

RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2011

The Geographical Imagination

Session proposal form

Please fill in all the details below and return to AC2011@rgs.org by **25 February 2011**.

Session summary	
Session Title:	What is happening to local government? From local governance to localism?
Research Group sponsor (if applicable):	Political Geography Research Group; Urban Geography Research Group
Session Convenor(s):	Nick Clarke (University of Southampton); Allan Cochrane (Open University)
Session Convenor(s) Email:	n.clarke@soton.ac.uk ; a.d.cochrane@open.ac.uk
Session Abstract:	<p>For a time, in the 1980s and early 1990s it was hard to escape geographical debates around the nature of local government and locality, whether expressed in terms of local social relations, uneven development and local dependence, theorisations around the dual state, or the search for a new urban Left. Since then, however, little sustained attention has been paid to these issues, whether because the local political arena has offered less opportunity for active engagement or because academic and theoretical debates moved on to other concerns.</p> <p>Contemporary political developments have now forcibly reintroduced the local onto the agenda. The UK's Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government (elected in 2010) has explicitly incorporated 'localism' into its legislative programme.</p> <p>This proposal is intended both as a response to that move, considering its implications for processes of local governance, and as an opportunity to review the debates of the past in the light of the localist claims being made within the programme of the Right, in contrast to those made in the past around the possibility of some sort of local socialism (or, more recently, for localism as the basis for a politics of transition to a low carbon economy).</p> <p>In this context, therefore, the sessions will focus on a series of key concerns and questions:</p> <p>1) Conceptualising local government. Is this simply the continuation (or end game) of moves to enabling authorities, from government to governance, to a dual welfare state or two-nation society, to ambulance authorities, to governance that is not best described as 'local'? Do we have here something different and/or new? How new is this latest 'new localism'? How local?</p> <p>2) Central government rhetoric and practice. How is localism being mobilised by the coalition government to enrol and create sympathetic publics? What are the implications of the coalition government's legislation, policy, and programmes in this area?</p> <p>3) Local government practices and responses. How are the reforms affecting different localities? How are different local organisations responding to them? What possibilities are being opened up/closed down (e.g. for service provision, local democracy, or alternative forms of local politics)?</p>
Keywords (max 5):	Local government; local governance; localism; locality; local politics

Session Requirements	
No. session slots required	2
	Session slots will be approximately 1hr 40minutes long, which accommodates 5 papers of 20min each including questions, or 7-10 shorter papers depending on format.

Type of session proposed e.g. papers, papers with discussant, posters, panel discussion, workshop...	The first session will consist of five papers. The second session will consist of a panel discussion.	The session organisers welcome innovative session formats. If you'd like to discuss a session format, please contact the organisers at AC2011@rgs.org .
Special audio visual requirements	None	Laptop with audio speakers, data projector and screen will be provided in each room. Speakers should bring their own laser pointers etc.
Any other special requests to be considered	<p>One of our panellists has also been asked to participate in a session organised by Jeff Maskovsky and Julian Brash on 'Imagined geographies of blame'. If it is possible to avoid a clash with this session, please can we do so.</p> <p>Some of our panellists will no doubt be travelling to the conference just for the day. If it is possible to avoid the first slot of the day, please can we do so.</p>	e.g. mobility requirements, room request, timetabling request.

