Re-Stating the Post-Political: Depoliticization, Social Inequalities, and City-Region Growth

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Figure 1: Manufacturing a Sheffield Post-Political Consensus

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Table 1. Six Dimensions of the State, Crisis Tendencies, and Depoliticization Processes

State Dimension	Definition	SRA Linkage	Crisis Aspects	Depoliticization Processes: strategies, tools and tactics
Governmental dimensions capturing institutional relations within the political and policy system				
Mode of Representation ***(Representational Regime)***	These give social forces access to the state apparatus and to its capacities	Unequal access to state Unequal ability to resist at distance from state Unequal capacity to shape, make, and implement decisions	Crisis of representation	Reordering of representational regimes, differentially incorporating new interests (forms of 'on the scene') into the state apparatus to promote and reworking forces and capacities to exclude interests
Mode of Articulation ***(Internal Structures of the State)***	Institutional architecture of the level and branches of the state	Unequal capacity to shape, make, and implement decisions	Crisis of institutional integration	Reorganising the state apparatus through administration/self-administration, government/governance, hollowing-out/filling-in, re- and decentralisation, and steering the distribution of power via institutional fixes and balancing geographical divisions (forms of 'collibration')
Modes of Intervention ***(Patterns of Intervention)***	Modes of intervention inside the state and beyond it	Different sites and mechanisms of intervention for deferring, displacing and transferring crisis from the economic to the political form (from the market to the administrative system) and political moments thereafter	Rationality crisis	Reworking state intervention and the policy field by delimiting mechanisms: public/private and (reprivatizing), universal/selective, quality/competition, and inclusive/exclusion, etc. Using spatio-temporal fixes to alter patterns of state intervention and policy-making repertoires spatially and temporally
Societal dimensions capturing the wider social relations and discursive domains				
Social Basis of the State ***(social bases of state power)***	Institutionalized social compromise	Uneven distribution of material and symbolic concessions to the 'population' in order to secure support for the state, state projects, specific policy sets, and hegemonic visions	Crisis of the power bloc Disaffection with parties and the state Civil unrest, civil war, revolution	Changes to the state's social and 'spatio-temporal selectivity' to include/exclude or privilege/disprivilege some coalition possibilities and interest groups, promote or ameliorate uneven development
State Project ***(accumulation strategy and state strategies)***	Secures operational unity of the state and its capacity to act	Linked to modes of intervention. Overcomes improbability of unified state system by orienting state agencies and agents	Legitimation crisis	Reworking the balance between forms of government, governance, and 'meta-governance' (the governance of governance) to provide compromise coherences or flexible policy-making repertoires/shifting policy paradigms
Hegemonic Vision ***(hegemonic project)***	Defines nature and purpose of the state for the wider social formation	Provides legitimacy for the state, defined in terms of promoting common good, etc.	Crisis of hegemony	'Semiosis' (sense and meaning making), 'construal' through 'spatial imaginaries' (identification of problems/goals/blame and mobilisation of solutions/visions) Scientisation, use of think-tanks, assemblages of 'experts', new intellectuals

Source: Columns 1-4 (Jessop, 2016: Table 3.1, page 58), column 5 (authors addition)

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Table 2. Sheffield City Region: Social Regulation, Reproduction and Political Struggle

Key Policy Interventions	Tensions and Conflicts	Agency/(key actors) and Sites of Negotiation and Struggle
City Region Growth Strategy, Northern Powerhouse	Growth versus distribution and inclusion, Funding for Devolution deals	Within Executive Board of Combined Authority, local authority interests on Board around benefits of growth, Northern Powerhouse and LA articulating inclusion agendas, Trade union and some LA pressure mobilization around nature of growth agenda (national and regional TUC)
Apprenticeships and Skills, Area Reviews	Cuts to skills funding, including Adult Skills Budget, European funded skills programmes, extent of employer buy-in in face of recession, quality of provision and limited access to advanced skills by disadvantaged groups to skills	Skills providers especially Further Education Colleges, (playing an advocacy role for disadvantaged groups), Work Programme providers, trade unions negotiating funding gaps in work representation around apprenticeship quality
Welfare to Work and Benefit Conditionality	Impact of Austerity increasing labour market marginalization and working poor, Cuts in funding and PBR model, negative impact of conditionality and sanctions, delays in benefit, tough claimant regime	Work Programme sub-contractors, Local authority employment and anti-poverty strategies and role of anti-poverty coalitions, disability rights organisations advice services (using the benefit appeal system), Voluntary and community sector and trade union advocacy oppositional politics against cuts mobilizing and representing disadvantaged groups
Social, Health and Community Support Services	Impact of Austerity on both local authorities and disadvantaged groups, Local authority conflicts with public sector trade unions	Local authorities, front line services and Work Programme providers, NHS providers, Advice Services – advocacy for benefit claimants, Trade union opposition to cuts in services and jobs

Source: author analysis

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Table 3. Sheffield City Region Income changes (£m): Local Authority Spending and Welfare Cuts (2015)

Local Authority Area	Total spending 2010 (£million)	Total spending 2014 (£million)	Reductions 2010-2014 (£million)	Total est. annual welfare cuts (2015) (£million)
Barnsley	196	167	29	86.6
Bassetlaw	20.8	12	8.8	35
Bolsover	13.3	10.3	3	27.0
Chesterfield	21.7	13.5	8.2	35.1
Derbyshire Dales	11.8	7.7	4.0	13.6
Doncaster	528	371	157	104.8
NE Derbyshire	16.8	10.4	6.4	13.6
Rotherham	484	399	85	86.8
Sheffield	970	829	141	162.6
Totals			442.4	Approx. 577

Sources: For Local Authority Spending (2010-2014):

http://ig.ft.com/sites/2015/local-cuts%20checker/" \l "E08000026ZZE08000026 [accessed 14th June 2016]

For welfare reforms: Data provided by Christina Beatty relate to annual changes

Note 2015/2016 local authority spending settlement and reductions are not included in this figure.

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Re-Stating the Post-Political:

Depoliticization, Social Inequalities, and City-Region Growth

Abstract

This paper argues that city-region building debates and relatedly 'post-political' literatures are missing critical perspectives on the state, particularly the state's continued existence as a social relation and an arena for politics, its role in the regulation of uneven development and the conflicts and struggles that arise from this. The paper brings the state centrally into 'post-political' debates via a critical analysis of the interrelationships between depoliticization and neoliberalism. Focusing on Sheffield (South Yorkshire, England) in the context of devolution and deal-making public policy, the paper explores the seemingly consensual vision-making dynamics of this city region and dissects the tensions around economic governance, welfare austerity and social inequalities to get a handle on the 'post-political' depoliticized state in, and of, contemporary capitalism.

