

Nurse, Alex; Sykes, Olivier

Article

Levelling up and the privileging of sub-national governance in England in the inter-Brexit space

ZFW - Advances in Economic Geography

Provided in Cooperation with:

De Gruyter Brill

Suggested Citation: Nurse, Alex; Sykes, Olivier (2023) : Levelling up and the privileging of sub-national governance in England in the inter-Brexit space, ZFW - Advances in Economic Geography, ISSN 2748-1964, De Gruyter, Berlin, Vol. 67, Iss. 2/3, pp. 161-171, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zfw-2023-0048>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/333176>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Alexander Nurse*, Olivier Sykes

Levelling up and the privileging of sub-national governance in England in the inter-Brexit space

<https://doi.org/10.1515/zfw-2023-0048>

Received: 22 June 2023; accepted: 3 July 2023

Abstract: Although the UK's exit from the European Union – ‘Brexit’ – has overwhelmingly dominated the national political discourse since 2016 to the expense of nearly every other domestic issue, the policy agenda in the wake of this process is beginning to emerge. This paper examines this agenda, ostensibly supporting a programme of ‘levelling up’ which responds to the perceived root-causes of Brexit. In doing so, we consider the funding streams proposed by the UK Government – namely the Towns Fund, Shared Prosperity Fund and Levelling Up Funds – and examine the extent to which the rhetoric aligns with the reality of their allocation. In doing so, we also consider how, if at all, these schemes correspond to the European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF) they are intended to replace. This paper examines this period of change to consider how the Brexit process is mirroring, and indeed entrenching, these processes of uneven development. We find that the early indications suggest that the UK government is proceeding with funding allocations in a way which can overlook places which meet the technical funding criteria, and therefore indicates political favouring is at play.

Keywords: Brexit, levelling up, United Kingdom

1 Introduction

The United Kingdom's 47 year-long membership of the European Economic Community and European Union ended in 2020, four years after a fiercely contested and bitterly divisive referendum (herein: the referendum) on continued membership of the EU in 2016. In the years following the 2016 referendum the process of ‘Brexit’, as it become known, swamped UK politics – particularly in England and Wales where ‘leave’ sentiment was at its most politically potent. Such was the gargantuan task of negotiating the UK's exit from the EU that two Prime Ministers

found their posts untenable as they tried (in the case of Theresa May), or refused (in the case of David Cameron) to grapple with the challenge of reaching an outcome which would satisfy the claims made by the winning ‘leave’ side during the referendum campaign. In addition, three further Prime Ministers (Johnson, Truss and Sunak) burnished their ‘leave’ credentials as they sought the UK's highest office.

Consequently, the post-referendum political landscape became heavily shaped by attempts to establish a coherent narrative around the result and the factors that drove it. In broad terms these narratives formed along two major lines. The first posited that the leave vote was driven by a ‘left-behind Britain’, largely located in former industrial and coastal towns, who had become dissociated with a globalising world (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018, Ford and Goodwin, 2017, Goodwin, 2017). The second challenged this view, instead arguing that such conceptions of a ‘left-behind Britain’ were a spatial imaginary riddled with tensions (Sykes, 2018, Burrell et al., 2018) and that whilst there was a geographical intensity of ‘leave’ sentiment (Dorling, 2016, Dorling and Tomlinson, 2019) it was perhaps an oversimplification to paint ‘Brexit’ in such a binary cities vs towns narrative (Nurse and Sykes, 2019, Nurse and Sykes, 2020, Creagh et al., 2019). Ultimately, however, these conceptualisations of a ‘left-behind Britain’ began to take hold in the popular narrative and in the 2019 General Election, Prime Minister Boris Johnson consolidated his power on a ‘get Brexit done’ platform which targeted those places and the residual ‘leave’ sentiment therein.

The subsequent passage of the ‘Withdrawal Agreement’ through UK Parliament – a political task which Teresa May could not accomplish – precipitated the UK's formal exit from the EU. In turn this broke the logjam which had effectively stalled much of the UK government's policy agenda between 2016 and 2019 (Sturzaker and Nurse, 2020), particularly in England which is not governed in the same way as the devolved nations of Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales.

With this political hurdle bulldozed (Johnson used such physical imagery during his general election campaign), by early 2020, Johnson's government now had the political space to attend to other domestic policy making for England – even amidst the tumult of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, Johnson's flagship ‘Levelling Up’

*Corresponding author: Alexander Nurse, University of Liverpool, Roxby Building, L69 3BX Liverpool, United Kingdom, E-Mail: anurse@liverpool.ac.uk, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0325-4420>
Olivier Sykes, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, United Kingdom, E-Mail: ollys@liverpool.ac.uk

agenda (Johnson, 2019) trailed shortly after his ascension to office, became a high priority. In short: ‘Levelling Up’ would represent the latest to attempt to tackling one of British planning’s most endemic problems, namely the growth gap between London and England’s South East and the remainder of the UK, often encapsulated by the ‘North-South Divide’ (Barlow, 1940, González, 2006, Dorling, 2010, Sturzaker and Nurse, 2020), and now given new impetus via a more spatially disparate ‘Left Behind Britain’.

This paper examines the emerging realities of this ‘Levelling Up’ agenda. To achieve this, it considers three inter-connected schemes brought forward in the wake of Britain’s exit from the EU considered to be the centre-pieces of this Levelling Up namely: The Towns Fund, The Shared Prosperity Fund and the Levelling Up Fund. In doing so, we explore the rhetoric surrounding each funding scheme and the realities of funding allocations made thus far to examine three core elements: first, the extent to which the schemes replace/replicate European Structural Investment Fund (ESIF) activity (both in spirit, and monetary terms); second the extent to which funding allocations correspond with accepted notions of need, and; third the extent to which these schemes have become politicised. In doing so, we argue the reality of allocations is one which runs against the intended spirit of ESIF. Instead, we argue that whilst the UK Levelling Up agenda appears to be needs-based and distributive in nature, the practice reveals a political privileging (Jessop, 1990) which can overlook places in the most objective need.

