Leadership and Governance in a City-Regional Context: A Case Study of Doncaster

By:

Charlotte Hoole

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The University of Sheffield
Faculty of Social Sciences
Department of Urban Studies and Planning

Supervised by: Professor Alasdair Rae

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Abstract

Since 2010, sub-national government in England has undergone a major restructure in view of a central government agenda to devolve more powers and fiscal responsibilities to city-regions, in the context of austerity. This has led to an increasingly complex governance and policy landscape for local leaders to navigate, who under these conditions are recognised for playing a significant role in responding to changes and acting strategically to ensure that local and regional development objectives are realised. In response, this thesis investigates the structures, processes and practices that underlie this new governance and policy context. It looks at this through the lens of a mid-sized city, bringing an alternative perspective to debates about urban and economic growth policy that have for a long time been dominated by big city-centrism and agglomeration economics. Drawing on 36 in-depth interviews with local leaders in Doncaster in the Sheffield City Region, rich insights are offered into the ways that sub-national institutions and leaders are coming together to implement city-regional governance on the ground. Drawing on the themes of power, negotiation and acceptability, the research reveals how city-regional devolution has created new institutional and spatial complexities, and has failed to rework central-local relations away from a highly centralised approach. The research also finds, however, that local leaders play a significant role in their ability to navigate the broader structures and controls for constructing an operating environment that they can work with. This is suggested to be particularly the case for mid-sized cities that have neither the political might nor collective weight of the 'big cities' under the current urban system.

This research adds knowledge to theories on leadership and governance, providing a greater level of depth for understanding the structures and processes that underlie city-regional governance and leadership than mostly broader narratives. It also provides original insights on the role of agency within this context that has seldom been examined in local and regional development research. Furthermore, by recognising that places on the periphery are a worthy object of research within urban studies, it sheds new light on the mid-sized city experience of city-regionalism as well as the relational dynamics between a mid-sized city and a core city within a city-region. This research will not only complement future academic study in this field, but it also has practical relevance for policymakers and place leaders for navigating, making arrangements, and suggesting ways forward for future policy on city-regional devolution.

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Glossary

ABI	Area Based Initiative
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DMBC	Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
HS2	High Speed Rail 2
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SEP	Strategic Economic Plan
SCC	Sheffield City Council
SCR	Sheffield City Region
SCR CA	Sheffield City Region Combined Authority
SCR LEP	Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

1.1   Introduction to the Research

This thesis is about leadership and governance in a city-regional setting. It looks at this at two levels: a larger city-region and a mid-sized city within it. It draws upon literature from studies on leadership (Beer & Clower, 2014; Hambleton, 2014a; Sotarauta, 2016), governance (Etherington & Jones, 2016; Pike *et al*., 2016) and institutions (Hildreth & Bailey, 2014; Rodríguez-Pose, 2013; Tomaney, 2014). It is based on 36 in-depth interviews and direct observation during a period of significant policy flux between March 2015 and December 2015. The research was carried out in Doncaster, which from the perspective of the wider literature, can be considered a mid-sized city[1] in a city-regional governance setting. The investigation presented in this thesis represents an attempt to understand the complexities of the topic with a view to making a contribution to knowledge on leadership and governance in the context of English city-regional devolution. However, the research also speaks to wider debates on the topic internationally.

This thesis stems from an emerging body of research within the fields of local and regional development, which suggests that local leadership plays a significant role in responding to a changing urban policy environment and for acting strategically to ensure that local and regional development objectives are realised (Beer & Clower, 2014; Hambleton, 2014a; Sotarauta, 2016). As such, there appears to be a consensus developing that local leaders are crucial for and highly influential in shaping place trajectories. These ideas are rooted in an assumption that place development is somewhat dependent on its leaders bringing together, producing, and attracting resources to survive in an increasingly complex urban policy environment (Sotarauta, 2016) that endorses the ideologies of 'competition' (see Brenner, 2004) and 'resilience' (see Bristow & Healy, 2014). The attempts of local leaders to respond (*'agency'*) however are, of course, also influenced by their wider contexts.

Firstly, the political and economic scalar arrangements and their associated institutional formations that are defined by the state play a fundamental part in the scope and

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[1] Other terms of reference include 'secondary', 'second-tier', and 'small' cities.

operationalisation of local and regional leadership. Related to this is also the extent to which central government is willing to release power and resources to local government (*'policy'*). Collinge and Gibney (2010), for example, question whether local leadership is simply a product of how effectively policy is delivered and resourced rather than the combined ability of local leaders to lead. Secondly, and more specifically, leadership is also recognised as being influenced by a place's distinct territorial make-up and path-dependencies (*'place'*).

It is the intention of this thesis, therefore, to investigate the space that lies at the intersection of *policy*, *place* and *agency* for understanding leadership and governance in accordance with the city-regional devolution landscape in England since 2010, in the context of austerity. Following a review of the key concepts and the research problem that this study responds to, this introductory chapter presents a recent history of English urban policy reform to contextualise the research. The discussion then turns towards establishing a research agenda for mid-sized cities as one of the key foci of the research, as well as addressing the main research aim and objectives. The study's origin and contribution to knowledge are clearly stated.

1.2   Research Problem and Conceptualisation

Place leadership[2] as a concept for study has only recently emerged. This follows a rise of interest in and appreciation of the role that local leadership has in influencing the social and economic performance of regions (Stough, 2003; Stimson at al., 2009), steering places in new directions (Bailey *et al*., 2010), and explaining why some places succeed whilst others decline (Rodríguez-Pose, 2013). A growing body of research is thus underway which attempts to provide some insights for shedding light on what leadership looks like in contemporary place settings. Key thinkers in the field of urban and regional studies include, amongst others, Andrew Beer and Markku Sotarauta who in particular have encouraged and inspired the research undertaken here. Their work has gone some way in opening up a debate and offering new avenues for exploration, in response to previous research that has fallen short in examining the locally driven aspects of sub-national development over broader structural influences. As such, studying the leadership dimension of place is contended to expose "aspects of the

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[2] Other key terms to describe leadership include, amongst others, 'local leadership', 'urban leadership', 'place-based leadership', 'city leadership' and 'city-regional leadership'.

motivations and contributions of the human entity that are a useful complement to those insights derived from inquiry into structures, regimes and systems" (Horlings, 2013; p.2).

However, with no single theory of either 'leadership' or 'place', defining place leadership in any systematic way has proven difficult. Nevertheless, some basic ideas exist. Hambleton (2011; p.7), for example, refers to place leadership as "all leadership activity that serves a public purpose in a given locality", whilst others describe place leadership as moving beyond traditional roles and hierarchies towards collaborative relationships based on trust and collaboration (Stimson *et al*, 2002, cited in Beer & Clower, 2014). Whilst useful for creating a discussion, these ideas are not far-reaching and often uncover further ambiguities to investigate.

Currently, there are many questions being raised in relation to, for instance, 'is this about agency or institutions?', 'how do we measure it?' (Sotarauta, 2016), and "how does leadership differ from partnership or governance?" (Sotarauta, 2014; p.29). These questions are indicative of the unknowns that currently surround the notion of leadership. This research aims to provide a valuable contribution to understanding the scope and operationalisation of place leadership within a contemporary governance context in England.

As previously noted, however, place leadership does not work independently; it only exists within the system that it is embedded. An investigation of place leadership, therefore, demands an inspection of the wider political and economic composition of the state that defines the conditions under which local leaders are operating. This is important for understanding the connection between the manifestation of leadership in place and a broader system of governance beyond place (Beer, 2014). This study therefore also examines the impact of broader policy and governance structures on leadership, as well as the interactions that occur in the space in between.

In doing so, a number of distinctions need to be drawn concerning various forms of governance. In simple terms, a governance system is traditionally described as being either centralist or localist (Bentley *et al*., 2010) with the idea that in more localist states the potential for local leadership is higher. Other levels of assessment include 'multi-level governance' (Pearce, 2001), 'partnership working' (Fenwick, 2015) and 'institutional thickness' (Amin & Thrift, 1994) (details are provided in Chapter 2).

Therefore in the English context that is based on a centralised system of governance, it might be expected that local leadership activity is a 'more challenging proposition' (Beer, 2014; p.260) in comparison to more localist states. However, with a current urban paradigm of devolving decision-making powers and resources from central to sub-national governments in England, it might be expected that an opportunity is opening up for local leaders to have more influence within local development. This is beginning to place local and regional leaders under the spotlight for their capacity to think strategically, collectively deliver services and, in the context of austerity, manage reduced local budgets. These circumstances make England a particularly interesting context to study sub-national leadership and governance.

The ideology behind moving from a more centralised to a more localised system of governance is not unique to England but is being globally recognised in response to an increasingly complex urban setting that continues to pose new problems. The New Urban Growth Agenda in 2017, for example, proposes that national governments support the conditions for more local autonomy at the sub-national level:

> "We will, in line with national legislations, support strengthening the capacity of sub-national and local governments to implement effective local and metropolitan multi-level governance, across administrative borders, and based on functional territories, ensuring the involvement of sub-national and local governments in decision-making, working to provide them with necessary authority and resources to manage critical urban, metropolitan, and territorial concerns."

> [Habitat III, 2017; p.23]

This study, therefore, draws on a body of research that seeks to conceptualise and understand the structures, processes and practices that underlie the structures of sub-national governance, giving a special focus to those that have examined the English context in the years since a new localist, city-regional devolution agenda became apparent in 2010 (see Ayres *et al*., 2017a; Bailey & Wood, 2017; Bentley *et al*., 2016; Haughton *et al*., 2016; Hincks *et al*., 2017; Etherington & Jones, 2016; Lowndes & McCaughie, 2013; O'Brien & Pike, 2015; Pike *et al*., 2016; Rees & Lord, 2013; and Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2016). This research has looked at the reshaping and scope of the new system of governance, the rules and norms that underpin it and, importantly, how national policy is translating into local action.

The discussion above begins to consider place leadership as operating in line with a wider system of governance, policy and institutions. Another dimension that is also important to consider, however, is the significance that particular place contexts play in influencing the actions of its leaders for which, as previously described, distinct territorial make-ups and path-dependencies will likely feature prominently. Thus, the research problem that this study responds to sits at the intersect of *policy*, *place* and *agency* for examining leadership and governance in the context of city-regional devolution in England. In order to contextualise this study, the next section introduces the foundations upon which current urban policies are built and which have influenced the development journeys of places over several decades.

1.3 A Recent History of Urban Policy Reform in England

1.3.1 Connecting *policy*, *place* and *agency*

The connection between *policy*, *place* and *agency* in England became apparent in the late 1970s when the pace of globalisation accelerated. During this time, place was considered "an arena in which generic or society-wide factors – such as de-industrialisation – were combined in particular ways to produce specific mixtures of results on the ground" (Collinge & Gibney, 2010; p.381). As such, place-shaping was thought of as a top-down process controlled by global and national forces (Massey, 1994), and policies were set nationally and delegated out towards local government that provided an administrative base for the organisation and delivery of these. This consolidated their position as managers or facilitators, rather than leaders of a place for which key tasks, including land-use planning, property management and environmental services, were led by specific departments that operated within professional 'silos' under each local authority (Collinge & Gibney, 2010).

By the early 1990s, increasing concern over the weaknesses of this model resulted in a change in emphasis towards a more joined-up approach to urban policy. This reflected, in part, the growing recognition of the significance of place contexts. For example, as Healey (1998; p.3 in Collinge & Gibney, 2010) states "there is strong evidence of a reassertion of place-focused concerns in public policy… and if public policy has to acknowledge that 'geography matters', then the challenge for public policy… is to develop the institutional capability to respond to concerns about placemaking in the

contemporary period". This idea was also founded upon the increasing importance being attached to achieving sustainable and equitable policy outcomes at the time (Mawson & Hall, 2000, in Collinge & Gibney, 2010), as well as the need for cross-boundary working (Gibney *et al.*, 2009).

The introduction of City Challenge in 1991 marked the first policy attempt towards achieving this transition, and, in the years that followed, a reinsertion of place to the urban policy agenda was rolled-out in the shape of the Single Regeneration Budget (1994), the Social Exclusion Unit (1997), Regional Development Agencies (1998), the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (2000) and, more recently, Local Enterprise Partnerships (2011) and Combined Authorities (2011-present).

The election of the UK Coalition Government in May 2010 marked a critical juncture for urban policy development in England, with a new urban paradigm premised on allowing local government 'new freedoms and flexibilities', communities and individuals 'new rights and powers', and increasing private-sector involvement in local strategies (HM Government, 2011). This has included the creation of new growth coalitions between the public and private sector. The creation of 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in 2011, described as "joint local authority-business bodies brought forward by local authorities themselves to promote economic development" (HM Government, 2010; p.10), became "the government's chosen engine for local growth" (Lord Heseltine, 2012; p.9) early in the process of sub-national governance change. This preceded the establishment of eight combined authorities (CAs) that mapped, to variable degrees, onto the geographies of eight newly formed city-regions outside of London as legal representative bodies for delivering local policy. This has also gone alongside an increasing expectation for public service delivery that is cross-sector and multi-agency in response to an austerity programme to reduce public spending.

In 2015, the election of a majority Conservative government gave this agenda further impetus. It was at this time that 'devolution deals', attached with the condition of electing a metro mayor and that begun towards the end of the Coalition Government (Greater Manchester being the first city-region to be granted a deal in late-2014), gained

momentum. By mid-2016, a total of nine devolution deals had been made with seven of the city-regions, six of which elected their first Metro Mayor in May 2017[3].

Whilst in many ways this is a continuation of what came before, this new approach has witnessed quite a significant shift in the scale and organisation of sub-national governance. It has also seen a renewed emphasis on ideology around, for instance, 'innovation', 'entrepreneurship' and 'knowledge exchange' (Mabey & Freeman, 2010), as well as new ways for central-local negotiation based on deal-making.

Overall, the English urban story over this period has followed two important shifts in global debates. Firstly, as Wang & Oakes (2016; p.ix) claim "in today's globalised, knowledge-driven and networked world, regions and cities have assumed heightened significance as the interconnected nodes of economic, social and cultural production, and as sites of new modes of economic and territorial governance and policy experimentation". This follows a significant rise in research over the last 20 years or more that has emphasised the role of cities as centres for creating economic growth (Glaeser, 2011; Jessop, 1990). Secondly, these changes also mark a move from 'local government' to 'local governance', the latter referring to "the processes and structures of a variety of public, private, and community and voluntary sector bodies at the local level" (Hambleton, 2011; p.6). This has meant a rolling out of urban policy over the years by which a move towards the regional narrative, and more recently the local narrative, marks an obstinate shift in English politics (Clarke & Cochrane, 2013). For many urban researchers, this move reflects the transformation of state space in response to a process of 'neoliberalization' (see Brenner & Theodore, 2002).

1.3.2   From rhetoric to reality: What does the new city-regional devolution agenda mean for local leadership and governance?

The previous section outlined a shift in urban policy in England towards increasing local capacity to drive local growth. However, the authenticity of localism has been heavily challenged. For example, accusations have been made of a spectacular growth of place-less power over the last forty years in England, with Hambleton (2014) pointing to a significant 142 centralising measures being attached to the 2011 Localism

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[3] Included in the first round of Mayoral Elections in May 2017 were Greater Manchester, the West Midlands, Liverpool City Region, the West of England, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and Tees Valley.

Act. Furthermore, introduced in the wake of the 2008 economic crash and an outed deficit of national accounts, Hildreth (2016) states that fiscal austerity is an attempt by central government to retain central control and manage relationships between the state and the local via restrictive funds and competitive bidding.

A series of discrepancies, deficiencies and contradictions have also been identified in relation to the discourse, intent and practice of the current city-regional devolution agenda in England. Fenwick (2015) for instance explains this by using the example of the contradictory sentiment of local places being encouraged to 'think big' in relation to city-regionalism, public-private partnerships and shared services, whilst being encouraged to 'think small' in relation to 'localism' and increasing community engagement. Furthermore, the tools and resources available to local leaders and institutions under devolution have been contested, with questions raised over the powers and long-term prospects of city-region governance (see Bentley *et al.*, 2016) and the opportunity for civic leadership (Hambleton, 2014a). Furthermore, Fullan (2001) explains how a rapid pace of churn in the system of governance creates a leadership environment that is inefficient, difficult to make sense of, and demoralising for those who continually have to change their approach.

Nevertheless, a new urban policy model since 2010 has had very real implications for sub-national governance and leadership in England, with a number of new and unfamiliar challenges for local leaders to contend with. For example, beyond becoming accustomed to representing a place rather than simply an organisation or local council, local leaders are now deemed to be increasingly judged by outcomes that are less concrete and more uncertain (MacNeill & Steiner, 2010). Furthermore, with the many actors, sectors and organisations now involved in leading a place, local leadership has become much more complex. Hence as Peters (2011; p.11 in Hambleton, 2013) points out, "governing has never been easy", but within the current context, "…it has become all the more complicated... The process of governing now involves more actors, more policy areas that impinge upon one another, and most importantly involves a wider range of goals". To this end, it is plausible to suggest that local leaders are left grappling with and trying to make sense of a new policy and governance environment that, as the evidence presented above suggests, is throwing out conflicting ideas and an unpredictable setting for local leaders to comprehend. Yet, equally, it is feasible to suggest that a change towards devolution is, however small, allowing for more local involvement, creativity and transformation.

1.4   Establishing a Research Agenda for Mid-sized Cities

Mid-sized cities have often been ignored or overlooked by urban scholars and policymakers that have tended to prioritise the urban experiences of the 'big cities', or indeed 'global cities' such as New York, London and Paris (for examples see Harvey, 1989; Sassen, 1991, 2009), at the expense of the 'smaller', 'less important' or 'junior partner' places. Whilst their exclusion has been recognised for some time - with Hardoy and Satterthwaite claiming in 1986 that "small and intermediate urban centres remain the least studied and perhaps the least understood elements within national and regional urban systems" (p.6) - mid-sized cities remain a largely under-theorised entity of the urban system. As a result, Western policy has been greatly influenced by a 'big city narrative' (Cox & Longlands, 2016), with preconceptions that findings can be applied across the broad spectrum of urban areas that exist. However, the exclusion of mid-sized cities, which are "sprinkled almost continuously over the globe" (Clancey, 2004; p.2337-8), fails to appreciate the full range of "urban form and function" which makes up the urban system in its entirety (Bell and Jayne, 2009; p.683), with approximately half of all city-dwellers living in cities with a population of less than 500,000 (UN, 2014; p.1).

Published in November 2002, a report of the 'Rochester Conversation' on mid-sized cities provided one of the first insights for making a place for mid-sized cities within public policy in the US and Canada. Referring to mid-sized cities as 'special places', the report also set out the scope for the study of mid-sized cities. This spurred an interest amongst urban researchers to "think big about thinking small" (Bell & Jayne, 2009; p.684), and a growing body of research now exists that attempts to achieve a deeper understanding of the urban experiences of mid-sized cities (see Kunzmann, 2010; Lorentzen, 2012; and Marlow, 2013).

Globalisation and technological shifts have forced mid-sized cities out of their traditional, heavily industrialised sectors towards the provision of services. Whilst this experience is not unique to mid-sized cities, these places, unlike others, often fall short of the resources, infrastructures, skills, and institutional capacities required to compete against larger cities that benefit from fast-growing agglomeration economies (Sotomayor & Flatt, 2017). Furthermore, their position is claimed to have been made

worse by the tendency of Western governments to favour larger, more competitive urban metropoles for funding and investment (Kresl & Ietri, 2016). To this effect, many mid-sized cities have experienced a prolonged period of relative decline, with rising inequality between mid-sized cities and larger cities. However, against these limitations, there are several opportunities that are opening up for mid-sized cities to redefine their futures, and recent insights have suggested that mid-sized cities have reached a 'turning point' in their development (Bradford, 2017).

In the context of housing shortages, soaring house prices, and high living costs in the big cities, mid-sized cities are becoming more affordable places to live, especially for first-time buyers (Sotomayor & Flatt, 2017). Mid-sized cities are also being increasingly recognised for potentially offering a better quality of life, particularly in relation to shorter commuting times (Donoghue, 2014). Furthermore, in England evidence has come to light recently that indicates that many mid-sized cities are outperforming average national growth (Bolton & Hildreth, 2013), and there are claims for new opportunities opening up for smaller cities to contribute towards local decision-making in line with city-regional devolution (Harrison, 2016a). This recent change in approach therefore arguably presents a chance for mid-sized cities to play a more central role in local decision-making, in a way that meets the needs of their local area and could increase their position within the urban hierarchy (Lorentzen, 2012). For these reasons, amongst others, it would appear that mid-sized cities have the potential to play a major part in the future of global and national economies, for which a richer understanding of their processes, forms and functions could help to ensure that policymakers are making the most of their potential. The Centre for Towns that was established in late-2017 has begun to respond to this call, an autonomous organisation focused on providing research and analysis on towns in Britain.

On the other hand, the current institutional and policy context in England also presents a threat to mid-sized cities (Marlow, 2013) given the current emphasis being placed on core cities. Thus in a context in which a mid-sized city has neither the political might nor the collective weight of a core city, it is feasible to suggest that local level leadership and governance conditions may be all the more important for mid-sized cities to overcome the challenges and make real the opportunities of city-regional devolution. This also responds to previous research by Bailey *et al*. (2010) which suggests that 'place-renewing leadership' is an especially important factor for turning around the development paths of places that have been negatively affected by deindustrialisation.

Of course, leadership is only part of the challenge, but it appears that the time is ripe to be taking seriously the leadership and governance capacities of mid-sized cities.

1.5   Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this thesis is to make a contribution to knowledge on sub-national governance and leadership under austerity, through a case study of a mid-sized city. This is examined in the context of an emerging city-regional devolution landscape in England since 2010. The aim is supported by the following three research objectives:

1. To *investigate* how sub-national leaders in England are navigating the emerging city-regional policy landscape in the context of austerity and a push towards more devolved governance, from the perspective of a mid-sized city;

2. To *explore* the nature, scope and operationalisation of city leadership in England, as well as the behaviours and practices that influence it, within a mid-sized city in the context of devolved city-regional governance under austerity;

3. To *conceptualise* and *understand* the structures, processes and practices that underlie the contemporary city-regional devolution governance and leadership landscape in England under austerity, from a case study of a mid-sized city.

Firstly, the purpose of research objective one is to understand the emergence of devolved city-regional governance and uncover the perceptions, practices and relational dynamics of the institutions and leaders within it. Positioning these within the broader policy context, it also brings to the fore how structures and agents interact to influence the manifestations of leadership and governance at different levels on the ground. Secondly, the purpose of research objective two is to explore the nature, scope and operationalisation of city leadership, as well as the behaviours and practices that influence it, within a mid-sized city context. The discussion draws particularly on the issues of path-dependency, austerity and partnership working. Thirdly, the purpose of research objective three is to bring together the key findings uncovered from research objectives one and two to pull out a number of key themes that distil the essence of contemporary city-regional devolution in England.

By addressing the research objectives outlined above, the research provides a valuable insight into sub-national leadership and governance under a city-regional devolution policy agenda in England. It does this by drawing on experience and knowledge of frontline practitioners on the ground, within a substantive setting. In doing so, it looks at leadership and governance challenges in 'place' given the importance of its embedded nature and of particular local circumstance. However, as previously mentioned, the research also speaks to wider debates on the topic internationally by conceptually and empirically developing existing understandings of sub-national leadership and governance. Moreover, it brings to the fore a mid-sized city perspective for exploring these and for understanding the relational dynamics between a mid-sized city and a core city within a city-region. These are nuanced insights that add to contemporary leadership and governance scholarship as is explained in detail below.

1.6   Research Origin and Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis originally emerged as part of a broader endeavour to address the issue of *place resilience*, as well as the possibilities for local change in the face of sub-national governance restructuring and fiscal austerity. This was in response to the rise of interest in the concept of 'resilience' post the 2008 crisis, both within policy and local and regional development literature (see Bristow & Healy, 2014; Martin *et al.*, 2015). To put simply, this describes the ability of a place to 'bounce back' following a crisis, aligning this to the 2008 economic crash. This rise in emphasis however also coincided with the election of a new Coalition government in 2010 that brought a new 'localism' agenda alongside plans for a long period of austerity.

However, given that place resilience, broadly speaking, involves a vast number of influences, the intention was to narrow down the focus as the thesis evolved and as the political and economic context in England continued to take on new dynamics. Thus in allowing the research to speak for itself, the course of the first year of research led towards an investigation of local leadership and governance within an urban policy setting. This topic in particular not only appealed to the researcher's interest but also reflected timely external policy developments in relation to the early implementation of LEPs and Combined Authorities (CAs). These were in reflection of the city-region as the new sub-national scale to implement local and regional policy. It was also at this

time when the proposition of devolution deals and metro mayors was firmly on the horizon. Taken together, the local governance and leadership setting was changing rapidly, and this called for research that aimed to provide a level of clarity and understanding of a new era of local leadership and governance in England. This research also came at a time when "renewed political leadership, rising voter turnouts, higher level of civic engagement and younger political faces are revitalising politics and opening a new window of opportunity to do things differently" (Sotomayor & Flatt, 2017; p.9).

This decision was also in consideration of the case under study, which provided an interesting setting for a study of place leadership and governance following a number of publically outed leadership and governance failings between the years of 2000 and 2010 (further details will be provided in section 6.2 in Chapter 6).

More broadly, this was also in recognition of leadership and governance affecting, to varying degrees, every single component of the urban system in its entirety. An investigation of local leadership and governance also serves well an enquiry of resilient places, which goes back to the original intention of the study.

A search of the literature confirmed the need for more research in this field. However, it should be noted that in the years since the early stages of this study, research has emerged that is opening up a fruitful debate around a new system of sub-national governance in England (see Ayres *et al*., 2017a; Bailey & Wood, 2017; Bentley *et al*., 2016; Haughton *et al*., 2016; and Hincks *et al*., 2017; Etherington & Jones, 2016; Lowndes & McCaughie, 2013; O'Brien & Pike, 2015; Pike *et al*., 2016; Rees & Lord, 2013; and Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2016). Given these recent contributions, therefore, this thesis adds knowledge to a growing debate around an evolving city-regional devolution governance context. It also adds to a growing discussion about the significant role that place leadership plays in responding to change and for acting strategically to ensure that local and regional development objectives are realised (Beer & Clower, 2014; Hambleton, 2014a; Sotarauta, 2016). We still have much to learn, for example, about the particular ways in which the new structures of city-regional governance are being interpreted and implemented on the ground, as well as how city leadership, as part of this wider institutional and regulatory city-regional and national framework, is being enacted in the context of austerity and devolution.

This thesis, therefore, adds knowledge to ideas on leadership and governance in a grounded, distinct and substantive setting, providing a greater level of depth for understanding city-regional governance and leadership than mostly broader narratives. However, the focus is less on what happens and more on the way it happens in order for lessons to be learnt both nationally and globally. Furthermore, in recognising that places on the periphery are a worthy object of research within urban studies, it sheds new light on the mid-sized city experience within this context as well as mid-sized city vis-à-vis core city relationships within a city-region. The mid-sized city element of the research thus brings a nuanced perspective for exploring these issues that go beyond the big city-centrism that often dominates these debates. This research also has practical relevance for policymakers and place leaders for navigating, making arrangements, and suggesting ways forward for the future evolution of city-regional devolution.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

This introduction has provided an overview of the research presented in this thesis, which is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 provides a detailed account of the theoretical and policy framing of the thesis, taking the reader through a recent history of major socio-political developments that have fed into the existing urban and economic policy setting in England.

Chapter 3 offers a detailed but succinct review of the literature on governance and leadership, giving focus to how theories have changed over time as well as an emerging body of literature which examines their contemporary formations. A conceptual framework is then presented at the end of this chapter, which considers the evidence from both Chapters 2 and 3 that assists in grounding and understanding the empirical research discussed later in the thesis.

Chapter 4 revisits the research aim and objectives, and provides a detailed description and justification of the techniques that were used to collect, process and analyse the data collected. This chapter also provides a detailed account of the case study context.

Chapter 5 marks a turn towards presenting the empirical findings of the research, investigating the emergence of devolved city-regional governance and the ways in which local institutions and leaders are navigating this new policy landscape. It brings

to the fore the perceptions, conditions, and practice of city-regional governance, as well as how structures and agents interact to influence the manifestation of sub-national leadership and governance on the ground.

Chapter 6 explores the nature, scope and operationalisation of city leadership, as well as the behaviours and practices that influence it, as part of a wider intuitional city-regional framework, within a mid-sized city context. More specifically, this chapter examines how leadership is being enacted in the context of austerity and growing expectations for leading in a way that endorses cross-sector partnership working. This follows a similar style to Chapter 5, but with a focus on the scale of the city.

Chapter 7 draws upon the empirical evidence of the case study (presented in Chapters 5 and 6) to capture the essence of city-regional devolution in England. It is also in this chapter that the mid-sized city experience is drawn upon in more depth. This is achieved by focusing upon a number of dominant themes that contribute to existing ideas in the fields of governance and leadership; particularly those which have focused on the city-regional devolution policy landscape in England to explore these.

Chapter 8 draws upon the discussions and findings laid out in all previous chapters to set out the study's key findings and contributions, provide research reflections, and outline the potential for future research.

Figure 1 below provides a summary diagram that charts the flow of the thesis.
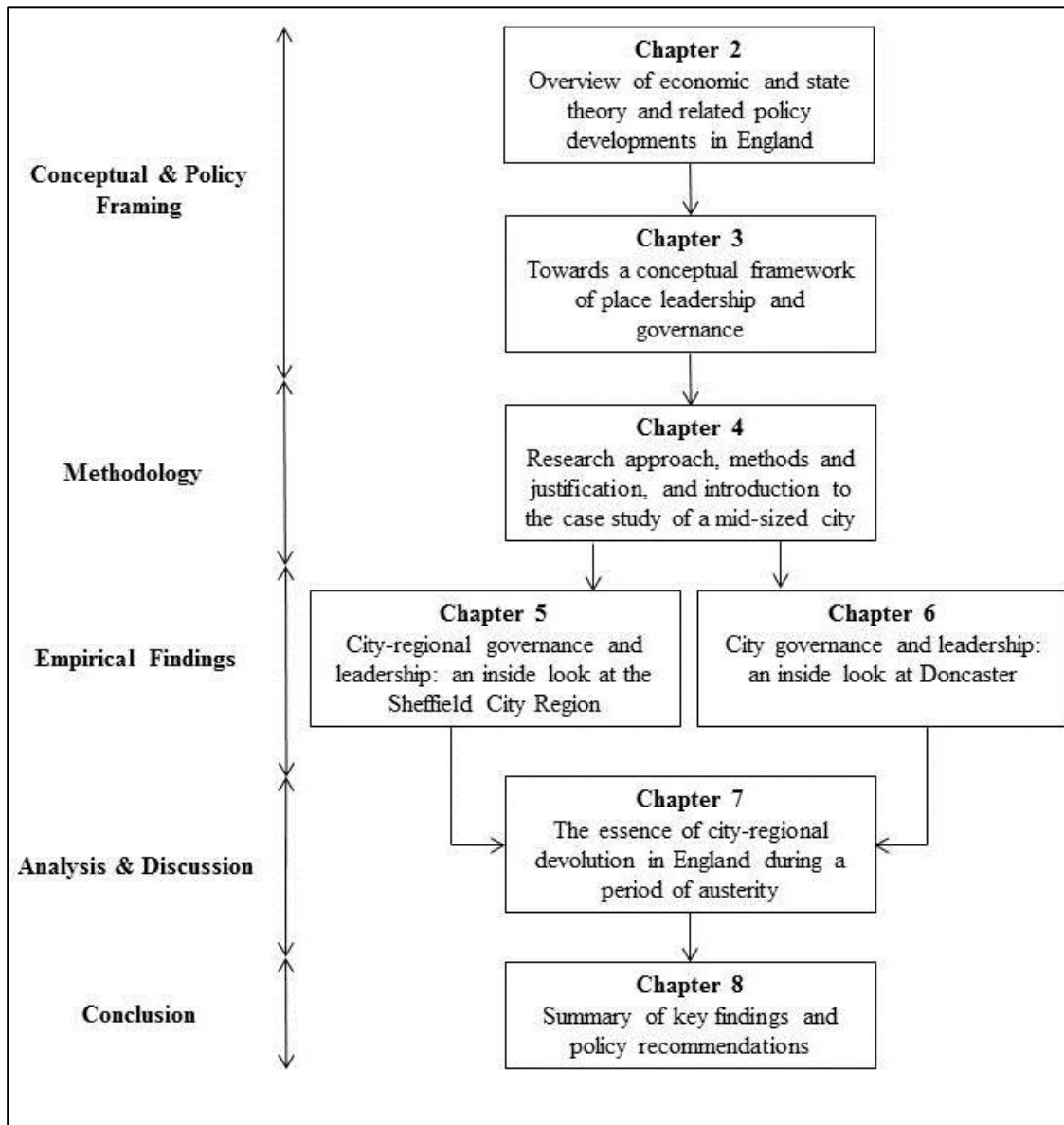
Figure 1: Summary diagram of the thesis. *Author*.

Chapter 2. THEORETICAL AND POLICY FRAMING: A RECENT HISTORY OF URBAN POLICY AND GOVERNANCE IN ENGLAND

2.1 Introduction

This chapter delivers a broad overview of urban and economic policy in theory and practice. More specifically, it examines the relationships, structures and forces that have moulded the urban policy and governance landscape in England over recent decades; linking wider global processes with national and local policy outcomes. Overall, this provides a theoretical and policy framing upon which this thesis rests.

Taking on a thematic structure, section 2.2 will draw upon theories of the state to establish a broad ideological framework that can assist in explaining the development of urban policy in England across space and over time. The intention of section 2.3 is then to provide a more 'geographically sensitive' and 'historically literate' narrative of national politics and related economic and governance policy in England since the late 1970s (Pike *et al*., 2015). This will consider the key eras of urban policy over this period right up to the present-day; providing a detailed description of the contemporary city-regional devolution policy agenda that was introduced in Chapter 1 according to key literature. As the discussion unfolds, it will highlight "a history of unsettled economic development policy and shifting institutional arrangements between national, regional and local scales" (Pike *et al*, 2016; p.9) that, in other words, lays to bare a relentless reordering and reorientation of urban policy and governance in England. In reflection of the policy developments outlined in section 2.3, section 2.4 will then move onto consider the somewhat disjointed and at times illogical process of policymaking.

2.2 Urban and Economic Policy in Theory

Insights into the theoretical foundations that have shaped urban and economic policy are the focus of this section. These are important to consider in their exposure of a set of beliefs about the organisation of the economy that, beginning in the late 1970s, have been deeply ingrained within Western policy and politics and which have influenced

and shaped the urban landscape into its current form. Beginning with the expansion of neoliberalism in the late 1970s, this section draws on several theories from the social and political sciences that have been used to explain the transformation of the state in response to a new ideological context of laissez-faire economic liberalism (see Jessop, 2004; Jones & Ward, 2002).

2.2.1   From a Keynesian to a Neoliberal approach

A Keynesian approach to the order of the state was underpinned by 'managerialism', with importance shown towards central government intervention and regulation and local input in national programmes (Hackworth, 2007). Whilst originating in the 19th century, this doctrine found its heyday in the 30-year period following the Second World War. During this time, central government was positioned as the overseer to ensure full employment and sustain employment in declining industries, protect workers' rights, encourage private investment in regions that were struggling, and provide welfare services for all (Gough *et al*, 2006). However, the decline of mass production industries in the late 1970s (Amin, 1999) paved the way for the uptake of a new doctrine known as 'neoliberalism' in view of a more flexible, service-led, and 'informational' global economy (Hall & Jacques, 1989).

Neoliberalism is a political project characterised by "a deep, taken-for-granted belief in neoclassical economics" favouring market regulation rather than state intervention for solving economic problems (Dumenil & Levy, 2001; p.5). As opposed to what came previously, Fuller and Geddes (2008) argue that policy initiatives under this regime have favoured low taxation, a minimised welfare state and increased labour market flexibility, and similarly Moody (1997) describes neoliberalism as the domination of capital over citizens.

2.2.2   "Actually Existing Neoliberalism" and Third Way politics

Taken at face value, neoliberalism presents a 'one size fits all' ideal of policymaking. However, this overlooks the conflicts and inconsistencies that are revealed when consumed by the institutional and policy contexts specific to national, regional and local contexts (Brenner & Theodore, 2002).

Writing in 2002, Brenner and Theodore speak of "the contradictory and chronically unstable geographies of *actually existing neoliberalism*" (p.349) (emphasis added). Similarly, Peck and Tickell (2002) argue for a process of 'neoliberalization' in an effort to convene the state and the market given the disjuncture that exists between an ideological self-regulating market for the optimum allocation of resource, and the actuality of growing economic and social inequality caused by diminished payouts and competitive disadvantage (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Similarly, Giddens (1998) puts forward his ideas for a Third Way political agenda whereby growth, wealth creation and entrepreneurship are favoured alongside greater social equity. These ideas coincided with a change in the global political climate at this time with a transition from Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Raegan in the 1980s that were radically anti-state, to the more 'socially correct' neoliberals of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton in the late 1990s. Yet Jordan (2010) describes the key failure of a Third Way politics as the inability to perform ethical practices within a market economy that is exploitative by nature.

Following a brief discussion of the shift that took place in the late 1970s from Keynesian to Neoliberal economics, the discussion will now turn towards the impact of this new politico-economic context on the structure and operation of urban policy.

2.2.3   Governance and governmentality

In response to a change in the politico-economic context guided by neoliberalism, there was a shift from 'government' to 'governance' (Geddes, 2005; Jessop, 2000). This denotes the neoliberal state as moving from the role of provider to 'mediator', for which Larner (2000; p.12) states that "while neoliberalism may mean less government, it does not follow that there is less governance". Under this new system, therefore, statutory powers of the central state are thought to have become marginalised (Swyngedouw *et al*., 2002), replaced with a more decentralised, informal structure made up of state and non-state actors.

The notion of governance has delivered "many ways to theorise the shifting power relations between the state, interest groups and civil society over the last thirty years" (Griffin, 2012; p.208). In policy terms, this has been witnessed by the spatial decentralisation of urban development programmes which are now performed by networks and partnerships (Gough *et al*., 2006), as well as the growing dependence on

stakeholders and institutions from the public, private and voluntary sectors to take up key positions and encourage innovation (Griffin, 2012). Bentley *et al.* (2016; p.5) refer to 'horizontal' governance to describe the coming together of sub-national actors and 'vertical' governance to denote nation-local relations, illustrated in Figure 1 below.
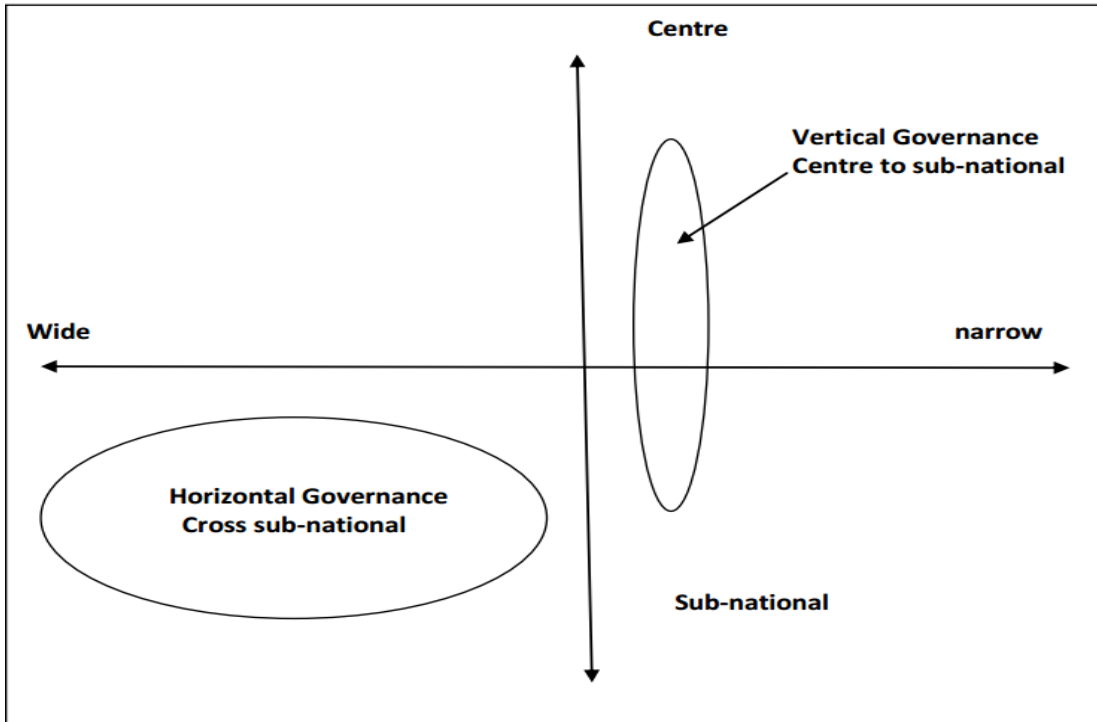
Figure 2: Horizontal and vertical governance. Source: Bentley *et al.* (2016)

Brenner (1998) refers to a 'hollowing out of the state', by which power is 'up-scaled' towards transnational corporations and 'down-scaled' towards actors and institutions at a regional and/or local level, leaving an empty space in the centre. Similarly, Swyngedouw (1992; 2004) introduced the concept of 'glocalisation' to refer to the transfer of power to both local and transnational levels. Offering a slightly different perspective however, Benington and Harvey (1994) speak of overlapping 'spheres of authority', and Rosenau (1995) goes further to contest what is an assumed withdrawal of the state to suggest that governance still adheres to a hierarchical structure despite the need for horizontal working to navigate a more complex policy environment. Similarly, Bentley *et al.* (2016) note that far from being clear-cut, national government intervenes and intersects horizontal spaces of governance. This has led to the contemporary arrangements for governing becoming "a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers" (Marks, 1993; p.392).

Furthermore, the term 'networked governance' has been used to describe the wide array of actors now operating across different sectors and at different scales. One application provided by Griffin (2012; p.211) refers to the "relationships between interdependent actors that exist around resource dependencies". Rhodes (1997) makes reference to 'many centres of power' which are dependent on each other for resource distribution. Other scholars have taken on a more structuralist approach by which power relations found in governance networks are unequal (Jones, 2001). Griffin (2007), for example, suggests that private stakeholders have increasingly gained more influence under this system by representing the voice of capitalism.

'Governmentality' has also been used to explain how the "various forms of neoliberal rationality are mobilised by and through the state" (Haughton *et al.*, 2013; p.220). Often taking on a post-structuralist perspective, this describes a situation whereby the "'minimal state' pervades under the 'turn towards governance', impalpably but powerfully altering and policing the behaviour of political agents" (Griffin, 2012; p.213). This concept, therefore, questions the agency of the non-state actors now involved in governance. As such, Bentley *et al.* (2016; p.1) refer to "the controlling mechanisms of the national system of governance", whilst Stein (2008; p.216) note how "faced with new problems, states can extend the scope of extant institutions or create new ones". The next section looks at how the concepts of institutionalism and actor-network theory have been used to add some stability to an economy that Amin (1999) argues is fundamentally irrational, imperfect and unstable.

2.2.4 Institutionalism and Actor-Network Theory

Institutions are described as shaping state behaviour, especially in relation to the increasingly influential role of supranational institutions such as the World Trade Organisation, United Nations, and International Monetary Fund (Stein, 2008). Conversely, others have concentrated on the influence of institutions in the development of places on a much narrower scale (North, 1990; Amin & Thrift, 1995; Rodríguez-Pose, 2013). As such, despite the difficulty of quantifying the institutional impact on policy practice (Rodríguez-Pose, 2013; Beer & Lester, 2015), there is now a widely shared view that institutions are pivotal for determining the growth trajectories of places (Bailey *et al.*, 2014; Tomaney, 2014).

North (1990), and later Amin and Thrift (1995), present the notion of 'institutional thickness' to describe a policy environment whereby the more institutionally dense a place, the higher the expectations for growth and innovation. However, in response to more recent works which have exposed the drawbacks of this concept by referring to, for example, issues of overcrowding, Rodríguez-Pose (2013) introduced the concept of 'institutional effectiveness' to argue that having the right combination of institutions that are effective in a place is more important than the number (Beer & Lester, 2015). Adding another dimension to the discussion, others have emphasised the distinctness of institutions between places. Morgan (2007), for example, refers to institutions as being specific to and shaped by their place. Furthermore, others have also differentiated between 'formal' institutions that operate according to laws and regulations, and 'informal' institutions such as the norms, values and habits of individuals or groups (Amin, 1999).

Actors have also been considered as an essential component of this system, especially when speaking in terms of networks that require active participants to take part in the interaction, movement and processes of governance (Montenegro & Bulgacov, 2014). Each actor, who fosters their own impression of the organisation of the economy, is thought to be involved in a continuous dialect with other actors whereby decision-making and activities take place (Montenegro & Bulgacov, 2014). As such, given what is likely to be conflicting ideas and beliefs, actor relationships are important to "converge their interests in a direction of a common goal" (Tureta *et al*., 2006; p.2 in Montenegro & Bulgacov, 2014). To this end, actor-network theory has been used to describe the constant negotiation taking place between actors in different knowledge settings and legislative cultures (Latour, 1986). Thus given that each place has its own distinct set of institutions and actors, attempting to provide any sort of blanket policy reform that suits all places is immensely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Hence turning around institutions that are often deeply embedded in a place arguably requires more than a change in approach to policymaking (Beer & Lester, 2015).

2.2.5   Rescaling the 'local' and global-local linkages

A shift towards governance and decentralisation has taken place via a restructuring and 'rescaling' of the state. Many urban scholars have therefore viewed scale as an

important means for understanding this new context, offering a "theoretical lens through which to analyse the workings of governance and politics" (Agnew, 2013; p.2).

A neoliberal system has, in large part, perceived 'the local' as the most suitable scale with which to accommodate its core values (Peck & Tickell, 2002). Brenner (2004) describes a spatial transformation of state activities in what he brands 'rescaled competition state regimes'. As such, Brenner (2004) asserts a replacement of previous central state control via a restructuring of scales at sub-national levels. According to Swyngedouw (1992; 2004), these new state spaces are created due to a development in 'urban locational policies' in which urban regions are targeted for investment and intervention. This has meant a 'revival of the local' as the 'key institutional arena' with which to implement policy (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). The scale at which 'the local' has been defined however has been subject to a series of different interpretations. The outcome has been a constantly changing relationship between the state and civil society which has, consequently, resulted in an increased fragmentation of urban governance, which has been characterised by greater territorial and fiscal competition, a retraction of democratic responsibility, and short-termism (Brenner, 2004).

Therefore the expansion of capital over recent decades can be seen, on the one hand, as breaching geographical borders whilst, on the other, creating new ones, continuously redefining and reorganising the spatial and temporal limits within which capital, commodities, information and people flow (Swyngedouw, 2004).

Fluctuations in politics, especially during episodes of political, economic and social disorder, produce and define the spatial scale of the moment: a practice referred to by Smith (1984) as the 'jumping of scales'. It is imperative to consider these scalar issues since the pre-eminence of the 'global', together with its free-flowing networks of capital and investment, risks silencing a constant spatial struggle in which 'the local' has become a key arena. And as Jessop (2002) goes on to argue, capitalist network flows are local at every instance but require a particular 'outside' to function.

With this background, Brenner (1998; p.1) defines globalisation as "a highly contradictory reconfiguration of superimposed spatial scales". Furthermore, Brenner (1998; p.1) claims that "the state scale is not being eroded, but rearticulated and reterritorialized in relation to both sub- and supra-state scales" for which "global city formation and state re-scaling are… dialectically intertwined moments of a single

dynamic of global capitalism restructuring". Brenner (2004; p.259) also notes how "national governments now come to view their most globally integrated cities and city-regions as key motors for national economic growth, and thus target them with particular intensity for various types of urban locational policies".

To shed some light on what the 'local' looks like within this nuanced dynamic described above, the next section outlines the increasing significance of the city.

2.2.6 The city, economics of agglomeration & "territorial competitiveness"

A growing body of evidence over the last two decades suggests that cities have become, more than ever before, a fundamental component of the global circuits that make up the global economy (Sassen, 2009). Thus set within an "increasingly complex, specialised and vast" global economy (Sassen, 2009; p.24), attempts have been made to gain a tangible grasp on "the territorial moment of all these increasingly globally dispersed operations". Much of this has been in relation to what has been termed the "growing network of global cities and regions" (Sassen, 2009; p.22), granted global recognition for their role in the "coordination, managing, and servicing" of wealth creation and economic activity for national and global economies. However, in not wanting to overlook the continued role of the state within this new system, other studies have also pointed to the role of cities as the "coordinates of state territorial power" as well as "local-regional levels within a larger, reterritorialized matrix of increasingly 'glocalized' state institutions" (Brenner, 1998; p.1).

Earlier to this, the research of Molotch (1976) suggested that "the object of growth unites otherwise pluralist interests in relation to the city" (Rodgers, 2009; p.3). Positioned within a wider theory concerning the commodification of places, to put simply, Molotch's (1976) main residing principle is that groups of agents and institutions, all of who share an interest in local growth, compete with agents and institutions in other places for inward investment alongside seeking the backing of local stakeholders for local growth (Rodgers, 2009). Thus Molotch's work exposes ideas about the political, economic and social production of place (Rodgers, 2009) and, at the time, offered urban theorists a framework with which to study the people and institutions of urban politics. It was not until some years afterwards, however, that

thinking about the city as an entity of strategic and economic importance was fully embraced in Europe.

The 1990s marked the emergence of a new body of literature known as the New Economic Geography. This looked at how and why cities compete for which ideas have been based on thinking around 'agglomeration economies', a 'concentration of innovation and entrepreneurship' and a 'diversity of information and knowledge resources' (Kourtit *et al*., 2015). The work of Ed Glaeser and Richard Florida, amongst others, provided key insights into the field. Emphasising the link between agglomeration and productivity by means of knowledge spill-overs and improved business links, this marked a turning point that has underpinned the study of urban systems ever since. This also gave rise to a number of think-tanks focusing on cities such as Centre for Cities and IPPR North.

Also emerging at this time was research on 'territorial competitiveness', described as "the formation of policies designed to promote local economic development, often explicitly, but certainly implicitly, in competition with other territories" (Cheshire & Gordon, 1998; p.321). Lever and Turok (1999; p.792) describe 'urban competitiveness' as "the degree to which cities can produce goods and services which meet the test of wider regional, national and international markets, while simultaneously increasing real incomes, improving the quality of life for citizens and promoting development in a manner that is sustainable". Lever and Turok (1999; p.791) also describe how cities "compete for mobile investment, population, tourism, public funds and hallmark events" by "assembling a skilled and educated workforce, efficient modern infrastructure, a responsive system of local governance, a flexible land and property market, high environmental standards and a high quality of life".