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Re-Stating the Post-Political:

Depoliticization, Social Inequalities, and City-Region Growth

1. Introduction

There has been an increasing focus in recent years on the devolution of economic, environmental, and social policies through city-region building endeavours (Deas, 2014; While et al, 2013). The context to this is, firstly, seeing city regions as the "scale at which principal economic interactions occur" (Storper et al, 2015: 230) and appropriate for territorially demarcating and anchoring functional economic areas, and secondly, as Storper (2013: 4) boldly puts it, "[c]ity-regions are the principal scale at which people experience lived reality" such that collectively city-regional development is "more important than ever". Within this literature there has been a debate around neoliberalism where state restructuring involves major changes in organizational forms and structures with an increasing role for non-state or quasi-state agencies (Swyngedouw, 2011). This is often referred to as a 'destatization' of a series of former (central) state domains, with the transfer of responsibilities to civil society organizations that redefines the state-civil society relationship "through the formation of governance beyond the state" (Swyngedouw, 2005: 1998). This involves increasingly networked forms of governance in policy fields, with an externalization process comprising privatization, contracting-out and deregulation, and service delivery, and public-private partnerships to ensure policy coordination.

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Relatedly, according to 'post-political' approaches, this 'regime' of governance, which operates at different spatial scales and territorial reaches, is increasing the

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amount of actors involved in policy implementation. An array of players, stakeholders and organizations are playing active roles in the transformation of relations between state and market economy by also involving and increasing the influence of corporate interests and the privatization of public services therein (Haughton et al, 2013; MacLeod, 2013). Correlated to this, power is being transferred to, or captured by, an elite formation in terms of political, social, and cultural influences (Crouch, 2004). Rather than promoting democracy, this new 'regime' of politics can undermine it; governance *per se* has bypassed direct elected and representative democracy. Accordingly, the "status, inclusion or exclusion, legitimacy, system of representation, scale of operation and internal or external accountability of such actors takes place in non-transparent, ad hoc, context dependent ways and differs greatly from those associated with egalitarian pluralistic democratic rules and codes" (Swyngedouw 2010: 6). One of the key elements to this approach, then, is the parallel role of *depoliticization*—the narrowing of the boundaries of democratic politics, the displacement strategies used by the state to frame engagement, and the emergence of technocratic and delegated forms of governance (Wood and Flinders, 2014). In the context of neoliberalism, which we discuss below, this process reinforces dominant ideologies around what is possible, restricting or foreclosing those avenues for debate around alternative and critical discourses.

This paper suggests that 'post-political' approaches downplay or ignore forms of crisis-management, governance failure and state failure, and the way state policies and institutions are sites themselves of political mobilization and conflict. The 'post-

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political' literatures can reduce the state to 'the police' (Rancière 1999, 2010)[1] and consequently the state is no longer directly seen as a key arena for struggle and political contestation (Dikeç and Swyngedouw, 2017; Swyngedouw, 2017). We challenge this closure and contend that the state should continue to be seen as a productive arena for performing politics, even, as Harvey points out, "in the midst of immense contemporary skepticism, on both the left and right of the political spectrum" (2013: 153). The state is the 'theatre for the contestation of ideologies', it is the place of the public, and there is no (as yet) credible alternative forum for mass representation, organized accountability, and the expression and enactment of collective solidarity (Glaser, 2015: 30). Put simply, the state needs to be brought back into urban and regional studies.

The paper addresses this enigma with a grounded focus on the politics and struggles of economic development in and across the city region, especially the economic forces acting upon them and the actors engaged in struggles to shape such forces in different ways within the state. Following Cumbers et al (2010:55), we are "interested not just in the overt forms of resistance that emerge at the level of individuals and groups, but also on the daily struggles of workers and their families to ensure their own social reproduction". A key element of the politics of city-region building, in particular in the older industrial areas, has been to give scant recognition

[1] Rancière (1999, 2010) makes a distinction between *politics*, defined as the sheer contingency of any social order, and *police*, defined not as a profession but the internal relations and constituent parts of society that give value to social roles, orders, conducts, and boundaries. Recent interventions in the debate on politicizing the city through urban theory and practice reduce 'the state' and 'policy' to the police, which misses the social and institutional materiality of the state and particularly how depoliticization operates in and through the state (see Beveridge and Koch; Swynedouw, 2017).

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to the underlying trend towards declining growth and productivity, the ongoing brutal logic of labour-market segmentation, marginalization, and flexibilization. Related to these labour-market changes, and an outcome of them, are the shifts in power relations between capital and labour vis-à-vis the weakening of collective bargaining and employment rights, which is creating the conditions for control over work arrangements and the casualization of employment through part-time, temporary and zero-hour jobs (Etherington and Jones, 2016a).

Our analysis traces the localization of welfare restructuring and the new geographies of austerity, alongside the evolving and more media-friendly devolution of skills and employment initiatives. Drawing on the Sheffield City Region (SCR) and the strategic shifts in governance and politics embraced by devolution, we explore the politics of welfare reform and employment policy. We undertake this analysis against a backdrop and context of social inequalities and austerity policies, identifying and analyzing emerging social struggles and their conflicts. The paper discusses city regions as contested 'post-political' spaces and we make connections between the state, depoliticization and neoliberalism.

Following Le Galès (2016), we are interested in the content of, processes and mechanisms within, and limits to, the neoliberal growth model. Section 2 accordingly brings the state centrally into 'post-political' debates via a strategic-relational analysis of the complex interrelationships between state power, depoliticization, and neoliberalism. Section 3 explores the development of the UK Conservative Government's 'devolution revolution' by analyzing the Sheffield City

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Region settlement and the seemingly consensual vision-making dynamics of this outward-looking city region.[2] Section 4 takes issue with this conjecture, suggests devolution is being used to implement austerity cuts, and analyzes struggle and contestation with respect to implementing employment and skills policies in the context of deepening inequalities, policy tensions, governance failure, and repoliticization possibilities. Section 5 discusses the implications of our analysis.