In developing our analysis, the paper now proceeds as follows. First, we discuss the sub-national (i. e. city-regions and local authorities) environment in the UK as it existed in the immediate post-Brexit environment. Here, we give particular attention to the processes of English devolution, and policy ambitions of the ‘levelling up’ agenda first brought forward by the Johnson Government. Following this, we provide some vignettes from across those contexts to explore what ‘levelling up’ in the post-Brexit space means in practice. In doing so we examine the alternatives to ESIF monies brought forward by the UK government, and how places are privileged, or otherwise, by those decisions.

2 Sub-national development in the run-up to Brexit

Sub-national development in the UK can be largely understood through two core trends. The first is an overwhelming tendency towards centralisation, even under the auspices of relinquishing control to local areas (Hambleton, 2017). The

second is a recurring and underlying neoliberal competitiveness that frequently pits places – cities and regions – against one another in a survival of the fittest (Peck and Tickell, 1994). The work of Jessop (1990) and others (e. g. Brenner, 2004, Brenner et al., 2003) is helpful in understanding the core mechanisms at play. In particular, Davies and Imbroscio (2009) argue that continued control over of budget allocation is what gives the UK state its power, and maintains it. In exercising this budgetary control, Jessop (1990) argues that the state cannot, and indeed does not, remain neutral. Rather, it exercises a strategic selectivity whereby its policies prioritise some actions – or places – over others. This is otherwise known as privileging.

Against this backdrop, the UK has a record of spatial redistribution spanning much of the last century. Beginning with the Barlow report (Barlow, 1940) which sought to redistribute industry to stymie economic decline in the wake of the Great Depression, a recurring focus is the attempt to rebalance growth away from a buoyant South East. However, across this period there was little consensus on how this would be achieved. Attempts at regionalism first emerged during the 1960s in the wake of the Redcliffe Maud report (Wise, 1969), before receding in the wake of the post-Fordist crisis which reduced appetite for a redistributive form of regional policy (Bachtler and Yuill, 2001). In turn, across the 1980s the acceptance of an ‘urban crisis’ (Couch et al., 2011) which had diminished ‘those inner cities’ in particular (Robson, 1988) led to a renewed urban focus with a heavy focus on competitive funding (Russell et al., 1996). Regional thinking saw a return to prominence first under John Major, who formalised Government Office Regions, before Tony Blair significantly expanded their planning powers (Nurse, 2015a). However, the ascendance of regional thinking would end when, upon election in 2010, the abolition of regional government was amongst the Coalition Government’s first acts – decrying a “Soviet Tractor-style” approach (Sturzaker and Nurse, 2020).

The European Union, and the UK’s membership thereof, cannot be fully extricated from developments across this period. Indeed, the Thomson report (1973) which made the case for an interventionist European Regional Policy that became the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), would also provide sustenance for UK regional policy against prevailing policy headwinds (Nurse and Sykes, 2020). It has also been suggested that EU monies – allocated to, and spent by, the regions – helped to shelter some cities from the worst of political meddling and neoliberal competitiveness (Nurse and Fulton, 2017), whilst the multi-year programmes provided a long-term platform which could counter the short-termism which permeated other domestic policy thinking (Glückler, 2020).

The post-2010 period marked a new period of thinking in UK sub-national development. The Regions were abolished (as discussed above), and replaced by a local government policy premised on a mixture of deal-making and the installation of directly elected mayors. Although we do not intend to give a full account of this period here (see Sturzaker and Nurse, 2020 for a more detailed overview of this time), from 2014 onwards a focus on improved transport links between city-regional Combined Authorities, and framed through boosterist rhetoric of creating a ‘Northern Powerhouse’ and ‘Midlands Engine’ (Haughton et al., 2016, Nurse, 2015b), set the scene for how the government was attempting to address the UK’s persistent north-south socio-economic divide (Dorling, 2010) and broader performance gap (Parkinson et al., 2006, Parkinson et al., 2016).

In broader political terms, the period following the 2015 general election was increasingly given over to David Cameron’s manifesto pledge to hold a referendum on Britain’s membership of the EU. During this time, the devolution agenda continued apace and the period leading up to the EU referendum overlapped with the processes of establishing several Combined Authority areas. Specifically, the role of the EU in city-regional development featured prominently in the primary elections as political parties selected their candidates for the new Metro-Mayor positions. For example, much was made of the contribution that the EU has made to regional development in the UK, including arguments that ESIF funds, often allocated through an assessment of regional GDP and thus insulated from national political decisions, provided a bulwark to mitigate some of the worst effects of the UK Government’s austerity programme (Nurse and Fulton, 2017). There was also significant uncertainty about what, if anything, might replace ESIF funding in the wake of a ‘leave’ vote and how any such replacement would be allocated (Sykes and Schulze Bäing, 2017). In strategic relational terms, these concerns revolved around whether allocations would become political in nature (i. e. privileged), and how this would affect places which did not align with prevailing national political power.

Following David Cameron’s resignation on the morning of the referendum result in June 2016, and the installation of Theresa May as his successor, there were concerns regarding how the May government would treat the post 2010 sub-national agenda. Now tasked as the person who would ‘deliver Brexit, May’s inaugural speech (May, 2016) was therefore rhetorically important. The speech heavily diluted the rhetoric around Northern England (Mance and Bounds, 2016), whilst acknowledging that ‘left behind’ places (Tomaney and Pike, 2018) had contributed to the Leave vote in England (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018). This set a new tone for Government, even if these analyses became contested

over time (Dorling, 2016) as part of the imaginaries which formed in the wake of Brexit (Sykes, 2018).

Despite the rhetorical shift, however, subnational governance in England changed little between 2016 and 2019, as May’s tenure as Prime Minister became increasingly characterised by the torpor of trying to negotiate the high-level withdrawal agreement with the EU. This consumed enormous amounts of political capital and governance, and meant that other issues were left by the wayside. Most notably, this included the primary legislation which would formally devolve many financial powers to the newly-elected Metro Mayors, and meant that upon assuming office in summer 2017, they could not legally exercise many of the financial functions which they had expected to be devolved to them (Sturzaker and Nurse, 2020).

