

ARTICLE

Whatever happened to municipal radicalism?

Matthew Thompson^{1,2} ¹Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD), Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK²Bartlett School of Planning, UCL, London, UK**Correspondence**Matthew Thompson, Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD), Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK.
Email: thompsonm19@cardiff.ac.uk**Funding information**

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Abstract

What can the municipal state do to radically transform urban economies? Local government in countries such as the UK has been historically tasked with delivering public services; rarely extending its remit to economic development, let alone community-led forms promoting economic democracy, at least not since 1980s municipal socialism. But times are changing, and the UK case provides some telling examples of what is now possible. Community wealth building, cooperative development and foundational economy approaches are fast gaining traction in municipalities across the UK, through emergent public-common-philanthropic partnerships with progressive think tanks, cooperative development agencies, community enterprises, foundations and charitable trusts. This article explores complexifying relations between the state, the cooperative movement and the non-profit industrial complex in the pursuit of sustainable and generative economic development as playing out differently in urban policy experiments in the English cities of Preston and Plymouth. The article contributes to current debates on local state restructuring, municipal statecraft and urban entrepreneurialism by critically comparing these place-based variegations of municipal-cooperative development with previous waves, and with more financialised and extractivist forms of statecraft, drawing out implications for praxis.

KEYWORDS

cooperative movement, local state restructuring, municipal statecraft, new municipalism, non-profit industrial complex, urban economic development

1 | INTRODUCTION: WHATEVER HAPPENED TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

Three decades ago, partly in response to the Tory takedown of ‘British municipal radicalism’ (Cooper, 2017), Allan Cochrane (1993) asked the pointed question: *Whatever Happened to Local Government?* While Cochrane’s ‘wistful’ account lamented, and anticipated, the attrition to local government’s public service responsibilities—from housing and schools to libraries, parks and leisure centres—his question also gestured at the loss of radical ambition and creative intervention in a realm historically beyond local government’s remit but into which it had strayed: economic development and indus-

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trial strategy; amongst the only functions gained rather than lost (John, 2014, p. 688; see also the review symposium: Ward et al., 2015).

A few years earlier, Cochrane (1988) was writing about the promise presented by the New Urban Left strategy of ‘working in and against the market’ trialled in various metropolitan and borough councils across the UK, especially Sheffield and London. This riff on the mantra originally popularised by the seminal 1979 pamphlet *In and Against the State*—influential amongst the ‘guerrilla economists’ of the 1981–86 Greater London Council (GLC) (Mackintosh, 1987)—captured the insurgent, experimental and postcapitalist spirit of the period. The GLC and its peers, wrote Rustin (1986, p. 75), ‘rejected the conventional idea that local government should concern itself only with social infrastructure, collective consumption and welfare, leaving production to the private sector and the central state’. Aspirations for a municipal-led, democratically planned economy (Murray, 1987; Nishat-Botero, 2023) were set firmly against concurrent trends at the national level for anti-democratic, anti-planning, free-market, property-led experiments with freeports, enterprises zones and urban development corporations (Benington, 1986). Municipal-socialist policy programmes for worker-owned cooperatives, popular planning and socially useful production were swiftly quashed by Thatcher—abolishing the metropolitan county councils in 1986—or else marginalised by wider forces of depoliticisation, marketisation and financialisation, putting paid to further attempts at harnessing local government for radical economic ends—that is, until now.

Responding to post-2010 austerity, various Labour-led councils across the UK, from North Ayrshire to Islington, are experimenting with municipal-cooperative forms of development, contrasting with contemporaneous trends in financialised forms of ‘city statecraft’ (Pike et al., 2019) and ‘speculative urban provisioning’ (Penny, 2022). This article critically compares the origins, operations, and relations of three distinctive place-based variegations of this revival in British municipal radicalism, comparing the famous Preston model with its understudied peer, Plymouth. I argue that, based on these English examples, municipal radicalism is back, but in mutated, variegated form, newly mediated by professional and philanthropic statecrafters.

Come 2020, Cochrane (2020) was once again riffing, albeit in a different register, on the local state’s resilient capacity to reinvent itself ‘in and beyond local government’. Despite relentless reconfigurations of local powers and responsibilities in the image of the national ruling party’s governing agenda—from Labour’s Community Development Projects of the 1960s and 1970s to the Conservatives’ Neighbourhood Plans, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Combined Authorities and Mayoral Development Corporations of the 2010s (Ayres et al., 2018)—local government has successfully resisted such circumventions, continually reinventing itself as the ‘great survivor’ of British statecraft, still the ‘main institution governing localities without serious competitors to its power and authority’ (John, 2014, p. 689). This represents an extraordinary accomplishment considering local government’s fragile constitutional status as a creature of national Parliament, without any continental European-style legal basis of self-government or statutory responsibility for economic development (Pike et al., 2019). Since the 2010s it has once again become a crucible for innovative experiments in radical place-based industrial strategy—but this time in close partnership with philanthropic, civic and cooperative actors working within the ‘shadows’ of the state (Baker & McGuirk, 2021) as progressive elements of the ‘non-profit industrial complex’ (INCITE!, 2017).

The ambivalent relationship between local government and civil society has taken an intriguing turn recently with concepts such as public-common partnerships (Russell, Milburn, & Heron, 2022) and the public-cooperative nexus (Ferreri & Vidal, 2022) registering a change in prevailing winds, perhaps, away from the privatised corporate partnerships documented by Cochrane (2020) and others towards more cooperative and civic collaborations. Situating this shift within critical debates on municipal statecraft and entrepreneurialism, this article explores emergent ‘extrospective’ statecraft, as conceptualised by McGuirk et al. (2021), in the way that novel partnerships, collaborations, investments and experiments are assembled ‘beyond-the-state’—as opposed to dialectically related ‘introspective’ efforts to expand capacities, cultivate new dispositions and rework bureaucracies for generating entrepreneurial and innovative activities, described elsewhere as ‘intrapreneurship’ (Phelps & Miao, 2020).

Most studies of ‘municipal entrepreneurship’ (Barnett et al., 2022) in the UK attend to the creative financial ways the local state deals with austerity (Beswick & Penny, 2018; Christophers, 2019; Penny, 2022; Pike et al., 2019) or through institutional switching and rescaling (Wills, 2020); others to how procurement and commissioning are undergoing revolutions in co-production and participation through the localism agenda (Wills, 2016). Few look at how the local state is intervening proactively to shape urban economies—rather than reactively reshaping public services—an overlooked task taken up here. In what follows, first, I evaluate the legacy of the previous wave of municipal-cooperative development in the 1980s, tracing conceptual connections with the present, before exploring the philanthropic turn in the 2010s. Second, I discern three variegations of proactive cooperative urban-economic development in terms of their distinctive rationales and variegated assemblage through local state, cooperative movement and philanthropic strategic agendas. Finally, I explore the implications for local state restructuring and the future of municipal radicalism.