2. Depoliticization, Agency, and the Institutional Materiality of the State

We advocate an approach to the state that provides nuanced insights into political agency, actor relations and interest groups, to illustrate how depoliticization occurs as a consequence of the complex interaction between reflexive subjects. We contend that extending Bob Jessop's strategic-relational approach (SRA) can both accommodate and operationalize this.

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Drawing on the contributions of Gramsci, Poulantzas, and Offe, Jessop (1985, 1990, 2008, 2016) sees the state not as an instrument of capital or class, but as a social relation. The state is a site, product, and generator of struggle itself, and its spatial form is determined by the condensation of political forces that are represented in and through the state apparatus. The state can thus be understood as first, varied apparatuses and boundaries according to its historical and geographical developments as well as its specific conjunctures. However, there is a strategic limit

[2] The research involved: a policy scoping of qualitative and quantitative sources; narrative policy analysis and discourse analysis, undertaken alongside stakeholder mapping to capture both the employment and skills policies flowing through the Sheffield city region as well as actors (policy-makers, practitioners, and stakeholders in general); 30 semi-structured interviews with key actors operating across the SCR; and a focus group involving unemployed participants randomly assigned from records held by Sheffield College.

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to this variation, imposed by the given balance of social forces. Thus, second, the state has differential effects on various political and economic strategies in a way that some are more privileged than others, but at the same time, it is the interaction among these strategies that results in the exercise of state power. Extending Jessop's analysis, we argue that depoliticization is an increasingly important governing strategy for exercising state power, removing the political character of decision-making by privileging certain interests in the state-making process, in turn framing politics and shaping political opportunities. Periodization matters.

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For Jessop (2002, 2016), post-war state intervention can be periodized as a shift from a dominant Keynesian redistributive to a neoliberal market-dominated mode of intervention. This is secured through 'spatiotemporal fixes', whereby the state performs the role of securing the relative stabilization of society by endeavouring to manage the various economic and political contradictions *within* the state system. While the Keynesian-welfare national states of the post-war era were intent on harmonizing the equalization of wealth, population, and infrastructure across national territories, contemporary neoliberal state projects are promoting territorial competitiveness within strategic subnational sites such as city regions, which are to be positioned in turn within global circuits of economic development.

While certain aspects of this entrepreneurial reorientation of local and regional economic policy has occurred from below, as fiscally strained localities and regional states have attempted proactively to attract new sources of investment through the actions of 'new institutional spaces' (Jones, 1999), the current 'new new localism'

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must also be construed as a national state project. Indeed, provoked by hegemonic discourses of globalization and business acumen alongside a political rhetoric of fiscal prudence, national states have actively sought to reduce commitments to universal welfare entitlements and redistributive urban and regional policies in favour of supply-side neoliberal interventions intended to promote technological innovation, labour-market flexibility, and endogenous growth (Jones and Jessop, 2010).

This neoliberal growth strategy should not be seen as an all-encompassing, universal and settled project. As noted above, it is important to highlight the contingent mechanisms or processes in and through which this project is being politically made and contested with "some forms of agency" to avoid "overgeneralizations" (Le Galès, 2016: 168). Following Offe (1984: 37), we favour a "processual" approach, which seeks out the mechanisms that generate events and can highlight developmental and counteracting tendencies.

Burnham provides a useful insight into this when he contends that depoliticization was central to Marx's critique of capitalism and is a key mechanism for the political management of an economy. The existence of the state being, among other things, a 'political' sphere, which presupposes the possibility of a depoliticization of civil society, makes it "clear that the depoliticisation of civil society could only be achieved through bloody legislation against the expropriated—producing a 'class' free from the means of production and 'free' to sell their labour power—a process that could not in essence be more political" (Burnham, 2014: 191). This is

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contemporized by Wood and Flinders (2014: 152), who emphasize that depoliticization is a contingent neoliberal political strategy for managing conflicts and rationalizing economic governance, which exhibits three forms:

- *Governmental depoliticization*: focusing on the switching of issues from the governmental sphere through the 'delegation' of those issues by politicians to arm's-length bodies, judicial structures or technocratic rule-based systems that limit discretion;
- *Societal depoliticization*: involving the transition of issues from the public sphere to the private sphere and focusing on the existence of choice, capacity deliberation and the shift towards individualized responses to collective challenges;
- *Discursive depolitizisation*: the role of language and ideas to depoliticize certain issues and, through this, define them as little more than elements of fate.

Allmendinger and Haughton (2015: 44) also consider that neoliberal state agents deploy three patterns of intervention across these forms for deferring, displacing, and transferring the political moment and containing, albeit temporarily, crises further. By *deferring* the political, the state can enact strategies of deferral of conflict to some future point in time. By *displacing*, the state can shift political problems to other arenas and groups. By *transferring* the political, conflict can be removed from immediate community and representative processes into new, fuzzy

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communities of interest and democratic processes that may not align or map on to experiences of change 'on the ground'.

In short, depoliticitization characterizes the neoliberal political-administrative state system, the operation of which requires a careful unpacking of the "organizational form and sociopolitical bases of the state" (Jessop, 1990: 345). The above accounts offered by Wood and Flinders (2014) and Allmendinger and Haughton (2015) are helpful in signposting the key issues, trends, and emerging dynamics of state intervention, but they give limited conceptual insights into the *processual* operation of the depoliticized state. By contrast, for Jessop, the state is a 'medium and outcome' of *processes* that constitute its many interventions and the terrain of the state is forged through the ongoing engagements between agents, institutions, and concrete political and policy circumstances (Jessop, 2008, 2016). In this approach, there is a need to not only examine where state power takes place (e.g. sites of government and governance), but also how policy and politics are defined by their contents and in situations where choice, capacity for agency, deliberation and social interaction prevail. In short, depoliticization can only be guaranteed through a process of 'repoliticisation' and an assertion of the 'political' in and through the state—underlying the point that both are integral to each other (Jessop 2014). For Jessop, this covers, inter alia:

> "(1) the forms and stakes of normal and/or exceptional politics; (2) the thematisation of issues as controversial, negotiable or consensual; (3) the subjective identity as well as material and ideal interests of political agents;

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> (4) their location within, on the margins of, or at a distance from the state's institutional architecture; and (5) their positioning relative to the front-or back-stage of the political scene … [Governance projects then] may become objects of political contestation as attempts occur to establish, deny, or reframe their relevance to the political field and changing policy agendas. These attempts may involve *reorganizing the integral state* in the shadow of hierarchy and, indeed, serve to enhance state power by exercising influence indirectly and/or at a distance from the state." (Jessop, 2014: 214, emphasis added)

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Jessop's 'integral state in the shadow of hierarchy' has six dimensions, summarized and extended by our analysis in Table 1, which points to how the city-region-state nexus operates not just in relation to the state's organization form and socio-political bases, but also how crises, contradictions, depoliticized politics, and struggles can emerge within a devolved governance framework and create opportunities.

