22).

### **How policies change as they move**

The analysis demonstrates that though policies with the same name may imply similar governance arrangements, rationales and underlying political ideology, policies mutate as they move, shaped by their context, with some elements proving immobile. Table 1 compares these elements of City Deals and dealmaking in the UK and Australia.

#### **Governance**

Governance arrangements are the most obviously different element in the two countries' expression, with far less Australian emphasis on horizontal relations between local government areas, especially given England's subsequent progression to Devolution Deals. Though Australia's Smart Cities Plan recognised that some City Deals may 'cover a whole city and surrounds' i.e., multiple local government areas, it singled out 'regional cities, where there is a single local government' as 'especially well placed to take advantage of City Deals' (DPMC 2016, 21). Six of the nine deals since agreed involve single local governments. Those which do entail horizontal relations – Hobart (four councils), Western Sydney (eight), and most recently South East Queensland (eleven) – all as yet lack the formalised 'new tier' of governance sought by KPMG (2014). Thus, the immobile aspect of the UK model is its formal supralocal governance structures of combined authorities. However, our analysis of practice (below) reveals developments in informal, supralocal governance relations.

#### **Rationales**

Fiscal austerity has been a key driver for UK dealmaking. The downscaling and offloading of responsibilities and risks through the vertical state hierarchy – as

**Table 1.** City deals and dealmaking in the UK and Australia.

	UK	Australia
<b>National state rationales</b>		
Drivers/ imperatives	Fiscal austerity Economic growth/productivity (GVA)	Economic growth Demands for federal infrastructure support from high growth areas
Shared discourses	Vertical and horizontal co-ordination of policy and planning, infrastructure provision	
Rationales used in discourse	(versions of) Devolution and localism (normative appeal given centralism) Spatial rebalancing (eg. Northern Powerhouse; 'levelling up')	Federal-led collaborative policy design and implementation Innovation, Smart Cities, knowledge economy
Ideology	(Neoliberal) Entrepreneurial, economic growth/productivity	(Neo-Keynesian) Catalytic investment for infrastructure combined with (neoliberal) entrepreneurial, economic growth
<b>Governance and inter-governmental relations</b>		
Scalar relations	Vertical – downscaling responsibilities and risks, combined with constraints on local/ multi-local political and fiscal autonomy Horizontal – joint working and co-ordination Central-local and intra-local relations upscaled from local to supralocal combined authorities	Vertical – Federal tier reasserting its role in urban and regional policy with steering of state and local planning functions via major infrastructure Horizontal – joint working and co-ordination Federal government link to local (with state consent)
Governance	Central government agreement with multiple local governments, incentivised to coalesce as Combined Authorities (with directly-elected 'metro mayors') in England (under Devolution Deals)	Tripartite agreements between federal, state and local governments (7 of the 9 City Deals single local government areas) No formal related governance structures, governance via a variety of state-determined arrangements
<b>The Deal</b>		
Signatories	Bilateral (or trilateral in devolved administrations) agreements between local government groupings and central government	Trilateral federal, state and local government agreements
Content	Economic growth primary Mixture of agenda items around a core menu, infrastructure focused	Economic growth primary Mixture of agenda items around a core menu of infrastructure, innovation and placemaking
Timeframe	20 to 30 years (for City Deals) – indefinite for Devolution Deals (though always subject to state rescaling)	10 years (6 of the 9 City Deals), 15 years (Townsville), 20 years (WSCD and SE Queensland)