Despite this, May’s Government did give some indication of how they wished to proceed post-Brexit. In particular, this included the UK’s Industrial Strategy (HM Government, 2017) which set out the economic growth areas that the government would seek to prioritise, and Local Industrial Strategies (HM Government, 2018) through which local areas could set out how they would connect to this agenda. Yet, reflecting other research discussing local economic innovation (Shearmur and Doloreux, 2022), initial assessments suggested that the areas prioritised through the Industrial Strategy (in essence, high-value science, engineering, manufacturing and digital) would likely disproportionately benefit already high-performing areas, whilst areas regarded as being ‘left-behind’ would lack the socio-economic base to support those industries (Nurse and Sykes, 2020). Further evidence suggests that any lack of specialisation leaves those left-behind areas more vulnerable to economic shock (Hundt and Grün, 2022). The 2017 Industrial Strategy also gave another indication of how the substantive ESIF monies would be replaced: nominally through the ‘Shared Prosperity Fund’ (SPF). However, details on this were slow to emerge, as we will return to later.

In practice, it would not be until Boris Johnson replaced Theresa May in office during 2019 – some three years after the referendum – that the post-Brexit landscape would begin crystallise. This became possible for two reasons. First, Johnson was prepared to fudge and dissemble important aspects of the EU Withdrawal Agreement, something which May had been unwilling or unable to do (some of the consequences of this would need to be addressed by his successor Rishi Sunak through the Windsor Framework of 2023). Second, he capitalised on the illusion of thus having ‘got Brexit done’ to comfortably win the 2019 general election with an 80-seat parliamentary majority. This result was driven by the collapse of Labour’s ‘Red Wall’ of safe seats

in northern England – frequently characterised as being ‘left-behind’ and for their 2016 Leave vote (Lawrence, 2020). Combined, this gave Johnson the political headroom, and the political impetus to press on with his intended reforms.

In doing so, Johnson had inherited a ‘patchwork quilt’ (Beel et al., 2018), in which successive Prime Ministers had added sub-national reform without removing other elements (Sturzaker and Nurse, 2020). Johnson would continue this trend with the first substantive acceleration in sub-national policy for nearly four years. Johnson’s formula, absorbing post-Brexit rhetoric, would develop through the rhetoric of ‘Levelling Up’ (Jennings et al., 2021). In the next section we will examine how this ‘Levelling up’ agenda has developed, and the ways in which it has become contested and confused as an omnibus policy that simultaneously focuses on ‘left-behind’ places, and a rising-tide approach which lifts all areas (Jennings et al., 2021). By examining the rhetoric, then the reality of the policies we, in turn, consider if such approach can succeed – even on its own terms?

3 Policy developments in the wake of the UK retreat from the EU

More than 3 years after the referendum, and three days after becoming Prime Minister in July 2019, Boris Johnson gave a speech in Manchester’s Museum of Science and Industry (Johnson, 2019) in which he expanded on his apparent aspiration to ‘level up’ the UK. It is no coincidence that 5 years earlier, in the same place, George Osborne had launched his vision for the Northern Powerhouse (Osborne, 2014). However, whilst Manchester would be the first beneficiary of Osborne’s intended reforms (Haughton et al., 2016), Johnson made clear his agenda would push to expand these devolved powers to other places.

The first scheme to be announced under the levelling up banner was the ‘Towns Fund’, a £3.6bn fund to be split between 100 towns across England – ostensibly for a mix of physical (e. g. transport, telecommunications) and socio-cultural infrastructure (Johnson, 2019).

Shortly after Johnson’s general election victory, in early 2020 attention began to return the long-touted substantive replacement for ESIF monies – the SPF. Following sporadic development under May, there remained a number of open questions regarding this SPF. Not least:

- *the priorities and objectives of the [SPF] Fund;*
- *the amount of money to be allocated;*
- *the method of allocating it between the countries and regions of the UK, and whether this is based on need (and what measure is used to determine need);*

- *the model by which funding will be allocated, whether pre-allocating an amount for a country or region or inviting competitive bids from across the UK;*
- *who administers the funds (whether they are controlled from Westminster or by the devolved administrations) and the degree to which local authorities are involved;*

(House of Commons Library, 2021)

In other words, alongside the practical scope of the scheme, a significant majority of questions were directly related to how the SPF would compare to ESIF monies. In particular major questions remained in relation to the methods of allocation and administration of the SPF – not least amongst the devolved nations, and the avoidance of accusations of political bias. Though others (see Industrial Communities Alliance, 2021) did attempt to flesh out what such a methodology might look like, and how it might replicate the procedures favoured by the European Commission, the UK government were hesitant to reveal any such methodology.

The third and final scheme announced in support of the ‘levelling up’ agenda was the Levelling Up Fund (LUF), a joint initiative between the Treasury, Department for Transport and Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government which proposed to streamline the funding of ‘high value local infrastructure’, whilst prioritising “ex-industrial areas, deprived towns and coastal communities” (HM Treasury, 2021 p1). The levelling up fund was initially costed at £4bn, and only for England. However, following remonstrations from devolved government, a further £800m was added for schemes in the devolved nations.

The Levelling Up Fund brought a significant innovation, hitherto unseen in British governance. For the first time local MPs would play a direct role in the allocation of schemes. This took two forms. The first would be that local authorities could make multiple bids to the fund, limited to the number of MPs whose constituency sits ‘wholly within [the local authority] boundary’ (Treasury, 2021). In the extreme, therefore, London, or rather the local authorities within it, could submit 73 bids to the LUF: one for each MP. On this point, however, there is uncertainty – not least as parliamentary constituencies do not always neatly align with local authority areas – and many MPs can span two or perhaps more local authorities. The second element is that every MP, currently 650 in all, would be entitled to lend their support to one ‘preferred’ bid, whilst indicating further general support for as many other bids as they desire. Though the implication was that this preferred bid would be from within their local area, this was not an explicit stipulation.

Though clearly novel, at least in UK policy terms, the LUF raised a number of questions. First, does the link between the number MPs and local authority areas inad-

vertently prioritise larger urban areas who can make multiple bids. In short: how does this tally with the principles of ‘levelling up’? Second: to what extent are those concerns balanced out by an understanding of quality versus quantity. Are local areas likely to be rewarded for producing one high quality bid, or several bids spanning multiple areas? Is there a risk of a repeat of the competitive wastefulness of the 1990s (Russell et al., 1996). The final question relates to how those MPs engage with the endorsement process, and the risk of introducing ‘pork-barrel politics’ in a way often seen in other political systems such as the USA (Lancaster, 1986).

