

Locating localism: putting local councils first

Jane Wills, Queen Mary, University of London

NALC'S LARGER COUNCILS CONFERENCE - CHANGING PLACES

LONDON, 30 NOVEMBER 2016

Locating localism ...

Phase 1: 2010-2013 - the Big Society, community and localism

‘Localism is the ethos; decentralisation is the process and the outcome is the Big Society’ (Greg Clark MP, The House of Commons’ Select Committee on Communities and Local Government, 2011, 13).

Localism is about encouraging “*people to get involved with, and direct the development of, their communities*” (HM Government, 2010, 3)

The Localism Act – new rights for communities to plan/bid/challenge



Decentralisation and
the Localism Bill:
an essential guide

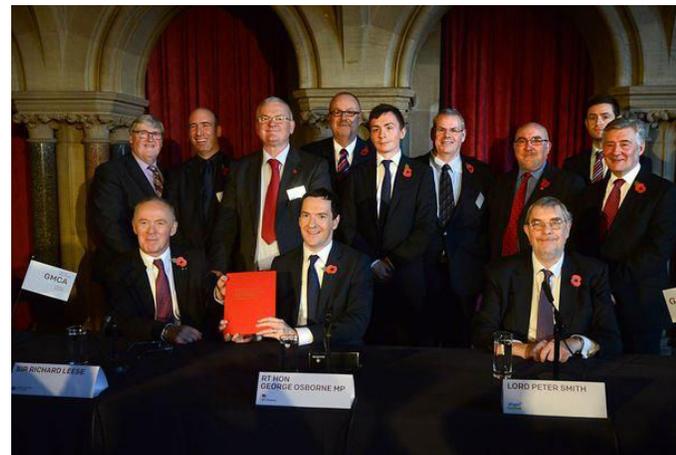
Phase 2: post 2014, new city deals

Combined Authorities leading the way

Manchester a combination of 10 existing LAs – a long way from the neighbourhood scale

Deal-making between one elite in Whitehall and Westminster and another in the local (or not-so-local town hall)?

So, where is the local?



...recognition that we need the local to secure the broad goals – the 3 Ds



Better for **decision making** and the quality of outcomes (does Whitehall really know best?)

- A way to solve the most pressing concerns
- A way to tap the wiki-capacity of social networks

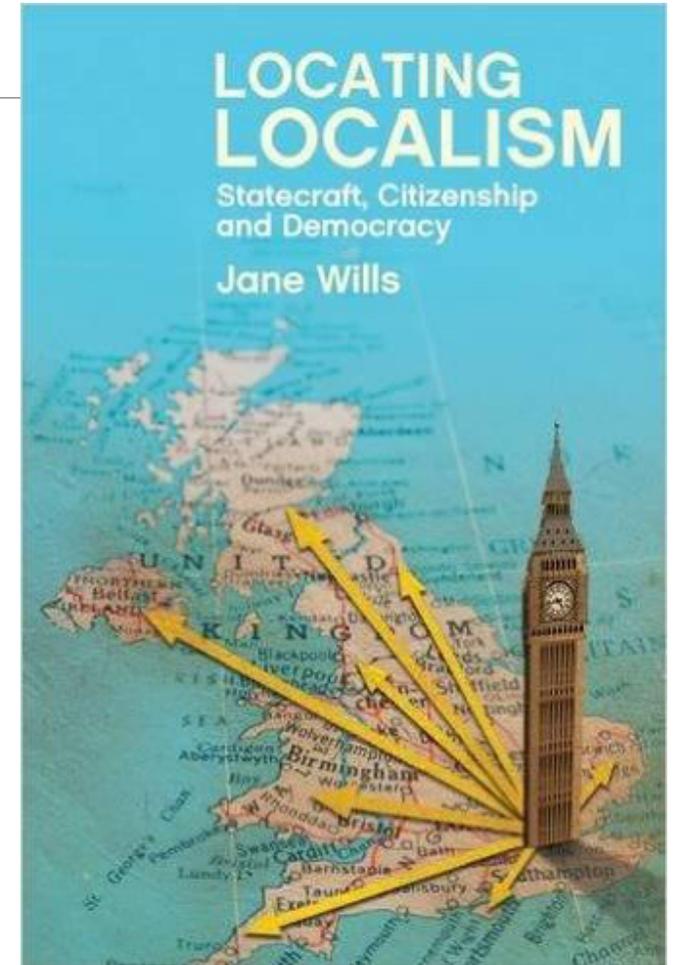
Better for **democracy** – increasing the scope for engagement, accountability and contestation (improving the quality of people who stand for office)

Better for the **deficit** – a way to save money by place-based policy/activity/efficiency

So there is a challenge to put the local back on the map

My research started in 2012 – when localism was still centre-stage and I asked:

- What is it?
- Why now?
- Why does it matter?
- Where it might well get stuck?
- What else should be done?

