Territorial Governance in Flux: A Case of the City-Regions in England

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Answers to challenges in a changing environment highlight the need to work with a more flexible sense of geography, developing institutional reforms in delivering public services. The emerging city regions in England can be regarded as a prime test of what the need for optimal territorial scope and enhanced coordination needs. The aim of this paper is to examine the emerging new forms of territorial governance in the light of the "piecemeal" approach of reforms launched by the post-2010 Conservative Liberal Government. We argue that the creation of city-regions is an organic part of the new territorial paradigm; an important element of which is an integrated and functional approach that intersects public administrative borders. Since 2010, the uniformed regional model has been replaced by primarily ad hoc, informal, and flexible approaches. The successive governments placed the bigger cities and its hinterland at the centre of English devolution, but wished to implement them in varying forms of "deal-making" as a means of decentralization, encouraging solutions tailored to local requirements and opportunities, and retaining the fundamental characteristics of the "asymmetrical devolution". However, in terms of regional governance, the relationship between the new and old regional configurations has seen the creation of a much-debated, malleable framework which, during the process of Brexit could generate new, further interpretations, narratives, and practical solutions.

Keywords: English devolution, city-region, devolution deal, metro-mayor, territorial governance

Introduction

In Jim Bulpitt's now-classic work, he characterised the political system of the United Kingdom (UK) for much of the 20th century as a kind of "dual polity". This meant that the centralised government dealt with "high politics", such as domestic policy, defence policy, and the economy, while local governments were responsible for "low politics", such as local services, education, transportation, and refuse collection (Bulpitt, 1983; Ayres, Flinders, & Sandford, 2017). In the mid-1970s, however, due to the economic and social effects of the global economic crisis, the scope between the two levels of politics in the UK grew smaller, which in practice led to the strengthening of the supervisory functions of central government. This process, however, brought to the surface the issue of the "missing middle", which had long been hidden by the shadow of the dual polity but quickly became part of political discourse and academic debate (Bogdanor 1999; Beel, Jones, & Jones, 2016; Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2016).

The far-from-smooth-progress has been gained a momentum since the late 1990s in the wake of the

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"asymmetrical", "piecemeal", or "rolling" devolution launched under the Labour Government in the second half of the 1990s. The wide-ranging constitutional reform almost immediately brought back to life the "ever-green" West Lothian Question referring to the paradox situation triggered by the devolution process to Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. All the three received national devolved governments and legislatures as well as Scotland and Wales have been the subject of significant financial devolution.

However, England has no devolved government outside London up till now, and both fewer MPs and lower public expenditure per head of the population than other part of the UK. The unresolved questions of the devolution process gave birth to the "English Question" which can in a narrow sense be framed as a procedural issue within Westminster intending to reserve certain "English" affairs for MPs representing English constituencies. However, its wider interpretation involves the (re)launching the "English devolution" with strong territorial dimension.

The "English devolution" brings up multi-layered issues which express the typical asymmetry of British devolution, the appearance of English identity and nationalism as a response to the dynamic strengthening of the identity of the "smaller nations" a variety of reforms from Westminster and the strengthening of regional competitiveness as well as the alleviation of the detrimental effects of the "old" North-South divide in relation to the "new" divides around the Brexit, leading to an aim of "rebalancing" the economy, improving public services and deepening local democracy (Cox, 2016).

Furthermore, these problematic elements have emerged in the form of simultaneous, often intertwined and mutually exclusive recommendations, whose very essence exclude the possibility of all-embracing and long-term solutions. This means that the "English devolution" cannot be separated from the two central aspects of devolution. The first aspect is concerned with how to give England independent representation in the system of political devolution, given the supremacy of parliament and the lack of a written constitution. The second aspect relates to administrative devolution, or more precisely, it focuses on different possible variants, ranging from decentralisation (typically referring to institutions, agencies, and think taking over task, duties, and responsibilities from the departments of the central government) to the establishment and support functional areas in order to enhance economic growth and alleviate uneven geographical development.

Concerning the latter, there are shifting horizons in local and regional development at different scales with various institutional forms not independently from their different historical and geographical context. A new regional policy model, which in the face of top down and uniform (one size fits all) solutions, encourages outcomes tailored to territorial and local requirements and resources (Pike, Kempton, Marlow, O'Brien, & Tomaney, 2016; Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, & Tomaney, 2017). The process of intention of "rescaling" territory takes often a form of functional areas crossing national, economic, and administrative boundaries, within which city-regions have recently acquired a pivotal role based on the economically driven city-growth narrative as well as the need for designing flexible governance framework and providing the necessary institutional and administrative capacities. As there is a mismatch between territorial administrative organizations and the city regions as functional areas including the core city and its environs, it raises the issue how to establish new forms of governance which move beyond the jurisdictional boundaries in particular and contribute at the same time to the further development of the concepts of multi-level governance (MLG) and territorial governance in general (Davoudi, Evans, Governa, & Santangelo, 2008; Well & Schmitt, 2013).

So, for all reasons, the "English devolution" can be considered as a "laboratory test" for issues which have recently acquired special significance all over the world. It can be referred among others to the strong

need for "re-scaling territory", putting the city-growth narrative into practice, as well as finding innovative forms of governance of functional areas which cross the administrative borders. The experiences of the "English devolution" allow drawing conclusions which can be applied in specific and context-dependent cases. So, the aim of the paper is therefore to examine the status and perspectives of the "English question" through the lenses of administrative devolution, city-regions, and the potential renewal of territorial governance within the context of the reforms launched by the successive coalition and the conservative governments since 2010.

The first point is the failure of the regionalisation which took place under the New Labour Government, as well as the contrasting conservative localisation programme and establishment of city-regions, which in accordance with neoliberal crisis management practices, has been strongly connected to the decentralisation of tasks carried out by the state, in order to lighten its burden. The second point is that the city-regions have gained a decisive and influential narrative in the last decade, though apparently without the emergence of a unified, mutually accepted concept, strategy, or detailed planning for its implementation. Instead, the well-known signs of the asymmetrical British devolution can be seen once again: gradual, rolling, piecemeal solutions, and an ad hoc approach. This can be summarised by a strange paradox: The asymmetrical British devolution process "manufactured" the "English question", which has in its turn generated asymmetrical solutions on a "domestic", regional level. The third point is that the "English Question", the English devolution, the role of the city-regions, and the need for proper territorial governance are closely related and multi-layered issues. Though each of these issues have a rich and growing literature, less attention has been made to the relationship between them, mostly to the context dependent nature of the emerging territorial governance around city-regions in England.