1.1 | A note on methodology

The research for this article was largely conducted between 2018 and 2021 as part of a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship on 'Reimagining the City: new municipalism and the future of economic democracy', which employed a qualitative mixed-methods approach of semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, and participant observation of urban policy, municipalist and cooperative movement networks. Case study places were chosen through policy mobilities methodologies: 'following the policy' (Peck & Theodore, 2012) as models in municipal-cooperative innovation were mobilised and mutated between sites and agents; prominent nodes in this circuit selected as paradigmatic cases for revealing exemplary manifestations of generic aspects of emergent trends. Through this distended case approach, circulating ideas were tracked in real-time, through participation in various 'convergence spaces' (Temenos, 2015) including conferences, workshops and festivals—shifting register and approach between activist circles and more elite spaces of policy expertise. Historical lineages and influences were also traced through a genealogical approach (Peck, 2011) utilising documentary analysis triangulated with personal testimony. Aiming for broad coverage of sectors, domains, case studies and positionalities—from community activists to council leaders—52 interview participants were identified through expert scoping interviews followed by snowball sampling techniques. This was complemented by earlier research conducted in 2017 on mapping the Liverpool City Region's social and solidarity economy (Thompson et al., 2022), in which Preston and Plymouth were case studies, involving site visits and semi-structured interviews in each city. Interview data were analysed through iterative thematic coding techniques using NVivo to find dominant discourses, common threads, contingencies and contradictions.

2 | THE RETURN OF BRITISH MUNICIPAL RADICALISM?

Reflecting the tentative return of 'British municipal radicalism', the legacy of the GLC is being reconsidered (Cooper, 2017; Egan, 2006; Peck, 2011); its history reconstructed through the lens of new municipalism (Hatherley, 2020; Joubert, 2022). The insurgent civil servants in the 1981–86 GLC administration, including Doreen Massey, John McDonnell and Hilary Wainwright, inspired largely by the ideas of Robin Murray (1987), formulated an economic plan—the London Industrial Strategy—aimed at 'reclaiming production' for labour, democracy and social use (Rustin, 1986). They critiqued mainstream local economic development, dominant since the 1960s, for its overly spatial and property-led approach to attracting mobile firms through financial assistance linked to providing premises, on industrial estates or science parks, for failing to contest the uneven urban development of capital accumulation exacerbated by such 'beggar-thy-neighbour' zero-sum policies. These 'activist state-workers' (Joubert, 2022) launched a radical strategy of 'restructuring for labour'—a three-pronged approach for economic democracy entailing direct state intervention in production through municipal enterprise alongside incubating worker-owned cooperatives; developing technology networks for socially useful production and human-centred design; and supporting labour and community organisations involved in popular planning (Egan, 2006; Mackintosh, 1987).

Not dissimilar policies were rolled out in Sheffield—the 'People's Republic of South Yorkshire' (Beveridge & Cochrane, 2023)—working 'in and against the market' (Cochrane, 1988) to move towards 'planned production for social need' (Benington, 1986). Municipal radicals used the then substantial roles of local government—as major employer, investor, producer and purchaser of goods and services—as powerful levers for generating, multiplying and circulating collective wealth (Benington, 1986), prefiguring community wealth building today (Manley & Whyman, 2021). The core concept of socially useful production anticipated contemporary debates around the 'everyday', 'overlooked' and 'foundational' economies (Russell, Beel, et al., 2022)—foregrounding goods used in common, such as laundrettes and child-care, forming the fabric of social infrastructure and collective provisioning—before being submerged beneath the tide of neoliberalism, churned up in the swell of a frothy new urbanism in thrall to the creative class (Peck, 2011).

But now municipal radicalism is back. As some announce the 'return of the local state' in its bid to re-municipalise public services and infrastructures (Paul & Cumbers, 2021), others are adapting Jim Bulpitt's classic account of British 'statecraft' (see: Ayres et al., 2018)—conceived in 1984 to describe the pragmatic power wielded by the central over the local state—to explain the growing confidence and sophistication in municipal strategies for 'financialising city statecraft' (Pike et al., 2019), 'local statecraft' (Pike, forthcoming), 'localist statecraft' (Wills, 2016) or 'municipal statecraft' (McGuirk et al., 2021), across a wide political spectrum. At one end: an evolution and proliferation in varieties of urban entrepreneurialism (Phelps & Miao, 2020), of which the most proactive, creative and interventionist is 'financialised municipal entrepreneurialism' (Beswick & Penny, 2018; Penny, 2022). At the other end: the global 'new municipalist'

movement working in, against *and beyond* the state to ‘prefigure’ (Cooper, 2017) a more democratic, feminist and, potentially, postcapitalist political economy (Thompson, 2021).

In the UK, varieties of municipal entrepreneurship have been classified according to their relative progressive credentials: from ‘municipal financialisation’, through ‘progressive interventionism’ and ‘social innovation’, to ‘progressive self-organisation’ (Barnett et al., 2022). Whilst plenty of attention has been directed at the extremes, at municipal financialisation (Beswick & Penny, 2018; Christophers, 2019; Penny, 2022; Pike, *forthcoming*; Pike et al., 2019) and progressive self-organisation (Russell, Milburn, & Heron, 2022; Thompson, 2021)—arguably the most regressive and progressive tendencies, respectively—far less has been given to the ambiguous centre-ground, the inflection point around which progressive and regressive trajectories pivot. If the concept of ‘entrepreneurial municipalism’ (Thompson et al., 2020) is a first cut at marking this inflection point between more speculative/extractivist and more generative/sustainable practices, this article explored the contours of the latter’s variegated landscape.

The contradictory, bi-polar logic of ‘financialised municipal entrepreneurialism’ (Beswick & Penny, 2018) is most fully embodied in the arms-length housing companies—local state ‘revenue generating machines’ designed to provide affordable and market housing to cross-subsidise cash-starved public services—now an almost ubiquitous appendage of London borough councils, deployed in 27 out of the 32 boroughs (Penny, 2022). Recalling Hatherley’s (2020, p. 221) reflections on Camden Council’s (mis)treatment of public land as its own ‘North Sea oil’, imploring progressive councils to ‘leave it in the ground’, Penny (2022, p. 557) articulates a damning critique of London’s housing companies as ‘speculative rent-seeking’ vehicles for ‘local state rentierism’. Such ‘speculative urban provisioning’ (ibid: 547) funds social infrastructure by exacerbating the very problems—rising rents, debts, extraction, exploitation—against which this provisioning intends to protect. In contrast, putatively ‘progressive’—if not necessarily ‘radical’—localism (Featherstone et al., 2012) or urbanism (Beveridge & Naumann, 2021) points towards a more grounded, sustainable and cooperative pathway that resists temptations to harness the forces of financialisation and extractivism.

Of particular note are ‘foundational economy’ and ‘grounded city’ approaches, which refocus development on those economic sectors foundational to human flourishing and societal functioning (Engelen et al., 2017; Foundational Economy Collective, 2018; Russell, Beel, et al., 2022; Schafran et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2020). The two domains comprising the foundational economy—the ‘material infrastructure’ of water, energy, food, transport and housing; alongside the ‘providential services’ of health and education—are conceptualised as ‘collective reliance systems’ without which human settlements would cease to function (Schafran et al., 2020). These sectors serve collective needs, provide employment for most and multiply and circulate wealth through regional supply chains (Foundational Economy Collective, 2018). This is where foundational perspectives align with community wealth building (CWB), developed in the Cleveland and Preston models to redirect the procurement contracts and supply chains of anchor institutions—large civic place-based organisations producing foundational goods and services—progressively towards local firms and cooperatives for the generation and retention of community wealth (Thompson et al., 2020). Such grounded, foundational approaches depart from prevailing high-tech visions for smart cities (Caprotti & Cowley, 2019).