*** Insert Table 1 here ***

As noted in Table 1, the first three dimensions capture the state's institutional relations within the political and policy system. This SRA approach identifies a *mode of representation* to delimit patterns of representation and the state in its inclusive sense. This uncovers the territorial agents, political parties, state officials, community groups, para-state institutions, regimes, and coalitions that are

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incorporated into the state's everyday policy-making practices. Alongside this, Jessop (2016: 66) identifies *modes of articulation*. This is the institutional embodiment of the above and it underscores the distribution of powers through different geographical divisions and departments of the state and its policy systems. This explores the ways in which political strategy helps to create spaces and scales of policy intervention and delivery. Last, Jessop (ibid: 70) introduces *modes of intervention* to analyse the different political and ideological rule systems that govern state intervention. In effect, through depoliticization as a governing strategy, read across these three dimensions of the state, state managers are able to spatially reorganize the state apparatus to retain arm's-length control over crucial economic and social processes, while simultaneously benefiting from the distancing effects of depoliticization. As a form of politics, then, in addition to shielding the government from the consequences of such unpopular policies, depoliticization also shapes market expectations via rationalist assumptions regarding the credibility of policy-making.

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The second set of three dimensions captures the state's 'inner-dwelling' (Jessop, 1990: 345) and the overarching forces in the political and policy system (see Table 1). As any substantive unity that the state possesses only derives from (but can never be guaranteed through) specific political projects, the state's wider social relations are key for securing integration and cohesion. Jessop (2016: 71) introduces the *social basis of the state* to draw attention to the consolidation of the representational regime through civil society, i.e., those social forces outside the political system. Jessop (ibid: 84) adds that just as *accumulation stra*tegies are needed to bring a

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coherence and direction to the circuit of capital, *state projects* are required to bring some guidance and coherence to the manifold activities of the state. Discursive domains are also important for uncovering the internal unity and modes of policy-making and in terms of securing the state's purpose for the wider society. Jessop notes the importance of *hegemonic visions* to examine language and other semiotic codes that enact ideological programmes of action, i.e., how forms of knowledge and discourses become codified and mobilized to advance particular interests (ibid: 86). The construal of *hegemonic projects* (in part through the mobilization of a social base of support within *spatial imaginaries*) can prove decisive in resolving (albeit temporarily and unevenly) the conflicts between particular interests. Depoliticization, read across these three dimensions of the state, thus operates through hegemony-seeking 'discursive institutions' (Fuller, 2017), which establish semantic links between the discursive aims of those seeking to control and the pragmatics of the everyday lives of those subject to such institutions. As these are socially constructed by particular actors and involve the operation of particular broader societal values, these dimensions stress the contingency of political decisions and the inescapable power relations that are involved in depoliticizing contexts (Jessop, 2016: 88–90).

As Newman, however, demonstrates, the construction of 'hegemonic projects' is a highly contested process within and between localities. Negotiating neoliberalism, in what Newman terms 'landscapes of antagonism', thus needs to be contextualized within a 'contradictory field of political forces' where,

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> "the vibrancy of local democracy can serve as a challenge to hegemonic projects ... Landscapes of antagonism are formed (and reformed) through the discursive constitution of new subjects and the orchestration of new lines of antagonism, resistance and alignment ... [and] local governments are both actors in such landscapes of antagonism, with their own interests and political projects, and the mediators of wider struggles in which they seek to privilege some and mitigate others." (Newman 2014: 3298–3299)

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The challenge is to demonstrate these processes and analyze the complex mechanisms shaping emergent forms of regional and urban governance. We undertake this below, focusing on the Sheffield City Region to re-state the post-political, particularly emphasizing the processual dynamics of structure and struggle taking place within the internal organization of the state and state-policy formation.

3. The Politics of Devolution and Welfare-to-Work

In the 1980s, as a result of a prolonged economic crisis, rising unemployment and extensive de-industrialization that was an outcome of the Thatcher Government monetarist and free-market *accumulation strategies*, Sheffield became a focal point of resistance to the Conservative Government's national *state project*. Labour-controlled local authorities took a proactive role in developing alternative *modes of intervention* by prioritizing local economic initiatives (employment and training) to promote a more redistributive and inclusive local state. Between 1979 and 1982, for instance, 45,000 jobs were shed in the core engineering and steel industries within the Sheffield local authority area alone. Added to this, the damaging effects of the

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2008 economic and financial crisis (Townsend and Champion, 2014) and weak economic growth has led to a further 'prosperity gap' of over £1.1 billion due to a combination of economic inactivity, unemployment and low-productivity sectors. Policy-makers have accordingly calculated that Sheffield needs to create around 120,000 jobs to close the gap with the national average by 2024 and "nowhere in the UK grows at this rate for such a sustained period of time" (Sheffield LEP 2014: 22).

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Depoliticization processes have been at work throughout the 1980s and 1990s, deferring, displacing, and transferring the crisis of this economy into more politically manageable *state projects* to promote regional and local economic development. This has been crucial for those seeking to govern uneven spatial development and deal with the political problems arising from this. Sheffield witnessed an ongoing reworking of neoliberal *modes of articulation*, spatially reorganizing the internal structures of the state and patterns of intervention to give unequal access and capacity to shape, make, and implement *state strategy*. Issues of economic management were displaced from the governmental sphere through the 'delegation' of those issues by politicians to arm's-length bodies, judicial structures or technocratic rule-based systems that limit discretion. Shifts within the *mode of representation* saw a raft of private sector-led initiatives being developed, including Training and Enterprise Councils as quasi-devolved bodies to cities and sub-regions charged with developing the skills and training market. Despite there being evidence-based limits to creating an employer-led training market, New Labour continued this depoliticization process via a *hegemonic vision* of promoting employer interests at all costs. Learning and Skills Councils, along with Regional

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Development Agencies (RDAs) and Sector Skills Councils, were charged with coordinating skills strategies across the region. The transitions within and between these new governing arrangements have lacked clarity and accountability, forming part of a broader depoliticized *mode of intervention* aimed at normalizing neoliberalism through the institutionalization of economic paradigms (such as the primacy of the market, deregulation, and privatization) and with central government state managers retaining control and distancing themselves from unpopular policies.