However, Fothergill & Houston (2016) challenges the notion of cities as the central hubs of regional growth, describing instead an interdependent relationship between cities and their wider regions (this is explained further in Chapter 4 in section 4.5). This is particularly relevant to the current study, which aims to shed light on mid-sized cities as a significant entity of the city-regional framework.

For Lever (1999), city competitiveness needs to be considered beyond growth indicators towards those that consider the distributed benefits of economic development such as 'sustainability', 'durability' and 'quality of life'. This idea has gained credibility

recently, with cities becoming the "flashpoints both for major economic dislocations and for various forms of sociopolitical struggle" (Brenner & Theodore, 2016; p.63). Thus, as Beel *et al.* (2016; p.513) have argued, current thinking that submits to a pro-neoliberal, urban growth model "celebrates the development of the urban whilst ignoring the structural inequality it creates". Beel *et al.* (2016; p.513) also allude to North American accounts of 'metro' success (Glaeser, 2012) that focus on 'successful' case studies (Harrison, 2006) and present a 'narrow narrative' of agglomeration (Lovering, 2007). Similarly, Haughton *et al.* (2014) refer to the 'boosterism potential' of agglomeration to point to its failure to develop even growth.

2.2.7   Inequality & 'loser cities'

In the wake of deindustrialisation, many cities encountered a period of physical, economic and social decay as their industries fell. Whilst some have been able to adapt and transform, such as Barcelona in Spain (Duarte, 2007) and Lille in France (John & Cole, 1998), many cities have struggled with the adjustment.

Rousseau (2009) refers to a rise of 'loser cities' overcome by a web of social difficulties including high unemployment, low levels of skill and limited inward investment. Drawing upon the case studies of Roubaix and Sheffield in Europe, Rousseau (2009) reveals how cultural policies have been used to attract elite groups with creative capital and business investment to counteract urban decay. Whilst aligning closely with the creative class phenomenon introduced by Florida (2002), this premise also speaks broadly to the idea of 'trickledown economics' with the belief that promoting capital accumulation of the highest strata will benefit disadvantaged groups (Rousseau, 2009). However, whilst reinstating high and middle-class groups occupying central spaces and promoting the urban image, Rousseau (2009) found that affluence only displaces poverty, revealing the force of gentrification for reinforcing segregation and inequality.

More recently, research has exposed the divergence that has been witnessed both within and between places. Martin *et al.* (2015), for example, have examined the separation between cities in post-industrial Britain as the outcome of path-dependencies. Furthermore, Rogers *et al.* (2015) consider the phenomenon of 'job polarisation' between low wage and high wage jobs - otherwise known as the 'hollowing out' of the labour market - to explain the growth of income inequality. Others have also

highlighted the way in which policy, and more specifically sectoral policy, has favoured some places more than others. Gordon (2015), for example, explains the success of London following the 2008 crisis as the result of the British government supporting London and the banking sector over other cities. Drawing on these ideas, Theodore *et al*. (2011; p.24) describe how this inequality and divergence within and between cities "breeds a persistent state of competitive anxiety amongst cities".

Jacobs and Mazzucato (2016) assert that today's economic and social problems are related to the inadequacies of economic theory over recent decades and the failure of policies that have been informed by it. Theodore *et al* (2011; p.18) denote the "unevenly developed and persistently unstable topography" of neoliberalization. Furthermore, Dorling (2011) refers to a broadening gap between the wealthy and the poor, and Sassen (2009; p.25) describes the "extreme concentrations of top-level resources in a limited number of places".

In order to bring the notions covered in section 2.2 to life, the next section will provide a narrative of urban and economic policy in England over this same period. This is needed to bridge the gap between discourse and reality, bring these theories into the real world, and situate the research with a national policy context.

2.3 Urban and Economic Policy in Practice

In England, cities and their hinterlands have been subject to a plethora of urban policy reforms in recent decades (Fuller & Geddes, 2008). These have followed a number of experiential efforts made by a succession of UK governments to reorganise sub-national governance arrangements and reform the geographies of administrative and economic boundaries for which local growth policy is made (Pike & Tomaney, 2009). Yet rather than creating more order, stability and efficiency, it is commonly maintained that this has made for a complex and fragmented system of governance in England (Pike *et al*., 2016). Fenwick (2015; p.7) claims that this is the result of "ad hoc initiatives, with no overall rationale". The discussion below will document these changes within UK politics and wider economic thought to create a dialogue of how the current policy and governance landscape in England came into being.

2.3.1 Conservative, 1979-1997: the demise of 'one nation' regionalism?

Beginning with the Local Government Act of 1972 and followed by an era of "consolidated" and "radical" Thatcherism (Jones & Ward, 2002; p.482), the 1970s and 1980s marked quite a significant transformation in the way the urban policy landscape has been rolled-out in England ever since. Coinciding with the rise of neoliberalism, as well as a significant change in British politics towards far-right Conservative rule, the notion of territorial governance rose to prominence. It was also during this period that the rhetoric and discourse which surrounds modern-day 'localism' and the city as a key site for growth were first born.

Whilst some have equated this change with the deep-seated structural problems faced by many of the major former-industrial cities following the onset of deindustrialisation, as well as the growing spatial inequality that was being felt between London and the South East, and the rest of the UK (see Peck & Tickell, 1995), others have referred more directly to the 'crises of neoliberalism' in which cities are used as an entity to internalise the 'contradictions of accumulation' (see Jones & Ward, 2002; p.482). This change in approach was met with a succession of 'institutional creations' (Jones & Ward, 2002; p.482) and area-based policy initiatives. These included Urban Development Corporations and Enterprise Zones in 1981, City Action Teams in 1985, City Challenge in 1991, and the Single Regeneration Budget in 1994. Earlier efforts were based on bodies coming together at the city scale to target local areas for investment and regeneration, whilst the latter schemes were based more heavily on cities competing against one another for funding. By the mid-1990s, however, a growing case for the regional scale for strategic urban planning and governance had gained momentum and was firmly underway (Harrison, 2007).

2.3.2 New Labour, 1997-2010: a turn back to regionalism?

In a move towards the region which aligned with a more European model of the state (Marks *et al*., 2008), the strategic local governance platform underwent expansion under New Labour (Ayres & Stafford, 2014). Introduced in 1998, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) became the new regulatory sub-national bodies charged with drawing up and implementing regional growth plans (Deas & Ward, 2000). Another major change that came early on was the devolution of substantial powers to Scotland and

Wales, as well as the establishment of the new Greater London Authority which, as stated by Harrison (2007; p.4), was "a territorially institutionalised platform from which to secure London and the South East's position in the global economy". Echoing the previous approach, agglomeration and territorial competitiveness continued to be the preferred approach to growth.

Yet despite a general shift towards regionalism, the neighbourhood scale continued to be the target of certain policies such as the New Deal for Communities (NDCs) Programme that was founded in 1998 (for an outline see North & Syrett, 2008). A closing evaluation of NDCs by Paul Lawless and colleagues at the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research in 2010 found a considerable positive impact for the neighbourhoods targeted and suggested that the programme was good value for money. In a rather different tone, however, other researchers have described how NDCs gave rise to a more complex arrangement, the outcome of which Stoker (2005; p.158) suggests was "New Labour's rather chaotic top-down approach to decentralisation". Furthermore, whilst claiming an agenda in line with 'localism', the autonomy of regions away from state regulation was also highly questioned (Tewdwr-Jones & McNeill, 2000), and as London's success continued to grow, the outlook of other cities was diminishing, particularly in the North of England (Robson, 2004).

This gave rise to the 'Northern Way' programme in 2004 which promoted and encouraged the work of the Core Cities Group which, created back in 1995, continued to have a strong presence in policymaking. Adams (2004; p.1) has argued that it was "one of the most significant initiatives in regional economic policy". Referring to the latter, Harrison (2007) describes how it allowed leaders the opportunity to think and act innovatively. It is also noted for encouraging a resurgence of recognition for the role of place leadership as cross-boundary working and partnership arrangements (i.e. Local Strategic Partnerships) were built into the structures of local governance (Fenwick, 2015).

During this political period, both RDAs (region) and the Core Cities Group (city) provided "a spatial-political response to uneven development" (Harrison, 2007; p.5). Yet despite both institutions having the same end goal in mind, their difference of geographical scale soon became problematic. There was also a lot of disagreement in Whitehall with regards to sub-national governance arrangements at this time (Ayres & Stafford, 2009), and regional institutions were criticised for being futile and lacking

leadership (Pearce & Ayres, 2007 in Ayres & Stafford, 2014). This paved the way for a shift in attention from the region to the city-region in England in 2006, confirmed by a key policy document which stated "successful cities can contribute to competitive regions, stimulating growth and employment, promoting excellence in surrounding areas and joining up separate business hubs to expand existing markets and create new ones" (HM Treasury, 2006; p.1). This encouraged another set of policy initiatives and institutions in the form of Multi Area Agreements in the same year. This period thus put in place important foundations for a city-regional scale of sub-national governance. However, it was not until the arrival of the 2008 financial crisis, followed by the election of a Conservative-led Coalition government in 2010, that the current city-regional agenda firmly found its place in policy.

2.3.3   The Conservative-led Coalition, 2010-2015: the new localism?

Between 2010 and 2015 under a Conservative-led Coalition administration, the pursuit for localism, and more specifically city-regionalism, was firmly back on the agenda with an added emphasis placed on the devolution of budgets and functions. This led to a mass rearrangement of the sub-regional policy landscape, alongside the Coalition's priority to reduce the UK's monetary deficit via a series of austerity measures.

The Localism Act of 2011 was the White Paper that set out the approach. In this document, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) were positioned as "the government's chosen engine for local growth" (Lord Heseltine, 2012; p.9) and described as "joint local authority-business bodies brought forward by local authorities themselves to promote economic development" (HM Government, 2010; p.10). In comparison to RDAs, LEPs are institutionally smaller, have much more input from the private sector, and receive significantly less funding that is bid for more competitively. The Localism Act also called for ten major cities outside of the capital to hold a referendum in May 2012 for bringing in a mayoral model of local governance, however, only Bristol opted in favour of this arrangement. Soon after, Combined Authorities (CAs) were created as the legal representative bodies holding accountability for the delivery of transport and economic policy, as well as various other boards to negotiate Growth Deals and City Deals. This became the framework for encouraging a network of local stakeholders from across different sectors and local authorities to work together for sharing ideas and

putting together local growth strategies that better reflected the priorities of local people (Clarke & Cochrane, 2013 in O'Brien and Pike, 2015).

Whilst witnessing yet another shift in the scale and organisation of governance, this approach also brought with it an emphasis on multi-level governance, partnerships and networking (Ayres & Stafford, 2014), and a renewed emphasis on 'innovation', 'entrepreneurship' and 'knowledge exchange' (Mabey & Freeman, 2010). Overall, these changes are thought to have significantly raised the profile of debates around politics, governance and public finances in England (O'Brien & Pike, 2015).

Something which has been even more prominent, however, is a turn towards a process of 'deal-making' that is transforming 'central-local' and 'intra-local' relations (O'Brien & Pike, 2015). However, various attempts to understand what this has meant for local governance have been much less straightforward. Whilst this approach is highlighted for improving central-local communication, promoting local empowerment, and making way for a much-needed reform of sub-national governance, others have spoken of a system of mere transactional exchanges that is lacking in scrutiny, accountability and transparency (O'Brien & Pike, 2015). This is also conceived as reinforcing uneven development, and as having insufficient resources to support objectives (O'Brien & Pike, 2015). For example in reference of the latter, the Coalition Government's austerity measures, with an overall fiscal value of £113 billion (IFS, 2014), was anticipated to result in a cut to local authority funding of over 37% between 2010 and 2015 (National Audit Office, 2014 in O'Brien & Pike, 2015). For these reasons, amongst others, city-regional devolution has been described as centrally prescribed localism (Etherington and Jones, 2016; Haughton *et al*, 2016).

Another significant development during this time was a proposal for creating a Northern Powerhouse to encourage growth outside of London as outlined below:

> "… if we can bring our northern cities closer together – not physically, or in some artificial political construct – but by providing modern transport connections, supporting great science and our universities here, giving more power and control to civic government; then we can create a northern powerhouse with the size, the population, the political and economic clout, to be as strong as any global city."

> [George Osborne, Beetham Tower, Manchester, 5th August 2014]

There has, however, been a lot of criticism levied towards the Northern Powerhouse bid, viewed as being more about politics and 'place branding' rather than any real attempt to rebalance the national economy and reduce regional inequalities (Lee, 2017). The Coalition's agenda has also been construed as an attempt to win over the traditional Labour heartlands, occupying a 'political vacuum' after the demise of RDAs which gave the indication that central government was giving something to the north of England (Lee, 2017). And yet in a world of competitive city branding to attract public and private investment, others see the potential of the Northern Powerhouse and devolution deals for the increased visibility they offer, as well as devolution being a step in the right direction for increasing the powers of local government (Swinney, 2016).

2.3.4   Conservative, 2015-Present: let's meet in the middle?

Further changes have been rolled-out since the election of a majority Conservative government in 2015 with grand ideas around a 'city revolution' and placing a renewed emphasis on city-regional devolution deals. This falls in line with their pursuit of establishing regional Powerhouses and Engines to boost economic growth outside of London, as well as their vision for having a directly elected metro-mayor heading up each city-region. A detailed timeline of England's city-regional devolution journey during the period 2012-2016 can be found in Table 1 below.

Date	Event
May 12	Referendums on elected mayors in ten major cities
July 12	City Deal approved in the eight Core Cities
Oct 12	Publication of the Heseltine Report (No Stone Unturned), including proposals for 'metro mayors'
Mar 13	Publication of Government response to Heseltine Report
June 13	Announcement of Growth Deals to be managed by Local Enterprise Partnerships
Sep 13 – Jul 14	City deals approved with twenty second-tier cities
Mar 14	LEPs submit Strategic Economic Plans to access Growth Deal funding
Jun 14	George Osborne speech proposing conurbation mayors in context of 'Northern Powerhouse'
Jul 14	Agreement of Growth Deals with all LEPs
Sep 14	Scottish Independence Referendum
Oct 14	Publication of final report from RSA's City Growth Commission
Nov 14	Greater Manchester Agreement (1)
Dec 14	Sheffield City Region Devolution Agreement (1)
Feb 15	Greater Manchester health and social care agreement
Mar 15	West Yorkshire Devolution Deal
May 15	*Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill* published
Jul 15	Greater Manchester devolution agreement (2)
Jul 15	*Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill* passes through House of Lords
Jul 15	Cornwall Devolution Deal published
Sep 15	Deadline for 'devolution bids' for Spending Review 2015
Oct 15	Sheffield City Region Devolution Agreement (2)
Oct 15	North-East and Tees Valley devolution deal published
Nov 15	West Midlands and Liverpool devolution deals published
Jan 16	*Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill* receives Royal Assent
Mar 16	New devolution deals announced in the Budget for East Anglia, Greater Lincolnshire and the West of England with further powers announced for Greater Manchester and Liverpool
Jun 16	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Devolution Deal published

Table 1: Timeline of English city-regional devolution, 2012 - 2016. Source: Flinders *et al*. (2016a; p.10)

Since June 2016, the first round of Mayoral Elections took place in May 2017. This led to the election of Metro Mayors in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, Tees Valley, West Midlands and West of England.

2.3.4.1   Devolution & Metro-Mayors

Lowndes and Gardiner (2016; p.357) describe the Conservative government as having shown a "new assertiveness" in their efforts to restructure local government, identifying the political project of devolution as a key game changer which they define as "a strategy to stimulate economic growth based on greater sub-regional autonomy and increased competitiveness across and between English localities". Alongside more detailed devolution talks, there has also been an emphasis placed on 'smart cities', suggesting the need for 'reform' and 'efficiency' (Lowndes & Gardiner, 2016).

This indicates an ideological transformation to Localism. Whilst initially imbued with claims of the 'Big Society' and more involvement for non-state actors, Localism has been converted into an opportunity for state actors to pursue economic growth at the city-regional scale (Lowndes & Gardiner, 2016). Alongside this, there has also been, as described by Tomaney (2016), a "fixation on directly elected metro-mayors as the answer to the urban governance problem". As such, metro-mayors are being called upon as a single accountable figure for overseeing sub-national governance and for bringing together shared growth strategies across a city-region (Tomaney, 2016).

With this background, the first devolution deal was agreed in Greater Manchester in late 2014 and, deemed a success, proposals were consolidated in the Cities and Devolution Bill in 2015 that allowed every region to submit a devolution bid. The then Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne played a fundamental role in handling a number of 'devolution deals', and Sheffield, West Yorkshire, the North East and Liverpool had agreements achieved in principle that same year (see Table 1 above).

2.3.4.2   'Secret Deals' & 'Super Austerity'

Whilst many believe devolution is the first step towards more local autonomy, it has also been heavily critiqued, especially in relation to the secrecy of the deals being made as well as devolution been used as a tool of austerity.

Ayres (2015) argues that devolution is an elitist agenda, with deals being negotiated behind closed doors and hidden from public view. Similarly, Tomaney (2016) refers to what he calls 'secret deals' to describe devolution talks that have been taking place between political and business elites which are neither the 'product of public debate'

nor subject to 'democratic scrutiny'. Tomaney (2016) goes on to argue that had these talks been more open, it is likely that deals would have been rejected given that the majority of major cities voted to reject having a Mayor as recently as 2012. To this end, it has also been suggested that devolution could potentially draw power and accountability from localities towards the sub-regional level (Lowndes & Gardner, 2016), a move that is feasibly pushing control further back towards London. As such, there have been questions about what implications metro mayors have for locally elected councillors and for civic engagement.

Another heavily critiqued aspect of devolution resides in the claim that it is a ploy to transfer the blame for austerity (Lowndes & Gardiner, 2016). With this background, Lowndes & Gardiner (2016) suggest that a clever display of discourse has intentionally diverted central opposition, whilst Peck (2012) also highlights how only certain resources and services have been targeted for cuts that are not headed by powerful institutions and that are not likely to put up a strong opposition.

In a move towards understanding further the impact of austerity, Wood *et al*. (2015) highlight the limited resources local authorities have in response to heightened responsibilities. Similarly, others highlight the many rules and restrictions devolution deals come attached with that restricts what can be achieved locally (Bentley *et al*., 2016). Reflecting the renewed proposal for austerity in 2015, Lowndes and Gardiner (2016) introduce the term 'super austerity' to describe a new era of austerity whereby new cuts are positioned on top of the old (a further 56% by 2020) (HM Treasury, 2015; p.78). And with this background, Lowndes and Gardiner (2016) suggest that local authorities may have reached a tipping point in relation to their capacity to deal with reduced budgets since previous reserves to mitigate its effects have now largely diminished. In addition, Lowndes and Gardner (2016) also refer to an unequal geography of austerity, hitting those hardest who relied most heavily on government grants and which commonly have the highest levels of deprivation, as well as being most damaging for certain groups such as those of working age and those with disabilities.

Overall, section 2.3 has revealed how a succession of central government administrations in England to decentralise state functions have swayed from one scale to another and sometimes overlapping (Pike *et al*., 2016). It has also provided further details on the premise for which the contemporary urban agenda is based.

2.4   Rationalising the Act of Policymaking

The previous two sections have described the urban policy context in England according to theory and practice. This has revealed a state of affairs by which often the way that urban theory is translated into practice does not always align. One explanation for this relates to the work of Simon (1954) that describes how policymakers go through a process of 'rational-decision making' when implementing policy in an attempt to maximise benefits over costs. On the other hand, Lindblom (1959) described policymaking as 'the science of muddling through', recognising that policymaking is restricted and often remedial and driven by means rather than objectives. To this end, Lindblom (1959; p. 83-84) describes how "policy is not made once and for all; it is made and remade endlessly"; a process of trying to achieve desired intentions through approximation by which what is desired is under constant re-examination. In addition, with so many stakeholders and institutions involved in the construction and implementation of policy, each with their individual interests, policy is considered to be a constant process of bargaining, negotiation and concession. It is, therefore, the intention of this next section to begin to draw out some of the insights that have been used to explain why urban policy has been subject to endless reordering and reorientation over the years.

One line of argument puts this down to policy failure, built upon the geographical and socio-political contradictions of previous state-led interventions (Jonas & Ward, 2002). Offe (1984) describes this as the 'crisis of crisis-management'. Taking this discussion forward, Brenner (2004; p.66) refers to the conflicting nature and complexity of state rescaling in which "a crisis-induced recalibration has been unfolding since the mid-1990s [whereby] a rescaled layer of state spatial projects… has been forged whose purpose is to confront some of the major regulatory failures generated through state intervention". As such, the term 'crisis metamorphosis' has been used to describe the displacement of crises through spatial scales (Thompson, 2013).

Jessop (2000; 2007) over many years has gone some way in developing the theory that market failures have been displaced into state failures, which have in turn been serially displaced into governance failures at various spatial scales, creating policy congestion and coordination problems. As a result, 'new' growth agendas are thought to have shown more signs of 'replication' rather than 'reinvention' (Theodore *et al*., 2011). Furthermore, Theodore *et al*. (2011) argue that the constant reproduction in

policymaking has encouraged 'competitive vulnerability' and 'fiscal institutional incapacity'. Therefore, to use Einstein's definition of insanity, the state is described as "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results" (Cable, 2011). As such, urban policymaking can be described as a never-ending call to find new ways of achieving growth and prosperity in response to previous attempts that have failed. Jonas & Ward (2002) put this down to contradictions of the state rather than contradictions of capitalism.

Another idea reveals how policymaking is at the mercy of the electoral cycle for which, as argued by Rubin (1988; p.249), "the goal of every politician is to get elected". This essentially means that only short-term achievements are sought for. Furthermore, Hale (2011) alludes to each successive government being placed on a political platform and posed with the question 'what's the big idea?', forcing the hand of the newly elected to conjure an approach that stands out from that which came before them. Furthermore, with so much churn in the system, government departments often lack organisational memory and lessons are not carried forward.

Rubin (1988; p.249) claims for a "shoot anything that flies; claim anything that falls" philosophy when referring to the behaviour of economic development practitioners. This is in response to an uncertain economic climate in which political leaders lack control and whereby "to do something is better than to remain inactive" (ibid; p.237). This study also highlights the tendency for practitioners to favour the more achievable tasks that have a quick turn-around rather than tackling the 'wicked problems' of urban society which are much less well defined (Rubin, 1988) and do not easily show that they are 'doing' urban development (Ward, 2001). Policies are also frequently described as being deliberately vague, with often no clear measures of success. This is considered to be a strategic move by policymakers so that they cannot easily be held to account.

With the wide range of actors and institutions now involved in governing, each with their own perceptions and interpretations, policymaking can be seen as an attempt to reach a middle ground. However, policymaking is also considered to be made according to how urban problems are defined, with, to put simply, different political groups having different ideas about who should lose and who should gain in society. To use a popular example, the issue of unemployment can be interpreted either as an individual's lack of motivation and work ethic or as a structural problem resulting from economic

neoliberalism and labour market reforms. Similarly, this also reinforces the scale at which urban problems are defined.

Broadly speaking, a succession of area-based initiatives since the 1970s have interpreted the policy problem as inherent to the neighbourhood using a pathological discourse. In line with this ideology, neighbourhoods targeted for intervention were construed as 'problematic' and imbued with a stigma which was historically rooted (Matthews, 2010). Supported by negative representations in the media, this approach renders 'broken' neighbourhoods as a burden on society and policymakers as the intervening body to sort out the problem. This framing gave way to 'inward-looking' interventions such as the deployment of community centres and local employment initiatives (Matthews, 2010). This approach also fails to recognise that the vast majority of problems inherent within deprived neighbourhoods are the outcome of economic restructuring processes that function at wider scales and lead to spatially uneven development (North & Syrett, 2008). This permits a 'scalar mismatch' in which the scales that policy solutions and policy problems operate do not align (Rae, 2011). There has also been a critique of the focus on competition and economic goals at the expense of social inclusion (Lloyd, 1999; Lovering, 1999).

With this background, a complex and somewhat confusing system is thought to have been created (North & Syrett, 2008). As such, Skelcher (2000) makes reference to a hollowed-out, overloaded and 'congested state', and similarly Wolf (2007; p.112-113) makes the claim that the "institutional context… is by now so complex and constantly in flux that people who work in it full-time cannot keep up". Moreover, recent writings have proposed a 'disoriented state' (Arts & Lagendijk, 2009) within a "congested inter-scalar institutional landscape" (Rees & Lord., 2013; p.681). Shaw and Tewdwr-Jones (2017) also describe the 'disorganised' approach to devolution in England.

2.5   Summary: Theoretical and Policy Framing

Chapter 2 has presented an unfolding urban policy and governance landscape in England over the last forty years according to theory and practice, providing a theoretical and analytical framing of the broader context in which the research has been carried out. This is essential for understanding the ideologies that surround the current city-regional governance set-up in England, as well as for understanding the broader

politico-economic circumstances with which local leaders are operating within. This also responds to the claim of Pike *et al*. (2016; p.8) that "understanding the restructuring of institutional landscapes requires historical awareness of change and continuity in the legacies and ways in which previous paths, approaches and practices prefigure and condition the changed and emergent structures". Chapter 2 has also merited the choice of case study for the empirical research, with mid-sized cities being largely overlooked in urban research of this nature.

The discussion began by explaining how urban problems and solutions are defined using the logic of neoliberalism (Theodore *et al*., 2011). Far from being a static concept, however, the discussion then turned towards exposing an evolving neoliberal ideology as continually being reconstituted and reproduced (Theodore *et al*., 2011). A key part of this transformation appears to be the way that it exhibits itself within cities, which are now seen as key sites for policy experimentation and institutional inventions in accordance with changing political agendas for growing the economy.

With claims of ineffective policymaking and ideas around political leaders merely 'muddling through' (Ward, 2001) however, it is unsurprising that arguments have been made which suggest that reforms have delivered little in the way to turn around urban problems. Others have also called upon the damaging and disruptive cycle of institutional restructuring and policy flux (Pike *et al*., 2016) for which we have seen contradictions, and even 'crises', in the system. The end product, as understood from the literature presented, is a highly complex and multifaceted framework of urban policy and governance. Whilst being a heavily debated topic amongst interested urban scholars for some time, however, only recently have these reached the public debate.

This aligns itself with a new era of urban politics. In the UK for example, recent calls for Scottish Independence and a vote for Brexit in 2016 changed the face of UK politics, a movement that is being echoed around the world. It is this grand narrative of instability and uncertainty that currently surrounds Western politics that is raising questions in relation to the effectiveness of the current economic world order and which, essentially, is placing 'places' and 'people' high up the political agenda.

What the discussion here has not considered in any detail, however, is the significance of 'places' and 'people' in relation to the particularities of local constructions and articulations of the economy and the state, which impact on how policies unfold at the

sub-national scale. This includes, for example, local governance coordination and the actions of local leaders which, as was described in Chapter 1, are important for considering how policy is impacted upon from below. This is especially the case given the currently evolving devolution and austerity governance landscape in England whereby increased responsibilities are being placed on local leaders for making decisions over policy and fiscal matters, and for working together across boundaries in cross-sector, multi-agency forums. Furthermore, given such policy complexity, local leadership is often considered something that can offer some clarity and stability to a new governance landscape as it evolves (Hambleton, 2014a; Sotarauta, 2016). With this background, it is the intention of Chapter 3 to explore the concepts of leadership and place for working towards a conceptual framework of sub-national governance.

Chapter 3. TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF URBAN LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

3.1 Introduction

Building on Chapter 2 which provided a framework for urban and economic policy in theory and practice, this chapter will begin to attach some meanings to 'place leadership'. To do this it will employ an emerging body of literature that investigates what place leadership looks like within the contemporary organisation of space, place and society. In doing so this chapter, together with Chapter 2, works towards a conceptual framework of urban leadership and governance, helping to foreground, explain and understand the empirical research that is reported later in the thesis.

In England, a succession of policy agendas since the late 1970s has led to a complex sub-national governance and policy landscape for local leaders to navigate a course through (see Chapter 2). The most recent edition of city-regional devolution at a time of austerity and political and economic turbulence is no exception, which is placing new responsibilities on local places for local growth and for working in partnerships across traditional boundaries. Increasingly, under these conditions place leaders are being recognised for playing a significant role in responding to changes and for acting strategically to ensure that local and regional development objectives are realised (Beer & Clower, 2014; Hambleton, 2014a; Sotarauta, 2016). As such, questions are being raised such as 'how has the role of place leaders changed?', 'who are the leaders?' and 'what difference, if any, can place leadership really make given the regulationist power of top-down institutions?'. In reference of the latter, however, Ladendijk (2007 in Sotarauta & Beer; p.2) points out that "place leadership is one of the ways to reinsert both "structure" and "subject" into accounts of regional processes".

More broadly, the study of leadership coincides with a general swing from the study of 'government' to 'governance' and from hierarchies to networks as previously described. However, Acuto (2013; p.483) states that "there has been a relatively poor problematization of the role of city leadership, and certainly a widespread lack of attempts towards a systematic theorisation".

This chapter will be presented as follows. In the first instance, a timeline of leadership theory is introduced. This leads the way for drawing links between the notions of leadership and governance in order to unpack their interdependencies, in reflection of the importance of wider governing frameworks as disclosed in Chapters 1 and 2. Following this, the concept of 'place' is examined, representing a collective mix of histories, circumstances and experiences which draws on the particularities of place and its influence on leadership. The review will then begin to explore the contemporary dynamics of place leadership, including the various forms and styles of leaders, as well as whom under current policy and governance circumstances are performing key roles. This discussion, together with that which was presented in Chapters 1 and 2, is then brought to life within a conceptual framework to present the key concepts under study and the relationship between them.

3.2 A Timeline of Leadership Theory

A history of leadership theory is a useful grounding for considering current notions of place leadership. Dating back to the 19th Century, the 'great persons' perspective of leadership emphasised the role of the individual, strong and charismatic leader: a theory that has gained the most recognition over the history of leadership research (see Lord *et al*., 1986; Judge *et al*., 2002). This interpretation, however, which follows an elitist approach by emphasising the actions, charisma and personality traits of single persons, is believed to be somewhat outdated for contemporary understandings of leading a place. Thus in the last half a century, several leadership theories have been developed with which to conduct leadership research. Figure 2 presents a timeline to illustrate how these theories have been established over time.

Whole
Systems

Emotional
Intelligence

Collective

Transformative

Individual

Behaviour

Trait

1860   **1960**   **1980**   **1990**   **2000**
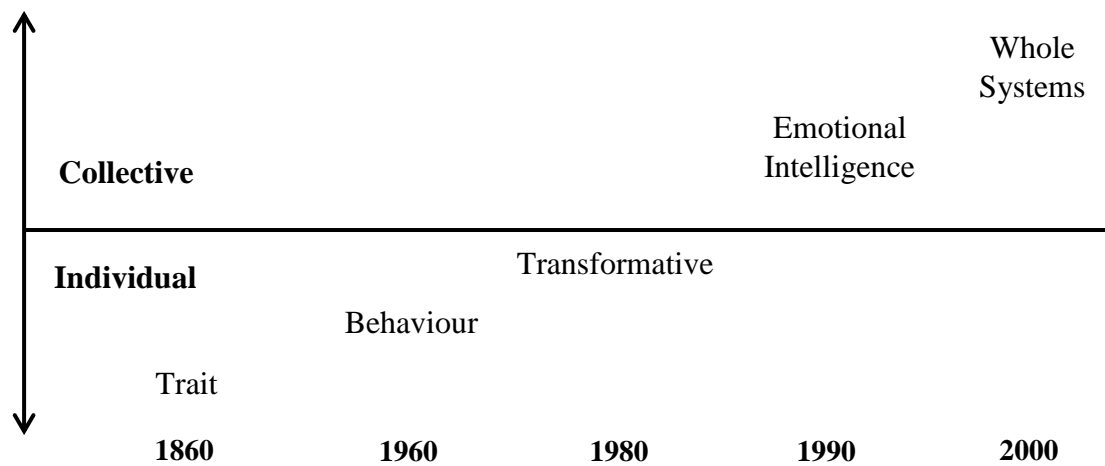
Figure 3: A timeline of leadership theory. Source: Staite (2017a)

Beginning in the 1960s, behavioural perspectives of leadership theory begun to emerge with an emphasis placed on leadership style. Whilst attempting to advance the theorisation of leadership to suit new dynamics, this approach draws upon ideas from the 'great persons' perspective by linking certain charismatic traits to leadership effectiveness. New ideas thus began to appear by the 1980s which recognised the importance of leading in a way that encourages others to follow by ensuring wider stakeholders feel valued and part of a team. Likewise, a further collection of work was established in the 1990s, reflecting the earlier ideas of Burns (1978), which examined how leaders pay attention to the emotions and feelings of followers and aim to encourage energy and commitment through bonding (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Lastly, since the early 2000s emphasis has been placed on 'whole systems' leadership (Benington & Hartley, 2009).

Whilst this timeline gives the impression of a linear formation, older leadership theories still continue to influence present-day thinking. This has come into view recently with, for example, the great man theory of the 19th Century coinciding with the enthusiasm being shown for metro mayors solving urban problems in England. Furthermore, in line with the transformative aspects of leadership as introduced in the 1980s, Sotarauta & Beer (2015) discuss the way in which leadership plays its part in diverting a place towards an alternative path. There are others, however, such as Henning *et al.* (2013 in Beer & Clower, 2014), who discuss the significance of path dependency for influencing economic development outcomes. Current understandings of place leadership are therefore thought of as being best described as the result of a collective mix of

traditional and contemporary schools of thought, for which a useful overview is provided in Table 2.

Transforming leadership	Related theories focus on the individual's ability to affect outcomes via 'intellectual stimulation', 'inspirational motivation' and 'idealised influence'.
Relational, collaborative and shared leadership	Related theories approach leadership as a process, and study it as a non-positional phenomenon. These theories revolve around ideas of participation and involvement, and the ways leaders take input from other actors. They build on the reciprocal nature of interdependent relationships, and thus also value trust and integrity.
Complexity leadership	Related theories conceptualise leadership as a complex dynamic process resulting from the collective need for change that emerges from the interaction of various actors. Complexity leadership focuses on systematic adaptive outcomes more than the other main approaches.
Trait and behavioural theories	Related theories that were dominant in the early phases of leadership scholarship have re-emerged with a new emphasis. If the earlier studies stressed intelligence, masculinity and dominance, the contemporary generation puts more emphasis on honesty, integrity and self-confidence. The new strand of trait and behavioural studies are more interested in determining what characteristics, capacities and behaviours are essential for effective leadership.
Situational and contingency theories	Related theories focus on contextual factors that may determine leadership styles in different environs. These include the path-goal theory and the leader-member-exchange-theory (LMX) under the rubric of industrial theories that also are under reconceptualization. Broadly speaking, these theories are productivity centred and as such more leader-centric than the other theories introduced here, and more often than not they see followers as collectives rather than individual actors with specific needs.

Table 2: Modern-day understandings of place leadership. Source: Sotarauta (2016; p.7)

The last decade has seen the emergence of a new age of leadership thought. Whilst acknowledging the value of trait, behavioural and transformative aspects of leadership, more recent studies have examined the context and place setting for which leadership is delivered (Osborn & Marion, 2009), viewing leadership as a process that goes beyond the actions of individual leaders. Therefore before going on to look at a contemporary understanding of place leadership in more detail, the next section will take a step back to reflect upon the wider context for which local leaders are placed.

3.3   Connecting Governance, Leadership and Place

Leadership and governance have been described as operating in a mutually reinforcing 'symbiotic relationship' (Davies, 2006). Davila *et al*. (2012; p.70), for example, describe how "good leadership can energize governance, while good governance can serve to sustain leadership". In other words, this suggests a situation whereby a change in one is expected to lead to a change in the other. Therefore whilst governance can constrain and/or enable place leadership, place leadership also has the potential to alter and shape the wider governance structures within which it operates. Place is also considered an important dimension as the space whereby structures and leaders interact. It is, therefore, the intention of this section to examine how governance, place and local level activity feed into a broader consideration of place leadership.

Jessop (2016a; p.74) describes governance as "the diverse mechanisms and strategies of coordination that are adopted by autonomous actors, organizations and functional systems in the face of complex reciprocal interdependence among their actions, activities and operations". It is important, however, to consider the different systems for which governance exists. Bentley *et al*. (2010) make a valuable distinction between centralism and localism to explain the differential organisation of governance power whereby, to put simply, local leaders have more power in localist systems than they do in centralist systems. This is because in a centralised system the majority of power and resources are held within national government, whereas in a localised system power and resources are decentralised to local and/or regional governments. Referring to the latter, localism can manifest in three different forms: 1) 'freedom from central interference', 2) 'freedom to effect particular outcomes', and 3) 'as the reflection of local identity' (Pratchett, 2004 in Bentley *et al*., 2010).

In the UK context of high centralisation, Bailey & Wood (2017) use the concept of 'meta-governance' to describe how central governments steer and shape local networks of actors and institutions by defining the 'rules' and 'norms' of engagement (also see Bentley *et al*., 2016). Similarly, Marshall and Finch (2006; p.16) find that city leaders in the UK 'have their hands tied' under a highly centralised system due largely to financial dependence on central government (in Beer & Clower, 2014).

This argument adopts a state-centric view of governance, which Jessop (2016b; p.16) describes takes place when the state "provide[s] the ground rules for governance and the

regulatory order in and through which governance partners can pursue their aims". This theory of governance, therefore, depicts an environment whereby the mechanics and rules of the system are controlled by the state. Other writers, however, have suggested that power can both be elicited by those who govern and those who are governed (Beer, 2014). This view is supported by Hambleton (2013; p.5) who states "imaginative civic leaders may be able to disrupt the pre-existing governmental frame and bring about an expansion in place-based power".

Thus beyond those who have adopted a state-centric view of governance, other research recognises the influence that place-based activity and local-led governance networks have (see Beer & Clower, 2014; Hambleton, 2014a; Sotarauta, 2016). And others, such as Cairney (2009; p.358), have pointed to the need for nation-states to draw on the "resources and knowledge held by external agencies in order to improve policy effectiveness, tailor policies to the specific needs of localities, boost economic productivity by building on the productive capacity of localities, and increase accountability and democratize governance structures". These networks, whilst in theory still steered by the state, are described as being able to self-organise, negotiate, and agree on their own rules (Rhodes, 1997). With this background, emphasis has been placed on partnership-working recently, involving multiple stakeholders from across the public, private and voluntary spheres of society.

Policy network analysis has been utilised to explore the ways that policy is coordinated at the local level (Rhodes, 1997). This has often been aligned with the notion of networked governance, for which more details can be found in section 2.2 in Chapter 2. However, considered below are further insights into local leadership interactions.

Rhodes (1997; p.53) describes networked governance as made up of 'game-like interactions'; interactions that Sotarauta (2016) refers to as the effect of 'complex reasoning' that 'players' engage in when choosing how they operate within the network. Trust is considered to be a major factor determining how networks are played out. For these reasons, Sotarauta (2016; p.12) refers to governance as a 'playing field' by which "leaders are highly influential players who aim to change the way games are played", as well as which 'field' the game is played on and who is permitted to play. Sotarauta (2016; p.12) also describes two other components of this game which are critical to an examination of place leadership: "the competition between cities as to which are to succeed in the future, and… the competition within cities concerning which groups are

best able to shape their respective cities". This suggests that good leadership has the potential to make a place more competitive (Stimson *et al*., 2009), but equally that competition can create tensions and conflicts.

Adding to this discussion of local interaction and governance, place is also considered a significant factor influencing place leadership. As Keohane (2010; p.10) states: "the size and culture of an organisation, the expectations of followers, the purposes the organisation is intended to pursue, and its history and traditions are all relevant in considering what kind of leadership is most likely to succeed" (in Hambleton, 2013).

Place is often used interchangeably to refer broadly to cities and regions, as well as more narrowly to denote local communities. Thus in constituting various scales, as well as physical, human and 'imagined' notions (see Hincks *et al*., 2017), place is recognised as a complex concept that is beyond the scope of attaching a precise definition to it. There are, however, several debates that can be drawn upon to highlight why 'place' has been brought back into the study of leadership.

Collinge *et al*. (2010) draw our attention to the popular phrase 'think global act local' for thinking about place, especially in relation to present-day urban problems. These are found to be particularly acute in England's former industrial towns and cities, many of which have encountered decades of high unemployment and skills that do not suit the new economy. These are often referred to as the 'wicked problems' of policy planning as first coined by Rittel and Webber in 1973. Similarly, Trickett (2011; p.6) claims that "place is a key determinant in defining people's experiences of social exclusion, poverty, and socio-economic opportunity". As such, Collinge *et al*. (2010; p.xv) state that "if we seek to address global issues at a global level we may need to wait forever for an appropriate consensus or compromise to emerge". They thus contend that action and challenge can and should emerge locally (Collinge *et al*., 2010). They also go on to argue that "place matters because it constitutes similar problems differently" (ibid; p.xv), and hence local people with local knowledge are best suited to yield a response. Moreover, Hambleton (2013) refers to the concept of 'place-shaping' to help foster community spirit and cultivate civic engagement.

These ideas, however, have not always been widely acknowledged or accepted. For example, in line with urban dependency theories, it is claimed that local power is threatened by broader forces that are creating the conditions for labour and capital to

move more freely as people relocate to find work and industries move to cheaper and more distant locations (Peterson, 1981 in Hambleton, 2011). Nevertheless, these arguments have since been challenged for their overemphasis on place-less power which fails to recognise the influence of local actors. For example, Hambleton (2013; p.12) makes the claim that "cities, far from being business corporations, are political entities with… elected civic leaders who are accountable to their citizens… civic leaders should be expected to pursue policies and practices relating to the needs and values of their residents, not the requirements of place-less capital". Therefore, by introducing a political and local democratic dimension to the debate rather than giving sole focus to higher structures, Hambleton (2011; 2013; 2014), and others, have brought back a sense of place and the local community to leadership debates. This will be described in more detail below for considering the contemporary dynamics of place leadership.

3.4   A Contemporary Definition of Place Leadership

As outlined above, there has been a rise in interest recently in investigating a new age of leadership theory. Therefore following a discussion of the theoretical and notional context within which place leadership literature exist, this section will narrow the focus to look more precisely at what broad categories of contemporary place leadership research is emerging, how place leadership is being defined and, on a more practical level, how, and by whom, place leadership is being performed.

A substantial body of research has examined the role that leadership plays in place prosperity (Collinge & Gibney, 2010; Stimson *et al*., 2009) and place shaping (Collinge & Gibney, 2010). This research has discovered that effective place leaders are those who are strategic visionaries and who can monitor local performance to be able to respond to change (Stimson *et al*., 2009). Similarly, another body of research has looked at transformational leadership. For example, Bailey *et al*. (2010) investigated how Europe's mature regions can utilise their local leadership capacities and capabilities to overcome the challenges of economic restructuring and embark upon a path of sustainable growth. Related to these are studies which have examined the importance of effective leadership in peripheral places (Kroehn *et al*., 2010), as well as for increasing the resilience of places (Trickett & Lee, 2010). Much of this research is based on comparative case studies to show how place leadership differs between different places (Budd & Sancino, 2016; Beer & Sotarauta, 2015). As described above, place leadership

is driven by national policy structures, local agency and the particularities of place. This includes local and regional government forms and the type and style of local leaders.

Mouritzen and Svara (2002) refer to four distinct forms of local government. These include the 'strong mayor form' whereby an elected mayor has complete control of all executive tasks; the 'committee-leader form' whereby a political leader, together with their elected committee members, perform executive functions together with the CEO; the 'collective form' of shared responsibility across the executive committee; and the 'council-manager form' whereby the CEO is chosen by the elected members to manage the city (ibid, p.55-56). These local government forms, together with the individual character traits of leaders, shape the leadership style that is adopted (John & Cole 1999). To this end, Goleman (2000; p.3) identifies six styles of leadership:

1. *"Coercive*: the leader demands compliance ('do what I tell you')";
2. *"Authoritative*: the leader mobilizes people toward a vision ('come with me')";
3. *"Affiliative*: the leader creates harmony and builds emotional bonds ('people come first')";
4. *"Democratic*: the leader forges consensus through participation ('what do you think?')";
5. *"Pacesetting*: the leader sets high standards for performance ('do as I do, now')";
6. *"Coaching*: the leader develops people for the future ('try this')".

However, beyond leaders who occupy traditional leadership roles, place leadership is commonly defined more broadly as consisting of members of the state, non-state, business, community, voluntary and faith sectors (Liddle, 2010).

To this end, Hambleton (2014) identifies five place leadership types:

1. *Political*: politicians who are elected by the public on a mandate;
2. *Public Managerial*: public servants who possess professional and managerial expertise;
3. *Community*: people with civic interests including community activists, voluntary sector leaders, religious leaders and higher education leaders;
4. *Business*: local businesses and entrepreneurs;
5. *Trade Union*: trade union representatives elected by their members.

Place leadership is therefore viewed as a practice that involves a whole network of actors operating at multiple and varying levels and scales (Stimson *et al*., 2002; Beer & Clower, 2014). Place leadership is also described as a collaborative and inclusive process rather than based on traditional positions and hierarchies. As such, the term 'informal governance' is often used to describe a web of 'un-codified' and 'non-institutional' activity taking place outside of 'formal governance' (Flinders *et al*, 2016b). Similarly, Sotarauta *et al* (2012; p.207) characterise place leadership as the "fragmented or shared actions, events and incidents amongst a whole series of organisations and leaders, rather than the processes that simply flow top-down". Place leadership has also been referred to as leadership that is based on power sharing, is flexible, and is driven by trust and a willingness to work together (Stimson *et al*., 2009).

Furthermore, Beer and Clower (2014) note how place leadership differs from leadership generally by the way that place leadership emanates from local communities. Similarly, Peters (2012) positions place leadership as originating from the social space of place, and Sotarauta (2014) from the social relationships within place. To this end, Hambleton (2014) draws upon the notion of 'civic leadership' to illustrate how place leadership should be an inclusive process that is modified to meet the needs of specific cities and neighbourhoods. This work utilises many concepts relating to the inclusive city such as Fainstein's (2010) proposal of the 'just city' and Lefebvre's (1968) 'right to the city' (also see Harvey, 2008).

However, with an extensive array of actors and institutions at various levels and scales involved in leading a place, this can create a blurring of roles and responsibilities (Beer & Clower, 2014). To this end, Beer & Clower (2014) present 'absent leadership' as a more pressing concern for contemporary places than 'poor leadership'. Others also highlight this in relation to the global economy that, with no geographical confinement, creates issues of accountability as leaders are less inclined to assume responsibility for outcomes (The Third Warwick Commission, 2012). Others add to this by highlighting the strains of leading on an individual's time, resource and career development (Gray & Sinclair, 2005) that, even with the best intentions, can limit the extent to which someone can commit to thinking about their duty to lead a place alongside their leadership responsibilities within their own organisation. Furthermore, whilst claiming inclusivity, place leaders continue to be described as those who "tend to possess a greater range and depth of assets… than other actors" (Sotarauta & Beer, 2016; p.3).

3.5   Closing Remarks on Place Leadership Literature

This chapter until now has built upon the concepts introduced in Chapters 1 and 2 to begin to attach some meanings to place leadership as part of a broader system of governance. Whilst this literature review is not exhaustive, the intention was to provide a sound insight into an emerging research field to foreground the empirical research.

It began by looking at leadership theory over time and identified a number of key eras in leadership thought. The most recent of these, which is still developing, coincided with a rise in the literature that attempts to look for alternative ways of understanding the organisation of society as "self-organizing networks, partnerships and other forms of reflexive collaboration" (Jessop, 2016a; p.71). Whilst earlier research often differentiated governance as a unit for study that was somehow separate from the state, most recent works have brought the state firmly back into enquiries. Nevertheless, and regardless of structural forces, local agency is increasingly acknowledged as an essential component of the system for shaping the economic and social performance of place (OECD, 2015a; Stimson *et al.*, 2009). Alongside leadership, however, place is also recognised as an important factor for determining path-dependencies (and which feed into the social and economic performance of a place) and ways of working.

This suggests that a suitable balance needs to be found between paying attention to 1) the structures and institutions as determined by policy, 2) the creative forces of place leaders (Grootens and Horlings, 2016), and 3) the particularities of place. This, as will become more evident in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, is particularly relevant within the national context of the case under study, for which a disjuncture is emerging between devolving powers and resources to the local level and a system of governance that remains highly centralised. Similarly, scale is also raised as an important issue. Ayres (2014), for example, makes a number of important distinctions between leadership at the community level and leadership at the regional level. This is noted as requiring further consideration since "there is a need to develop a theory of place-based leadership appropriate to scale… and type... without this, findings will have limited resonance with scholars looking for precision or practitioners seeking toolkits" (Ayres, 2014; p.22). This study, therefore, looks at the local and regional scale of activity, in turn, presented in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively. Furthermore, Ayres (2014) also points to the need to explore the differences in the roles of 'formal' and 'informal' leaders under a new

system of governance in England for which this study also sheds some light on. It is for these reasons that make this investigation a timely contribution to these debates.

3.5.1 Gaps in the literature

Overall, a vast body of research has been presented that examines urban and economic notions in theory and practice, both generally and in a UK policy setting. Added to this, there is a growing body of research looking at governance and, to a more limited extent, place leadership as presented in this chapter. Together, these have considered the structures (institutional and regulatory conditions of policy) and agents (local activity of leaders) that exist within a whole system of leadership and governance in place. Literature is more limited, however, on bringing the study of governance and leadership together for considering the scope of agency within a wider system of controls. This is particularly relevant in the context of a city-regional devolution policy context in England that is new and still evolving (although a recent contribution by Bentley *et al*., 2016 has begun to fill this gap). There is also a significant lack of literature looking at these debates in relation to a mid-sized city. This is not just within the fields of leadership and governance but is a broader issue within urban and regional research.