Across this period, and in addition to those three core schemes, the Government began unveiling a number of other initiatives in support of its levelling up agenda. This included the partial relocation of major government departments to cities in northern England. For example, plans were announced for the Treasury to partially relocate to Darlington, whilst the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government would partially relocate to Wolverhampton. In moving government departments, the UK government’s strategy mirrors Sejong, South Korea, an administrative centre designed to break up the administrative power of Seoul (Kwon, 2015, Park, 2008), and would face similar questions about if this strategy could really dilute the power of the capital.

Thus, by mid-2021, and nearly 5 years after the referendum, the contours of how the UK Government intended to implement subnational funding post-Brexit had become a little clearer. Across the early parts of 2021, some allocations began to be made – providing a glimpse of how the UK government would spend this structural money. In doing so, it also provides the opportunity to analyse several things. First, we can see how it compares – both in method of allocation, and the allocation itself – to ESIF. We can also reflect that had the UK remained a member of the European Union, its potential income via Cohesion Funding would have been expected to rise reflecting a fall in the UK regional GDP which saw a number of areas slide back into transitioning or less developed status (CMPR, 2019). Second, we can also compare how the funds are adhering to the stated principles of levelling up, or otherwise. Finally, we can assess if the break from the EU has allowed this arena of funding to become susceptible to the kinds of privileging ESIF funds sought to mitigate against.

To further this discussion, the next section now examines early movements within the Towns Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund, considering them in light of the discussion above.

4 The UK’s levelling up agenda in action

4.1 The Towns Fund

The first post-Brexit funding allocation to be revealed by the UK government was the Towns Fund, with 45 towns granted funding in March 2021. The allocations were not uniform, and areas received between £10–40m, with most receiving approximately £20m (MHCLG, 2021). Immediately, accusations began to circulate with regard to the pork-barrel politics that many had feared following the break with the EU (Hanretty, 2021). In the first instance, these accusations were grounded in the fact that, of the 45 areas receiving Towns Fund money, 39 (or 87 %) were in Conservative-held areas (Walker and Allegratti, 2021). To some extent, and in a generous reading, this can be explained when considered against the post-referendum political landscape. For example, the Towns Fund is ostensibly targeted at those ‘left-behind’ places which not only voted to Leave the EU in significant numbers (e. g. Coastal or former industrial towns), but also could be considered to be part of the ‘red wall’ – e. g. areas popularly characterised as economically deprived, having a substantial Leave vote – which saw a drastic change from traditional Labour Party areas to Conservative-held in the period since 2016 (Baston, 2019). Under this reading, many of the places given allocations have simply become Conservative-held following the 2019 general election landslide. However, this reading begins to fall apart under scrutiny. For example, there is evidence that, in making the allocations, the Government ignored advice from its Civil Service – particularly in relation to funding areas deemed to be ‘low priority’. This is exemplified in the case of Cheadle, an affluent area in the South of Greater Manchester, which received Towns Fund money, despite being the 7th lowest ranked local authority in the MHCLG ranking of all applicants (Walker and Allegratti, 2021).

It is here that accusations of ‘pork-barrel’ politics become more difficult to assuage. For example, though there are many funded-areas which are objectively deprived (e. g. Middlesbrough is the 16th most deprived authority in the UK, Rochdale is 17th, and Great Yarmouth is 24th), many other areas in receipt of the Towns Fund are objectively not. For example, Burton-upon-Trent (157th), Bournemouth (166th), Swindon (171st), Milton Keynes (172nd) and Colchester (181st) are all in the 50 % least deprived (i. e. best performing) local authorities in England. Similarly, Carlisle (115th), Stevenage (117th), Crawley (136th), Rowley-Regis (150th) and Cheadle (154th) are all outside of the bottom third of the IMD ranking (MHCLG, 2019). In other words, when measured against the

clearest statistical measure the UK has, the Towns Fund is not primarily going towards places which are, in statistical terms, 'left behind'.

In part the rhetorical focus on towns explains this. For example, 6 of the 10 most-deprived local authorities in England are located in cities. If accounting for city-region combined authorities that number rises to 9 of 10. There is an argument that those places are therefore already accounted for in Government thinking through post-2010 devolution. Indeed, when launching the Towns Fund, Johnson stated his ambition to spread activities seen in places like Greater Manchester to other areas of England. Yet this explanation only goes so far. For example, Blackpool is a coastal town, and voted to leave the EU. It is also the single most-deprived local authority in England, yet did not receive any Towns Fund money. Stoke-on-Trent, another former-industrial town which featured prominently in lead-up to the Referendum, is the 15th most-deprived local authority in England and is similarly not funded.

There is, therefore, clear evidence of a spatial privileging in the roll out of the Towns Fund. Though the accusations of political bias may well, as Boris Johnson put it, 'reflect the political reality' it is difficult to argue that some places which clearly meet the Towns Fund criteria are not funded, whilst others considered as less-deserving are funded.

4.2 The Shared Prosperity Fund

Ahead of the full rollout of the Shared Prosperity Fund, touted as the main replacement for ERDF, the UK government announced a pilot scheme to run in 2021, dubbed the Community Renewal Fund (CRF) and with a total value of £220m. At the outset, this £220m would be a fraction of the ESIF money allocated to the UK in any given year – for example Wales alone received £375m p/a in its 2014–2020 ESIF allocation.

Although at the time of writing the full-extent of the CRF allocations was not yet clear, when examining the allocations already in the public domain, the extent of the shortfall becomes even clearer. For example, Wales was scheduled to receive £30m from the CRF – just 8 % of the £375m p/a it received from the EU. Crucially, this money would also be allocated via Westminster (i. e. London) rather than the Welsh Government in Cardiff, leading Welsh finance minister, Vaughan Gething, to describe the fund as giving Wales 'less say over less money' (BBC, 2021b). Similar concerns were also raised in Scotland, particularly over the way in which the CRF and SPF would 'bypass' the mechanisms of devolved government which would ordinarily expect to hold competence over funding allocations like this (BBC, 2021a)

Similar cuts could be observed elsewhere in the UK. For example, Northern Ireland has a flat £11m allocation under the CRF, but this is only 9.1 % of its £70m p/a cohesion fund allocation. Cornwall is even more heavily affected, receiving £1.8m p/a in the CRF, despite previously receiving £70m p/a from cohesion funds. This means that despite being the least-developed area in England in cohesion terms, Cornwall will receive just 2.8 % of its previous allocation (BBC, 2020).