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As noted above, a central element of depoliticization is the rescaling of *modes of intervention* to localities for the 'management' of the social reproduction of labour, reorganising class alliances among dominant class fractions and disorganising subordinate classes and forces, whether through divide-and-rule tactics or through a national-popular interest that transcends particular class interests (Jessop 2014: 214). Sheffield's *state strategy* for tackling unemployment and 'worklessness' is indicative of this and how the depoliticization of the unemployment problem operates. The City Strategy Pathfinder (CSP) pilot, targeted at major de-industrialised conurbations, was accordingly established in 2006 with the primary aims of devolving welfare-to-work programmes for tackling worklessness and integrating employment and skills strategies. The CSP was seen as a vehicle to promote an element of devolved responsibility to local partnerships in delivering pathways and presented as a bottom-up process—partnerships and consortia were formed by local employment services along with local authorities, the private, voluntary and community sectors where there was some discretion given to

innovate with project development. In many respects, a wider Sheffield City Region building project was to emerge from the CSP, which was initially geographically confined to South Yorkshire local authorities and then expanded to the local authorities covering the North East Derbyshire coalfield. In terms of Jessop's (2016) *social basis of the state*, a new institutionalized social compromise was emerging, based around 'multi-city regionalism' (Wachsmuth, 2016). Instead of addressing uneven development within these localities, changes were taking place to the state's 'spatial selectivity' (Jones, 1999; see also Omstedt 2016) for depoliticizing inequality by drawing local government further into the normalization of neoliberalism through the promotion of uneven development between city regions.

The Sheffield City Region Development Programme, which set out how the local authorities believed that by working together and with the business sector as a city region, they could increase the economic output of the area (12.6% by 2016), further embodied and embedded depoliticization through *modes of representation*. The economic context to city-region governance building at this conjuncture is important to understand; one of increasing labour-market inequalities and socioeconomic exclusion as a result of the 2008 recession. Within the SCR, for instance, there are 85,640 people claiming Employment Support Allowance (ESA)/Incapacity Benefit (IB) and 16,090 claiming disability benefits.[3] Furthermore, in-work poverty has become a major issue with significant numbers of people paid below the Living Wage (currently £8.45 an hour). It is not only the rates of pay that are important but also the hours of work. As a result of the scale of (full-time)

[3] See ONS May 2015.

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manufacturing job losses, the SCR has created fewer new full-time jobs in the last growth period when compared to other leading city regions. As highlighted by the Sheffield Independent Economic Review, this difference in the balance of full-time to part-time job creation is one of the key defining features of low-performing city-region areas (Sheffield LEP, 2013, 2016).

Against this low-skills equilibrium backdrop, Sheffield's post-2015 'Devolution Agreement' has been concerned with locally making more with skills and employment—local councils and businesses have been promised the control of a £150 million skills budget (2015–21) for 'building a new skills system' (HM Government, 2015). This 'Devolution Deal', totaling £900 million over other policy areas, builds on previous 'City Deals' as deal-making *state projects* for orienting state agencies and agents, with the difference being the requirement to elect a metro mayor (a representational instance of depoliticization through an appeal to populism) to access devolved economic-development budgets. For Wharton, then Conservative Party Minister for the wider 'Northern Powerhouse' initiative, this positions places like Sheffield as: "local areas [which could] now look forward to real control … devolution has arrived and is here to stay. It will require local business and civic leaders to take ownership … and maintain the momentum of growth" (2016: 8–9). Attempts made to secure further operational unity of the state and its capacity to act for this saw the introduction of new *state projects*, such as a Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), superseding the Yorkshire Forward RDA, without an evaluation of the success of the RDA model of governance (Pike et al, 2016). Legitimacy for LEPs has been secured by further widening the *social basis of*

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the state through local government, albeit "an unstable equilibrium of compromise" (Jessop, 2016: 72), with the creation of a Sheffield City Region Combined Authority (SCRCA).

'SCR2040' is the epitome of a consensual depoliticized call-to-arms vision for the Sheffield City Region (SCR Vision, 2017). Targeted by SCRCA at bolstering support for the devolution deal, Figure 1 captures the press coverage of the *A Better Future Together* prospectus for the Sheffield City Region. Here, the SCRCA, locality education and health bosses unite—booster-style—around the digital, creative and logistics sectors, 'fab-labs', opportunities for a factory 2050 'fourth industrial revolution' based on apprenticeships and innovation districts, and better internal and external connectivity to facilitate agglomeration through competition. This represents a powerful, no-discussion, *hegemonic vision* to legitimize state intervention by framing policy problems and mobilizing support behind a *spatial imaginary* vision (in this case Sheffield as a one-road, high-skills, knowledge-based economy). As this defines the nature and purpose of the state for the wider social formation though, the state apparatus remains the conduit for neoliberalism via "post-politicizing processes … channeled into post-democratic forms of consensual policy-making [which] cannot be questioned" (Haughton et al, 2016: 477). SCR2040 argues that "we cannot leave it to our elected representatives" (SCR Vision, 2017: 24), such partisanship must be cast aside for the "common good". Sheffield's residents are asked *not* to question or debate these issues, but to "read it, decide how they can help … and make a pledge of support" (Moore, 2017: 5) and "back bold decisions" (Mothersole, 2017: 18). By depoliticizing economic choice, SCR2040

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further normalizes neoliberalism. There is no mention of distribution, inequality, or poverty; the liberation of markets and privatization continues at pace.[4] Put bluntly:

> "The new devolution arrangements are not the product of wider public debate in the areas to be affected by them, but instead are the outcomes of 'secret deals' (City Deals, 'Devolution Deals', etc.) between the political and business elites at the national and local levels ... [T]he model of devolution currently on offer is one designed to advance [a] narrowly defined set of business interests with very little democratic scrutiny." (Tomaney, 2016: 550)

*** Insert Figure 1 here ***

A key element of this Devolution Agreement, which has involved little public discussion or debate, is the emerging post-Work Programme (WP) *mode of intervention* between the central government Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and SCRCA partners for piloting changes to and co-designing the future of welfare-to-work programmes to operate at the city-region scale from the end of 2017. The WP was established in 2011 by the former Coalition Government and designed to deliver personalized services via 'private contractor market actors'

[4] Sheffield's Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC), the 'jewel in the crown' (Caborn 2017: 18) of the SCR knowledge-based economy, is located on the former Orgreave Coking Plant site, which featured strongly in the 1980s miners strike. Now renamed 'Waverley', this site is owned and developed by the Harworth Group (Peel Holdings)—a major player in the privatization (with the aid of the British state and European structural funding) of public infrastructure land assets across England (Harrison, 2014)—deploying "state power to further their interests" (Dean, 2009: 12). This is running alongside Boeing's use of Waverley as an emerging military industrial complex.