Against the smart urbanist mainstream, British Labour-run councils influenced by CWB are beginning to experiment with foundational-cooperative incubation models. In an historic move, Islington is the first municipality in four decades to establish and fund a Cooperative Development Agency—Cooperate Islington—designed to incubate co-ops specialising in foundational sectors such as retail, care and transport. This represents an extraordinary turnaround following the rapid dismantling or co-optation, in the 1990s and 2000s, of the Cooperative Development Agencies set up by authorities such as the GLC and Sheffield in the 1980s, either cut along with their municipal funders or subsumed within the neoliberal machinery assembling around conventional enterprise skills training hubs, before, as Huckfield (2021) shows, being incorporated within a shadow state social enterprise sector.

Municipal experimentation with cooperative development in 1980s Britain was enabled by critical support at the national level, with the Industrial Common Ownership Movement (ICOM) working with the Labour Government in the 1970s to pass legislation that supported the growth of municipal Cooperative Development Agencies, to around 100 across the UK by the mid-1980s, including one for most London boroughs (Egan, 2006; Huckfield, 2021). In 2001, ICOM merged with the Co-operative Union to form the national membership body Co-operatives UK, signalling the end of a dedicated worker-owned co-op federation. Plans are now afoot to re-establish such a federation outside of Co-ops UK in a bid to recreate ICOM for the 2020s. This follows renewed interest in cooperatives in the Labour Party whose leadership under Corbyn and McDonnell—publishing the *Alternative Models of Ownership* report (Labour Party, 2017), pledging to ‘double the size of the cooperative economy’, informed by an influential New Economics Foundation (NEF) report commissioned by the Cooperative Party (Lawrence et al., 2018)—revitalised the historically ambivalent relationship between Labour and its sister Cooperative Party.

This reanimation of the Labour-Cooperative partnership produced or strengthened two significant new infrastructure bodies. First, a dedicated Community Wealth Building Unit was established in Corbyn's office, with a remit to roadshow the Preston model around Labour-run councils and provide technical advice and in-house support for developing CWB policies. Second, the Cooperative Councils Innovation Network (CCIN) was established independently by elected Labour-Cooperative Party council leaders to innovate and embed cooperative practices for improving local governance under austerity. CCIN is a growing network of mostly Labour councils, including 32 Full Member unitary and district councils, notably Preston and Plymouth, and 43 Affiliate Member organisations, including think tanks, development agencies, membership bodies and consultancies whose membership grants access to procurement contracts with CCIN council members.

CCIN was inspired by Lambeth's contentious Cooperative Council model, devised by Steve Reed's leadership in response to austerity (Wills, 2016). Seen as the gentler, cooperative alternative to Conservative-run Barnet's failed 'easy-Council' model of stripped-back, privatised and outsourced pay-per-use services, Lambeth was nonetheless criticised for using cooperation and citizen participation in public service redesign as a thinly veiled cover for destructive cuts and violent dispossessions (Penny, 2017, 2020). Although some are understandably concerned that CCIN, in mainstreaming the outsourcing of public services to co-ops and community enterprise, is merely reproducing a similarly marketised version of cooperativism as Blairite social entrepreneurship (Huckfield, 2021), CCIN's vanguard members—Preston and Plymouth—are developing more transformative and democratic forms of municipal-cooperative innovation. A Co-ops UK representative characterised the radical potential of CCIN thus:

It started in this place where there are a few councils who are experimenting with designing services through a lens of co-operative values and principles ... What I've started to see over the last 18–24 months is some of those councils, like Preston, like Plymouth, take that transition away from service design to a restructure of their local economy ... That is really encouraging, because I think as a network, they have over £10 billion worth of spend. So, through things like improved procurement and commissioning ... though unlocking pension funds and all sorts, their potential to be real facilitators of change within their local economies is huge.

(Interview, 2020)

Such interventions are now coming close to the radical ambition of 1980s municipal-socialism. While the latter, especially the GLC, was more 'radical' than 'progressive' in intent—seeking structural transformation from the root rather than gradualist, incremental, accommodative progressive change (Beveridge & Naumann, 2021)—today's municipal statecrafters are careful not to repeat the adversarial stand-off with central government that ultimately destroyed 1980s municipal radicalism; to pursue instead an arguably more sophisticated and accommodative strategy, working within more constrained circumstances, of crafting progressive plans within prevailing discourses of austerity localism and inclusive growth, and harnessing the extrospective repertoires and transnational alternative policy networks developed in the intervening decades to pull in resources from, and effectively outsource radicalism to, novel partnerships with social change agents. In this sense today's experiments more readily resemble forms of municipal *statecraft*.

Indeed, while 1980s municipal radicalism funded cooperative development and established municipal enterprises more directly—such as Sheffield Council's direct development of Red Tape music studios in 1986 (Beveridge & Cochrane, 2023)—the recent resurgence in such activity is circuitously mediated through various other agents, from think tanks and foundations to community development trusts. Especially prominent in the growing 'para-state apparatus comprised of multiple voluntary sector organisations, administered outside of traditional democratic politics'—what Wolch famously defined as the 'shadow state' (quoted in Baker & McGuirk, 2021, p. 1340)—is a 'philanthropic complex' (Martin, 2015) swollen by austerity, increasingly resembling the American 'non-profit industrial complex' (INCITE!, 2017), whose shape I outline in the next section.

2.1 | The municipal revolution will not be funded

In the 2010s 'post-regeneration' era (O'Brien & Matthews, 2015), with large-scale state-led regeneration programmes abandoned, the vacuum of 'austerity localism' (Featherstone et al., 2012) was to be filled not only by localist civic voluntarism but by systematic programmes designed and delivered by third-sector actors coming 'out from the shadows' (Baker & McGuirk, 2021) of the state. This trend escalated following a philanthropic turn, around mid-2017, away from ad-hoc

grant-giving towards more targeted, strategic, comprehensive place-based approaches, as detected and amplified by an influential think tank report by the New Local Government Network (Gilbert, 2017, p. 9), which found that place-based philanthropic investment strategies have come to occupy ground hitherto the domain of local government:

A decade ago, when local government was making great investment in civil society, independent funders' money was the 'icing on the cake' as one funder described to us, focusing on innovation and activities broadly peripheral to core needs. Now, as many councils have been forced to roll back their service provision to statutory at only the highest threshold of need, independent funders' money is increasingly important and takes on a growing share of local investment.

The shape of British municipal statecraft is shifting with this austerity-spun philanthropic turn. If 1980s municipal radicalism fought for an alternative to the market-driven public-private partnership, then its reinvention today contracts the public-*common* partnership: 'an alternative institutional design that moves us beyond the overly simplistic binary of market/state' towards management of the commons through partnerships with commoners' associations (Milburn & Russell, 2019; Russell, Milburn, & Heron, 2022). Such associations may be informal commoning groups or take the organisational form of a cooperative or social enterprise—legally incorporated as a Community Benefit Society (BenCom) or Community Interest Company (CIC), respectively. Key aspects missing from this conceptualisation, I argue, are, first, the philanthropic funder, whose role is especially important under austerity and, second, more professionalised organisations acting on behalf of commoners. Various think tanks, cooperative development agencies and progressive funders are inserting themselves into emerging public-common-*philanthropic* partnerships to play the role of policy advisor, programme designer or delivery agent. Together, such agencies constitute an emerging non-profit industrial complex exercising increasing power over urban governance; portending the professional-managerialisation and NGOisation of municipal radicalism.