In this paper, we argue that while it is evident that the city-regions need strong territorial governance, based on vertical and horizontal cooperation and coordination among actors, the experiences of the city regions show that although various functional levels may overlap, but there are holes, grey zones, neglected areas in it, so the "floors" do not match smoothly.

With this in mind, the paper is divided into three parts. The first part takes an overview of the concept of territorial governance, considering it as a special form of multi-level governance which is available to describe the nature of functional areas. The second will examine English devolution in the last two decades in the context of the overall devolution process. This will be followed by an analysis of the post-2010 governmental objectives in relation to the transformation of territorial government in England in the context of city-regions, as well as the processes related to its implementation. In the final part, conclusions will be drawn concerning perspectives on territorial governance in the light of English devolution.

Multi-level and Territorial Governance: Does it Make a Difference?

The baseline for the concept of MLG is the idea and phenomenon of governance. The new paradigm—referring to the renewal of traditional government structures and methods—originally evolved from the practice of social partnership and the horizontal cooperation between the state and the private sphere.

The novelty of the approach of MLG is shown by the fact that alongside the determining role of the nation states, the interdependence, and influence between supra-national and sub-national levels is also a central question (Conzelmann & Smith, 2008; Piattoni 2009). However, MLG has been subject to strong criticism and has become the subject of contentious debate

In order to answer the critics, Gary Marks and Liesbet Hooghe (2004) had refined the concept by establishing "two types" or "contrasting visions" of MLG (see Table 1).

Table 1

Types of Multi-level Governance

Type I	Type II
General-purpose jurisdictions	Task-specific jurisdictions
Non-intersecting memberships	Intersecting memberships
Jurisdictions at a limited number of levels	No limit to the number of jurisdictional levels
System-wide architecture	Flexible design

Note. Source: Marks and Hooghe (2004, p. 17).

Type I establishes general purpose jurisdictions, non-intersecting memberships, and a limited number of relatively stable levels that can be found in conventional territorial government with a strong federalist inspiration, while Type II allows for more task-specific jurisdictions, with tailored membership and a flexible design, more likely to be found in cross-border regions and to be widespread on the local level. In practical terms, it leads to the emergence of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of MLG being built on the relation systems of "geographical space" and "functional spaces". The latter is built on the interdependences and relations of actors, e.g., in the case of the business sector or the civil sector—whose scope of action does not necessarily coincide with geographically delineated areas. These types of MLG are not mutually exclusive, although their coexistence may lead to tensions, with such conflicts being an essential feature of MLG.

Therefore, the most important feature distinguishing MLG from governance in general lies in the territorial nature of its functioning and through this, its integration of a large number of stakeholders. It can be grasped fundamentally as territorial governance that allows for more task-specific jurisdictions, with tailored membership and a flexible design, more likely to be found in cross-border regions and widespread at the local level. In other words, a new, bottom-down integrated place-based form of MLG may be called territorial governance, to use previously existing terminology.

Territorial governance in this sense is a tool for the realization of territorial cohesion in which highly institutionalised, hierarchical, and looser, network-based coordination forms of governance coexist, often intersecting boundaries of public administrative. It is a new explicit and cross-cutting principle in the general regulation without a clear-cut definition, although its basic features have been adopted. The key term is territory which is a complex phenomenon as a "social and political construction" deriving from the collective action of groups, interests, and institutions underpinned by its territorial capital (Davoudi et al., 2008, p. 35). Therefore, territorial governance is an organisational mode of territorial collective action based on cooperation and coordination among actors both in a horizontal and vertical way. From this point of view, the key challenges for territorial governance are to create horizontal and vertical modes of cooperation and coordination between various levels of government and sectoral policies with territorial impact (establishing vertical relations, as indicated by MLG I), as well as governmental and non- governmental organizations and citizens (establishing various forms of MLG II).

At this point, according to the concept of MLG, the "types" developed by Gary Marks and Liesbet Hooghe seem to be the proper "toolbox" to address how the governance of functional areas works. The distinction between Type I and Type II helps to make a difference between different types of such "interlinkages between

levels". By emphasising the vertical coordination, Type I approach concerns the integration between administrative and political levels. It means that many associations and representative organisations, such as chambers of commerce, trade unions, and NGOs are organised at within the boundaries of local and regional authorities. The Type II model has "fuzzy" boundaries, as by seeking to address issues rather than territories, its actions are delineated by so called "soft spaces".

However, before opening the box, it is worth taking the question whether "soft" and "hard" places represent the two ends of a continuum or are they discrete categories? If not, are there hybrid forms between them? Territorial governance might be said to encompass both the Type I arrangements of multi-issues within a specific territory as well as Type II processes among territories and with regard to issue-specific as well as more cross-sectoral issues.

In our view, the Type II model could be useful to explore the nature of functional regions in general, and in the case of city-regions in particular. To achieve this, the key challenge for MLG is in fact to become a real "territorial governance" able to establish horizontal and vertical coordination between various levels and sectoral policies with territorial impacts. The interrelationship between territorial capital, territorial cohesion, and integrated approach makes it necessary to create innovative, tailor-made forms of governance both at sub-national, national, and transnational level. In this sense, territorial governance can be defined as the process of organization and coordination of actors to develop and exploit territorial capital in a sustainable way in order to improve territorial cohesion at different levels (Davoudi et al., 2008, p. 37; Well & Schmitt, 2013, p. 211).

An important caveat is that the scale and scope of territory as social constructs are not necessary fit with the jurisdictional boundaries, rather, often cross them. It clearly indicates the relevance of "soft places" or "functional areas" (cross-border cooperations, macro-regions, city-regions, urban agglomerations, etc.), which are not represented by governmental layers, opposite to "hard places" with administrative boundaries. There can often be observed a tension between the hard and soft spaces: It seems that the soft or functional approach can challenge prevailing perceptions and routines of actors and institutions being locked in hard spaces. A key question is then to what extent a more relational understanding gets integrated into programmes or projects or even formally institutionalised in the long run.

This shows the need to move towards a more flexible type of territorial governance through coordination, cooperation, and communication. However, its success proves to be very context-dependent, as the case of the asymmetrical process of English devolution clearly demonstrates.