3.6 Conceptual Framework: Place Leadership and Governance

This section draws on the notions presented in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 to establish a conceptual framework that will assist in grounding the empirical findings that are delivered later in the thesis. This is important for organising ideas, providing conceptual clarity, and offering an integrated and multifaceted assessment of the key concepts and interacting forces at the nexus of *policy*, *place* and *agency* as introduced in Chapters 1, 2 and 3. The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 3, illustrating a whole system of governance operating at multiple scales and in vertical and horizontal dimensions (the hashed lines reflect the permeability of the different scales that operate). To put simply, it shows how top-down, macro-level forces at global and national levels ('beyond place') impact upon the sub-national arena within which more localised processes unfold ('in place'). A more detailed explanation is provided below.
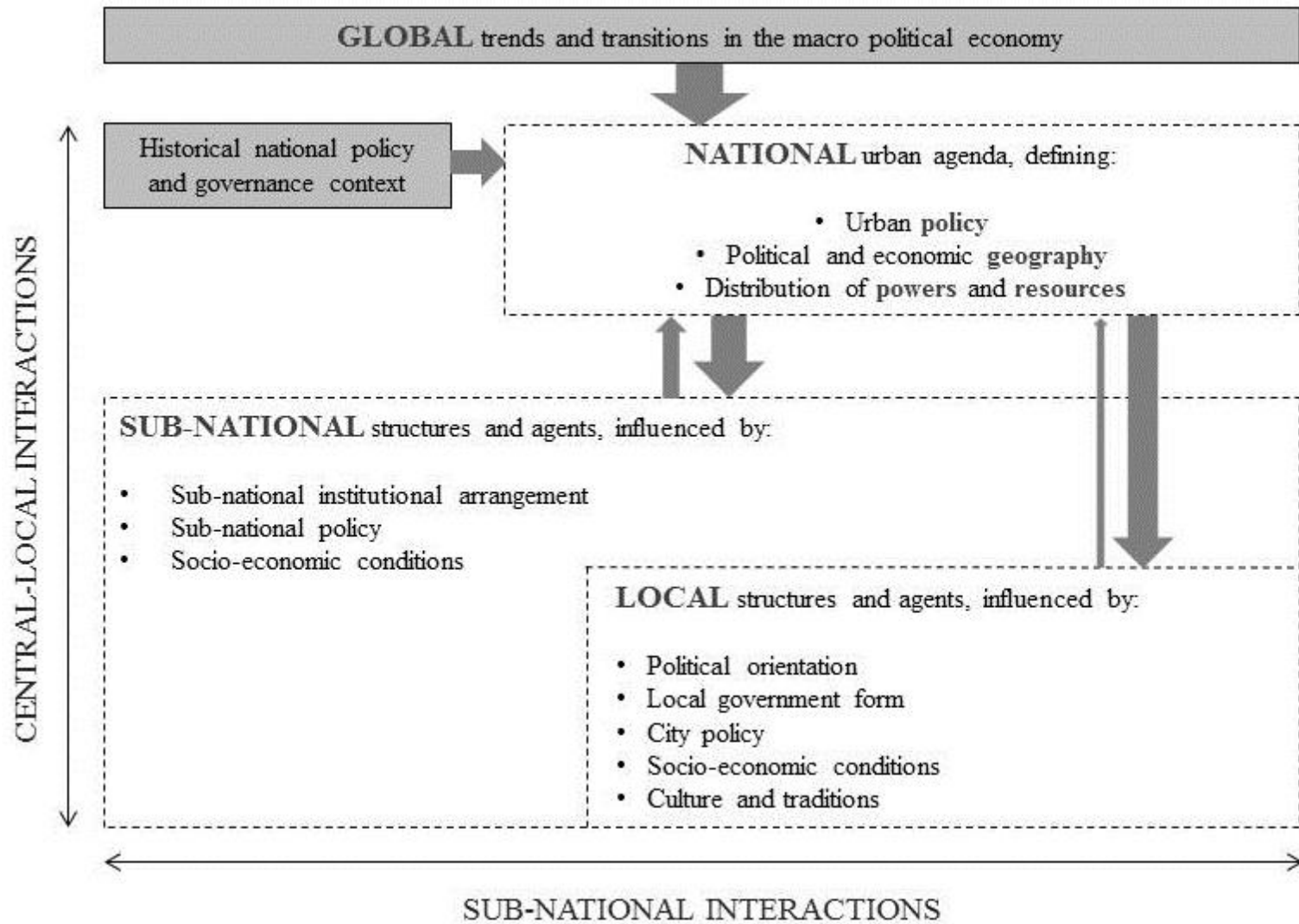
Figure 4: Conceptual Framework. Source: *Author*

'Beyond place' the global political economy, reflecting the ideas, trends and transitions in the way that urban spaces are defined (see section 2.2 in Chapter 2), impact upon the national level where the national urban agenda is set out. This is heavily informed by the global forces that are described above, the previous formations of policy and governance, and the dominant political ideology of the central administration at a given temporal moment. Together, these influence the urban policies that are put in place, the administrative and political geographical and institutional arrangement, and the level of decentralisation of powers and resources at the sub-national level 'in place' (see section 2.3 in Chapter 2).

'In place' is where regional and local level structures, processes and interplays come into existence. Whilst heavily dependent on the institutions and regulations that are set according to the national agenda, it is at this level that place-specific situational factors unfold. These include, amongst other things, path dependencies relating to place, political orientation and local government form, local visions and capacities, cultures and traditions, and leadership styles (see sections 3.3 and 3.4).

Against this background, it would appear that local and regional actors and institutions build their governance capacity in reflection of a number of externalities ('beyond place') and internalities ('in place'). Rather than the two levels working independently, however, leadership and governance is also the product of the relationships and interactions that occur in between. This echoes Buller and James' (2015; p.81) assessment of political leadership for which they state that "both actors and structures are necessarily interdependent entities, exhibiting a relationship of 'duality'". There are a number of theories that can be drawn from here to help explore this further.

The core ideas encapsulated by the structure-agency debate (for key insights see Bourdieu, 1990; Giddens, 1984) suggest that leadership and governance are the products of the interplay between structures and agents, for which Bhaskar (1989 in Kempster & Parry, 2011; p.111) describes:

> "People do not create society. For it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce and transform, but which would not exist unless they did so."

Adding to this debate, Cole (2008) introduced the terms 'bounded governance' and 'capacity building' for investigating the structural and agency influences on leadership

and governance. The former describes how leaders are 'bounded' by their environment (in the form of top-down global and national forces and more localised path-dependencies) and draws on a model of bounded rationality that challenges theories of individualism and rational choice (see Sabatier, 1999). Conversely, the latter draws on the role of local agents and is described as a process encompassing the relationships and interactions between institutions, regulations, actors and socially constructed identities (Cole, 2008). This idea, therefore, suggests both a 'constructed' dimension of leadership and governance in the form of institutional and regulatory controls and a 'subjective' dimension in, for example, the form of local abilities, relationships and politics. To this end, Cole (2008) suggests that the capacity to govern and lead must be read according to institutional and regulatory conditions together with the more agency- and place-specific intricacies of local coalitions and territoriality and the ability to be strategic and make the most of opportunities.

Drawing similar conclusions to Cole (2008), other researchers in the field have drawn on urban regime theory to explore the interplay between different layers of structures, powers and influences of place leadership and governance. Mossberger (2009; p.40) for example, describes local actors as "constrained by their environment (for example, by fiscal and economic necessity), but also as capable of reshaping that environment through cross-sector governing arrangements". Drawing on the latter, Mossberger (2009; p.40) also states how "arrangements vary not only because of differences in historical trends and local conditions but because of the particular agendas and decisions of local political actors".

Whilst the conceptual framework that is presented in Figure 3 has been used as an investigative tool for guidance, the intention from this point forward is to better understand, develop and refine the notions of leadership and governance, from the perspective of a mid-sized city in a contemporary policy context in England.

3.7   Intention of the Research

In line with the conceptual framework presented above, it is the intention of the following chapters to re-examine the structures and agents (and the vertical and horizontal dimensions by which interactions and relationships take place) of contemporary sub-national leadership and governance in England, from the perspective

of a mid-sized city. In doing so, this study will add knowledge to a growing debate around an evolving city-regional devolution governance context (see Hincks *et al*., 2017; Etherington & Jones, 2016; and Pike *et al*., 2016). It will also add to an emerging discussion about the significant part place leadership plays in responding to change and for acting strategically in order for local and regional development objectives to be realised (Beer & Clower, 2014; Hambleton, 2014a; Sotarauta, 2016). There is still a lot to be known, for example, about the particular ways in which the new structures of city-regional governance are being interpreted and implemented on the ground, as well as how city leadership, as part of this wider institutional and regulatory city-regional and national framework, is being enacted in the context of austerity and the devolution of responsibilities.

It will also add knowledge to theories on leadership and governance in a grounded, distinct and substantive setting, providing a greater level of depth for understanding city-regional governance and leadership than mostly broader narratives. However, the focus will be less on what happens and more on the way it happens in order for lessons to be learnt both nationally and globally. Furthermore, in recognising that places on the periphery are a worthy object of research within urban studies, it will shed new light on the mid-sized city experience within this context as well as mid-sized city vis-à-vis core city relationships within a city-region. The mid-sized city element of the research thus brings a new perspective for exploring these issues. This research will not only complement future studies on these debates, but it also has practical relevance for policymakers and place leaders for navigating, making arrangements, and suggesting ways forward for the future evolution of city-regional devolution.

Chapter 4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach, design and methods used to conduct the research. Firstly, the study's main aim and research objectives are revisited, before consideration is given to the methodological approach and justification. This provides the foundations for explaining the research design, including an in-depth look at the case study location and context. This is followed by a review of the research methods together with issues of practicalities and ethics.

4.2 Research Aim and Objectives Revisited

The aim of this thesis is to make a contribution to knowledge on sub-national governance and leadership under austerity, through a case study of a mid-sized city. This is examined in the context of an emerging city-regional devolution landscape in England since 2010. The aim is supported by the following three research objectives:

1. To *investigate* how sub-national leaders in England are navigating the emerging city-regional policy landscape in the context of austerity and a push towards more devolved governance, from the perspective of a mid-sized city;

2. To *explore* the nature, scope and operationalisation of city leadership in England, as well as the behaviours and practices that influence it, within a mid-sized city in the context of devolved city-regional governance under austerity;

3. To *conceptualise* and *understand* the structures, processes and practices that underlie the contemporary city-regional devolution governance and leadership landscape in England under austerity, from a case study of a mid-sized city.

Firstly, the purpose of research objective one is to understand the emergence of devolved city-regional governance and uncover the perceptions, practices and relational dynamics of the institutions and leaders within it. Positioning these within the broader policy context, it will also bring to the fore how structures and agents interact to

influence the manifestations of leadership and governance at different levels on the ground. Secondly, the purpose of research objective two is to explore the scope and operationalisation of city leadership, as well as the behaviours and practices that influence it, within a mid-sized city context. The discussion will draw particularly on the issues of path-dependency, austerity and partnership working. Thirdly, the purpose of research objective three is to bring together the key findings uncovered from research objectives one and two to pull out a number of key themes that distil the essence of contemporary city-regional devolution in England.

The following sections add clarity and rationale to the research that was undertaken.

4.3 Methodological Approach and Justification

In responding to the call by Bryman (2004) for leadership research that is situated but that has general application, a 'critical-realist informed grounded theory approach' first introduced by Kempster and Parry (2011) was used to inform the epistemological and ontological framing of this study. This approach is described in relation to the following (p.118):

- "An emphasis on context-rich qualitative data";
- "Awareness of a stratified reality and that the empirical data may be influenced by underlying mechanisms";
- "Draws on the ideas and theories of extant knowledge";
- "Generate[s] explanations that are either drawn explicitly from the empirical data or are postulated to be occurring";
- Provides insights that can be "'offered up' for other researchers to critique for its usefulness in other contexts".

Leadership and governance are globally significant phenomena, however, they manifest themselves in different forms depending on the place context for which a 'complex nexus of influences' come into effect (Kempster & Parry, 2011).

Whilst grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) has often been drawn upon for examining the leadership processes within a particular context, this raises the epistemological dilemma of generalisability beyond the setting in which theories are drawn from (Kempster & Parry, 2011). By approaching this with a critical

realist lens, however, that engages with the nature of agency, structures, associations and causality (see Bhaskar, 1978; Sayer, 1992), it is possible to begin to understand how context influences the manifestation and expression of leadership within a particular place. Critical realism also endorses the idea that rather than research being absolute, research knowledge should be interpreted flexibly and be continually improved and clarified according to real-world developments. This is particularly relevant for this study which is investigating leadership and governance at a time of considerable change and flux. A 'critical-realist informed grounded theory approach' (Kempster & Parry, 2011) therefore reflects the theoretical underpinnings of this research which recognises the value of a critical case for understanding a common practice, and qualitative techniques for gaining rich insights into a topic that calls for real-life knowledge and experience (Yin, 2003).

Until recently, quantitative methods were mainly used to study leadership. However qualitative approaches are now emerging that foster a "nuanced and contextualised richness" for studying the "structures, relationships and practices" of leading (Kempster & Parry, 2011; p.108). Therefore the research objectives outlined above, which seek to *understand*, *explore* and *distil* leadership and governance at the sub-national level in the context of city-regional devolution in England, lend themselves to a qualitative methodological approach. The primary method of semi-structured interviews was therefore chosen for the purposes of investigation, for which a case study provided a conceptual and substantive base for the fieldwork. Furthermore, given the dynamic nature of the context under investigation that continued to evolve throughout the lifecycle of the study, a qualitative approach allowed for researcher adaptation at any given moment to "respond to changes on the ground to capture meaningful data" (Sallee & Flood., 2012; p.140).

As outlined above, the method of semi-structured interviews was chosen for data collection. This method was selected to gain the level of depth that was required to explore the "less-well understood features of urban and regional development such as hidden covert leadership and the place of 'the other'… as well as the significance of emotionality and identity in subnational decision-making" (Liddle *et al*., 2016; p.13). These 'hidden' features are thought to be particularly important in times of "political and economic transition… or where there is economic uncertainty or social instability…". Direct observation was also used to capture the 'doing' of leading; "the

ordinary and mundane everyday activities that take place in and around leaders and leading" (Liddle *et al*., 2016; p.13).

There are, undeniably, limitations associated with this methodological approach. Jacobs (1999), for example, raises the epistemological question of relativism in discerning interpretation from prior judgements and for favouring certain structures or institutions (for further insights also see Cochrane, 1998). Furthermore, Ward and Jones (1999) reflect on the need for researchers to consider the findings of a single case as 'situated knowledge' in a way that appreciates the 'research situatedness' of their interview responses to avoid over-generalising (Cochrane, 1998). This is particularly pertinent within the field of policy, but it is also relevant when seeking to gain the views and study the spaces of people in a position of power over those of the ordinary citizen. However, for the purposes of this research, interviewing those who are deeply embedded within sub-national leadership and governance was deemed as the best approach. This aligns with Beamer (2002; p.86) who states that "elite interviews offer political scientists a rich, cost-effective vehicle for generating unique data to investigate the complexities of policy and politics" (citing Dexter, 1970). Furthermore, whilst surveys would have allowed for the study of multiple cases for reasons of comparison, these would have lacked in-depth understanding (Bentley *et al*., 2016).

Flyvbjerg (2006; p.220) describes case studies as a "detailed examination of a single example" that have the advantage of getting up-close to lived experience and testing hypotheses relative to occurrences as they unravel in the field. Therefore in reflection of 'what is this case a case of?', Flyvbjerg (2006) suggests that case study researchers must overcome anxieties about gaining an absolute understanding of a problem and aim rather to present an open story in its diversity. And as Eysenck (1976; p.9) also contends, "sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases – not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something". This is particularly the case for policy-relevant research, with Abbott (1992; p.79) claiming that case studies provide "far better access for policy intervention than the present social science of variables". For these reasons, case studies can be used as a 'pedagogical tool', offering 'context-dependent knowledge' that is critical for 'learning processes and expertise' (Flyvbjerg, 2007) at the local scale that can be applied to the broader narratives that surround urban policy.

4.4   A Detailed Look at the Case Study

This section provides a detailed account of the case study context.

Firstly, the case study location of Doncaster is introduced, before placing Doncaster within a national setting and identifying comparable urban areas in England that have similar characteristics and that experience similar opportunities and challenges in relation to the current urban growth agenda in England. This section is important for showing how the research findings of this study have the potential to be applied to other places, making this research highly-relevant and far-reaching.

Secondly, a synopsis of the economic and social conditions of the case study of Doncaster is presented in order to gain a better understanding of the setting for which the empirical narrative directly relates. This is based on the premise that whilst generalisations can be made, it is important that the findings are applied in the context of the particularities of place, each with their own unique challenges and opportunities as well as regional externalities and national pressures.

Thirdly, the spatial context of mid-sized cities in England is introduced. This looks at mid-sized cities in view of their wider regional geography by looking at existing research exploring intra-regional relationships and interdependencies. This is relevant for discussions on the relationships between a mid-sized city and their neighbouring cities that draw upon the empirical research later in the thesis.

4.4.1   Case study location

The metropolitan borough of Doncaster[4] was chosen for the research location, a local authority and medium-sized settlement in the north of England with a population of approximately 306,400 (ONS, mid-2016 estimate, 2017a). Doncaster developed into an industrial district between the 18th and 20th centuries founded largely on coal mining, as well as manufacturing, railway and horse-racing. During this time, Doncaster experienced population growth and in-migration, with the mining communities situated outside of the main urban area expanding rapidly. As a result, Doncaster's pattern of settlement became highly dispersed to which housing developments in the mid to late

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[4] The geography reflects the area represented by Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council rather than the town of Doncaster which has a population of just over 100,000.

20th century contributed to further growth in the suburbs. These processes have made for a distinct geography of Doncaster, a geography that makes the metropolitan borough the largest in England by geographic area (220 square miles). Doncaster's industrial roots and long history have resulted in a strong and unique local identity.

Currently, the borough forms part of the Sheffield City Region (SCR) (see Figure 4) which, like many other urban areas in England, has been the target of a series of governance restructuring efforts in recent years in the form of the Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership (SCR LEP) in 2011 and the Sheffield City Region Combined Authority (SCR CA) in 2014. The introduction of these institutions has gone alongside a City Deal in 2012, a Growth Deal in 2014, and a two-round Devolution Deal in 2014-2015.

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC) has been predominantly under Labour control since the Council was first elected in 1973. In 2001, Doncaster became the first metropolitan borough in England to elect a city Mayor. This position was initially held by Labour's Martin Winter who was re-elected in 2006. However, in 2009, Peter Davis was elected who represented the English Democrats. In 2013, Labour regained its position by the election of Ros Jones, who was re-elected in May 2017.

Figure 5: Map of the Sheffield City Region. Source: *Author*

Doncaster provided an appealing case for various reasons. Firstly, Doncaster is a 'typical case' of a mid-sized city, a relatively unexplored entity of the urban landscape which this research aims to shed new light on. Doncaster is indicative of the challenges that many mid-sized cities in the UK and overseas have faced since deindustrialisation, adding to the potential for transferability of the study's findings. Other typical cases include Middlesbrough in the UK (Lloyd, 2010), Roubaix in France (Rousseau, 2009) and Youngstown Ohio in the US (Buss & Redburn, 1983). These areas share many common features such as unstable labour markets, insufficient inward investment and high unemployment, and are commonly beset by social problems including comparatively poor health and low educational achievement (Dorling, 2011).

Secondly, Doncaster is part of a city-region (the SCR) which is critical for investigating the city-regional devolution governance system in England that this study aims to explore, as well as for investigating the relationship between a mid-sized city and a core city within this wider geographical setting. The SCR setting also provides an interesting alternative to the heavily dominated 'Greater Manchester approach' to city-regional governance studies.

Thirdly, the governance history of Doncaster makes it an interesting case. Doncaster was publically exposed for illegal governance practices in the year 2000 which led to the borough electing its first City Mayor in 2001. Doncaster was also subject to an Audit Commission Review in 2010 following a major incident exposing major failings in relation to its children's services. This led to another period of central government intervention up until 2014 with various new appointments for those occupying key leadership roles. Together, these incidents have impacted significantly on the conditions for which leaders currently operate (more detail is provided in Chapter 6).

Fourthly, the city mayoral model which Doncaster has been governed under since 2001 is a novel aspect of urban governance in England for which new insights can be gained.

4.4.2   A mid-sized city in England

According to the definition used by Bolton and Hildreth (2013) and adopted in this study, there are 26 mid-sized cities in England, each with between 250-500,000 residents and collectively accounting for 8.9 million of the national population (Bolton

& Hildreth, 2013; p.1) and approximately 16.8% of England's population (ONS, 2011). These are shown in Figure 5 below.

Figure 6: Mid-sized cities in England. Source: Bolton & Hildreth (2013)

Mid-sized cities are being increasingly recognised as sites for growth and investment. Drawing on data from between 2001 and 2011, Bolton and Hildreth (2013) found that mid-sized cities in England accounted for 14.2% of the total population growth and contributed 14% towards England's total Gross Value Added (GVA). This study also revealed that several mid-sized cities are some of England's fastest growing economies in terms of GVA, such as Reading and Milton Keynes, with a total of 12 mid-sized cities outperforming average national growth (Bolton & Hildreth, 2013). These findings were further emphasised in 2015 by research conducted by the Key Cities Group which

found that the collective GVA of mid-sized cities is growing faster than the collective GVA for the eight core cities (excluding London) in England which are Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield.

Mid-sized cities exhibit a set of similar features. These include demography, geography, economic trajectories, and institutional make-up (Sotomayor & Flatt, 2017). That said, however, not all mid-sized cities are the same. Hildreth (2007), for example, points to a number of differences related to history, industrial sectors and specialisations, knowledge assets, place functionality, and city networks and inter-dependence to highlight this. This is also true in relation to the diverging development paths that are found between those mid-sized cities that have experienced growth (such as Reading and Norwich) and others, primarily in the North of England (such as Hull and Blackpool), which have experienced decline.

Doncaster is the second largest economy in the SCR (the largest is Sheffield). This is due to a recent history of growth in the sectors of engineering and manufacturing, logistics, retail, and tourism. Doncaster is also well connected, served by five major motorways (M18, M1, A1(M), M62 and M180), the Doncaster Sheffield Airport and East Coast Mainline (Doncaster's Economic Growth Plan 2013-18).

Despite this positive outlook, however, a number of challenges remain. Doncaster suffers from persistently high levels of deprivation and is repeatedly placed within the top forty most deprived areas in England by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) (DMBC, 2013a). In 2015 for example, 20.6% of LSOAs in Doncaster were found to be in the top 10% most deprived in England (IMD, 2015), with the most severe deprivation found in and around the urban centre, as well as the former mining towns such as Stainforth and Mexborough as shown in Figure 6 below.

IMD 2015 % of LSOAs by Decile
1=most deprived, 10=least deprived

- 1 (20.6%)
- 2 (14.9%)
- 3 (13.4%)
- 4 (10.8%)
- 5 (9.8%)
- 6 (8.8%)
- 7 (9.3%)
- 8 (6.7%)
- 9 (4.6%)
- 10 (1.0%)
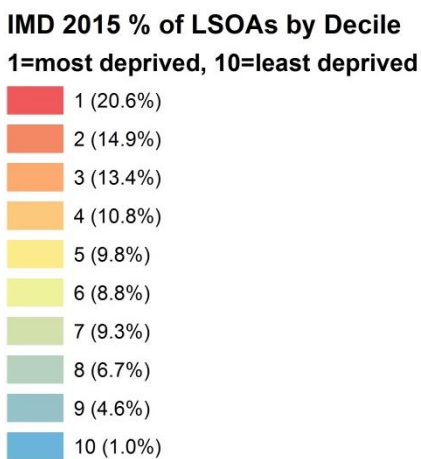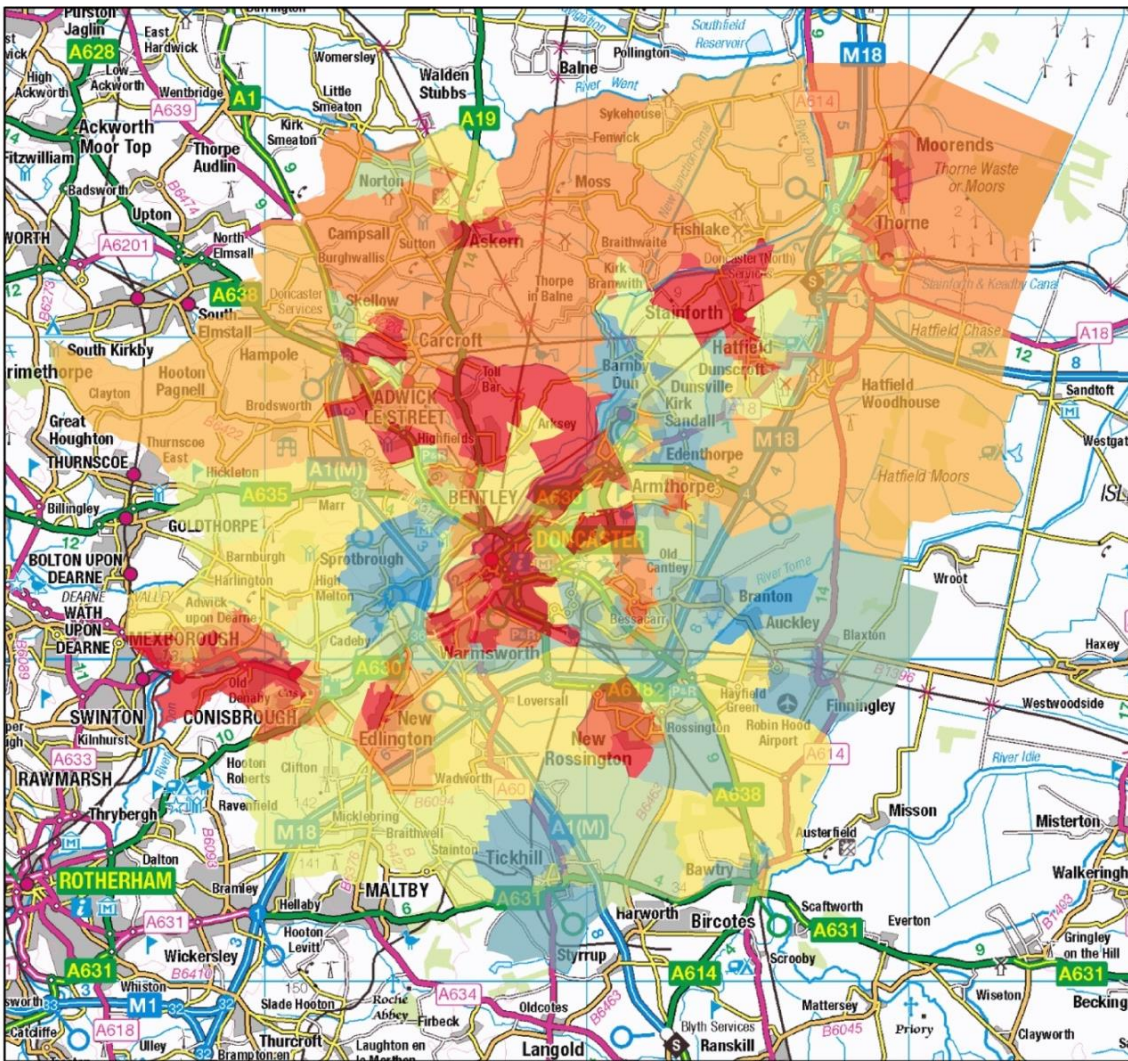
Figure 7: Deprivation in Doncaster. *Author.* Data source: IMD (2015)

Furthermore, despite being nationally well-connected, connectivity within Doncaster to the city centre where a large proportion of the job opportunities are located is a major issue for many of the residents living in peripheral settlements (DMBC, 2013a). This not only describes the situation within the settlement itself but also the way in which

Doncaster's residents are excluded from the labour markets of nearby towns and cities due to poor commuting links (DMBC, 2013a). This is evidenced by only 3.2% of its population commuting to the nearby core city of Sheffield (Cox & Longlands, 2016).

Beyond issues of connectivity are matters relating to Doncaster's labour market profile, as shown in Table 3. In terms of demographic profile, Doncaster has a comparatively low percentage of young and working age people, and a high percentage of people aged over 65. Furthermore, Doncaster's GVA is low compared to the national average, and the town is lacking in sectors which can offer high wage and high-value jobs. Thus despite having experienced growth in logistics and retail recently, this has made the town dependent on lower skilled and less productive sectors. In addition, earnings are relatively low and claimants are relatively high. Doncaster also has a 'low skills equilibrium'[5], with the number of young people going into further and higher education significantly lower than regional and national averages. Only 24.7% of the working-age population are qualified to degree level (ONS, 2015b). This could reflect a situation whereby the best-educated people are leaving Doncaster to seek opportunities elsewhere, contributing towards its ageing population profile. As such, it is clear that Doncaster has specific challenges in relation to labour supply, productivity, jobs, skills, and earnings. Doncaster does, however, have relatively high economic activity, low unemployment and high business births in comparison to the SCR. These indicators suggest a more positive outlook for the future.

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[5] "A low skills equilibrium is a situation where an economy becomes trapped in a vicious circle of low value added, low skills and low wages" (Wilson & Hogarth; 2003; p.vii)

	Doncaster	Sheffield	SCR	England
POPULATION (2016)				
Aged 18-24, as a % of total	7.8	14.5	10.6	8.8
Aged 16-64, %	62.3	65.8	63.7	63.1
Aged 65+, %	18.6	16.1	17.8	17.9
GVA (2015)				
GVA per Head (£)	16,889	19,833	-	26,159
EMPLOYMENT (2016)				
Economic Activity Rate (%), aged 16-64	76.7	72.7	73.7	78.1
Unemployment Rate (%), aged 16-64	6.4	6.6	6.6	5.0
BUSINESS COUNTS (2015)				
Births per 1000 population[6]	7.0	4.0	-	6.2
Deaths per 1000 population	3.0	3.0	-	4.0
SKILLS, 2015 (2015)				
NVQ4 and above, % of those aged 16-64	24.7	38.0	30.8	37.9
No Qualifications, aged 16-64 (%)	7.9	8.4	9.3	7.8
JOBS (2016)				
Jobs Density	0.72	0.76	0.71	0.84
Managers, Directors & Senior Officials, as % of total employment	9.2	9.6	9.3	10.9
Professional Occupations, % (SOC2)	13.5	21.6	17.8	20.4
WORKLESSNESS (2015)				
Workless Households %, 2015	17.2	19.3	19.0	14.9
CLAIMANTS (2016)				
Number of employment and support allowance claimants per 1000 people	47.1	41.6	46.5	35.5
EARNINGS (2015)				
Median Gross Weekly Pay, full-time workers (£)	479.1	505.3	-	544.7

Table 3: Labour market profile, Doncaster. *Author*. Data source: ONS (2017)

4.4.3   The spatial context of mid-sized cities

Mid-sized cities are often described in relation to their position within the wider region. Hildreth (2007; p.163), for example, suggests that mid-sized cities, unlike core cities, cannot be viewed as 'stand-alone' places but must be considered as part of a 'wider regional and urban hierarchy'. To explain, Hildreth (2007) describes how people's lived experiences operate beyond administrative boundaries, and thus proposes a need to address a holistic system of 'connections and flows'. Referring to what is termed the 'functional city', Hildreth also refers to the interdependencies which exist between the

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[6] Data unavailable for a city-regional geography

economies of mid-sized cities and the economies of other nearby places (Hildreth, 2007). However, since mid-sized cities often have more localised economies, they are often heavily reliant on the relative success of their wider regions and of their partnering 'core city'. Nevertheless, given their potential as described above, mid-sized cities are now well-positioned as important 'secondary nodes' for supporting the overall functioning capacity of a region.

Thus the opportunities and challenges facing mid-sized cities cannot be taken in isolation, especially in the context of the current city-regional geography in England. It is for these reasons that places like Hull are potentially disadvantaged in this context, with no wider city-regional geography or nearby core city with which to draw strengths from. Equally, however, mid-sized cities have also been described as in danger of being 'isolated' or 'overshadowed' within this geographical setting whereby larger, more dominant nearby towns and cities claim the majority of resources, powers and investment. To this end, research by Cox and Longlands (2016) propose several key factors (see Figure 7) which influence the likelihood of an urban area experiencing geographical isolation or overshadowing. These include; being historically dependent on a small number of big employers, being portrayed as an undesirable place to live within the public imagination and by the media, having weak institutional leadership, and experiencing low levels of skill, poor connectivity, social problems, poor quality of place and out-migration (Cox & Longlands, 2016; p.35-37).

Figure 8: Factors influencing the geographic isolation and/or overshadowing of mid-sized cities. Source: Cox and Longlands (2016)

Cox and Longlands (2016) identify four types of 'city relationships' that are illustrated and explained in Figure 8 below. These include 'independent', 'isolated', 'dependent' and 'interdependent' relationships between core cities and their neighbouring towns and cities. For the reasons outlined above, Doncaster is considered to fall under the category 'isolated'.
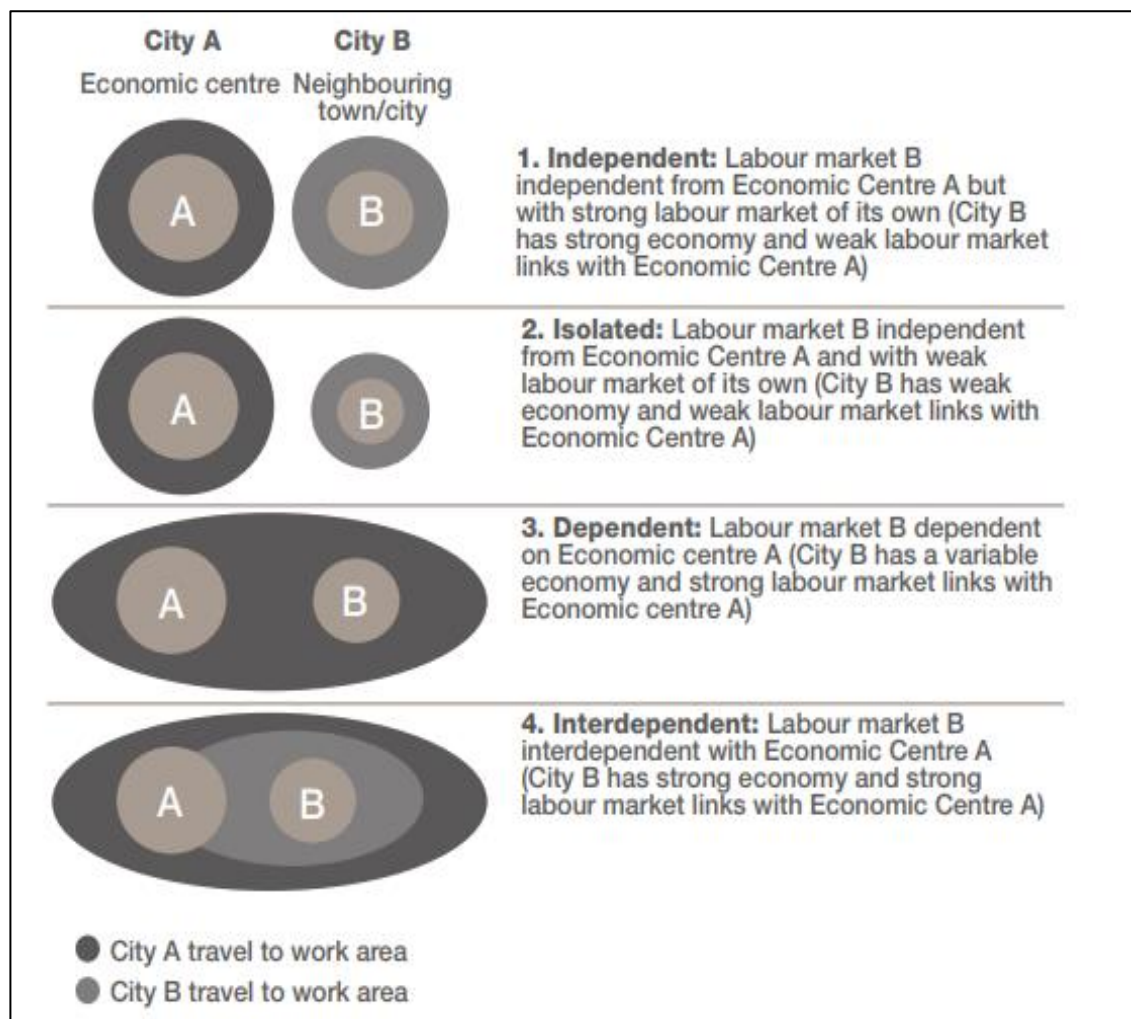
Figure 9: The four types of 'city relationships'. Source: Cox and Longlands (2016), adapted from Jones *et al.* (2009; p.23)

Overall, this section has provided a contextual insight of the case study location as well as a more in-depth discernment of a mid-sized city in its regional and national setting in England. The next section will now move on to outline the research methods that were used to conduct the research.

4.5   Research Methods

A period of fieldwork was conducted during the period of March to December in 2015. Overall, 36 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were carried out in Doncaster (including three within the wider SCR). These were complemented by a three-month internship exploring leadership and governance in Sheffield, as well as attendance at a number of meetings and events that allowed for researcher observation. These methods

will be discussed in turn, outlining why these particular methods were chosen and how they were carried out in the field.

4.5.1 Participant recruitment

Before the fieldwork phase could begin, a short period of desk-based planning was required to begin the recruitment of participants for interview. Firstly, this involved identifying different groups of individuals that could offer valuable insights into the research topic. These were broadly defined as stakeholders from the public, private, voluntary, community and faith sectors that played a role in leadership at the city and/or city-regional level. In the early stages, there were a number of important gatekeepers drawn upon from DMBC and the Doncaster Chamber of Commerce (DCC) that acted as gate-keepers for accessing research participants, drawing on their professional networks to identify persons to approach for interview.

A snowball sampling technique was adopted once interviewing had begun, each interview leading to further opportunities for interview (Henn *et al*., 2009). As Atkinson and Flint (2001; p.2) point out: "if the aim of a study is primarily explorative, qualitative and descriptive, then snowball sampling offers practical advantages". A snowballing technique does, however, pose the danger of excluding certain voices by drawing only on those that are found within certain networks, especially those for which access was initially granted. Yet in this case, the technique proved fruitful and granted access to participants that were not necessarily publically visible or well-known. Each participant recruited was sent an email prior to the interview taking place with a clear description and explanation of the research.

As mentioned above, each interviewee played a role in place leadership. These ranged from those who were more formally appointed such as Council executives and elected members, to leaders who voluntarily gave up their time to sit as part of a leadership board from a wide variety of sectors. The opportunity for access to participants was never restricted since, as was revealed in Chapter 3, leadership is no longer considered to be an exclusive act performed only by those occupying the more 'traditional' positions.

4.5.2   Direct observation

A total of three months were spent working as a research assistant within Sheffield First Partnership during the period of July to September in 2015, as part of a PhD Student Internship Scheme funded in association with White Rose DTC and Research Exchange for the Social Sciences at the University of Sheffield. Sheffield First Partnership[7] is a non-statutory body under the arm of Sheffield City Council (SCC) that "brings together leaders from across the public, private, voluntary, community and faith sectors in the city" (SFP Website, 2016). This experience provided the opportunity to be embedded within a local policy setting and gain a real-world insight into the realities of the evolving governance context this study explores.

The role involved working on a research project with the Director of Sheffield First Partnership examining local leadership in accordance with new models and trends of governance. Besides delivering on this precise remit, a lot of time was spent observing the everyday practices of leading senior officials within SCC as well as their engagement with outside organisations across a broad range of sectors. This provided a richer awareness and a deeper understanding of the processes of leading a place. The most interesting insights came from attending meetings and events whereby leaders would come together to strategise and network. For example, several Sheffield Executive Board[8] consultations were attended along with other related meetings to discuss the ongoing SCR devolution deal negotiations. Opportunities for observation also came from attending key leadership events. These included an event to launch the 2015 State of Sheffield Report and a 'Women in Leadership' event. Observations were captured by taking notes and writing weekly reflective diaries.

Whilst insights were not directly comparable to the primary research which was carried out in Doncaster, this experience did provide a broader understanding of place leadership and governance, gaining an insider's perspective which allowed me to compare academic knowledge with real-world practice. Furthermore, by being ideally situated after the first but before the second round of interviews in Doncaster (details are provided in the next sub-section), enhanced researcher reflection for developing and refining ideas for investigation in the second phase of interviewing was gained. This experience also offered an improved awareness of the broader SCR context for which

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[7] Sheffield First Partnership has since been renamed the Sheffield City Partnership.

Doncaster sits; not only in terms of the institutional arrangements that are nationally defined but also the internal workings of and relationships between the local authorities that sit within it. Thus overall it allowed for a richer engagement with the research data and enhanced interpretation of the findings.

Direct observation was also sought when conducting the fieldwork in Doncaster. Opportunities for this came when observing the everyday exchanges of interview participants within their organisational setting, as well as attendance at leadership events and visits to local organisations and businesses. These were recorded in a field diary, along with other fieldwork experiences and reflections.

4.5.3 Semi-structured interviews

Primary data was collected via a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with leaders in Doncaster and a small number from the wider Sheffield City Region via a selection process outlined in section 4.5.1. Following two pilot interviews with two key contacts from DMBC early in March 2015, the interviews were carried out in two stages. The initial stage ran from March to May 2015 and the second from October to December 2015.

Whilst theory-driven (Flick, 2009), the interviews were semi-structured to allow for a degree of openness, guided by an interview framework. This was created to explore the structural and institutionalised context through which local leadership is delivered, before exploring the intricacies of place leadership and its everyday practices. Some general questions were also asked impromptu at the beginning of each interview to set the scene, included questions regarding their background and day-to-day role. This was to put the interviewee at ease from the outset and encourage more open reflections. As stated by Beamer (2002; p.86): "poorly prepared and unstructured interviews can yield poor information and funnel an inquiry away from the primary research focus to a respondent's stream of conscious thoughts and biased perceptions". This framework evolved throughout the fieldwork process as new insights opened up. Interview questions were also adapted to suit the position of each interviewee and the flow of conversation, allowing the course of the interview to be developed during data collection in recognition that interview subjects are unique and shaped by their individual experiences (Mason, 2002). This approach, therefore, allowed for common

themes to be addressed, as well as affording the opportunity for participants to raise topics and issues which were not previously foreseen (Flick, 2009).

Overall, 36 interviews were carried out (see Table 4 below for a list of the interviewees). All interviews were conducted face-to-face so that other considerations such as body language and social cues could be interpreted to provide extra information to complement the data that telephone interviews would not have exposed (Opdenakker, 2006). The intention was for each interview to last about 60 minutes, however in practice interviews were between 30 and 90 minutes in length. Prior to each interview, the informant was given an explanation of the research study and was asked for their consent for the interview to take place and for the interview to be recorded.

Participant	Sector	Institution
INTERVIEW PHASE 1: March-May 2015		
1	Public Service	Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
2	Public Service	Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
3	Public Service	Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
4	Public Service	Doncaster Chamber of Commerce
5	Business	Rejus Ltd
6	Business	Peter Brett
7	Public Democratic	Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
8	Public Service	Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
9	Business	Sherwood Restaurants Ltd
10	Business	Keepmoat Group
11	Public Service	Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
12	Public Service	Sheffield City Region LEP (on secondment from DMBC)
13	Business	ProActive
14	Public Service	Sheffield City Region LEP (former employee of DMBC)
15	Public Service	Sheffield City Region LEP
16	Public Service	Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
17	Public Service	Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
18	Public Service	Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
19	Business	BSA Training
INTERVIEW PHASE 2: October – December 2015		
20	Private Sector	Doncaster Chamber of Commerce
21	Private Sector	Doncaster Chamber of Commerce
22	Education	Sir Thomas Wharton Community College
23	Faith	Church of England
24	Business	Taylor Bracewell
25	Business	Yorkshire Wildlife Park
26	Business	Pennine Stone
27	Business	Vigo Group
28	Business	Doncaster Rovers Football Club
29	Public Service	South Yorkshire Police
30	Public Service	NHS Doncaster Clinical Commissioning
31	Public Service	Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
32	Education	Doncaster College
33	Education	Doncaster College
34	Voluntary Sector	Health Watch Doncaster
35	Voluntary Sector	Doncaster Children's Services Trust
36	Entrepreneur	Other

Table 4: Table of interview participants.

4.6   Storing and Analysing Data

Following consent, each interview was recorded using a Dictaphone which was backed-up shortly afterwards onto a password-protected computer. Whilst recording the interviews had the potential to create unease for interviewees and reduce openness, being fully engaged in conversations was essential for grasping the most important and most interesting information for an instant follow up. This meant that extensive notetaking could not be achieved (Henn *et al*., 2009). As most participants were familiar with being recorded this was largely not an issue. Given the position of the stakeholders being interviewed and the topics being discussed, however, this may have had implications for achieving honest responses to the interview questions.

Transcription took place shortly after each interview, preferably on the same day, however sometimes this did run over into the days following. Alongside transcribing each interview word-for-word, additional researcher comments were also added referring to hesitations, the tone of voice and sarcasm to avoid loss of meaning. Whilst assistance technologies could have been used to aid this process such as Nvivo, this could have obscured a full and true emersion into the data.

Following the transcription of all interviews and once key themes had been identified, the full analysis was achieved via a drawn-out process of thematic coding until a coherent narrative was reached. Coding was both focused and open, involving an iterative process of reasoning following both 'deductive' and 'inductive' techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus interrelated concepts based on prior theoretical assumptions, as well as those which were drawn out during data collection and subsequent analysis, were utilised to make sense of the data that was generated. By linking local circumstances with wider structural processes within a specific place, the intention was to produce "a continuous dialectical tackling between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring both into view simultaneously" (Geertz, 1974; p.43).

Largely, the aim of 'deductive' reasoning is to test theory whilst 'inductive' reasoning involves generating new theory from new data (Bryman, 2012). Whilst the latter provided the main basis to explore the research objectives to be examined, the fieldwork was influenced by current knowledge in the field and large parts of the analysis were offered in accordance with existing theories. Thus whilst the two are quite often

described as separate methods for carrying out social research, this research recognises the value of using both interchangeably to allow for 'circularity' within the research process (Bryman, 2012). Figure 9 below illustrates the stages of the research and how these were linked.
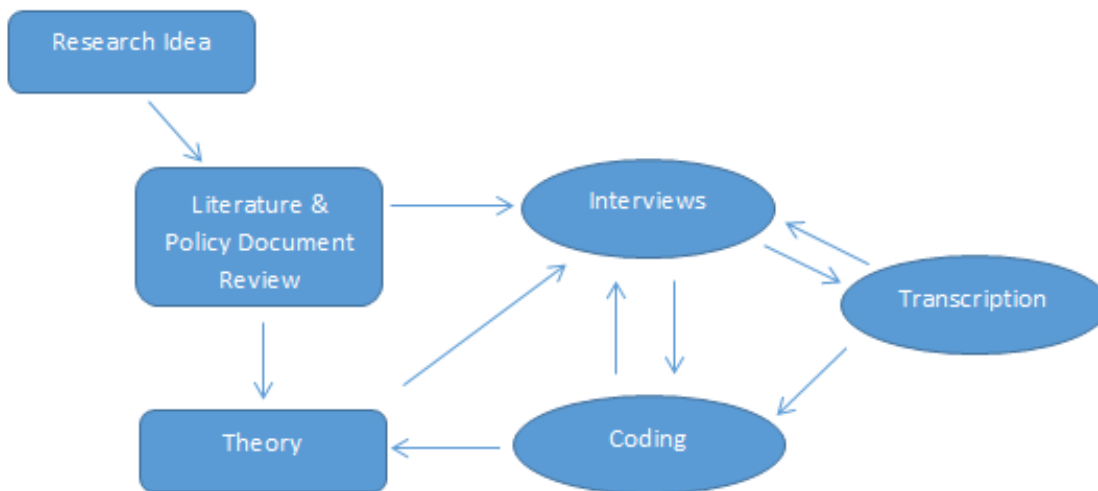
Figure 10: Stages of the research. Source: *Author*

Interview data was contextualised using the accounts of the interview participants, together with the literature review and policy documents. This material was then used to write up the empirical findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6. A number of themes are then drawn out in Chapter 7 that have a high degree of transferability and the potential to be developed into hypotheses for further study and subsequent testing.

4.7 Positionality, Ethics and Safety

The embedded participant observation phase of the research acquired whilst working as a research intern within Sheffield First Partnership, had the potential to encourage mission creep and skew the judgement of the empirical research being carried out in Doncaster. It was therefore essential that the researcher, whilst using this experience to complement the investigation of the case study under review and get closer to the issues that were emerging, was critically aware of their position and able to provide a true reflection of the conversations that were had with the research participants of this study. Furthermore, since interviewing more broadly is imbued with a complex politics of

power dynamics, representation and positionality (Rose, 1997), caution was given to the researcher position vis-à-vis the position of the interviewee via active reflexivity.

The University of Sheffield's comprehensive ethical policies and procedures were followed. Formal approval by the Research Integrity and Ethics Committee was received before any fieldwork was carried out. Following the policy procedures, the rights of the participants were recognised by guaranteeing anonymity, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any point. These rights were clearly outlined in the informed consent form that was given to each participant to sign prior to any data collection. Given the organic nature of direct observation (Silverman, 2013), consent for this was gained indirectly via the approval to be within a particular setting. Permission was also requested to audio-record the interviews and had permission not been granted, detailed notes would have been written instead. During the fieldwork, the researcher acted with a duty of care to minimise the chance of any risk or harm inflicted as a result of the research. The data and related materials were stored on a password-protected computer and in a locked drawer (Silverman, 2013).

4.8   Summary: Methodology

This chapter has provided a comprehensive account of the methodological approach, design and methods used to conduct the research. It has also offered an insight into the case study location, positioning this within its regional and national context in England. The methodological approach reflects the epistemological framing of this research for which a case study provides an opportunity to test and develop hypotheses within a particular setting, but for which lessons learnt are transferable to other places. It is also, given the nature of the research, a reflection of the importance that has been placed on empirical application, responding to a legacy of academic inquiry that is "inaccessible to the practitioner and policy communities who could most benefit from it" (Sallee & Flood, 2012; p.137). This thesis, therefore, provides a voice to those at the frontline of changing governance processes and practices, allowing for an in-depth exploration of leadership and governance within a complex policy environment. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 that follow will present the empirical findings of the research.

Chapter 5. CITY-REGIONAL GOVERNANCE: AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE SHEFFIELD CITY REGION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will address research objective 1:

> To *investigate* how sub-national leaders in England are navigating the emerging city-regional policy landscape in the context of austerity and a push towards more devolved governance, from the perspective of a mid-sized city.

This chapter marks the first of two chapters that will present the findings from the interviews that were carried out in Doncaster, using the theoretical notions discovered in previous chapters as a guide to explore leadership and governance within a live, real-world city-regional policy setting. Firstly, perceptions of the emergence of city-regional governance in England are presented, before secondly, the discussion draws on the experience and insights of interviewees to look at how regional and local institutions and leaders are navigating this new governance and policy landscape. In doing so, this chapter adds to existing ideas on the governance, policy, and institutional processes that underlie the structural foundations of city-regional devolution and provide meaning for sub-national leadership and governance in action. It will also consider the importance of the particularities of place (the city-regional setting) and the influence of agency (place leaders) in its implementation.

This will be achieved by:

- Introducing the new sub-national, city-regional governance setting specific to the case study (section 5.2);
- Unearthing local perceptions in relation to devolution, austerity, and the new city-regional scale of governance (section 5.3);
- Highlighting a number of discrepancies between policy discourse and the institutional conditions under which city-regional governance is performed (section 5.3);

- Bringing to light the struggle for power and resources, and the difficulties and strains of institutional arrangements for city-region leadership across administrative boundaries (sections 5.3 and 5.4);
- Reflecting on how leaders are negotiating their position and making sense of the new city-regional governance arrangements (section 5.4);
- Bringing to the fore how Doncaster, as a mid-sized city, is making sense of the interplay, relational dynamics and power-sharing arrangements of an evolving city-regional governance landscape in England, and looking for ways to strategise and negotiate its role and position within it (section 5.5).