Session details	
Session: 1	What is happening to local government? From local governance to localism? (1)
Paper 1 Title:	Parish politics and the prosaic state: Blurred boundaries of 'stateness' and super-local government.
Paper 1 Abstract:	The UK government's recent 'Localism Bill' for England is the latest instalment of a trajectory towards a governmental strategy of 'governing through communities' that has been pursued by both Conservative and Labour administrations. A key element of this strategy has been attempts to reinvigorate and modernize the long-standing but frequently moribund tier of Parish and Town Councils. Drawing on a decade of research on Parish, Town and Community Councils in England and Wales, this paper examines the implications of localist reforms in blurring the boundaries of 'stateness' at the community scale. It considers the function of super-local councils as part of Painter's (2006) prosaic state, and the changed relations between state and citizen that result from 'government-by-neighbour'. In particular, the paper highlights the ambivalent attitude of many participants in super-local government – councillors and clerks – towards the state, and their preferred self-definition as part of civil society. This follows in part from the dynamics of community leadership, with parish and town councillors commonly active across a range of organizations, such that the council becomes just one 'arena of engagement' in which community politics are articulated and practiced, often with an anti-statist agenda.
Paper 1 Author(s):	Michael Woods (Aberystwyth University)
Paper 1 Presenter(s):	Michael Woods (Aberystwyth University)
Paper 1 Author(s) email address:	zzp@aber.ac.uk
Paper 2 Title:	Localism, land use planning, and the shifting scales and modes of governance: Some preliminary evidence from Cameron Country.
Paper 2 Abstract:	Despite government assertions about the 'revolutionary' nature of its proposals (Pickles, 2010), it is important to place current discussions about localism and the Big Society in the context of broader debates about governance. Focusing on the area of land use planning as a key site within which localism is being played out; this paper draws on preliminary evidence from Oxfordshire, home to the constituencies of both David Cameron and the architect of the Open Source Planning paper, John Howell. The paper will set this emergent experience in the context of debates on multi-scalar governance and will discuss in particular whether we are seeing the devolution of power to localities and publics or the emergence of new forms of governmentality and narratives of meta-governance (Swyngedouw,

	2005). Spatial policy has long been seen as containing an uneasy tension between contrasting discourses and modes of governance (Raco 2005) including those between representative and participatory modes of governance (Carpenter and Brownill, 2008). Therefore the paper will examine what localism might tell us about this continuing dynamic and will contribute to discussions of how we might understand and characterise it. Finally the paper will explore whether new spaces of democracy and co-governance (Newman and Clarke, 2009) are likely to being opened up through the theory and practice of localism.
Paper 2 Author(s):	Sue Brownill (Oxford Brookes University)
Paper 2 Presenter(s):	Sue Brownill (Oxford Brookes University)
Paper 2 Author(s) email address:	sbrownill@brookes.ac.uk
Paper 3 Title:	Planning for growth in the South East: The implications of localism for 'Science Vale', Oxfordshire.
Paper 3 Abstract:	In his speech to the Confederation of British Industry on 25 th October 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron announced that a 'forensic, relentless focus on growth is what you will get from this government'. Amongst a package of measures to 'rebalance' the economy, scientific and hi-tech development is accorded a prominent position, given the perceived importance of science and research in capturing a significant share of high value activity in global markets. In this context the future development of the 'Science Vale' area in South Oxfordshire provides a critical touchstone against which to judge the overall success of the Government's economic strategy, and in particular the impact of its planning reforms. Science Vale encompasses the towns of Didcot, Wantage and Grove, and the employment centres of Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, Milton Park and Culham Science Centre. Together these represent a critical concentration of scientific and hi-tech development, accounting for about 4% of total Research and Development employment in England and 13% in the South East area. The Science Vale area is programmed for significant expansion with approximately 18,000 net additional dwellings and 12,000 additional jobs planned by 2026. The achievement of such growth raises major challenges, however, in terms of planning policy and infrastructure provision in an era of localism, issues which are of central importance to local government and which find a wider resonance with growth areas across the South East region. The current paper presents initial empirical findings around 3 critical themes associated with the localism agenda (i) the emergence and consolidation of new spaces for growth (ii) the complex implications of localism in planning, and (iii) infrastructure delivery for dispersed development.
Paper 3 Author(s):	Dave Valler (Oxford Brookes University); Nick Phelps (University College London)
Paper 3 Presenter(s):	Dave Valler (Oxford Brookes University)
Paper 3 Author(s) email address:	dvaller@brookes.ac.uk ; n.phelps@ucl.ac.uk
Paper 4 Title:	New vocabularies of crisis: Localism, Big Society, and struggles for meaning in Stokes Croft, Bristol.
Paper 4 Abstract:	In this paper we examine the relationship between alternative political and democratic practices the UK on the one hand and the coalition government's new calls for localism and Big Society agendas on the other. Specifically, the paper looks at ongoing socio-political struggles in Stokes Croft, Bristol and the associated conflicts between city-led and social enterprise regeneration initiatives. Once a space of disinvestment marked by the "classic" signs of urban decline, in recent years the area has become a site of intense, concentrated activity along a number of different lines, ranging from social protest to alternative forms of dwelling, to artistic and creative ventures, social innovation, and moves toward 'regeneration from below'. Through this case we explore how new calls for localism have been interpreted and the ways in which they have influenced the supposed agents of localism delivery, including: city councillors, planners and public service actors, and philanthropic interests, as well as social entrepreneurs and local activists who find