Stages and Changes in the Process of English Devolution

The first 35 years after the end of World War II were an active period in terms of British regional politics in the wider sense. However, it did not happened in a bottom up way as UK Governments as the incumbent governments irrespectively of their "party colours" have sought to confer task and powers to regions and local authorities purely by an economically and technocratic driven approach. Given the regional unevenness of the UK as a whole, which is among the greatest in Europe on the basis of the GDP, emphasis was put both on "equalization" via redistributive polices and on "concentration" via selected development or agglomeration poles' building on the neoliberal paradigm with its expected "trickle-down" effects. The North-South divide alongside with the large inequalities between London and South East compared to the rest of the country is a longstanding problem in England, which was exacerbated by the successive crises periods from the mid 1970s onwards (Omstedt, 2016, p. 102). Recently, the Brexit vote has revealed a more divided country in the wider

sense of the "Two Englands" which reflects the different perceptions, experiences and outlooks between citizens whose lives are strongly connected to global growth and those whose lives are not (Jennings, Lent, & Stoker, 2018, p. 4). The territorial imbalances and the various cleavages stemming from it have a great impact on the "spatial selectivity" of the state—being it "equalization" or "concentration"—including the connected forms and task of the regional institutions. In another words, in order to explore the nature of the territorial governance in England, it is necessary to make a brief overview of the institutional landscape over the past 50 years.

The Labour Party Government which came to power in 1964 established regional and planning councils for nine regions alongside numerous initiatives for the formation of English regional local governments. After having abolished in 1979, these functional regions were replaced by private-sector led geographical focused urban development corporations under the Margaret Thatcher Conservative Governments (Ayres et al., 2017, p. 854). In order to resolve the problems of increasingly expensive regional administration and services, in April 1994, the Conservative Government under John Major created 10 Government Offices for the regions in order to provide integrated coordination of the regional bodies of different branches of government. The nine regions outside of London (East Midlands, East of England, North East, North West, Merseyside, South East, South West, West Midlands, and Yorkshire and the Humber) were headed by Local Authority Leader Boards.[1] In addition, an independent region (the Region of London) was created for the greater London area, with a directly elected General Assembly and Mayor. Between 1994 and 2011, decentralised regional offices operating as public administrative bodies received powers delegated by the central government ministries, and were responsible for managing EU regional support alongside the expansion of the coordination of operating regional governmental bodies and the provision of individual public services.

Despite the fact that by 2003, nine different ministerial branches were represented by the Government Offices, they could in no way be considered as regional governments, or even public administration bodies with a general jurisdiction. The offices were the government's "eyes and ears" in the regions, but because of their restricted functions and paltry budgets as well as the fact that the status of their civil servants meant that they belonged to the "parent ministry", they were unable to be considered as "regional ministries" with genuine power.

The next important step for bolstering the regions came in 1998, when Tony Blair New Labour Government established nine Regional Development Agencies (RDA) under the jurisdiction of the Government Office for the Regions (including London), with the goal of improving and promoting regional economic development, regeneration, competitiveness, employment levels, vocational training, and sustainable development. The RDAs and Government Offices were also given the joint responsibility of managing regional support provided by the EU.

Alongside the RDAs and Government Offices the Regional Assemblies became the third pillar of the English regional institutional system in the regions outside of London. Based on the *Regional Development Agencies Act*, 70% of the members were appointed by the competent minister from local councils and authorities, while 30% were taken from business groups, the industrial and service sectors, higher education, professional organisations, and delegates from NGOs. This meant that the Regional Assemblies did not have directly elected representatives. These bodies took over tasks from the ministries of the central government and other previously existing regional bodies, such as regional planning conferences and regional employment organisations.

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[1] Merseyside was merged into the North West region in 1998.

The Blair Government—as was clearly highlighted in their 2001 election manifesto—wanted to deal with the deficiencies of the devolution process by the introduction of elected regional assemblies in England. Following its 2002 election victory, the Labour Party publicly announced its plan entitled *Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions*, which recommended the creation of regions in alignment with Scottish and Welsh devolution models in those regions where there was a tangible demand confirmed by a referendum (Your Region, Your Choice, 2002).

In doing so, the model of the "rolling devolution" served again as a guideline for the creation of elected regional assemblies. In the end, however, a referendum was only held in the North East region, where the government felt the public support for regionalism was at its strongest. Despite this, the 4 November, 2002 votes brought an overwhelming defeat: with a 48% voter turnout, 78% voted against the recommendation, and just 22% voted in its favour. Following the unsuccessful referendum, the government had no desire to embark on any further adventures with the likelihood of further failures, and the issue of elected regional assemblies was dismissed from the political agenda. The decline in popularity of New Labour and exhaustion with its "third way" politics meant that the sentiment against devolution primarily served as an expression of the dissatisfaction of English voters.

It was no surprise therefore that in England, after the failure of the 2002 North East referendum, the Labour Party gradually backed out of English regionalisation. They may have pronounced English regionalisation as successful and almost complete in their 2005 election manifesto, but the emphasis was already clearly on strengthening local councils and communities shifting towards city-regions and functional economic areas[2].

Despite the fact that, prior to the 2010 general elections, none of the larger parties gave any serious focus to the problems of regional government, it was clear from their manifestoes that the result of the election would mean radical changes in the future shape of English regionalisation. At the same time, English regionalisation not only foundered due to the increased interest in city regions, it was also affected by the growing polarities, functional areas and tailor-made development strategies of the new regional policy model. The emerging "new localism" concept was initially embraced by politicians of bigger cities, who saw excellent opportunities in the vacuum left by the weakening position of the regions, and also desired the opportunity to possess the abilities and strategies needed to perform new tasks.

A degree of consensus gradually began to develop around the implementation of city regions, demonstrated by the acceptance of the *Local Democracy, Economic Development, and Construction Act*[3]. The Act created the legal framework to construct an institutional arrangement for the creation of city regions. As a result, in the last two years of the Labour Party Government, 2009 and 2010, two city regions (West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester) were close to being established.

The most radical change was undoubtedly the promise of the Conservatives, if they came to power, to essentially abolish regional institutions in the name of their enlarged and ideologically underpinned 'new localism' philosophy[4].

