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Geographies and politics of localism: the localism of the United Kingdom's coalition government

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GEOGRAPHIES AND POLITICS OF LOCALISM

Abstract

There has always been a localist element to British politics. But recently, a particular version of localism has been moved to the foreground by the 2011 Localism Act. This paper identifies various uses and meanings of localism, maps their geographical assumptions and effects, and critiques their politics. It does this using the localism of the United Kingdom's Coalition Government as a case study of localism in practice. The rationalities, mentalities, programmes, and technologies of this localism are established from Ministerial speeches and press releases, along with Parliamentary Acts, Bills, White Papers, Green Papers, and Statements – all published between May 2010 when the Coalition Government was formed, and November 2011 when the Localism Act became law. We argue that localism may be conceptualised as spatial liberalism, is never straightforwardly local, and can be anti-political.

Key Words

Localism, British politics, spatial liberalism, anti-politics.

GEOGRAPHIES AND POLITICS OF LOCALISM

1. Uses and Meanings of Localism

The potential of local politics has long been a matter of controversy in political geography. From one perspective, the relentlessly parochial nature of the local is said to invite fragmentation, not only limiting the ambitions of those engaged in politics at that level, but also encouraging division and competition between those who should be united in the face of global challenges. From another, local action is understood to make it possible to build movements that can both win particular concessions and, in some circumstances at least, go beyond them – whether by generalising around a shared agenda or building alliances with others. In the academic literature, the potential and limitations of local politics have often been considered from the point of view of those seeking to develop a progressive politics. In this paper we have rather a different starting point, focusing on a particular example of local politics in practice; or, more accurately, a particular way of thinking about local politics that its proponents hope to see translated into practice – namely, the localism espoused by the United Kingdom's (UK) Coalition government (although it is one of the constitutional ironies of British politics that the UK government's localism policy only applies to England). If developing a progressive politics of place or locality is a difficult challenge, here we reflect on some of the challenges and tensions being faced by those seeking to develop localism as a more straightforward conservative force.

A set of overlapping and contradictory political meanings clusters around the notion of localism. It is possible to identify at least four of these in contemporary political and academic discourses. At its simplest, a commitment to localism describes a positive disposition towards the decentralisation of political power. In this regard, two traditions are apparent that sit uneasily alongside each other but are often mobilised together as if they were

complementary or indeed identical. The first is the classical-liberal tradition harking back to John Stuart Mill, comparing local or neighbourhood government to national or regional government and finding it to be less bureaucratic, more efficient, more responsive to local needs, and more democratic – in part because it is assumed that people can know local councillors personally or relatively easily become local councillors themselves (see Corry and Stoker 2002, Lowndes and Sullivan 2008). The second, communitarian, localism, which in some respects harks back to Burke but in other versions has a more anarchist pedigree echoing Kropotkin, views local community or civil society as some kind of mediating institutional layer through which responsible action, right living, and good welfare outcomes may be achieved (see Blond 2010, Hall 1988, Smith 2000).

Localism is also used, however, to describe the actually existing decentralisation of political responsibility, which may or may not follow from the positive disposition identified in the previous paragraph. This may be decentralisation to elected local government – the meaning of localism for the Council of Europe (Council of Europe 1985), the New Local Government Network (Corry and Stoker 2002), and the Local Government Association of England and Wales (LGA 2006). Or it may be decentralisation to numerous bodies thought to be local in some way or other e.g. partnerships, community groups, neighbourhood organisations, private-sector firms, civil society organisations, public-service professionals, or individuals. This is less a vision of localism as a way of organising social and political life and more an expression of institutional reality, consistent with the way in which Duncan and Goodwin (1988) explain the local state as a necessary consequence of uneven development, rather than the result of any political or ideological commitment (while nevertheless suggesting that it is this that generates the possibility of pluralism as a necessary feature of local politics).

Aspects of these first two phenomena, when expressed in recent moves to decentralise political power in the UK, have been termed ‘the new localism’ (Corry and Stoker 2002). But the term has also been used to capture rather different ways of thinking (see Brenner and Theodore 2002, Clarke 2009). These include our third and fourth expressions of localism. The third starts from an assumption that some groups and interests are locally dependent, in the short term at least, which may generate a politics of locality that brings together locally dependent firms, politicians, and workers in growth coalitions of one sort or another (Cox and Mair 1988, 1991; Logan and Molotch 2007). Connected to this, but going further, the fourth conceptualisation of localism raises the possibility of the strategic production and use of localities as spaces of engagement oriented to a variety of ends (Cox 1998). At various times and in different places, this has been associated with: attempts to regulate the capitalist economy by, for example, promotion of local economic development policies or even local socialism (see Boddy and Fudge 1984, Clarke and Cochrane 1990, Goodwin and Painter 1996, Goodwin et al 1993, Mackintosh and Wainwright 1987, Stoker and Mossberger 1995, Wainwright 2003); the reframing of welfare provision by, for example, decentralisation of functions to micro-agencies and private-sector firms, or through democratisation and participation (see Burns et al 1994, King and Stoker 1996, John 2001, Wainwright and Little 2009); and government of the population by, for example, promotion of self-regulating and enterprising communities (see Amin 2005, Cochrane and Newman 2009, Rose 1996).

When localism is used in political discourse, its meaning is often purposefully vague and imprecise. It brings geographical understandings about scale and place together with sets of political understandings about decentralisation, participation, and community, and managerialist understandings about efficiency and forms of market delivery – moving easily between each of them, even when their fit is uncertain. It is often intentionally associated, confused, or conflated with local government, local democracy, community, decentralisation,

governance, privatisation, civil society etc. for political effect. This is part of what makes localism such an attractive concept capable of being mobilised by all three of the UK's main Westminster-oriented political parties.

Until recently, the UK's governmental system was often described as a unitary one in contrast to federal systems like those of the USA or Germany (Rose 1982: 50). Formally, even devolution to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland may not have changed this position – since devolution remains a gift of Westminster – but in practice, coupled with the multi-level governance associated with the European Union, it is now hard for even the most resistant of constitutionalists to view matters through a unitary prism. It would in any case be mistaken to maintain a vision of the UK as a state in which power had ever been somehow concentrated in Whitehall to be delegated from the centre. Rhodes' systematic and thoughtful work on central-local relations and sub-national government of the 1980s confirms the negotiated complexities of the relationship (Rhodes 1981, 1984, 1985, 1988). And, of course, there has been a long tradition of local government initiative, from the 'gas and water socialism' and 'urban squirearchy' of the late nineteenth century (Fraser 1976, Garrard 1995, Hunt 2004), to the Poplarism and Little Moscows of the 1920s and 1930s (Branson 1979, Macintyre 1980), to the municipal Labourism of Herbert Morrison's London County Council and the pragmatic Toryism of the shires (Donoghue and Jones 2001, Bulpitt 1983), to the taken for granted municipal empires of the post-1945 period, nominally with delegated responsibility for education, council housing, and social service, but in practice defining the local welfare state (Cockburn 1977, Dearlove 1979, Keith-Lucas and Richards 1978). And alongside this long tradition of municipal activism of one sort or another has run an equally significant discourse – particularly within the Conservative Party - finding an expression in a language of 'local patriotism' (Cragoe 2007), in which the local has been explicitly counterposed to fears of socialist centralism. For some, rooted in this tradition, the Thatcher

period of the 1980s was a regrettable lapse into centralism even if it was justified in neo-liberal terms (see, e.g., Jenkins 2004).