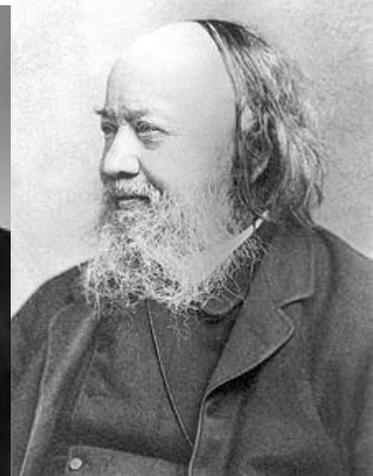


Top down and bottom up

Reversing a long history of centralisation – Henry VIII, Edwin Chadwick, Clement Atlee, Mrs T and even Tony Blair with his targets

Reconfiguring the geography of the state – decentralising decision making/authority

Remaking the constitution – the rules and procedures of the state - the **geo-constitution**



Top down and bottom up

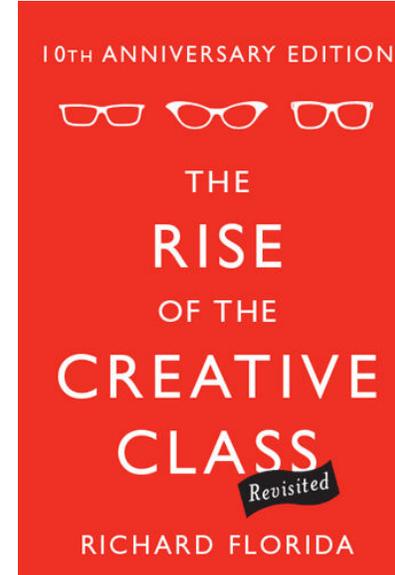
The post-1960s DIY end of deference

The expansion of higher education

The creative class

With the internet to facilitate

Are we doing things for ourselves?



So, making sense of localism?

A new **vision for government**?

New **state practices** – the state being more open to working with citizens (making a '**civic offer**') and citizens having the capacity to respond ('**civic capacity**')?

With no certainty that any of this will work...



A new geography of statecraft?

	Centralism (c20th)	Localism (c21st)
The vision	National standards and uniform delivery	Subsidiarity
The means	A national strategy, targets, audit and local compliance	Local democracy (politicians, voters, lay representatives and community voice)
The fears	The postcode lottery	The lack of local capacity
The risks	Being out-of-touch and unable to meet the challenges faced; the democratic deficit	Providing an uneven and uncertain landscape for business and life; that the loudest voices determine what's done
The goals	Social and spatial equity in access, experience and outcomes of services	Locally determined and accountable activity and outcomes

Research (2012-15)

Into 'top down' reform

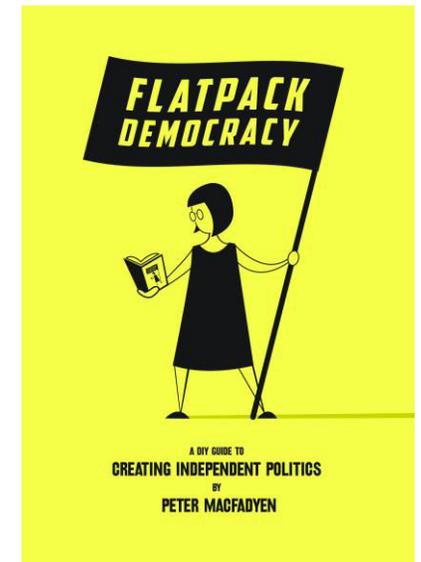
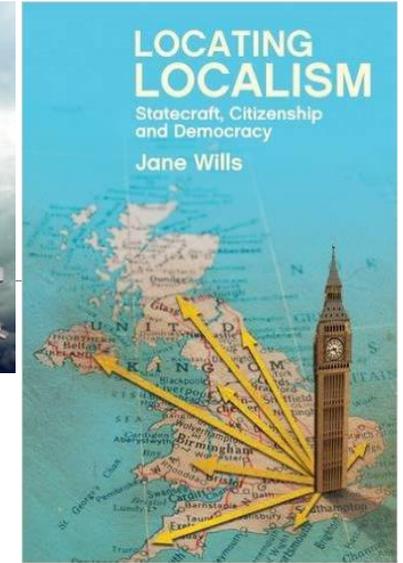
- **Neighbourhood community budgets** – Poplar NCB in east London (2012-13)
- **Lambeth's cooperative council** – neighbourhood working – in south London (2014-15)