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[2] The Labour Party Manifesto. (2005). http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/ge05/man/lab/manifesto.pdf (Accessed 10 July 2018)

[3] Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. Accessed 10 July 2018. http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/20/contents

[4] Conservative Party Manifesto. (2010). http://media.conservatives.s3.amazonaws.com/manifesto/cpmanifesto2010_lewres.pdf (Accessed 10 July 2018)

The election promises were implemented by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition which came into power in May 2010. On the basis of the "emergency" budget act passed in June 2010, citing the need for unavoidable budget cuts, reduced bureaucracy, more basic public services and strengthening the role of local councils, regional ministerial positions, parliamentary supervisory councils, and local authority management bodies were all abolished with immediate effect, while the implementation of regional strategies was suspended. The deadline for the abolition of the Regional Governmental Offices was set as 31 March, 2011 and the Agencies as 31 March, 2012. The RDAs were replaced in April 2012 by local enterprise partnerships (LEP) for local economic development, while in Greater London the tasks of the RDA were taken over by the Mayor's Office.[5] So, these radical measures clearly indicated that the Coalition Government got off to a flying start within which the urgent and unresolved issues of crises-management, the need for rebalancing the economy as well as finding resolutions to the problems of the English Question has become interconnected.

The Majority Conservative Government's U-Turn on Regional Policy: Local Areas in Regional Locations

After the 2010 elections, the Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition now in power openly abandoned regionalisation and replaced it with a philosophy of localisation. Localisation was intended to be directed towards "low politics", with the central government handing out duties using a "top-down" approach, though the recipients of these duties were not the local councils, but functional areas of various configurations and with different spatial boundaries, with specific paths for city regions.

Local Enterprise Partnerships

Following the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies, the Cameron-Clegg Government created 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships in England (National Audit Office, 2016b, p. 12). The LEPs were private sector-led, voluntary bodies with no legal powers which had the task of managing and supporting local economic development. Their creation was based on the premise that this new form of cooperation would better mirror naturally-occurring individual economic effects, thus creating genuine territories in both economic and functional terms.

The aim of the LEPs was to bring together the important roles of local politics and business life in a flexible organisational framework, clearly reflecting the ideas of the Conservative Liberal Government, which held that economic growth should be generated from the market rather than the public sector. This was also made clear by the fact that though local councils were members of the LEPs, and even supplied administrative support for their operation, the leader of each LEP came from the private sector, which was in any case overrepresented in these bodies. These points clearly demonstrated the intentions of the government, which desired to strengthen the presence and influence of business in the development of local territories.

Proposals for the establishment of LEPs are approved by the government, which also supports them financially. In the period between 2011 and 2016, the Regional Growth Fund was created with this aim and received GBP 2.7 billion of funding, with LEPs able to bid for the funding. LEPs also had further access to funding from the Growing Places Fund.

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[5] With the abolition of Regional Development Agencies, the Cameron government hoped to make a saving of GPB 2.3 billion a year, as LEPs do not receive direct budget support.

One of the most important elements in its financing, however, were the Growth Deals agreed between the LEP and the government[6]. An important precursor for this was the publication of Lord Heseltine's influential report (No stone unturned) (Lord Heseltine, 2012). The report recommended that LEPS prepare a long-term strategy for the areas they covered, and that different sources of funding should be united into a "single funding pot", which would then be made available for the local regions through a competition-based bidding process.

In response, following the budget review in June 2013, the government asked LEPs to prepare a *Strategic Economic Plan (SEP)* reaching until 2020, which would then form the basis for the negotiations for the preparation of Growth Deals. The document named March 2014 as the deadline for the preparation of the strategic plans, and all 39 plans were submitted. It was clear that the plans were considerably different from each other: Some of them are more like business plans or tenders, whereas others resemble a collection of regional requirements (Royal Town Planning Institute [RTPI] Research Report, 2015, p. 3).

After the government's evaluation of the strategic plans, it was then possible for agreements to be made for LEPs to receive support from the Single Growth Fund, approved in 2013, with GBP 2 billion provided annually between 2015/2016 and 2020/2021. The government also undertook to provide GBP 5 billion in the same period for the development of public transport, as well as the chance to benefit from EU Structural and Investment Funds.[7]

All of this shows that the LEPs have become unavoidable strategic players in English regional politics and that they provide a "business perspective" concerning the establishment of development goals. Their role today is much greater and more influential than was originally intended. They not only integrate the development plans of local councils, but also provide a flexible, effective framework with significant resources to turn local needs and opportunities into reality.

Critics of LEPs usually emphasize that the volunteer-based membership and the constraints of institutional and human resources for tailor-made tasks place a further burden on the effective public administration of boundary-crossing, functional territories. This is underlined by the fact that LEPs are strongly bound to administrative support from local councils. Another potential problem is that the support system will further deepen regional differences, with the government justifying the differences in levels of support in order to give priority to the creativity, innovation, and risk-taking typical of more developed regions. Criticisms also include the fact that the operation of the LEPs in themselves are an expression of the underlying inner tensions of centralisation and localisation, competition and cooperation, and speed and excessive bureaucracy (Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2016, p. 6).

City Deals

The Localism Act, passed in 2011, gave ministers the power to transfer responsibilities to individual cities which presented innovative proposals to promote economic growth[8]. The "City Deal" process meant that English cities and their wider areas would assume responsibility for delivering growth locally in exchange for being granted greater powers. This approach essentially reinforced the principle of asymmetrical devolution, where different combinations of existing powers are allocated to different cities. This marked a break with the traditional approach to English regional governance, which saw uniform treatment for individual regional areas, including larger city regions (Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2016, p. 7).

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[6] It is important to note that the Development Deals only cover the territory of England.
[7] The effects of Brexit are likely to affect the use of support by the UK for the 2014-2020 programme period.
[8] The Localism Act 2011. Accessed 10 July 2018, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/pdfs/ukpga_20110020_en.pdf9

The government's flexibility was also demonstrated by the fact that they allowed cities to decide how the agreement would be implemented and the size of the area in which this implementation would occur. To do this, the ministries compiled lists of the relevant powers from which the cities could choose. The subject of the agreement could be interpreted as the city itself or the city and its surrounding area (or even the area of the LEP), which could be agreed on an individual, case-by-case basis.

This process was carried out between 2011 and 2014. The first wave was completed in July 2012, with eight "core cities" taking part (Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, and Sheffield). The first eight City Deals also contained an agreement to have direct mayoral elections, which were then held in the ten largest English cities in May 2012, while subsequently Bristol's population also had the chance to directly elect a mayor (Cabinet Office and Deputy Prime Minister's Office, 2013).

The second wave saw the creation of 20 more City Deals, involving the next 11 biggest cities and six cities which had seen the biggest population growth between 2001 and 2010. The agreements were created between the government and the local authorities with the close cooperation of the relevant LEP. By July 2014, another 20 agreements were created with smaller cities and city regions (Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2016, p. 7).