In that sense, localism has been a continuing and inescapable feature of British politics. In that sense, localism has been a continuing and inescapable feature of British politics. But recently it has been moved to the foreground in a distinctive way once more by the UK Coalition government's Localism Act 2011 (see below) – in the context of a rather different set of political imaginings, as well as the wider context of a devolved UK, which means that the Act itself is only relevant to England. In their different ways, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are all developing quite distinctive institutional lives of their own, while the sub-national spatial scales of English politics remain uncertain, as the regional government machinery of the 1997-2010 Labour government is dismantled to be replaced by more diffuse institutional structures (such as Local Enterprise Partnerships and City Deals), and localism replaces regionalism as a discourse of spatial governance (for a case study of the rise and fall of one government region as a political territory, see Cochrane 2012). Some have even begun to argue that forms of localism might provide an alternative vision for the European Union, in place of more complex and patterns of multi-level governance and the principle of delivering an 'ever closer union' (see, e.g., Browne and Persson 2012)..

In this paper, we make no claims to define localism for use as a social science concept. Instead, we aim to explore the way in which it has been mobilised in the language of the UK's Coalition Government (as it relates to other localisms e.g. the localism of New Labour), taking it seriously as an active geographical political re-imagining of the spaces and places of advanced liberalism. The rationalities, mentalities, programmes, and technologies of this localism were established from relevant Ministerial speeches and press releases, along with Parliamentary Acts, Bills, White Papers, Green Papers, and Statements – all published

between May 2010 when the Coalition Government was formed, and November 2011 when the Localism Bill received royal assent and became law (as the Localism Act).

The next section introduces the localism of the Coalition Government. After that, we consider: the relationship between localism, liberalism, and decentralisation, conceptualising localism as spatial liberalism (section three); the geographies of localism, which are not straightforwardly local (section four); and the politics of localism, including various ways in which localism can be anti-political (section five).

2. The Localism of the UK's Coalition Government

The UK's first Coalition Government for more than 60 years was formed in May 2010 between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats after no party received enough votes in the 2010 General Election to govern alone. To date, one of the central themes of this Coalition Government has been localism. This is reflected in its *Programme for Government* (HM Government 2010a: 11):

The Government believes that it is time for a fundamental shift of power from Westminster to people. We will promote decentralisation and democratic engagement, and we will end the era of top-down government by giving new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods, and individuals.

It can also be seen in the *Localism Bill*, given royal assent and made law in November 2011 (HM Government 2010b: 2):

The best contribution that central government can make is to devolve power, money, and knowledge to those best placed to find the best solutions to local needs: elected local representatives, frontline public service professionals, social enterprises, charities, co-ops, community groups, neighbourhoods, and individuals.

In both documents, it is argued that power in England has become too concentrated in Westminster and needs dispersing to local councils, but also to a variety of other actors presumed to be local in some way or other (communities, public service professionals, social enterprises, individuals, and so on). Prime Minister David Cameron is quoted in the Executive Summary of the *Localism Bill* on the case for decentralisation (HM Government 2010b: 4):

There's the efficiency argument – that in huge hierarchies, money gets spent on bureaucracy instead of the frontline. There is the fairness argument – that centralised national blueprints don't allow for local solutions to major social problems. And there is the political argument – that centralisation creates a distance in our democracy between the government and the governed.

The case begins with identification of three deficits: an efficiency deficit; a fairness deficit; and a democratic deficit. It proceeds by attributing these deficits to centralisation, which is associated with hierarchy and bureaucracy. Decentralisation is proposed as the solution.

Elsewhere, decentralisation has been positioned by Greg Clark, Minister for Decentralisation and Cities, as one method for achieving all three strands of the Big Society: public sector reform; community empowerment; and philanthropic action (Clark 2010).

How are these rationalities or mentalities of government being translated into policy, legislation, programmes, and technologies? Figures 1 and 2 list the relevant legislative and policy documents and announcements published between May 2010 and November 2011. It would seem that localism for the Coalition Government involves at least three parts. First, there are moves to free local government from central and regional control. These include: abolishing Comprehensive Area Assessments, Local Area Agreements, Regional Strategies, Government Offices in the Regions, the Standards Board regime, the Audit Commission, the National Indicator Set, and central house building targets; reducing ring-fencing of revenue

grants, the number of statutory duties on local government, and the amount of planning law and guidance; allowing Local Authorities to change bylaws without consulting Whitehall, to choose their own structure of governance (Mayor, Leader and Cabinet, or Committee), and to retain and borrow against business rates generated locally; and introducing a General Power of Competence for Local Authorities, allowing them to act in the interest of their communities and in their own financial interest, to raise money by charging and trading, and to provide indemnities and guarantees.

The second part is to make local government more directly accountable to local people. We see this in new codes on publicity (limiting the public relations and marketing content of Local Authority newspapers) and data transparency (requiring Local Authorities to publish information on contracts, tenders, performance, salaries, and assets). There are also plans for elected mayors in England's twelve largest cities outside London,² and to allow residents to instigate referendums on local issues.

The final part involves devolving power beyond local government to that variety of actors presumed to be local (communities, civil society organisations, individuals, and so on). Here, the Academies Act allowed more schools to become Academies. Free Schools have been introduced. The Local Authority Two-Tier Code has been revoked, freeing private sector firms with Local Authority contracts to set their own terms and conditions for transferred staff and their equivalents. Local Enterprise Partnerships have been established with chairs from the business sector and direct access to a Regional Growth Fund as well as responsibility for transport planning and expenditure. All of these items – some of which may appear unrelated in significant respects – have been woven into the localism narrative of the Coalition Government. They have been joined by: a community Right to Challenge (to challenge the delivery of services by Local Authorities); a community Right to Buy (to buy community assets from Local Authorities); a community Right to Provide (to provide

services in place of Local Authorities); a Civil Society Red Tape Task Force to assist civil society organisations in their dealings with government; a Big Society Bank to provide social enterprises with access to finance; Community Budgets and Personal Budgets to enable local partnerships and individuals to become commissioners of public services; and Neighbourhood Planning.

In a speech to the Local Government Association Annual Conference, Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, listed many of these actions and plans before concluding (Pickles 2011a: no p. n.): “This is a decisive, fundamental, and irreversible change in England’s political geography, one of the world’s most centralised states. We are taking power away from Whitehall and putting it back in the hands of councillors and councils”. Such claims about England’s political geography demand consideration from geographers and related scholars, even if some appear questionable at best; particularly the claim that power is being put back in the hands of local government.

This becomes especially clear when local government funding is added to the mix. In the Comprehensive Spending Review of October 2010, covering the period from 2010 to 2015, revenue funding to local government was cut by 26% in real terms (excluding schools, fire, and police). Capital funding to local government was cut by 45%. The schools budget was increased by 0.1% but capital funding for schools was cut by 60%. Other cuts included 50% to social housing, 34% to flood defence and coastal erosion, and 8% to local roads. Additional money for social care was made available: £530m in 2011-12, rising to £1bn in 2013-14. But the Local Government Association estimates rising costs for social care far beyond these amounts because of demographic pressures (LGA 2010a). It also estimates rising costs in the areas of flood defence, child protection, and waste management (LGA 2010b).