Ultimately, it became clear that although there CRF did introduce some funding, even for those in receipt, they would be significantly financially worse off than pre-Brexit. Other areas will receive no money whatsoever. Thus, and when considering that many places in England (e. g. Cornwall) are overlooked by the Towns Fund (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are excluded entirely), the post-Brexit funding landscape for these places begins to look particularly bleak. The same can also be said of many of the UK core-cities, often viewed as engines of economic growth, but whose growth and economic recoveries have frequently been underpinned by EU money (e. g. Sykes et al., 2013, Nurse and Fulton, 2017 for discussion of this activity in Liverpool) and are, for now at least, shut out of the process. We will return to this analysis later in the paper.

4.3 The Levelling Up Fund

The £4.8bn Levelling Up Fund was the last of the three interconnected funding streams to emerge. Initially, the Government allocated every local authority in the UK to levelling up 'priority categories', through which it would distribute funding. There were three tiers. 1 is considered to be the highest priority, and 3 the lowest. In this way, the categories are perhaps reminiscent of the 3 categories used by EU Cohesion Funding: less developed, transitioning, and most developed regions. In broad terms, the LUF allocations pass a sense check. For example, all of the UK's core cities are designated as high priority and, when considered against the Index of Multiple Deprivation 18 of the top 20 most deprived local authorities feature in the high priority list.

Much like the Towns Fund, however, there were inconsistencies. For example, despite being in the 10 % most deprived local authorities in England, Hackney (7th most-deprived), Salford (20th), Tower Hamlets (27th) and Islington (28th) were not ranked as high priority. Though slightly outside this ranking, Halton (39th) is not, whilst St Helens (40th) which borders Halton, and is ranked one place less-deprived is included. That no London boroughs are included in Tier-One, is perhaps understandable – not least given the

rhetoric of ‘levelling up’ implying bringing other areas up to the level of the capital. Yet even so, this ignores the multiple dimensions of deprivation within places that at aggregated level may seem to be prosperous and unproblematic. The EU Cohesion Policy, for example, recognised (e. g. through European Social Fund (ESF) programmes) that even in outwardly ‘successful’ places there were populations and sectors that needed support – e. g. as evidenced by ESF projects within Greater London.

Here, the omission of areas like Salford and Halton from High Priority begins to raise serious questions about whether this fund would attend to the areas with the most need. Indeed, we can deepen this concern when considering that Lewes, (194th), High Peak (202nd), Richmondshire (251st), and Derbyshire Dales (265th) are designated as high priority. It is not unreasonable to ask why a local authority within the top 10 % least-deprived areas is to be considered a higher priority for government intervention than an area in the bottom 10 % most deprived. Again, it is difficult to avoid accusations of Pork-barrel politics, not least given that Richmondshire is the parliamentary seat of then-Chancellor (and administrator of the fund), Rishi Sunak and all the seats discussed in this paragraph have Conservative MPs.

The initial round of funding (DLUHC, 2021) made via these allocations only deepened these question of fairness. 5 of the 10 most deprived authorities – including Blackpool ranked as the most deprived area in the UK – received no funding. Elsewhere, Gloucester (138), Forest of Dean (143) and Derbyshire (177/218/265) all received funding allocations greater than the most deprived areas.

In all, the proposition that the Levelling Up Fund targets the areas of the UK in the most-objective need is unconvincing. Even against the Government’s own criteria, places such as Blackpool, as well as many deprived inner-city areas are overlooked or side-lined.

4.4 Combined Authority Areas

Whilst the UK government’s post-Brexit agenda has slowly unfurled, the programme of English devolution which was once a flagship policy has quietly continued in the background.

There has been some further devolution to city-regions, with the Sheffield City Region, North of Tyne (Newcastle), and the West Yorkshire City Region (Leeds) electing their first Metro Mayors in 2018, 2019 and 2021 respectively. Yet the rejection of a proposed ‘One Yorkshire’ combined authority which would combine the Leeds and Sheffield City Regions along with a host of other local authorities,

and which held broad public and institutional support, suggests that English devolution remains strictly on the Government’s terms.

Taking office amidst the early post-referendum debate, the first Metro Mayors have steadily been getting on with the job, and finding their voice. The extent to which the metro-mayors had established themselves was perhaps exemplified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, and led by Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, several northern English combined authorities began to push back against the various Coronavirus funding mechanisms provided to the combined authorities, and the ways in which they were communicated (or rather, not communicated). This set up a high-profile political clash, elements of which took place on live television, where Burnham publicly challenged the government to justify their actions. This had clear echoes of the clash between the metropolitan areas (most notably the Greater London Authority and Merseyside) and the Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher in the early 1980s. Though this ultimately had dire political consequences for those involved, and led to the ultimate abolition of the Metropolitan counties in 1986 (Frost and North, 2013, Parkinson, 1985), there is no indication that this would happen this time around.

Thus far, the message for the Combined Authorities in terms of the post-Brexit funding landscape is mixed. In large part they remain at the fringes of the Towns Fund, which saw nominal investment in some, but not all, combined authority areas. Yet, ravaged by austerity (Lowndes and Gardner, 2016, Lowndes and McCaughie, 2013, Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012), many remain in fiscal dire straits. In making allocations at the local authority level, the Levelling-Up fund also ignores the Combined Authorities/LEP areas which have, since 2010, been touted as the Government’s preferred administrative tier. This is particularly pertinent given those areas were largely responsible for administering the previous ESIF allocations. At the local authority level most, but not all, combined authority areas are classified as high priority and will expect to see LUF funding on a scale to which they had been accustomed before ‘Brexit’. But this is clearly not guaranteed, and the broader experience suggests that many urban authorities may have to cut from a smaller cloth.