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(Dean, 2009: 3) to people who have significant barriers to work or who are on long-term sickness benefits. The WP 'contract areas' territorially cut across SCRCA administrative boundaries (as it covers the South Yorkshire contract area and part of the East Midlands contract area), which reinforces the operation and fragmentation of the welfare market by shaping the *internal structures of the state* and *patterns of intervention* to "facilitate the process of neoliberalism through flexibility and variability" (Haughton et al, 2013: 217).

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The localization agenda now involves bringing target groups into employment—those on long-term sickness benefits and with disabilities. This contains a tough medical Work Capability Assessment, which is designed to determine eligibility for sickness benefits such as Employment Support Allowance (ESA). Local authorities also have their own employment and welfare *modes of intervention* to support more marginalized groups at a city-region scale. Sheffield City Council, for instance, operate an Apprenticeship Programme across the SCRCA and other local authorities run a city-region-wide programme (called Ambition) targeting young people and providing support into employment and training.

Devolution and city-region building though is being implicitly used to implement welfare cuts and austerity. The roll-out of Universal Credit (UC), "the biggest change to the welfare system since its creation" (Foley 2017: 3) and one which will affect 69,000 households across Sheffield alone, involves the twin movement of slashing by merging six different benefits with a tapering system linked to in-work benefits and wages designed to 'make work pay'. This requires a more disciplinary and

conditional welfare system through a tougher claimant regime in which sanctions are an integral feature (see below). In turn, 'in-work conditionality' is a central feature of UC, with the requirement for claimants to attain 'earning thresholds' set at the level of effort reasonable for an individual to undertake. Working-age adults are subject to conditionality until they are working full time (35 hours) at National Minimum Wage. If someone is earning below the conditionality cut-off point, they are expected to 'look for work, more work or better paid work' (see HM Government, 2016b). In short, the localization of welfare performs societal depoliticization by transferring aspects of social policy from the (collective) public to the (individualised) private sphere, articulated locally through the changing *internal structures of the state*. As we highlight below, although "the politics of austerity can be interpreted as a long-term strategic offensive designed to reorganize the institutional matrix and balance of forces in favour of capital" (Jessop, 2016: 235), challenges to this are occurring within the state, "exploiting the bloc's fragilities" (ibid: 237).

4. Sheffield City Region Devolution: Depoliticization and Repoliticization Reactions

The dynamic interrelationship between the two processes of depoliticization and repoliticization is appearing in the contemporary rolling out of devolution, which has in turn generated open political conflict and opposition. Three examples demonstrate the importance and role of agency with respect to the state as a social relation, arena of struggle, and the 'theatre for the contestation of ideologies' (Glaser, 2015).

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First, Sheffield City Council organized an event on devolution attended by civil-society leaders, to provide opportunities for critical voices to express concerns around the Northern Powerhouse *state project* (see Sheffield First Partnership, 2016). A round-table discussion and panel session noted the limits to the clustering forces of agglomeration and pointed to geographies of uneven development:

> "The first unanimous issue raised was that of social inequalities, with delegates noting the economic emphasis of the deal and the devolution debate in general, and wondering how devolution will serve to combat inequalities and increase fairness. In particular there were concerns that in discussions on the economy the question of how growth alleviates poverty is often lost. Though delegates agreed that growth is an important contributory factor in improving people's lives, it is not the only one and the links between economic growth and lessening of inequalities need to be drawn more clearly. Relatedly, concerns exist that action is required to address some of the structural inequalities that exist in Sheffield in order to make the most of the opportunities of devolution. Growth will be best achieved if citizens have the opportunity and skills to participate but there is a sense that this is not the case at the moment; for example, delegates asked whether we will create an Advanced Manufacturing Innovation District only to import employees?" (Sheffield First Partnership, 2016: 10)

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Through our research, the voluntary and community sector expressed a similar viewpoint in their response to the devolution deal. According to one source:

> "We also believe there is a case for constructing a 'social deal' to sit alongside the present economic, employment, planning and infrastructure deal. Without this, we are concerned that growth will not be inclusive, and that we may see growing inequalities and the risks that emanate from this despite overall better economic performance." (Voluntary and Community Sector, Interview, 2016)

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Second, the closure of the government's Business Innovation and Skills offices in Sheffield is creating civil-service redundancies and transfers, with resulting demonstrations and strikes (organized by the employment services trade union Public and Commercial Services Union) against this cost-cutting endeavour (under the banner of "Northern Poor House, Not Powerhouse" – see RSA, 2016: 6). The links and tensions between austerity and devolution have indeed surfaced in the Sheffield City Region and this has brought into sharp focus how the 'devolution revolution' (HM Government, 2016a) underpins, manages, and at the same time is threated by, austerity. Table 2 summarizes the dynamics of these processes taking place in and through the state apparatus as an assemblage of social relations.

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Third, the implementation of the extensive welfare market within the Sheffield City Region has raised further issues and tensions around *modes of representation* accountabilities with respect to employment and skills programmes, in particular the Work Programme. The lack of transparency and engagement by WP providers with local actors and partnerships has been seen as a key source of tensions in the decentralisation of welfare-to-work programmes in the UK (Finn, 2015). This is certainly the case within the Sheffield City Region: widespread technocratic criticism of the performance of the WP providers exists and local authorities and agencies express a view that the DWP is not fully aware of what the providers actually deliver. This is indicative of how this output-centred and contractual governance *mode of intervention* limits certain forms of engagement (Raco et al, 2016). As one local authority officer stated:

> "There is no published data on the volume of referrals made to these learning providers, on what their geographic coverage is, or the nature of skills provision and outcomes. The policy-making process and its evaluation aren't known locally within this city region." (Interview, 2016)

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Welfare, Conditionality, Employment and Skills Systems