This chapter presents the local voice via a series of interview excerpts[9] alongside researcher commentary, reflection, and synthesis to frame the discussion. Owing to the uncertainty and ever-changing policy setting within which this research took place, this chapter attempts to disentangle this policy landscape by presenting local perceptions and understandings of city-regional governance, from the perspectives of local leaders in Doncaster. These will be drawn upon in Chapter 7 that provides a deeper and richer synthesis of the empirical findings of this study and how these relate to wider research.

Interviews were carried out in 2015 before the Cities and Local Government Act in 2016. Therefore the findings that are presented must be interpreted in the context of the post-2010 and pre-2016 approach to local growth in England.

5.2   Introducing the Sheffield City Region

In 2010, the election of a Conservative-led Coalition government in the UK gave rise to a Localist and 'radical devolution' agenda for urban growth (Cabinet Office, 2010). Following the creation of 39 LEPs by 2011, in the years that followed a number of Combined Authorities were established based on a new city-regional geography for sub-national governance (Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2016). The overall narrative of the new approach was to allow local places more autonomy over how they grow by, in part, giving more power to local businesses and local communities. Also underlying the new approach was a major reduction in local government funding, with the devolution agenda readily cited as being in close connection with austerity policies (Etherington & Jones, 2016).

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[9] Direct quotes from interview transcripts will be integrated into the discussion.

This has given way to a period of major institutional rearrangement for sub-national governance since 2010. This has required local leaders to adapt to a new way of working that aligns with a city-regional approach, with city-regional leaders and institutions described as the "catalysts of urban transformation" (Bradford, 2017; p.3).

The Sheffield City Region (SCR) whereby this research was carried out is a city-region in the north of England with a population of approximately 1.8 million, covering nine local authorities that span across the three metropolitan counties of South Yorkshire, Derbyshire, and Nottinghamshire. These include Sheffield (the core city) together with Bassetlaw, Barnsley, Bolsover, Chesterfield, Derbyshire Dales, Doncaster, North East Derbyshire, and Rotherham. The SCR was first defined in 2004 under New Labour's Northern Way agenda. However, it was not until the demise of Yorkshire Forward[10] under a new Conservative-led Coalition government that was elected in 2010 with an 'anti-regional' and 'new local' agenda, that the SCR geography became the focus for sub-national activity. A major factor in this was the creation of the Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership (SCR LEP) and the Sheffield City Region Combined Authority (SCR CA).

5.2.1   Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership

The SCR LEP was established in October 2010 as the driver of economic policy within the SCR, responsible for putting together the multi-year SCR Strategic Economic Plans (SEPs) for growing the sub-national economy and to create jobs. They are also responsible for Enterprise Zones and EU Structural and Investment Funds for the period covering 2014-2020 (Hackett & Hunter, 2017). The SCR LEP is charged with understanding better the needs of diverse sectors and markets by engaging with local businesses (SCR LEP, 2017), and has set up a number of sector groups to widen the network of businesses to inform the development of the SEPs. The SCR LEP is overseen by a board of representatives, made up of 19 members. These include ten business leaders appointed via "an open, transparent, competitive and non-discriminatory process" (SCR LEP, 2017), together with the nine Leaders of the local authorities that make up the SCR CA (the Chair and Vice-Chair, however, are always

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[10] Regional Development Agency (RDA) covering the whole of the Yorkshire region, 1999-2012.

private sector representatives). The SCR LEP works closely with the SCR CA to steer and support public sector decision-making.

5.2.2 Sheffield City Region Combined Authority

The SCR CA was created in April 2014; accountable for the delivery of economic development, transport, and regeneration policies. Overall, the SCR CA responsibilities include setting the policy direction, making investment decisions, and commissioning (SCR LEP, 2017). Made up of the nine local authorities of the SCR, it is comprised of four constituent members (Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham, and Sheffield), five non-constituent members (Bassetlaw, Bolsover, Chesterfield, Derbyshire Dales, and North East Derbyshire), and a number of observers (Derbyshire CC and Nottinghamshire CC) (SCR LEP, 2017). This is outlined in Table 5 below.

Member	Post	CA Membership Type
Barnsley MBC	Leader (Chair)	Constituent
Bassetlaw DC	Leader	Non-Constituent
Bolsover DC	Leader	Non-Constituent
Chesterfield DC	Leader	Non-Constituent
Derbyshire Dales DC	Leader	Non-Constituent
Doncaster MBC	Elected Mayor	Constituent
North East Derbyshire DC	Leader	Non-Constituent
Rotherham MBC	Leader	Constituent
Sheffield CC	Leader	Constituent
SCR LEP	Chair	LEP Representative
Derbyshire CC	Leader	Observer
Nottinghamshire CC	Leader	Observer
D2N2 LEP	Chair	TBC

Table 5: Sheffield City Region Combined Authority Membership. Source: SCR LEP (2017; p.11-12)

5.2.3 Sheffield City Region decision-making process

In order to provide formal guidance and clarity over the decision-making process for the SCR under this new institutional arrangement (see Figure 10), the following protocols were set (SCR LEP, 2017):

- The CA Board is the accountable body for the Sheffield City Region, providing democratic representation for signing off the Strategic Economic Plan.

- The LEP is responsible for reflecting the views of local businesses and for contributing to the economic plan for the Sheffield City Region.

- The CA and LEP are supported by the Sheffield City Region Executive Team, providing day-to-day support for policy development, commissioning, project development, project appraisal, programme management, and meeting administration. The Sheffield City Region Executive Team works closely with the Leaders, chief executives and officers from the member authorities.

- Five Delivery Boards review, approve and monitor projects in relation to transport; infrastructure; housing; skills, employment and education; and business growth. These are complemented by a Programme Board that helps to review and coordinate their work to ensure that all objectives are met.

- The Sheffield City Region Audit and Scrutiny Committees provide oversight of the overall functionality of the Sheffield City Region.
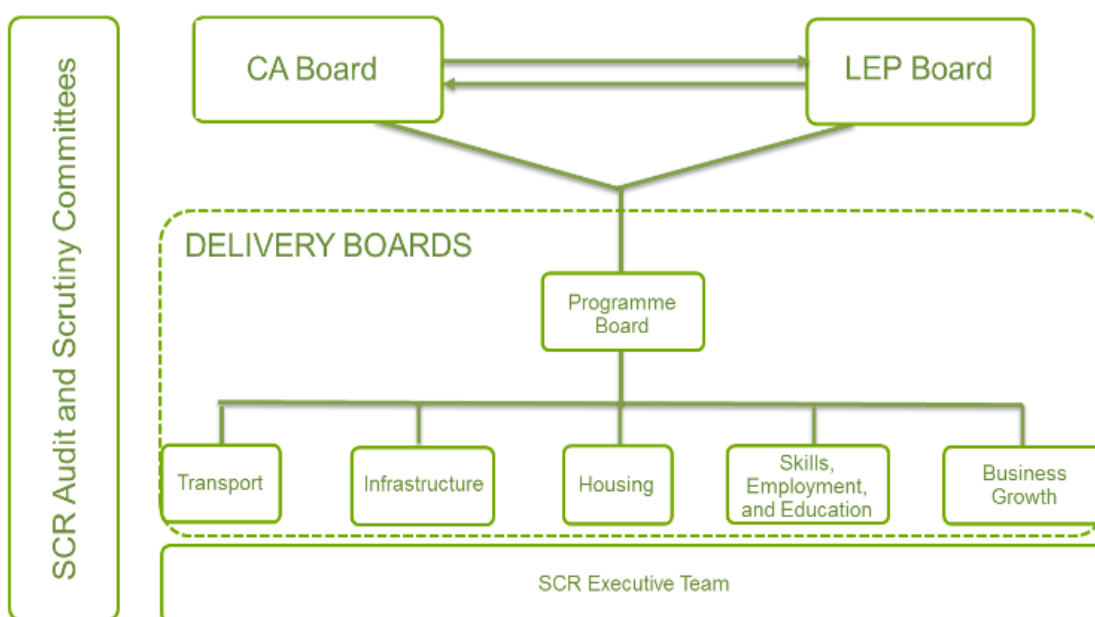
Figure 11: SCR decision-making structure. Source: SCR LEP (2017; p.10)

Figure 10 provides an example of the pseudo governance model of the SCR that can be used to reflect upon the actual practice that will be presented from section 5.3 onwards.

5.2.4   Sheffield City Region devolution deals

The first Sheffield City Region Devolution Deal was agreed between the SCR CA and central government in December 2014, followed by a second deal in October 2015 the following year. Together, these promised more local control over strategic planning and transport budgets, as well as an additional £30 million a year over a 30-year period for investment in growth and skills (Paun & Jack, 2017). The SCR devolution deals were two of the first granted in England, preceded only by the deals agreed in Greater Manchester. The SCR accepted to elect a metro mayor as part of the terms and conditions set by national government. The SCR, however, was not included in the first round of mayoral elections in May 2017. This was due to geographical conflicts and local disagreements in relation to the memberships of Chesterfield (in Derbyshire) and Bassetlaw (in Nottinghamshire) (Paun & Jack, 2017). It is expected that this issue will be resolved by the time of the second mayoral elections in May 2018.

Overall, this first section has provided an overview of the city-regional devolution structures that have been implemented within the SCR since 2010. The rest of this chapter will now begin to present the empirical findings. In the first instance, the discussion will reflect on the policy, structures and institutions of city-regional governance as presented in the next section. As previously stated, direct quotes from interviewees will be integrated into the discussion.

5.3   The Sheffield City Region: Policy, Structures, and Institutions

Discussions over the current policy and governance arrangements for local growth were filled with both optimism and dismay, or as was captured from one interviewee: the new approach has "*taken with one hand and given with the other*".

Generally speaking, local stakeholders spoke of the new model and its general notions of 'localism', 'decentralisation' and 'devolution' as a positive step in the right direction towards more local involvement in and influence over local growth. More local autonomy was considered to be long overdue and recent changes were, at least to a certain extent, viewed favourably. Such sentiments were often made in relation to decades of a highly top-down, centralised approach, in addition to local people knowing how best to lead their place. There was also some enthusiasm shown for a city-regional

geography, with interviewees echoing the messages of central government that city-regions *"make sense"* and reflect the *"area's true economic functionality"*. The model was also recognised as being more in line with other national systems whereby city-regionalism has been well received as one interviewee points out:

> *"...**city-region models we can see internationally work** because that's where most of the innovation, the capital, intellectually, human and economic, tends to sort of concentrate."[11]*

[Public Service Representative]

In the United States, as well as Europe in countries such as France, Spain, Italy and Germany (Herrschel & Newman, 2002), transfers of central powers to regional city governments have arisen over several decades. Many local leaders also supported a city-regional geography for encouraging cross-boundary working, resource efficiency and better policymaking in areas such as transport.

Despite this initial positive outlook, however, there were a number of issues identified that were preventing a city-regional geography from working as effectively as that which is described above. Firstly, the geographical and historical make-up of the SCR was perceived as creating problems from the outset. Furthermore, questions were raised regarding the real intentions of central government for this new approach to policy and governance, with discussions highlighting concerns over resources and responsibilities, institutional complexity and the nature of devolution deals.

5.3.1   The importance of geography and history in city-regional governance

The SCR geography, a relatively new and unfamiliar setting for practising sub-national governance for the nine local authorities that make-up the region, is presenting a number of problems owing to the geographical and historical make-up of the region (see Figure 4 in Chapter 4 for a map of the SCR).

Firstly, during discussions about the SCR collaboration with stakeholders in Doncaster, the four local authorities of Sheffield, Doncaster, Rotherham and Barnsley in the north

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[11] For each interview excerpt, the key text has been emboldened to ease readership and interpretation. However, the excerpts should be read in full in order to receive the full contribution each brings to the discussion. The text is also shown in a lighter shade to the main body of text and is in italics to make clear the distinction between quotes from interviewees and quotes from other literatures.

featured prominently. Whilst this is unsurprising given that these four areas up until recently had their own defined governance arrangement as South Yorkshire County Council, this emphasis began to reveal a rather obvious divide between the areas that make up the SCR in the early stages of the research.

Relatively speaking, the four local authorities of Sheffield, Rotherham, Doncaster and Barnsley were described as having a long history of working together. The relationship between Sheffield and Rotherham, in particular, was described as a close one, especially in economic terms. In the south of the SCR, the three local authorities of North East Derbyshire, Chesterfield and Bolsover have elsewhere been described as having strong historic ties, all which are governed under Derbyshire County Council (Jones *et al*., 2009). The connection between the north and the south, however, is much less well established. Research has suggested that this has been exacerbated by the fact that whilst areas in the north have historically looked to Sheffield as their core city, areas in the south have more often looked to places like Derby, Mansfield, Nottingham and North East Lincolnshire in the East Midlands (Jones *et al*., 2009).

To put simply, this points to at least two distinct geographies and set of relationships within the region. As conversations continued, however, a more complicated web of relationships was revealed. The polycentric geography of the SCR was described as a major barrier for city-regional working. Several interviewees, for example, referred to the physical separation between Doncaster and Sheffield (the two largest economies in the SCR) which means that the two economies almost sit independently. As a result, it was explained how Doncaster is unable to benefit from growth within Sheffield (the core city) as perhaps other similar sized urban areas in other regions would:

> *"It's a good half an hour on the train from Sheffield to Doncaster so that degree of separation has meant that it's had to do something else, **it can't just ride on the coattails in the way that others might if Sheffield does really start to take off**."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

This supports previous findings that Sheffield, whilst being the city-regional economic core and the centre of employment opportunities, is relatively self-contained compared to other core cities within city-regions such as Leeds and Manchester (Jones *et al*., 2009). Thus despite Sheffield having strong labour market links with Rotherham, and to some extent Barnsley and North East Derbyshire, links between the core city and neighbouring areas were alleged to be relatively weak within the SCR. This supports the

discussion that was presented in section 4.4 which suggested that Doncaster is an independent (or otherwise 'isolated') economy. This, as one interviewee explains below, is unfavourable in terms of city-regional working:

> *"I think **one of the problems with the city-region, as Doncaster we've not really been a part of it. Naturally, we sit** outside of the sort of Sheffield centric... you've got Barnsley and Rotherham that are very much feeders into Sheffield and they sit very comfortably alongside that, whereas I think **Doncaster has its own independent economy**, there's relatively little trade between them… I think the city region represents more of a threat to Doncaster than an opportunity actually… as more and more power, money, influence moves from regional bodies to central governments into that city region, we're at risk of being left behind."*

[Private Sector Representative]

It is perhaps for these reasons why, as explained by interviewees, Doncaster has strong connections with places in the broader Yorkshire region such as York, Leeds and Hull. Therefore whilst interviewees recognised that for some metropolitan areas city-regional governance works well, such as Greater Manchester that has a monocentric geography, local leaders alleged that a more flexible approach was needed within national policy that recognises the distinctiveness of city-regional geographies.

Relationships between the local authorities that make up the SCR were also described as being partly determined by history. Whilst little detail of this was provided during the interviews, research carried out elsewhere has shed some light on these issues. For example, the expansion of steel production in Sheffield in the early 20th century fed by the extraction of coal in Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster produced ties between these areas in the region (Jones *et al*., 2009). In particular, given that a large part of the steel production took place in the east of Sheffield and the west of Rotherham, a strong link between the two has been flourishing ever since (Jones *et al*., 2009). However, de-industrialisation in the 1980s and the 1990s led to some places within South Yorkshire becoming isolated, with connectivity in terms of transport and accessibility also affected. Furthermore, under market conditions that have encouraged competition, local authorities have been battling for regional resources which have led to feelings of hostility. As one local practitioner stated for example: *"…it's tribal, it's historical, it's one feels that it will be to the disadvantage of the other"*. These were thought to have intensified recently under the pressures of austerity since 2010.

Taking on a slightly different perspective, despite a prominent union presence across all the local authorities during the period of deindustrialisation in the 1980s, the SCR has since seen some divergence in terms of its political trajectories. For instance, whilst much of the region has remained strongly aligned with Old Labour values, Sheffield has been described as being more heavily influenced by New Labour politics, which it is claimed made the city more entrepreneurial and open for business than other parts of the region (Herrschel & Newman, 2002). Political hostilities and protectionist views have also been reinforced by the idea that Sheffield, as the core city, has too much power over the region (see section 5.5 for a more detailed insight).

Thus despite expectations for the nine local authorities of the SCR to come together under a new city-regional governance arrangement, these were described as operating within a deeply fragmented geographical landscape of diverging histories. Fractions were thought to be also partly the result of a continually changing regional geography (see sections 2.3 and 2.4), which has not only influenced the connection felt between a place and its region but also confusion over place identity (these points will be expanded upon in Chapter 7). This, as recent events have shown, has the potential to hinder the devolution journey of city-regions, with the SCR excluded from the first round of metro mayoral elections in May 2017 for disputes over its geography and membership (details can be found in section 7.4). Beyond matters of geographical and historical importance, however, the next section will begin to identify challenges relating to the devolution process and the instruments used to implement it.

5.3.2   The devolution of resource, responsibility, and autonomy

Conversations with local leaders in Doncaster revealed scepticism in relation to the real intentions of the new approach for local growth. Many local leaders, for example, were of the opinion that the changes were *"a really clever move by government"* to transfer the blame for public service budget cuts:

> *"…whilst it's refreshing… **you could argue that they've been quite clever… to say well we've given money to local areas… it's for them to decide how they spend it**. So local authorities get kicked if we shut libraries or… care homes because oh it's for us to decide, and yes it is, but you also took 100 million pounds out of our budget…"*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

And in view of the long-term plans of central government to impose austerity, suggestions were made that the new city-regional governance arrangement is a tactic to place a buffer between national government and local communities;

> *"I think what the government has cleverly done is recognise there'll be fifteen years or more of austerity. Therefore, having Combined Authorities and having LEPs who are at the front line of that with their spending reduced, then the easy answer as an MP or as leader of the country is to turn round and say well actually that's not our decision, that's Sheffield City Region, talk to Sheffield City Region."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Stakeholders also questioned the authenticity of the new agenda given a governance system that ultimately still remains highly centralised, with one interviewee describing how central government is *"still retaining all the authority and all the power just under the veil of devolution and localism"*. Thus whilst devolution has the potential to serve local interests, many local leaders suggested that it was constrained by a lack of will by central government to radically change the power structures of governance. Whilst this suggests a degree of deception over the intention of devolution, others pointed to a lack of trust shown by Whitehall for local leaders being able to work independently:

> *"…from a government point of view… the default position is we know best, why would you want to do this?... you need to prove to us that you're worthy of it. Tell us what you want to do, we'll have to sign that off, and then tell us how you want to do it and then we'll have to sign that off as well…"*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Beyond this 'government knows best' mentality, questions were also raised with regards to whether city-regions have the capacity to truly drive growth given the limited tools and resources on offer. For example, comments were often made in relation to reduced budgets acting as a major barrier for utilising new powers or effectively delivering on new responsibilities, and as one interviewee noted: *"…yeah, there is some choice about how that money is spent, but some of that choice will be really difficult on a reduced budget"*. Local practitioners also expressed concern for a continuation of excessive regulation and bureaucratic controls, with one leader stating: *"…we're all still governed by central government red tape and that's a big issue that we all come across…"*.

Furthermore, the need to conform to the ideals of central government, or as one interviewee puts it, *"jumping through all the hoops that they've put in place"*, has meant that city-regional decision-making is heavily constrained:

> *"…[they] say we're devolving this money to you, but… here are the rules of how to spend it and **you've got to comply with all of their criteria**... so there's kind of partial devolution, **as long as you play to their rules it's okay**."*
>
> [Private Sector Representative]

As such, discussions revealed a constant thought-process by local leaders for acting in a way that complied with what they perceived central government would allow and would want them to do. This aligns with regulationist type thinking (see Jones, 1997) which poses that 'national economic and ideological forces' are the most influencing factors that frame 'local activity and governmental choice' by which "national impulses impose such strong mediating forces on the local that, even when alternative options may be considered in theory, in reality governing elites tend to make similar choices" (Digaetano & Lawless, 1999; p.551 citing Molotch, 1993). This is also outlined in the following comment that was given by one interviewee:

> *"**Our agenda**… being realistic **it's also partly determined by government** and what conversations do they want to have? What other things do we think they might want to do? Not want to do? and the funding that they might want to give us and not want to give us… so **that shapes the type of work we do**."*
>
> [Public Sector Representative]

As such, there was an appetite for a governance environment that allowed for some *"real local decision-making"* over, for example, what budgets can be spent on: *"...we need them in the next phase to really let go and let us make decisions on how we want to spend the money"*. Overall, therefore, local leaders recognised a need for *"government to do some actual proper devolution and stop holding the purse strings"*.

This section has begun to uncover a process of city-regional devolution that is beginning to disperse certain functions, tasks and budgets to local areas after several decades of operating in a highly centralised system. However, also revealed was a devolution agenda that is wrought with a large number of rules and restrictions which suggests high levels of central control and regulation. Thus in reflection of sentiments by local leaders in Doncaster that favoured having a more localised approach and more local control over local growth, calls were made for having more fiscal autonomy and for devolution proposals to be rolled out further. Also beginning to be exposed here is a

mismatch between responsibility, autonomy and resource that are limiting the capacity of local leaders to deliver on new responsibilities. Thus whilst this new approach is calling for more creativity and innovation to adapt to the new system as described in Chapter 3, the discussion here suggests that system conditions are not allowing leaders to embrace this new way of working. This was also aligned with issues of institutional complexity as the following section will begin to unfold.

5.3.3 Institutional complexity

A recent report published by the SCR LEP in 2017 outlines that "the configuration and membership of the SCR LEP Board and SCR CA is designed such that they have mutually supportive roles*" (p.20). The reasons given to support this include clarity over their institutional roles and responsibilities, and overlapping membership encouraging communication and the sharing of ideas and experiences (SCR LEP, 2017).

This sentiment, however, did not parallel the observations of local leaders in Doncaster. By and large, the SCR governance structure was described as *"messy"*, and whilst it was recognised that *"…it's still in its fairly early stages and trying to flex its muscles"*, many referred to a multitude of inconsistencies, contradictions and complexities that are preventing the SCR from operating effectively. This echoes the term coined by Shaw and Tewdwr-Jones (2016) of 'disorganised devolution' to describe city-regional devolution in England. Interviewees often spoke about this disorganisation in relation to the roles and functions of the SCR LEP and the SCR CA that, as the two main bodies responsible for local growth, revealed a complicated web of relationships.

In the first instance, referring back to when the new arrangements for city-regional growth were first introduced in 2010, it was suggested that the functioning capacity of the SCR LEP (the first of the two institutions to be created) was not properly thought through, set up with insufficient levels of power, resource and accountability:

> *"**I don't think LEPs were thought through properly**. I think **they were rushed out as a solution to a problem**… we've just abolished all the RDAs, oh shit, what are we going to do?... **without any resource, given conflicting priorities and objectives**, **without thought about accountability or governance or resourcing** or any of that stuff."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

This finding supports earlier claims made in Chapter 2 that LEPs, in contrast to RDAs that preceded them, were formed with "negligible budgets" and "limited delivery powers at their disposal" (Shutt *et al*., 2012; p.15). This meant that their task of 'rebalancing the economy' was an extremely difficult one, if not unrealistic. Whilst RDAs had a combined annual budget of a little over £1.4 billion in 2010/11, LEPs were given a £5 million one-off Start-up Fund, supported by a £4 million Capacity Fund over four years (Shutt *et al*., 2012). This, as Shutt *et al*. (2012) go on to describe, is insufficient and limited the potential for LEPs to deliver anything similar to RDAs. Thus without the powers and resources to *"get stuff done"*, LEPs were described as not having the might or weight to be able to deliver any real results. Consequently, comments were made in relation to a concern early in its implementation that the SCR LEP would lose its initial backing from businesses in the region. Furthermore, LEPs were described as having very little direction from central government, with one explanation given for this suggesting that even those in central government were unclear about how a LEP structure of governance would hold up on the ground.

The issue of accountability was raised as a key concern when LEPs were first introduced in their representation of informal voluntary relationships. In addition, and resonating with the findings of Cominetti *et al*. (2012), LEPs were characterised by interviewees as being neither accountable to the centre nor to the local communities they aimed to serve. Interviewees also suggested that this was an issue that central government had overlooked in their proposal, which Cominetti *et al*. (2012) suggest is surprising given that accountability was one of the central criticisms of RDAs.

Beyond its impact on the capacity of the SCR LEP to deliver any real results early in its implementation, interviewees also felt that this accountability lapse impinged upon the perceptions of leaders in the region. Some interviewees, for example, suggested that questions were being raised at this time in relation to the SCR LEP's credibility. This was considered to be particularly the case from leaders in the public sector that, as described by one business representative, are suspicious of the business community in the region and their intentions. This also feasibly aligns with uncertainties over power being concentrated in a new 'quasi monopoly' of private sector leaders rather than leaders across a broader spectrum of sectors (Shaw and Tewdwr-Jones, 2016).

With this background, interviewees shed light on a situation whereby, following an accountability oversight, central government soon recognised the need for a politically

administered and representative body to go alongside and complement the workings of LEPs to fill the gap. This came in the form of CAs as one interviewee explains:

> *"You need resource, accountability and responsibility to be equally weighted… they [LEPs] seem to have responsibility but without being allowed the accountability because that's when you've got Combined Authorities coming in…"*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Given that LEPs, represented by business leaders, could not be granted 'direct' accountability (Cominetti *et al*., 2012) within a democratic system that would require its members to be democratically elected, CAs represented by local authority leaders were introduced in 2014 as a body with which to inject a more robust structure of accountability into city-regional operations. As a result, LEPs, which now have local authority leaders as members, have been referred to as receiving a level of 'indirect' accountability (Cominetti *et al*., 2012). However, as is described below in relation to the case of the SCR, this has resulted in the SCR LEP becoming heavily dependent on local authority backing to influence decision-making and funding that has got in the way of achieving private sector-led growth for which the SCR LEP was first created.

Whilst the SCR governance structure was described as working reasonably well given the circumstances, especially in relation to being granted one of the first devolution deals in England, a somewhat disjointed and chaotic implementation of city-regional governance was described by interviewees that has created operational confusion.

For example, it was claimed that the responsibilities and roles of the SCR LEP and the SCR CA have become blurred and unclear for the reason that, as one interviewee puts it, *"no one quite knows who is the boss of which"*. This was explained as having created a situation whereby both institutions try to take the lead, creating a set of circumstances whereby the two are in competition for the most power and influence within the region. On the other hand, however, this could also give way to neither institution taking on the responsibility of leading. In either case, effective decision-making for the good of the region is unlikely to thrive in this environment.

During interviews, local leaders spoke of the SCR LEP and the SCR CA as almost two distinct modes of governance, despite central government intention for the one working to complement the other. Some interviewees related this to a clear divide that exists

between the SCR LEP and the SCR CA in line with public and private sector representation:

> *"...leaders themselves, they'll talk about the LEP like it's some other board, they're on that board, they are the LEP, but **there's a clear separation** between private sector members and then the leaders that are on that board as well, **almost like LEPs the private sector board and the combined authority is the public sector board**..."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

This may be the result of former governance arrangements for which the public and private sectors were not particularly encouraged to align. As mentioned above, however, this division was also described as having been made deeper by the staggered way in which the city-regional governance structure has been implemented. It was described, for example, how the SCR LEP has found it difficult to relinquish its responsibilities to the SCR CA which, essentially, now has the most power for making decisions in the region. Furthermore, whilst the SCR CA was perceived as a necessary creation for upholding a democratic style of sub-national governance, some interviewees felt that the SCR CA fails to recognise the potential of the SCR LEP. Still, given the struggles that the SCR LEP endured during its first years in operation, others were of the view that the SCR LEP was relieved to share its responsibility for leading the region.

Undoubtedly, however, this situation was thought to have created tension and conflict between the SCR LEP and the SCR CA, as described by one interviewee who states:

> *"I think there's **still some tension between** how the LEP operates, how the Combined Authority operates, and **who really runs the area**..."*
>
> [Education Representative]

This sentiment was also expressed by another who stated:

> *"...it feels a little bit like **butting of heads** a bit, like **jockeying for position**."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Rather than central policymakers attempting to provide some coherency and clarity in response, however, interviewees alluded to the language of policy as only *"muddying the waters"*, and suggestions were made that whilst central government have favoured LEPs in the language it speaks, this does not reflect the true functioning of city-regions since the introduction of CAs. The rhetoric of policy, for instance, has over the years given a lot of focus to LEPs (in representation of the private sector) as a major device to

drive local growth and, more recently, as a key component for the future of an emerging metro-mayoral devolution landscape. Yet, as conversations with local leaders in Doncaster revealed, in practice LEPs have very little authority when up against CAs who hold the accountability and administrative power in a city-region:

> *"...it's been tiptoed around too lightly,* **where the power in that relationship rests** *and regardless of the rhetoric… the LEP, LEP, the LEP, LEP, LEP,* **it's not the LEP, it is with the Combined Authority, they're democratically elected**…*"*
> [Public Service Representative]

Whilst the SCR LEP was still recognised as having a role in negotiating Growth Deals and putting together SEPs for the region to draw down funds, these monies were exposed as going straight into the hands of the SCR CA who, unlike the SCR LEP, has the legitimate authority and organisational capacity to decide how they are spent. As a result, there were anxieties raised in relation to a diminishing private sector within city-regional devolution, and as one interviewee states:

> *"The other bit that I am incredibly worried about is* **the role of the private sector getting increasingly marginalised in all this**… *51% private sector surrounded by nine leaders so that doesn't feel very private sector-led does it?... you've got this incredibly diminished private sector that is* **nowhere near as influential as three years ago when we were led to believe LEPs would be***."*
> [Public Service Representative]

Overall, the discussion here begs the question of why national policymakers, even in the years since the creation of CAs, have continued to emphasise the importance of LEPs to deliver local growth. Whether this is due to a reluctance of policymakers to deviate from the language of their original remit, or whether this is due to a lack of awareness remains unclear. What is clear, however, is that the internal workings of sub-national governance in the SCR, despite policy rhetoric, has aligned itself once again towards a more traditional style of governance by which those who are democratically elected are perceived as having the legitimate power required for making decisions.

This section has also begun to expose a messy implementation of city-regional governance since 2010 that has led to a confused sub-national governance structure, especially in the way that LEPs and CAs have been implemented. With this background, discussions in relation to the future prospect for a SCR metro mayor in line with ongoing negotiations for a devolution deal uncovered mixed feelings. On the one hand, some interviewees saw the potential of a metro mayor for adding some coherency to the city-regional setup, whilst on the other, there were concerns raised that a metro

mayor would only add another layer of complexity to an already complex city-regional arrangement.

5.3.4   Devolution deals and metro mayors

Discussions over the arrangement of city-regional governance fed into further exploration of the future of the SCR in line with the impending outcomes of devolution deals for the SCR[12] and the prospect of electing a metro mayor. Often comments echoed the ongoing devolution deal negotiations between the SCR and central government (at the time of interviewing), reflecting a move towards making local government policy through deals rather than adopting blanket local growth policy. Initially this was witnessed via a number of City Deals, however, 'devolution deals' introduced in 2014 soon became the preferred method. 'Devolution deals' went hand-in-hand with the requirement for city-regions accepting a metro mayor.

For the majority of stakeholders who were interviewed however, despite being aware that devolution talks were taking place between the SCR and central government, most were unfamiliar with the details of these discussions, and it was made clear during the course of interviews that only a select few high-level leaders within the SCR CA had been invited to take part in the negotiations. As a result, there was an air of mystery around how the negotiations had been dealt with, as well as what exactly had been negotiated. This made some interviewees irritated by the way the deals had been handled, with suggestions made that only Sheffield was at the forefront of the negotiations and that the other local authorities in the SCR had been almost completely excluded from the process. As one interviewee claims:

> *"…really, **Sheffield** just **put it together** and **asked everybody else to approve it** at the very last minute."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Furthermore, in response to questions over the likely impact of the deal, reactions were mixed. On the one hand, some interviewees were relatively optimistic, recognising the potential to reduce state involvement and add some coherency to city-regional workings as one interviewee claims:

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[12] Sheffield City Region Devolution Deal (1) was reached in Dec 2014; Sheffield City Region Devolution Deal (2) was reached in Oct 2015.

> *"I think there is an opportunity to reduce the burden on the state… trying to bring **a singular accountability framework to a much bigger geographical area to reduce the unnecessary bureaucratic burdens, I can see the logic in that**…"*
>
> [Voluntary Sector Representative]

Others however were much more cynical, paralleling earlier concerns over the amount of funding and resource being offered in exchange for more responsibility:

> *"**I'm not convinced** that despite what the government says, **that it will provide any further resources to the area to enable us to do more**…"*
>
> [Faith Sector Representative]

This highlights local fears for a devolution agenda that, in spite of *"grand gestures"* being used to feed local support to ensure a deal, in reality offers areas little more than what they would receive without a deal. This is in line with other research that has found that the first round of devolution deals offered little, if any, fiscal powers (see Smith Institute Report, 2017). There were also claims made that local leaders had little influence over the terms and conditions of the SCR deal, with the asks of the SCR being largely guided by what leaders perceived central government would agree to as well as what Greater Manchester had been able to accrue during their negotiations. To this end, discussions revealed concerns for an unequal power relationship between the SCR and central government, with claims that those involved in the negotiations had the belief that 'a bad deal is better than no deal'. However, this was in recognition of the fact that failing to pursue a deal would put the SCR at a major disadvantage compared to other places like Manchester whose deal was already in place and Leeds whose deal was in the pipeline. It is therefore unsurprising that despite reservations, stakeholders backed a local deal being agreed.

As previously mentioned, the SCR agreed to elect a metro mayor as part of the SCR deal as a single stakeholder that will oversee the entire city-region and is accountable (it is expected that a SCR metro mayor will be elected in 2018). This was a necessary condition for obtaining a deal, clearly specified in the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act of 2015 which states "with these new powers for cities must come new city-wide elected mayors". On the one hand, metro-mayoral governance was recognised for having the potential to provide a strong political voice for the SCR, and add some coherency to city-regional institutional complexities as outlined above:

> *"… if it works effectively, **one would hope that it might bring a voice and a coherency to the whole area**… that unites us all…"*

[Faith Sector Representative]

Largely, however, a metro-mayoral style of regional governance was not favoured, and as one interviewee states: *"the metro mayor is kind of the pill that everyone has had to swallow for it".* Firstly, there were claims that a mayoral system would not hold up within the current *"untidy"* institutional set up within the SCR, and as one interviewee stated: *"...its one person in the mix of a very, very messy bunch of bureaucracy."* And given the state of flux that the system was going through during the time that the interviews were taking place, there were anxieties about adding another layer of governance to proceedings. Recent events have exposed such concerns, whereby boundary disputes led to the SCR being excluded from the first round of metro mayor elections in 2017. Local leaders were also fearful that placing more power at the city-regional level would lead to a loss of influence at the local authority level:

> *"**I can't see, certainly the current leadership of Doncaster, seeding its authority and its resources up a tier**, I certainly can't see it happening anywhere else in the city region, so all you're left with is putting something else on top."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Anxieties about a loss of more localised powers and accountabilities not only suggest a lack of buy-in for a mayoral model of governance, but also for a city-regional governance system more generally. Thus despite the support that was shown for city-regional governance in theory as outlined previously, in practice, local leaders appear to be prioritising their local authority area. This could also be the result of a devolution agenda that is still yet to be entirely understood by the majority of local leaders.

Referring to the latter, this could be the effect of a devolution framework that since its implementation had been inconsistent and constantly renegotiated, making it difficult for local stakeholders to fully grasp the bigger picture. In addition, this may also be the effect of devolution talks that have taken place behind closed doors which, given that this agenda is supposed to be about creating local policy and governance from the bottom up, is failing to reach the vast majority of leaders and citizens across the city-region. This is particularly the case for Doncaster which, as a mid-sized city, is relentlessly trying to claim its place at the head table beside Sheffield.

Furthermore, since Doncaster has had a mayoral model of governance in place since 2001, the prospect of adding a city-regional mayor to the structure raised questions over

the future role of the Doncaster Mayor. For these reasons, introducing a metro mayor to an already complex mix of city-regional governance without attempting to tackle the geographical inconsistencies and institutional tensions that already exist was viewed as potentially making the governance landscape of the SCR even more chaotic:

> *"**Doncaster within three years will have three mayors; a civic mayor, a locally elected one and a city-region one**. I as someone who lives inside this economic growth bubble think **that's nonsensical**. If I was a member of the community I would think that was bonkers, what the hell have we got three mayors for? And **it just confuses the hell out of stuff… it means there's inevitably one more set of bureaucracy, one more set of egos to cut through in this kind of stuff**…"*
>
> [Private Sector Representative]

Overall, discussions in relation to the SCR devolution deal negotiations raised questions about the 'local' with which central government are making their deals with, as well as how central government may be feeding some of the local tensions that reside within the SCR. Also exposed here are the anxieties that exist around the implementation of metro mayors, with local leaders suggesting that another layer of bureaucracy on top of an already complex institutional set-up with conflicts over scale may lead to more confusion. As the next section will begin to uncover, this is compounded by city-regional devolution being built upon conflicting accountabilities and competition between local authorities for resources.

5.3.5   Conflicting accountabilities and the competition for resources

Interviewees shed light on a political and institutional system that is beset with conflicting accountabilities. This was suggested by some local leaders to be the result of the political structure which goes against city-region thinking, with democratically accountable local authority leaders prioritising looking after their voters foremost:

> *"…**if you're a leader** or a local authority, or the mayor, and was **elected by the residents of that area** in essence to do the best for that area… **it's difficult to justify funding something in Rotherham** for example, that may have a bigger economic impact in Doncaster than funding something in Doncaster **because it's not happening in Doncaster**."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

This conceivably reflects a more traditional form of local government whereby the duty of local leaders is to serve their electorate, and interviewees suggested that this is valued

more heavily than the interests of the wider region. Likewise, party politics were also considered a major contributing factor deepening city-regional divisions:

> *"...you've got political factions, you've got political factions within political factions, you've then got egos and **you've got people wanting to have power and influence**..."*
>
> [Voluntary Sector Representative]

Beyond this, there were also concerns over central government imposing different organisational accountabilities which are defying partnership working:

> *"I think the dominance **of institutional governance has always trumped partnership governance** and what the government isn't doing is really seeding too much of that,* what it's doing is seeding powers from government to the locality, what it's not doing is directing organisations within the place... *That will be the lead weight on the flywheel of progress, the fact that you will be creating **jarring between different organisations because they have different accountabilities**."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

To explain, one interviewee shared their experience of attempting to deploy an NHS anti-smoking initiative within their organisation, only to find out that it was confined to the residents of Doncaster rather than the wider-geography whereby workers lived:

> *"...last year I got in some people for an **anti-smoking campaign**... it was a **Doncaster health initiative**... **it became apparent that you only got help if your address was a Doncaster address**, so our guys that live in Barnsley or Chesterfield or Sheffield... just outside the Doncaster area, would not get any help... and **it almost fell flat, the whole initiative**... **there was this disconnect** that if you live in Barnsley, they didn't want to know, but if you live in Doncaster they did..."*
>
> [Business Representative]

To this end, as drawn upon in the preceding section, it was proposed that a politically accountable metro mayor for the SCR could go some way to dispel the way in which conflicting accountabilities are creating a barrier for local authority leaders to fully endorse working as part of a city-region. Equally, however, there were also concerns that a metro mayor may be perceived as taking away local control for which, under these circumstances, locally elected leaders may feel the need to be providing an even stronger voice for their local communities at the city-regional arena.

Carrying forward this discussion, other perceptions were drawn out relating to previously mentioned ideas about fiscal austerity which is encouraging leaders to

"batten down their hatches". This, in turn, was also professed as leading to a situation whereby leaders are prioritising their own organisation or local authority above thinking about the benefits for the entire region. For many interviewees, this makes working together as a city-region difficult since the limited resources available instinctively encourages leaders to think along the lines of *"what's our share of the pie?"* as one local leader explains:

> *"... **you'd still always be driven by what's best for your locality**, and as much as someone might be able to prove economically it's better for Doncaster for something to be developed in Bassetlaw, are we going to just go oh yeah we're on board with that, cause **all everything comes down to is how much have government allocated to city-region, and how much has Donny got of that?** Why haven't we got more on this? Why haven't we got more on that?"*
>
> <div align="right">[Public Service Representative]</div>

Beyond the allocation of city-regional funds, other comments were also made regarding the competition that still exists between the Local Authorities within the SCR for people, jobs and investment:

> *"Now whether we like it or not, I know that it's good to have businesses coming in to Sheffield, and it's good to have more things happening in Doncaster for Sheffield, but **fundamentally we are competing for business, we're competing for people, for jobs, and so I think there's always going to be an inherent disconnection between what's good for Doncaster and what's good for Sheffield**."*
>
> <div align="right">[Business Representative]</div>

This echoes research that highlights the increasing competition that is found between cities (and city-regions), fed by an ideology that assumes that all places can succeed if they adopt similar growth policies and market-led developments (Bristow, 2010). Beyond the systemic conditions that have been considered here, however, conversations with local leaders in Doncaster also revealed a set of locally-driven behaviours and practices which also impacted upon city-regional working.

5.4   Sheffield City Region: Agency, Behaviours and Practices

Following on from an examination of a new arrangement for local growth in relation to policy, structures and institutions, it is the intention of this section to look more closely at the internal dynamics of local leaders between the local authorities in the SCR. These are in part fed by the system as described in section 5.3, but they are also partly the

result of local agency. Firstly, the competitive and territorial behaviours of local leaders will be considered. The discussion will then turn towards identifying the ways in which local leaders are coming together to make sense of, and attempt to regain a level of control over, what has been revealed up until now to be an unwieldy system of city-regional devolution with a number of inherent contradictions.

5.4.1   Local divisions, tensions and conflicts

Resonating earlier sentiments, it was clear to most interviewees that being able to work together as a city-region and forge a holistic and integrated approach to growth were important aspects for gaining favour within the current arrangement for sub-national governance. This was thought to be particularly the case since, as previously stated, central government have named the city-region geography as their platform for local dealings, and thus being able to *"create a cadre of leadership across the sub-region that can do business with national government…"* was considered to be to the benefit of all local authorities and local leaders involved. Thus despite the evidence pointing to a number of barriers for city-regional workings, interviewees readily stressed the importance of local leaders endorsing their duty of leadership at this level:

> *"…**our role is to do our part to release that growth and that potential so that Sheffield City Region can prosper**… provide some thought leadership for Sheffield City Region… so we're not seeing ourselves… as just Doncaster, but we see ourselves as part of a city region and beyond…"*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

However, in spite of such claims, there was a prevailing narrative that within the SCR there were strong divides along local authority lines that prevented city-regional governance from operating effectively (see also section 5.3.1). As such, frequent comments were made that local leaders across the SCR had yet to stop prioritising their own local authority as claimed by one interviewee who stated: *"it's fascinating... as chief executive of a board... it's still predominantly about here and about Doncaster"*.

With this background, discussions revealed a number of underlying tensions and conflicts between the Local Authorities within the SCR that are leading to, as one interviewee suggested, the *"local authority devilling that exists".* The constituent members of the SCR CA for example, that as previously stated come together to form

the metropolitan county of South Yorkshire, were noted in particular for having four quite distinct Councils that are dogged and dictatorial:

> *"**[South] Yorkshire is not an area which people have historically lined dots and seen the additional value of joining things up**... you've got Councils within that who are empires aren't they and the thought, if you're a Barnsley councillor, of saying to Doncaster can you do this for me? That's quite a challenge..."*
>
> [Voluntary Sector Representative]

This, therefore, paints quite a different picture than that which was reflected upon in section 5.3.1, where research has suggested that the local authorities in South Yorkshire have, compared to the rest of the SCR, had a history of working together. And yet as the earlier discussion also revealed, apart from the alliance between Sheffield and Rotherham, affiliations have not been particularly strong due to a divergence in industrial specialisms, the polycentric geography of the area, and recent detachments due to politics and competition for regional resources. With this background, interviewees spoke of a rivalry between the 'big players' or otherwise constituent members of the SCR in their struggle to gain the upper-hand:

> *"Sometimes they spend more time having pissing contests than actually doing stuff, and, you know, that's not what we need... people having these **individual contests of I'm bigger than you and so on and so forth**..."*
>
> [Private Sector Representative]

> *"**I wouldn't like to be refereeing between Barnsley, Sheffield and Doncaster…**"*
>
> [Education Representative]

And whilst relations were thought to have improved from what they were a decade or more ago, hostilities between the local authorities and Leaders within the SCR were seen as a significant barrier to working effectively together as a city-region:

> *"This is where it's totally dysfunctional because you've got **nine local authorities who are really only interested in fighting their own corner**..."*
>
> [Voluntary Sector Representative]

A prominent example that was repeatedly used to describe and explain this dynamic was in relation to discussions over the High Speed 2 station location (a detailed explanation of this is provided in section 7.4.1 in Chapter 7). This was also used as an example to criticise the workings of the SCR in comparison with other city-regions:

> *"**This city-region is nowhere near as well marshalled as others are**. So what Manchester's getting, including the NHS budget and that kind of thing, they've earned it because each time they've had something, they've proved they can deliver on it… Sheffield City Region, **we've just spent the last 6 months embarrassing ourselves over HS2 station location**… so those in the centre saying well we've just given you a massive investment that's really good for the economy and could be a step change and now you've torn lumps off each other about where you put it. What possible faith could you have in giving us something as huge as the NHS budget?"*
>
> [Private Sector Representative]

And whilst other city-regions have demonstrated their ability to work together well (with remarks made in relation to Manchester as mentioned above), similar tensions were also described in relation to other city-regions as one interviewee describes:

> *"…I mean the **transport links, wherever I've worked, have always been a nightmare and it's often because you will not get people collaborating**. Or the classic at the moment is flood defences, we've got to find a way of actually supporting communities so that it's not 38 million for Cumbria and another 20 million for Northumberland. We've got to try and think that's a Combined Authority opportunity."*
>
> [Voluntary Service Representative]

Overall, this section has exposed underlying tensions and conflicts between the local authorities that make up the SCR. The reasons for these are multiple and complex, fed by historical and geographical legacies as described in section 5.3.1 as well as a competitive ideology underpinning the organisation of the economy. Taking on a different perspective, however, the next section will begin to consider the strategic ways that local leaders are making sense of and playing the game of city-regional governance despite the endogenous and exogenous obstacles as outlined until now.

5.4.2   Sense-making and playing the game of city-regional governance

In order to understand how new government forms and institutional arrangements 'bed-down' on the ground, Shaw and Tewdwr-Jones (2016; p.222) highlight the importance of relating this to the ways that local leaders "make sense and achieve some semblance of order out of the chaos, to achieve integration, and strategic delivery". Similarly, Coleman *et al*. (2010; p.290) describe how a period of sense-making is required for local leaders to "reconcile old assumptions and identities with new realities". This was

indicated during the course of interviews in Doncaster for which, faced with a new urban agenda, local leaders recognised a need to reconfigure their position within it:

> *"... **it's asking questions of how strategically insightful are you** around what you think your priorities are? **How well do you know your place?** And how do you gel that with your ambitions to fill the gaps or gain the distinctiveness compared to others?"*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

This is something that local leaders in Doncaster claimed the SCR was still in the midst of, with a lot of *"toing and froing"* taking place to work through the mechanics of the new arrangement. As such, echoing the findings of Shaw and Tewdwr-Jones (2016) as indicated above, there was a lot of emphasis placed on the need for leaders to undergo a period of transition when major governance changes occur. As such, interviewees spoke of the need for leaders to stay abreast of policy developments, specifically in relation to any changes that may have direct implications for their individual role as a leader and particularly the development path of their local area. As one local leader states, there is a need to "*...understand what's going on down in Westminster that applies to Doncaster..."*, and as another describes, *"you have to convert the national picture and think about what this means for Doncaster and what can we do about it."*

On the one hand, this left leaders feeling unstable within a system that demands constant renegotiation and adaptation which was, in turn, draining leaders of their creative and innovative potential. On the other hand, however, by recognising the need to be keeping pace with policy developments as they unfold, leaders felt a sense of empowerment for being able to stay one step ahead of the game in predicting and preparing for what might be on the horizon:

> *"The key thing for now... in terms of devolution and the additional opportunities... **we've got to tailor our local solutions and use the funding more creatively and more strategically**, that's the next stage really and that's all ongoing... But again, **how does it work for Doncaster? At what level is the devolution taking place? How will the collaboration actually work?"***
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Beyond the need for local leaders to be keeping on top of a constant state of flux in the urban agenda and related policy developments, conversations also revealed a governance game at work. The rules of this game, as revealed in this chapter so far, are imposed in a top-down fashion by national policymakers as the implementers of the

local growth approach. The rules of engagement, however, whilst dependent on the degree to which local leaders are freed up to exercise autonomy, are to some degree determined by how well stakeholders play the game. These findings correspond with those of Sotarauta (2016) and are expanded upon below.

It was readily cited that despite local concerns over the current governance arrangements as they saw them playing out on the ground, local leaders have no choice but to take part in the city-regional devolution game with remarks made such as *"it's the only game in town so you can't just not engage…"*, *"it's here to stay"* and *"…government clearly [only] wanna do business through LEPs and city regions."*. Against this background, and in spite of the criticisms and anxieties many local leaders shared, the need for compliance was highly regarded:

> *"…we all kind of said alright, let's just get on and run with it because money is going to come through that route and **if we're not on board we're not going to get anything**."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

As such, local leaders spoke of a willingness to follow the 'rules' of this game and, in fact, positive engagement was seen as key to ensure the best possible local outcome: *"…we've just got to try and make sure we work with that and try and promote Doncaster and the city region in that context…"*. With this background, accommodating the demands of central government was viewed as being a pragmatic necessity, and whilst recognising that playing by the rules did not necessarily lead to a winning result, one interviewee claims how not working within the confines of central government would put Doncaster (and the wider Sheffield City Region) in a disadvantaged position and would leave little opening for opportunities to develop in the future:

> *"I think the context of local leadership in recent years… with the way government are going and **the devolution agenda and localism… whether you can pick holes in it or not… as a local authority you are over a barrel** to put it crudely, because **you can't say we're not playing because then you're going to get nothing**, and if you do play you still might only get a proportion of what you would have got prior to this whole model of localism and devolution being implemented."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

On the face of it, this could be construed as the result of the dutiful or even submissive tendencies of local leaders following a highly centralised system of control and

regulation. It could also be explained by a belief in nation-state powers or as one local leader puts it: *"that safety and security you can get from central government"*.