Ultimately, the Combined Authorities find themselves both cast out of, and simultaneously at the centre of a debate about what Levelling Up is in the UK. Many are premised on core cities which are the site of some of the UK’s most profound deprivation, yet in the post-referendum framing, they are also cast as the ‘metropolitan elite’ from whom growth needs re-distributing to other places. But some of those ‘other’ places also sit within those same combined

authorities. As we will return to later, these might seem like inconsistencies, but they were part of the beating heart of the Johnson government's agenda (Jennings et al., 2021).

5 Analysis

An analysis of the activities and funding mechanisms which have emerged since 2016, ostensibly to replace EU monies, show relatively consistent patterns of behaviour.

Above all, the post-Brexit funding mechanisms indicate a UK Government which is undertaking a clear retrenchment back to England. The significant majority of funding, and the focus of that funding is on England. The Towns Fund did not extend beyond the English border, and the monies for the devolved nations held within the LUF were only found after the fact, and after protest. In practical terms, many of these schemes (particularly the SPF) also overlook the accepted channels of devolved government – effectively reinstalling power to Westminster and away from devolved government. Speaking in June 2023, the Wales director of the Industrial Communities Alliance thus ruefully noted how “Under the old system, overall objectives were set in Brussels but priorities were decided locally” (cited in Elliott, 2023). He goes on to add that under ESIFs “The emphasis on strategic projects became inbuilt in local authorities and the university sector” but that “With levelling-up funding, that has disappeared” and “Forcing local authorities to bid against each other for cash prevents partnership and a more strategic approach” (cited in Elliott, 2023).

Here, not only are we seeing a re-strengthening of the central UK state, but we can observe an active privileging of those places seen to be electorally aligned with the current government. In this instance those places are to be found in England, voted for ‘Brexit’, and more likely than in the past to have Conservative MPs. In other words, and to put it bluntly, there is an argument to be made that the Johnson-led Conservative UK government was pandering to their electoral base.

The work of Jessop (1990) continues to hold up in this analysis precisely because the UK has left the European Union. With some exceptions, the SRA has largely been a UK-focused theoretical framework, and has often struggled to find purchase when analysing the technocratic workings of the EU, not least the apolitical nature of how structural funds are allocated. Brexit strips this away, and has seemingly allowed the pitfalls of centralisation to gain a deeper hold in UK policy making. Consequently, we can observe how some places which are no-less aligned with the rhetoric of the UK government – no-less left behind, to all intents

and purposes – are largely cast aside, whilst other places are included.

Our analysis of the post-Brexit funding landscape in the UK ultimately reveals the inconsistencies and contradictions which sit at the heart of the ‘levelling up’ agenda. However, in our analysis we also find reason to agree with Jennings et al. (2021) who argue that:

“Just as Stuart Hall clarified about Thatcherism, so we argue about levelling up: ‘this is no rhetorical device or trick, for this populism is operating on genuine contradictions, and it has a rational and material core’.”

That core is twofold. First, the retrenchment to England. Second, the support for those places seen as Brexit-supporting, and electorally favourable to the Conservatives. In short: privileging.

The longer-term consequences of this course of action remain unclear. At the time of writing, the Johnson government continued with its pursuit of votes in Labour’s ‘Red Wall’ (Lawrence, 2020). Yet, even then, there were questions surrounding the potential vulnerability of a ‘blue wall’ in southern England, comprised of conservative held ‘safe’ seats which are being increasingly neglected as the Conservatives pursue political wins elsewhere. These places are likely wealthy, likely to have voted ‘remain’ and are increasingly neglected by government agendas. Proponents of this theory would point to defeat in the Chesham and Amer-sham by-election in 2021.

In the intervening period, however, just as he entered it, Boris Johnson left office in chaos. Resigning in disgrace in the wake of growing questions regarding his conduct, the UK was plunged into further political crisis. This came through the record-breaking and short-lived premiership of Liz Truss who, in her 41 days in office caused turmoil through ill-conceived economic reform. It was reported that between the date of Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng’s ‘boost-up’ mini budget announcement on 23 September 2022 and Friday 14 October the Bank of England spent around £65 billion to try and restore some stability to Britain’s bond market. Such large sums might have done rather a lot to level-up the UK if available for other purposes. Now, in the post-Johnson landscape the UK is again characterised by torpor. Truss seems almost forgotten and Johnson’s rocambolesque fall from grace continues to fill the headlines. Yet in the ‘real’ world of ‘serious’ politics such as it survives in the post-Brexit UK, less than a year from a general election, political capital is not squandered on scrapping or launching new initiatives.

Consequently, there remain concerns about how both places and people outwith of Levelling Up are are rec-

onciled into development agendas in the longer term. If such places – often the current growth engines of the UK economy – are ignored, there is a real danger that the UKs levelling up agenda may have the effect of creating a more equal landscape by attempting to bring ‘left behind’ places up to the average, whilst hampering high-performing places and dragging them back towards that average. But is there any evidence of this? We have pointed out at least three material things in the paper – 1. The ideas of industrial strategy (such as they survive) favour an existing geography of privilege (golden triangle cf. Nurse and Sykes, 2021); 2 – levelling up funds are small in comparison to ESIFs; and, 3 – these new funds are not all that well targeted towards areas that actually need to be brought up to the average. In that light there is as much ‘danger’ that they continue to languish, whilst being brought-up to the average as/if high performing places are dragged down. In other words: levelling up by levelling down some places.

6 Conclusion

There is substantial evidence to suggest that the post-Brexit Levelling Up agenda is heavily influenced by spatial privileging, and that in attempting to replace the ESIF, the UK government has returned to the patterns of behaviour which have long-characterised the centralised UK state. The lacunae of these emerging ESIF replacements, also hint strongly at the fact that the UK levelling up agenda is underpinned by reductionist ideas about places, as opposed to a more granular appreciation of how they may be composed of multiple social, economic, environmental etc. spaces and interests.

One of the great ironies here is that, since the EU referendum, some have argued that Brexit was an opportunity to address the perceived shortfalls of EU cohesion policy. Better targeting and more local control were cited as potential avenues by which to improve place-based policies delivered under a new UK regional policy. But as the evidence reviewed above suggests (and as predicted by experienced observers), these purported ‘silver linings’ following the years of policy inertia induced by the Brexit torpor alluded to earlier, are yet to emerge. Instead, the reality is centralisation and having less say over less money. The competitive bidding model, smaller funding pots, and shorter time horizons of the hotchpotch of ‘levelling up’ funds introduced since ‘Brexit’ do not so far it seems come close to replicating the benefits previously offered by EU regional support (Liddle et al., 2022, Elliott, 2023).