In *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, the US-derived 'non-profit industrial complex' is defined as a 'set of symbiotic relationships that link together political and financial technologies of state and owning-class proctorship and surveillance over public political intercourse, including and especially emergent progressive and leftist social movements' (INCITE!, 2017, pp. 21–22). Symbiosis, here, connotes mutual advantage for two powerful players: the state in meeting public responsibilities, managing crises and solving social problems; and philanthrocapitalists in strengthening their role as patrons of policy solutions and maintaining hegemonic common-sense for the reproduction of capitalist social relations and accumulation. In the latter case, George Soros' Open Society Foundations (OSF)—the main funder of the Preston model—is instructive.

Described as 'the only American citizen with his own foreign policy' (ibid: 27), Soros founded OSF on a liberal mission to pluralise and protect society from fascism and communism, and laissez-faire capitalism, by funding dissenting political projects whose opposition acts to strengthen liberal values and improve an 'open society [which] offers a vista of limitless progress ...' (Soros quoted in INCITE!, 2017, p. 28). Resistance is contained and channelled into productive societal improvement by funding—placing conditionalities upon—radical movements; hence *the revolution will not be funded*. The third partners in this symbiotic relationship are the non-profits established to access foundation funding for resourcing movement strategies while resisting isomorphic capture. The problem for critics is that philanthropy-dependent non-profits replace social movements—funded autonomously by their grassroots base—in the mobilisation of progressive change. The question remains how far local authority strategies are similarly shaped by funder requirements and what this institutional isomorphism might mean for public policy.

Although the influence of the non-profit industrial complex is growing in the UK—as explored below, in Preston—public-common-philanthropic partnerships, here, tend to draw on different sources, from the shadow state and charitable trusts more than private or corporate philanthropists. While organisations such as Big Society Capital, the Access Foundation and Social Finance were established by the British state in the 2010s as pioneers of 'social investment' for the resolution of public policy problems in services cut by austerity and communities blighted by neoliberalism (Huckfield, 2021), others, notably the Big Lottery Fund, Big Local and Power to Change, were state-supported to cultivate a 'Big Society' of community self-help resilience, some commandeered to support cooperative development. Such para-state organisations became proactive in funding local economic development in deprived places, often focused on cooperative and community enterprise—as explored below in Plymouth—joining more established charitable trusts, such as Cripplegate, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Rank Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Lankelly Chase, with longer legacies of mission-oriented grant-giving.

When such funders partner with non-profits and local authorities to create public-common-philanthropic partnerships for place-based change, they become entangled in capitalist-state rationalities and begin to resemble the

public-private-philanthropy partnerships—‘3P partnerships’—of the ‘New Washington Consensus’ (Mitchell & Sparke, 2016). Yet these social change agencies play a role at the local level—aiming to socialise urban economies—not dissimilar to that played trans-locally by ‘transnational alternative policy groups’ such as the Transnational Institute and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, whose mission is to challenge neoliberal hegemony and support ‘justice globalism’ (Carroll, 2016). A tension, then—between delivering progressive policy solutions within hegemonic coordinates for austerity-starved local authorities facing compounding social problems, and building radical new foundational and cooperative economies that may challenge neoliberal-capitalist hegemony—defines and ultimately contains within limits municipal-cooperative statecraft.

3 | PLACE-BASED VARIATIONS IN MUNICIPAL STATECRAFT

Locality is a significant factor in the development of municipal-cooperative statecraft. The two cases studied here are both ‘small cities’ (Bell & Jayne, 2009) acting as regional centres with significant anchor institutions that ‘stabilise’ economic development (Engelen et al., 2017). With populations distributed around the 250,000 mark that distinguishes ‘provincial’ from ‘regional’ cities—148,000 in Preston (330,000 for wider metropolitan area); 265,000 in Plymouth (according to public 2021 census data)—their comparative analysis contributes to a research agenda for overlooked, ‘ordinary’ small cities rather than overstudied global cities (Bell & Jayne, 2009).

Following the ‘new localities’ framework (Jones & Woods, 2013, p. 36), these places possess more-or-less ‘material’ and ‘imagined’ coherence: the *material* catchment areas of anchor institutions, supply chains, travel-to-work areas and ‘the institutional structures that hold a locality together and provide vehicles for collective action’; and *imagined* place identities and ‘shared geographical reference points’ that ‘makes a locality meaningful as a space of collective action’. The idea of municipal statecraft resuscitates the 1980s locality debate over whether localities can act, through ‘locality effects’, in the face of structural forces (Jones & Woods, 2013). To understand this potential to enact change, localities must first be situated within their wider political-economic context.

Each place analysed below occupies a relatively peripheral position within the UK’s especially polarised political economy of decoupling cores and peripheries, differentially positioned within the nested hierarchy of the UK’s spatially uneven geo-constitution (Wills, 2020). Preston is a district city authority within a unitary county council—the county capital of Lancashire in England’s industrial Northwest, the world’s first region to industrialise and then deindustrialise. Plymouth is a unitary city council in largely rural Devon—governing England’s most south-westerly major urban area. Each city’s economy is underpinned by state-funded defence industries: aerospace in Preston; maritime in Plymouth. Both are relative cores within peripheral regions, suffering mass job losses in the late-twentieth century, isolated from Southeast-centric growth, losing skilled labour to both London and larger regional hubs (Manchester, Liverpool; Bristol). Each place is now seeking to capitalise on economic opportunities presented by local assets and differential core-periphery relations to build alternative cooperative economies.

3.1 | Preston’s anchor institutional model

Preston is bestowed with its very own ‘model’—already well documented in the literature (Brown & Jones, 2021; Lockey & Glover, 2019; Manley & Whyman, 2021; Thompson, 2021). It is arguably the pioneer of CWB in the UK, comprising five pillars: pluralising economic ownership, including municipal and cooperative enterprise; localising finance, through community banks and regional public pension fund investment; making labour markets socially just, starting with living wage regulations; socialising the value of land, through community land trust development; and retaining community wealth through progressive procurement. However, what distinguishes the Preston model from its peers, I argue, is the unified approach to cooperative ecosystem development through anchor institutional procurement.

Preston is a second-tier district council—operating within the wider remit of Lancashire County Council—with fewer budgetary powers than single-tier, unitary authorities, and a jurisdiction smaller than its metropolitan area, which includes contiguous Chorley. Preston’s core spending power—£159 m—is a fraction of Plymouth’s £1,626 m (estimated by HM Government for 2022/23). This explains why Preston City Council has adopted an especially *extrospective* ‘anchor institutional’ strategy of coordinating the greater combined spending powers of multiple partners in the public and third sectors, including the county council, to complement its own limited resources, redirecting ‘influenceable spend’ to local firms for generating multiplier effects. While Preston is historically dominated by the Labour Party—winning more city

council seats than any other since 1980, in power since 2011, following a long decade of no overall control—Lancashire County Council is governed by the Conservatives. This leads to contradictory presentations of the Preston model, torn between a radical rendering—‘painting the town red’ (Brown & Jones, 2021)—and claims to pragmatism or what Preston Council Leader Matthew Brown likes to call ‘just extreme common sense really’ (interview, 2017) in a move to appease politically diverse partners.