The negotiations were generally made between the central government, the relevant local authority, and LEPs, in some cases augmented with business groups and representatives from universities. Each agreement was unique, though with clear common features. The agreements received relatively small amounts of additional funding with flexible directions for use, while the government undertook responsibility for the continuation of shared tasks. The agreements were linked to their specific programmes and the anticipated results, but did not transfer general powers for individual public policies to the local authorities.

The contents of the City Deals make it clear that, although there are similarities, certain areas were selected by many (training, transport, and access to investment funds), while others (especially housing) were less popular. At the same time, cities were able to make recommendations on how they would use the new powers and tools to promote growth.

In any case, the City Deals have demonstrated that in practice, the government which came to power in 2010 would lead neo-liberal, market-based economic growth programmes which connect the new regulations for local economic development with central governmental procedures.

This governmental permissiveness and flexibility meant that the City Deals have been created in a variety of regional geographical (and administrative) forms. While most of the local authorities decided on functional greater city regions (largely the same as the agreed LEP territory), some applied the agreement to solely the city itself. While the Greater Manchester City Deal covered 10 local authorities in the wider functional area, Newcastle only included one other local authority (Gateshead), and Nottingham was the only city to complete an agreement with the government without including any other local authority from the surrounding area.

Combined Authorities

Combined Authorities are bodies formed from two or more local councils, set up by ministry decree on the request of the parties concerned. The process can be started "upwards" from the local authorities, according to the original 2009 Act, but according to the new 2016 Act, the minister can also instigate the formation of a new Combined Authority, providing they have the agreement of the concerned local authorities.[9] Combined

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[9] The legal foundations for the creation of the Combined authorities: Partly from the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/20/contents), partly from the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016. Accessed 10 July 2018 (http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/1/pdfs/ukpga_20160001_en.pdf).

Authorities were not originally provided with a directly elected mayor, with their management the responsibility of representatives from a governing body (cabinet) of the relevant local authorities. However, the 2016 Act made it possible for the Combined Authorities to directly elect a mayor. This possibility clearly encouraged the agreement of "Devolution Deals", a significant factor given they enabled local authorities to take on more tasks and powers as desired, with the accompanying growth in their political responsibility and accountability requirements, and the possibility of electing a mayor. Of course, the current Combined Authorities can also request the introduction of the position of a directly elected mayor themselves, though only with the expressed agreement of each individual local authority. There must also be a deputy mayor nominated, and if the mayor also takes over the duties of a Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), then a deputy PCC must also be nominated alongside the deputy mayor.

According to the data provided by the UK Office for National Statistics in July 2016, there are seven Combined Authorities in operation in the United Kingdom: Greater Manchester, formed in 2011, Liverpool City Region, formed in 2014, Sheffield City Region, West Yorkshire, and the North-East, formed in 2014, and Tees Valley and West Midlands, in operation since 2016. With the exception of West Yorkshire and the North-East, all of these held elections for a mayor on 4 May 2017.

The duties of the Combined Authorities were originally defined in the 2009 Act as including the areas of economic development, regeneration, and transport, though it was also made possible for the member local authorities to transfer tasks to the shared bodies in the hope of a more efficient and economical distribution of tasks and organisation of services. The 2016 Act removed this restriction and made it possible for the minister to transfer by decree to the Combined Authorities tasks outlined in the act or the powers of public bodies. Here, it is also important to note that the next stage for the Devolution Deals will see the further expansion of the transfer of powers, especially of programmes financed by the government. The provision of services will therefore see an open system, created in line with regional requirements and elections and the results of negotiations with the government. The operation of the Combined Authorities will in no way be closed, and can be regarded as an ongoing process: Initially, it will take place between the relevant local authorities, before expanding to agreements between the local authorities and the government.

The final form of the Combined Authorities will see a transfer to city regions in order to provide a legal framework for joint operation, in order to ensure the implementation, coordination, and activities of those elements agreed upon in the City Deals and LEPs. It is not yet clear, however, which institutional and administrative capacities and material sources of funding will be required to implement the transferred tasks, including the organisation and operation of the directly elected mayoral office.

Finally, it is important to mention the geographic delimitation of the LEPs, City Deals, and the Combined Authorities and their relationship with each other[10]. In practices, the three initiatives exist in quite varied forms, reflecting the principle of asymmetrical devolution, as well as providing a practical solution to their implementation. For instance, in the Greater Manchester city region, the City Deal, LEP, and the Combined Authorities region are the same, while in contrast, in the aforementioned North East region there are three different City Deals, two LEPs, and two Combined Authorities in operation. North East combined seven local authorities in the region, while Tees Valley consists of five city councils in the southern part of the region.

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[10]   In the case of local Combined Authorities, it should be mentioned that the borders cannot cross the administrative boundaries of districts and local authorities, but can cross the boundaries of counties. The 2016 Act removed the veto right of the counties.

Devolution Deals in the Making: Bumpy Road With Deadlocks and Delights

A wealth of findings and analysis has been produced concerning the Conservative Government's localisation plans from various think tanks and research groups, with the specialist materials provided by the City Growth Commission headed by Lord O'Neill of particular significance. The commission argues that local regions need to receive more power to support local economic growth (vocational training, apprenticeship schemes, house-building, support for employment, and business development) and reforming public services (health services and social care, childcare, and transport). For this, new governmental methods are recommended. Each report emphasises that powers should be given to the Combined Authorities rather than the individual local authorities. From this, it also follows that strong local direction is needed for an effective administration of these increased powers, with one (but not the only) aspect of this the direct election of a "metro mayor" in the Combined Authorities involved in Devolution Deals (thereafter: devo-deals).

On the basis of the above-mentioned principles and recommendations, the first devolution agreement was completed between the British Government and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority on 14 November, 2014. In the 2015 general election campaign, all of the parties to some extent committed themselves to the expansion of devolution on a local level. After the parliamentary elections in May 2015, the Conservative Government which came into power further again refined the steps taken for the introduction of city regions. The chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne promised "radical devolution" for cities to allow them to grow their local economies as well as had a vision for a Northern Powerhouse—to "join our northern cities together" with faster, modern transport connections. He announced in a speech on 15 May that any region could submit proposals in the form of tenders for the transfer of powers before the 4 September deadline. In reply to it, 38 tenders were submitted.