However, this could also be interpreted as a clever and tactful move by local leaders to become influential players in the game. This was thought to be particularly the case with regards to the devolution deals that were being negotiated for the SCR. Thus whilst described as being largely driven by central government and with questions over how much extra autonomy and resource these were delivering in reality, some interviewees reflected on this process as an attempt of the SCR to get on the right side of national government and to be seen as a key player driving the agenda. By doing so, it was suggested that more power may be granted from the centre in the future, and as a result, an opportunity may arise to change the 'rules' of play:

> *"...it comes down to how you work, cajole, lead, influence, to **get the best possible outcome within that stricter framework** or approach."*
> [Public Service Representative]

And others indicated, more explicitly, how local leaders are capable of using the system to their benefit and play the government at their own game:

> *"... **you don't fight against that, there's no point, so you work with it**. So all the stuff that we did on the rail college we would **play back government's messages** to it. So if you're talking about the Northern Powerhouse… why would you put a rail college in Birmingham?... put it in the north… If you're serious about devolution, make sure Sheffield City Region gets the resources… **you've got to use the system to get what you need**…"*
> [Public Service Representative]

In a similar vein, by understanding the game, local leaders described a situation whereby in their asks of central government for funding they purposely exaggerate what they hope to achieve in the know that some negotiation is likely to take place:

> *"I think undoubtedly a lot of **LEPs have overegged what they can achieve to draw the funding down**… absolutely, **it is a competition**."*
> [Public Service Representative]

All of this implies that a competitive ethos, together with being able to barter a good deal with central government, is an essential component of the game. Similarly, one interviewee describes how city-regions need to be strategic to gain favour over others:

> *"**You've got to have your business case ready to go and have your promotional material, your message, up there, prominent**, and ready to be perused at a*

*global level… that can sway whether a global company locates in Leeds City Region or Sheffield City Region, and so **it's one thing understanding that distinctiveness economically but it's also recognising how investors think** in the broader decision making process… **we've tried to recognise that in strategic documents**…"*

[Public Service Representative]

Overall, this section has revealed how following a change in the institutional and regulatory conditions for delivering sub-national governance, local leaders undergo a period of sense-making to adapt to new ways of working. Furthermore, despite criticism with regards to the workings of a new system (see section 5.3) and local tensions and conflicts (see sub-section 5.4.1), local leaders recognise the value that is gained from responding positively to central demands and demonstrating an ability to work together as a city-region.

The next section will take a turn in the narrative that has been presented so far to begin to consider the position of Doncaster, as a mid-sized city, within a wider city-regional framework. In doing so, it will begin to look at the relationship between Doncaster (the 'second-rank city') and Sheffield (the 'core city').

5.5   The Sheffield City Region: The 'Big City' Narrative

Conversations about the city-regional devolution agenda in England provided insights into the position of mid-sized cities vis-à-vis core cites within this context. Primarily, local leaders in Doncaster expressed the challenges they, as a mid-sized city, are facing within a city-regional devolution context whereby emphasis is given to core cities as the key drivers of city-regions and the non-London economy. This model is based on ideas about the processes of accumulation and agglomeration within a city-regional framework (Scott, 2001). These notions are based on the premise that growth within the core city will trickle out to benefit the wider city-region. However, as was revealed from speaking to local leaders in Doncaster, together with other research (see Cox & Longlands, 2016), this emphasis on core cities is perceived as being to the exclusion of mid-sized cities who are at risk of being overlooked and under-valued:

> *"… **you've got the challenges around core cities versus mid-sized cities**… trying to get greater recognition for the role of mid-sized cities not just core cities."*

[Public Service Representative]

Local leaders in Doncaster also made claims that having a mid-sized city status as opposed to a core city status makes it difficult for Doncaster to have their voice heard on a national stage. This came through, for example, during discussions over the process of bidding for national projects or drawing down central funding. To give an example, several interviewees referred to Doncaster's bid to host one of two HS2 rail colleges in the country that, despite their eventual success, was a long drawn-out battle due to their status and relative position within the urban hierarchy:

> *"We found that with **the rail college**… **because we're not a big city, we have to shout and fight very hard to get heard and to get on the table for that**… the default was why should Doncaster get something like this? Even though we've got the heritage we had to shout very loud to make that heard…"*
> [Public Service Representative]

This demonstrates a governance challenge with regards to the pressures that mid-sized cities face in enhancing their competitiveness in a system that, almost by default, positions them on the back foot. This was found to be fuelling frictional intra-city-regional relationships, especially in relation to the distribution of resources since *"funding is biased towards Sheffield"* and this is creating *"mistrust within the Sheffield City Region at the moment and it flares up from time to time on specific issues…"*.

Firstly, as one interviewee puts it: *"it's called the Sheffield City Region which straight away by definition is Sheffield."* Beyond echoing the contemporary urban agenda, however, tensions between the core city and the other local authorities that make up the SCR were referred to as having developed over many years, linked to former urban growth approaches as well as to place-specific rivalries (see sections 5.3.1 and 5.4.1 for further details). Somewhat unsurprisingly given the case study location, this was readily cited in reference to the relationship between Sheffield and Doncaster, the largest and second largest economies within the city-region respectively.

There was a conviction that Doncaster has *"lived in the shadow of Sheffield"* and that Doncaster's people have been made to *"feel like the poor relations of Sheffield"*. Similarly, there was a prevailing view that Sheffield has outwardly shown their arrogance by labelling themselves as *"the only significant player in the area"*. Sheffield was also described as having used *"their core city status to benefit themselves and drop a few crumbs…"*, and that as a result *"there has always been a distrust with Sheffield trying to dominate everything"*. This was repeatedly referred to in relation to the handling of funds and investment coming into the region:

*"…from my own personal experience of living in Doncaster for nearly forty years… **Sheffield seemed to always take the bulk of everything**."*

[Education Representative]

This was prevalent, for example, in the resentment felt amongst local leaders in Doncaster in relation to the Sheffield Supertram[13] that was partially funded by finance from the European Union, which was targeted for the whole South Yorkshire regional. This was captured in the following interview excerpt:

*"Objective One status was only received in the region because of the deprivation indices of Doncaster, Rotherham, Barnsley, but Sheffield got 90% of the funding with the idea that the benefits will filter out. **Doncaster is still paying for Sheffield Supertram**."*

[Public Service Representative]

Tensions between Sheffield and Doncaster were also alleged to be puerile and based largely on rumour and hearsay, with one interviewee claiming *"…I can tell you loads of great stories about Doncaster and Sheffield hating each other"*, and another:

*"… **there's a story that when we tried to become a city, Sheffield objected to it, not sure if it's true, but I'm pretty certain it is**, and why wouldn't Sheffield want us as a city?"*

[Private Sector Representative]

As such, suggestions were made that Sheffield suffers from 'big city syndrome' (Herrschel & Newman, 2002), and there was a lot of speculation from leaders in Doncaster over whether Sheffield is deserving of the core city status it is credited with:

*"So we've had **frustrations in the past because it's been Sheffield led**, and yes they're the core city… but **they're not a strong core city**, they don't stand shoulder to shoulder with – as much as they might think they do - with Leeds or Manchester or Birmingham."*

[Public Service Representative]

Similarly, other research is also questioning the 'agglomeration effects' of big cities. Martin *et al*. (2014), for example, find that for the majority of core cities, employment growth rates and productivity have remained consistently below national growth rates. Elsewhere, McCann (2016) finds no clear correlation between urban productivity and

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[13] The Sheffield Supertram cost approximately £240 million. The funding largely came from central government, however this was added to from the European Regional Development Fund and private funding related to Meadowhall (a regional shopping centre that opened in 1990).

urban density in 14 UK cities. Nevertheless, in the context of city-regions, there is a fear of Doncaster becoming the *"younger sibling"* or the *"smaller party"* in negotiations, and this is feeding the anxieties around being made to *"buy into"* a system which risks building Sheffield into a *"northern superpower"* whilst leaving Doncaster *"on the outskirts"*. Whilst this section has provided a flavour of the mid-sized city experience in the context of city-regional devolution, the ideas presented here will be drawn out in much greater depth in section 7.6 in Chapter 7.

5.6   Summary: Lofty Rhetoric and Complex Reality

This chapter has investigated how sub-national leaders in England are navigating an emerging city-regional institutional and policy landscape in the context of austerity and a push towards a more devolved system of governance, from the perspective of a mid-sized city. In doing so, the discussion has demonstrated a series of discrepancies between policy rhetoric and the reality of city-regional devolution on the ground. Importantly, this has been found in relation to the failure of the new system to rework central-local relations away from a highly centralised approach, fed by the rules and restrictions of city-regional devolution that are passed down from central government (see section 5.3). Furthermore, also exposed here are new sub-national institutional and spatial misalignments and competing forces in relation to, for example, competition and cooperation. However, the evidence also unearthed a number of 'institutional legacies' and 'city-regional circumstances' (Herrschel & Newman, 2002) that influence how local agents behave and interact and thus navigate and deliver a top-down national system of governance (see section 5.4).

To begin, the geographical, institutional and historical make-up of the SCR was presented. This provided detail on the place-specific foundations upon which city-regional governance for the case study area is being implemented. This narrative showed how far from being a blank canvas for laying down a new sub-national governance set-up, spatial imaginaries and attachments to place impinge heavily upon its implementation. These were fed by previous policy and governance structures (for example the continued allegiance between the authorities that made up the former South Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council) as well as the industrial legacies of the local areas. These, in turn, influenced the relationships and affiliations between the local

authorities, institutions and leaders in the SCR. These intra-local relations were drawn out in further detail in section 5.4 for which further details are provided below.

Discussions over the emerging institutional landscape for delivering sub-national governance revealed a sense of both optimism and dismay. On the face of it, the duo of 'localism' and 'devolution' was viewed as an opportunity for more local autonomy and to do things differently away from decades of high centralisation. Devolution, for example, was cited as having the potential to allow for more place-based creativity and innovation for fostering local economic growth in a way that suits the needs of local places. These ideas align with Bentley et al. (2016; p.3) who claim that, in theory, "localist systems of governance provide greater scope for place-sensitive leadership".

However, the authenticity of central government's devolution agenda was subject to heavy scrutiny, with claims that power and resource are largely remaining within central hands. This was described in relation to the competitive basis upon which sub-national funds are allocated, with those who are able to "dance more credibly to the tune of central government" (Haughton *et al*., 2016; p.367) winning the most resources. This was also found in relation to the central conditions sub-national leaders must adhere to when, for example, preparing SEPs and negotiating growth deals, which were heavily subjected to central government approval and meeting certain growth targets. This coincides with what Hildreth (2011) terms 'conditional localism'. This also revealed itself in relation to the SCR devolution deal negotiations, for which central government was described as largely setting the terms and conditions of the deal. This, in turn, influenced local leadership strategies and the likelihood that supposedly local-led strategy documents are reflective of place-sensitive issues.

With this background, local power seems to be heavily dependent on local leaders accepting top-heavy controls. Furthermore, devolved funds were described as not corresponding with new local responsibilities. This led to some interviewees claiming that devolution was a ploy by central government to place local government as the bearer of public service cuts. Overall, this begins to uncover the complex and asymmetrical ways that central and local government interact, which in turn gave way to an examination of the systemic foundations of city-regional devolution in England.

The policies and institutions to support city-regional devolution were described as being rolled out by central government in an unorderly and piecemeal fashion. This has

created an increasingly complex and confused model of sub-national governance for local leaders to make sense of and navigate a course through. Largely, the establishment of the SCR LEP was used as an example to explain this. Interviewees described the SCR LEP as being given little direction or indication of scope which ultimately led to inaction. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that members of the SCR LEP were faced with the unprecedented challenge of delivering local growth for a newly defined scale of governance without any statutory functions and with little available funds.

Added to this, when the SCR CA was created in 2014, the roles and responsibilities between the SCR LEP and the SCR CA were referred to as becoming blurred. Whilst supposedly working in a complementary fashion, there was a clear division found between the SCR LEP and SCR CA along the lines of, for example, private sector-led versus public sector-led. This is not surprising given that, broadly speaking, their traditional ways of working (e.g. risk-inclined versus risk-averse) and underlying motives (e.g. profit-focused versus people-focused) do not align. Furthermore, in spite of the emphasis that was initially placed on private sector-led growth, the SCR LEP's influence was described as being undermined by the creation of the SCR CA. The reasons for this related to the value that continues to be placed on democratic leadership and traditional types of power in sub-national governance and local decision-making. Whilst some thought that a metro mayor for the SCR had the potential to add some coherency, others felt that this would only add to the governance confusion.

The tension between the SCR LEP and SCR CA also reflected a division between the 'hard' spaces of an old political landscape built on the customs of democracy and legitimacy (i.e. local authority scale), and the new 'soft' spaces of an economic landscape (i.e. city-region scale) (also see Beel *et al*., 2016). This aligns with other research which emphasises how political boundaries fail to reflect the workings of a globalised economy (for example Deas, 2014). This was also fed by the conditions of austerity and the competitive struggle for sub-national resources between the localities that make-up a city-region. This was encouraging fractures within city-regions whilst reinforcing the togetherness of local authorities. In view of the latter, the local authority scale was revealed as a favoured unit of governance by local leaders.

Several reasons emerged for the priority that was shown towards the local authority scale. Firstly, it is at this scale that local leaders are elected, appointed or volunteered to serve. This, therefore, resonates with issues relating to local accountability. Secondly, it is a scale that feels

most familiar and is a space that remains constant, as opposed to the transient space to deliver economic policy (Hincks *et al.*, 2017). Thirdly, local Councils still have a very significant role to play in, for instance, delivering public services (particularly given the increased burden on local authorities to deliver social care), as well as in their local knowledge of and affinity to a place. This meant that whilst working together as a city-region was seemingly supported by local leaders for gaining a devolution deal and winning central resources, behind the scenes leaders continue to prioritise the needs and interests of their local authority. This also related to a culture of territorial politics that was revealed, by which tensions and conflicts emerged across institutional and political boundaries.

Despite the structural restrictions and intra-local competitions that are described above, local leaders recognised that city-regional devolution was the only offer available. Therefore the need to engage in city-regional activities, with the city-region the chosen platform by central government to do their business with and provide funds to, was deemed essential to be able to gain access to resources and have more influence over local decision-making. This aligns with the findings of Bentley *et al.* (2016; p.11) who put forward the notion of 'acceptability' to describe how this can "help to construct an operating framework and, thus, an enhanced degree of certainty for sub-national governance structures; providing a framework within which sub-national leadership can take decisions on strategy and action". Furthermore, rather than passive recipients of the system, the ability of local leaders to make sense of and become proficient players was believed to potentially lead to better local outcomes. This adheres to the claims of Mayntz & Scharpf (1995) who endorse that urban systems are the product of the institutional and regulatory context, but with some room for manoeuvre. It also suggests the need for a more relational perspective to the structure-agency debate and thus the scope for local leadership activity within a wider system (MacKinnon *et al.*, 2010; p.4).

Lastly, city-regional devolution is highlighted as being city-centric in nature, based on ideas of agglomeration economics and cities as the drivers of national growth. This added to the intra-local tensions that were uncovered. For example, there were concerns over the way that the SCR devolution deal process has been handled, with negotiations largely taking place between Whitehall and Sheffield to the exclusion of the Leaders of the other local authorities in the SCR. This provided a challenge for Doncaster over being able to contribute to decisions that were ultimately going to affect their future development. This created feelings of resentment towards Sheffield as a result, which fed into a history of contentions that had earlier exposed themselves between Sheffield

and 'the rest'. Thus for places that are part of a city-region but that are not the core city, it would seem that strong leadership is required at the local authority level for gaining recognition and having their voices heard by sub-national and national stakeholders.

Overall, this chapter has explored the emergence of city-regional devolution and drawn out a number of discrepancies between the rhetoric of central policymakers and the reality of its implementation on the ground; particularly with regards to the issues of scale and central-local and intra-local interactions. These are findings for which a more detailed analysis is provided in Chapter 7. In recognition that the city-region scale is only one dimension of contemporary sub-national governance in England, the next chapter will examine city leadership as part of this broader framework.

Chapter 6. CITY LEADERSHIP: AN INSIDE LOOK AT DONCASTER

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will address research objective 2:

> To *explore* the nature, scope and operationalisation of city leadership in England, as well as the behaviours and practices that influence it, within a mid-sized city in the context of devolved city-regional governance under austerity.

Following Chapter 5 which examined leadership and governance at the city-regional scale, this chapter explores the nature, scope and operationalisation of leadership and governance at the city scale under the contemporary urban policy landscape in England.

Whilst traditional leadership enquiry investigated the traits, actions and competencies of individual leaders (see Judge *et al*., 2002), more recently relational perspectives have emerged which emphasise the significance of exploring the organisation, operationalisation and relational dynamics of a whole system of leadership (Uhl-Bien *et al*., 2000). This is particularly important in an emerging governance and policy setting which poses new complexities for leaders to navigate and is constantly in flux (Beer & Sotarauta, 2016). It is, therefore, the intention of the discussion below to gain an improved understanding of the nature and scope of city leadership under a new governance and policy context in England, for which two key features at the city level are austerity and increased expectations for leading in a way that endorses multi-agency and multi-sector partnership working. It will also explore the interactions, interplays and relationships that underlie the operation of city leadership.

The chapter will begin by outlining a number of significant moments in history that have influenced the leadership conditions in Doncaster today, these include deindustrialisation and related path-dependencies, local governance failings and interventions, and a new age of austerity (section 6.2). The discussion will then turn towards the contemporary policy setting to look at the scope of leadership in Doncaster (section 6.3) and the ways it is being performed (sections 6.4 to 6.6). These are findings that will be considered in more depth in Chapter 7, which provides a richer synthesis of the empirical evidence of this study and how this relates to wider research.

6.2 Introducing Leadership in Doncaster: The Nature of the Task

This section provides an overview of the nature of the leadership task in Doncaster, outlining a number of significant moments over the last 40 years that have influenced the conditions under which local leaders currently operate. In doing so, the discussion will unveil a number of significant exogenous and endogenous forces that play out in local leadership settings, with issues relating particularly to path-dependencies.

6.2.1 Post-industrial policy responses

Historical trajectories tied to deindustrialisation, labour market restructuring and place decay featured heavily in the accounts of local leaders in Doncaster to explain present-day leadership conditions. This reflects the changing nature of capital accumulation at the end of the 1970s for which, in the decades that followed, Doncaster suffered heavily.

Far from being something of the past, however, Doncaster's post-industrial transition is something that leaders claimed the city continues to struggle with: referring to the change as *"a legacy… that we're still recovering from"* and *"a huge, huge transition that we're still in the midst of"*. Consequently, local leaders spoke of the acute and deep-seated urban problems they face in relation to, for example, high unemployment and low levels of skill (see section 4.4 for related statistics).

Beyond looking to a new organisation of the global economy to explain the social and economic challenges facing Doncaster however, questions were also raised in relation to the *"awful decisions that were made"* at the national scale during the time of the transition. For example, there were accusations concerning a succession of national policymakers and government administrations that have favoured market-led growth and restricted social intervention at the expense of urban decline in certain areas, especially those whose local economy was primarily supported by a single industry:

> *"… it's fine eliminating a particular industry from the landscape, but… **something should have been put in place**… a central government policy… **not to leave a generation of people out of work and on benefits** …"*
>
> [Business Representative]

To this end, questions were raised with regards to where the blame for urban decline has been placed within national policy initiatives for urban regeneration and local economic development in the years following the change:

> *"Is that a Doncaster failure or is that a national failure?... You know what, this shouldn't have been quite as localised as it was."*
>
> [Business Representative]

As such, there were sentiments revealed that central government have endorsed neither the 'money' nor the 'appetite' to deal with the economic and social issues that many post-industrial cities now face. Others also doubted the capacity of national policymakers to provide a solution to the levels of urban decline that places like Doncaster were facing, as one interviewee alludes:

> *"I do think that the challenges faced by post-industrial northern towns and cities is pretty well known and it has been for many decades, but how you tackle that, how you fund that, to what extent, I think is where* **the politicians don't propose any views and that manifests itself in the tangible policies***."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Issues were also raised in accordance with short-term, space-blind urban policies and ineffective reforms of welfare provision. For instance, interviewees spoke of a relentless policy agenda from the centre of *"moving deck chairs around"* that has failed to provide appropriate interventions to the challenges of post-industrial places. This parallels a number of theoretical insights about the state (in Chapter 2) by which new growth agendas show signs of replication rather than reinvention (Theodore *et al*., 2011), as market failures are displaced into state failures (Jessop, 2000; 2007; 2016a).

Thus in the omission of a long-term approach to urban policy and governance, interviewees shed light on a situation whereby urban problems, that are multiple and multifaceted and require sustained and coordinated action, were not appropriately dealt with. Some interviewees explained this in relation to the customs of a democratic style of government, and as one stakeholder put forward: *"...when you have anything that's voted by democracy, you've got five-year plans at best… one problem at a time...".* This corresponds to the findings of Rubin (1988) that policymaking is driven by the electoral cycle which encourages short-termism and actions that will help politicians get elected.

Concerns were also raised in relation to 'blanket policies' that are simplistic and that do not consider the distinctiveness of place. This was explained by one interviewee in

relation to the New Homes Bonus, a supposedly community-led regeneration project that disproportionately negatively impacts on places experiencing high levels of urban decline:

> *"…New Homes Bonus… shifting money from the north to the south where more houses are being built. **Policy decisions that look alright on the surface are a bit smoke and mirrors underneath**, they're redistribution methodologies."*
> [Public Service Representative]

These concerns align with those described by Pugalis (2011) who claims that the New Homes Bonus is a 'market-based mechanism' that is likely to work adversely for the communities that require the most assistance and thus exacerbate levels of deprivation and urban decay for these areas. Relating to the blanket, 'space-blind' nature of central government thinking, one interviewee provides an example concerning business size definitions to explain how national definitions often do not translate well on the ground when integrated with the particularities of place:

> *"I think the bit that gets lost in translation is what an SME really looks like. So we have this definition of 249 people or more as a large company, but actually Doncaster's only got 35 of them, half our members employ less than 5 people. That gets lost in translation around policy design… That leads to **lots of policy decisions that don't quite fit the bill when they get down to the coal face of it**."*
> [Private Sector Representative]

Similarly, criticism was levied on how welfare reforms have failed to take into account the varying social and economic conditions of different places. As one interviewee describes: *"…it was things like the bedroom tax that came in and that hurt Doncaster in a huge way"*. Across the UK, the Spare Room Subsidy, which was removed in April 2013 is estimated to have affected 660,000 households in Great Britain (Beatty & Fothergill, 2013), reducing the weekly incomes of working age social housing tenants by £12-22 (Moffatt *et al*., 2015). As Gibb (2015; 158) describes, however, this policy more severely and disproportionately affected the poorest regions in the "North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humber, Scotland and Wales".

Beatty & Fothergill (2013) contribute further to this discussion by suggesting that welfare reforms have widened the gap between the best and worst local economies following a nationwide analysis. To this end, they position that "as a general rule, the more deprived the local authority, the greater the financial hit" (ibid; p.3), as illustrated in Figure 11. They also claim that "Britain's oldest industrial areas, a number of seaside towns, and some London boroughs are hit hardest" (ibid; p.3).
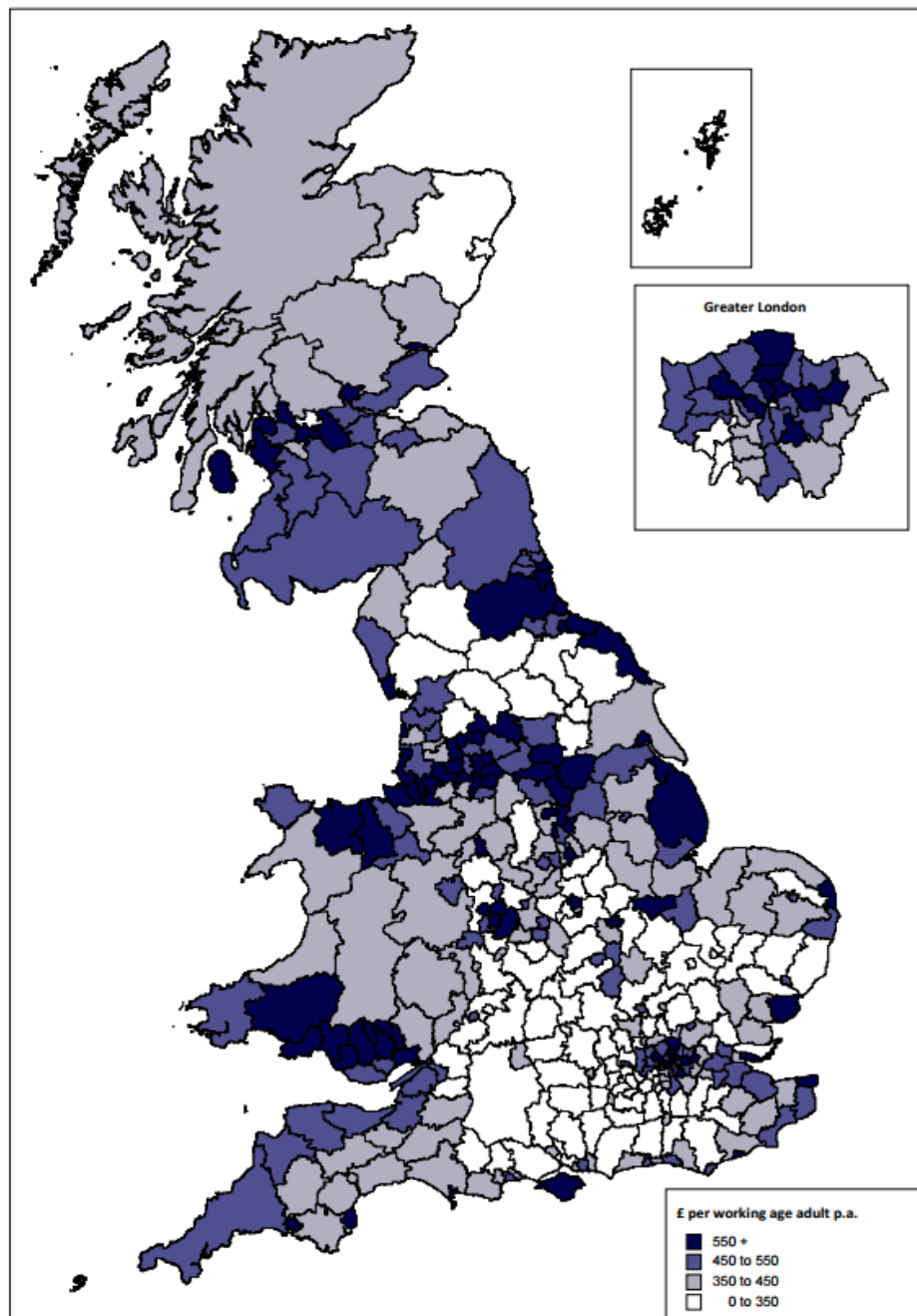
Figure 12: Overall financial loss arising from welfare reform by 2014/15, by local authority. Source: Beatty & Fothergill (2013)

In summary, these findings point to the perceived and, importantly, evidential shortcomings of national policymakers' understanding of post-industrial places, many of which have been in a downward spiral of decline due to their failure to compete on global markets. Also highlighted here is a lack of central government intervention to assist post-industrial places in their recovery, as well as the limited recognition shown for differential circumstances between places when setting urban policy. As such, the position of post-industrial places appears, to some extent, to be the outcome of a lack of opportunity to thrive within the present-day policy system in England.

6.2.2 Responding to austerity

Under an austerity agenda in England since 2010, DMBC has seen huge cuts in its budget. As a result, it is anticipated that by the financial year of 2019/20, total central government funding for Doncaster will have reduced by 59% (DMBC, 2016). In response, DMBC has had to reduce its overall expenditure. During the financial period of 2014/15 - 2016/17 for example, DMBC set a savings target of £109m to buffer the cuts - a trend that is set to stay with a further saving commitment issued of £66.8m for the period 2017/18 to 2020/21 (DMBC, 2017). Other significant funding changes have included the end of the Educational Maintenance Allowance and the Working Neighbourhood Fund, the introduction of Universal Credit, and the freezing of child benefits to reduce welfare spend (Lowndes & McCaughie, 2013). All of this has and will continue to impact heavily on DMBC in terms of their staff numbers and their ability to deliver public services.

With this background, many interviewees claimed that Doncaster and other similar places (i.e. post-industrial urban areas that have for many decades suffered from acute social issues) have most heavily felt the burden of austerity:

> *"… the hit that we take on our general fund as a deprived area like Doncaster, it's got a lot of social challenges, and* **to lose what I think will be 40-50% of our budget from 2010 to 2018 is massive… that's the bit that I don't think is right***."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

This supports the findings of Beatty and Fothergill (2013) above who found that financial losses have been the highest in Britain's oldest industrial areas (see Figure 11). Interviewees also claimed that young people, in particular, have suffered from a lack of jobs together with over-stretched employment services to offer support.

DMBC's method at dealing with the cuts has been to adopt a 'universalist' approach proposed by Hastings *et al*. (2012) for implementing 'proportional cuts' across the board to avoid the loss of entire services, as well as making in-house efficiencies to limit the public impact (in Lowndes & McCaughie, 2013). This supports the results of a national survey carried out by the Royal Society of the Arts in 2012, that found that 86% of the 50 local authorities surveyed were protecting frontline services by making 'back office savings' and 'efficiency measures' (RSA, 2012). However, many

interviewees were of the opinion that if austerity continues at its current rate and pace, this approach will soon be no longer sustainable as officers and budgets get stretched too far. It is also for these reasons why interviewees pointed to the need for leaders to work collaboratively, to engage with communities, and for DMBC to commission work to a wide network of organisations across the city.

Whilst not forgetting the extreme difficulties interviewees described in relation to the severity of the cuts, there was also some enthusiasm shown for a perceived new way of working brought about by austerity measures which, as described by one interviewee, has *"encouraged innovation and encouraged us to work in a different way which we have done…"*. And as another interviewee claims:

> *"The local government budgets have born the brunt of the cuts… it's had an absolutely huge impact on the way the council operates… **I think it's made the council move faster than it would have done**… established that we need to be more of a commissioning authority rather than just delivering services… and **it's meant that we've had to be much more pragmatic and collaborative**… the Council's role is evolving much more to a leader and enabler, a broker of solutions…"*

[Public Service Representative]

As such, many viewed the new context as having reinvigorated local leaders to deliver more cost-effective local governance, coercing more collaborative working to deliver services and encouraging more strategic and innovative approaches to lead.

Similarly, it was also suggested that having recently endured a period of recession has encouraged better local leadership practices in Doncaster, with one interviewee stating: *"I think a lot of change is good, and a lot of our growth came through the recession because it was forcing people to change... it creates holes in the market"*. Likewise, comments were made that having more money does not necessarily lead to better outcomes, and that being forced to work under restrictive resource conditions has in fact provided an incentive for leaders to come together in a more effective way to, as was commonly recalled, *"deliver more for less"*. Moreover, suggestions were made that having large pots of money to deliver programmes requires a lot of management and commissioning, and that this can get in the way of programmes running effectively. Insights also revealed that having less money at the local scale can go some way in overcoming issues of monetary self-interest:

> *"I think as well in a perverse way, some of the austerity cuts that we've had to do have changed how we do business. **We do more business better with more***

> *strategic partners now than we've done in years gone by* when we've had say a big pot of neighbourhood renewal fund money there… *everyone looking at the money thinking* right, I'm sat at this table but *I just want to share that cash to fund my own programme, the cash int there now so when you're working with companies or partners it's properly around doing it for the right kind of reasons."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Similarly, it was suggested that running the Council on a reduced number of staff has led to better working practices:

> *"I think **it's doing a better job for seven and a half thousand employees than it did with fifteen thousand employees** because it's had to concentrate on what its core activities are and it can't any longer do what it used to do which is when any money came in its first thought was how do we spend that money to keep more bums on seats in my department because my empire will then be bigger than his empire and her empire and I think that's all gone now…"*
>
> [Voluntary Sector Representative]

Overall, the narrative here outlines the struggles that local authorities are facing on a significantly reduced budget. Largely, interviewees were highly aware of the impact that the cuts have had on DMBC with expectations that there were still much further reductions to come. However, as previous research has shown, local leaders in this study showed signs of adopting "creative approaches to service redesign… based upon pragmatic politics and institutional bricolage" (Lowndes & McCaughie, 2013; p.533). In other words, local leaders were found to have an incredible capacity to be resilient and bring institutions together in a way that is able to, at least to some extent, withstand the brutality of austerity by adopting a 'life must go on' sort of mentality (Lowndes & McCaughie, 2013).

Also suggested in the above is that certain strategies are being adopted by local leaders to deal with the cutbacks which are perceived as leading to better working practices. As will be revealed later in the chapter, these include working together to 'spread the cost', pool resources and combine capacity (see sections 6.3 to 6.5). However, it must also be noted how, for the case under study, this finding may have been influenced by the intervention that local leadership in Doncaster went through at the onset of austerity as will be described below in sub-section 6.2.5. Nevertheless, these findings indicate that whilst being a harsh dealing, austerity may not have created the crisis atmosphere in local councils that was anticipated, or at least local leaders are making the most of a bad situation. This supports the findings of a national survey carried out by the Royal

Society of the Arts in 2012, with 71% of the 50 local authorities surveyed believing that the effect of financial cuts had been 'positive' or 'neutral'.

However, as continued in the next section, this is not the full story. Some interviewees, for example, pointed to the tendency for local leaders to show signs of inertia when looking for something or someone to blame, and questions were also raised in relation to the failures of local leaders to respond and adapt to new conditions.

Following a discussion of a number of external factors over several decades that have influenced the context under which local leaders now operate, the focus will now be repositioned towards a series of internal factors specific to Doncaster that have also fed into the working conditions of the current local leadership landscape. In doing so, it will look at the path-dependent and place-specific long-term trends and levers that have influenced local leadership. It will also provide an overview of a number of governance failings in Doncaster that has subjected DMBC to central government intervention and, in turn, new appointments within top leadership positions.

6.2.3   Local 'lock-in'

The notion of path-dependency is readily cited (see Martin & Sunley, 2006) to describe the journey that post-industrial places have been on since the period of deindustrialisation that hit the developed world in the late 1970s. For example, Wolfe (2010; p.139) depicts how "the trajectory of specific regions and cities is rooted in a series of economic, social and cultural factors that shape their development over time". Path-dependency also recognises 'chance events' and 'accidents of history' (Wolfe, 2010; p.139). As such, path-dependency theory can go some way in helping to explain the difficulties that have been felt by post-industrial places, as well as their current and often unfavourable relative position in the urban hierarchy.

However, beyond recognising the exogenous structural influences as described above, path-dependency also accounts for local level activity. This is synonymous with ideas around 'lock-in' (David, 1994), driven by hierarchical firm relations (functional lock-in), community values attached to industrial production (cognitive lock-in), and local influential stakeholders and institutions that work against economic diversification (political lock-in) (Grabher, 1993). Each of these, according to Greco and Fabbio

(2014), denotes a resistance to the status quo and a barrier to growth. In response to a dialogue over Doncaster's challenges, for example, one interviewee stated:

> *"I'm hesitant to say the closure of the mines and stuff…* **I think we've reached the point where it's in the past and it has shaped but we can't keep constantly saying that it's still the main issue** *because actually if you had come and spoke to people 12, 15 years ago, they would have probably said the same… so* **I'm always a bit hesitant to say oh it's because we lost the coal***."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

This view was reinforced by the comments of another interviewee who gave the impression that a number of influential local stakeholders have been unwilling to see a future for Doncaster beyond its former precedence of coal mining and rail. This reluctance to change, it was claimed, was one of the reasons why Doncaster has in the past struggled to adopt new practices and ways of thinking that are suited to a new economy and urban trajectory:

> *"I went to an event… about Doncaster… people there from the local authority, business, charities, and they were saying... if we could change Doncaster, what would it be?* **I was shocked at how many people were looking backwards***, we need to be building on* **our mining heritage***… I'm thinking, is that the vision, is that the message,* **is that the image you want to portray of Doncaster?"**
>
> [Business Representative]

With this background, a strong institutional legacy was found to persist amongst a certain group in Doncaster which has potentially impacted on the economic recovery of the city and the creative appetite of those who are able to see what opportunities the new system has to offer. This adheres to the assumption put forward by David (1994) which suggests that local histories have a major bearing on the form, function, behaviours and expectations of local leaders and institutions. Overall, this begs the question of 'to what extent are post-industrial places determined by their history, and by the exogenous economic and political structures within which they are placed?'.

6.2.4   Local governance failings

Following a discussion of a traditionalist culture that has acted as a barrier to growth, outlined below are details of two key governance failings in Doncaster that have had a significant impact on leadership in the city.

In the year 2000, 21 local politicians in Doncaster were convicted of fraud for corrupt planning practices and false expenses claims. Following a period of central government intervention and in an attempt to overcome the failings of the previous local governance set-up, Doncaster became the first metropolitan borough in England to have a directly elected metropolitan mayor in 2002. Under this new system, the Mayor leads the Council, is directly accountable to local people, and has overall responsibility to deliver Council services. The Mayor leads alongside a Cabinet, made up of members of the Council that the Mayor chooses. Whilst this did initially have some positive outcomes for Doncaster in the form of major investments and infrastructural developments (details provided in section 6.3), progress was mixed, and in the years that followed further problems were exposed, particularly in relation to Children's Services. Against this background, in April 2010 an Audit Commission Report proposed that DMBC was a dysfunctional local authority and failing to provide good governance.

In the Report, the following failures were identified, centred around four key themes[14]:

1. Leadership

The most prevalent cause of failure found in the investigation was ineffective leadership, largely due to a breakdown of working relationships between elected Councillors and senior officers. In the years since 2001 for example, tensions arose due to the Council's refusal to embrace the new mayoral model, and they were found to have been operating in a way that frustrated the proposals of the Mayor and their Cabinet. As such, the Report stated that "some influential Councillors place their antagonism towards the Mayor and the Mayoral system, and the achievement of their political objectives, above the needs of the people of Doncaster, and their duty to lead the continuous improvement of services" (p.4). Instability within local leadership and the failure to suitably appoint individuals to fill key administrative roles was also found to be a significant factor which prevented effective leadership, for which during the appointment of an interim Chief Executive in 2010, it was found that "the Council failed to live up to minimum governance standards, and persevered with an appointment process they were advised, by external legal experts, was flawed" (p.4).

The Commission also found instances of a lack of well-defined roles between political members and managerial staff. The report stated that "some have become used to the dysfunctional politics of the Council and no longer seek to maintain proper boundaries

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[14] Themes identified by the Author

between definitions of the respective roles of officers and Councillors" (p.5). Failings were also attributed to an elected Mayor who lacked prior political experience and had limited knowledge of local government processes. Importantly, it was found that "the Mayor does not always act in a way which demonstrates an understanding of the need for an elected Mayor to lead his authority and represent all the people in Doncaster. Some of the behaviours adopted by the Mayor… have failed to meet required standards… This contributes to the Mayor often failing to achieve consensus around his key proposals" (p.5).

2. Organisational culture

The Report presented evidence of a long history of the Council not facing up to its problems. Furthermore, accusations were made of "bullying and intimidating behaviour" (p.7) shown by the Mayor, members of the Cabinet, and those occupying key officer roles.

3. Internal systems and processes

The Report found issues in relation to weak financial and personnel planning, poor performance management, and ineffective internal and external scrutiny.

4. Joined up working

The Report established that the Mayor and the Council were "insular in their approach" (p.22), and that decision making was not "rigorous or transparent" (p.6). It was found that "engagement by the Council is inadequate, both internally with staff, and externally with partners and the people of Doncaster. Key groups of people within Doncaster find it hard to get their voices heard" (p.6). There was also a reluctance to participate in sector-wide activities, a lack of engagement with local partners and local communities, a lack of contact with other Councils, and unawareness of and disinterest in good practice in other organisations. The Report also found failures in relation to recognising the importance of shared accountability, and a lack of trust between officers.

It is important to remember, however, that whilst describing a series of local governance failings in Doncaster, similar conditions have been found within other local authorities across the country, for which Table 6 highlights some of these for reference.

Birmingham City Council was subjected to a city-wide inquiry into its governance and organisational capabilities following allegations of extremism in Birmingham schools. The results were published in December 2014 after a five-month long investigation. Birmingham City Council has since been subjected to an independent improvement panel.

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council was subjected to an independent inquiry following the failure of both the Council and South Yorkshire Police to intervene in the sexual exploitation of 1,400 children between 1997 and 2013. Following the investigation, the Chief Executive of the Council stepped down and further investigations were commissioned.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council was subjected to an Audit Commission inquiry in 2008 after the arrests of the then elected Mayor and a former Conservative leader as part of a police investigation into alleged Council corruption.

Tower Hamlets Council was subjected to an inquiry ordered by the Communities Secretary, with a Report published in November 2014, to investigate its financial dealings following allegations of fraud by the Mayor and questions around public spending.

Table 6: Case studies of local authority failings. Source: *Author*

Overall, therefore, this section has provided a level of justification for this study's partial focus on local leadership and the need to understand it better, especially given a recent history of the local leadership and governance failings of the case under study. However, as Table 6 indicates above, this is a cross-national issue for which the research findings can be applied and lessons can be learnt more broadly.

6.2.5 Central government intervention: A turning point for leadership and governance

Following an investigation by the Audit Commission in 2010, the local governance arrangement in Doncaster was deemed incapable of responding appropriately to local failures without external support and guidance. Consequently, DMBC underwent a period of central government intervention until the Council had proved capable of being able to run independently (accomplished in August 2014). A major focus during these years was to develop a leadership team with the capacity to reinstate good governance. Overall, this was described as being an unsettling time for Doncaster's leaders. However, many interviewees reflected on this period as marking a positive turning point to address some of the chronic problems within local governance:

> *"...**what it did showcase was underlying problems**, underlying problems in terms of leadership, in terms of management and… in terms of the culture…"*
> [Business Representative]

As such, there was a consensus that leadership in the city has since changed for the better. And whilst, on the one hand, some interviewees said that this was inevitable

given that Doncaster was put under a microscope of scrutiny and surveillance, others suggested that those now occupying key leadership roles have shown a real appetite to do things differently to take Doncaster away from its former past.

This was depicted well in the following statements made during interviews:

> *"We've got a really good dynamic leadership team who **work strongly together in partnership**"*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

> *"We have some key people in leadership now that see the bigger picture… we've seen the results from it and **success breeds success**"*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

> *"There's a **buzz about the place** now… it's like we're all on steroids"*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

> *"Now we have a really strong influential seat around the table for Sheffield City Region… we're **shaping policy** whereas before we were a passenger"*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

> *"This has always been a town of potential, **potential which is now being realised** both at a regional and national level."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Largely, recognition was given to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of DMBC appointed in 2012, and the Mayor who was elected in 2013, for providing strong leadership and for putting in place a good, dynamic leadership team with the right skills, energy, and can-do attitude to take Doncaster down a better path. This was also thought to have been fed by a change in officer roles as one interviewee describes:

> *"Within any organisation **you're always going to have resistance to change if you've had people there for a long time**... the ones that weren't necessarily working in the same way as leadership want them to work in now, they just found themselves that **they didn't have a role or a place there anymore**… so a change of people at the top and they've filtered that through… to the rest of the organisation I suppose."*
>
> [Business Representative]

This positive change was also attributed to the *"political alignment"* between the Mayor and the CEO, with what was described as much greater coherence between the city's strategic overview and delivery. It is for these reasons, as indicated by interviewees, that Doncaster was nominated for the most improved Council award in 2015. This is an encouraging signal for Doncaster and its future development.

Furthermore, the new appointments were described as having encouraged a change of culture. Of course, some interviewees were cautious of making too many claims given the limited amount of time Doncaster has had to establish its own governance since the withdrawal of intervention in 2014. However, overall the strength and integrity of local leadership was described as having undergone vast improvements. This aligns with ideas resonating from contingency theorists that see a crisis (or economic shock) like that experienced in Doncaster as critical for highlighting a "need to change processes and mindsets at a local or regional scale, which in turn energizes existing leaders and creates the conditions that see new leaders emerge" (Stimson *et al*., 2009 in Beer & Clower, 2014; p.8). Conversely, however, there were some interviewees who were more cautious of a quick-fix solution that does not allow for lessons to be learnt by those already in the system, perceived as reflecting a prevailing central government attitude of failure aversion:

> *"...**nobody really knows what to do when you cross a failing organisation**, so what we do is we **sack everybody, blame people for it, bring new people in**, and is that really the best thing to do? To bring someone new in, they don't really know what's going on... **All that collective learning, all that understanding of mistakes - all that's vanished** so you're starting from scratch so then you repeat the cycle again... that's a bit naive I think and it goes back to the not being allowed to fail..."*

[Public Service Representative]

This also aligns with research that has found that 'institutional memory' (Bailey *et al*., 2008) is a key factor influencing a place's adaptive capacity (Pike, 2002). This was further supported by Pike *et al*. (2010; p.68) who claim: "affording a degree of continuity in the ability of institutions in places to interpret and make sense of disruptive challenges is preferable to any simple reactive and/or 'off-the-shelf' response".

Nevertheless, described here is the way in which an opportunity for change was opened up following a crisis episode. This was brought about by the way it jolted the existing institutional arrangements out of their established pathways and, in turn, enabled new constitutions to emerge (Ayres *et al*., 2017a). Whilst an initial key factor of change was central government enforcement, this led to the second key factor which was the appointment of a new Chief Executive of the Council (in 2012) and the election of a new Mayor (in 2013) who together are professed to have demonstrated strong leadership skills and the ability to work together effectively. Thirdly, and importantly,

this change has received buy-in from across the broad leadership network. Thus in this context, the role of individuals and their relationships with each other appears to be vital. Whilst leading to a positive change, however, there are issues within the governance and leadership of Doncaster that remain. These will be explored below.

6.3   A New Stage for Leadership in Doncaster

Section 6.2 of this chapter examined the conditions under which Doncaster's leaders have been operating under in recent years, highlighting a number of structurally- and agency-driven political and economic circumstances which have significantly shaped the leadership and governance landscape of the city. Thus following an assessment of the nature of leadership in Doncaster, the discussion will now turn to explore the scope and operationalisation of leadership: the who and how of leading a city. In doing so, the discussion also highlights a number of behaviours and practices that influence its performance, providing an in-depth and fine-grained assessment of the mechanics and intricacies of city leadership that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

6.3.1   Who is leading?

Respondents were very clear about who is leading the city. Largely, this position rested with the 'Council'; a term used loosely to refer to both the managerial and political administrations. Within it, important leadership roles were alleged to be performed by the CEO and the Mayor. Whilst both were celebrated as leading figures, however, the CEO, as opposed to the Mayor, was seen to be holding a larger share of authority and influence on the city's development. This may at first seem unexpected given that the Mayor is the democratically elected figure amongst the two, and yet this finding aligns with research which suggests that local leadership is increasingly being performed by 'city managers' rather than political elites (Zhang, 2012). Mostly, this was put down to the charisma and individual character strengths of the CEO. This supports the non-structuralist assumptions of Zhang and Feiock (2009) who found that the relationship between locally elected officials and appointed administrators is heavily influenced by the political experience of Mayors, as well as the professionalism of city managers. This suggests that a dichotomy model of public administration, whereby political officials

(who make policy) and city managers (who carry out policy) have different and distinct roles, is no longer suited to present-day circumstances (Svara, 1999).

Beyond the central role being played by those occupying key strategic positions, interviewees also identified city leaders across multiple sectors and at various levels. Firstly, emphasis was placed on the input of many officers within DMBC who were supporting the CE and the Mayor in their strategic approach and delivery. Beyond the public sector, the increasing influence of the private sector in Doncaster's leadership was also recognised, with suggestions made of an increasingly flourishing relationship between DMBC and the Doncaster Chamber of Commerce, as well as a number of major businesses in the area. This adheres to the national agenda for more private sector involvement in local leadership. Their involvement, however, whilst gaining momentum, was believed to still be quite limited, partly due to a lack of large businesses in the area.

Education was also credited as having a leading role, with Doncaster College alongside a number of secondary schools, considered as providing key inputs. However, with no major higher education institution, the influence of the education sector was also deemed to be limited. Another leading body was the local media which was highlighted as having a major influence in shaping local perceptions. In contrast, however, the third sector was highlighted as being an overstretched and underused resource, and community leadership was almost entirely absent from discussions.

Overall, these findings indicate highly visible leadership in Doncaster performed by elected and administrative officials together with wider inputs from business, and to a more limited extent, education. In view of the current policy and governance complexities, together with Doncaster's recent past whereby leadership was deemed unruly and lacking direction, this visibility was considered to be particularly advantageous. Similar suggestions have also been made elsewhere, with Squires (2017) emphasising a lack of visible leadership as a key concern amongst local leadership networks, as well as Beer and Clower (2014) who suggest that absent leadership is a bigger threat to place development than poor leadership. These ideas are expanded upon further in section 6.4 below.

6.3.2 What is their vision and strategy?

As highlighted in the previous section, this research uncovered a composite and interrelated set of local leaders in Doncaster. These included leaders occupying 'formal' roles with institutional power, as well as a number of other 'informal' actors whose involvement was voluntary. Overall, however, those occupying the more traditional administrative leadership positions were seen as the main steers of the cities visionary and strategic goals.

Largely, the city's vision is to transform Doncaster towards a new growth path away from being a faded post-industrial town. To achieve this, the following four key policy objectives were proposed in 2014:

- "A strong local economy"
- "Progressive, healthy, safe and vibrant communities"
- "All residents will be able to achieve their full potential in employment, education, care and life chances"
- "Pride in Doncaster will have increased further"

Source: DMBC (2014; p.2)

These build on Doncaster's Economic Growth Plan 2013-2018 which highlights a framework for action centred on the following four key aims:

1. To create the conditions which will foster business investment, increase innovation and diversify the business base.
2. To fully utilise Doncaster's asset base, including the urban centre, motorway and rail links, green space, and large amount of available land.
3. To promote Doncaster's connectivity with the Sheffield City Region and improve commuter links with other economic bases and labour markets in the district.
4. To improve the education and skills of Doncaster residents to accommodate current and future businesses.

Accordingly, Doncaster has expressed commitment to growing its local economy as a first step towards achieving these aims and objectives (DMBC, 2013b). This focus on the economy - *"first and foremost"* - was described as being based on the premise that economic success will increase the quality of jobs on offer, bring more highly-skilled

employment to the area, and ultimately lead to whole-place growth. This aligns with a growth-first ideology in which economic growth is thought to serve overall prosperity:

> *"**If we get the economy working well** – I know it's a real cliché – with balanced growth and good growth, you've got good quality jobs and decent wages, then **it works for the place and it works for the public services within that place***."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Against this background, local leaders spoke with enthusiasm about recent developments in the town which they described as a succession of *"economic wins"*. These resided with, for example, their success in 2015 to host one of two HS2 Rail Colleges in England and the international PGI golf tournament. Moreover, emphasis was also placed on the successful delivery of a pipeline of mega development projects over the last ten years or more, described by local leaders as being *"transformational projects"*, *"iconic"*, and *"the game changer type things"*.