Preston played an important part in England’s industrial revolution, a boomtown for cotton and then heavy engineering, becoming a centre of radical labour activism—described by Marx, on a visit in the 1850s, as ‘the next Saint Petersburg’ (quoted in Lockey & Glover, 2019). Though most of this industry (and radicalism) is long gone, significant manufacturing firms, notably BAE Systems—supplier of the British state and largest defence contractor in Europe, with three sites within Preston’s functional urban-economic area—maintain well-paying jobs, support feeder firms, and bring wealth into the city, with relatively affluent suburbs surrounding a much poorer centre and inner-city. Another major employer is the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), one of the largest in the UK, with student and staff numbers approaching 38,000, buoying local housing and labour markets. The literature on the Preston model tends to overlook the local economic impact of export industry surpluses—higher education exports and ‘making weapons for Syria’, as one commentator put it (interview, 2020); something for future research to investigate. This political-economic context highlights how the Preston model is targeted at the metropolitan core, suffering relative decline and disinvestment—a solution to the problem faced by Preston City Council of how to regenerate the city centre with no state funding forthcoming under austerity; a plan hatched in response to the protracted failure of the Tithebarn project, a large-scale speculative shopping centre redevelopment, made unviable by the 2008 financial crash (Brown & Jones, 2021).

Lacking introspective capacities and budgetary clout, Preston City Council has sought vital partnerships with supporting agencies, notably with Manchester-based think-and-do-tank CLES. Indeed, the model first emerged as a creative collaboration between elected Labour-Cooperative politicians Matthew Brown and Martyn Rawlinson, progressive council officers, notably Derek Whyte and Gordon Benson, and public policy entrepreneurs such as Neil McInroy, then Chief Exec of CLES. Established in 1986 by the GLC, Sheffield and other metropolitan authorities as they faced extinction, explicitly to carry the torch and keep the flame alight for radical municipal industrial strategy, the aptly named Centre for Local Economic Strategies has been the catalysing agency behind the Preston model; the latter therefore heir to 1980s British municipal radicalism. With a funding model initially leaning heavily on local government member subscriptions, CLES increasingly pursued consultancy contracts to build independence and viability. In the 1990s and 2000s CLES followed the money to focus on more pluralist and localist agendas around local multipliers and public spend circulation, building on NEF’s seminal work on *Plugging the Leaks*. In the 2010s post-regeneration era, CLES began advising local authorities such as Knowsley, in nearby Liverpool City Region, to use public procurement budgets as alternative regeneration pots (Thompson et al., 2020).

The missing *radical* element was provided by US-based The Democracy Collaborative (TDC)—the originator of the CWB concept and CLES’s ‘sister organisation or close partner in crime’ (stakeholder interview, 2020). TDC introduced more radical ideas for economic democracy, based on the Cleveland model of anchor institutional contracts for worker-owned co-ops and the Mondragón Corporation model of multi-sector and multi-scalar confederated co-op development (Hanna and Kelly, 2021). Brokered by TDC, the Preston Cooperative Development Network has been established with a £760,000 grant from Open Society Foundations (OSF), match-funded by the council to reach a total of £1 m, specifically for incubating a worker-owned cooperative ecosystem of 10 co-ops; five developed so far, working in foundational sectors such as food, education, transport and digital services.

Cash injections from the American non-profit industrial complex have thus proven indispensable in generating momentum—part of a unified multi-scalar ‘transatlantic left’ strategy for ‘full-system change’ initiated by OSF and TDC (Hanna and Kelly, 2021). Prior to its recent restructuring, OSF’s economic transformation programme was focused on marginalised areas of the global North, with CWB and cooperative development targeted as major strategic opportunities; while Matthew Brown has been employed as a TDC Senior Fellow paying for time devoted to strategic development and dissemination; likewise, Neil McInroy. Funded by less traditional American foundations, notably including Soros’s OSF, TDC effectively leveraged superior fundraising capabilities in the US and concertedly mobilised surplus resources across the Atlantic to capitalise on opportunities for political-economic transformation in the UK presented by the Corbyn-McDonnell project alongside Preston’s potential to road-test the CWB model at speed. TDC became centrally involved, alongside CLES, in organising the CWB Unit in Corbyn’s office, set up to replicate the Preston model across Labour authorities, eventually acting as its administrative Secretariat. TDC was also instrumental in OSF’s providing start-up funding for Commonwealth, the London-based think tank supporting work on ‘public-common partnerships’, documented in Plymouth (Milburn & Russell, 2019); the ultimate aim to create a ‘war chest for the movement, so that we could create a multimillion-dollar fund that would be available for economic democracy actors all over’ (interview, 2020).

Although UCLan-based scholar-activists claim Preston's is not actually a model but rather a miscellaneous 'hotch-potch of more or less progressive ideas', a 'structure of feeling' or 'rhizomatic economy' of 'unplanned paths' (Manley & Whyman, 2021, pp. 17–26), Preston has nonetheless been funded systematically by think tanks and foundations, and mobilised strategically as the inspiration for a distinctive vision of urban-economic transformation based on anchor institutional flows and cooperative ecosystem infrastructure.

The potential of CWB to radically transform Preston's political economy now hinges on Preston Cooperative Development Network's success in incubating and coordinating the activities of new worker-owned co-ops. Such enterprises not only provide new employment for those marginalised from mainstream markets, with multiplier effects through local circuits of value, but also embed democratic ownership and practices for empowering workers to build a confederated movement that may begin to challenge neoliberal capitalism. However, initial co-operative education and business support has been mostly focused on UCLan students, with little conception of how to address pervasive inequalities through widening access. To this end, the council contracted Co-ops UK and Stir to Action to develop awareness raising, popular education, capacity building and cultural change programmes, specifically supporting racialised and marginalised communities traditionally excluded from local labour markets with 'pre-technical support' to build a 'pipeline' of 'contract-ready' community-led co-ops (Gordon-Farleigh, 2021).

The missing piece in this puzzle is the overlooked though vital role for community anchor organisations. Just as anchor institutions are mainstays of city-regional economies, generating social value and circulating wealth at scale, their capacity and capability to channel resources more locally depends on community anchors providing the crucial mediating link at the neighbourhood level. These may take the form of community land or development trusts—increasingly registered as BenComs (co-ops) rather than CICs (social enterprises)—acting as neighbourhood hubs in myriad ways: stewards of community assets; arenas of local decision-making and neighbourhood planning; incubators of start-ups; consortia for distributing grant and procurement funding; spaces for encounter, assembly, education and celebration—a function whose genesis is explored in Plymouth below.

3.2 | Plymouth's municipal-cooperative enterprise model

If Preston's is an *anchor institutional* strategy, Plymouth's is a *community anchor organisational* strategy—developed via two parallel though potentially complementary routes: one through a council-led attempt to revive the city's cooperative movement through public-common partnerships; the other funded by a state-endowed charitable trust supporting community enterprises in partnership with Plymouth's vibrant social enterprise sector—each explored in turn.

Unlike Preston, Plymouth City Council is a single-tier unitary authority with greater public policy powers and bigger budgets—and larger boundaries extending to cover its metropolitan area. There is more potential to make radical municipal change here. However, political control over the council is bi-polar, swinging between Conservative and Labour, reflecting a distinctive local working-class culture allied to the maritime military. This makes delivering long-term policy agendas challenging. For many years until the 2020 local elections, Plymouth was run by a Labour administration with strong ties to its sister Cooperative Party and led by Tudor Evans—a co-founder of CCIN—supported by Chris Penberthy, both committed cooperative advocates and practitioners. While 'not so easily marketable [as the Preston model]', suggests Penberthy, 'in some ways it's richer, more resilient, more diverse on the ground, in terms of what's going on' (interview 2020). Building on NEF's *Cooperatives Unleashed* report (Lawrence et al., 2018), the Council has pledged to double the size of Plymouth's cooperative economy by 2025, publishing *Cooperatives Unleashed from the Grassroots* (Peachey, 2020), a report commissioned by CCIN to showcase how CCIN members can follow Plymouth's lead.