There is more. The Budget of June 2010 asked Local Authorities to freeze Council Tax³ in return for a share of £650m – equivalent to a below-inflation rise of 2.5%. This was done under threat of Council Tax capping. It has been done again for 2012-13. Meanwhile, Council Tax revaluation has been postponed until after the next General Election. And small Business Rate Relief was doubled in 2010-11 and again for 2011-12. So local government is under severe financial pressure. Margaret Eaton, Chair of the Local Government Association in October 2010, responded to the Comprehensive Spending Review by saying (Eaton 2010: no p. n.): “These cuts will hurt. We know this means there will be fewer libraries, more pot holes going unrepaired, parks shutting earlier, and youth clubs closing. [...] Our estimate is up to 100,000 jobs in Local Authorities will go”. We might add that cuts will hurt some Local Authorities more than others. In the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2011-12, the spending power of Local Authorities was cut by an average of 4.4%. But some Local Authorities received cuts of 1% or less, while others received cuts of 8.9%. The former included some of the least deprived localities in England (Dorset, Windsor, Maidenhead, Poole, West Sussex, Wokingham, Richmond, and Buckinghamshire). The latter included some of the most deprived (Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Newham, Manchester, Rochdale, Knowlsey, Liverpool, St Helens, Doncaster, and South Tyneside). These deprived localities had benefited under New Labour from area-based grants such as the Working Neighbourhoods Fund.

So localism is a central theme for the Coalition Government. It is understood to mean decentralisation and is presented as a solution to perceived deficits of efficiency, fairness, and democracy in the British state. Already, there have been legislative moves towards freeing local government from central and regional control, making local government more accountable to local people, and devolving power beyond local government to a variety of other bodies thought to be local. Complicating this picture, there have been moves to reduce

local government funding. These latter developments may support the devolution of power beyond local government, but they compromise any potential autonomy for local government. It is to localism's complicated relationship with decentralisation and centralisation that we now turn.

3. Localism as Spatial Liberalism

The Coalition Government associates localism with decentralisation. Ministers speak of freeing local government and other local bodies from regional and central control. But decentralisation is not all they speak of when the topic is localism (see Figures 1 and 2). Ministers are consulting on whether to use 'proportions' (of public services that must be delivered by civil society organisations) in pursuit of devolution beyond local government. Eric Pickles has promised to cap Council Tax in cases of "excessive increase". In a speech to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations Annual Conference, Pickles threatened to force Local Authorities to protect local voluntary and community groups from "disproportionate" cuts (Pickles 2011b: no p. n.):

I think the way that a council works with the voluntary sector through this testing time is a key test of whether they are really ready for independent, responsible leadership. I've made it very clear they must resist any temptation to pull up the drawbridge and pass on disproportionate cuts. [...] Let me be crystal clear: we have reasonable expectations of how Local Authorities will conduct themselves. [...] So if councils are being high-handed, I'll consider giving our reasonable expectations statutory force. Because in order to make a success of localism – in order to enable our towns and neighbourhoods to thrive – I want to make sure that voluntary and charitable groups have got the confidence, the clout, and the power to make their mark.

Here, decentralisation appears conditional on local government behaving “responsibly” and meeting the expectations of Ministers regarding conduct. It is suggested, paradoxically, that statutory force may be used against local government to ensure that localism becomes a success.

How should we interpret this complicated picture? We could take the above paragraph as evidence that localism for the Coalition Government is ‘merely rhetorical’ – ideological cover for something else (in this case, localism’s apparent opposite: centralisation). But that would be to deny substantial evidence to the contrary (see Section 2). Instead, we could learn something from nuanced accounts of liberalism influenced by Foucault’s writings on governmentality (e.g. Dean 1999, Rose 1999). Positioning liberalism in the large space between absolute freedom and total regulation, these accounts suggest that critiques of localism should not aim to measure it against some ideal of absolute decentralisation. Just as liberalism in practice does not equate straightforwardly to complete liberalisation, so localism in practice will not equate straightforwardly to complete decentralisation or localisation.

For Dean, Rose, and others (e.g. Hindess 2004), liberalism describes a normative critique of excessive government; a response to the dangers of governing too much. But the freedoms of liberalism are conditional. Freed citizens must behave rationally and responsibly because, just as there are dangers of governing too much (e.g. dependency), so there are dangers of governing too little (e.g. disorder). Liberalism in practice, then, involves not the retreat of regulation but the shift of regulation from domination towards the production of rational and responsible citizens through technologies of ‘government at a distance’. Finally, where such liberal technologies fail, in the last instance, liberalism in practice involves regulation by sovereign, illiberal solutions (e.g. confinement).

Localism can usefully be thought of as spatial liberalism: government of localities, as opposed to persons, from the position that localities should be assembled and freed to act in the interests of general security and wellbeing, but only so long as they can be made up as rational and responsible actors. Such government involves: deciding on what counts as rational and responsible local action; enabling those actions through decentralisation where possible; encouraging those actions through liberal technologies of government where appropriate; and enforcing those actions through centralisation where absolutely necessary.

In some respects there are strong continuities between New Labour's emphasis on community and neighbourhood, and the Coalition's approach to localism. For New Labour, drawing in community or neighbourhood interests was understood as a means of encouraging different forms of behaviour by involving local actors in making decisions about the places in which they lived and the ways in which they lived in them. The various New Deal for Communities programmes linked community representatives into renewal schemes where communities were offered influence over those schemes, within the parameters set by government and commercial partners, so long as they also accepted responsibility for maintaining the viability of their own communities (Cochrane 2004, 2007). However, the localism of the Coalition Government both builds on New Labour's approaches – taking the logics further in significant ways – but also reframes them by moving away from any remaining expectations about the maintenance of national standards.

For New Labour, good conduct in localities described actions that were innovative, responsible, and entrepreneurial, but with a continued expectation of minimum national standards for public service delivery, policed through a range of agencies and agreements (see Foley and Martin 2000, Hambleton 2003, Lodge and Muir 2010, Lowndes and Sullivan 2008, Wallace 2010, Wilson 2001). New Labour's 'Third Way' promised to balance freedom and (spatial) equity, even if the promise was rarely delivered (Giddens 2000). Such

rational and responsible action was to be achieved by freeing from central control certain ‘high performing’ Local Authorities – so-called ‘earned autonomy’ – while governing the conduct of other councils through technologies of agency (Dean 1999; e.g. best practice guidance), technologies of performance (ibid; e.g. targets and audit), and, where necessary, illiberal solutions e.g. inspection (see Martin 2002, Pratchett and Leach 2003, 2004).

For the Coalition Government, while rational and responsible action in localities is also expected to deliver innovative and entrepreneurial conduct, significantly greater emphasis is placed on action responding to needs perceived to be local in character. We see this in comments on the so-called ‘postcode lottery’ in the Executive Summary of the Localism Bill (HM Government 2010b: 5):

Decentralisation will allow different communities to do things in different ways to meet their different needs. This will certainly increase variety in service provision.

But far from being random – as the word ‘lottery’ implies – such variation will reflect the conscious choices made by local people.