In short, these include major infrastructure projects such as the development of the airport and the FARRS link road[15]; commercial and leisure facilities such as Doncaster Racecourse, Keepmoat Football Stadium, Frenchgate shopping centre, Yorkshire Wildlife Park and the Civic and Cultural Quarter[16]; and new-build housing developments such as Lakeside[17]. It is important to note, however, that the bulk of these developments were underway prior to the appointment of Doncaster's current CEO and Mayor, with many aligned to the introduction of the first city Mayor in 2002.

To this effect, a visible transformation of Doncaster's landscape has been high on the economic agenda of local leaders over the last decade, and it would seem that they are not unique in their approach. Similarities can be seen up and down the country - especially in relation to the larger northern cities of Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester whereby new skylines have emerged and impressive constructs erected over this same period. Local leaders in Doncaster gave various reasons for this approach.

Firstly, this approach was recognised for promoting and enhancing Doncaster's profile, giving out the impression that the town is *"open for business"*, *"developer and business friendly"*, and a credible player for business negotiations at regional, national and international arenas. Similarly, since such projects are clearly visible, interviewees

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[15] A three-mile long link road providing a direct connection between South East Doncaster and the M18, which has easy access to the M1 and A1(M). Work began in late 2013 and was completed in early 2016.
[16] A £300 million redevelopment scheme covering 25% of the city centre.
[17] A mixed-use housing development comprising of 51 homes.

explained how they are easy to recognise, especially by the national and local media for providing the town with headline news stories and good publicity. Akin to this was the emphasis placed on marketing Doncaster to promote a more positive image away from its past. This went hand-in-hand with discussions over the necessity for local leaders to be able to drive a change of perception, so that Doncaster is seen as a modern and vibrant place for investment, as well as offering a decent quality of life to its residents:

> *"**Biggest challenge is marketing Doncaster as a modern vibrant place for investment and as a quality of life to live in** ... not the image of Doncaster as a post-industrial northern town with all of the associated issues of deprivation."*
> [Public Service Representative]

This aligns with thinking about the role of image being particularly imperative as cities and regions compete for investment and for people in an increasingly neoliberal and competitive environment (see Hambleton *et al*., 2013).

Secondly, in attempting to improve the quality of life for Doncaster's residents, construction projects were viewed as providing "potentially valuable employment and training opportunities" (While *et al*., 2016; p.53) to boost local skills and employment.

Overall, recent developments appear to be a step in the right direction for Doncaster, and leaders are gaining credibility from both within and outside of Doncaster for their bold and ambitious approach, as well as their ability to deliver mega projects. Akin to the findings of Fuller (2017), this could be a reflection of Doncaster's insecurities over its past whereby being confident and showing your organisational capabilities are important. This was also reflected in comments by interviewees who spoke of a nothing to lose boldness that has encouraged leaders to *"be big and brave"* and take more risks:

> *"... **there's still a certain sensitivity about the past** and wanting to make sure that we're not coloured by that... but I think that's what's unique about Doncaster, **it's got a sort of well we might as well** because actually where we came from wasn't something stunning..."*
> [Public Service Representative]

Many local stakeholders favoured a pragmatic approach to leadership, and for some of the reasons described above, referred to what was a particularly interesting and exciting time to be involved in leadership in the city. However, whilst interviewees were supportive of what Doncaster's leaders had achieved in recent years, most were able to recognise a number of weaknesses in their approach which has focused mainly on the economy. Of course, leaders have to begin somewhere, and given the deep structural

challenges Doncaster has faced, many interviewees claimed that the economy has unavoidably had to come first. However, there was an argument presented that essentially leaders are in danger of transforming the place but not the lives of the people living within it, with concerns that economic wins are not translating into social wins. This will be explained in more detail in section 6.6.

6.4 Collaboration, Roles and Responsibilities in Doncaster

Interviewees claimed that city leadership works best when it is distributive, collective, and based on operating in collaboration with others, which means as one interviewee claimed: *"maximising the initiative and the creativity and the innovative potential"* of a diverse, multi-sector network of key stakeholders from across the whole city. Furthermore, given the current context in which local authorities are granted less central guidance and are facing significant cuts to their budgets, there was widespread recognition that urban problems cannot be resolved by formal leaders alone.

That said, however, in order to achieve collaborative leadership interviewees described how a catalyst is required in the form of an individual, group or entire organisation to provide some clarity of vision and strategic direction to coordinate it. Furthermore, given Doncaster's past, demonstrating good governance was deemed essential to allow joined-up working to practice, and in the case of Doncaster this direction was often referred to as coming *"from the top"*. This endorsed earlier sentiments, with those appointed or elected to senior positions within DMBC perceived as the driving force to coordinate activity and facilitate the leadership potential of others:

> *"In terms of place leadership, **without the role of the anchor institutions** like the authority and around good leadership in them, **there would just be lots of disparate activity without any roadmap or strategy** to it… they're almost **the glue that holds everything together** type thing. There are loads of good stuff within that but they allow it to be more successful than it would have been in its own right."*
>
> [Private Sector Representative]

As such, considerable value was placed on having leaders who are accountable, who lead by example, and who bring a strong voice to negotiations on regional, national and international stages. One respondent summed this up by stating: *"…it needs someone who really flies the flag, talks the talk…"*. These ideas were also undoubtedly

influenced by the widely promoted success of other cities such as London and Manchester which, for many interviewees, provided exemplars of the positive change that could be brought about by having dynamic, well-known, and highly-visible leaders fronting a place. This sentiment also echoes, at least to some extent, the current metro-mayor agenda being endorsed by central government.

The prominent role of formal leaders also aligns with the findings of Ayres and Stafford (2014) who point to the dominant position of those occupying formally assigned roles for determining what resources and legitimacy are granted to local development efforts by those occupying informal positions. That said, however, this is also about those occupying senior positions making the best use of their local assets by mobilising a dynamic team of leaders around them. This was viewed as essential for generating new ideas, opening up new opportunities, and for bringing challenge and debate; all factors which were associated with effective leadership.

Thus far from succumbing to a hierarchical model of governance, an appetite for strong and visible leadership went hand-in-hand with a desire for a more joined-up approach. Yet in order for this model of leadership to hold up, the evidence suggests that a middle ground needs to be found between a suitable centralisation of power for those with the Council setting the policy objectives and providing the steer for place leadership, and a distribution of power within the wider leadership networks that operate. Also commented upon, however, was the responsibility of those occupying informal positions to take on their city leadership roles. With this in mind, there were two key observations made by local leaders in Doncaster which could potentially jeopardise a joined-up approach to leadership being achieved as are outlined below.

6.4.1   Council-led leadership

As presented in the discussion so far, DMBC is perceived as the dominant body for leading Doncaster. To some degree, this was looked upon favourably by interviewees for providing a clear and visible direction for other leaders in foreseeing a joined-up leadership approach. On the other hand, however, some interviewees were critical of DMBC's allegedly authoritarian and imposing influence on the wider leadership team that has left wider stakeholders feeling excluded. In these cases, leadership in Doncaster was described as being *"too hierarchical"* with suggestions made that only the voices

of those occupying the most senior leadership positions are listened to. As one interviewee describes: *"we need to get people away from seeing leadership as about you have credibility, you have kudos because of your title"*. As such, issues were raised in relation to who has the capacity to influence and make decisions on behalf of the city since, as it was readily claimed, DMBC has overall discretion over who is granted the authority and credibility to lead:

> *"I think the Council still is... well **I'm only going to trust you** with that or **I'm only going to talk to you**... and **it ends up being Chinese whispers**…"*
> [Public Service Representative]

Referred to here is also a guarded approach to leading which made for a lot of unhealthy speculation amongst wider partners. As such, there were apprehensions relating to a lack of transparency and a reluctance of formal leaders to open up a wider debate about how the city should be led for fear of being challenged. As a result, it was perceived as creating tensions between the leading partners. One reason given for this was a reluctance of the Council to relinquish control:

> *"...there's tendencies for it just to be **quite old-fashioned, very public sector led kind of stuff** where god forbid if they haven't had any involvement with it…."*
> [Private Sector Representative]

This was highlighted with reference to a history of public sector dominance, which can be linked to the long prevalence of Old Labour politics in the area which favoured interventionist type approaches. Similarly, suggestions were made that DMBC has a tendency to be paternalistic, with an ethos of 'the Council will look after you':

> *"[We've had a] very paternalistic history within Doncaster… **paternalism was appropriate probably between 1940s and 2004/5**, maybe 8, **but that's no longer the methodology on the block anymore**, we're moving on from that."*
> [Voluntary Sector Representative]

Despite criticism, however, reasons for the Council's apparent authoritative leadership style could be explained with the help of research elsewhere. For example, given the challenges that austerity presents whereby difficult decisions need to be made promptly, Overman and Timm-Arnold (2015; p.1045) argue that the "nature of municipal austerity plans is the product of an elite decision-making process". Furthermore, some interviewees referred to DMBC's approach in relation to the pragmatics of being able to push through agendas and achieve outcomes amidst a complex web of stakeholder involvement: *"it's just necessary behaviours to get the project done or fixed"*.

On a different note, some interviewees thought that the propensity for the Council to sometimes show signs of inertia resonated with a tendency for local stakeholders to scapegoat the Council when things go wrong:

> *"... there's perhaps so much attack that they think just bat all that away,* ***surround yourself with people who are just going to agree because it gets the job done quicker****, but actually it doesn't lead to that sustained improvement."*
> [Voluntary Sector Representative]

Therefore, from the perspective of DMBC, involving others may be viewed as opening up the potential for criticism and in practical terms putting up obstacles to decisions being made. This shed light on the need for partners to challenge without undermining; making this a helpful part of the process and creating a constructive debate.

However, interviewees suggested that on the whole there was not enough challenge to the Council. For example, it was explained how Doncaster has experienced difficulty in attracting large businesses to the area, and as a result, there is a lack of competition coming from private sector representatives to occupy prominent leadership roles:

> *"...there's a dominance of the Council in Doncaster, and* ***there isn't as much competition for local leadership*** *as there are in some big cities where you will have big players,* ***a bank of real movers and shakers like development corporations, big organisations*** *that bring about serious regeneration in a particular area, where the leaders of those organisations are very apparent,* ***they're very visible, and they have a big influence****. If you think about Leeds... the leadership was often driven by the private sector as opposed to the public sector but* ***there doesn't seem to be as prominent private sector leaders in Doncaster, there's a reliance on the Council to be local leaders, not just on the public side but on the private side too****."*
> [Voluntary Sector Representative]

Furthermore, local stakeholders were also concerned by what some proposed was a stagnant political system in Doncaster, described as being *"staunchly Labour"* and based on a one-party system which was failing to produce enough churn of new thoughts and ideas to throw out the best leaders. This was attached with notions around a weak power of recall:

> *"...I think one of the big problems we have in Doncaster is that* ***you can put a donkey up and stick labour on its backside and people will vote for it****... so none of the MPs in Doncaster really have to work to do something good for Doncaster because they know they're going to get re-elected time and time again."*
> [Business Representative]

As such, questions were raised with regards to the quality of elected leaders:

> *"In terms of **the quality of leadership that comes out of locally elected councillors** with one or two honourable exceptions… **leaves a lot to be desired**. I don't think Doncaster's alone in that nationally, but I do feel that we have a particularly acute version of it… just from a pure governance point of **view, I don't think the quality of challenge that comes up in councillors is anywhere near good enough and I don't think the quality of leadership from them - with exception - is good enough**."*
>
> [Private Sector Representative]

Taking on a different perspective, however, discussions revealed a dependence on an accustomed leadership style by which stakeholders continue to rely on the Council for leadership direction. The most cited motive given for this was due to the accountability for place development sitting with the Council as one respondent explains:

> *"**The accountability for the place sits with the Council**… it has a sort of jurisdictional requirement to look after its place and the wellbeing of its citizens, and the localism act defines that more specifically so… **other sectors, business, health whatever, will look to the Council to take the steer**… the democratically elected members who have the actual political accountability because they're elected..."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Nevertheless, there were also suggestions that in a new era of joined-up leadership, wider stakeholders are not assuming their leadership roles and responsibilities:

> *"I think there's a combination of compliance, and people almost, well, it's what the Council does, so they sit back, **people don't take on leadership responsibility** so **they just leave it to the Council**."*
>
> [Voluntary Sector Representative]

As such, some partners were described as being too reliant on traditional structures, perhaps reflecting a history of national and local governance approaches which have encouraged dependency. Others, however, suggested that leaders that span the multiple sectors and organisations that operate in the city were not recognising their leadership roles and responsibilities. As such, often described was a situation whereby stakeholders found it hard to think beyond the needs and beneficiaries of their own organisation when sitting as members of multi-agency and cross-sector partnership boards with a remit to deliver city-wide strategic insights. This was linked to austerity, with interviewees describing how under such conditions leaders are being forced to put most of their efforts into the immediate challenges they face within their own organisations. As such, DMBC was frequently described as filling a leadership void:

*"The Council is having to respond to that because they know that the leadership is required… If nobody does it, then nothing happens, if someone is a dominant player then they're seen as domineering… **I do think the Council… has stepped into a void where there's a space there for others to occupy** but they're not necessarily coming to the table to do that.*

[Voluntary Sector Representative]

This supports the findings of Beer and Clower (2014; p.10) who state that "in understanding how leadership might find expression in the city, community or region we need to accept that despite apparent need, leadership roles may not be taken up". Furthermore, with no clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, this could lead to a situation whereby there is no obvious division between leaders and followers (Trickett & Lee, 2010). Equally, with a propensity to align leadership with those occupying formal roles, informal leaders are at risk of becoming followers or being overlooked.

Overall, this suggests a straining of relationships between the formal and informal leaders, as well as a state of confusion over roles and responsibilities. In many ways, the Council are fulfilling their duty as the body perceived as holding the legitimacy for making decisions over the development of the city. However, as the evidence has begun to reveal if this is not done in an accessible and visible way, it can create a situation whereby people believe there is too much power being held at the core. This can lead to feelings of exclusion and resentment. Similarly, there is a widely shared perception that a lot of talking about the city takes place behind closed doors which has led to *"an awful lot of suspicions"* and issues of *"trust"*.

On the contrary, if wider stakeholders are not actively seeking to carry out their roles as place leaders, this creates a void for which the Council seems almost the expected body to step into. In this respect, therefore, the Council are in a difficult position whereby, for want of a better phrase, they are 'damned if they do and damned if they don't'. By the same token, wider stakeholders need the confidence and support to apply their skills and express more directly the sort of relationship they wish to have with those within the core leadership team in the hope of developing new working relationships. This overall feeling was summed up well by one interviewee who referred to this scenario as a *"chicken and egg thing"*. Nonetheless, as the next section will disclose, it is important that open and honest conversations take place to ensure that cities are making the most of their leadership resource and potential.

6.5   Partnerships and City Networking in Doncaster

Despite tensions over who is responsible for leading Doncaster as outlined in the previous section, the evidence revealed that some recent progress has been made to consolidate a city-wide leadership network, with a number of executive boards, thematic groups, and partnership-led programmes that now operate. Team Doncaster[18], for example, was regularly named as one such body whose remit it is to provide leadership on issues of whole place significance. Promoting an attitude of 'collaboration', 'progress' and 'positivity', the Team Doncaster Partnership oversees four thematic boards: 'Children and Families', 'Enterprising Doncaster', 'Health and Wellbeing', and 'Safer and Stronger Doncaster' (Team Doncaster, 2017).

The creation of the Team Doncaster Partnership is alleged to have been fed by austerity measures which have required a *"brave new world of working in public-private partnerships"*. It was also described as being in response to a genuine appetite amongst Doncaster's leaders to share ideas, pool resources, and avoid overlap between partners. As one local leader claims: *"I think overall everyone has got the right attitude and wants to do the right thing"*. However, despite the good intentions partnership working was described as being *"polite and purposeful but not yet productive"*. Thus despite a network of activity that takes place with what was referred to by one interviewee as *"more meetings than you can shake a stick at"*, there was an overriding feeling that more needs to be done to get partnerships working in practice:

> *"**I don't think we've spent enough time** to all come up with a system to work out how we **make that good will a reality**, and I think still things fall through the gaps… even though none of us want that to happen."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Partnership arrangements were described as still requiring time to mature. However, others referred more directly to organisations working in silos as a common practice. To this end, there were a number of factors highlighted which could potentially assist partnership working and help to translate good intentions into practice.

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[18] Team Doncaster is a "strategic partnership of organisations and individuals that span the public, private, voluntary and community sectors". (Team Doncaster, 2017).

6.5.1 Translating talk into action

There were concerns relating to a fragmented local partnership framework that is in need of better cross-institutional alignment and a more well-developed 'web of connections' to enable joined-up thinking as one interviewee describes: *"the first challenge is to get better alignment..."*. There were various reasons given for this.

Firstly, many interviewees thought that there was not enough dialogue between the thematic boards, and in spite of there being some crossover with single members sitting on multiple boards, many interviewees believed that information was not being shared and that partnership groups were considered as separate entities rather than as part of a city-wide leadership network. Also referred to was an issue of competing organisational accountabilities; preventing partners from working towards a set of common priorities, creating conflicts of interests, and encouraging leaders to prioritise the interests of their own organisation and its members over whole place concerns:

> *"...that's our governance is more important than your governance and I have to be accountable to my trustees... actually the accountability is to the citizen and the people that receive the services...* ***it's a new democratic dialogue around whom are we accountable.****"*
> [Public Service Representative]

Another concern related to the static operationalisation of partnerships, which some interviewees perceived as sometimes getting in the way of actions being delivered. As one interviewee alludes: *"I think we need more movements and less structures…"*. In other words, local leaders described *"a need to be more action-centric"* in order to *"create more dynamism between the meeting structures"*. Currently, however, it was alleged that not enough is being done to ensure that partners are held to account to deliver on the actions agreed during meetings:

> *"It sees its role as a committee structure where* ***actions are agreed and then dispensed in between meetings****. My argument is* ***that's insufficient****."*
> [Public Service Representative]

As such, the evidence suggests that partnership working needs to be more deeply entrenched within the ethos of leaders, rather than being viewed as a simple exercise of attending meetings to tick a box. Similarly, interviewees referred to a need to change the mindset of partners to think beyond their own organisational interests and agendas:

> *"... it takes a lot of effort and **when you've got to do it in your own sort of backyard, you tend to concentrate on your own backyard rather than the streets you're on**."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Organisational boundaries also aligned with previous comments regarding a lack of recognition of place leadership roles and influence. This was perceived as leading to situations whereby board members were thinking of themselves as organisational representatives and broadly as spectators rather than city leaders.

Relating to the earlier point made regarding actions and delivery, some interviewees referred to a need for partners to be more honest and open about expectations:

> *"...if it was able to **speak a bit more honestly about the fact that some people aren't delivering** at the expected pace or to the expected quality or whatever then actually we would be a bit more grown up about it."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

On a more practical level, as previously described, issues relating to an individual's time and budgets were also regularly cited as impacting on partnership working.

Taking on a different perspective, another explanation related to the need for partners to feel that their contributions are appreciated and adding value. This resonates with earlier sentiments around DMBC's dominance which some interviewees described as leaving partners feeling that their input has no tangible impact:

> *"...**you've got to give people a sense that they're contributing to that discussion and therefore they're proud of their contributions**, and you want their contributions and not feel as though it's the Council that's made all the approvals..."*
>
> [Voluntary Sector Representative]

As such, interviewees commented on the need for partners to witness the benefit of their investment otherwise partnerships are seen as a waste of time and resource which, as previously mentioned, are key obstacles to an individual's contribution:

> *"...lots of transactions are neutral or actually wasteful, so **it's really important to make sure that we get value out of action and that we're clear about… [the] relationship between the impact and the investment**."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

A key question, therefore, as one interviewee puts forward is: *"how do we get people around the table so they want to contribute?"*.

6.5.2 Creating agency without control

Reflecting earlier sentiments regarding the importance of a leading figure providing the strategic direction, as well as wider stakeholders' expectations on formal leaders to lead, reflections were made that partnership arrangements need an overseeing hand to steer and facilitate. Respondents looked to DMBC to coordinate this activity:

> *"**Partners can only play their part to it, they can facilitate from their own organisational responsibilities, but without the overall strategic leadership, it falls down** and I think there's a bit more strength needed in that… I think most of the CE's in the area... I think genuinely want to work together and I think there's a strong possibility to do that. I think **there just needs to be a bit more council facilitation** for that... I think that's the bit where it falls down if anything at the moment…"*
>
> [Education Representative]

However, also reflecting earlier ideas, others were critical of local leaders relying too heavily on hierarchical impetus, and as one interviewee claims:

> *"...what we need is **adaptive models to cope with change which are self-adaptive, not require hierarchal decisions and timeframes that are determined by when the committee next meets…**"*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

This begs the question of, as one interviewee points out, *"how do you create agency without control?"*. This was supported by other comments in relation to generating a leadership environment that is less about telling others what to do or waiting for direction and more about looking for joint ways to resolve issues:

> *"I think that the next phase of leadership in Doncaster is that you can kind of **suck the authority out of it and collaboration can still happen**…"*
>
> [Private Sector Representative]

However, this was described as needing to be underpinned by a framework that supports a shared understanding and assessment of place:

> *"… the concept of distributed leadership, that's brilliant, but **you need a really clear vision, journey… parameters within which you can work**."*

This issue will be explored in more detail below.

6.5.3 Developing a common purpose and shared understanding of place

There was overwhelming support for establishing a shared vision for the city. It was perceived that having a clear statement of purpose would help those driving the objectives at the core to get the support and backing of a wider leadership network, encouraging a sharing of values and aspirations, and restoring confidence in their abilities to lead. Alongside this, a shared vision was also viewed as important for stimulating partnership working and for providing a more formative experience that avoided aimless interaction. This could also help to shape the identity of group members. Whilst it was appreciated, given the multiple voices that occupy the city, that achieving a single vision is not without difficulty, leaders embraced the idea of *"togetherness in difference"*, and views were expressed that a nexus of clearly defined objectives would go some way towards developing a common purpose.

The discussion in section 6.3.2 provided some exploration of Doncaster's vision, built on economic growth, inward investment and transformational projects. However, there were many comments made that Doncaster's vision is unclear and unnecessarily complex. One participant, for example, made reference to the *"70, 80, 90 page reports that genuinely are unreadable"* that are received by members of their leadership board. As such, suggestions were made about the need for a vision that is simple and that everyone can understand, and that can align partnership working in the city.

Others however believe that whilst a vision existed, being able to communicate this vision effectively was the biggest problem. As such, a number of interviewees were concerned that key messages were not infiltrating out from the core team:

> *"**There's a core group of organisations, individuals who absolutely get it, absolutely understand it** – how far that goes down in every organisation I think there's a big question mark, how far that goes down into every community I think there's an even bigger question mark but again… **they just need to communicate it a bit better**, everything will then start to improve as a direct result of that but I think unfortunately that's the hard bit."*
>
> [Private Sector Representative]

Overall, partnership working was viewed as a necessity for leading a place and as a platform for dialogue, insight and collaboration (Liddle, 2012). However, as the evidence has shown, whilst there is a positive attitude towards working in partnerships, in reality there are several obstacles to achieving this. Firstly, partners felt that there was no clear division of labour and that there was a lack of direction in relation to what was

trying to be collectively achieved. Secondly, interviewees felt that there needed to be less talk and more action and that training leaders on how to collaborate effectively with others would be beneficial. Thirdly, time and resources presented as significant issues. Fourthly, partners were often found to be participating in partnership efforts with their own agendas and motivations in mind (Sotarauta, 2015). The latter aligns with research by Liddle (2012) who found that partnership working is a constant battle to find a common ground that suits a collection of ideas, visions and interests.

With this background, there appears to be a need for more clarity over what being a 'partner' in the city or a 'member' of a board actually means, in addition to how diverse organisational interests can work in harmony and in accordance with wider city objectives. Thus more open, dedicated and challenging discussions on how best to shape effective and aspiring shared visions and responses could go some way in developing better quality interactions between partners, encourage partners to recognise the value of others, and promote more openness with regards to sharing ideas and information.

6.6   Leading with and for People in Doncaster

Following on from a discussion of inclusive leadership, this section draws on the ideas of inclusive growth (for further details see Green *et al*., 2017). Recently, the ability of local leaders to connect with their local communities and take local people on the development journeys of place has been gaining credence (Hambleton, 2014a). Therefore this section will not only investigate the extent to which local leaders in Doncaster are engaging with their residents and vice versa, but it will also look at the growth intentions of local leaders and the ability of local people to access new growth opportunities (Green *et al*., 2017).

6.6.1   Community engagement and empowerment

Doncaster's leaders were described as relentlessly seeking to extend their reach by making connections with external stakeholders and promoting a more positive image of Doncaster on national and international stages. On the contrary, however, local leaders were described as failing to connect with local communities, with interviewees

recounting a fundamental need to create more direct links with local people and to generate a better dialogue between local leaders and local communities. This could potentially reflect a lack of third sector leadership involvement as previously identified in section 6.3.1, which are ideally placed as an intercessor to bridge this gap.

In response, some called for a more transparent style of governance that showed more commitment towards creating opportunities for community consultation in decision-making processes. This was also considered important for providing feedback on leadership efforts that, in turn, can supply highly valuable information related to local need and the extent to which initiatives are having a local impact:

> *"…the amount of **feedback that you get from the community is a really important indicator of the degree to which you are developing an authentic profile and an authentic agenda** in terms of impact because **if it isn't felt by the people and the systems of the community then it's not real…"***
>
> [Public Service Representative]

This supports research that suggests that leadership is best served when deeply entrenched within the social composition of places (Peters, 2012), and comments were made that leadership needs to be responsive to local needs by reflecting the real-life insights of those who live and work in local communities, especially in areas where social and economic problems are most acute. This also aligns with the findings of Haus and Klausen (2011) that wide-spread participation in place leadership is vital for understanding problems and identifying solutions, as well as to gain support and invoke shared aspirations for a place's development.

Community engagement was also linked to the promotion of *"a real sense of civic pride"*, and for fostering a positive sense of place. This was thought to be particularly valuable for Doncaster, with claims that morale is low within local communities:

> *"**Doncaster doesn't believe in itself**… the glass is always half empty rather than half full, it has lots of **people here who have quite low aspirations**… doesn't believe that anything is ever going to happen…"*
>
> [Faith Sector Representative]

Related to this, increased community engagement was also linked to the knock-on effect this would have on increasing the level of trust between local communities and local leaders. This was in reference to, as one interviewee describes, the discovery that *"leaders are constantly working against the negative tide of past history"* with a

perceived cynicism amongst the local populous in reflection of the city's tainted governance history.

Comments on community engagement also revealed insights into community empowerment, with some interviewees speaking of the need to roll out leadership in order for communities to be considered a key strategic force of leadership in the city. To this effect, one interviewee describes a need *"to move away from a more managed down approach to a more directly engaged and self-organised…"* and as another recounts: *"reinvigorate communities by giving them some responsibilities to do things for themselves"*. Similarly, a need was also presented to *"encourage people in Doncaster to be the ones who can find the solutions"*, which could go some way in alleviating the difficult decisions leaders are having to make in relation to reduced budgets.

6.6.2 Balancing economic wins and social gains

Making sure that success is being felt by local people was viewed as one of the major challenges for the future of leadership in Doncaster, with a *"need to go further on that economic-social balance"*. This relates back to the discussion found in section 6.3.2 whereby the prominence that is being placed on the economy has created concern around not enough attention being put into the social aspects of place development:

> *"I think certainly the economic success is fairly well driven, **I'm not wholly sure that it's supported enough in the social inclusion, the social impact if you like***, the other part of what transforms people's lives… **health** and **education** and **social services**… **the other things that will make a town a truly attractive place to live in**."*
>
> [Education Representative]

To this end, it was highlighted how leaders in Doncaster currently wear a development-led set of lenses that is feeding into Doncaster's success in relation to mega projects and inward investment. However, concerns were exposed with regards to this top-down technocratic approach for being able to achieve overall growth. This was repeatedly in response to the social struggles that Doncaster still faces in relation to, for example, high unemployment and low levels of skill as illustrated in section 4.4.2. These issues were alleged to be particularly acute amongst young people in Doncaster. Referring to a significant skills gap, for example, one interviewee claims: *"…we can't claim to be a*

great or even good town I don't think with numbers like that behind us." Moreover, questions were raised with regards to the way in which success was being measured, and it was suggested that the only 'real' way to measure the outcome of interventions is to measure the impact that it has on people's lives:

> *"…ultimately Joe Public who used to work in a mine is going to believe it's true when Joe Public… has got a job and he can afford to do a slightly more expensive weekly shop… if* **it means bugger all to that person, it just feels like wasted energy** *at best."*
>
> [Private Sector Representative]

Further comments were also made regarding the high expectation being placed on economic growth to deal with social problems, and that rather more direct intervention is required. DMBC was also criticised for favouring quick-wins and shying away from dealing with the *"real problems"* that are harder to tackle:

> *"I think these* **big infrastructure projects is what everybody likes to do... but they're the easy things** *for civic leaders to do* **whereas education is a hell of a lot more difficult and it's less certain that you're going to succeed with it***."*
>
> [Business Representative]

A further critique was levied towards the emphasis on big infrastructural projects that, as one interviewee describes, are acting as *"a polish and a gloss on what we're doing… we try to put too much maybe of a shine on it…"*. To this end, suggestions were made that the ability of leaders to manage the intangible aspects of growth and place development is a much greater leadership attribute than being able to deliver on the more tangible aspects that are easier to control. It was for these reasons, however, that interviewees felt that a physical transformation had been pursued, with one interviewee claiming: *"people only believe what they see so that tends to prioritise physical action and physical development because you can see effective change"*.

With this background, it is feasible to suggest that Doncaster's leaders have become friendly to development at the expense of developing a comprehensive plan for achieving overall growth, favouring short-term fixes over a long-term strategic response. Having said that, however, some interviewees described how prevailing economic conditions render local leaders vulnerable to a "shoot anything that flies; claim anything that falls" (Rubin, 1988; p.288) philosophy by which local leaders are pigeonholed strategically in relation to their development.

Some interviewees also referred to Doncaster's previous governance failings which have placed the Council under heavy scrutiny. In a discussion around the issue of procurement, for example, one business leader expressed that Doncaster, unlike other places, was insistent on 'sticking to the rules' when putting out calls for business. Whilst ethical practices are undoubtedly favoured, there was a concern that a high level of caution was negatively impacting on local businesses:

> *"I listen to the Doncaster Chamber initiative and the importance of buying locally. I then get a phone call about the Doncaster Chamber diary for 2015 and would I like to upgrade my advert… and the printer's number comes up and it's a Liverpool number and they're Liverpool printers. Now if you're going to shout about how important it is about using local organisations… is there not a printing service in South Yorkshire?"*
>
> [Business Representative]

That said, however, others claimed that economic growth is necessarily the first step towards social inclusion with one business leader claiming:

> *"**It's the wealth creators you need, not pet projects that sound emotionally nice,** let's care, okay care, but **create wealth first then you've got funds to care**, don't be spending your cash on something that's absolute nonsense..."*
>
> [Business Representative]

In this context, a two-sided tale begun to emerge whereby on the one side are the opportunities that surround the economy, and on the other is a resident population which is ill-equipped to benefit from that. Therefore whilst interviewees were largely in support of what leaders had achieved recently, conversations exposed weaknesses in the city's growth agenda. As previously stated, a number of interviewees explained how a lot of the growth rhetoric coming from leaders with regards to economic prioritisation and seeking investment was about bringing high value-added jobs to the city. However, with a resident profile that does not have the skills to match and set against a competitive and mobile labour market, many spoke of a disjuncture between local supply and demand. As such, concerns were raised by interviewees that the majority of benefits could potentially go to people from outside the city:

> *"…if someone says to me what keeps you awake at night with your job, it's about all these **fantastic projects we have coming on stream at the moment which is going to create thousands of jobs** for the people of Doncaster… **I worry that… the young people of Doncaster won't get the jobs because they haven't got the skills**."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Other questions were also raised in relation to what leaders are championing. For example, in response to calls to promote Doncaster for its great connectivity, one interviewee pointed out that Doncaster could become a transitory place, a place that people come through for work or for road and rail links into the wider SCR. This raises a question in relation to the inclusivity of growth and 'success for who?'.

In this regard, it is feasible to suggest that the desire of leaders to prove their capacity to transform Doncaster's outlook has got in the way of recognising the overall steps required to assume an inclusive transition (Trickett, 2011). With this in mind, many interviewees spoke that the next big challenge for Doncaster is recognising the value of investing in local people, and making sure that the opportunities that are coming to the city are benefitting rather than alienating local people. Similar findings are also being exposed elsewhere (see While *et al.*, 2016). To this end, interviewees spoke of the need to do *"that kind of glue stuff in the middle"* as well as a coordination of activity of *"joining the dots"* to work out a holistic development strategy. Furthermore, with social problems as entrenched as they are in Doncaster, many interviewees thought that more direct intervention for addressing these was essential. Against this background, conclusions were made that ultimately places need both economic and social investment that offers an all-inclusive approach to growth:

> *"...I think it's a really hard tension because **you can't have one without the other**... economic success drives the ability to do other things, it drives full employment... without the economic growth, none of that is actually possible either. I think **it just needs to get that real balance between doing both**."*
>
> [Education Representative]

6.7   Summary: Civic-centrism in an Urban Nexus

This chapter has explored the nature, scope and operationalisation of city leadership in England, as well as the behaviours and practices that influence it, within a mid-sized city in the context of devolved city-regional governance under austerity. In doing so, it has demonstrated how leadership in Doncaster has remained largely public-sector driven but with a shift away from social intervention towards more intensity on growing the economy. It has also revealed that whilst cross-sector, multi-agency partnerships are supported in theory, in reality, formal customs and organisational pressures get in the way of joined-up leadership. A more detailed summary is presented below.

Firstly, in recognition of the path-dependent nature of place development, this chapter positioned city leadership in relation to a number of exogenous and endogenous influences that have shaped leadership conditions in Doncaster over the last 40 years. These included the external influences of deindustrialisation and related national policy responses and, more recently, central government's austerity agenda, before addressing a number of internal influences relating to local responses to deindustrialisation and local governance failings. In Doncaster, these have led to a specific and yet not uncommon set of circumstances that have fed into the leadership and governance conditions under which leaders are currently operating.

The discussion then turned towards examining the existing leadership arrangements in Doncaster, positioning this in relation to the conditions described above as well as a new local growth agenda at a time of austerity. This emphasised the need for a joined-up approach to leading and a pooling of resources from across the many sectors, organisations and stakeholders that occupy a city. Consideration was given not only to who is leading Doncaster, but also to the roles, responsibilities and power-sharing arrangements of city leaders under these new conditions. To end, the opportunities and challenges of partnership working and establishing a shared vision were explored, before addressing issues of community engagement and inclusive place development.

Doncaster is an interesting case to explore place leadership given its mayoral model of governance since 2001, its particularly acute and multiple governance failings, and its mid-sized city status. Drawing on the latter, and like many other cities of a similar size and ranking in England, their growth and recovery have featured less prominently in the agendas of national policymakers for growing the national economy. Recently, this has given rise to a narrative that critiques the city-centric nature of economic growth policy and exposes the 'forgotten' or 'left behind' places of Britain. Nevertheless, Doncaster was described by its leaders as a city that is once again finding its feet. There were several factors related to this, none more so than the success that the existing Mayor and CEO of Doncaster have had in leading the city down a positive development path. Local leadership was also described as having become more efficient, effective and creative in response to austerity conditions, and many celebrated the broad input from stakeholders across many sectors and organisations via newly created partnership boards.

The leadership vision for Doncaster in recent years has largely been one of economic growth and urban transformation. This can be seen in the form of major infrastructural

developments that have been rising since the early 2000's. Given where Doncaster was coming from following two decades of economic stagnation in the 1980s and 1990s, this can be seen as an attempt by local leaders in Doncaster to catch up with the sort of urban renaissance that many of the major cities have experienced since the late-1980s. This is also reflective of the wave of urban entrepreneurialism that has been sweeping towns and cities since the turn towards capitalism. As Harvey (1989; p.3) writes, "urban governance has become increasingly preoccupied with the exploration of new ways in which to foster and encourage local development and employment growth. Such an entrepreneurial stance contrasts with the managerial practices of earlier decades which primarily focused on the local provision of services, facilities and benefits to urban populations". This, however, was also deemed a response to Doncaster's recently turbulent past that has left leaders more willing to take risks in the drive to change their path-dependency. Doncaster's leaders have, therefore, been seeking new growth and employment opportunities by promoting the sense that they are 'open for business'.

However, interviewees were concerned about the city leaving its residents behind, for which the biggest challenge for local leaders in the coming years was described as connecting local people across all sections of society with the economic opportunities that were emerging. This resonates with ideas about inclusive growth (see for example Green *et al.*, 2017). Many described how this will require more local intervention and people-focused investment, and increased input from the voluntary sector to support public-private leadership. And yet, difficulties emerged in relation to delivering public services at a time when resources are being cut and social issues are becoming more abundant. This is especially the case given the increasing responsibility that is being placed on local authorities by central government to deliver on local social care needs. Concerns were also raised, however, in relation to local leaders favouring 'quick wins' over tackling Doncaster's deep-seated social issues. This aligns with Rubin's (1988) "shoot anything that flies; claim anything that falls" (p.249) philosophy, whereby in response to an uncertain economic climate and when "to do something is better than to remain inactive" (p.237), practitioners favour more achievable, quick-turnaround tasks. This makes it easier to show that they are 'doing' urban development (Ward, 2001).

In relation to partnership working, the need to assess the local distribution of powers and expectations, both legitimate and perceived, became apparent. Largely, there was a lot of emphasis placed on leadership that is accountable, with the elected Mayor together with the formally appointed CEO described as holding the responsibility and

legitimacy for leading. And yet, in recognition of the need for a joined-up approach for making the best use of resources, interviewees described how achieving a balance between an appropriate centralisation of power for those in the Council setting the steer and a delegation of power to a wider leadership network was critical. However, whilst on the surface partnership working was widely promoted and supported, there were a number of factors that were preventing a joined-up approach from being fully realised.

Firstly, evidence came to light of an elitist attitude to leadership, with accusations made that there is too much reluctance shown by senior political and managerial figures within DMBC to give away power. This supports the claim of Brooks *et al*. (2016; p.13) that "the legacy of public sector-led governance remains despite increased engagement from the private and third sectors". On the contrary, however, another view held that informal leaders remain too reliant on the Council for direction. Within a partnership set-up, for example, informal leaders were found to be "standing on the side-lines" (Squires, 2017; p.8) and waiting for senior leaders to take charge. This resonated with the value that is placed on political structures and formal stability and customs. There were also sentiments that whilst partnership working was largely supported, local partnership boards are not receiving full buy-in from members. One reason given for this was the need for stakeholders to prioritise the immediate needs of their organisation under austerity. Furthermore, since the roles of the majority of members are voluntary, there were problems over delivery as partners could not be held to account.

With this background, the importance of having shared objectives and setting a vision for the city that everyone can get on board with was believed as key to allowing partnership working to prosper. This, essentially, is about developing a common purpose and a shared understanding of place. This would not only encourage stakeholders from across the public, private and voluntary sectors to want to become more involved in leading but would also help to harness support from the public.

Finally, also implied within this discussion, together with Chapter 5, are the behaviours and leadership practices that most suit the contemporary conditions for leading. These, together with the ideas identified above, will be expanded upon in the next chapter that provides an all-encompassing analysis and discussion of the empirical findings.

Chapter 7. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION: THE ESSENCE OF CITY-REGIONAL DEVOLUTION IN ENGLAND

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will address research objective 3:

> To *conceptualise* and *understand* the structures, processes and practices that underlie the contemporary city-regional devolution governance and leadership landscape in England under austerity, from a case study of a mid-sized city.

Chapters 5 and 6 presented the empirical evidence of this study which examined local leadership and governance in the context of city-regional devolution in England. It looked at this at two dimensions: a larger city-region and a mid-sized city within it.

This examination was carried out in order to; a) understand the emergence of devolved city-regional governance and how institutions and leaders are navigating a new policy landscape, and b) explore the nature, scope and operationalisation of city leadership, as well as the behaviours and practices that influence it, within a mid-sized city context. With this background, it is the intention here to draw upon the empirical evidence that has been presented to capture the essence of contemporary city-regional devolution in England. This will contribute to an emerging body of research that seeks to conceptualise and understand the structures, processes and practices that underlie a new city-regional devolution governance and policy context in England (see Hincks *et al*., 2017; Etherington & Jones, 2016; and Pike *et al*., 2016). In doing so, the particularities of the Doncaster experience are translated into something that can be usefully applied to other places both nationally and globally.

Whilst acknowledging that many of the research findings resonate with the assumptions of leading scholars in leadership (Beer & Clower, 2014; Hambleton, 2014a; Sotarauta, 2016), governance (Etherington & Jones, 2016; Pike *et al*., 2016) and institutions (Hildreth & Bailey, 2014; Rodríguez-Pose, 2013; Tomaney, 2014), this chapter brings all of these elements together to provide a somewhat more holistic understanding of the urban and policy system in its entirety. Furthermore, the case study of a mid-sized city brings a different perspective for exploring these issues and sheds new light on the

relational dynamics between a mid-sized city and a core city within a city-regional geography. The themes addressed in this chapter are as follows:

- Central-local interactions (section 7.2)
- Multi-scale and multi-level governance (section 7.3)
- Intra-local interactions (section 7.4)
- Leadership qualities (section 7.5)
- The mid-sized city experience (section 7.6)

These themes were chosen as issues that are relevant to both the city and city-regional scale to provide a more inclusive conceptualisation that can be applied at various levels of sub-national leadership and governance. These will be considered, in turn, below.

7.2   Central-local Interactions

As outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, the current city-regional devolution agenda is based on the idea of devolving more resources and decision-making powers to a more localised level of governance. This agenda came about following a revival of localism upon the election of a Conservative-led Coalition government in 2010; defined as a process that enables better local participation in and influence over the local decisions that are made that impact on local-level activity and, ultimately, place outcomes (Hildreth, 2011). Whilst localism as a concept is not new, it is widely conveyed that there has been an ideological transformation in how localism is currently being sold as a political project to implement austerity and pursue 'deal-making' (Lowndes & Gardiner, 2016).

As previously outlined in Chapter 3, localism infers a high degree of local autonomy which can manifest in three ways (Pratchett, 2004 in Bentley *et al*., 2010): 'freedom from central interference', 'freedom to effect particular outcomes', and 'as the reflection of local identity'. The findings of this study, however, suggest that none of these manifestations are true under the city-regional devolution approach since 2010. Therefore despite hopes of a localist approach that corresponds with the idealist notions described above, the evidence presented in Chapters 5 and 6 points to a governance structure that continues to be highly centralised.

This aligns with claims that the UK's efforts to pursue localism have been consistently undermined by centralism (Lodge & Muir, 2010). This is alleged to have created a sub-

national governance deficit which is, if anything, now widening under the current regime as local budgets continue to be squeezed under austerity (Lowndes & Pratchett, 2011). As will be outlined in the discussion to follow, these conditions have given way to a particular set of relations between the centre and the local that, referring back to the conceptual framework at the end of Chapter 3, aids our understanding of the 'vertical' dimension of governance under a city-regional devolution framework. This not only considers the points of interaction but also the nature of these relationships in the way that the centre and the local behave towards one another. This will be discussed in relation to the processes of devolution and 'deal-making', and the instruments to deliver these under austerity.

7.2.1   The 'rules' of city-regional devolution

Following the introduction of City Deals in 2011, 'devolution deals' soon became central government's "preferred method of formulating public policy and resource allocation" (Pike *et al*., 2016; p.15). As a nuanced and unfamiliar style of 'informal governance' (O'Brien & Pike, 2015), this approach has presented a number of opportunities and challenges for both central and local leaders to contend with. On the one hand, devolution deals were recognised as offering the opportunity of increasing the amount of dialogue between local and national government and encouraging strategic thinking and governance reforms at a scale that economically makes sense. However, on the other hand, devolution deals were exposed during interviews in Doncaster in the SCR as posing new, and accentuating existing, challenges regarding an unequal power dynamic between national and local government (Pike *et al*., 2016). Largely, this was exposed in relation to a set of centrally-determined 'governing codes' and expectations for certain policy-related behaviours (Ayres *et al*., 2017a).

Devolution deals were described by interviewees as coming with a number of rules and conditions that can be linked to a continuation of parliamentary controls and standards (Bailey & Wood, 2017). This became apparent when speaking about the asks of the SCR during the negotiation phase of the SCR devolution deal process with central government, with interviewees claiming that central government had largely dictated the terms of the deals. Furthermore, with a devolution agenda based on a commitment of the centre to focus on growing the economy, conversations with local leaders in

Doncaster revealed that this was also reflected in the local approaches that were adopted with both the SCR and Doncaster heavily promoting economic aspects of growth.

Elsewhere, researchers have pointed to the vagueness of central government guidelines over devolution deals, with Ayres *et al*. (2017) claiming that this is to allow central government enough leverage to get their desired outcome. As a result, this appears to be encouraging local leaders to look to what other city-regions have been able to negotiate, with interviewees regularly referring to the deal that was made in Manchester as providing some guidance for the SCR negotiations. This, however, is also likely to have been driven by the competitive ideology underpinning the current sub-national governance paradigm, with city-regions in a constant battle for central government recognition to gain a larger share of the limited power and resources on offer.

Further restrictions were also identified in relation to the fact that, ultimately, central government has the power to choose who they want to do business with. This supports the findings of Haughton *et al*. (2016; p.367) who state that: "rewards [are] going to those who dance more credibly to the tune of central government". For this reason, it was inferred that local leaders had to oblige with the terms of devolution, otherwise they risked losing out to other areas that were prepared to take less. In relation to funding, for example, interviewees felt that they had to accept the restricted funds that were being offered (£30 million a year over 30 years for the SCR) despite being dubious that these were anything more than they would have received even without a deal.

The steps towards achieving the SCR devolution deal were described as an exclusive negotiation between a limited number of sub-national high-level stakeholders, namely the nine Leaders of each local authority and Whitehall. This was deemed to be to the exclusion of the majority of leadership representatives across the SCR, and especially beyond the core city of Sheffield who was believed to have had the largest input in the devolution deal negotiations. Whilst this could be due to the limited time available to finalise a deal[19] and to avoid chaos in the midst of multiple local partners that each have differing views and stakes, these 'hidden' (Ayres *et al*, 2017b), 'secret' (Tomaney, 2016), and 'backroom' conversations (O'Brien & Pike, 2015) have made for an elitist approach to local growth, with the majority of local stakeholders only finding out the fine details of the deal once the deal had already been formalised (see also Blunkett *et*

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[19] At the time of the first round of interviews, Leaders in the SCR were working towards the 'devolution bids' deadline in September 2015 to be considered in the Spending Review .

al., 2016). This has fed into the intra-local tensions that reside as will be explored in section 7.4.

Similarly, interviewees also unearthed concerns relating to a lack of 'public debate' and 'democratic scrutiny' in the way that devolution has been handled between central and local stakeholders (see also Tomaney, 2016). Therefore similar to what Etherington and Jones (2016) found, whilst the Localism Act promised more power to local communities, these groups were acknowledged as having less power than they did before. Similar findings have also emerged elsewhere. For example, in an opinion survey carried out in South Yorkshire in 2016 by the Yorkshire Devolution Movement[20], 55% of respondents who took part had never heard about devolution policy and fewer than 9% felt that they had been informed about it. This suggests that citizens are becoming more distant and disengaged from politics.

Overall, these findings point to the city-regional devolution agenda as "centrally orchestrated localism" (Pike *et al*., 2016; p.10), whereby central government are setting the rules of engagement. The findings also suggest that devolution is an elite process, challenging what is meant to be a more bottom-up, locally engaged approach. Fundamental questions have also been raised in relation to the centre's commitment to localism beyond their own economic objectives, together with a 'government knows best' (Rhodes, 2007) and a 'take it or leave it' attitude by the centre towards the local.

7.2.2   The instruments of city-regional devolution

The discussion above dealt with the top-down way in which devolution has begun to unfold via a process of deal-making, which is creating a particular set of unequal power relations between central and local government. Expanding on this discussion, this sub-section examines the 'instruments of devolution' (i.e. the way that institutions and resources are being used to enforce the rules that have been identified).

The institutional creations of the SCR LEP and the SCR CA, together with the future election of a SCR metro mayor, were described as being non-negotiable; indicated in the conditions set by national policymakers for achieving a devolution deal. In relation

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[20] The Yorkshire Devolution Movement was set up in 2012 as an independent campaign group in favour of electing a regional assembly for Yorkshire. The group describes itself as being disassociated with any political party.

to LEPs, for example, former Communities Secretary Greg Clark clearly indicated that "no devolution deal will be signed off unless it is absolutely clear Local Enterprise Partnerships will also be at the heart of arrangements" (in Bailey & Wood, 2017; p.975). Metro mayors have also been described as "an unofficial deal breaker" of devolution (Ayres *et al.*, 2017a; p.3), replicating the mayoral model of Greater London since 1999 which is heralded as a success story by central government to harness support. As such, Bentley *et al.* (2016) refer to the 'super' strategic economic plan put forward by central government, with gestures that metro mayors will become mandatory by law.

However, interviewees shared concerns over the capacity of the SCR LEP to drive local growth beyond their role to draw funds into the city-region. This was mainly for the reasons of problematic representation and a lack of resource. Interviewees were also anxious about the prospect of having a SCR metro mayor for the reasons of adding another layer of local governance and further complicating an already confused model of governance. Interviewees were also concerned about the new democratic powers that a metro mayor would hold as taking power away from the local authority level. These issues are discussed in more detail later in the chapter (see sections 7.3 and 7.4).

Furthermore, whilst some cite the steadily growing influence of LEPs (see Bailey & Wood, 2017), this research found that the SCR LEP is institutionally weak. This could have hampered the SCR's capacity to negotiate a good deal. However, interviewees claimed that it was the SCR CA (led by the nine Leaders of each local authority), rather than the SCR LEP (led by local business elites together with the backing of the nine Leaders of each local authority), that managed the negotiations on behalf of the city-region. This poses a question with regards to who, in reality, central government want to negotiate a deal with. It must be noted, however, that since negotiations are taking place on a case by case basis, LEPs in other city-regions may be having more influence than is the case in the SCR. Furthermore, it was also mentioned that the SCR LEP has developed a stronger relationship with central government than they have with other stakeholders in the SCR, and therefore perhaps the SCR LEP is having more influence on the terms of devolution than local leaders in the area realise.

Beyond the application of institutional creations to enforce the rules of engagement, the level of fiscal resource under austerity conditions can also be linked to the centre's endeavour to control local activity. This aligns with Peck (2012; p.6) who claims that

"fiscal restraint reinforces the hierarchical powers of budget chiefs and audit regimes". As previously alluded to, this is due to a shift towards a more competitive system of sub-national funding allocation that, for the reasons outlined below, "plays to the political advantage of supralocal budget holders, who are able to pick (and for that matter announce) winners, to endorse and advance favoured experiments, and to steer local policies and priorities from a distance" (Peck, 2012; p.20).