The unusual influence of cooperativism in Plymouth's local Labour Party can be traced back to its rich cooperative history, with one of the first ever retail co-ops established here in the 1860s and developing by the mid-twentieth century extensive local food supply chains while also building housing estates and selling foundational services to its members. Yet Plymouth's economic base rested on extensive dockyards serving the Royal Navy, as well as auxiliary maritime industries such as shipbuilding, which, since the 1980s, have shed 10,000s of jobs, plunging into long-term decline the dockside districts of Devonport and Stonehouse—now the main focus of municipal-cooperative regeneration.

The Labour-Cooperative Council's approach—until it lost office in 2021—centred on the municipal incubation and development of public-common partnerships innovating in foundational sectors, most prominently Plymouth Energy Community (PEC), a BenCom set up by the council, with seconded specialist staff, as a solar energy cooperative to tackle fuel poverty and decarbonisation challenges, create local jobs and reinvest surpluses for community-led initiatives. PEC focused initially on installing solar panels on roofs of public and civic buildings to create a green grid, since diversifying

with a BenCom subsidiary PEC Homes, developing a city-wide Community Land Trust—one of the first publicly funded city-regional CLTs of its kind—now working closely with PEC Renewables to provide affordable housing and cheap, clean energy for marginalised groups. Its first site, for an ambitious large-scale development of 70 community-owned net-zero homes at Kings Tamerton, won planning permission in 2022, with plans to start construction by 2024, making it the first new-build scheme to use the ‘Energiesprong’ approach in England.

PEC is just the latest council-led community development trust designed to address failures in land and labour markets across the city, beginning with the pioneering Wolseley Trust and Millfields Trust in the 1980s—‘a new way of doing community economic development’ (Labour councillor interview 2020). In 2021 the council established Four Greens Trust as a BenCom offering wellbeing and employment services, operating across four neighbourhoods, ‘in the image of Millfields Trust ... to replicate what they see as a successful model’ (community development trust director interview, 2017). Millfields Trust is leading a new industrial strategy to revive the fashion textiles industry in Plymouth, following the Jaeger factory’s closure in 1997 and loss of 250 jobs. Makers HQ is a CIC set up in 2018 as a public-common partnership between Millfields Trust and Plymouth College of Art, working alongside former Jaeger employees to reinvent the factory as a makerspace for fashion design and manufacture; aiming to retain fashion and design graduates from Plymouth University, and College of Art, who tend to leave for Bristol or London. Funding was procured from Power to Change (£184,000) and the council’s Social Enterprise Investment Fund (£96,000) following a feasibility study grant. Here, a council-established community development trust is drawing on expertise in non-profit property development to forge a public-common-philanthropic partnership for industrial renewal, leveraging local state and para-state-philanthropic funds.

Alongside launching a Social Enterprise Investment Fund for patient capital investment and investing in premises, start-up costs, staff secondments, and HR and accountancy services for community development trusts such as PEC, Plymouth City Council has taken a more direct role in municipal-cooperative development. CATERed is a new municipal-cooperative trading company specialising in providing affordable, nutritious, organic school meals through localised, socialised, sustainable supply chains, jointly owned by 67 schools across the city, with the council owning a 51% controlling stake. This represents a revival in municipal-cooperative innovation in foundational provision not seen since the GLC.

At the same time, boundaries between the state and civil society are being blurred through an innovative crowdfunding programme. Crowdfund Plymouth is a platform for match-funding citizen-led crowdfunded projects with municipal revenues generated by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) collected through the urban planning process. Since 2015, the Council has distributed the ‘neighbourhood proportion’ of CIL revenues across around 100 projects that meet key public policy objectives. Pledging up to 50% of a project’s costs (up to a maximum of £20,000), the council has invested some £500,000 raising over £1.5 million across the city. In 2019, Crowdfund Plymouth won the Engaged Cities Award funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, receiving a \$75,000 prize for reinvestment in the scheme. This creative and contradictory innovation to crowdsource solutions to policy problems—some of which exacerbated by the very growth in property markets used to cross-subsidise them—represents the sublimation of public goods by what Martin (2015) calls the ‘derivative’ logic of private values; an insight explored further in the conclusion.

3.3 | Plymouth’s philanthropic community anchor model

The municipal-led model of community economic development is accompanied by a new breed of community anchor organisation funded by Power to Change’s Empowering Places programme. Established in 2015 with a £150 m endowment from The National Lottery Community Fund—gambling revenues collected by the state—Power to Change supports the development of ‘community business’: non-profit enterprises initiated by, accountable to, governed democratically by, and trading for the benefit of, its local stakeholders, with broad beneficial impact to address social needs left unmet by state and market failure. Empowering Places is Power to Change’s flagship fund—a five-year programme in six places (Plymouth, Grimsby, Leicester, Hartlepool, Bradford, Wigan) selected from amongst the top 10% most deprived localities in the UK. In each place, Power to Change has partnered with a primary community anchor organisation to act as the catalyst for incubating and networking community businesses to resolve place-based problems—providing on average £650,000 per catalyst for staff overheads and seed-funding of community-led projects. Significantly, Empowering Places is delivered by Co-operatives UK in partnership with NEF and CLES—bringing the main agents of the new cooperative economy into collaboration.

The Empowering Places partnership originated in the forerunning Community Economic Development (CED) Programme funded centrally by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG; now Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities). Running from 2015 to 2017, DCLG invested £1.455 m to support some 70 communities across England to formulate local economic plans—the first state-funded programme for community economic development in over three decades. Led by Co-operatives UK, working with NEF, amongst several others,

notably including CLES from the second year, the consortium was, as coordinator Rachel Laurence explained, an ‘entry-ist initiative for wedging economic development back into the community development movement’ (interview 2021). This laid the groundwork for both the consortium approach and programme design of Empowering Places.

Plymouth is Empowering Place’s exemplar, one of two pilots, alongside Sheffield, which was dropped. Although CLES has not been especially active here, NEF has provided technical support and Co-ops UK delivered cooperative incubation, each working closely with Real Ideas, the programme’s first partner anchor. Real Ideas is led by social entrepreneurs highly networked into London-based social innovation circles, especially the Arts Council and Royal Society of Arts (RSA). As a Real Ideas representative put it: ‘A lot of people involved in social enterprise are RSA Fellows; there is quite a lot of RSA activity in the city.’ With offices in Cornwall, Bristol and Plymouth, Real Ideas was founded through Creative Partnerships, a national programme funded by Arts Council England, to engage in social enterprise incubation, urban regeneration and historic asset revitalisation—notably regenerating Devonport’s dilapidated Market Hall and Guildhall. Real Ideas is one of the big players in Plymouth’s highly developed social enterprise sector, coordinated by Plymouth Social Enterprise Network, one of the UK’s first such networks, pioneering a dynamic, flexible organisational structure described as the ‘graphene model’ by one of its founding members, Real Ideas’ Head of Enterprise and Regeneration Ed Whitelaw. Thanks to the network, Plymouth won the accolade of Social Enterprise UK’s first Social Enterprise City, in 2013.