described in Peck's (2012) austerity urbanism – characterises the governmental relations dealmaking has encouraged, proving powerful in compelling local governments to engage in risk-taking in a context in which it is very hard to reject funding (Martin et al. 2016, Bailey and Wood 2017) due to local government funding cuts along with restrictions on revenue-raising. England-wide, net expenditure on planning and development and housing services has more than halved and on highways and transport has reduced by more than 40% since austerity measures were introduced by central government in 2010 (HCLG 2019). For example, transport infrastructure resources agreed in four City Deals were in all but one case exceeded by reductions in the spending power of the participant local governments (O'Brien and Pike 2019). Any fiscal powers devolved to combined authorities are highly conditional, as seen in the challenges the GMCA faced in negotiating its earn-back proposals. Phased release of funds, combined with a requirement for balanced annual spending profiles, entail borrowing to invest in infrastructure in the expectation of stimulating economic growth and tax revenues to repay the debt, showing that the risks of speculative investment and debt repayment have been downscaled (O'Brien and Pike 2019).

Australia does not share the UK's austerity imperative but does share the imperative of economic growth and a focus on infrastructure to enable this. Here, City Deals are not bundled with a justificatory discourse of devolution and purposive state rescaling is not evident. This makes sense given the country's federal governmental system and sensitivities regarding the respective constitutional roles of the federal and state government tiers, wherein local government is a 'creature' of the state tier and strategic planning, along with any associated supralocal governance arrangements, are at the behest of state government. However, the federal government has latitude to intervene in state matters, particularly regarding major infrastructure projects deemed in the national interest such as the new Western Sydney airport. Its latitude to intervene is compounded by Australia's extreme 'vertical fiscal imbalance' (Tomlinson 2017), as federal government collects most taxation revenue, far in excess of its expenditure responsibilities, meaning that states are reliant on federal redistribution for nearly half their revenue, itself a contentious policy realm (Productivity Commission 2018). The primary research was conducted during a period of national debate about the distribution of population growth and infrastructure deficiencies. The largest cities – Sydney (New South Wales' state capital), Melbourne (Victoria) and Brisbane (Queensland) - absorb the majority of international migration, the major driver of Australian population growth. Thus, the federal government's responsibility for determining immigration policy without taking responsibility for the increased demand on infrastructure and services provided by the states is a particular source of tension (Davies 2018), raising state and public expectations of federal government transfers and thus engagement in

ostensibly state matters. Understanding this, the Australian Infrastructure Plan explained:

The Australian Government possesses taxation and funding powers as well as primary responsibility for immigration policies, which in turn impact urban population growth rates. The Australian Government should use two of these levers – infrastructure funding and population policy – to improve our cities  
(*Infrastructure Australia 2016*, 33).

### **Political ideology**

At first look, the influence of shared political ideologies between the countries is clear, with the policy model presented in Australia as a 'neutral form of best-practice pragmatism' (Peck 2011, 178) wherein 'all three levels of government can partner to support economic growth' (DPMC 2016, 21) to 'overcome infrastructure deficits, reduce funding shortfalls and grow local economic activity' (KPMG 2014, 6). As such, City Deals' Australian adaptation can be seen to encapsulate the 'fast-policy development' tendency of emphasising pragmatic solutions within a 'narrow ideological bandwidth' (Peck 2011, 177). Indeed, by their very nature as conditional, performance-related contracts, deals exemplify an entrepreneurial policy instrument aligned with neoliberal ideologies in which the national state's role is conceived as market-enabling (Harvey 1989, O'Brien and Pike 2019).

However, once we move beyond broadbrush understandings we can discern important differences in terms of 'the practical co-existence of multiple political projects' (Baker and McGuirk 2017). It is notable that whilst Australia shares the key imperative of growth, in contrast to the resultant impetus in the UK and elsewhere to supralocal governance supporting competitive city-regionalism (Brenner 2019, Ward and Jonas 2004), the trend in Australia is towards increased inter-governmental centralisation (Phillimore and Harwood 2015). Such 'opportunistic federalism' (Appleby, Aroney, and John 2012) can be regarded as neo-Keynesian, in that it involves spatially selective federal redistribution to support infrastructure to secure desired spatial outcomes. However, our consideration of local enactment, below, reveals how deal implementation is opening up opportunities for horizontal relations and associated, albeit informal, forms of supralocal governance, providing a localist countercurrent to centralisation.