As such, Peck (2012) uses the term 'austerity urbanism' to describe how cities are under 'austerity rule'. In a sub-national governance setting of heavily reduced budgets and having to compete for shares of a much-reduced pot of money, chasing investments and competitive bidding have become a fiscal necessity of local government in an endeavour to survive (Peck, 2012). In this environment, local government is foreseen to absorb the logic of the competition state as well as reduce their dependence on national expenditure by coming up with new ways of generating local revenue (Pike *et al*., 2016).

However, a lack of resource was linked to an inability to act and think strategically. This was certainly the case in relation to the SCR LEP that was recognised as having a much tighter budget than Yorkshire Forward (former RDA), with interviewees claiming that under these conditions the SCR LEP was set up to fail from the very beginning.

This was also found to be true at the city level, especially given that the cuts had largely targeted social services and welfare provision for which local authority responsibilities in these areas had increased in corresponding years. As research by Beatty & Fothergill (2013) has pointed out, places like Doncaster that suffer from high levels of deprivation and whose communities have complex needs have been heavily impacted by austerity. This situation reveals a mismatch between responsibility and resource and thus localism and austerity, supporting what others have referred to as a "parallel world" for local leaders who are "caught up in a crisis atmosphere" (Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2016; p.221). Having said that, however, the findings also suggested that leadership and governance have become more effective under austerity, with reduced budgets and fewer staff making leaders work more efficiently and innovatively together.

Nevertheless, the continued control by central government was revealed in the way that resources continue to be centralised: a major barrier to achieving local autonomy (Cox, 2014). This resonates with the work of Marshall and Finch (2006) who state that "in a

country where local political leaders must submit bids to central government for a share of their own residents' tax payments, accountability for urban government has, inevitably, become confused" (foreword). To this end, Tomaney *et al.* (2011) argue that redistributing finance is fundamental to achieve decentralisation.

The UK is amongst the most centralised economies internationally, and despite claims of decentralisation in recent decades, the UK's finances have evidently become more centralised over this period (Pike *et al.*, 2016). In 2012, only 5% of taxes were raised locally in the UK, compared to 42% in Spain and 40% in Germany (OECD, 2015b in Pike *et al.*, 2016), and between 1975 and 2012, the UK saw the largest percentage decrease of all the other OECD countries included in the study (Pike *et al.*, 2016).

Similarly, interviewees felt that central government was overly cautious of placing any substantial money-raising powers in the hands of local government due to a long-standing lack of confidence in the capabilities of local stakeholders to deliver on things that have traditionally been a national government responsibility. As Cox describes (2014; p.155):

> "Very few people see local government as anything more than one among a number of relatively benign tools in the central government toolbox let alone as an institution with autonomous legitimacy that might be equipped to protect its citizens from the injustices exacted upon it by the sometimes malign intents of the central state."

Interviewees also stressed that this was especially the case for Doncaster because of their recent history of governance failings and that, as a result, they had to constantly prove to central government that they were now trustworthy to be able to cope with potentially new fiscal responsibilities. This came through, for example, during the process of Doncaster's bid to host one of the two HS2 colleges.

7.2.3   Scope for leadership in the context of city-regional devolution

The discussion presented until now has looked at how local agency is restricted under a city-regional devolution system that endorses central government control and inadequate instruments to deliver new responsibilities. This aligns with a legacy of working within the confines of a centrally controlled system of urban governance and finance, encouraging a relationship of dependency between local leaders and national

government. This is because, historically, central government has been seen as the chief decision-maker and distributor of resources.

However, suggestions also came through during the research that local leaders do not necessarily possess the right skills, experience and confidence to be able to cope with new responsibilities. This offers a somewhat more nuanced perspective than those which have been outlined until now. Yet, far from being an issue that rests solely with local leaders, it is arguable that several decades of state centralisation has marginalised local leaders to the extent that their transition from being implementers ('do as you're told') to shapers and innovators ('do something for yourself') has, and continues to be, an enormously difficult one. Geoff Mulgan for example, former head of policy during the Blairite period, stated in 2005 that "local government has been so squeezed, knocked and drained of power that its impotence has become … a problem" (Marshall & Finch, 2006; p.ix). Accordingly, this research shed light on a paternalistic central-local relationship. Also revealed was a belief in 'nation-state powers' by local actors. This became apparent in the way that the centre's spending cuts have been absorbed by local government without any major backlash (Haughton *et al*., 2016).

Despite a lot of critique, discussions with local stakeholders revealed a lack of will to fight against austerity, with suggestions made that there was little local leaders could do but to deliver and manage the cuts that were being forced upon them. To some extent, this is unsurprising given that the energy of local leaders is largely being put into surviving under austerity conditions whilst at the same time trying to remain competitive. Interviewees also described each leader as having their own individual crisis to contend with that meant prioritising their immediate needs over the bigger picture, which also impacted upon partnership working as described in section 7.4.

However, this state of affairs also showcased how deeply entrenched austerity has become within the mind-sets of local leaders in the SCR, a place that has taken several knocks as a result of urban policy since deindustrialisation and the associated challenges that came along with it. Davies *et al*. (2017; p.23) refer to this as 'austerity realism', for which one participant in their case study of Leicester in England claimed that "while most of our respondents in the City Council detest austerity, they deliver it diligently, though reluctantly, for lack of a perceived alternative". This is not the same everywhere, however, with Davies *et al*. (2017) comparing austerity politics across eight European cities and finding that, contrary to local governments in England, some cities have

shown a major resistance to austerity. Barcelona is one such case whereby an 'urban renaissance' has emerged as an attempt by local leaders to regain control and radically change the government's approach to austerity (Davies *et al*., 2017).

Overall, therefore, depicted here is how a history of central control has left places dependent on the centre for direction and money. Also suggested above is an acceptance of the centre's symbolic framing of a "politics of no alternatives", a norm constructed and institutionalised by the state (Fuller, 2017; p.32).

Rather than mere consumers of the system, however, local leaders showed how they critically engage with it to maximise their outcomes, unravelling a more complex set of interactions. Still, questions are raised in relation to why austerity has been consumed in the way it has. There are several key reasons that emerged as outlined below.

Firstly, local leadership behaviours were found to be driven by the inevitability and 'pragmatics' of the situation (Fuller, 2017), recognising that the current city-regional devolution approach to growth was the only proposition available. This aligns with Rees and Lord (2013) who claim that local areas assume a position based on the rationale of growing fiscal pressures, that this was the only deal on offer and, as previously alluded to, deals are the only means by which to be allocated money and power. Furthermore as *"the only game in town"* as stated by one interviewee, only by playing the game was it possible for local leaders to have any sort of conversation with central government, in the hope of regaining a level of local control and a share of the limited resources on offer. Also, in a competitive environment of bidding against other city-regions for powers and resource, local leaders sensed that a 'get on with it' sort of mentality was required to keep up with what others were doing. Under these conditions, therefore, it is unsurprising that some interviewees accepted that a bad deal is better than no deal, whilst others claimed that it is about making the most of a bad deal. To this end, an acceptance of the centre's approach to devolution can be viewed as a sensible move (see also Bentley *et al*., 2016).

Secondly, interviewees spoke about the need for local leaders to be making sense of the way devolution is unravelling, especially as the system has been in a persistent state of flux since its implementation. This was referred to as the best way to manage uncertainty, as well as for keeping one step ahead and to foresee changes that require a local response. In this sense, local leaders described how the more that they can

understand the system, the more they can get out of it. It was also contended by some that only by engaging with the system and better understanding its rules was it possible to bend the rules. Whilst the ability of local leaders to adjust to changing government priorities has been a growing necessity under a succession of central government administrations (Rees & Lord, 2013), under the current system it would seem that local leaders are having to become increasingly sophisticated about their understanding of and engagement with high-level power (Sotarauta, 2015).

Thirdly, there were sentiments from interviewees that devolution is a 'long game', supporting other research which suggests that the importance is not what is being offered now but what the offer could evolve into in the future (Ayres *et al*., 2017a). Ayres *et al*. (2017a) use Wright's (2004) 'cracks and wedges' metaphor (describing a process of negligible reforms built upon over time) to explain this dynamic. This, however, has been noted elsewhere as creating a dilemma for local leaders: "secure imperfect change now with a view to building on it in the years ahead, or be complicit in locking in the status quo for at least another decade?" (Harrison, 2016b).

7.2.4   Summary: Central-local interactions

A discussion of central-local relations and interactions is important for understanding the complex and asymmetrical ways that central and local governments connect within a city-regional devolution framework. A key finding here is that regardless of the rhetoric of localism, central government has maintained a high degree of control over the processes and instruments of devolution. More importantly, the current urban agenda can be viewed as a missed opportunity to radically rework central-local relations.

The research uncovered that whilst experiencing the decentralisation of certain functions, tasks and budgets, the limited power and fiscal autonomy of sub-national governance arrangements was stopping real devolution from taking place. The reasons given for this aligned with an allegedly rigid set of central conditions and restrictions. This revealed a devolution process that is centrally driven and highly regulated, especially, for example, in relation to devolution deal negotiations.

Sub-national governance reforms have also been conditioned by non-negotiable institutional creations (i.e. CAs, LEPs and metro mayors) and resource allocation

(power over to who and how money is distributed). Similarly, local leaders recognise that rewards are going to those who adhere closely to the way that central government want to do things. Bentley *et al*. (2016) claim that these conditions are evidence of 'conditional localism' in practice, defined by Hildreth (2011; p.704) as:

> "A commitment of the centre to decentralise that is conditional on the more local body supporting the centre's national policy objective and/or performance priorities and standards… As a consequence, the priorities of the local authority are driven as much by the demands of the centre as by the aspiration to serve its communities."

The notion of 'metagovernance' is relevant here, a concept used to theorise the way central government "steer decentralised networks by indirectly shaping the rules and norms of those networks" (Bailey & Wood, 2017; p.1). They also suggest that central government has been able to "shape the preferences and practices of local actors to accommodate the priorities of central government in processes of complex, messy political bargaining over the shape and scope of networks as they are reconfigured" (ibid; p.2). With this background, the future extent of local power seems to be, perhaps more than ever before, heavily dependent on local leaders accepting top-heavy controls:

> "When one talks of devolution, it's not realistic to talk about freedom… Central governments are elected and they are entitled to have their manifestos implemented and it cannot be contemplated there is a sense of freedom at a local level which can actually frustrate the clear mandates upon which governments are elected..."
>
> [Heseltine, 2015, in Ayres *et al*., 2017a]

This has been identified as a significant weakness of the English approach towards redistribution and growth; with Willett & Giovannini (2013) claiming that central claim of the devolution agenda is likely to be the main reason for its failure. However, on a rather different note, MacKinnon *et al*. (2010; p.4) state that:

> "Rather than viewing local-central relations in zero-sum terms whereby the introduction of new central initiatives is seen as inevitably undermining local autonomy and the transfer of powers to local authorities as reducing central control, the adoption of a relational perspective casts these relations in a more constructive and mutually-reinforcing light."

This aligns with an 'actor-centred institutionalism approach' (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995) that endorses urban systems as the product of the institutional and regulatory context, but with some room for manoeuvre. These ideas are developed further in sections 7.4

and 7.5. The discussion will now turn towards examining the multi-scale and multi-level nature of city-regional governance.

7.3   Spatial Scales and Layers of Governance

In recent decades, local government in England has been subjected to a series of experimental efforts to rescale and reorient sub-national governance under a succession of national government administrations (Deas, 2014). These, as explained in Chapter 2, have been fed by political ideology aligning with the next 'big idea' for boosting urban growth and rebalancing the national economy.

Since 2010, the city-region has been viewed by central government as the most appropriate spatial scale with which to deliver sub-national governance. Whilst the city-regional concept is not new, it was not until the Conservative-led administration was elected that this scale was formalised, supported by a number of institutional creations in the form of LEPs, CAs and, more recently, metro mayors. And yet as the following discussion illustrates, this has created a complex, disjointed and unstable sub-national governance landscape for leaders to navigate a course through. This has been partly fed by what came before it, with a constant churn in the institutional make-up, scale and function of sub-national governance (Jonas & Ward, 2002). However, it is also the result of the 'disorganised' manner (Shaw and Tewdwr-Jones, 2016) by which the current city-regional devolution approach has been rolled out.

7.3.1   Geographical complexity and institutional misalignment

The city-regional devolution programme has been unravelling at a rapid pace (Pike *et al.*, 2015). Following the announcement in 2010 to abolish RDAs, Regional Assemblies and other related bodies that had a regional focus, 39 LEPs were created in 2011, followed by 28 City Deals, a smaller but growing number of CAs, and a number of devolution deals (details of these are given in Table 1 in section 2.3 in Chapter 2).

Far from being a coherent process of rescaling, however, this has been cited as being ad hoc, fragmented and inadequate (Deas, 2014; Pike *et al.*, 2016), leading to a

geographically complex sub-national governance arrangement (Cox, 2014) that is proving impractical and difficult to make sense of.

In support of the above, interviewees claimed that the implementation of the SCR LEP was not thought through properly, caught up in an unstable environment of local governance as Yorkshire Foreward was being dismantled. The SCR LEP was also described as being given a lot of responsibility early in their operation that, given their limited resource and the harsh budget cuts local authorities were facing, was hard to keep pace with. Their membership was also disputed over as almost a complete overhaul of what had come before, led by business members that have not traditionally occupied a formal leadership role. This made local stakeholders dubious of the SCR LEP which, to some extent, made political leaders withdraw from wider regional engagement back to their local authority; a scale at which they could tangibly apply themselves and regain a sense of control over. This was perceived to have led to the creation of the SCR CA which, for many of those interviewed, represented a more traditionally defined and politically-driven establishment to lead the region.

With no clear central guidance in relation to the roles and responsibilities of each body, however, there has been confusion and this has created tension. Thus rather than working in a complementary fashion as was initially the intention of central government, interviewees spoke of a division between the SCR LEP that represented the 'private sector voice' and the SCR CA that represented the 'public sector voice'.

This somewhat ill-considered, chaotic and factitious approach of central government has been highlighted elsewhere. Hambleton (2016; p.350-351), for example, refers to three major reports to depict this:

- In the report 'The House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, in Devolution: The Next Five Years and Beyond' (February 2016) it is stated that devolution has been 'rushed' and 'driven by a purely political timetable' (p.3).
- In the report 'Cities and Local Growth (July 2016) it is stated that "the speed of the process so far has already led to a lack of meaningful consultation with stakeholders, including local MPs, councils and voters" (p.6).

- In the report 'Devolution and the Union' (March 2016) it is claimed that "progress to date has been piecemeal; devolution arrangements emerging through bilateral conversations and narrow constitutional amendments" (p.4).

Reasons for this related to geographical complexity and institutional misalignment.

There has been conflict, both nationally and locally, about what spatial scale is best to deliver local policy. Whilst the city-region remains the principal unit, this has, to some extent, been compromised by recent ambitions for building regional 'Powerhouses' and 'Engines' which point to a reinsertion of regionalism. In many ways, this move could be perceived as a step in the right direction since, as McCann (2016) writes extensively, governments need to realise and give prominence to the regional problem over and above their latest efforts to tackle problems at the local level. Nevertheless, without a consistent scalar arrangement for sub-national growth, national and local government ambitions are less likely to be sustained or realised.

Furthermore, the geography of city-regions was also contested during interviews, with difficulties over aligning a number of individual and uniquely defined geographies into one single economic arrangement. Firstly, interviewees claimed that as a consequence of its geography (polycentric), the SCR does not reap the benefits that form the underlying principles of the city-regional model as well as other places do such as Manchester (monocentric). This was partly due to the disconnection that is felt between Sheffield as the core city and those that sit on the outskirts of the region.

In addition, the local sense of the 'region', as described by leaders in Doncaster, aligned much more closely with the South Yorkshire metropolitan county, made up of Sheffield, Doncaster, Rotherham and Barnsley, rather than the nine local authorities that make up the SCR. This claim was particularly made in relation to transport and development planning. This suggested that the metropolitan level may potentially be a preferable governance unit; one which undoubtedly felt more real to local leaders in Doncaster. On these grounds, what makes a space function well appears to go well beyond the 'economic imaginaries' and 'discursive claims' of labour markets and travel-to-work areas that have defined city-regions so far (Rees & Lord, 2013).

Concerns over the artificial and problematic nature of the SCR scale came to fruition in 2016, with disputes over its geographical make-up leading to a delay in the SCR electing a metro mayor during the first round of elections in May 2017, despite being

one of the first city-regions to be granted a devolution in principle deal back in 2015. This situation was created when Bassetlaw in Nottinghamshire and Chesterfield in Derbyshire applied to become constituent members of the SCR CA, but without the support of their County Councils which created local frictions (Hambleton, 2016). More recently, the SCR devolution deal has been hampered further by the Leaders of Doncaster and Barnsley pulling out of the SCR devolution deal in favour of a Yorkshire wide deal.

Expanding on this discussion, problems were found in relation to the geographical misalignment of sub-national institutions. Using the comparison mentioned above, the contrasting geographies between the SCR LEP and the constituent members of the SCR CA, whereby the former supports the so-called economic functional area whilst the latter upholds an assembly of politically defined units of governance (and the older metropolitan geography of the local area), was described as creating a jarring between the functionality of economic space and the accountability of local political leaders. This relates back to the discussion in Chapter 2, where Rees and Lord (2013; p.681) refer to a "congested inter-scalar institutional landscape", and Lowndes & McCaughie (2013; p.546) make the claim that "spatial scales are bent and boundaries blurred" (also see Pike *et al*., 2016).

7.3.2   Democracy and conflicting accountabilities

The focus on city-regions, which as previously described are founded on the rationale of agglomeration economics, has led to a debate within academia regarding the lack of political democracy underpinning the current arrangements of sub-national governance.

With promises of a more business-led approach, LEPs are led by private sector members. However this, as interviewees described, was not supported by local political leaders. This made it difficult for the SCR LEP to have an authoritative stance over or to be able to make decisions on behalf of the city-region. It was for these reasons that interviewees claimed that the SCR CA was created to bring back some political weight to proceedings. However, since the constituent membership of the SCR CA does not cover the whole SCR[21], the SCR CA cannot provide a political voice for all of the nine local authorities that are found within it. Furthermore, since local authority leaders do

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[21] In 2015, only Sheffield, Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham had constituent status membership.

not hold any formal or direct responsibilities outside their jurisdictional borders, a democratic deficit can be claimed for those city regions that are still to elect a mayor (as is the case for the SCR).

Similarly, accountability was raised as a key issue for leaders being able to make decisions or be held responsible for their outcomes, and this is why for many of those interviewed a democratically elected leader is essential. This view extended even to those who were supportive of the role of businesses in leading and were concerned about their diminishing role as city-regional devolution continued to unravel. As previously described, this can be seen as a turn back towards protecting political institutionalism, a far cry from a new world of post-political sub-national governance. This was not only relevant at the wider city-regional scale, but also in relation to partnership working at the city level (see sections 7.4 and 7.5).

This opened up a debate over the prospect of electing a metro mayor for the SCR with questions over future accountabilities and localised powers. Interviewees, for instance, indicated that a metro mayor for the SCR could make the SCR CA more meaningful and transparent by having a single elected political member who is accountable. However, the evidence also suggested that the majority of local leaders in Doncaster were not in favour of having a SCR metro mayor for the reasons outlined below.

Firstly, and as previously described, interviewees referred to metro mayors as being yet another layer of governance that will only add to the institutional clutter that was already creating chaos. This, as interviewees explained, is especially the case for Doncaster that has had a city mayor in place since 2001, and thus for which adding another mayor to the mix adds another coating of complexity and potentially renders the position of the city Mayor vulnerable. Doncaster's current Mayor was professed as having a positive influence on the city and local leaders were anxious not to disrupt this.

There were also concerns that the alleged messy geographical and institutional arrangement could hinder a prospective SCR mayor from being able to shape policy effectively and deliver on their manifesto. Also raised were questions of whether a metro mayor would receive the necessary institutional backing of the local authorities that make up the SCR which, if this is not the case, could disempower the mayor. This is especially a concern given the 2012 Mayoral Referendums[22] which saw the majority

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[22] The 2012 Mayoral Referendums took place on 3rd May in the 11 largest cities in England.

of major cities across England vote to reject having a mayor. There was also scepticism over what real powers a metro mayor would have, and whilst some thought that their role would only be limited and not make all that much difference, others were against having a mayor as a political figure operating above them that would take away what they perceived as being too much power and control from more localised leaders.

This also fed concerns over a lack of public engagement, with some interviewees suggesting that a focus on city-regional leadership has created a further disconnect between local leaders and local communities. This was highlighted in May 2017 with low turnouts in the first round of English metro mayoral elections; the highest turnouts found in Greater Manchester at 28.93% and the West Midlands at 26.68%, and the lowest in Tees Valley at 21% (BBC, 2017). Considering these low turn-outs, England's Metro Mayors are arguably being elected on a low mandate.

7.3.3   Institutional memory and spatial perceptions

Despite the dismissal of former ideas, institutions and geographies when new policy proposals are put in place, interviewees described how the previous political and institutional make-up of the region has left a historical imprint in the minds of local people and, indeed, local leaders. This supports the findings of Hincks *et al*. (2017; p.13) who put forward: "the legacies of earlier attempts to construct spatial imaginaries live on in multiple ways". This was found in the way that historical ties (or conflicts) and former geographical alliances are shaping city-regional working, built upon a long-established framework of planning and resource allocation (Gore & Fothergill, 2007).

This is important as the imagined leadership space of leaders was highly influential in their endorsement of and involvement in city-wide or city-region-wide activities.

7.3.4   Summary: Spatial Scales and Layers of Governance

This section has discussed the incoherent implementation of city-regional devolution that has created geographical and institutional complexity and, consequently, confusion and tension within the governance of city-regions. As Fenwick (2015) points out, this is the effect of the fragmentation of sub-national governance which embraces regions, city-regions and cities, alongside varying political and economic structures from place to place. This was discussed in relation to several key issues.

Firstly, there are questions over the city-region as the suitable scale by which to deliver sub-national governance. One reason for this is because this scale may conflict with the local sense of place according to local knowledge and real relationships. Secondly, geographical and institutional misalignments were found to be creating local contention and counter-productive competitions. And thirdly, there was a perception that the new geopolitical scale is a threat to local democracy and local accountability.

Moreover, set against a historical legacy of "compulsive re-organisation" (Jones, 2010; p.374), local leaders seemed to recognise that, inevitably, the geography and institutional arrangement for sub-national governance will reorganise once again (and that even under the current administration the emphasis keeps changing). This impacted on the level of investment local leaders were willing to put into making city-regional governance work. Against this background, the next section will move on to consider the intra-local interactions that play out within city-regions.

7.4   Intra-local Interactions

The previous two sections have examined the 'vertical' dimensions of city-regional devolution, exploring the linkages between higher and lower levels of government via an assessment of the structural, institutional, and resource-based aspects that contribute to the conditions under which leaders currently operate. In a change of direction, this section looks at aspects of the 'horizontal' dimension of the conceptual framework presented at the end of Chapter 3. It does this by focusing on the sub-national scale for examining the interactions that take place between the local authorities that make-up a city-region, as well as investigating leadership exchanges at the scale of the city.

City-regional devolution relies on local authorities working jointly together, for which institutions have been created to enable this to happen. For example, CAs (some of which are now supported by a mayor) were founded as a single political-administrative platform for neighbouring local authorities to come together to deliver joined-up decision-making, organise city-regional activities, and distribute opportunities. And with good relationships being essential for sub-national governance to work effectively, local authorities are expected to overcome any intra-regional conflicts and foster cooperation. At the city level, this involves working in partnerships to deliver public services and encouraging a culture of commissioning, enabling and empowering.

Beyond the expectations set out in national policy, this research also revealed similar sentiments from local leaders who recognised the importance of actors and organisations coordinating efforts across traditional boundaries for achieving new, more inclusive ways of leading. This included support for more transparency within decision-making, for sector-wide voices to be heard, and for formal leaders to use their legitimacy to facilitate and unleash the potential of others. This was deemed necessary under austerity conditions as well as the new structures for delivering economic growth and public service delivery. And yet, city-regional governance and partnership working were revealed as being difficult to achieve given the limited resources that encouraged competitiveness, and conflicting geographical scales and institutional complexity.

Besides the restrictive context in which leaders are placed, however, this research also disclosed that leaders are driven by their own particular (and often place-specific) set of behavioural practices and territorial politics. This resonates with the findings of Shaw and Tewdwr-Jones (2016; p.231) who state that "…even in highly centralised systems, national government faces challenges in ensuring the compliance of devolved administrations that have their own democratic legitimacy, local power bases, administrative resources, and local 'know-how' to draw upon". This was reported, for example, in relation to the tensions that exist between the local authorities that make up the SCR, for which there were questions raised in accordance to the impartiality of allocating resources and the willingness of leaders to prioritise collective goods at the expense of their individual and local place interests.

The discussion to follow, therefore, will reflect on the way that local processes, practices and behaviours mould city-regional devolution and city leadership from 'below' (Jonas, 2013; p.287), fed by the structural and theoretical underpinnings of sub-national governance that are centre-driven, the particularities of place, and the nature of local leadership relations. The latter two highlight the significance of territoriality and place for understanding intra-local interactions, examining what Deas (2014) refers to as a new custom of territorial local policy and politics. Below, city-regional interactions are discussed in relation to an urban agenda that endorses 'competitive cooperation', as well as place-specific historical, geographical, and institutional legacies that have created long traditions of urban alliances and rivalries.

7.4.1 Territoriality and distinct place identities

As already discussed in previous sections, city-regional working is arguably fraught by the conditions of austerity that breeds 'defensiveness' and 'sectionalism' (Peck *et al*., 2015), and "resource-based competition between overlapping layers of public administration" (Cole, 2006; p.17). Beyond this, however, city-regional relationships are also partly fed by the city-regional devolution agenda that encourages urban entrepreneurialism and competition at the same time as encouraging collaboration and cross-boundary working. For interviewees, this led to a double orthodoxy that local leaders find difficult to comprehend. For example, local leaders in Doncaster described how local authorities in the SCR will work together to bid for central funds, but will then battle against one another as to where in the region this money is invested. This was clearly highlighted by one interviewee who stated: *"there will always be tensions because there is one pot of money which isn't enough to fulfil each area's ambitions"*.

Competition was also mentioned by interviewees when referring to the way that local authorities battle for inward investment, with rewards gained for the local authorities that are able to develop a competitive profile and make their place stand out above others. The constant state of flux also feasibly makes it difficult for local authorities within a city-region to manage relationships. Moreover, this idea was extended to the way that city-regions are in competition for securing devolution deals.

As a result, city-regional working was described, at times, as being an uncomfortable exchange. That said, however, it was recognised that it was important that the SCR gives a good outwards impression (particularly to central government) that they are working well together, and some interviewees stated directly that the SCR was good at doing this in the early years. This provides an explanation for why, despite underlying tensions, the SCR was able to obtain one of the first devolution deals in England. This resonates with the findings of Herrschel and Newman (2002) that cross-boundary collaboration as a 'marriage of convenience', and Rees and Lord (2013) refer to 'uneasy partnerships' between local authorities in the search for resources and autonomy.

Nevertheless, despite most interviewees acknowledging the importance of the city-regional scale as the platform that central government want to do business with, interviewees suggested that the local authority remained the favoured scale as a traditional, fixed and familiar unit of governance. Accordingly, interviewees described

how each local authority continues to prioritise the economic interests of their own area above those that benefit the city-region. There were also concerns that Sheffield, as the core city, always considered themselves and their needs as superior which led to tensions and trust issues. In light of this, the research evidence revealed a fractious set of relationships between the local authorities that make up the SCR.

In an attempt to explain some of the dynamics outlined above, many interviewees used the conflict over the preferred location for the HS2 station within the SCR as a prime example. In 2013, central government announced their plan to locate a station to serve the SCR at Meadowhall (north of Sheffield and close to Rotherham and Doncaster). This was reported as being supported by all of the Council Leaders within the region, except the leader of Sheffield City Council who strongly opposed the plan and campaigned instead to have the station located in the centre of Sheffield (Yorkshire Post, 2017), claiming that this would be to the economic advantage of the entire city-region. Interviewees, however, claimed that this was due to the leaders of Sheffield thinking about their credibility as a core city above the benefits of the entire region. This instance provides a clear display of the immaturity of relationships in the SCR and a willingness shown by each local authority to 'air their dirty washing in public' (Lord & Rees, 2013; Deas, 2014). It also demonstrates the inability of the SCR to reach a collective agreement and for the nine local authorities to compromise.

Since the time of interviewing, this dispute came to a head in 2016 when Sheffield supposedly won the battle (an indication of central government prioritising core city interests). And yet, as details of the adapted plans begun to emerge, it became apparent that the SCR would no longer benefit from a new station and rather Sheffield train station would be modified to accommodate high-speed trains. This was a major loss for the SCR. The proposed new route, which will now cut through several districts in Rotherham and Doncaster that were not previously affected, has also created new tensions. It has been argued that this incident, amongst others, has contributed to Barnsley and Doncaster voting against the SCR devolution deal (agreed in 2015) in September 2017 in pursuit of a wider 'Yorkshire deal' (Yorkshire Post, 2017).

Against this background, territoriality and distinct place identities were found to play a key role in the effectiveness of city-regional working. It is for these reasons that interviewees felt that local authorities within the SCR were not wholly embracing of, and did not buy into, the city-regional sub-national governance structure. In fact, some

felt that it was because of this new emphasis on a wider geography that local conflicts had been exacerbated, with local authority leaders sensing the need to exert territorial claim and cultural resistance in order to protect what was theirs and hang-on to powers that they perceived were being taken away.

7.4.2 Local traditions and barriers to partnership working

Following a discussion on the intra-local dynamics at the scale of the city-region, the discussion will now consider this at the city scale for which emphasis is being placed on collaboration and cross-sector working. A joined-up approach was described as being necessary under austerity conditions, forcing leaders from across different organisations together to think of new ways to deliver public services with heavily reduced budgets. However, in order for this to work, interviewees described how a whole place approach requires a high degree of coordination alongside clarity of vision and strategic direction. In Doncaster's case, this coordination was essentially seen as the responsibility of those who are elected or appointed into senior leadership positions within DMBC, whose duty it was perceived is to facilitate the leadership potential of others:

> *"I think the Mayor should be drawing it together because that's **an easy understandable figure head** role that can influence private and public to make things happen. Where you have got pockets of activity **you need someone actually who's got the helicopter view who can bring those threads together"***

[Business Representative]

A desire for strong and visible leadership, however, has the potential to get in the way of aspirations for a more joined-up leadership approach. It was for this reason that interviewees recognised that a balance is needed between an appropriate centralisation of power for those in the Council setting the local policy objectives and providing the steer for whole place leadership action, and a delegation of power to a wider leadership network. However, whilst new partnership relationships were recognised as being fundamental to success, there were a number of factors identified that could potentially prevent a harmonious, whole place approach from being fully achieved.

Firstly, evidence came to light of an elitist attitude to leadership in the city in which the work of wider stakeholders and their attempts to contribute are undervalued. Accordingly, there were accusations made that too much power is kept in the hands of

those who hold legitimate power in the city, namely senior political and managerial figures within DMBC. As a result, interviewees referred to a significant pool of leadership resource that is underutilised, with sentiments that formal leaders were denying leadership power to wider partners. This was explained, in part, by allegations of a leadership culture in the city that was not open to challenge. To this end, leadership in Doncaster was perceived by some interviewees as being insular, authoritarian and hierarchical, with a reluctance of formal leaders to relinquish control.

However, there was a great deal of expectation placed on DMBC to provide clear and visible leadership for the city, with considerable impetus placed on leaders who are accountable. This not only highlighted a dependence on an accustomed style of leadership coming from the Council, but also a situation whereby sector-wide stakeholders were not endorsing their leadership responsibilities under a new framework of networked governance. Within a partnership set-up, for example, city-wide partners were found to be "standing on the side-lines" (Squires, 2017; p.8) and waiting for senior leaders to take charge. Whilst this can be put down to a paternalistic style of governance (similar to that which was described in section 7.2 in relation to local dependence on the centre), interviewees also made suggestions that hierarchy was still highly valued amongst broader leadership networks.

There were also sentiments that whilst partnership working was largely supported, local partnership boards are not receiving full buy-in from members and are not productive as a result. One reason given for this was the need for stakeholders to prioritise the immediate needs of their organisation under austerity. This made it difficult for partners to commit and invest in their role as a city leader, with some stating that they needed to be able to foresee the obvious benefits of their contribution for themselves and for their organisation to compensate their time and resource. There were also frustrations shown of not enough interaction between meetings to ensure continuous coordination, as well as insufficient dialogue between the different partnership boards to avoid overlap. This, however, was fed by the ambiguity that was felt over partnership roles and responsibilities. Others also questioned whether people had the right skills and knowledge to lead.

Moreover, local accountability emerged as a key factor influencing partnership working. For the vast majority of members sitting on partnership boards, their role is voluntary, and this was a key reason why interviewees felt that objectives were not being met as no

one could be held accountable. As a result, some suggested that partnerships in the city needed a more clearly defined structure to move them beyond being merely *"talking shops"* or *"discussion groups"*. This was for the reason that without being supported by a legitimate figure occupying a formal leadership position, partnerships do not have the authority for decision-making on behalf of the city. However, others felt that stakeholders needed the confidence to take charge without relying on formal leaders.

Another challenge related to the issue of competing accountabilities between different organisations and at varying scales as drawn out in section 7.3. Supporting the findings of Parker *et al*. (2016), this was found to be further impeded by the channels of accountability under the new city-regional devolution arrangement becoming more "obscured as service delivery becomes more fragmented" (Parker *et al*. 2016; p.2), as well as the disjuncture between 'ballot box accountability' and expectations for partnership working (ibid; p.9).

Clearly, local governance now involves a wide range of actors. However, under a democratic style of sub-national governance, the Council continues to hold a direct channel of accountability (Copus, 2015). This creates a challenge and a contradiction. As stated by Considine (2002: p.22): "in the new world of enterprising government, the public official is expected to both honour his/her official mandate and to move freely outside the hierarchical constraints of government in search of collaborative and quasi-market relationships with contractors, competitors and co-producers". This, as Wilson *et al*. (2015) point out, also follows decades of institutional fragmentation which has influenced the way that risk and accountability are dealt with. Under these circumstances, there is risk involved for elected leaders to fully embrace partnership working for fear that partners, who may or may not have prior experience of leading, are unable to deliver desired outcomes in the interest of the public. Partnership arrangements, therefore, require a high level of trust. Interviewees also spoke of a 'blame culture' (Bovaird & Quirk, 2013) that was preventing the Council from giving away power.

Also emerging from this research is the importance of having shared objectives. Whilst public-private partnerships were described as having flourished recently with a focus that is heavily economically driven, the third sector (more society-driven) was almost completely left out of discussions. This suggests that sector-wide partnerships would be best served by developing a common purpose and a shared understanding of place.

7.4.3   Engagement with local communities

The last section examined the interplay of the various actors, sectors and organisations that occupy a leadership role at the city level; either through being elected, appointed as a senior officer, or sitting as a member of a partnership group. It is the intention now to review what interactions occur between local leaders and local communities.

Notably, other than reference to the use of social media to engage the public, there was little mention of how leaders connected with local communities and vice versa. One interviewee went as far as suggesting that the only contact the public has with their Council is via their 'weekly bin collection'. Some interviewees did, however, show concern for the dearth of opportunity for public participation in leading and decision-making. This was often highlighted in relation to what local wins leaders should prioritise, as well as for addressing the acute social issues that Doncaster's communities face (see section 4.4 in Chapter 4). Due to this lack of interaction, questions were raised in accordance with whether Doncaster's leaders have a true understanding of their local communities and therefore whether the needs of local communities were truly being met. This has the potential to lead to community 'alienation' and disengagement. This is particularly important to consider in Doncaster given recent governance failings, with some reporting that local citizens were already distrustful of local governance practices and cynical with regards to what leaders are doing.

Firstly, this can be attributed to a change in the way that the national agenda prioritises community engagement. Under a Conservative-led Coalition government between 2010 and 2015, the former initiatives of neighbourhood renewal and area regeneration set up under New Labour were abolished with no replacement. Thus despite claims of a Big Society, communities were almost completely left out of this proposal, focusing instead on local economic growth and claiming that neighbourhood regeneration is a 'local issue' (Fitzgerald & Lupton, 2015). This has led to heightened inequality, with economic and social indicators in the richest and poorest neighbourhoods in England widening during this period (Lupton & Fitzgerald, 2015). However, whilst more responsibility is being placed on local government to intervene, the evidence presented so far suggests that austerity is making it increasingly difficult for local government to deliver merely their basic Council services, not to mention the incentives given by the

centre to focus on the economy at the local level. This emphasis on the economy, however, was also found to be indicative of the strategic intent of Doncaster's leaders. For example, it was often described how major infrastructure projects and economic investments are prioritised rather than tackling Doncaster's social issues such as education and health that are more difficult to deal with.

Secondly, with a new city-region scale to deal with, leaders described the strategic importance of engaging at this level for reasons of gaining funding and power as outlined previously. However, this is coercing leaders to 'look out' for providing thought leadership at a city-regional scale, rather than 'look in' to support their local communities. Of course, leaders were encouraged by the assumption that their communities will benefit from economic and power gains. However, some interviewees suggested that leaders were leaving their local communities behind by battling for more influence at city-regional, national and even international arenas. However, also mentioned by a small number of interviewees was the appetite amongst leaders for increased self-reliance and more active engagement by local communities.

Finally, the lack of interaction between local leaders and local communities can be linked to the fragile status of the voluntary and community sector in Doncaster. This is partly the result of government cuts, which are important given this sector's dependency on statutory funding (Jones *et al*., 2015). Therefore in line with evidence that shows how social issues become more acute in times of austerity (O'Hara, 2015), the voluntary sector was perceived as being enormously stretched, and this was described as affecting their ability to provide strategic insight for the city. Furthermore, place-specific factors were also regarded as shaping the relationship of the voluntary sector with DMBC, which was described as having become strained in recent years with reference given of the acute failings of the Children's and Young People's Service[23]. This disconnect, therefore, may be impacting on the ability of leaders to engage with communities since often the voluntary and community sector is used as an intercessor or a way in for building leadership-community relations and making the appropriate connections.

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[23] The service for children and young people became independent of DMBC in 2013 following a series of public cases of systemic failure since 2005.

7.4.4   Summary: Intra-local interactions

This section has provided an insight into the intra-local relations, attitudes and behaviours that influence the interactions between local institutions, sectors and agents in the context of city-regional devolution, partnership working and austerity. At a city-regional scale, local authority relations were found to be based on an ethos of 'competitive cooperation'. This meant that whilst working together as a city-region was seemingly supported, especially in relation to being granted a devolution deal and winning central resources, behind the scenes leaders continue to prioritise the needs and interests of the local authority for which they are elected, appointed or have volunteered to serve. At the city scale, partnership relations were described as being largely collaborative, and yet issues of accountability, impractical expectations and selectivity were found to get in the way of achieving a coordinated and whole place approach to leading. Also described was the relationship between leaders and local communities for which a significant disconnect was detected, linked to central and local ambitions for growing the economy and the diminishing status of the voluntary sector.

Overall, the discussion above has highlighted the importance of examining the local distribution of powers, both legitimate and perceived, for understanding the horizontal dimension of local leadership and governance. In doing so this research, like Sotarauta (2016), found that power is a significant determining factor of intra-local leadership dynamics. Considerable value also continues to be placed on a democratic governance structure, which suggests that despite new spaces opening up for partnership activity, traditional power relations are potentially being reproduced (Gaventa, 2004). To this end, interviewees often referred to partners as feeling powerless and without the support of those who are elected or formally appointed to serve. Also revealed was the way that power is used to encourage or restrict who enters the space of leadership.

The issue of accountability was also raised. This became apparent in relation to the misalignment between political and economic boundaries (see section 7.3), as well as a prevailing perception that only those who are elected have the legitimacy to lead as described above. Sub-national leadership would, therefore, benefit from more open conversations regarding hard and soft forms of local power, as well as clearer guidance in relation to the expectations of and opportunities for partners.

Finally, it seems that local leaders are in a confused state of trying to embrace partnership working whilst at the same time wanting to reinstate political structures and formal stability and customs. Nevertheless, the discussion also showcased how agents contribute to city-regional and city development efforts with their own interests in mind (Sotarauta, 2016). One possible way forward is to address what qualities are required by leaders to accommodate and make sense of the new structures and ways of working as will be brought out in the next section.

7.5   Leadership Qualities

So far, this chapter has focused primarily on the structures and processes of governance under city-regional devolution. This is important to consider given the broader system of controls and regulation imposed from above, meaning that the degree to which local leaders can and are permitted to influence place development is, to a large extent, dependent on wider structures. Nevertheless, this research also endorses the view that once exogenous factors are controlled for, effective local leadership is something that places can have some control over to affect local outcomes. The previous section began to examine this by looking at how the scalar arrangements and institutional creations of central government are interwoven with local human agency in the way that local leaders behave and interact. It is the intention now, however, to provide a deeper and more fine-grained assessment of local agency by outlining a set of qualities that, according to the perceptions and experiences of local leaders in Doncaster, are favourable for leading under existing policy and governance conditions.

Pike and Tomaney (2009; p.29) highlight the importance of agency when they claim: "local and regional actors are not passive, nor do they merely respond to the initiatives of the centre". Therefore, whilst appreciating the way in which central government endeavours to control local action as presented in sections 7.2 and 7.3, this research also unearthed what actions local leaders can take to respond to the changes and act strategically to ensure that local and regional development objectives are realised (also see Beer & Clower, 2014; Hambleton, 2014a; Sotarauta, 2016). This supports the findings of Rodríguez-Pose (2013) who states that leadership is possibly the 'missing variable' for considering the reasons behind place success and place failure. As such,

local leaders are recognised as a significant asset that must not be overshadowed by a tenacity to examine wider structures as claimed by one interviewee:

> *"… it's less the models and it's more the individuals, and **I think good leaders will shine no matter what the system that they're operating in** … it's how you work within the structures that you've got around you, you know **people often focus on the structure, but structures don't make things happen**."*

[Public Service Representative]

With the exception of a number of key pieces that have come to light recently (see for example Squires, 2017), very little has been written about the qualities that are favourable for leading a place under the current city-regional devolution arrangement in England. One reason for this may be that any assessment of leadership qualities has to be approached with caution given that 'effective' leadership skills will vary according to the context, individual and scale for which leadership is being performed (Beer & Clower, 2014). Nevertheless, there is an element of 'universality' to leadership for which understandings can be applied across a spectrum of place leadership activity (Bass, 1996).

Leadership qualities are important to consider for two reasons. Firstly, with a new approach to governance in England that is changing the geographies, institutions, and central-local and intra-local interactions for leading, a new and unfamiliar set of demands are emerging that local leaders need to be able to keep pace with. For example, local leaders are expected to operate at multiple scales and negotiate a wide array of diverging views and interests of the many sectors, actors and organisations that now play a role in leading (MacNeill & Steiner, 2010; Trickett & Lee, 2010). As a result, the roles and requirements of local leaders have changed significantly.

Secondly, the capacity of local leaders to show that they are right for the job has risen to prominence recently in a demanding policy environment that is becoming more complex, volatile and unpredictable, coupled with a devolution agenda that is seemingly placing more autonomy in local hands. The need for leaders to possess the right skills set presents itself particularly strongly for the case under study, not only because of Doncaster's unique history of governance failings revealing the damage that can be caused if leaders do not perform well, but also because of Doncaster's deep-seated economic and social challenges that, in the absence of a central response, call for more local intervention. This was neatly pointed out by one interviewee who stated:

*"**The reality is that we've got to make the most of the situation we've got and the position we're in**… if you're within an environment that's taking off then no matter what local leadership does it's going to keep on going that way, **if you're in an environment that's flat or that's rocky then that's when leadership becomes absolutely essential.** So in Doncaster's case leadership is absolutely crucial."*

[Public Service Representative]

However, with little or no emphasis placed on leadership training, often leaders are expected to lead without being helped to develop their skills as one interviewee claims: *"the responsibilities happen overnight but the skills don't…"*. This would suggest that skills development for place leaders is essential, and as Trickett (2011; p.6) describes: "the development of effective place leaders is a public policy requirement that cannot be left to chance". Furthermore, whilst a common view holds that more regulatory structures to create order from the messiness of the processes and structures of the existing governance system as one possible solution, Staite (2017b) recognises that this is unlikely in reality, and rather real change might occur from investing more on the skills of agents within the system. The following discussion provides a review of a number of leadership qualities that were viewed as favourable under the current urban policy context in England, but that can also be applied to other leadership settings.

7.5.1 Being pragmatic and opportunistic

In order to manage austerity, research has suggested that leaders need to be pragmatic, have the ability to 'do more with less', and be able to prioritise key actions (OECD, 2015a; 9). According to Clarke & Newman (2012), this means acting in the present, and similarly for Lowndes and McCaughie (2013) focusing on the 'doing'. This came through strongly during the research, with interviewees referring to the need for leaders to be *"pragmatic realists"* when making challenging decisions over, for example, local Council staff redundancies and public service cuts. Likewise, there was also emphasis placed on *"just getting on with stuff"* and *"not giving in… not seeing the hurdles as a reason to stop"*. And as another interviewee claims: *"we haven't moaned about the fact there's no money… we've rolled our sleeves up and got on with it."*

Successful leaders were also perceived to be those who are proficient at winning resources and make the most of their income potential from different sources and central funding streams (Hambleton & Bullock, 1996). Proficient management skills,

such as cost-efficiency and making difficult decisions quickly, were therefore regarded as critical in times of adversity. Equally, a strong message came through that leaders should continue to be strategic and actively pursue growth by *"understanding what's possible"* and *"taking every opportunity that presents itself"*.

7.5.2 Adapting to the broader governance setting

In a policy environment that is continually reshaping the foundations and parameters of sub-national governance, leaders need to be flexible and have the ability to adapt quickly. Leaders also need to be outward-looking, supporting the claim by Hambleton (2013) that "to serve a city well, its leaders must transcend the city" (Frederickson, 2005; p.6). It also became apparent how, in a web of city-regional working, it is vital that leaders are able to work out what their new roles and positions are that transcend organisational, city, and even city-regional boundaries. To the latter, the ability to claim a space on global and national stages was also seen as advantageous.

To this end, effective leadership is partly about being a good *"sense-maker"*, and as another interviewee claims:

> *"... **you need to understand the operating environment** that you're operating in, **you need to understand the agents within the system,** you need to understand **the interactions,** you need to understand **the interfaces** and you need to understand what sort of change and modes you can use to affect that change to create shift."*
> [Public Service Representative]

This supports the assertion of Coleman *et al*. (2010; p.290) in which sense-making is "required to reconcile old assumptions and identities with new realities". Contemporary leaders were also described as requiring the capability to become a *"chameleon"* in their endeavour to *"play to different requirements and different audiences"*.

7.5.3 Working collaboratively and recognising the leadership potential of others

Effective leadership was also judged to be about bringing together the 'right team' of leaders to lead (The Third Warwick Commission, 2012). This was often in reference to formal leaders mobilising key stakeholders from wider networks to unleash the leadership potential of the city. As such, the role of the Council was viewed as moving

away from being a *"manager"* to being an *"enabler"* and a *"broker"* to encourage collaborative relationships and to bring out the best in others. Working collaboratively was recognised as an important factor for success in relation to devolution deals and winning resources. Also acknowledged was the need to provide support for the many varied sectors and organisations involved in leading. For this, a healthy organisational culture that "find[s] a balance between competition and cooperation" (Sotarauta & Beer, 2014; p.14), transcends parochialism (Hambleton, 2013), encourages people to behave in the 'right way' (Grant Thornton, 2013; p.17), and is guided by 'instincts of appropriateness' (Hambleton, 2014b) appears crucial.

As one interviewee claims:

> *"You want to see leadership down the organisation otherwise you're not maximising the initiative and the creativity and the innovative potential of the whole organisation* if what you assume is leadership can only come from the top."
>
> [Public Service Representative]

This supports the work of Beer & Clower (2014; p.16) who state that place leadership should be based on "power-sharing". Similarly, Hambleton (2011; p.8) speaks of a new kind of 'civic leadership' which is both inspirational and collaborative and "invites leaders to move outside of their organisation… to engage with the concerns of place".

This was viewed as particularly important at times of austerity that places increasing demands on the delivery of local public officials. As neatly pointed out by Maddock (2009; p.17): "the ability to collaborate is becoming more and more significant within organisations and localities undergoing transformation".

7.5.4   Creating the right conditions for partnership working

Partnership working has been described as requiring leaders who can create an environment and the conditions that encourage stakeholders to want to get involved (Lowndes & Squires, 2012). In order to do this, formal leaders need to understand better the drivers that motivate others players to give up their time and resource to invest in city-wide efforts. This research suggests that a major factor influencing the willingness to contribute is based on whether partners feel that their contribution is valued, as well

as foresee what personal benefits could be gained for themselves and for their organisation. Therefore partnerships would benefit from improving incentives.

Suggestions were made that local government has a key role to play as the initiator and facilitator of partnership groups made up of both 'formal' and 'informal' leaders:

> *"...**without the role of those anchor institutions** like the authority and around good leadership in them, **there would just be lots of disparate activity without any roadmap or strategy to it**."*
>
> [Private Sector Representative]

However, whilst some speak in terms of leaders utilising their formal authority - "demand from others the support we need to maximise the potential of our place" (Schmuecker, 2012; p.18) - this research found that partnerships work best when partners feel empowered and when there is a genuine desire to contribute. . This requires an honest and open conversation between 'formal' leaders whose remit it is to lead and 'informal' leaders who are often entering a new leadership space about how partnerships will work best. Also needed are discussions around the kind of leadership both parties want to see in each other, as well as what kind of leadership informal leaders can feasibly offer given their day-to-day working commitments. Also identified was the need for partnerships to be open to challenge, encourage strong communication links between stakeholders, to share experiences of best (and worst) practice, and to promote a culture of 'compromise' for the greater good (Le Feuvre *et al.*, 2016).

7.5.5   Promoting a sense of collective accountability

Responsibility for leading a place was readily placed on those who are democratically elected or formally appointed. This reflects Staite's (2017b) claim that "accountability is the lifeblood of good governance". However, accountability under the contemporary governance system is a much messier and complex procedure in view of the multiple sectors and organisations now involved in leading at multiple and often overlapping scales of governance. Therefore required is a culture change that values collective accountability and recognises the value of 'soft power' (Stoker, 2011), as well as co-production and sharing decision-making across networks (Richardson & Durose, 2013).