In this analysis there are lessons for both the UK and the EU, and beyond.

For the EU there is the opportunity to assess the ways in which ESIF funding is administered against a now-direct competitor that has, to some extent, been cast in its image. Though the EU has modified ESIF at regular intervals to reflect the changing nature of Europe, the opportunity to reflect on a similar mechanism in a highly comparable and transferrable context may prove useful. Continuing review of these processes becomes particularly important during times of economic shock and crisis (e. g. pandemic, war, climate change), and how structured mechanisms can support areas which may lack sectoral resilience (Hundt and Grün, 2022).

In particular, there is an ongoing need to reflect on whether EU approaches remain the right ones. Are they fair, and targeted at the right places? These latter lessons are equally valid for EU member states in their own right, and other countries facing similar issues of spatial inequity. For example, the issues facing the UK have also manifested in France, Italy, Poland, Spain, the USA and many others (Desjardins and Estèbe, 2022).

For the UK, there is the opportunity to reflect on a policy process which is clearly in its formative stages. Schemes such as the SPF are in the early stages of rollout, and there is the opportunity to modify them in response to potential pitfalls – not least the anomalies which may lead to perverse outcomes. Here, the renewed political stagnation introduced post-Truss may present an opportunity to renew and revisit. If not, the danger for the UK is that in the longer term, even if some places might be levelled up this may be achieved by the levelling down of others. And, though this paper has focussed primarily on the changes to regional and place-based policy since the UK’s retreat from the EU, the outcomes of levelling up will also be shaped by the wider macro-economic and trading shocks of this process. With ‘Brexit’ being identified as responsible for almost a third of food price inflation and having added £6.95 billion to household food bills since December 2019 (Bakker et al., 2023), there are clear questions to ask about how this will impact those communities and places in ‘left behind Britain’ which the levelling up agenda was meant to serve. Equally, with a general election on the horizon, more change may be on the way. This, therefore, is a chance to reflect. Yet for the time being Levelling Up still lives, but largely only as a slogan. A ghost.

References

- Bachtler, J. & Yuill, D. 2001. *Policies and strategies for regional development: a shift in paradigm?*, University of Strathclyde, European Policies Research Centre Glasgow.
- Bakker, J. D., Datta, N., Davies, R. & De Lyon, J. 2023. *Brexit and consumer food prices: 2023 update*, LSE, Centre for Economic Performance.
- Barlow, M., Sir 1940. *Report [of the] Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population*, London, HMSO.
- BBC. 2020. *Brexit: Cornwall to face 'significant' funding cut* [Online]. London: BBC News. Available: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cornwall-55279468> [Accessed 28th June 2023].
- BBC. 2021a. *Shared Prosperity Fund to Bypass Holyrood* [Online]. London: BBC News. Available: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-55687977> [Accessed June 28 2023].
- BBC. 2021b. *Wales Failed by EU Aid Replacement, Vaughan Gething claims* [Online]. London. Available: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-57487369> [Accessed June 28 2023].
- Beel, D., Jones, M. & Rees Jones, I. 2018. Elite city-deals for economic growth? Problematising the complexities of devolution, city-region building, and the (re)positioning of civil society. *Space and Polity*, 22, 307–327.
- Brenner, N. 2004. *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Brenner, N., Jessop, B., Jones, G. & MacLeod, G. 2003. *State/Space: A Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell.
- Burrell, K., Hopkins, P., Isakjee, A., Lorne, C., Nagel, C., Finlay, R., Nayak, A., Benwell, M. C., Pande, R., Richardson, M., Botterill, K. & Rogaly, B. 2018. Brexit, race and migration. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 37, 3–40.
- CMPR 2019. *Analysis: UK Entitled to 13 bn euro Regional Funding if it Remains in EU*, Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions, Jan. 2019.
- Couch, C., Sykes, O. & Börstinghaus, W. 2011. Thirty Years of Regeneration in France, Germany and Britain. *Progress in Planning*, 75, 1–52.
- Creagh, M., Turley, A., Wilson, P. & McKinnell, C. 2019. 'Stop stereotyping the north as Brexitland' say four Labour MPs [Online]. Northern Echo. Available: <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/17580613/stop-stereotyping-the-north-as-brexitland-say-four-labour-mps/> [Accessed June 28 2023].
- Davies, J. & Imbroscio, D. 2009. *Theories of Urban Politics*, London, Sage.
- Desjardins, X. & Estébe, P. 2022. Forgotten territories in Europe: lessons from Italy, Spain, and Poland. *Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning*, 6, 30–40.
- DLUHC 2021. *Levelling Up Fund: first round successful bidders* London, HMSO.
- Dorling, D. 2010. Persistent North–South Divides. In: COE, N. M. & JONES, A. (eds.) *The Economic Geography of the UK*. London: Sage.
- Dorling, D. 2016. Brexit: The Decision of a Divided County. *BMJ*, 354.
- Dorling, D. & Tomlinson, S. 2019. *Rule Britannia: BREXIT and the End of empire*, Biteback Publishing.
- Eatwell, R. & Goodwin, M. 2018. *National populism: The revolt against liberal democracy*, Penguin UK.
- Elliott, L. 2023. 'We're crap at capitalism. We need something different': the battle for economic revival in the Welsh valleys [Online]. The Guardian. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/jun/03/were-crap-at-capitalism-we-need-something-different-the-battle-for-economic-revival-in-the-welsh-valleys> [Accessed June 28 2023].
- Ford, R. & Goodwin, M. 2017. Britain after Brexit: A nation divided. *Journal of Democracy*, 28, 17–30.
- Frost, D. & North, P. 2013. *Militant Liverpool a City on the Edge*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press.
- Glückler, J. 2020. Institutional context and place-based policy: The case of Coventry & Warwickshire. *Growth and Change*, 51, 234–255.
- González, S. 2006. *The Northern Way: a celebration or a victim of the new city-regional government policy?*, CiteSeer.
- Goodwin, M. 2017. Brexit: Causes and consequences. *Royal Geographical Society, Monday Night Lectures*. London.
- Hambleton, R. 2017. The super-centralisation of the English state – Why we need to move beyond the devolution deception. *Local Economy*, 32, 3–13.
- Hanretty, C. 2021. The pork barrel politics of the Towns Fund. *The Political Quarterly*, 92, 7–13.
- Haughton, G., Deas, I., Hincks, S. & Ward, K. 2016. Mythic Manchester: Devo Manc, the Northern Powerhouse and rebalancing the English economy. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*.
- HM Government 2017. *Industrial Strategy: Building a Britain fit for the future*, London, HMSO.
- HM Government 2018. *Local Industrial Strategies: Policy Prospectus*, London, HMSO.
- HM Treasury 2021. *Levelling Up Fund: Prospectus*, London, HMSO.
- House of Commons Library 2021. *The UK Shared Prosperity Fund*, London, House of Commons Library.
- Hundt, C. & Grün, L. 2022. Resilience and specialization – How German regions weathered the Great Recession. *ZfW – Advances in Economic Geography*, 66, 96–110.
- Industrial Communities Alliance 2021. *Allocation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund*, Industrial Communities Alliance.
- Jennings, W., MCKAY, L. & STOKER, G. 2021. The Politics of Levelling Up. *The Political Quarterly*, Online First.
- Jessop, B. 1990. *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in its Place*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Johnson, B. 2019. *PM speech at Manchester Science and Industry Museum* London, HM Government.
- Kwon, Y. 2015. Sejong Si (City): are TOD and TND models effective in planning Korea's new capital? *Cities*, 42, 242–257.
- Lancaster, T. D. 1986. Electoral structures and pork barrel politics. *International Political Science Review*, 7, 67–81.
- Lawrence, J. 2020. Labour and the Culture Wars of Modern Politics. *The Political Quarterly*, 91, 31–34.
- Liddle, J., Shutt, J. & Addidle, G. 2022. Editorial: Levelling up the United Kingdom? A useful mantra but too little substance or delivery? *Local Economy*, 37, 3–12.
- Lowndes, V. & Gardner, A. 2016. Local governance under the Conservatives: super-austerity, devolution and the 'smarter state'. *Local Government Studies*, 42, 357–375.
- Lowndes, V. & McCaughie, K. 2013. Weathering the perfect storm? Austerity and institutional resilience in local government. *Policy & Politics*, 41, 533–549.
- Lowndes, V. & Pratchett, L. 2012. Local Governance under the Coalition Government: Austerity, Localism and the 'Big Society'. *Local Government Studies*, 38, 21–40.
- Mance, H. & Bounds, A. 2016. Theresa May shifts focus from 'Northern Powerhouse'. *Financial Times*, 2nd Aug 2016.
- May, T. 2016. Statement from the new Prime Minister Theresa May.
- MHCLG 2019. *Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019*, London, HMSO.
- MHCLG 2021. *Towns Fund Recipients March 2021*, London, HMSO.
- Nurse, A. 2015a. Bridging the Gap? The role of regional governance in delivering effective public services Evidence from England. *Planning Practice & Research*, 30, 69–82.