### **Local enactment/practice**

We now move beyond the preceding top-down perspective derived from policy pronouncements and expert views to examine how City Deals are put into practice at the local level, enabling us to examine the implications for

horizontal as well as hierarchical scalar power relations. We focus on the Western Sydney City Deal (WSCD).

In Greater Sydney (population 5.1 million) strategic planning is undertaken by the Greater Sydney Commission (GSC), an independent agency created by the New South Wales state government in 2015 to provide strategic coordination across its 33 local government areas. Economic growth is a key objective of its Greater Sydney Region Plan (2018), reinforced through planning priorities for jobs growth, connectivity and housing supply. The Plan comprises three sub-regional plans, one of which, the Western Parkland City, is coterminous with the WSCD area.

The City Deal was signed by the Prime Minister, state premier and the mayors of its eight constituent local authorities in 2018. It proposes a 20-year framework for coordinating existing and new investment, strategic planning and infrastructure provision, with 38 commitments focused on 'a liveable 30-minute city, with infrastructure and facilities that bring residents closer to jobs, services, education and the world' (DITRDC 2019: 1). It centres on the transformative infrastructure of a new airport and rail link, deemed of national significance, along with 200,000 new jobs and a series of initiatives around industry investment, agri-business, science and technology and higher education.

Those interviewed were largely positive about the opportunities presented, both in terms of the 'infrastructure bonanza' and in terms of the emergent horizontal and vertical relations entailed. At state level, improved horizontal co-ordination between strategic planning and infrastructure strategy was cited, an officer explaining it was the first time key state strategies had used 'common planning assumptions' (NSW Treasury, n.d.). At local government level, a heritage of horizontal collaborative relations akin to GMCA's longstanding informal joint working was lacking. To date, deal implementation has focused on establishing horizontal as well as vertical relations to ease planning and policy coordination. This was welcomed by the local authorities, one interviewee contrasting 'parochial' locality-based working with the collaborative working enabled by the City Deal. Another emphasised the importance of the 'unofficial, organic stuff' seen as enabling development of relationships and thus new ways of working. A local authority lead officer observed 'we've found we've got more things by sticking together', illustrated by the eight authorities agreeing the shared priority of a north-south rail line which was then included in the City Deal. The 'collegial approach' in how the Western City Liveability Program, resourced by all three levels of government via the deal, was apportioned across all eight WSCD local authorities was also cited, seen as enabling 'successes on the board' which strengthened the emergent horizontal partnership.

In considering vertical governance relationships, those engaged welcomed increasing tripartite governmental co-ordination (between the federal



Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities; the state Departments of Premier and Cabinet, Transport and Planning and Environment; and the eight local authorities). As a local officer explained:

The real benefit of the City Deal ... there's a whole lot of goodies in it and we were absolutely delighted to see stage one north-south rail in there but the real benefit we think is the ongoing governance and the ongoing culture shift in the way that local, state and federal Government work together. That is the real game changer moving forward.

Officers from another local authority perceived that their 'seat at the table' conferred policy influence. Emergent informal governance structures such as the WSCD local authority general manager and lead officer meetings, and the planning partnership between the eight local authorities (plus the state's planning department, water and transport agencies, and the GSC) were perceived as positive signs of remaking relational connections, a local officer commenting that 'the planning partnership is very much about let's do things differently ... work collaboratively with local government'. Some WSCD resourcing assists these emerging forms of vertical and horizontal cross-governmental co-ordination, with funding to accelerate local plan revision.