And, 'bottom up' engagement

- **Neighbourhood planning** in urban areas – Exeter St James; Highgate, north London; Holbeck Leeds (2012-15)
- **Community organising** in east London (2001-15)

Including the **new community council** at Queen's Park in West London

And **non-partisan political organisation at the Town Parish scale** – Frome in Somerset



Headline findings

Good intentions were thwarted by:

1. The absence of a local **neighbourhood forum - basic civic infrastructure** - in Poplar
2. The absence of **sufficient community organisation and capacity** to underpin such a forum – in Leeds (but not elsewhere)
3. The inability of statutory bodies to work in partnership with community groups/neighbourhood forums – **unequal power relationships between state and citizens** – in Lambeth (likely elsewhere!)

So, what is needed for localism to work in every locality?

1. **a representative and independent neighbourhood forum** – including residents groups and local associations, and active citizens, with the ability to formulate a position, negotiate, act and mobilise
2. **support for community organisations and their capacity** in places where they are weak so people can then create and sustain a neighbourhood forum
3. **a shift in culture** on the part of the state – mutual recognition and joint working between the state and the forum

So where next for the work that you do?

Localism may make life easier in future?

- Local councils can use neighbourhood planning, and new forms of civic engagement, to provide opportunities to **widen representation** and bring in new blood?
- They can also experiment with new ideas for **local improvements** – funded by CIL?
- Local councils can also work with larger councils to demonstrate the power of localism and the **virtue of being closer to the people**?
- Any other ideas?



And where next for localism?

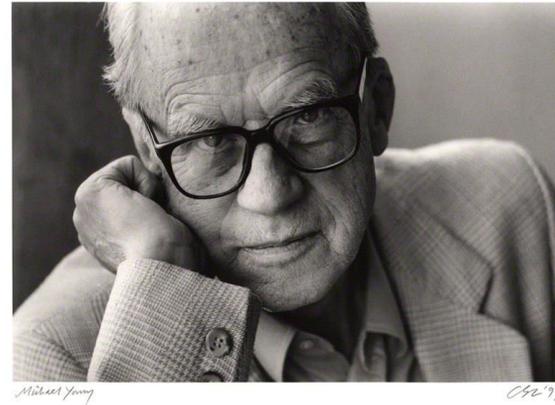
No-one knows!

There is already a very long history of struggle over the geo-constitution

What you (and all parts of representative government) do makes a difference – there is a lot to play for ...

The time is ripe – devolution to Scotland, Wales and NI, city-deals ... and there are people willing to act ...

A renewed parochialism may yet come to be?



Joshua Toulmin Smith [1816-1869]

1851 *Local Self-Government and Centralisation*

1854 *The Parish and its Obligations and Powers*

1857 founded the *Anti-Centralization Union*

Michael Young [1915-2002]

Championed the urban community council in the 1970s

Time	Regime	The major political tradition	The institutional infrastructure of the state	The geography of power relations	The 'civic offer' to citizens
C17th C18th	Juridical	Conservative	Crown, parish, borough	Semi-autonomous localism	To be self-appointed and anointed guardians of order; to serve.
C19th	Governmental	Liberal	Parliament, local authorities (county, city, borough, district)	Central oversight of local expansion	For some: to vote, join a party, stand for office.
C20th	Welfarist	Social democratic	Government, parliament, civil service, local authorities	Centralisation	Universal: to vote, join a party, stand for office, join a movement.
C21st	Localist	Liberal-republican/institutional	Government, parliament, civil service, local authorities, state-funded bodies, civic organisations.	Towards subsidiarity, dispersed away from the centre	Universal: to vote, join a party, stand for office, organise, negotiate, co-produce.

The shifting governmental regimes and spatial orders of English state-craft, from the seventeenth century