Here, local variety in service provision is viewed as a good thing. Rightly or wrongly, it is approached as an outcome not of local resource availability, nor of local provider competence, but of local priorities – to be expressed clearly through new mechanisms of democracy. If New Labour borrowed the language of the new managerialism and positioned choice within that narrative, here the market analogy is still more powerful. Perhaps in unconscious echoes of Tiebout (1956) – and, indeed, evocations of the ‘enabling’ authority endorsed under a previous Conservative government (Ridley 1988) – what is implied is that local governments and maybe even neighbourhoods can make their own choices and, by implication, meet whatever might be the consequences of those choices.

The Coalition Government has little interest in pursuing national standards, except in a few policy areas perceived to be sensitive because voters might blame central government

for the deviations of local actors. In these areas – including local taxation, local economic development, access to education and housing, and weekly bin collections – rational and responsible action is to be achieved by freeing all local actors from central control before governing their conduct through technologies of consumption (Rose 1999): marketing, advertising, and sales that fuel aspiration and shape market choice. Funding was made available to those Local Authorities who ‘chose’ to freeze Council Tax in 2011-12 and 2012-13. There are plans to allow Local Authorities to keep more of their business rates, rewarding Local Authorities that ‘choose’ to support, attract, and retain business. Communities that ‘choose’ to allow development in their neighbourhoods will receive the New Homes Bonus, matching Council Tax from new houses for six years, and more of the Community Infrastructure Levy, paid by developers in return for planning permission. The New Homes Bonus will pay an extra 36% for ‘affordable’ homes, while the Pupil Premium will reward schools for recruiting children on free school meals. Finally, £250m has been made available for Local Authorities that ‘choose’ to restore weekly bin collections.

In one respect, these choices are not really choices at all. Local government funding has been cut quite enough that Local Authorities and other local actors may be desperate for the additional funding on offer through various bonus and compensation schemes. Such provision of choice that is subsequently circumscribed by manipulating contexts will be familiar to those acquainted with recent libertarian/soft paternalist approaches to policy areas from personal debt to obesity and climate change (see Jones et al 2010, Pykett et al 2011). It will be interesting to see how long the Coalition Government persists with government through liberal technologies, even libertarian paternalist technologies, if local actors continue to act ‘irresponsibly’ – raising local taxes, resisting local development, rationing household waste collections, and so on. For now, we can say that contemporary localism makes for a complicated picture and is best conceptualised as spatial liberalism. Approaching localism in

this way, we are encouraged to look beyond simple dismissals of localism as centralisation in disguise, towards different visions of rational and responsible local actors, and technologies for producing and regulating such actors. What characterises the localism of the Coalition Government is a vision of good local conduct as that which, for the most part, responds in tailored ways to perceived local needs, and a project of encouraging such conduct limited to, again for the most part, soft-paternalist technologies of consumption. We now turn to the geographies and politics of localism, because what counts as ‘local conduct’ and ‘local needs’, and whether ‘local actors’ and ‘local needs’ are indeed straightforwardly local, are questions demanding further consideration.

4. Geographies of Localism

Localists tend to make naïve and romantic assumptions about the geographies of social structures. They tend to overestimate the extent to which contemporary localities are coherent and autonomous – or the extent to which they can be made to be so. This was true of New Labour’s attempt to govern through community (Amin 2005, Wallace 2010). It is also true of the Coalition Government’s localism. We see this in statements on the abolition of regional government, where regional government is referred to as “arbitrary government” (Pickles 2010b: no p. n.), “a country divided into unnatural blocks” (Pickles and Cable 2010: no p. n.), with localities positioned as the natural units of political geography. Meanwhile, in the Executive Summary of the Localism Bill (HM Government 2010b: 2), local actors are described as “those best placed to find the best solutions to local needs”.

But localities are no by no means natural. Local needs are rarely homogeneous. And localities are rarely autonomous such that effective solutions to local needs are found just at the local scale. If we did not already know this, it is confirmed from two decades of research on place, community, and the city (see Albrow 1996, Amin 2002, Amin and Thrift 2002,

Appadurai 1996, Massey 2005, Smith 2001, Urry 2000). Localities are produced through distanced relations. They are nodes in networks, meeting places for mobilities, assemblages of parts from elsewhere (Allen and Cochrane 2010). They are dynamic, becoming, contingent. They are plural, heterogeneous, contested. This does not mean that community has been lost in the twenty-first century. But it does mean that its geography and temporality have changed – from the relatively permanent neighbourhood to the relatively temporary personal network (Wellman 1999).

The localism of recent governments imagines natural localities in which needs can be agreed and met through local agency. In doing so, it fails to recognise the translocal geography of many lives, which continually move across local borders – whether physically, virtually, or imaginatively. It fails to recognise the radical plurality of many localities, where people meet with different genders and sexualities, from different social classes and ethnic backgrounds – often to disagree about local needs. And it fails to recognise the extent to which local needs, so far as they can be identified, often result from decisions made far beyond local borders – by investors, legislators, recruiters, migrants, polluters, and so on. We return to this last point below in discussion of the politics of localism (see also Featherstone et al 2012). Before that, we develop the more general claim of this section: the geographies of localism are not straightforwardly local.

This observation has been made in passing by others. Considering decentralisation beyond local government during the 1980s and early 1990s, Goodwin and Painter (1996) comment that moves from local government to local governance problematise the local in local government. Partnerships open up ‘local’ governance to multiple actors (national and international governmental organisations, private-sector firms, community groups etc.) and their multiple agendas, whether local, national, international, or ‘sub-local’/neighbourhood (see also Cochrane 2004). Graham and Marvin (2001) consider the decentralisation of

infrastructure networks from the 1960s onwards. For a time, these networks were bundled by the state, with services standardised across localities, such that urban space was integrated in part by this very infrastructure. Now, such networks are privatised. This unbundled infrastructure fragments cities and splinters urbanism.

So will the localism of the Coalition Government advance these processes, opening up local governance to multiple actors, agendas, and geographies, unbundling local services, fragmenting and splintering localities? The actions and plans compiled in Figures 1 and 2 suggest a complex institutional landscape comprised of:

- Weakened Local Authorities. These may be subject to local electorates. But they may also be subject to national funding cuts. And they may be subject to partners in service delivery. For example, a tri-borough agreement has been signed between Westminster, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Kensington and Chelsea. They will share senior management and integrate services.
- Strengthened civil society organisations. These may have new ‘rights’ of various kinds. Some may be community organisations based in local neighbourhoods. But some may be connected to larger organisations, whether charities, faith organisations, or investors. For example, some Academies and Free Schools are links in ‘Academy chains’ (E-ACT, the Ark Trust, Oasis Community Learning, the Harris Foundation, the United Learning Trust) or embedded in faith-based organisations (the Church of England, the i-Foundation).
- Strengthened private-sector firms. These may be well-placed to compete for local government contracts in a context of fiscal tightening. Again, some may be small and medium-sized enterprises based in local neighbourhoods. But some may be connected to national and transnational parent companies, groups, investors, and so on.

- Various partnerships e.g. Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). These may cut across existing local government boundaries (e.g. Derby and Nottingham LEP). They may focus on specific sites via Local Enterprise Zones (e.g. Boots Campus, Nottingham).