Working closely with Real Ideas, and targeting the deprived dockside districts of Devonport and Stonehouse, the Empowering Places consortium has incubated community businesses and anchors of which some have become catalysts alongside Real Ideas, including the high-profile Nudge Community Builders. Nudge was established in Stonehouse in 2017 to restore empty buildings for diverse community uses, including hosting pop-ups and start-ups, and celebrated as an exemplary public-common partnership, a concept developed with the support of OSF-funded Commonwealth (Milburn & Russell, 2019; Russell, Milburn, & Heron, 2022). In drawing on crowd-sourced, philanthropic and public funding—from Power to Change amongst other charities; patient capital loans and grants from the council’s Social Enterprise Investment Fund; and municipal match-funding of community shares through the council’s Crowdfund Plymouth initiative—Nudge might more accurately be described as a public-common-*philanthropic* partnership.

In sum, Plymouth’s dual model of ‘letting a thousand flowers bloom’ (interview, councillor, 2020) has produced an efflorescence of diverse innovation in cooperative development—yet also created growing pains and problems of coordination, duplication and competition between parallel approaches. Each approach—a community business incubation programme centred on philanthropic-supported community anchor catalysts; and a foundational asset management strategy centred on council-supported community development trusts—is complementary, running in parallel, but lacking the overarching coordination required to radically transform Plymouth’s political economy; as implied by a city councillor:

The reason Power to Change came to Plymouth is that they could piggyback on everything that was already happening and have the success. And Rank Foundation are doing the same; we’ve got Esmée [Fairbairn Foundation] here ... so we’ve got all these big players, who are all going to pull out in the next year or so ... And I’ve said to Power to Change, to Rank and to Esmée that the best way to do things is to work with us, not just to come in and do it. Part of my frustration is that we don’t have the same joined-upness on that, and it plays to those people who do want to be a bit independent ... If people are going to come to a city ... why not seek to join up, so you don’t duplicate?

(Interview 2020)

Economic democracy is another unresolved question. While the council-led community development trusts are community-owned organisations, mostly BenComs in the cooperative tradition, the Power to Change partners tend to be CICs (Nudge notwithstanding) working within the social enterprise sector. While both forms are non-profit with constitutional asset locks preventing privatisation, only co-ops offer broad-based, democratic collective control and ownership—the substance sacrificed at the neoliberal altar of social entrepreneurship (Huckfield, 2021). These two trajectories in Plymouth’s progressive visioning—a cooperative city or a social enterprise city—point in different (though not incompatible) directions: one more rooted in cooperative ownership; the other in social innovation.

4 | CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

When Cochrane (1993) conceived *Whatever Happened to Local Government?* he might have written a book with a slightly different title: *Whatever Happened to Municipal Radicalism?* Municipal statecrafters are once again pushing the envelope

of local economic development, pursuing progressive, if not always radical, strategies for cooperative foundational provisioning—rediscovering 1980s municipal radicalism only with an extrospective twist. Contrasting with the early 1980s, when municipal authorities had greater capacities and powers as employer, investor, producer *and* purchaser to intervene directly in (socially useful) production and develop ‘paradigms for a planned economy’ (Benington, 1986)—prefiguring postcapitalist visions of economic planning currently gaining currency (Nishat-Botero, 2023)—the 2020s present more limited prospects. Local government has been hollowed out, constrained by austerity; the local state turned inside-out into a shadow assemblage of arms-length agencies, charitable trusts, social enterprises and private consultancies. New forms of municipal statecraft are emerging—developing ‘introspective’ capacities and ‘extrospective’ repertoires for working creatively and entrepreneurially (McGuirk et al., 2021) to redesign urban economies through more concerted collaborations with civic and philanthropic—as well as private—partners.

Despite constraints, local government has drawn on external ideas, energies and resources—through forging novel public-common-philanthropic partnerships—to develop ambitious strategies for rebuilding local economies on cooperative foundations as alternatives to neoliberal austerity urbanism. This article has discerned three distinct variegations in infrastructural support systems for municipal-cooperative development:

1. Preston's ‘anchor institutional’ model inspired by a transformative-statist vision for full-system multi-scalar community wealth building (CWB) through confederated worker-owned co-ops, propagated by think tanks CLES and TDC, tied to the fortunes of the national Labour-Cooperative Party through Corbyn's CWB Unit, seed-funded by the American non-profit industrial complex and sustained by anchor institutional procurement spending.
2. Plymouth's ‘municipal-cooperative enterprise’ model based on a renewed municipal-socialist vision for a cooperative ecosystem of community development trusts such as Millfields and PEC specialising in foundational sector innovation, shunning philanthropy in favour of creative planning gain, crowd-funding and municipal returns on patient capital investment in cooperative enterprise.
3. Plymouth's ‘community anchor’ model rooted in a democratic-localist vision for community economic development, catalysed by cooperative development agencies such as Co-ops UK and NEF working with community anchors like Real Ideas and Nudge, dependent on place-based philanthropic funders like Power to Change, operating as shadow arms of the state, bypassing local government entirely.

These exemplary models are by no means exhaustive. The exploratory research on which this article is based identified two other place-based variegations—in the London Boroughs of Islington and Barking & Dagenham—to be analysed elsewhere. This distended case approach could be usefully triangulated with more ethnographic and systematic research of these and all possible cases. Further variegations may emerge in complex combinations in different places. Plymouth's parallel models suggest how variegation occurs *within* as well as *between* places, as also documented for smart cities (Caprotti & Cowley, 2019, p. 590). Each variegation places differing emphasis on ‘extrospective’ versus ‘introspective’ development of municipal statecraft repertoires (McGuirk et al., 2021), forging variegated relationships with the state, non-profit industrial complex and the cooperative movement.

First, each council has different internal capabilities and local levers upon which to pull. Preston has constructed a meticulously marketed model for a lower-tier district authority to extrospectively harness local and translocal assets, through partnering with anchor institutions and external agencies beyond-the-state, for generating and localising community wealth in the face of fiscal austerity and limited municipal powers—ambitious yet risking overreach and hype. Plymouth is a single-tier unitary authority, with much greater policy and spending powers than Preston's, with a progressive approach split in two: one drawing deeply on municipal resources and repertoires for a staunchly municipal model of cooperative enterprise; the other circumventing the council altogether to construct a local para-state assemblage of community anchor catalysts for community economic development. That these two models operate almost in parallel, risking duplication, is a missed opportunity for creating an integrated cooperative ecosystem. Moreover, their lack of coordination exacerbates the fragility of each: Plymouth Council's cooperative agenda threatened by the Labour-Cooperative Council recently losing control to a Conservative minority administration; Power to Change's funding dependent on gambling receipts gifted by the state to sustain austerity localism.

Further research is needed on how municipal statecrafters build, reconfigure and transform local government bureaucratic capabilities, much like the GLC's ‘activist state-workers’ (Joubert, 2022); to better understand how the outer reach of extrospective repertoires is dialectically dependent on the inner development of introspective capacities (McGuirk et al., 2021). Such studies of municipal statecraft need to be brought into closer conversation with state-theoretical debates between open Marxist (Joubert, 2022; Thompson, 2021) and more poststructuralist (Baker & McGuirk, 2021;

Cooper, 2017) perspectives on the relative plasticity of the (local) state as totalising abstract political form of capital and/or prosaic apparatus for prefiguring alternatives.