The impact of welfare reforms on poverty and social inequality has been an intensely contested issue at the national level (see HM Government, 2016b) and these tensions have been deeply experienced in the Sheffield City Region. Several initiatives illustrate the importance and impact of struggle and contestation in and against this neoliberal *mode of intervention*. First, the action taken by Unite trade

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union against Sports Direct, a mass-production sportswear company, whose headquarters are located in Shirebrook (in the Bolsover District). This has been against low-pay, zero-hours contracts and poor working conditions, which has had major national impacts as both local and national actors and campaigns have successfully brought the company to account through the government's Select Committee evidence process (Goodley and Ashby 2015). Second, local authorities, advice organizations, and anti-poverty coalitions have been very outspoken, seeking to mobilize advocacy on behalf of residents within the welfare system. Accordingly to one particularly vocal organization:

> "The circumstances of people coming through our doors are far worse than those of the 1980s. Reliance on foodbanks, benefit sanctions on a massive scale, sick or disabled workers, without a hope of being employed, found 'fit for work', are some of the issues that our team of advisers have dealt with this year. Policies which are supposed to be about helping people to move closer to the labour market are in many cases damaging to health, self-defeating, and, at their very worst, causing deaths and contributing to suicides." (Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centre, Interview, 2015)

As noted above, one of the features of the government localization welfare reforms is the increasing use of benefit sanctions (Webster, 2015) as a national *state project* of disciplining benefit claimants, while at the same time depoliticizing the unemployment and job-gap problem and undermining the safety net provided by social benefits (Fletcher et al, 2016). The significant number of benefit sanctions

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implemented in the Sheffield City Region (at approximately 70,000 sanctions between 2012 and 2015)[5] has been the subject of intense criticism among local authorities, advice services and welfare workers. Local authorities have borne the brunt of the sanctions in terms of the pressures on their welfare and support services and have accordingly articulated opposition to the use of sanctions and the way other tools of benefit conditionality are leading to the increasing impoverishment of claimants. For example, Rotherham MBC (Rotherham MBC, 2014), Sheffield Citizens Advice Bureaux (Arnold, 2014) and Derbyshire network of advice centres (Needham, 2015), have all voiced concerns about claimants in many cases being unfairly (incorrectly against the DWP guidelines) sanctioned and seeing their benefits cease. Disability rights organizations, trade unions, and community coalitions have run campaigns against such benefit sanctions, involving picketing the Job Centre network and seeking to raise the profile of the issue through publicity campaigns, as the impact of sanctions combined with benefit cuts is creating serious financial hardships for vulnerable groups (Involve Yorkshire and Humber, 2014). At the same time, Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centre has successfully won tribunals and appeals on benefit-sanctions decisions through representation, which underlines the importance of advocacy via the formal political system for those negotiating the benefit system from within the state. This illustrates how policy implementation happens as a consequence of the "complex interaction between reflexive subjects involved in multiple relations of power and objective factors that present opportunities and constraints on actions" (Prior and Barnes 2011: 267) and how the unemployed and the socially excluded exercise

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[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/jobseekers-allowance-sanctions [accessed 21st February 2016]

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purposeful agency in "*collective* practices" (Wright 2012: 316, emphasis original). According to one source:

> "Each year we deal with over 9,000 enquiries at our centres and outreach venues. We have recovered over £3 million in lump-sum payments and increased weekly benefits for the people of Derbyshire. This money is vital both for the recipients, but also for the regeneration of the local economy. Money gained is mostly spent locally helping to preserve jobs and aid local businesses." (Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centre, Interview, 2016)

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The *hegemonic project* and policy debate though is largely construed around unemployed and disadvantaged groups becoming 'employable' and obtaining the 'right skills' to obtain employment. The views of stakeholders consider that employers as well as the employment services have an important role to play. The evidence submitted to the Sheffield Fairness Commission (2013: 42) indicates, "that people from deprived communities are often trapped in 'poor' work with low pay, poor working conditions, long hours and job insecurity". Once people have obtained qualifications, there are no guarantees of progression in employment, given the nature of pay, work organization, job design, casualization and the increasing use of zero-hours contracts. This is indicative, on Jessop's terms, of a depoliticization transference shift occurring towards individualized responses to collective challenges in the state's *mode of intervention*: "a further move from national welfare states to more postnational workfare regimes in advanced capital states and a

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3 reinforcement of current tendencies towards enduring states of austerity" (2016:
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5 246).
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10 *The Politics of 'States of Austerity' in the City Region*
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12 As noted above, an underlying tension exists in the Sheffield City Region between
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14 the somewhat consensual *hegemonic vision* of promoting growth (see SCR Vision,
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16 2017) within the context and backdrop of a *state project* of austerity and welfare
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18 cuts. Beatty and Fothergill (2016) demonstrate that the greatest loss in the income
19
20 of working-age adults occurred in the more deprived local authorities. For example,
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22 two local authority districts within the SCRCA, Bolsover and Barnsley, are in the top
23
24 50 districts in the UK worst affected by the reforms. Also, as Table 3 shows, the
25
26 largest loss in income occurs through the changes in tax credits, which has
27
28 implications for those on low wages. Collectively, the stark reality of the Sheffield
29
30 City Region financial context reveals cuts of £1,109 million over a four-year period
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32 set against the much-hyped fanfare of the (offered) £900 million total 'devolution
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34 deal' (over 30 years). Within the expanded nine local authority *social basis* of the
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36 SCRCA state form, the gap between devo-rhetoric and austerity-reality could not be
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38 greater. Despite this, the Sheffield LEP Chair has reinforced a neoliberal
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40 participatory inclusiveness strategy, where the "let's get it done work-ethic in
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42 Sheffield City Region harnesses drive and ambition [and] with everyone pulling
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44 together, and a significant sense of community, we are achieving transformational
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46 change" (Walsh, 2017: 61).
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The role and nature of local authorities (all are represented on the Sheffield City Region Combined Authority Board) has been diverse and their relationship with the city region building process in some cases has been ambivalent. On the one hand, local authorities are managing austerity (but in different ways) by moving towards a more 'facilitating' and enabling role in terms of provision of services (CLES, 2014). SCRCA and its local authorities are 'discursive institutions' (Fuller, 2017), discussed above, relaying depoliticization through the ongoing savage cuts in public-sector budgets, which contribute directly to their economic agenda by providing opportunities for private profit (outsourcing and privatization), as well as, on the other hand, providing a critical voice in relation to increasing poverty and social inequalities.