Based on the agreed devo-deals, the existing Combined Authorities can make a commitment, if they agree to do so, to directly elect a mayor. It is important to note that the scope of commitments which can be undertaken was significantly enlarged directly after the Conservative Government returned to power[11].

The durability of the process is shown by the fact that in spring 2015, devo-deals extended to Leeds, Cornwall and again to Greater Manchester, in autumn of the same year to Sheffield, the North East, Tees Valley, Liverpool, the West Midlands, and in spring of 2016 to Greater Lincolnshire and East Anglia, while in March of 2016 Greater Manchester completed its fifth agreement.[12]

However, between 1 April, 2016 and 31 March, 2017, the government reached no devolution agreements with new areas (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018, p. 5). Beside this, in relation to areas where agreements were previously reached, no further devolution agreements were concluded in that period. It obviously mirrors the shock caused by the Brexit, leading to the immediate resignation of the Prime Minister, David Cameron. From the aspect of the English devolution, George Osborne's departure from the Cabinet was a great loss in particular as he strongly committed himself to the devolution, driving personally the agenda (Ayres et al., 2017, p. 862). The role of Osborne can be characterized as a "metagovernor" or a "policy

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[11] Not an exhaustive list: economic development, urban renewal, transport, vocational training, health and social care integration, childcare services, land use and spatial planning, the takeover of certain police and law enforcement powers, fire and disaster management duties.

[12] The Devolution Deals concluded by 31 March 2016 will be subject to a detailed overview of the 2015-16 report submitted by the Minister of Local Government and Local Government. In this regard, it should be noted that the Government of Theresa May has terminated the agreement with East England, replaced by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Convention, adopted in March 2017 (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2016).

entrepreneur" which at the same time clearly indicate the risks of having an initiative attached to only one "forerunner" politician. Since Theresa May took over as Prime Minister in July 2016, the devolution process slowed down and its importance obviously decreased. It remained initially unaffected by the direct mayoral election in six city regions in May 2017.

In addition, the government has become overloaded due to the preparation and conduction of the Brexit negotiations. Having only a small majority in the parliament, Theresa May called an early election to try to improve her negotiation positions on Brexit in June 2017. The Conservatives won by a marginal difference but lost their majority in the parliament, to be constraint forming coalition with the help of the Democratic Unionist Party. However, after 18 months "devolution deadlock", the government put again an important focus on mayoral city-regions in a number of policy decisions of the 2017 Autumn Budget. The new Chancellor, Phillip Hammond announced that the mayoral city regions will receive half of the new £1.7 billion "Transforming Cities" fund for improving transport and infrastructure. He also promised £12 million of additional funding to create the metro-mayors's proper institutional and administrative capacities (Carter, 2017b, p. 1)[13].

This short summary of the progression of the devo-deals with its deadlocks and delights clearly indicates that the successive governments have two real options. The first, committing themselves to continue the devolution process in an asymmetrical way by expanding its scale and scope, with real measurements in order to establish the conditions of fiscal decentralization. This option could lighten the government's burdens in the wake of Brexit negotiations, as well as contribute to the programmes aimed at "rebalancing economy", improving public services, enhancing local democracy (Cox, 2016, p. 565). The second option, with regard to the still unforeseen content, requirements, and potential impacts of the Brexit, can give an argument in favour of keeping up the centralized form of territorial governance in England. In this way, the recent and the future deals cannot be interpreted and implemented as devolution in its "classic" form, but as a government-led "new partnership" in centre-periphery relationships (Ayres et al., 2017, p. 861). At this time, it seems that the incumbent governments still seek their place between the two extreme poles of the continuum. So, it is worth to review the nature and relevant elements of the existing devo-deals, with special regard to the aspects and perspectives of territorial governance in England.

Contested Geography and New Cleavages

Within the urban-centric and economically driven approach the dominant economic "flows" determine the extent of the city-regions and other functional areas. However, the concept of "flows" does not substitute the requirement to delineate the extent and the borders of the functional areas. There are many types of "flows" (daily commuters, journey to shops, using public services and leisure facilities), but their statistical measurement faces several bottlenecks and as a consequence, has a limited utility (Davoudi, 2009, pp. 130-131). As the functional areas are characterized by fuzzy borders and overlapping territories, there is often a misfit between them and the areas with jurisdictional boundaries. The delineation problem is deepened by the so called "contested geography". The term refers to the heavy debates developing around the belongings of particular settlements with own needs and drivers which cannot be sufficiently realised within its administrative borders. On the contrary, they form part of a single functional economic area which means the need for merging differing and non-coterminous

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[13] In addition, the Chancellor unveiled a number of devolution deals in the North of the Tyne region and the West Midlands as well as other tools for cities to make the most of their assets.

political and economic geographies without altering the jurisdictional boundaries (not to mention here the case of a fundamental public administration or state reform).

Taking an example, the story of devolution deals in Yorkshire clearly highlights the origins and the nature of the "contested geography". In 2015, local authorities across the region submitted two devo-deal proposals, drawing on existing city regions and combined authorities. The proposal of Sheffield City Region Combined Authority (SCRCA) proved to be successful and was signed after Greater Manchester in October. As of 2016, SCRCA was the only area preparing to elect a metro mayor in May 2017 and get a devo-deal.

However, this process was soon slowed down. The accepted deal included Chesterfield in Derbyshire and Bassetlaw in Nottinghamshire as constituent members due to the towns' close economic links with Sheffield. However, Derbyshire County Council called for a judicial review of Chesterfield's decision to become a statutory member of SCRCA along with Bassetlaw. The High Court found the process was flawed and had to be re-run. Eventually, Chesterfield and Bassetlaw pulled out, remaining in the deal just as non-statutory partners. This meant that the initial membership of the CA changed, with implications for the powers, functions, and funding attached to the agreement. It also led to delays in the election of the SCRCA metro-mayor in May 2018. All in all, the SCRCA deal has been undermined by its artificial geography, party political rivalries, the lack of an institutional architecture that maps onto local identities, and the absence of popular engagement.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) proposal, however, did not receive support from central government. While the SCRCA conducted direct negotiations with the Treasury and the Department for International Trade accepting most of the conditions and functions (adult skills, housing, and local transport) required by the government, the WYCA proposal contained 27 "asks" with greater fiscal control over local financial resources (including 100% retention of business rate, pooling funding of local public sector agencies within the region) which confronted to the government's intention. Accordingly, local leaders took a tougher line in the negotiations with the government emphasising their substantial ambition for the city region's economy, infrastructure, jobs, and housing. The government refused the WYCA proposal referring to its too ambitious scope of powers being devolved. However, the "contested geography" also played a significant role in the form of political rivalry as local Conservative MPs lobbied against the deal due to the involvement of York and Harrogate, which lie outside of West Yorkshire.

