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**Wills, Jane. (2016). *Locating Localism: Statecraft, Citizenship and Democracy*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.**

***Dr Madeleine Pill, Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney***

In her excellent book on the emergent form of statecraft, localism, Jane Wills explores the structures that can help and constrain the decentralisation of political power in England. To date localism has largely been a top-down project but Wills cogently argues, drawing on detailed case studies, that people can best effect change in their communities in bottom up ways. In so doing Wills advocates for the creation of civic infrastructure and capacity at the neighbourhood scale.

The book 'locates localism' by combining a geographer's appreciation of scale and place to consideration of the distribution of power in England. As such, it complements other recent place-based scholarship (such as Hambleton, 2014). Importantly, it also provides a rich understanding of the history of localism which frames contemporary resonances. For example, Wills' explanation of the post-Reformation emergence of parish government and the civic duties for parishioners this entailed is reflected in the final chapter's discussion of the newly-created Queens Park Community Council, pioneering an avowedly non-partisan form of enacted citizenship in London. Thus while localism in its current incarnation can be thought of as a recent trend in British politics, its ideas are rooted in a long history which has been disrupted by the increasing centralisation of political power (chapter 2) and the concomitant weakening of local civic infrastructure (chapter 3). Such weakening is linked to the inability of more recent state-led experimentation to sustain (such as the 1970s Community Development Projects) and the challenges of inculcating community-led endeavours.

The majority of the book is devoted to Wills' research into what she casts as four different types of localist experimentation. Two of these, neighbourhood community budgets and a 'cooperative council' are respectively central- and local state-led. The other two, neighbourhood planning and community organising, are characterised as 'bottom up'. That all cases are located in cities (predominantly London, also Leeds and Exeter) underlines the city's importance as a sub-national scale of political organisation.

The initial two cases enable exploration of the weaknesses of local civic infrastructure and its importance in coalescing people and organisations. The Neighbourhood Community Budgeting (NCB) initiative strongly resounds with the paradoxes of earlier top-down state attempts to nurture localism. Organisations had to bid to central government for funding to create NCBs, under which funding for different organisations in a locality is pooled, and the initiative was circumscribed by a set of expected outcomes. Wills' research into the NCB pilot in Poplar, London, revealed the lack of community capacity to meaningfully engage, and showed that 'state-funded organisations retreated to the use of basic community consultation activity in the absence of a strong community voice' (p100). The case also revealed that initiative funding was sought by some partners as a way of sustaining 'business as usual' in the context of the drastic public sector funding cuts which accompanied central government's adoption of austerity measures in 2010.

Wills' community case studies also point to the importance of melding top down and bottom up approaches, echoing the 'empowered participatory governance' of Fung and Wright (2001). In her account of a local council's (Lambeth, London) ambitions to be 'co-operative' manifested in a community-based service commissioning project, Wills stresses the importance of the prior establishment of a strong neighbourhood forum comprising organisations such as local residents' associations and a community development trust. The forum, with a leadership independent of the Council, was already undertaking significant action, often working with elected councillors and about

which council staff were only partially aware. Likely most intriguing to an international audience is Wills' consideration of a third English experiment in localism, neighbourhood planning, enshrined as a right in the Localism Act (2011) whereby designated neighbourhood forums can prepare neighbourhood plans which on adoption become part of the statutory planning schema. Albeit state-enabled via legislative change rather than being state-led via area-based initiatives, the approach does raise questions about state control as neighbourhood plans need to conform with local plans. However, Wills uncovers that the forums created to develop neighbourhood plans have enabled a shift in power relations, as they are a 'vehicle for civic engagement, voice and action around – but beyond – planning' (p145). Wills' caveats that neighbourhood planning in the deprived community of Holbeck (Leeds) remains a state-led endeavour given lack of civic infrastructure and capacity. The need for support to develop such capacity leads into Wills' final case, of the Citizens UK network of community activists, explained in the context of the US-originated Alinsky tradition of community organising which she emphasises had its roots in specific neighbourhoods. Wills illustrates the importance of geographical place in the practice of politics by stressing the need for a scalar change in organising up from the individual, and down from city-wide, to the neighbourhood level.

Importantly, the rich insights provided by the case studies' relative success and failure enable Wills to robustly and clearly conclude that neighbourhoods need some form of representative structure that can 'identify shared issues and concerns... articulate and mobilise around these and... negotiate with other power brokers' (p198). She recognises that resource is needed to help organise people to build such institutions and to foster neighbourhood activity, but the inherent risk of reliance on state funding is not explicitly addressed. Her advocacy for the creation of urban parish councils, able to self-fund through levying a tax precept, is thus perhaps a more palatable lesson for policymakers despite the change in power relations. A theme which could usefully have been further explored is the specific role of community development trusts as a backbone of local civic infrastructure (for example, Hightrees and Paddington CDTs in chapters 4 and 7) and how such trusts can be initiated and sustained, for example through the transfer of state assets.

The book's focus on bottom up approaches arguably lacks consideration of the scope for devolution to lower scales of government, playing out in the current UK emphasis on the city-region. The approach also could be accused of glossing over the struggles which can occur - within local communities, given the areas 'that most need improvements and political voice are least likely to be able to mount a response' (p93) - and in turn within sub-local communities, with Wills stressing the importance of non-partisan neighbourhood politics.

This book makes an important contribution to the emerging literature on localism and its implications for changing state-society relationships and the location of power and control. It affirms the importance of place to politics and self-determination. As such, though Wills focuses on the English brand of localism, the book's lessons are of much broader relevance. But the debates about control underpinning the recent Brexit referendum underline the need for such quality and considered scholarship to inform research, policy and practice in the UK and elsewhere.

Fung, Archon and Wright, Erik Olin. (2001). Deepening Democracy: Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance. *Politics and Society* 29 (1), 5-41.

Hambleton, Robin. (2014). *Leading the Inclusive City: Place-based innovation for a bounded planet*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.