	themselves uncomfortably mirrored in Conservative party visions of a Big Society. Our preliminary evidence suggests that while local government policy-makers may welcome alternative forms of service provision and political action under the auspices of the Big Society, actual support for these activities may be less readily available.
Paper 4 Author(s):	Michael Buser (University of the West of England); Carlo Bonura (University of Oxford); Maria Fannin (University of Bristol); Kate Boyer (University of Southampton)
Paper 4 Presenter(s):	Michael Buser (University of the West of England)
Paper 4 Author(s) email address:	Michael.buser@uwe.ac.uk ; carlo.bonura@politics.ox.ac.uk ; m.fannin@bristol.ac.uk ; l.k.boyer@soton.ac.uk
Paper 5 Title:	'Patch-based' knowledges and practices of local government actors in Wales.
Paper 5 Abstract:	This paper stems from a multi-disciplinary research project on 'Knowing Localities' examining the situated experiences of stakeholders and communities within the shifting socio-political contexts of post-Devolution Wales. Specifically, we draw on interviews conducted with key local authority actors concerning how they come to 'know' their locality; what are the knowledges they draw on and the coherences (imagined and material) they invoke, and how are these ways of knowing practically enrolled in understanding and carrying out the shifting roles and responsibilities of local government? These questions are considered in dialogue with the policy backdrop of the Wales Spatial Plan (WAG, 2008) which establishes a vision for regional partnership working across public, private and third sectors, and requires local authority actors to increasingly think and act within and beyond both their administrative boundaries and policy areas. This requirement takes on added import in the context of the coalition government's comprehensive spending review and anticipated challenges for public service provision across the UK. In interrogating these concerns empirically, we introduce the term 'patch' as a means through which to elicit the various forms of socio-spatiality (e.g. place, network, community, identity) which actors themselves draw on in constituting and defining their area of responsibility, and the ways in which they are enabled or constrained to act within it. In doing so, we seek to engage with contemporary debates in the social sciences concerning the need for multidimensional and actor-driven accounts of the complexity of socio-spatial relations (Jessop et al, 2008; Leitner et al, 2008).
Paper 5 Author(s):	Laura Jones (Aberystwyth University); Robin Mann (Bangor University); Suzie Watkin (Aberystwyth University)
Paper 5 Presenter(s):	Laura Jones (Aberystwyth University); Robin Mann (Bangor University)
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Session details	
Session: 2	What is happening to local government? From local governance to localism? (2)
Paper 1 Title:	Panel contribution
Paper 1 Abstract:	N/A
Paper 1 Author(s):	Allan Cochrane (Open University)
Paper 1 Presenter(s):	Allan Cochrane (Open University)
Paper 1 Author(s) email address:	a.d.cochrane@open.ac.uk
Paper 2 Title:	Panel contribution

Paper 2 Abstract:	N/A
Paper 2 Author(s):	Gerry Stoker (University of Southampton)
Paper 2 Presenter(s):	Gerry Stoker (University of Southampton)
Paper 2 Author(s) email address:	g.stoker@soton.ac.uk
Paper 3 Title:	Panel contribution
Paper 3 Abstract:	N/A
Paper 3 Author(s):	Janet Newman (Open University)
Paper 3 Presenter(s):	Janet Newman (Open University)
Paper 3 Author(s) email address:	j.e.newman@open.ac.uk
Paper 4 Title:	Panel contribution
Paper 4 Abstract:	N/A
Paper 4 Author(s):	Mark Goodwin (University of Exeter)
Paper 4 Presenter(s):	Mark Goodwin (University of Exeter)
Paper 4 Author(s) email address:	m.goodwin@exeter.ac.uk
Paper 5 Title:	Panel contribution
Paper 5 Abstract:	N/A
Paper 5 Author(s):	Martin Boddy
Paper 5 Presenter(s):	Martin Boddy
Paper 5 Author(s) email address:	Martin.boddy@uwe.ac.uk
Paper 6 Title:	Panel contribution
Paper 6 Abstract:	N/A
Paper 6 Author(s):	Helen Sullivan
Paper 6 Presenter(s):	Helen Sullivan
Paper 6 Author(s) email address:	h.c.sullivan@bham.ac.uk