In February 2017, the WYCA instead began to explore the possibility of a pan-Yorkshire deal with a single mayor which would include rural areas of Yorkshire that have been largely ignored by the devolution debate. The initiative gained support from the constituent members of the SCRCA as Doncaster and Barnsley entered discussions with other councils in Yorkshire over a "|One Yorkshire" proposal. The aim is to set up a single mayoral combined authority for Yorkshire, "based on the widest possible geography, conditional on Government enabling all 20 Yorkshire Councils to join, if they so choose, by May 2020". However, currently Sheffield and Rotherham are not backing the proposal, as they committed themselves to the original SCRCA deal.

The contested geography of the devolution deals in Yorkshire highlighted many obstacles and unresolved questions regarding the establishment and operation of a functional territorial governance in general, and in the case of English city regions in particular. In order to cover a single functional economic area, the scale of SRCA and WYCA intend to extend beyond the former metropolitan county areas abolished in 1986 involving local authorities in other counties. However, it became quickly apparent that is a politically sensitive issue being liable to party rivalries and other conflicting local interests. This is compounded by the non-coterminous administrative areas used by the government departments, such as education policing and health, which allowed the government

to "divide and rule" by hindering the establishment of powerful regional institutions (Paun & Jack, 2017, p. 3).

The whole story of the "contested geography" in Yorkshire shed light on the government's approach to devolution, focusing mostly on core cities while large parts of the region as smaller and/or post-industrial towns and rural-coastal areas with aging population, high levels of deprivation, low levels of inward investment seems to be as being neglected. As a result, smaller cities are treated as "spokes around the hubs" or "grey zones" as it was indicated in the case of North Yorkshire, the East Riding and Hull, none of which formed combined authorities in 2014 when the SCRCA and WYCA were established.

From a wider perspective, the key role of larger cities and its environs corresponds with the dominance of the approach of giving priority to greater spatial concentration of activities in the form of urban agglomerations within the framework of the emerging service-intensive and global economy (Davoudi, 2009, p. 126). The "new Economic Geography", for instance, emphasises geographically concentrated economic activity as the main driver of economic growth. In this way, economic activity tends to concentrate in a few dominant metropolitan areas reflecting natural advantages as well as other factors, such as special endowments of human capital, institutional qualities, or the innovative capacity of firms and individuals. However, patterns of agglomeration vary widely depending on its historical, geographical, and constitutional conditions (Pike et al., 2017, p. 48). The global economic and financial crises and the ensuing Great Recession accelerated and intensified patterns of inequality between and within cities and regions as under certain conditions the trends of regionalization and decentralization show favour towards already strong regions. It undermines the appropriateness of the neoliberal city-growth narrative based on the assumption that the economic growth produced by the city centre will simply trickle down throughout the wider city-region. The development of the British cities clearly demonstrates that city centrism on its own does not generate automatically faster growth, as in several cases smaller and medium-sized cities have outperformed larger cities. It shows that productivity growth is not guaranteed with high skilled employment, services and scale (Pike, 2018, p. 2). Other factors are also significant as urban service economy has become highly polarized in occupational terms. As a consequence, newer and smaller cities have been an innovative and productive part of the city-growth economy. It underlines that the implementation of the city-region-based narrative requires place-based approaches in order to put the right policies into practise for the different needs of different places (Jennings et al., 2018, p. 19). In another words, the place-based approach means the breaking of the "one-size-fits-all" attitude to policy of central government.

The Brexit vote revealed a divided country, reflecting the differing results and perceptions taken by cities and citizens strongly connected to the global knowledge economy and living in a highly connected urban areas compared to those areas that are less well integrated including suburban communities, costal-regional areas, and post-industrial towns (Jennings et al., 2018, p. 3). As a result, "two Englands" have been emerged out of the uneven development, the one is characterized as global in outlook, liberal and more plural in its sense of identity, while the other, on the contrary seems to be inward looking, relatively illiberal, negative about the EU and immigration, nostalgic and has a strong English identity (Jennings & Stoker, 2016, p. 372). Not surprising that the main cleavages of the Brexit vote were between the 'winners' and losers' of Briain's experiment with globalisation and the impact of the membership of the EU. Brexit revealed the cleavages but not how to respond them. Currently, 50 out of 62 British cities lagged behind the national productivity average in 2015 including big cities, such as Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham (Centre for Cities, 2017, p. 2). Brexit will obviously exacerbate the divides which is clearly forecasted by the spatial distribution which was 20 points higher in those places that have recently experienced the greatest social and economic declines. Paradoxically, the effects of

Brexit will hit principally those areas in the long run which tended to vote Leave in spite of the fact that they have been the major beneficiaries of EU Cohesion policy (Brexit: Local and Devolved Government, 2018, p. 10).

To sum up, it will be a hard task to resolve the ongoing problems generated at the same time by the old Northern-South divide as well as the emerging cleavages between the "champion" and "left behind" areas. The government, being overloaded by the Brexit negotiations may intend to block the process of English devolution, or at least aims at slowing down the implementation of the provisions of devo-deals. As a result, instead of further decentralising power, tasks, and funding, England will return to the more centralized way of governance. There are many determinant factors which can influence which scenario will take place in the near future. However, the introduction of the position of the directly elected "metro-mayors" seems currently to be a radical, "bottom-up" innovation in the England heavily centralized political landscape offering democratic accountability for their communities.

The "Combined Authority" Model of Devo-Deals: Metro-Mayors in a Driving Seat?

Programmes and related budgets, mostly for housing, infrastructure, transport, and adult skills were directly transformed to the CAs financed by a "single pot" method. However, every devo-deal has a unique character. Some CAs submitted a more ambitious proposal with an aim of gaining greater fiscal control while others represent a pragmatic approach claiming narrower functions, as we have seen in the cases of SCRCA and WYCA. Differences can also be observed between the procedures for devolving tasks as a parliamentary decision is needed for a full transfer of powers while launching individual programmes requires "merely" the decision of the government.