Little about this geography will be straightforwardly local. And little about it will be radically new either. The apparent plan is to complete moves begun in the 1980s and continued, sometimes hesitantly, over the last three decades: from local government to local governance; from Local Authorities to local partnerships; and from representative democracy to participatory democracy. These moves have been associated with integration and coordination problems regarding service provision. They have also been associated with accountability and participation problems regarding local democracy. We now consider these problems and the politics of localism more broadly.

5. (Anti-)Politics of Localism

There never was a golden age of perfectly democratic local government. There have always been one-party cities, run by paternalistic elites, where much of the power is held by unelected officers (Cochrane 1993, Imrie and Raco 1999). But recent moves towards governance and partnerships – central elements of ‘the new localism’ identified by Brenner and Theodore (2002) – have been much criticised in democratic terms. Such changes may have opened up local politics to more actors (Morgan 2007), but responsibility has been obscured in governance arrangements, leading to accountability problems (Hambleton 2003, Stewart and Stoker 1995). In partnerships, participation has been partial and unequal, favouring the educated, the wealthy, the ‘responsible’; excluding the inarticulate, the poor, the ‘extremists’ (Geddes 2000, Raco 2000, Swyngedouw 2010, Walters 2004). Participation has also had little effect on decisions because elites, often unelected, set the procedures and

agendas, position themselves as experts, and position others as amateurs (Kearns 1995, Lake 1994, Lowndes and Sullivan 2004). Alternatively, consensus is achieved between stakeholders. This often glosses the key issues. Little changes fundamentally, while political debate narrows (Geddes 2000, Swyngedouw 2009).

We might add that even beyond these well-rehearsed criticisms, the politics of localism repays further critical attention (see also Featherstone et al 2012). As we have seen above, what happens locally is not shaped exclusively or even primarily by local decisions. Localities are produced by distanced relations (Allen and Cochrane 2010). So an effective local politics in defence of local spaces of dependence must operate in multiple spaces of engagement, including supra-local arenas (Cox 1998). The corollary here is that local decisions have effects elsewhere. Just as the local is globally produced, so the global is locally produced (Massey 2005). Massey uses the example of London – a place in and through which globalisation is produced (see Massey 2005, 2007). London is an agent in globalisation. It is a seat of power, a command centre, a heartland and beneficiary of neoliberalism, a node in the production of an increasingly unequal world. London has boomed in the UK at the expense of other regions, creating a brain drain from other regions. The same policies that have supported London have undermined other regions, from high interest rates to prevent inflationary consumer booms in London, to a focus on ‘the knowledge economy’. London has also pulled in workers from Eastern Europe and the Global South. It emits waste and carbon. So there is potentially some purchase through local politics on wider global mechanisms. And there is potentially some local responsibility for the global. For Massey, a global sense of place demands a politics of connectivity or outwardlookingness. This would be a politics questioning whether local residents should take all the decisions pertaining to a particular area, since the effects of such decisions would

likely exceed the borders of that area. It would be a local politics thinking beyond the local: “a politics *of place beyond place*” (ibid: 15).

Neither of these complications – that localities are both produced by and productive of globalisation and the global – are recognised in the localism of the Coalition Government. Instead, the plan is for more of the same: local governance through partnerships. There is, however, a concern to differentiate current localism from what has gone before. Writing in *The Guardian*, Eric Pickles was concerned to do this regarding planning policy (Pickles 2011c: no p. n.):

We want to take the power out of the hands of lawyers and bureaucrats and put it back in the hands of local people. We are getting rid of John Prescott’s regional strategies and housing targets. The local plans that councils draw up together with residents will hold greater sway than ever.

He was also concerned to differentiate his own localism in a speech to the Queen’s Speech Forum (2011d: no p. n.):

When people ask me about my priorities, I have three very clear priorities: localism, and we’ll weave that into everything we do from parks to finance to policy. My second priority is localism, and my third is ... localism. [...] Because we like the folks. We don’t think we know better than they do. And we trust them to know what’s best for them. So we are determined to wrest control from the bureaucrats, the quangos, and central government departments.

If the localism of the Coalition Government differs from New Labour’s localism, it is because moves have been made to free local government from central and regional control, local government funding has been cut, and local variation in service provision is viewed as a problem only in certain policy areas, with economic incentives replacing targets and inspection as the preferred solution to this problem. One way of presenting these differences

is to emphasise the central role of unelected professionals during New Labour's period of government (the "bureaucrats" and "quangos" mentioned by Pickles). But two points are worth noting in this regard. Firstly, the Coalition Government has established its own expert and, for the most part, unelected organisations operating at scales within and beyond the local government area (e.g. Academies, Free Schools, Local Enterprise Partnerships). Secondly, while accusing New Labour of paternalism, the Coalition Government is effectively setting out to replace one form of anti-politics with another.

Schedler (1997) conceptualises politics as activity defining societal problems and conflicts (i.e. delineating the realm of common affairs), elaborating binding decisions (i.e. managing these common affairs), and establishing its own rules. He goes on to identify two forms of anti-political thought. One works to dethrone, banish, and abolish politics so that politics becomes unemployed and the public sphere becomes vacated. Here, collective problems might be replaced by self-regulating orders (e.g. the market). Plurality, difference, and the need for coordination might be replaced by uniformity (e.g. 'the people' of populism). Contingency and the availability of alternatives might be replaced by fate and necessity (e.g. 'the will of the market'). And political power and authority might be replaced by a particular notion of individual liberty (e.g. Hobbes's view of life as solitary and short). Schedler's second form of anti-political thought works, by contrast, to conquest, colonise, and invade politics so that its communicative rationality becomes subverted and replaced by another form of rationality from another societal subsystem or non-political mode of action (e.g. money and the market, or science and technology, or entertainment and advertising, or the family and intimacy). This gives us: instrumental anti-politics – when technocratic experts colonise the space of politics; amoral anti-politics – when the space of politics is colonised by utility-maximising, rational, private individuals; moral anti-politics – when

moral absolutists colonise the space of politics; and aesthetic anti-politics – when the space of politics is colonised by theatrical performances.

In defining politics as communicative interaction between interest groups and oriented towards collective decisions, Schedler follows a long tradition of thinking about politics and anti-politics – running from Aristotle (see Weiler 1997) to Crick (1962) to Stoker (2006) – that views politics as deriving from certain conditions in which different interest groups confront each other across complex moral terrains, and views politics as involving content appropriate to such conditions: tolerating, canvassing, listening, discussing, negotiating, conciliating, compromising, and so on. This is a different tradition, though with some overlap (see Clarke 2011), to that followed by scholars currently using the term ‘post-politics’. Such scholars include radical philosophers and theorists from Rancière to Mouffe, Žižek, Nancy, and Badiou, whose arguments have been developed particularly powerfully by Eric Swyngedouw (2009, 2010, 2011). They emphasise the participatory and antagonistic qualities of politics, defining post-politics as activity or situations in which certain participants and topics get excluded from discussions in order that consensus might be reached between the rest. This often happens in contemporary forms of governance among disciplined stakeholders (i.e. those prepared to start from shared assumptions like neoliberal capitalism, parliamentary democracy, humanitarianism, and cosmopolitanism – Swyngedouw 2009). Examples include governance for sustainability in Brussels (Oosterlynk and Swyngedouw 2010) and Taipei (Raco and Lin 2012), international discussions about climate change (Kythreotis 2012; Swyngedouw 2009, 2010), and spatial planning in England (Allmendinger and Haughton 2012). Exclusions of participants or topics for discussion mean that little ever changes through such processes of governance and consensus. The existing arrangement of things – ‘the police’ (Rancière 2004) – proceeds as before. Indeed, this can be the point of such processes. Raco and Lin (2012) provide the example of Taipei, where

collaboration around sustainability works to control an emerging civil society while at the same time deflecting attention from rising social inequalities and environmental degradation. Yet politics, in the radical tradition of Rancière, Swyngedouw, and others, is meant to change things for the better and not just to keep the peace in plural societies (Castree et al 2010) – the latter being a valid endpoint of classical, Aristotelian political theory and practice.