That said, however, there were sentiments that the division of powers and expectations needed to be more realistic. The input of many stakeholders now involved in leading is

entirely voluntary, with often their day-to-day organisational pressures influencing their capacity and willingness to take on too much responsibility at a city or city-regional level. As such, the value of democratic leaders whose sole purpose it is to lead should not be undervalued. However, it would seem that today's leaders of all kinds need to recognise when which type of power is most appropriate. One possible solution is for leaders to collectively set out the new rules of representation and engagement with a clear delineation of rights, roles and responsibilities. Also required are healthy leadership and partnership relationships that neither sanction 'blame-avoidance' nor 'witch-hunts' when things go wrong (Richardson & Durose, 2013).

7.5.6   Sponsoring a shared vision

In order for collaborative leadership and partnership working to operate to best effect, there was a lot of emphasis placed on establishing a shared vision that is easy to understand, that everyone can get on board with, and that provides a more formative experience (Hambleton, 2013). As interviewees point out: *"we definitely need a shared vision because there are so many different players involved"* and *"if everyone's working to the same vision they'll work together"*. As Meadows *et al*. (2005; p.272) state: "action without vision is directionless and feeble. Vision is absolutely necessary to guide and motivate" (in Hambleton, 2014a). Therefore whilst providing a united sense of what is trying to be achieved (Liddle, 2012), a shared vision also needs to embrace the complex identities that add to the richness and diversity of a place.

7.5.7   Selling a place brand and being aspirational

This research emphasised the importance of leaders promoting their place and identifying what their brand assets are. As such, it was suggested that leaders need to become 'the face of the place' (Stoker, 2004; 16). In today's competitive urban context, this was viewed as vital for gaining favour in relation to others and winning resources from central funding pots and attracting inward investment.

To this effect, arguments were made that a good leader is able to engage wider stakeholders to 'sell their city' (Hambleton *et al*., 2013) as, referred to by one interviewee, *"a modern vibrant place for investment and as [having] a quality of life to*

live in". Also highlighted was the need to create a 'city brand'. As referred to by Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2009), a city's brand is "an important asset for urban development and an effective tool for cities to distinguish themselves and improve their positioning" (p.529). In Doncaster's case, this was about turning around perceptions.

With this background, therefore, one aspect of effective leadership is convincing others that your place is important. And yet, whilst leadership should be aspirational, also highlighted was the need for leaders to have a good sense of comparative advantage. For the case under study for example, it was recognised that Doncaster only needs to be seen as doing better than other places in the city-region with a similar profile (not the core city), such as Barnsley and Rotherham, to ensure that they are favoured for resources and are able to have a major input into decision-making. This also applies to the national scale, with sentiments that places do not need to be better than every other place, but just other places that are similar. Importantly, this requires leaders to think strategically about how their place connects locally, nationally and globally.

Beyond the need for leaders to promote an outwardly positive image of place, however, also recognised was a need to promote a positive perception of place amongst local communities. This came through particularly strongly for the case under study with claims that local people had an *"inferiority complex"* and *"lower aspirational levels"* than other places. Negative place connotations were also described as impacting upon what leaders are trying to achieve, with one interviewee claiming: *"I think one of the problems in trying to offer clear leadership in a place like Doncaster, is that Doncaster doesn't believe in itself..."*. It was therefore stressed how leaders need to share their aspirations for a place and encourage local people to focus on the positives and not the negatives to foster civic pride (Hambleton & Bullock, 1996).

7.5.8   Engaging with local communities and pursuing inclusive growth

As previously stated, a lot of prominence is currently being placed on economic growth and competitiveness (e.g. Local Growth Deals). This is based on the assumption that social issues will be tackled by the trickle-down of growing local economies.

However, there were concerns that successes around 'place' are not necessarily to the benefit of local 'people', and there were suggestions that a pro-growth approach was

seeding some of the economic and social inequality that exists (see also Lee *et al.*, 2014; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). On this basis, comments were made that the market values of efficiency and effectiveness rarely translate into establishing a more just city (Fainstein, 2010). Furthermore, economic growth that does not go hand-in-hand with overcoming the social issues of a place was considered to be unsustainable, with a competitive city regarded as one that is able to have success on both the economic and social aspects of place development. For Doncaster, this came through in relation to that attracting inward investment whilst not upskilling local residents to be able to take advantage of new job opportunities. Therefore, in line with the research of Green *et al.* (2017), it can be suggested that place leadership would benefit from adopting a more inclusive growth approach in order for benefits to be gained by all.

For these reasons, it was readily referred to that 'big fix' solutions do not work, and that more direct intervention is required to tackle the 'wicked issues' (Rittel & Webber, 1973). However, with a political imperative to focus on 'quick wins', many interviewees recognised the lack of incentives for leaders to address issues such as housing, education and skills that require a longer-term approach:

> *"The more complex leadership challenge is to deal with the wicked issues not the managed ones - the wicked issues are things that exist out there that have causal factors that we have to address."*
>
> [Public Service Representative]

Essentially, therefore, a balance is required between promoting economic growth so that a place can remain competitive, and at the same time investing in people so that local communities can benefit from that growth. Perhaps one solution is for leaders to be smarter about investing in quick-wins that lead to longer-term benefits.

This links back to leaders realising what their assets are, with local people an essential local asset that should be invested in (Green *et al.*, 2017). This also resonates with research elsewhere which proposes that good leaders are those that endorse an ethic of responsibility for serving their citizens in a way that makes them feel valued, well connected to their leaders, and engaged in the narrative and vision for a place (OECD, 2015a). This sentiment is clearly articulated by the OECD (2015; p.49) who claim "the best leaders are close to the people and their problems", and by way of recognising "… the accountability of their position…", they can "… focus on faithfully serving their

citizens interests… become more effective judges of local sentiment… [and] achieve longer leadership terms to fulfil a whole cycle of infrastructure and reform".

7.5.9   Summary: Leadership qualities

In this section, the following eight categories of leadership qualities have been identified:

- Being pragmatic and opportunistic
- Adapting to the broader governance setting
- Working collaboratively and recognising the leadership potential of others
- Creating the right conditions for partnership working
- Promoting a sense of collective accountability
- Sponsoring a shared vision
- Selling a place brand and being aspirational
- Engaging with local communities and pursuing inclusive growth

These depict a number of leadership qualities that became apparent during discussions in Doncaster in relation to the practice of leading within a mid-sized city and as part of a wider city-region, in the context of devolution, austerity and public-private partnerships. Given that the roles of leaders vary and that leadership is performed at multiple levels and at different scales, the combination of desired qualities is likely to vary. However, all together they provide a comprehensive set in view of providing training for leaders which was readily cited as a key requirement for those occupying both formal and informal leadership positions at the sub-national scale.

7.6   The Mid-sized City Experience

> "Smaller cities now confront greater challenges than has ever been the case, while at the same time the need for focused and determined action with regard to strategic economic planning and mobilisation of local assets has never been greater"
>
> [Kresl & Ietri, 2016; p.7]

Following an assessment of the structural, agency and place-based driven components of city-regional devolution, this last section reflects upon the 'mid-sized city

experience' using the insights and understandings of local leaders in Doncaster to think about the opportunities and challenges mid-sized cities are facing in this context. As explained in Chapter 4 (see section 4.4), Doncaster is considered a mid-sized city in England according to wider literature (see Bolton & Hildreth, 2013) and was named one of England's 26 'key cities' in 2015 (Blond & Morrin, 2015).

Whilst research looking at mid-sized cities in the context of city-regional devolution is largely limited, there are two principal arguments that have been made (see section 1.4 in Chapter 1). One claims that mid-sized cities are at risk of being overshadowed by core cities (Marlow, 2013), whilst the other focuses on the scope for mid-sized cities to perform a more central role in local policy and funding decisions within a city-regional framework (Harrison, 2016a). This research found both to be true. However, only by understanding better the mid-sized city experience is it possible to understand how mid-sized cities might overcome the challenges and unleash the opportunities of city-regional devolution.

7.6.1   The latent potential of mid-sized cities

The potential of mid-sized cities is evident (see section 1.4 and 4.4 for further details). Upon investigation of the case in question, for instance, it became clear that Doncaster, in many ways, provides a prime example of a mid-sized city at the cusp of a 'turn around' as Bradford (2017) describes, still facing abundant social and economic difficulties but with positive signs of growth. This can be evidenced by data, with Doncaster experiencing a high business birth rate (7 per 1,000 people) in comparison to the other local authorities within the SCR and especially Sheffield (4 per 1,000 people). Whilst, as noted by interviewees, Doncaster's high business births is likely to depict an increase in smaller rather than larger businesses (although this cannot be known from the data), this nevertheless does suggest that the city is becoming more entrepreneurial. There are likely to be many factors influencing this which would require further study. Doncaster has also experienced a significantly higher growth rate in its GVA[24] per head in the five-year period up to 2015 (latest data available) at a rate of 15% compared to Sheffield at 5% (see Table 7). This is also the case for many other mid-sized cities in England: for example, Bradford (14%) and Derby (14%) both experiencing

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[24] GVA (Gross Value Added) is a commonly used measure of economic growth.

considerably higher growth in their GVA per head than Leeds (8%) and Nottingham (6%) respectively over this same five-year period (2011-2015).

	Local Authority	Percentage Growth in GVA per head, 2011-2015
Mid-sized Cities	**Barnsley**	**10%**
	Bradford	16%
	Coventry	12%
	Derby	14%
	Doncaster	**15%**
	Rotherham	**11%**
Core Cities	Birmingham	12%
	Bristol, City of	15%
	Leeds	8%
	Liverpool	18%
	Manchester	18%
	Newcastle-under-Lyme	-1%
	Nottingham	6%
	Sheffield	**5%**

Table 7: Percentage growth in GVA per head in selected cities (SCR cities emboldened), 2011-2015. *Author*. Data source: ONS (2017c)

Of course, this is not the case everywhere and there are other mid-sized cities that continue to struggle. There are also other core cities such as Manchester and Liverpool that have achieved substantial growth over this period. It is also important to bear in mind that GVA growth does not reveal the actual GVA that lies underneath, for which in absolute terms core cities (by virtue of their size alone) remain crucial. However, the examples used above do raise the key question of why so much focus has been on core cities as the main drivers of city-regional growth given the latent and combined potential of smaller cities for which many are experiencing relatively high growth rates. This evidence also supports the stories of interviewees that Doncaster has been witnessing a positive upwards trend in relation to their economic growth and ability to attract inward investment, despite the downturn and austerity. Furthermore, Doncaster's GVA growth upholds the claim that Doncaster is doing relatively well in comparison to other places in the SCR and particularly the core city of Sheffield.

As previously described, places outside of the big cities have been side-lined since deindustrialisation following a shift in economic paradigm. This has not only manifested in the thinking of policymakers, but also in urban researchers. These biases,

it would seem, also play out at the local level with allegations made during interviews that Sheffield perceived their position as being *"above the rest"*.

The current political project of city-regionalism has been claimed by Beel *et al*. (2016; p.514) to be an endeavour to "rescale the central city into a much larger territory and to bring surrounding territories under its purview". As such, the city-regional system, as Coombes (2013) argues, is the outcome of a 'city-first' approach which has the potential to foster new urban and spatial inequalities. This is being recognised locally with one local leader in Doncaster claiming the following in a discussion over devolution deals: *"we're trying to make sure that Doncaster as a mid-sized city, not a core city, has its due prominence"*.

However, research is also emerging which exposes the many caveats of the 'big city agglomeration narrative' (Cox and Longlands, 2016), with official data being drawn upon to show that there is no link between city size and productivity in the UK outside of London (McCann, 2016). Given these claims, together with evidence that points to the advances that mid-sized cities have managed to accrue recently, perhaps now is the time for policymakers to be rethinking their approach for achieving national growth and rebalancing the economy. This coincides with declarations that small cities are the 'missing multipliers' of economic growth (Blond & Morrin, 2015), and the rise of a Key Cities Group (parallel to the Core Cities Group but representing the economic interests of 21 (formerly 26) 'key cities') that, as one interviewee describes: *"is recognising the power of mid-sized cities and their additional agility and flexibility to make things happen"*. There is, however, still much work to be done to assess the role of mid-sized cities within the contemporary system. This research has begun to explore this, looking at how local leaders within a mid-sized city are making sense of, adapting to and challenging the city-regional devolution arrangement as it evolves.

7.6.2   What 'deal' for mid-sized cities under city-regional devolution?

On the one hand, interviewees claimed that a city-regional devolution system has, in comparison to the regional approach under RDAs, allowed places like Doncaster to play a more active role in regional policymaking. One reason for this was the focus on a smaller geography which, in comparison to RDAs, is closer to the local scale and more accessible to local leaders outside the core cities. Such sentiments can be found elsewhere, with the Centre for Cities celebrating the inclusion of over 30 smaller local

authorities within the devolution deals (Harrison, 2016a). However, this study also revealed the frustration that is being felt within mid-sized cities over the favour that is being shown towards core cities and, similarly, the lack of acknowledgement and appreciation shown for the potential and contribution of mid-sized cities within a wider city-regional framework. This came through, for example, in the way that devolution talks have been carried out which, for the case under study, were described as an exclusive negotiation between the leaders of Sheffield and Whitehall.

Rather than being defeatist, however, this study found that leaders in Doncaster are beginning to challenge the core city narrative for gaining a more active role in city-regional policymaking alongside Sheffield. It also revealed how Doncaster's leaders are managing to bypass city-regional structures to extend their influence and reach for gaining more recognition for Doncaster at national and global arenas as a place that is developing independently of its city-region. In this respect, therefore, city-regional devolution is encouraging leaders to think differently about their strategic approach.

Given the primary policy focus is on big cities which automatically puts mid-sized cities *"on the back-foot"*, it was alleged that Doncaster's leaders have had to *"fight harder"* and *"shout louder"* on city-regional and national stages than they perhaps would have done otherwise, and that this was leading to positive outcomes for the city.

Similarly, a nothing to lose mentality was also perceived to have been encouraged under the conditions of city-regional devolution and austerity, enabling leaders to be braver and bolder, eager to look for opportunities, and more willing to take risks. With this background, it came to light that mid-sized cities, despite a system that puts up many barriers in their way, have the potential to contest the broader structural context and, in turn, begin to adjust their position within the urban hierarchy (Lorentzen, 2012). There are, however, many contextual and place-based factors that need to be considered here.

Firstly, the coherence and intensity of this challenge will be largely dependent on the skills and capacities of local leaders. This, as the following discussion outlines, suggests the need for leaders to have the right skills (see section 7.5) is particularly critical in mid-sized and smaller cities and will be drawn out in the next sub-section.

Secondly, it seems that a mid-sized city's location and ranking within their wider geography also plays a crucial role in their negotiation and bargaining powers. In Doncaster's case, for example, it was clear that the city has used its 'second-tier' status

as a way in to contribute to city-regional discussions as best they can and to question whether Sheffield is really deserving of its core city status. Also significant was the relative success of other places within their wider economic geography, with remarks made, for example, that due to Sheffield not being a particularly strong core city Doncaster has been able to take advantage of this. Likewise, comparisons were made between other neighbouring local authorities such as Barnsley and Rotherham which were perceived as being unable to compete; Rotherham described as being in danger of *"falling between the cracks if they're not careful"*. It is for these reasons why leaders in Doncaster believed they had been successful at, for instance, securing a disproportionately high percentage of their bids from city-regional funding. However, this could lead to the following situation, as one interviewee explains:

> *"...what **you don't want to end up with** is **being Bradford to Sheffield's Leeds where you end up as a poor neighbour because you're too big to be a feeder and you're too close to stand on your own**, so that's a real danger we've got to avoid I think as we get more and more towards this city region focus."*
> [Private Sector Representative]

All of this suggests that mid-sized cities, and especially 'second rank' cities as the previous discussion begun to unfold, could potentially play a critical role in the existing city-regional devolution agenda in England. It also contends, however, how this potential will be heavily dependent on their geography and the success of other nearby places, as well as the capacity, willingness and determination of local leaders to fight for recognition and investment within a system in which they can easily be overlooked. This is not to imply that mid-sized cities are more important than core cities, but rather that more needs to be done to encourage the growth of mid-sized cities and to release their potential in view of adding to the overall strength of city-regional development. As one interviewee states: *"we're big enough to be important, but we're not big enough to go it alone"*. In opening up this discussion, however, it does raise questions in relation to the opportunities for the more peripheral places within a city-regional geography that do not make it to 'second rank' position, as well as those places that are 'left out' entirely, have non-constituent status, or have 'contested association' (Pike *et al*., 2016).

7.6.3   Why is leadership important for a mid-sized city?

The discussion above has begun to showcase why leadership is important for mid-sized cities. This was revealed during interviews to be particularly the case for Doncaster, with the quality of leadership readily cited as one of the largest contributors to the city's successes and failures in recent decades. Furthermore, good leadership is all the more imperative for mid-sized cities because they have neither the political might nor collective weight of core cities for influencing policy and attracting inward investment.

Many mid-sized cities have experienced acute post-industrial economic and social decline under a central urban system that has prioritised growth in core cities. As such, it would appear that market forces have been inadequate to break historical path-dependencies in these places, which have been further impeded by the lack of commitment shown by central government to intervene.

In this context, it would seem that good leadership and a network of coordinated institutional activity is something that mid-sized cities can foster to endogenously and proactively pursue growth. This was particularly apparent in relation to economic development, but as the research also discovered, leadership is equally important for overcoming social issues which mid-sized cities suffer particularly acutely from. For these reasons, effective leadership is critical for places whose communities suffer from complex social problems, especially given the approach of central government that appears to only want to focus on the economy and is increasingly positioning social responsibilities as a local government responsibility. Therefore when leaders focus their efforts on transforming the local economy, local people are in danger of being left behind. Good leadership is also important for those places that have experienced negative connotations of decline and decay and require local advocates of place to turn around perceptions. These are issues that previous research has found to be particularly abundant in mid-sized (post-industrial) cities in England (see section 4.4).

Related to this, larger cities are, to some degree, protected no matter what their leaders are doing, which is another reason why leadership is particularly important for mid-sized cities. A further consideration that came through during the interviews carried out in Doncaster is that mid-sized cities tend to have a smaller private sector than larger cities following their failure in the decades following deindustrialisation to attract large firms which, as a result, leaves such places more dependent on leaders, and especially

public sector leaders, to steer a place. And yet even the larger cities, when up against the bright lights of London, need to recognise their leadership potential to attract inward investment and generate growth. Even so, this research argues that the need for good leadership in mid-sized cities is more profound.

7.6.4   Summary: The mid-sized city experience

This section has begun to unpick the potential of mid-sized cities within city-regions for contributing to growth at the national and city-regional level, with recent evidence pointing to an upward trend in their growth and development. It has also looked at the opportunities and challenges that city-regional devolution presents for mid-sized cities, for which their wider city-regional geography and their relative position within it were found to be major influences on whether the opportunities are likely to compensate the challenges. Furthermore, leadership potential was identified as being particularly significant in mid-sized cities given the prioritisation that is given to core cities by central policymakers, as well as for turning around the economic and social stagnation that many of those who were formerly heavily industrialised faced following a transformation of the world economy that has relied heavily on local intervention.

7.7   Summary: The Essence of City-Regional Devolution in England

This chapter has distilled from a case study of leadership and governance in a mid-sized city the essence of contemporary city-regional devolution in England. It has achieved this by providing an integrated analysis and discussion of the empirical findings; shedding light on the complex and interconnected ways in which policy, place and actors interact. A summary of the discoveries relating to the five key themes that have been presented in this chapter are considered in turn below.

Firstly, the theme of 'central-local interactions' looks at the vertical dimension of governance, drawing on the rules and instruments of city-regional devolution and exploring the complex and asymmetrical ways that central and local government interact within the contemporary spaces of governance. Rather than moving from a centralised to a more bottom-up approach to local growth as policy rhetoric would leave us to believe, city-regional devolution was found to be a missed opportunity to rework

centre-local relationships. This is because central government continues to act as the control and command hub with, for example, austerity and 'devolution deals' being used as gears to determine these relationships. This is due to their connection to resources which was found as a key driver of transactions and interactions within the system. Deal-making was also found to be ad hoc and incoherent, which left local leaders in a state of insecurity. Reasons for the compliance of local leaders included the dependency that has been encouraged between central and local government over many years of centralisation, as well as a belief in nation-state powers and difficult leadership conditions limiting the capacity of local agents to challenge. However, another reason also included local leaders recognising the game of governance and accepting limited freedoms in the hope of there being something more profound on the horizon.

As such, ideas emerged around the need for devolution to be based on true co-evolution and with genuinely more powers and resources being devolved to a sub-national level of governance. In order to achieve this, there is a need to steer central government away from viewing the local is a vehicle to implement their own policies.

Secondly, the theme of 'spatial scales and layers of governance' describes the messy and disorganised implementation of city-regional devolution by central government that has created organisational confusion and operational complexity. In the case of the SCR, the geographical and institutional set-ups of city-regional governance do not align, which when taken together with the traditionally defined politically administered boundaries at the scale of the local authority, makes for a piecemeal and conflicting sub-national governance arrangement. This also fed the issue of conflicting local accountabilities, with local leaders who are democratically elected prioritising the scale at which their electorate sits over a city-regional geography. Furthermore, with so much uncertainty and flux over the scale and level of regional governance, local leaders were found to prioritise the local authority as a scale that is stable and familiar.

Thirdly, the theme of 'intra-local interactions' examined the horizontal dimension of governance under city-regional devolution. City-regions were set up with the assumption that local authorities will come together to act in the interest of their wider economic geography. However, historical territorial politics and organisational boundaries were found to reside between and within local authorities. City-regions were also found to suffer from fragmentation and competitive resource allocation that was

reinforcing intra-local competitions and divisions. This supports the findings of Harrison and Heley (2015; p.1124) who state:

> "a paralysis of city-region policymaking has ensued from policy elites constantly swaying between a spatially-selective, city-first, agglomeration perspective on city-regionalism and a spatially-inclusive, region-first, scalar approach which fragments and divides territorial space along historical lines"

Furthermore, discussions revealed the competitive ethos that underpins the entire economic system that rewards those local authorities who are able to stand out above the rest (including those within and outside their city-regional boundaries). Despite these tensions, however, local leaders acknowledged that the city-region was the favoured scale for sub-national governance by Whitehall. Therefore in recognition that this is where the resources are banked and key growth and funding decisions are made, a certain level of engagement was deemed essential. To this end, a process of competitive cooperation was found to be underlying city-regional devolution.

Thus city-regional devolution needs to recognise, respect and celebrate local identities and the uniqueness of place. Also suggested here is the need for an alignment of political and economic boundaries and infrastructures.

At the city level, conflicts also emerged in relation to the formal and informal spaces of leadership, for which there were several circumstantial reasons provided. To put simply, however, a dichotomy emerged between supposedly reluctant formal leaders that were not willing to share their leadership powers and, in reverse, an expectation placed on formal leaders to lead by informal leaders who were not stepping up to extend the potential for leadership in the city. This suggests a need to better understand how power is exercised and understood. Also underlying these are matters of accountability, resources, skills and a shared sense of direction and purpose. Another finding was in relation to the level of engagement that existed between local leaders and local communities. Largely, suggestions were made that local leaders in Doncaster were failing to pursue growth that was inclusive, and yet this was also linked to the prominence that was being placed on economic growth from the centre.

Fourthly, the theme of 'leadership qualities' provided a rather different output from the research, moving from a discussion of the processes of city-regional devolution and, accordingly, suggestions for future development, towards a more practical reflection of how leaders might better navigate a course through the system as it currently stands.

These are less about individual character traits and more about understanding the leadership context and creating the best conditions to encourage the best use of resources for the development of place and its people. Given the many and varied stakeholders now involved in place leadership at different levels and at different scales, it is not the case that all leaders can or should behave the same. However, more engagement with the sort of skills that place leaders require is essential.

Lastly, the theme of 'the mid-sized city experience' provided a rather more novel contribution of the research. In recognition of the potential of mid-sized cities for contributing to city-regional growth and, more broadly, growth outside of London for rebalancing the national economy, it was suggested that central government needs to readdress the emphasis that is largely being placed on core cities. In this sense, city-regional devolution presented the challenge to mid-sized cities of being overlooked since city-regional areas are founded with core cities as the nucleus of activity. Equally however, city-regional devolution presents an opportunity for mid-sized cities to have a, higher stake in the decision making processes and gain access to resources at the city-regional scale in view of extending their reach of engagement. This potential is especially significant if, like in Doncaster's case, a city is in 'second-rank' position behind the core city. This does, however, raise concerns over the potential for those mid-sized cities that do not achieve a second-rank position, or are excluded from a city-regional geography altogether within the current framework of city-regional activity.

From the empirical evidence presented, it would appear that the relationship between a core city and a 'second-rank' mid-sized city within a city-region is based predominantly on competition. However, city-regions would feasibly operate more efficiently if this relationship was one of complementarity. This lesson also applies more broadly, with the ideas of the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine being based on the idea of the benefits that are gained by neighbouring cities and regions being able to work together and grow together. This is rarely the reality in practice however. A better understanding of the inputs and outputs between areas, and of the advantages of working within a network of activity, could aid this process. Furthermore, leadership was found to be significantly important for mid-sized cities because they have neither the political might nor the collective weight of core cities, which means that being able to capitalise on the opportunities warrants more local strategic action.

Chapter 8. CONCLUSION: LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE WITHIN A CITY-REGIONAL DEVOLUTION POLICY CONTEXT

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has investigated sub-national leadership and governance in a city-regional devolution policy setting in England. More specifically, it has examined the structures, processes and practices that underlie this new governance and policy framework.

This investigation was born following the 2010 announcement to radically alter the way local places are governed in view of a central government agenda to devolve more powers and fiscal responsibilities to city-regions, in the context of austerity. Since then an increasingly complex sub-national governance and policy landscape has emerged for local and regional leaders to navigate a course through, in a period when Council budgets are being cut and when policy has been in a relentless state of flux and turmoil. This study, therefore, set out to understand better the ways in which local and regional leaders are responding to these new conditions and acting strategically to influence place resilience and place development. However, it soon became clear that leadership does not exist in isolation, and that it can only be considered within the infrastructures in which it is embedded. During the course of the study's development, therefore, a more relational perspective was adopted by examining a whole system of complexities, relationships and interactions involved in place leadership and governance.

A key assumption of the research is that whilst structures play a very significant role in terms of setting the agenda, defining the scale, and putting in place the institutions for sub-national governance, it is only via the agents that operate it that the system actually exists. This is summed up by Bhaskar (1989; p.36) who states:

> "People do not create society. For it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structure, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce and transform, but which would not exist unless they did so"

How agents navigate and work the system, however, will depend on many factors associated with *policy*, *place* and *agency*. It was therefore the intention of this study to investigate the space that lies at the nexus of these three realms.

The research has drawn on 36 in-depth interviews with local leaders from Doncaster, a local authority that forms part of the SCR. The study's location provided fertile ground for gaining real-time knowledge and experience of city-regional devolution within a city-region that has been one of the frontrunners and heavily caught up in central government's devolution agenda. The case study has also brought a new mid-sized city perspective for exploring this context and for understanding the relational dynamics between a mid-sized city and a core city within a city-region. These are nuanced insights that add to contemporary leadership and governance scholarship.

Overall, the research speaks to wider debates in the field both nationally and globally and can be generalised for lessons to be learnt more broadly. However, by anchoring the research within a distinct and substantive setting in 'place', this research also sheds light on the particularities of regional and local circumstances that influence leadership and governance on the ground and which make every place's experience unique. This is important given the embedded nature of place leadership and governance and the specific local circumstances that influence it.

8.2   Key Findings and Contributions of the Research

The key findings of this research add conceptual and empirical knowledge to a growing debate around an evolving city-regional devolution governance system in England (see Hincks *et al*., 2017; Etherington & Jones, 2016; and Pike *et al*., 2016). They also add to an emerging body of literature on the dynamics, drivers and meanings of leadership within a contemporary sub-national development environment (Beer & Clower, 2014; Hambleton, 2014a; Sotarauta, 2016). By bringing these two fields of enquiry together, this study has provided empirical evidence for understanding how structures and agents influence sub-national leadership and governance on the ground.

The empirical evidence of this research was presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, each addressing one of the three research objectives which are revisited below. Whilst Chapters 5 and 6 gave prominence to the voice of the interview participants via

narrative accounts of the local experience of a new city-regional devolution policy and governance arrangement for leading, Chapter 7 provided a more in-depth synthesis of the empirical findings and positioned these alongside wider research in the field. This discussion provided detailed insights on the themes of 'central-local interactions', 'multi-scale and multi-level governance', 'intra-local interactions', 'leadership qualities' and 'the mid-sized city experience', for which the key findings are presented below. It is anticipated that these findings will inform policymakers' decisions in relation to the future evolution of city-regional devolution, as well as frontline practitioners regarding how best to navigate this policy landscape, in the context of austerity. Whilst they are most applicable to the English context, lessons can be shared across other similar places; especially within countries that have a highly centralised system of governance.

This study set out to address the following three research objectives:

1. To *investigate* how sub-national leaders in England are navigating the emerging city-regional policy landscape in the context of austerity and a push towards more devolved governance, from the perspective of a mid-sized city;

2. To *explore* the nature, scope and operationalisation of city leadership in England, as well as the behaviours and practices that influence it, within a mid-sized city in the context of devolved city-regional governance under austerity;

3. To *conceptualise* and *understand* the structures, processes and practices that underlie the contemporary city-regional devolution governance and leadership landscape in England under austerity, from a case study of a mid-sized city.

Following an investigation of the above research objectives, the key findings of this study are as follows:

- City-regional devolution is a missed opportunity to radically rework central-local relations away from a highly centralised approach.

- City-regional devolution has created a disjuncture between an old political landscape built upon the customs of democracy, legitimacy and accountability, and a new economic system of blended scales and market rationales.

- City-regional and city practices, interactions and relationships are heavily influenced by geographical and historical path-dependencies. Therefore whilst local engagement with place is becoming more open to the city-region scale for the purpose of affecting decision-making and funding allocation, local perceptions and attachments to place continue to align primarily with the local authority scale.

- At the city scale, leadership remains dominantly Council-led but with a shift away from social intervention towards more intensity on driving the economy.

- Leading in cross-sector, multi-agency partnerships is supported in theory, however, in reality, formal customs and organisational pressures get in the way.

- The contemporary urban policy context calls for leaders who are smart, strategic, collaborative, competitive, inclusive and flexible in their approach.

- City-regional devolution is an opportunity for mid-sized cities that fall within a city-region to have a higher input into sub-national decision making and to gain access to central funding. This is influenced, however, by a mid-sized city's position and ranking within their wider city-regional geography.

- City-regional devolution prioritises growth in the big cities, and therefore leadership is potentially all the more important for mid-sized cities for ensuring place development and for gaining outside recognition.

A more detailed account of these findings will now be presented. In doing so, it is useful to re-draw upon the conceptual framework offered at the end of Chapter 3 as a guide for reflection and for considering how the empirical research has added to existing knowledge of place leadership and governance within a broader urban policy system. Whilst presenting a simple framework to be able to add value to the study of governance and place leadership in a form that is accessible and easy to navigate, this research has revealed a much messier picture of structures, processes and interactions.
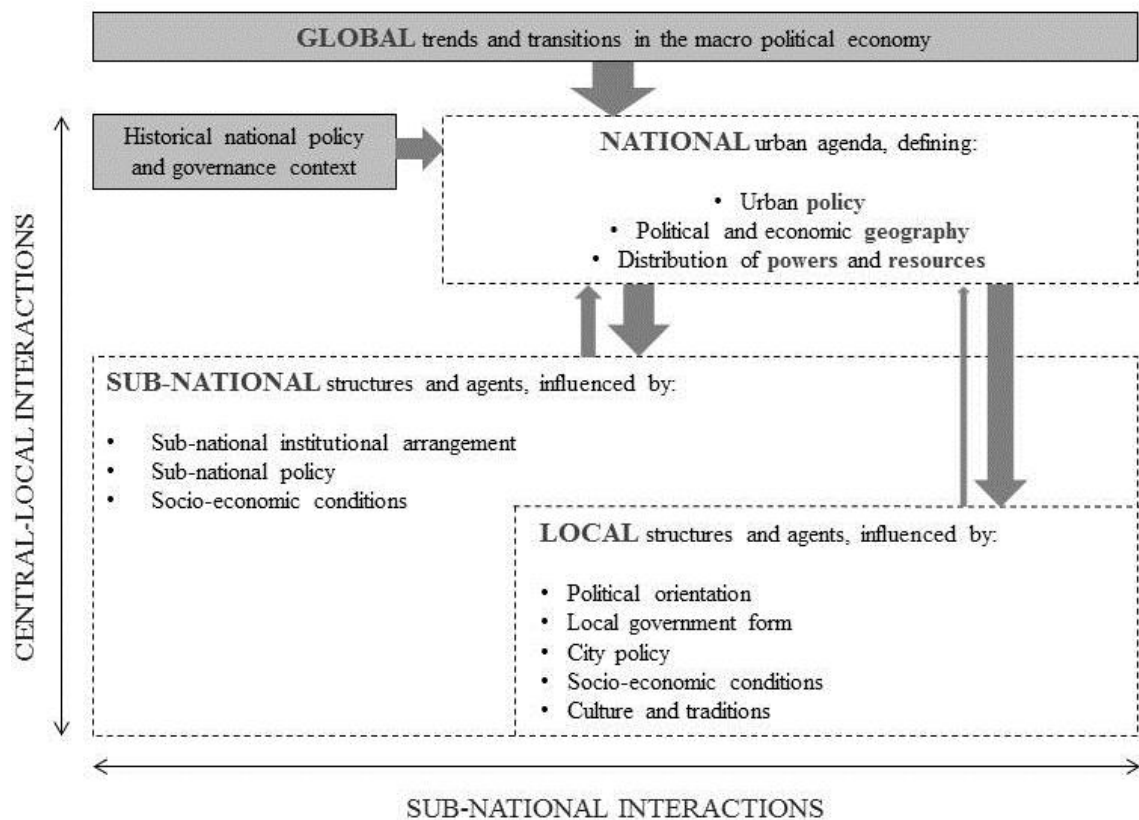
From the perspective of many of the interview participants, under the current city-regional devolution agenda central government has retained a high level of control. Whilst experiencing the decentralisation of certain functions, tasks and budgets, the limited autonomy and resources that sub-national leaders have available were perceived as inhibiting real devolution from taking place. Set within an austerity environment, for example, perceptions were revealed that devolution is a strategy to place a buffer between central government and local communities for the financial cuts that are being rolled out. Furthermore, the evidence revealed that resources are being used as a tool by central government to ensure local compliance. However, despite concerns over the true intentions of the agenda, the research found that local leaders are largely accepting of the new conditions of city-regional devolution as the only means to guarantee survival and in the hope that greater freedoms would be granted in the future.

Rather than mere facilitators of the system however, local leaders participated in an act of gameplay which, akin to what Bentley *et al*. (2016; p.206) found, was used to enable "the enrichment of understandings of how the (vertical) system of governance affects leadership capacity in sub-national (horizontal) governance structures". Nevertheless, given a highly unequal power relationship, the findings of this research suggest that the

way in which city-regional devolution is emerging is presenting a missed opportunity to radically rework central-local relations away from a highly centralised approach.

Significant insights were also revealed in relation to the incoherent implementation of city-regional devolution, as well as a number of geographical and institutional misalignments (see also Cox, 2014; Deas, 2014; Pike *et al*., 2016). Underpinning the latter, one key finding was a disjuncture between an old political landscape and related customs and a new economic system of scales and rationales. This was not only for the reasons of scalar and ideological disparity, but was also founded upon the considerable value that continues to be placed on a democratic form of governance for the reasons of legitimacy and accountability, both by the system and by the agents within it.

Another key finding was the institutional separation between LEPs and CAs. Whilst LEPs cover an economically defined city-regional geography and are led by business leaders, CAs cover an assembly of politically defined units of governance and are led by local authority leaders. This was found to create a jarring between the economic space and the political space of city-regional governance and the institutions and leaders that support them. Furthermore, in spite of a proposed new emphasis on business-led growth at a scale that economically makes sense, CAs were found to have a much more significant influence on city-regional processes and practices than LEPs; largely because its members are democratically elected. Nevertheless, given that local authority leaders are voted to serve their electorate and hold no formal or direct responsibilities outside their jurisdictional borders, a democratic deficit was also found at this level. Moreover, this democratic deficit was further impeded by the partial constituent membership of the local authorities that make up a city-region[25]. A metro mayor could be the answer to this problem. However, concerns were readily shared that this could add to what has already emerged to be a dense and cluttered institutional arrangement.

Furthermore, despite leaders coming together to provide city-regional governance under a combined authority, the evidence found that council leaders continue to favour their own local authority over whole city-regional concerns. There were several reasons suggested for this.

Firstly, as outlined above, council leaders are accountable to their electorate at the city level which, by virtue, encourages leaders to prioritise the benefits gained for their own

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[25] During 2015 when the interviews took place, only four out of nine local authorities in the SCR had constituent member status (Sheffield, Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham).

city's development over the interests of the wider region. As such, a city-regional scale of governance was seen by some as a threat to democracy and local accountabilities.

Secondly, given the churn and complexities of the geographical and institutional arrangements with which the perform regional governance, this research found that the local authority is a scale which leaders can tangibly apply themselves and regain a sense of control over (this is especially the case given that CAs have no tangible infrastructure to support them). This is summed up by Hincks *et al*. (2017; p.644) who state:

> "local governments are important not only because of their democratic mandate, but also because they tend to be more durable than soft spaces which are more readily discarded"

Thirdly, the system encourages competitive play between the local authorities that make up a city-region. This was found largely in relation to the battle for resources that are being devolved, as well as for inward investment within a market economy.

Overall, these findings indicate the need for a more coordinated, aligned and stable system of governance that provides leaders with the agency to act.

Other structural influences were also found to originate at the sub-national level, leading to the distinct identities, cultures and loyalties of each local authority that makes up a city-regional geography and that feed into the interactions and relationships that reside at this level. These are partly found as the result of local histories (including economic, social and leadership history), and this is why path-dependencies are important to consider when attempting to understand the present. They are also the result of local politics (influenced by history as well as the contemporary political setting). Together these affect how the system is implemented and how agency is enacted within it. These often came to light in the form of territorial politics and cross-boundary contestations, influenced by local leaders' perceptions of, and attachments to, 'place'. Thus whilst undoubtedly local leaders' engagement with place is changing in line with a city-regional geography that is acknowledged as the chosen scale of central government for doing business and for gaining access to powers and resources, it was found that leaders' perceptions of place are not changing at the same pace; the latter of which are founded on local knowledge and real relationships rather than top-down structures.

However, rather than viewing distinct place identities as a weakness, city-regionalism would do better to recognise and embrace the richness of diversity these offer.

Similarly, it is important to recognise that despite the emphasis being placed on the city-regional scale of governance, city councils still have an extremely significant role to play. This is not only in their delivery of local services that remain largely a local authority responsibility, but also in their local knowledge and affinity to their local place and their local communities that are less recognised within the wider city-regional structure. Overall, this finding relates to those of Beel *et al*. (2016) who suggest that a middle ground needs to be found between 'hard' city-regional government and material flows, and 'soft' cross-territorial governance and cultural flows.

Narrowing down the focus to the scale of the city, another set of processes, practices and behaviours were found to operate. Further validating the sentiments over democracy and accountability that are described above, leadership power continues to remain in the hands of those occupying formal positions in the public sector. This supports the claim of Brooks *et al*. (2016; p.13) that "the legacy of public sector-led governance remains despite increased engagement from the private and third sectors". There were, however, indications that a stronger allegiance is being formed between the public and private sectors, although the voluntary sector was largely excluded from this engagement. This conceivably reflects the emphasis that is being placed on economic growth for place development. However, as the evidence laid bare, a lack of social intervention risks leaving local communities disconnected and unable to benefit from growth.

Furthermore, despite partnership working being recognised by interviewees as a necessity to make the best use of local resource under austerity conditions, this was described as struggling to hold up. This was viewed as the result of a reluctance shown by formal leaders for giving power away (and in many ways accountability inhibits risk-taking, innovation and experimentation), as well as expectations from informal leaders on those who are elected or appointed to take the lead and direct others. The latter was also linked to unrealistic expectations on 'informal' partners who are dealing with their own organisational difficulties and financial pressures.

Overall, therefore, it seems that local leaders are in a confused state of trying to embrace partnership working whilst at the same time wanting to reinstate political structures and formal stability and customs. This highlighted the need to better understand local power distributions, both legitimate and perceived, for understanding the horizontal dimension of place leadership and governance. To this end, partnership working might benefit

from more open conversations regarding hard and soft forms of local power, as well as clearer guidance in relation to expectations of and opportunities for partners.

By examining the state of play of leadership and governance at the sub-national scale, a number of leadership qualities were unearthed which could help prepare leaders for leadership roles within the context of city-regional devolution and for leading in partnerships that cut across sectors and agents. These are important to consider since, as revealed for the case under study, weak leadership can be costly. To put simply, the contemporary leadership and governance environment calls for leaders who are smart, strategic, collaborative, competitive, inclusive and flexible in their approach. Full details are included in section 7.5 in accordance with the following eight themes:

- Being pragmatic and opportunistic
- Adapting to a broader governance setting
- Working collaboratively and recognising the leadership potential of others
- Creating the right conditions for partnership working
- Promoting a sense of collective accountability
- Sponsoring a shared vision
- Selling a place brand and being aspirational
- Engaging with local communities and pursuing inclusive growth

Given that the roles of place leaders vary and that place leadership is performed at multiple levels and at different scales, the combination of skills required is likely to vary. However, all together they provide a comprehensive set that can be used to inform leadership training that was readily cited as a key requirement for those occupying both formal and informal leadership positions at the sub-national scale.

Whilst it is valuable to highlight 'good leadership' qualities under a contemporary urban governance system of scales and rationales, it is also important to recognise that these could potentially lead to unintended consequences and/or unforeseen implications. Opportunism, for example, has the potential to lead to short-term gains at the expense of a longer-term agenda that would be required for pursuing inclusive growth. This is indicative of the nature of city-regional devolution and echoes a 'zero-sum' model of central-local relations, whereby the competitive and pro-growth demands of central government under austerity are conflicting with ideologies of equitable opportunities. These are contradictions that are rife within the rhetoric of national policy.

This also aligns with Rubin's (1988; p.249) claim that when faced with an uncertain economic climate, economic development practitioners "claim anything that flies" and "shoot anything that falls", with the view that "to do something is better than to remain inactive" (ibid; p.237). With this in mind, it would appear that it is important for local leaders to be able to find a middle ground between playing the game of governance whilst at the same time responding to the long-term, locally-sensitive needs of place.

By investigating leadership and governance in the context of city-regional devolution in a mid-sized city, the research was able to shed new light and reflect on the mid-sized city experience as an under-researched entity of this wider system. This responds to the global story in the last twenty years or more of the return of the 'big city', which has meant that the vast majority of urban policy and research has prioritised the growth and experience of the big cities. This is true under the current urban agenda in England, for which city-regional devolution can be viewed as a tool for core cities to grow, as well as for the reasons of seeding new spatial inequalities in its exclusion of many mid-sized and small cities, and more rural areas.

And yet, this study has also found an opportunity opening up for mid-sized cities that are on the periphery in terms of their city-regional geography (i.e. not being the core city) but that are not beyond the periphery (i.e. those falling outside of the city-regional geography). This is due to city-regional devolution bringing such places closer to sub-national decision-making and to regional resources. However, also found to be significant was the relative success of a mid-sized city's nearest core city, in addition to a mid-sized city's position and ranking within their wider geography. To this end, this research found that a mid-sized city's geography and location may be key to their success, especially under the city-regional system in England.

Nevertheless, there is a risk that mid-sized cities will continue to be overshadowed by core cities. This is one of the reasons why it is claimed that leadership is all the more important for mid-sized cities to provide the strategic direction needed to benefit from the opportunities of city-regional devolution and not be overcome by the challenges. This is debatably all the more relevant given the economic uncertainty of Brexit on the horizon for which it is feasible to assume that central government will continue to do what it has done before, protect the big cities whilst ignoring those on the outskirts. Furthermore, despite many mid-sized cities showing signs of significant improvement and growth in recent years, they still have neither the collective might nor the political

weight of core cities which are, at least to some extent, supported by central government regardless of their performance. Leadership is also important given the path-dependencies of many mid-sized cities in England that were exposed to slow growth and social problems following deindustrialisation, for which previous research has found that transformational leadership can go some way in turning around a place's development path (Bailey *et al*, 2010).

Drawing on the point above that many mid-sized cities are beginning to turnaround their position, with evidence being presented that some are experiencing relatively higher growth than their corresponding core cities (see section 7.6), the claim for more recognition for mid-sized cities is justified. Whilst it would be unwise to suggest that mid-sized cities should go it alone, more emphasis should be placed on the critical mass of city-regions and on the complementary roles of the core city and the second-rank city for driving city-regional growth. There will likely always be some tension under a competitive system. However, a governance approach that considers and reflects the different economic roles between the places that make-up a city-region could help to reconceive intra-local relationships, especially between the two largest economies.

8.3   Key Policy & Practice Implications

In addition to the academic contributions of this study, there are a number of key policy and practice implications emanating from the empirical research as presented below:

- City-regional devolution requires a more long-term, coordinated, aligned and stable system of governance to provide the suitable foundations for public-private partnerships to emerge and for cross-boundary working to flourish.
- City-regional devolution needs to be more bottom-up and involve a significantly higher transfer of funds to the sub-national level. This will help to empower local leaders, make local action more feasible, and encourage place-sensitive development that meets place-sensitive economic and social needs.
- A framework for assessing the capacity and delivery of local leadership could help to encourage collaboration and identify areas for improvement. Similarly, the leadership qualities that have been identified could help to support and inform the development of local leadership training programmes.

- More open forums to discuss local power distributions (both hard and soft forms) at the sub-national level are recommended to encourage an ethos that sees beyond the traditions of council-centric democratic leadership to realise the full leadership potential of a city where innovation and creativity can prosper. This would also benefit from clearer guidelines in relation to the opportunities for and expectations of partnership working.

- The importance of places outside of the 'big cities' needs to be recognised and better understood by central policymakers, not only in view of their economic potential but also for delivering a more balanced economy.

Beneficiaries, therefore, include policymakers and stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors, assisting them in navigating, making arrangements and suggesting alternative ways forward for the future evolution of city-regional devolution in England. At the national level, this research has the potential to benefit central government ministers by identifying caveats in the current sub-national institutional set-up and leading to new developments. At the sub-national level, beneficiaries will comprise of city-regional government officials, including members of Combined Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and other related bodies. At the local level, this research has value for local politicians and Councillors, local government officials charged with local economic development and public service delivery, local businesses and investors, third sector organisations, and local partnership board members. Advantages at this level include contributing to better local decision-making, encouraging better working relationships across geographical boundaries and sectors to foster greater coherency, addressing regressive organisational cultures, and offering a framework for assessing the quality of local leadership to identify gaps and provide training to those occupying a leadership role. This will be particularly the case for policymakers and stakeholders from within city-regions in England, and especially those from mid-sized cities.

8.4   Future Study

This research has offered a unique insight into leadership and governance in the context of city-regional devolution in England, in a mid-sized city. In doing so, the research has added conceptual and empirical knowledge to leadership and governance scholarship. However, there is still much scope for future studies in this field for which this research

can be used as a basis to guide and inform these. Essentially, this is not a research area for which a 'tidy' vision can be achieved. Taken in the context of English city-regional devolution, for example, research will require constant improvement and possibly reorientation as the agenda evolves and as new policies are introduced. Whilst it is not the purpose here to offer a complete breakdown of the potential for the future study of leadership and governance in all of its complexity, outlined below are some which could enhance the research that has been carried out here.

A comparative study would go some way in increasing the generalisability of this investigation by drawing out commonalities and differences between different cases. For example, research could be carried out in other cities (mid-sized or otherwise) that fall within the city-regional geography in England to compare experiences across different city-regions. It would also be interesting to compare the experience of Doncaster with other mid-sized cities in England that sit beyond the city-regional periphery such as Hull, or indeed other smaller towns and rural areas. Beyond the city-regional devolution policy context in England, it would also be desirable to carry out a case study of sub-national leadership and governance under a different system of governance internationally; for example, a country whose governance structure is, in relative terms, considered decentralised and/or has a different sub-national government form. Equally, it would be worthwhile to study a case in a nation such as France that has, over several decades, experienced a city-regional, mayoral form of sub-national government and for which lessons can be learnt and applied to the English context.

In methodological terms, future research could take a more ethnographic approach to achieve an even richer appreciation of the realities of leading a city within the city-regional devolution context in England, at a time of austerity. Another potentially profitable method would be the use of focus groups whereby the issues raised by this study could be debated in an open forum. These could also be used as a means to test the research findings across different city-regions in a time and cost-effective manner.

Furthermore, given the findings unearthed by this research in relation to a disconnect between those who govern and those who are governed, a study which gains the citizen perspective on the issues of leadership and governance could provide essential insights for investigating this gap further. This is particularly pertinent for the English context given the events of late such as the EU Referendum vote in June 2016 which saw Britain vote to leave the EU. Whilst there are many reasons proposed for this outcome, one of these points to the distrust of the citizen towards elite government officials.

Similarly, given the concerns that were raised in relation to economic gains not translating into social gains, research that explores the role of leadership in delivering social just city outcomes would be highly recommended for bringing an agency perspective into a debate which has largely focused on structures.

8.5   Research Reflections

Leadership and governance are complex notions that involve an entire system of interactions, behaviours and actions, and whilst restricted under central regulation and control, involve actors who possess agency to act and make decisions. For these reasons, exploring leadership and governance within a city-regional policy context has been a riveting but challenging experience. For example, with so much policy flux in the system over the period of fieldwork (Mar-Dec, 2015), it was difficult to frame the interviews in one particular way. This lead to an exploration of many and varied aspects of leadership and governance that, whilst reflecting the complexities of the research area, was at times difficult to navigate. Leadership and governance are also not fixed in policy terms, with a number of key developments of central government's devolution agenda coming forward since the time of interviewing such as the Metro Mayor elections in May 2017; these will likely unearth a new set of processes and relationships that it would be useful to investigate. There have also been a number of new developments specific to the SCR in relation to the HS2 station location and their exclusion from electing a mayor during the first round of elections due to boundary disputes. Therefore given that the game is constantly changing, further follow up work would be of value to bring the story up-to-date.

Furthermore, having picked a topical subject area for studying leadership and governance, a number of related works have emerged since the early stages of this research that have also endeavoured to examine the structures, processes and practices that underlie the city-regional devolution governance landscape in England (see Bentley *et al*., 2016; Hincks *et al*., 2017; Etherington & Jones, 2016; and Pike *et al*., 2016). However, rather than viewing this as a weakness of the study, these have only added to the validity of the study's findings as was made clear in Chapter 7. This research also brings a substantive insight of the mid-sized city experience of this policy context, and the relational dynamics between a mid-sized city and their neighbouring core city within a city-region which brings two new perspectives to the debate.

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