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'Levelling Up' and local governance capacity in Bristol and Stoke on Trent

Levelling up?

- *"In policy terms, the government has declared the objective of 'levelling up', although nobody knows what this means".*

  (Tomaney and Pike, 2020).

Levelling up?

- *"When I say level up, I don't mean attacking our great companies. I don't mean impeding the success of London. I believe in building people up, giving everyone growing up in this country the opportunity they need, whoever you are, whatever your ethnicity, whatever your background"*

(Boris Johnson, Dudley Speech, June 2020)

BUILD BUILD BUILD

Levelling up?

- The importance of multiple 'capitals'

  (physical, human, intangible, financial, institutional, social)

- *"Every capital is high in places which grow strongly and sustainably … they experience a 'Medici effect': a self-reinforcing cycle of strength, economically, financially and culturally"*

  (DLUHC, 2022, p.50)

Levelling up?

- Leadership is *"the yeast that lifts the whole mattress of dough, the magic sauce, the ketchup of catch-up"*

  (Boris Johnson, Coventry Speech, July 2021)

- 12 "Missions"

Bristol: Context

- Complacent city
- Lacking institutional capacity to get things done
- Successful city
- High levels of capitals
- But social and economic inequalities
- Response: One City Plan
- Strong networks/collaboration
- Leadership changes
- Narratives of creative/green/smart city

Bristol: Post austerity

- Focus on agglomeration economies/key high-end clusters

- Focus on meaningful functional space – city-region

- Leadership of place essential to exploit 'capitals' to best effect

- Leadership constrained/fragmented

Bristol: Post austerity

- Bidding for (small) pots of levelling up money compared with past government/regeneration money

- Regeneration in 'favoured places' rather than by need

- Entrepreneurial (with social/environmental dimensions)

- Rhetoric of 'loony left' (taking down statues, etc.)

Stoke on Trent: Context

- A 'growth laggard' (Martin et al, 2014)

- 'Economically isolated' (Bolton and Hildreth, 2013)

- An 'overshadowed city' (Pike et al, 2016)

- A 'place that doesn't matter'? (Rodriguez-Pose, 2018)

Stoke on Trent: Post austerity

- Deconstruction of regeneration policy networks
- Fragmented local business / community sector
- Opportunistic, resource led decision making
- Resilience of local parochialism

Conclusions

- White Paper makes assumptions about attributes of place, and role in driving growth

- Two (very contrasting) examples demonstrate challenges of this approach

- Bristol: succeeds 'in spite of itself' – local economic advantages but weak governance – 'capitals' partially in evidence

- Stoke – most of this wholly absent – a 'place left behind'