In this paper, by contrast, we use the term ‘anti-politics’ and draw on the tradition to which it belongs for three main reasons. First, their definition of politics includes multiple styles of human interaction – antagonism but also toleration, discussion, negotiation, conciliation etc. – that seem valid in plural societies where knowledge is partial and moral issues are complex. There is a danger that too much toleration and conciliation of existing privileged groups leads to conservation in already unjust societies. But this danger is not so great as to justify narrowing “proper politics”, “true politics”, or “genuine politics” (Swyngedouw 2009) to only antagonistic styles of human interaction: dissent, critique, polemic, interruption, division, disagreement, conflict, uncompromising attempts to universalise demands, and so on (ibid). So, for example, in her discussion of community politics in London, Jane Wills highlights its political potential in ways that move beyond such interpretations of politics (Wills 2012). Second, as heuristic, the literature on anti-politics provides a more extensive and useful range of alternatives to politics. Governance is one of these alternatives. But others include those listed by Schedler and outlined above (abolished politics, colonised politics, instrumental anti-politics, amoral anti-politics, aesthetic anti-politics etc.), or those listed by Crick (1962) including the anti-politics of ideologues, the anti-politics of direct democrats, and the anti-politics of technocrats. Finally, the term ‘anti-politics’ does not imply, whether intentionally or not, a periodisation of history into a properly political past of antagonism and progress, and a post-political present of consensus and conservation – even if this post-political present gets punctuated by conflict expressed in

other ways e.g. revolts, rebellions, and insurgencies in Athens, London, Tunis, Cairo etc. (Swyngedouw 2011); or protest movements in Taipei (Raco and Lin 2012); or judicial reviews of planning decisions in England (Allmendinger and Haughton 2012). Instead, if anything, the term ‘anti-politics’ implies an active strategy more than a passive condition, mobilised at specific and various historical conjunctures, that is anti-political in one respect (by abolishing or colonising Aristotelian politics), yet determinedly political in another, serving to advance the interests of certain groups by means other than crude violence.

This framework of anti-politics allows us to see New Labour’s localism as anti-political because although it recognised the preconditions for politics (the plurality of society and the need for collective decisions among different interest groups), it replaced the content of politics – the discussion and negotiation associated with Local Authority committees, for example – with expertise and technology in the form of Local Authority chief executives, Government Offices in the Regions, the Audit Commission, central targets etc. (perceived to be more efficient and also, by mobilising objective evidence in place of subjective interests, more effective). The localism of the Coalition Government, by contrast, denies even the preconditions for politics. It imagines a nation of autonomous and internally homogeneous localities. Then it replaces the content of politics – canvassing of majority but also minority opinions, listening and discussing, conciliating and compromising etc. – with two things: markets, through which localities are thought to get the services they deserve – the services a critical mass of local people are prepared to support by user-fees or volunteer-hours (e.g. parks or libraries or swimming pools or anything covered by a combination of local government funding cuts, limited statutory duties for Local Authorities, the ‘Community Right to Buy’ local assets, and the Asset Transfer Fund); and, secondly, technologies of direct democracy such as referenda, through which majorities, however slight, might control

council tax levels or housing development (in the latter case, via the ‘Community Right to Build’).

In the quotations above, Pickles accuses New Labour of Schedler’s second form of anti-politics: the colonisation of the space of politics by the instrumental rationality of technology and expertise – by “lawyers”, “bureaucrats”, and “quangos”. Incidentally, he might have also mentioned Blair’s moral absolutism and theatrical performances. But in place of New Labour’s instrumental anti-politics, Pickles offers only Schedler’s first form of anti-politics: the abolition of the public sphere of politics so that uniform populations and self-regulating orders – “the folks” who “know what’s best for them” – are left to run their course. We have seen how this latter form of anti-politics fails to recognise the translocal geography of “the folks” and the radical plurality of localities – such that “folks” often differ by subject position and fail to agree on “what’s best for them”. It also overestimates the ability of local actors to shape their locality in a world of distanced relations. Therefore, we can expect the anti-political vision of the Coalition Government fairly quickly to find itself confronted by a given political reality of diverse interest groups, complex moral terrains, and needs for collective decisions both within and between localities. We can expect this anti-political strategy to have its moment, but not to become an enduring condition.

6. Conclusions: Localism in Theory and Practice

Localism is a fuzzy, political concept with many uses and meanings. It describes a positive disposition towards the decentralisation of political power – because of the supposed connection between decentralisation and democracy, effective government, freedom, and community. Alternatively, it describes the actual decentralisation of political power, either to elected local government or to other bodies presumed to be local e.g. partnerships, neighbourhood organisations, community groups, civil-society organisations, private-sector

firms, public-service professionals, or individuals. Third, localism describes the fight for locality by locally dependent people – using any effective space of engagement (from the local to the global). Lastly, it describes the production and use of locality as a space of engagement to a variety of ends, including: regulation of the capitalist economy; efficient organisation of welfare provision; and government of the population.

The uses and meanings of localism have been explored in this paper with a focus on localism's relationship to liberalism and decentralisation, and the geographies and politics of localism. This has been done using a case study of localism in practice: the localism of the UK's Coalition Government. So we are left with the beginnings of a critical assessment of this particular localism (as it relates to comparable localisms). The Coalition conceives of localism as a solution to the problems of advanced liberal governance because it promises the breakup of bureaucracy and seems to undermine big politics, moving beyond class politics, serving to responsabilise communities, and making it easier to introduce choice through market-based delivery. But Localism is becoming a problem of government for the Coalition, as it was for New Labour. The problem today is less one of general principle (e.g. equity of service provision across space) and more one of control over certain particularly sensitive policy areas e.g. taxation, economic development, and access to education and housing. In addition, this problem is being addressed not by targets and inspections but by economic incentives. Furthermore, localism here works ideologically to obscure the agency and responsibility of localities in a globalised world. It also looks set to exacerbate recent trends towards governance, partnerships, unbundled public services, and fragmented localities. Finally, this localism seeks to replace New Labour's technocratic government, but it appears to be doing so with just another form of anti-politics: naïve, populist liberalism.

These are only the beginnings of a critical assessment of the localism of the Coalition Government. History teaches that governmental intentions rarely translate straightforwardly

into governmental effects. This is because governments tend to lack coherence – say between the Treasury and the Department of Communities and Local Government. Rationalities, mentalities, and programmes of government also tend to lack coherence – say between centralisation and decentralisation, or between representative and participatory democracy. Meanwhile, people tend to resist change and attempts to govern their conduct because they have interests vested in the status quo and/or because they are persons capable of reasoning and seeing the flaws of proposed developments. So there is more research to be done on how English localism translates in the coming years from policy document and legislation to everyday practice and experience.