Whilst also welcoming tripartite collaboration, a state agency official alluded to the vertical power relationships entailed in explaining how the emergent governance 'includes all three tiers of government, not just officer level or political level discussion, there's senior executive governance that has decision-making power', going on to describe the deal's usefulness as it 'mandates collaboration'. Cultural differences between federal, state and local government were linked to the need for all actors to change attitudes towards each other and 'dump the baggage'. In turn, legislative challenges were raised in relation to sharing information and transparency around procurement, a local officer commenting:

Different systems, different legislation ... we're a lot more transparent than state government or federal government ... the way we purchase services and service provision, we're very locked into a specific tendering process ... whereas state government has a lot more flexibility on how they procure stuff.

Constitutional challenges were highlighted, in particular that federal funds have to be channelled via the state to local authorities rather than being received directly. Hamstrung by remaining 'creatures' of the state, one local officer remarked that this ongoing hierarchy was 'stand[ing] in the way of doing things differently'. But overall WSCD local authority officers stressed that the 'real benefit we see is the ongoing governance and culture shift in how the three levels of government work together', and perceived that local government was being more meaningfully engaged in critical policy and planning processes.

Those interviewed stressed both the progress made to date and the pressures and time needed for relationships to evolve sufficiently to achieve 'true three levels of governmental collaboration'. Interviewees explained that though the initial deal 'lacked substance', the effort involved in negotiating it 'can't be over-estimated'. The lack of a 'pause point' given the need to progress implementation proved difficult for local authorities. Their 'extraordinary effort' combined with a lack of dedicated resource for this purpose was underlined, as a local authority lead officer explained:

We've got the local level knowledge but [state government] tends to run off – state government has got a lot more resourcing and resources than we have at the local level, so they're able to progress things a lot quicker. What we're finding is the expectations on the eight councils to contribute and be a part of this ... my role has been taken up with nearly two to three days a week of City Deals ... there is no resourcing that's been allocated for that.

At this preliminary stage discussion of specific instruments had not evolved. Officers from two local authorities expressed interest in the scope for value capture on transit-orientated development related to the new rail line. But in expressing concerns about how any infrastructure contributions would be divided between local, state and federal government, their recognition of the challenge of navigating vertical power relations was clear.

The political oversight and accountability provided by England's combined authorities contrasts with the Australian City Deal model. The GSC, as an arms-length state agency, is insulated from direct democratic accountability. Empirical work revealed that the GSC is mindful of the need to collaborate with local authorities though it has the constitutional authority, via the state, to lead strategic planning processes, define housing supply targets, and articulate other policy priorities which local government must implement. It remains to be seen to what extent the GSC comprises a step towards a more formalised and accountable form of governance. But the research revealed that many favoured the idea of a cohesive approach to planning across the multiple local government areas of the Sydney city-region. An officer of a local government representative body saw the lack of supralocal governance arrangements, as advocated for in the initial KPMG report, as a hindrance to improving 'how we operate a city':

We actually don't have a city-wide operating layer for the city. That we have this planning layer, because the Greater Sydney Commission has been tasked with looking at planning most of the city, but the operating layer is now resident in multiple government agencies and across local government.

## Conclusion: scalar power relations

Application of our policy adaptation framework – combining policy mobilities’ emphasis on context (governmental system and scalar distributions of state power) and local enactment with policy transfer’s consideration of hierarchical and network relations (McCann and Ward 2013, Marsh and Evans 2012) – affirms that in broad terms dealmaking is a hierarchical instrument in terms of the power dynamics of inter-governmental scalar relations, and one which is deployed in tandem with national government’s pivotal role in infrastructure funding and financing. But the framework refines understanding by demonstrating that policies with the same name and deployed with similar rhetoric do not necessarily entail the same governance arrangements, rationales and underlying political ideologies. Key aspects of UK dealmaking – formal supralocal governance and rationales of austerity urbanism – remain immobile in Australian adaptation, in which a neo-Keynesian ideology is to the fore. Thus the framework signposts us to examine why some aspects prove mobile and others not.