Second, each model attempts to construct a cooperative ecosystem for the innovative provision of foundational goods and services, dependent on ‘anchors’ to catalyse activity. Each foregrounds a different kind of anchor: Plymouth’s community anchor organisations at the neighbourhood scale are arguably the missing link in the Preston model’s emphasis on city-regional anchor institutions (Gordon-Farleigh, 2021; Thompson et al., 2022). For the question of how to catalyse autonomous confederated ‘cooperative ecosystems’, the issue of public procurement looms large. Some see great potential, not least in Preston, for harnessing state—and para-state anchor institutional—contracts to grow new co-op ecosystems quickly, to ‘double their size’ (Lawrence et al., 2018); others see greater dangers in coupling the resurgent co-op movement to procurement, emasculating it as a marketised and managerialised delivery agent of outsourced and disinvested services under austerity, much like ‘how Blair killed the co-ops’ by transforming the movement into a subordinated social enterprise sector (Huckfield, 2021). Municipal-cooperative statecraft thus contains contradictory trajectories, polarised politically between using cooperative practices for neoliberal cost-cutting and state privatisation, and using municipal powers to build an autonomous cooperative ecosystem of democratic foundational provision.

Third, each model is a progressive response to austerity localism (Featherstone et al., 2012) attempting to find alternative funding sources beyond-the-state for economic regeneration: variously reliant on para-state procurement or philanthropic funding; using public resources to leverage charitable and social investment, or vice versa. New public-common-philanthropic partnerships have assembled in the vacuum created by the withdrawal of large-scale regeneration funding (O’Brien & Matthews, 2015), accelerated by the 2017 turn in philanthropic funding strategies towards holistic place-based projects (Gilbert, 2017). Each model thus depends on geographically-mobile non-profit professional agencies—CLES, TDC and OSF in Preston; Power to Change and Real Ideas in Plymouth—mobilising models from elsewhere and resources from external circuits of value into place-based projects reassembled and scaled-up beyond their original context; a fast-moving frontier between urban activism and the non-profit industrial complex for future policy mobilities research to explore (Peck & Theodore, 2012; Temenos, 2015).

This also problematises recent research on public-common partnerships (Russell, Milburn, & Heron, 2022) and the public-cooperative nexus (Ferreri & Vidal, 2022) by foregrounding a significant, overlooked element: philanthropic and professional-managerial interests. Following Martin’s (2015, pp. 91–92) insight that ‘the third sector amalgamates a call to governance, a type of organising, and an expression of activism’, which renders ‘the public’ a ‘derivative of private values’, local public-common-philanthropic partnerships sublimate *democratic* accountability into *fiduciary* accountability amenable to impact measurement, risk management and returns on investment; mirroring similar trends at national and international scales (Mitchell & Sparke, 2016). Further research is needed on how the local state is being reassembled and what this means for notions of public value and democratic representation.

Fourth, each model entails a distinctive supportive infrastructure for replicating, scaling up and coordinating activity across neighbourhoods, cities and regions: Preston’s translating into Labour’s CWB Unit administered by TDC and CLES; Plymouth’s into the Community Economic Development (CED) consortium emerging around Empowering Places, notably Power to Change, Co-ops UK and NEF. Although coming from different organising traditions and relationships to state power—the first associated with the vertical (Labour) *party*, the second with the horizontal (cooperative) *movement* (see: Nunes, 2021)—they bear resemblances in their mutual endeavour to develop a multi-scalar networked infrastructure for developing the democratic-cooperative economy. Each is dependent in different ways on both the non-profit industrial complex and the political machinery of the state: while the CWB Unit was bankrolled by TDC’s philanthropic sources, it lost energy following the electoral failure of the Corbyn-McDonnell project; the CED consortium is dependent on the renewal of funding for Power to Change, a mutated philanthropic appendage of the state, following the end of the government’s original two-year CED programme. Each initiative consolidated its own cohort of CWB or CED advocates and technical advisors with a shared vision for urban-economic transformation. The CED-Empowering Places programme became a school for advisors to learn from each other, hone skills and develop infrastructures for replicating citizen-led projects across the country; presenting opportunities to create a ‘more permanent network of CED Advisors and practitioners across the UK’ (Rachel Laurence, interview, 2021)—a potential ‘introspective’ platform hub for storing and archiving resources, for ‘training the trainers’, and lobbying government for generating ‘extrospective’ growth in British municipal radicalism.

We can learn from how the 1970s Community Development Projects (CDPs) produced a cohort of workers that then formed the ranks of insurgent bureaucrats devising the radical industrial strategies of the GLC and Sheffield. The backlash of the CDP workers against the localist self-help precepts of the CDP ‘poverty experiments’ that merely ‘gilded the ghetto’—as their structuralist critique skewered it (CDP, 1977)—directly informed the municipal-socialist shift towards

more interventionist policies for restructuring production, not just distribution (Rustin, 1986). In the ‘local government bandwagon’, Benington (1986, p. 7) remarked, it was no coincidence that ‘economic development [was] the fashion for the ‘80s where community development was the frontier in the ‘70s’. The CDPs were ‘one of the great formative places’, suggests a former GLC officer (interview, 2020); ‘You can find, probably, half a dozen people who came from CDP to the GLC’—such as Marj Mayo, who became the first (co-)director of CLES in 1986. Today, a similar process is occurring, as some of the CED Advisors and CWB Unit members begin to constitute a new generation of ‘activist state-workers’ (Joubert, 2022) in Preston, Plymouth and other municipalities. The question remains whether these schools for municipal radicalism can be sustained, consolidated and coordinated at scale to cultivate the skills required for growing the movement.

Finally, progressive and regressive tendencies are not mutually exclusive but dialectically related poles of a contradictory local-state-capitalist totality. The growing trend for financialised city statecraft—‘councillors at the casino’ (Pike, forthcoming) making speculative bets on commercial property deals, borrowing money on capital markets, and engaging in complex financial engineering (Christophers, 2019)—is evident even in apparently municipal-socialist authorities. In 2020 Plymouth was the first council in three decades to venture into swaps, following the Hammersmith & Fulham scandal of the 1990s, to hedge against exposure to interest rate rises as Plymouth refinanced £468 m worth of short-term debts (Stubington, 2020). This demonstrates how the most financialised and extractivist and the most foundational and generative forms of municipal statecraft are not necessarily to be found in different places, as mutually exclusive tendencies, but are very often simultaneously present within the same local authority, co-constitutive as bi-polar strategies pulling in different directions certainly not by accident, if not by design; forays into the deepest depths—and debts!—of the former extending the progressive reach of the latter; problematising any clear-cut demarcation between neoliberal and progressive strategies. The two tendencies often go hand-in-hand, with different departments within the same local authorities—almost always controlled by Labour—playing different games of urban provisioning: one extractivist and speculative (Penny, 2022); the other foundational and generative (Engelen et al., 2017).

Research now needs to follow the money as it circulates between these different circuits of value to trace their enmeshments, interdependencies, consequences and autonomies, to ascertain just how progressive—or, even, radical—different models of urban-economic transformation are claimed to be, and begin to more accurately delineate the boundaries, contradictions and possibilities for putatively ‘progressive’ urbanism (Beveridge & Naumann, 2021; Featherstone et al., 2012). We need to follow the money more closely as it circulates between local and global circuits of value through more-or-less extractive and exploitative supply chains, using the tools developed by NEF and CLES, to understand how effectively community wealth is generated and retained, who benefits, with what wider political-economic impacts, and with what strategic prospects for the future of municipal radicalism.

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ORCID

Matthew Thompson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5691-4851>

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