Such research might take the conceptual insights from this paper as starting points. First, localism can usefully be thought of as spatial liberalism. In the case of recent and current British politics, it is not appropriate to measure localism against some ideal of absolute decentralisation, nor to dismiss it for being rhetorical, ideological cover regarding some project of complete centralisation. Rather, in practice, such localism describes the assembly and liberation of rational and responsible localities to act in the interests of general security and wellbeing. This involves decentralisation where possible, government of local actors through liberal technologies where appropriate, and government through illiberal technologies or centralisation where deemed necessary. The lens of spatial liberalism, then, brings into focus at least two key questions for any localism. What is its conception of rational and responsible local action? And what are its preferred technologies of government for ensuring such action?

The second insight is that localism is not straightforwardly local in terms of its geographies and politics. Localities are neither coherent nor autonomous. They are heterogeneous, contested, and produced through distanced relations. Local actors often have complex institutional geographies, embedded as they are in partnerships, associations,

groups, and contracts stretching down into neighbourhoods and out into other localities, regions, and countries. Such complexity poses challenges for tracing democratic accountability and ensuring democratic participation. To be effective, localism in defence of locally dependent groups must operate in multiple spaces of engagement. To be responsible, localism must know and regulate its effects on distant places and people.

The final insight is that localism may be anti-political in at least two distinct ways. If politics describes activity assuming the simultaneous existence of different interest groups within a territorial unit, and activity involving formalised modes of canvassing, listening, discussing, negotiating, conciliating, compromising, and collective decision-making, then localism can evade or colonise politics, replacing the communicative rationality of politics with another rationality e.g. the instrumental rationality of science and technology.

Alternatively, localism can seek to abolish politics, imaging uniform populations where plurality and difference exist, and imaging self-regulating orders in place of collective problems. The latter is anti-political in one respect, in that central assumptions and content associated with Aristotelian politics are denied; but political in another respect, since it involves strategic action to further particular interests in society.

Notes

1. Annex A of the Localism Bill (HM Government 2010b) details those parts of the Bill applying to England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. None apply to Northern Ireland. Hardly any apply to Scotland (a rare example is abolition of the Infrastructure Planning Committee, which previously covered Scottish infrastructure planning). A few apply to Wales (e.g. requirements that Local Authorities publish information on senior pay, and provisions for Local Authorities to lower Business Rates, and for communities to retain more of the Community Infrastructure Levy). The vast majority of the Localism Bill, and the localism agenda more broadly, applies only to England.
2. These plans translated into referenda in ten English cities on 3 May 2012. Only one of those cities, Bristol, voted for the mayoral system.
3. Council Tax is a residential property tax collected by Local Authorities in England, Scotland, and Wales to part-fund local government services.

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Figure 1: Major Legislative and Policy Documents Relevant to Localism, May 2010 to November 2011

Date	Document	Relevant content
20/05/10	The Coalition: Our Programme for Government	Plans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies; • to give communities the right to bid and take over local state-run services; • to give residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue and the power to veto excessive council tax increases; • to give greater financial autonomy to local government and community groups; • to create Local Enterprise Partnerships (business-led bodies to promote local economic development); • to decentralise the planning system; • to freeze council tax for at least one year.
26/05/10	Academies Bill	Plans to expand the proportion of Academies.
22/06/10	Budget	Compensatory funding (£650m) made available for local authorities that freeze council tax (equivalent to a rise of approx. 2.5%).
30/06/10	Public Services (Social Enterprise and Social Value Bill)	Plans to require public authorities (e.g. local authorities) to have regard to economic, social, and environmental wellbeing in connection with public services contracts (to encourage contracting out to social enterprises).
27/07/10	Academies Act	More schools allowed to become academies.
20/10/10	Comprehensive Spending Review 2010-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revenue funding to local government cut by 26% in real terms (excluding schools, fire, and police). • Ring-fencing of all revenue grants ended from 2011-12 (except school grants and new public health grant from 2013). • £4 billion of grants in 2010-11 rolled into formula grant (the grant redistributed from the central pot of business rates the Treasury collects from local authorities), reducing over 90 core revenue grants (e.g. Race Equality, Concessionary Travel, Animal Health Enforcement, AIDS support) to fewer than 10 (e.g. New Homes Bonus, Council Tax Freeze Grant, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Administration Grant, PFI Grant). • Capital funding to local government cut by 45% in real terms. • £650m made available to local government to encourage freezing of Council tax in the coming year. • Council tax capping power retained until 2012-13 (when residents should be able to veto council tax rises themselves using referenda). • Schools budget increased by 0.1% in real terms each year, including £2.5bn for Pupil Premium (to follow pupils from deprived backgrounds). Capital funding for schools cut by 60% in real terms. • Additional social care funding of £530m in 2011-12, rising to £1bn in 2013-14. • Social housing budget halved. • Roads budget for non-national roads cut by 8%. • Annual flood defence and coastal erosion budget cut from £763m to £500m. • Community Budgets to be introduced in 16 areas from April 2011. The intention is to introduce them in all areas from 2013. These first 16 will focus on families with complex needs. • New Homes Bonus to be introduced from April 2011 (with central government matching the increased council tax from new housing stock for six years, and a premium for 'affordable homes' of 36%).
28/10/10	Local Economic Growth White Paper	Plans to replace Regional Development Agencies with Local Enterprise Partnerships. These should reflect local economies in their size and shape (e.g. the Leeds City Region or the Thames Valley). They should be free to experiment (i.e. free from central government guidance). They should be

		led by the private sector (in partnership with other sectors). They should bid into the £1.4bn Regional Growth Fund.
24/11/10	Education White Paper	Plans to expand the proportion of Academies and Free Schools (funded by central government; freed from local government control; able to vary the school day, the curriculum, and pay and conditions for staff).
01/12/10	Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill	Plans to abolish police authorities and for police commissioners to be directly elected.
01/12/10	Public Health White Paper	Plans to give local government the majority of £4bn to address public health issues like smoking, obesity, and excessive drinking (through transport, housing, education, and other policies and services).
07/12/10	Modernising Commissioning Green Paper	Plans to open up public services to civil society organisations and SMEs using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportions (a certain proportion of public services should be provided independently); • A Right to Challenge (for civil society organisations to challenge local authority delivery); • A Right to Buy (for civil society to buy community assets); • A Right to Provide (for public sector workers to form mutuals and take over service delivery); • A Civil Society Red Tape Taskforce (targeting barriers to participation in public service markets such as short tender deadlines or long and complex contracts); • A Big Society Bank (helping civil society organisations to access resources); • Community Budgets (where commissioning is done by local public service partnerships); • Personal Budgets (where commissioning is done by individuals); • A Right to Control (where commissioning is done by individuals in receipt of direct payments).
13/12/10	Localism Bill	Plans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘To lift the burden of bureaucracy’ by abolishing Regional Strategies and the Standards Board regime; • ‘To empower communities’ by introducing a General Power of Competence for local authorities, a Community Right to Buy local assets threatened with closure, and Neighbourhood Plans; • ‘To increase local control of public finance’ by introducing Council Tax referenda, allowing local authorities to discount business rates, and requiring local authorities to allocate a proportion of Community Infrastructure Levy income back to the neighbourhood level; • ‘To diversify the supply of public services’ by introducing a Community Right to Challenge the running of services, and a Community Right to Buy local assets; • ‘To open up government to public scrutiny’ by requiring local authorities to make annual statements about salaries for senior staff and to publish information on items of expenditure over £500; • ‘To strengthen accountability to local people’ by introducing local referenda on any issue for which a petition can be generated, and elected mayors for England’s 12 largest cities outside London.
13/12/10	Local Government Finance Settlement 2011-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total formula grant cut by 12.1%. • Total funding for local government (including e.g. schools grant) cut by 2.7%. • Spending power (formula grant + NHS support + council tax receipts) cut by an average of 4.4%. The worst hit councils get cuts of 8.9%. • £650m provided as compensation if councils freeze council tax. • Number of specific grants cut from c100 to 12. With a couple of exceptions (schools and public health), none of these are ring-fenced. • Local authorities encouraged to manage cuts by sharing services, cutting out waste, improving procurement, bringing senior pay under