In the UK, dealmaking exemplifies how governments engage in rescaling to realise political projects (Brenner 2009). Here, dealmaking is a continuance of processes of state rescaling underway since the 1990s that further the neoliberal ideal of the ‘competition state’, sweetened by limited devolution. Deals have helped upscale central-local relations to the supralocal, city-regional level whilst political and especially fiscal powers remain highly constrained. The GMCA illustrates that under competitive city-regionalism the political goals of economic agglomeration and capital accumulation dominate over goals of democratic control and distributive justice (Jonas and Moio 2018), though such formalisation of governing arrangements – including strategic planning and associated public consultation – does hold some disruptive potentialities in this regard (Hodson et al. 2020). The key government rationale is to seek economic growth through positioning sub-national spaces as ‘competitive’ whilst downscaling and offloading responsibilities and risks to lower tiers of government within a reduced public sector funding environment. From the perspective of constituent local governments, governance upscaling poses a challenge to democratic accountability, affirmed by Roberts (2020), who found that local government officers perceived combined authorities as more ‘them’ than ‘us’, whilst central government officers viewed the combined authorities as ‘their creatures’ (Roberts 2020, 1004).

In contrast in Australia, City Deals, and in particular the transformative infrastructure funding entailed, provide a way for the federal government to circumvent ostensible constitutional roles and engage in a form of neo-Keynesianism, with a dual imperative of economic growth and the accommodation of immigration-fuelled population growth, a policy realm

controlled by federal government. Federal use of City Deals to 'drive change in the planning and operation of Australia's cities' (Infrastructure Australia 2016, 175) combines with federal infrastructure investment to shape state tier strategic planning whilst gaining favour with local level constituents. Therefore though in both countries deals are conceived and implemented hierarchically, in Australia this is unapologetically so, whilst in the UK deals are packaged with devolutionary promise, of great normative appeal in such a centralised and London-centric governmental system.

In Australia, federal intervention at lower (state and local) scales via deals has not purposively sought to establish and formalise a supralocal, city-regional scale of governance, a realm at the behest of the state tier and across which a mix of approaches are taken which to date lack formal institutional arrangements. Indeed, Burton (2017) identifies little appetite for creating a city-regional, fourth tier of government in Australia. However, our examination of locally grounded practice in one deal in which multiple local government areas are engaged points to the remaking of horizontal as well as vertical scalar relations (Peck and Theodore 2015), centred around shaping and managing strategic development. The key finding derived from our empirical focus on local enactment was that local actors welcomed not only the investment entailed but the opportunities to engage in the informal forms of governance arising from tripartite state engagement in dealmaking and the governance imperative to co-ordinate plans and actions. Local actors were positive about their perceived increased influence, but also flagged the challenges arising in establishing new forms of governance, such as regarding officer capacity and resourcing and bridging cultural differences between tiers of the state. Thus our research revealed both emergent informal supra-local governance and an appetite for more structured forms of horizontal and vertical collaboration across and between the local and state tiers, indicating scope for future formalisation of supralocal governance – a localist counter-current to centralisation – if politically palatable.

Our policy adaptation framework has enabled us to consider how local enactment remakes horizontal and vertical relational connections and thus assess the implications for state scalar power relations. In Australia, the lack of purposive state rescaling (on the part of federal government) does not mean that there are no implications for rescaling at sub-national levels. Dealmaking has opened up alternative ways of working welcomed by local government and to which the state tier has latitude in how to respond. Therefore local as well as state and federal government plays a role in shaping rescaling, purposive or not. In revealing support for the opportunities for collaboration across and between different tiers of government enabled by City Deals, our examination of local practice indicates an appetite for more formalised supralocal state rescaling, should the state tier concur. Emergent governance arrangements – with their expectations of vertical and horizontal collaboration – are therefore coalescing

around City Deal agreement and implementation processes. Therefore while Australia's adaptation of dealmaking did not incorporate the UK's formal governance arrangements, the inherent institutional logics of the policy instrument – the governance imperative of co-ordination – may in time encourage their realisation.

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