The "metro-mayors" and the establishment of a CA can be treated as informal pre-conditions of completing devo-deals. The devolution deals were based on the creation of a CA which were expected to provide a focal point as well as a local powerbase for devolved city regions, working together and holding to account to the metro-mayors (Paun & Jack, 2017, p. 3). CAs are designed to provide a framework for different local councils in order to cooperate and decide on various policy areas across council borders. So, the legal and institutional basis of the devo-deals builds on the "Combined Authority" model, expressed by its official denomination: "Combined Authority with a directly elected mayor". It is indicated by the fact that each devolution agreement sets out separately the different responsibilities both of the CA and the mayor as well as their relationship to each other in the form of governance arrangements[14].

The first pillar of the model is the system of shared responsibilities. Both the CA (including the LEP) and the metro-mayor exercise powers and functions devolved from government.

The second pillar is the "cabinet system" with a role of giving support to the metro-mayor by providing the necessary legal, institutional, and administrative capacities for the day to day operation. In practice, the metro-mayor chairs the cabinet which consists of the CA members and the representatives of the LEPs. The policy-making process is based on the concept of "checks and balances" which was a precondition in persuading local councils to accept the deal. For example, the metro mayor has to consult the Cabinet on his/her planning strategies and spending plans, and the Cabinet is able to reject with a two third majority.

Considering the future perspectives of the CA model living together with its metro-mayors in flatshare, a fundamental question is how to walk a fine line between the two actors. Hardly more than a year ago the first

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[14] The following findings are based on the official documents provided by the page of Local Government Association containing devo-deals that have been secured to date. See in detail: https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/devolution/devolution-deals

metro-mayor elections took place and they have changed the landscape of British politics in a significant way. It seems likely that the metro-mayors will be the dominant players within the CAs despite of lacking the proper capacities to plan and deliver policy. On the contrary, it is still a big question, whether the operation of the metro-mayors will be a radical innovation in England's strongly centralized political system (Travers, 2017, p. 1).

The metro-mayors gained a relatively strong legitimacy as the turnout in the elections in May 2017 ranged from 21% in Tees Valley to 33% in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, with an average just under 30%. Compared to London, the turnout exceeded 45% in 2016 which seems to be favourable to the newly elected metro-mayors. On the contrary, they have still limited powers and resources at their disposal being highly constrained in their control over local tax revenue and how it is spent. For example, in West Midlands adult skills budget were postponed until 2019, despite it is one of the key powers set out in the devo-deal (Magrini, 2017, p. 2). Despite the fact that the metro-mayors have little room for manoeuvre, their influence obvious at the local level which is indicated among others by the activities of Andy Burnham (Greater Manchester) and Andy Street (West Midlands) setting up new funds and initiatives to tackle serious problems (homelessness, working age adults with no qualifications). They are visible in the national media, which contribute to secure a significant lobbying power in the wake of Brexit negotiations. To sum up, metro mayors have an opportunity to provide high-profile leadership and representation on the issues that matter most to their places (Carter, 2017a, p. 1). As a matter of the future role and development of the metro-mayors, it may be a good sign that the 2017 Autumn Budget gave priority to the mayoral city regions. In spite of this the Brexit negotiations may lead the government to centralize more power at national level to the detriment of the deepening of devolution. However, it is also a real scenario that the government wants to lighten its burden by strengthening and widening the scope of devolution. The elements of the Autumn Budget 2017 gave priority to the second option, indicating the government's intention to put the devolution as well as the significance of city regions back to the political agenda. What remains to be seen is whether the government will be willing to open the way to continue devolution in a wider and deeper manner.

Conclusion

With the election defeat of the Labour Party in 2010, the period of English devolution appeared to be over for the foreseeable future. However, the "new localisation" programme strengthened in the last few years of the New Labour Government has resurfaced in the amended form of city regions. In the post-regional vacuum, the city-regions appeared to be suitable for meeting the challenges of competitiveness in the global environment, the requirements of strategic planning and an effective provision of services through the integration of public services and functional regions. Localisation, as the newest period of devolution, can be regarded as a government-led process, which focuses on a transfer of powers, though the final result of its implementation is the creation of regionalisation in new, varied, and city-based forms.

In contrast to the focus on regions, the post-2010 Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition nominated local levels and primarily the city regions as the ideal place for the integration and realisation of public policies. This did not signify, however, the solution to the problem, given that the Cameron cabinet placed the same cities and wider areas (essentially the functional city regions) at the centre of English devolution, but wished to implement them in varying forms and with different mechanisms (LEP, City Deals, Combined Authorities, and Devolution Deals, directly elected "metro mayors"). The initial basis for this was that during the formation of the English regional meso-level government, it was necessary to retain an asymmetrical devolution, with a

case-by-case approach, but at the same time, giving flexible and sufficient room for manoeuvre for the parties concerned. For this, the government, according to its new regional policy plans, eliminated the uniform (one-size-fits-all) approach, and instead expressly encouraged solutions tailored to local requirements and opportunities.

In 2015, for the returning Conservatives (though without their former coalition partners, the Liberal Democrats), the issue of the organisation of the regional mid-level government solution remained unsolved, and its frameworks continue to be formed by disparities in development between the North and South, the gradual phasing out of EU funding as a result of Brexit and the related return to the political agenda of Scottish independence and potential Irish unification.

The emerging English devolution has been accompanied by fierce debate, during which there has been no consensus developed for the optimal delimitation of borders and the most appropriate institutional structure, as well as relationships between individual levels—collectively the development of a multi-level territorial government. However, the English devolution represents a top-down approach but its roadmap is uncertain. It does not cover all areas and each deal involves different powers, funding, and responsibilities. In addition, it aims to reduce territorial inequalities, improve the quality of public services, enhance the feeling of "local ownership", but at the same time, creates new divides between deal haves and have-nots, while many towns and rural areas are fully neglected in the devo-deals.

It is underpinned the gradual unfolding of the effects of Brexit, the May 2017 direct mayoral elections and the results of the early parliamentary election initiated by the May Government which has a hard task to manage complex, interrelated, and multi-layered problems. One the one hand, the government has to deal with the different territorial and local impacts of Brexit by finding solutions at the same time to the emerging new divides lead to the vote for the UK to leave the EU, on the other. So, there are no easy options in the government's dilemma of choosing between the possible modes of territorial governance in a country which has been always governed in a centralized way.

All these findings indicate that a long time will be needed for the consolidation of the multi-level English public administration system and refinement of the English devolution administrative system. It also underpin that territorial governance implies the emergence of new forms of governance which intend to translate the various types of coordination in the practice, as it clearly indicates for example the case of the emerging city-regions in England.

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