		control, and tapping reserves.
19/01/11	Health and Social Care Bill	Plans to give local government responsibility for health improvement, and for this responsibility to be discharged via Health and Wellbeing Boards (bringing together local authorities, GP consortia, and other relevant bodies).
23/03/11	Budget	11 Local Enterprise Zones established (embedded within Local Enterprise Partnerships; incorporating tax breaks for businesses, simplified planning rules, and super-fast broadband; benefiting from retained business rates for 25 years).
11/07/11	Open Public Services White Paper	<p>Plans to make public services more responsive and efficient by introducing more:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice (using Direct Payments, Personal Budgets, and Entitlements); • Decentralisation (to local authorities, neighbourhood councils, community groups etc.); • Providers (public, private, and voluntary sector); • Access (using the Pupil Premium and New Homes Bonus); • Accountability (using elected Police and Crime Commissioners, elected mayors, local referenda, and publication of contract and spending data). <p>Plans for three types of public service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual services (e.g. education, adult social care, childcare, housing support – controlled by individuals using Direct Cash Payments, Personal Budgets, Vouchers, Entitlements, and performance data); • Neighbourhood services (e.g. maintenance of the local public realm, leisure and recreation facilities, community safety – controlled by elected councils at the local or neighbourhood level using the Community Right to Buy, the Community Right to Challenge, Neighbourhood Planning, and Community Budgets); • Commissioned services (e.g. tax collection, prisons, welfare to work – controlled by government at the national or local level using commissioning, Payment by Results, and the General Power of Competence for local government).
15/11/11	Education Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some duties removed from schools. • Academies programme extended to provision for 16-19 year olds and alternative provision for the most vulnerable children.
15/11/11	Localism Act	See Localism Bill above (no major amendments).

Figure 2: Other Legislative and Policy Announcements Relevant to Localism, May 2010 to November 2011

Date	Document	Relevant content
09/06/10	DCLG press release	Minimum housing density targets removed from Planning Policy Statement 3.
25/06/10	DCLG press release	Comprehensive Area Assessments abolished.
22/07/10	Written Statement by Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, to Parliament	Plans to abolish Government Offices in the Regions.
13/08/10	DCLG press release	Plans to abolish the Audit Commission.
31/08/10	DCLG press release	Plans to allow local authorities to abolish outdated bylaws and to introduce new ones (without consulting Whitehall).
20/09/10	DCLG press release	Plans to allow local authorities to decide on their own system of governance (Mayor, Leader and Cabinet, or Committee).
21/09/10	DCLG press release	Plans for a Barrier Busting Team to help community groups to establish local projects.
22/09/10	DCLG press release	Plans to introduce a Community Right to Build (where housing developments receiving support of more than 75% in local referenda will automatically receive planning permission).
24/09/10	DCLG press release	Plans to postpone council tax revaluation in England until after the next general election.
12/10/10	Speech by Grant Shapps, Minister for Housing and Local Government, to the Housing Market Intelligence Conference	Plans to replace central house-building targets with a New Homes Bonus (rewarding communities who approve house building in their localities with extra funding).
12/10/10	Speech by Grant Shapps to the Housing Market Intelligence Conference	Plans to reduce Building Regulations.
13/10/10	Written Statement by Eric Pickles to Parliament	Local authorities and their partners given permission to amend or drop any of their 4700 Local Area Agreement targets. Where they choose to keep targets, central government will no longer monitor performance against them. No further LAAs will need preparing from April 2011 (when existing agreements expire).
13/10/10	Written Statement by Eric Pickles to Parliament	Plans to replace the National Indicator Set (c200 indicators) with a smaller list of data required from local government by central government.
19/01/11	Speech by Eric Pickles to <i>The Economist's</i> Liveable Cities Conference	Plans to reform business rates, allowing local authorities to borrow against future business rates (Tax Increment Financing), and, eventually, to keep more of their business rates.
09/02/11	Written Statement by Eric Pickles to Parliament	Plans to cap Council Tax for 2011-12 in all cases of 'excessive increase'.
11/02/11	DCLG press release	New Publicity Code for local government (to control the circulation and content of local government newspapers).
16/02/11	DCLG press release	Local authorities encouraged to give councillors a vote on senior officer salaries over £100,000.
01/03/11	Speech by Eric Pickles to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations Annual Conference	Local authorities encouraged (under threat of statutory force) to cut funding and contracts to voluntary and community groups only in proportion to other local government cuts, to consult with such groups prior to making cuts, and to provide such groups with three months' notice of cuts.
01/03/11	DCLG press release	Asset Transfer Unit established with £1m for 2011-12. Plan is to help communities and voluntary sector groups to take over buildings and services from local government (e.g. libraries or parks) and to generate income with them and to become financially sustainable.
08/03/11	DCLG press release	Plans to reduce the number of statutory duties of local authorities.
23/03/11	Written Statement by Eric	Local Authority Two-Tier Code revoked (meaning that private

	Pickles to Parliament	firms which take on council services no longer need to respect the terms of council workers transferred across nor to employ new workers on the same terms as those transferred across).
10/05/11	Speech by Grant Shapps to the Home Builders Federation Annual Lunch	Plans to reduce the number of pages of Planning Law and Guidance (from c1000 to 52).
25/08/11	DCLG press release	Small business rate relief doubled, October 2011 to September 2012.
29/09/11	DCLG press release	Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency published. Councils encouraged to publish details of contracts, tenders, performance, salaries, and assets.
30/09/11	DCLG press release	Weekly Collections Support Scheme launched. £250m available to councils restoring weekly collections of household waste.
03/10/11	Speech by George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer, to the Conservative Party Conference	£800m available to councils freezing council tax in 2012-13 (equivalent to a rise of approx. 2.5%).
07/10/11	DCLG press release	Plans to reform local government pensions. Employee contributions will rise. Accrual rates will change. Retirement will be later in life.
31/10/11	DCLG press release	Plans to allow councils to remove council tax relief on second homes and empty homes (so long as they use the proceeds to lower council tax in general).
07/11/11	Written Statement by Eric Pickles to Parliament	Growing Places Fund launched. £500m available to Local Enterprise Partnerships for infrastructure projects to boost local economic growth.