- Nurse, A. 2015b. Creating the north from the sum of its parts? Research questions to assess the Northern Powerhouse. *Local Economy*, 30, 689–701.
- Nurse, A. & Fulton, M. 2017. Delivering strategic economic development in a time of urban austerity: European Union structural funds and the English city regions. *Local Economy*, 32, 164–182.
- Nurse, A. & Sykes, O. 2019. It's more complicated than that!: Unpacking 'Left Behind Britain' and some other spatial tropes following the UK's 2016 EU referendum. *Local Economy*, Online first.
- Nurse, A. & Sykes, O. 2020. Place-based vs. place blind? – Where do England's new local industrial strategies fit in the 'levelling up' agenda? *Local Economy*, 35, 277–296.
- Osborne, G. 2014. *What we can do to make the cities of the north a powerhouse for our economy again*. [Speech], London, HM Treasury.
- Park, B. G. 2008. Uneven development, inter-scalar tensions, and the politics of decentralization in South Korea. *International journal of urban and regional research*, 32, 40–59.
- Parkinson, M. 1985. *Liverpool on the Brink*, Hermitage, Policy Journals.
- Parkinson, M., Champion, T., Simmie, J., Turok, I., Crookston, M., Katz, B. & Park, A. 2006. State of the English cities-volumes 1 and 2.
- Parkinson, M., Evans, R., Meegan, R. & Karecha, J. 2016. *The State of Liverpool City Region*, Liverpool, Heseltine Institute for Public Policy.
- Peck, J. & Tickell, A. 1994. Jungle Law breaks out: neo-liberalism and global-local disorder. *Area*, 26, 317–326.
- Robson, B. 1988. *Those Inner Cities*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Russell, H., Dawson, J., P., G. & Parkinson, M. 1996. *City Challenge: Interim National Evaluation*, London, HMSO.
- Shearmur, R. & Doloreux, D. 2022. Innovation, scaling-up, and local development in peripheral regions: do establishments scale-up locally? *ZfW – Advances in Economic Geography*, 66, 185–200.
- Sturzaker, J. & Nurse, A. 2020. *Rescaling Urban Governance – Planning, Localism and Institutional Change*, Bristol, Policy Press.
- Sykes, O. 2018. Post-geography worlds, new dominions, left behind regions, and 'other' places: unpacking some spatial imaginaries of the UK's 'Brexit' debate. *Space and Polity*, 22, 137–161.
- Sykes, O., Brown, J., Cocks, M., Shaw, D. & Couch, C. 2013. A City Profile of Liverpool. *Cities*, (Published Online).
- Thomson, G. 1973. *Report on the Regional Problems of the Enlarged Community*, Brussels, EEC.
- Tomaney, J. & Pike, A. 2018. Brexit, devolution and economic development in 'left-behind' regions. *Welsh Economic Review*, 26, 29–37.
- Walker, P. & Allegretti, A. 2021. Sunak's £1bn of 'town deals' will nearly all go to Tory constituencies *Guardian*.
- Wise, M. J. 1969. The Future of Local Government In England: 'The Redcliffe Maud Report'. *The Geographical Journal*, 135, 583–587.