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This dynamic highlights the contradictory 'agent and obstacle' nature of the state as a social relation and the multiple roles that *modes of representation* can have for opening up political engagement (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988). Sheffield's Fairness Commission (see above) is further illustrative of this, as it promotes inclusion discourses and politics around alternatives to benefit and welfare cuts, but is also a site of tensions and struggles itself. Stakeholders witness how Sheffield City Council, as well as promoting the growth agenda through its involvement in the SCRCA, and despite being integral to the Fairness Commission, bows to the dominant narrative of the necessity of cuts and is actively part of their implementation.

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Pessimism is toxic and we are certainly not conceding ground to the TINA mantra of 'there is no alternative'. Our analysis highlights "the fractures and frictions that create the space for alternative" (Jessop, 2016: 246). The Sheffield City Region is witness to an increasing lack of buy-in to the neoliberal growth model, which is coalescing around the local state and the SCRCA local authorities as key agents for counteracting depoliticization and becoming a space for repoliticization.

First, the Sheffield-centric location of the proposed High-Speed (HS2) transport connection stations has created agglomeration territorial tensions between the South Yorkshire councils. Added to this, the cross-border involvement of Chesterfield and Bassetlaw (which are based in Derbyshire) local authorities in a South Yorkshire deal has led Derbyshire County Council to seek a (successful) judicial review (on the breadth of the consultation, on its fairness, on the means used to consult, and on the complexity of the information surrounding transfer of powers) of this devolution process, effectively putting back the mayoral election timetable to run the city region's development corporation. These 'custody battles' and 'regional rows' (Perraudin, 2016), illustrating how the "the power of the state is the power of the forces acting in and through the state" (Jessop, 1990: 270), have increased during 2017 through the ambitions of Barnsley and Doncaster's local authorities to be part of a wider Yorkshire Devolution Deal, culminating on the 18th September with their withdrawal from, and 'derailing' of, the SCR devolution process (Burn, 2017). This triggered central government to withdraw the £900 million financial offer, with a possible mayor de facto powerless, while austerity romps on and the welfare cuts bite deeper.

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Second, trade unions, in particular Unite Community, have played a key role in making connections with, recruiting and involving unemployed people with 'local' campaigns around benefit sanctions and austerity policies. Third, Barnsley Borough Council has also developed an alternative employment and skills strategy around 'more and better jobs', recognizing the limits to the city-region growth model and the low-pay low-skills cycle that is a dominant feature of this economy.

5. Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the trajectories of a 'post-political' approach to city-region building. 'The post-political condition' is clearly seen not to be a coherent institutional-fix that supports this neoliberal growth project, but is instead like other neoliberalisation strategies and projects, best regarded as heterogeneous, mutable, and involving variegated responses and unstable uneven geographical outcomes (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2015). Here, city-region building frameworks are incapable of addressing the dilemmas associated with uneven growth and the failure of policies to address deep-rooted problems of labour-market inequalities that are integral to market, state, and governance failures.

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We concur with Darling (2016: 230) that when "combined with a market-oriented transfer of responsibilities, depoliticization acts to constrain the possibilities of political debate and to predetermine the contours of those policy discussions that do take place". We have discussed how the Sheffield City Region is being depoliticized through *state projects* and *hegemonic visions*, continually generating discourses and narratives on the economy (the *shaping of context*, according to

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Jessop, 2016). Our analysis has though stressed the importance of considering trends and countertrends and there has been a failure to build a broad *social basis* for devolution *spatial imaginary* initiatives such as the Northern Powerhouse. Devolution deals are concerned with arrangements for individual city regions and beyond the aspiration for a larger collective contribution to national economic output, there is no focus on the relationships with and between city regions and hence the overall functioning of the economy is bereft of strategic planning (Goodwin et al, 2017). In effect, there is an asymmetric distribution of powers: the devolution deals encourage competition over collaboration between city regions, which exacerbates existing inequalities, whereas the fantasy of "neoliberalism promises that everyone will win" (Dean, 2009: 72) prevails in policy and political discourses. This is heightened by the welfare and local authority cuts, as many of the policies that previously distributed the proceeds of the UK's finance-centric economic model have been ended by the broader austerity agenda. We maintain that public sector and public investment should play key roles in supporting and leading growth, but this stance "is being directly hampered by a big withdrawal of state funding for this purpose" (RSA, 2016: 6).

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We argue that it is essential to continue to find ways of working for change from *within* the state (in our case, our research situations, leadership roles, and our individual lives in civil and political society) and find ways to develop effective organized oppositional action, which comes directly out of exposing these contradictions of neoliberalism (see Etherington and Jones, 2016b). As opposed to 'post-political' approaches, which tend to stand outside of the state, our goal is to

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"advocate participation within the mechanisms of power to intensify their internal contradictions and conflicts" (Jessop, 1985: 129). In this paper, by focusing on the Jessop's 'state as a social relation'—not as a static 'black box' (cf. Swyngedouw, 2017) but continually materializing as an institutional ensemble and one where any power distributed through the state only constitutes the power of particular agents (and their practices) incorporated into its *social bases*—we have highlighted how different forms of agency are embracing this opportunity, shaping and politicizing the Sheffield city-region governance landscape.

We have highlighted how a number of 'bottom-up' initiatives have served to develop *counter-hegemonic visions* by directly engaging with the city-region devolution agenda, all of which are forming part of an important repoliticizing of the local state. The task is to identify further counter-discourses and ideas about a more inclusive city region (RSA, 2017) and consider how these might be 'scaled up' from the locally specific to the general, to mobilize a broader social base of support (Haughton et al, 2016; RSA 2016: 11). Addressing these would, paraphrasing Larner (2014: 203), allow for "new political formations [to] emerge", and empower grass-roots democracy via a repoliticized civil society to recast the 'integral state'.

We are certainly not arguing that engagement has to be modeled *only* on the state within capitalism—a challenge made by Amin and Thrift (2013: 113) in their promotion of what they call "liquid models of political organization", some of which are akin to the more libertarian and revolutionary frameworks advocated by 'post-political' commentators that see limited viability or desirability for these forms of

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institutionalization (see Swyngedouw, 2017). We have argued that Jessop's SRA approach allows for just this—with the state as "an institutionally diverse form of political organization that can be more open and flexible than the standard state form" (ibid: 113)—and we encourage constructive discussion and debate on advancing this and other frameworks to get a handle on the 'post-political' depoliticized state in, and of, contemporary capitalism.

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