

Placecast Episode 26 – Transcript

Nicola Headlam

Welcome to Placecast, a Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub production based at the University of Birmingham.

Placecast is essential listening for those keen to explore the ins and outs of knowledge mobilisation for influence in central and local government based on the view that it's only through animating the power of place-based leadership that the wicked problems of 2026 can become more manageable.

Whether you're a researcher, a citizen scientist, an activist, professional in the public sector, a civil servant, politician, analyst, entrepreneur or new Prime Minister, we think it's through our networks that most solutions can be assembled, tested and the learning shared before we go again, and that universities can act as the repositories and observatories of these efforts.

We're based in City-REDI and rooted in the LPIP programme funded by ESRC, AHRC and Innovate UK.

This podcast aims to highlight knowledge and evidence-based ways of working and the strategies needed to make real impact on the decisions that shape our society.

Our guests are change makers from across the UK with stories about the ways in which influence may be achieved.

We focus in particular on some of the connective tissue within and between sectors for clues as to how to animate place-based leadership as innovating is a team sport best done in the open.

My guest this afternoon is Professor Martin Jones, Professor of Human Geography and DPVC at Staffordshire University and a founding co-director of WISERD, the Welsh Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data.

Over more than two decades, he's charted the shifting geographies of the British state from the new localism to the new regionalism and beyond.

And his work on devolution, economic governance and city region building has shaped how we understand the institutional architecture of sub-national Britain.

His recent book, *Cities in Region in Crisis*, traces the political economy of sub-national economic development through regional development agencies and devolution deals.

A very timely conversation, I'm sure you will agree, as the new government have started talking our language straight away.

Professor Jones, welcome to PlaceCast.

Prof Martin Jones

Thank you for this opportunity, Nicola.

Thank you for the introduction.

I think we live in a perfect time to put some of the things that I've been writing about over the last 20 years into practice.

As you know, I'm known for my work on subnational economic governance as your summary pitches.

And I think this has exploded, hasn't it, in the last three weeks with the rewiring document, a document that's only 7 pages, but a document, I think, that opens up a conversational conduit that is likely to go on for, I think, the next decade, regardless of who wins the next election.

These dynamics around placemaking and devolution, once they're out-of-the-box, you can't put them back in, I think, nor would you want to put them back in.

Nicola Headlam

I agree. I'm extremely positive about that rewiring document.

I was talking to somebody recently that was saying, oh, you know, it's dropped on a Friday in August.

Maybe it's just for us nerds.

And I was a bit like, no, I don't think so.

I agree with you. I think it's going to be impossible to rewind to before that document.

Prof Martin Jones

The coverage on LinkedIn was good.

I mean, yourself, you said it was about putting central local relations into a new era.

Somebody else tweeted from the LGiU on LinkedIn, this is a policy, err, analyst Christmas present.

It doesn't get much better than this.

Of course, the detail needs to be fleshed out.

There's a white paper, there's a spending, there's a treasury dialogue, but I think it's bold.

It's only 7 pages. It's a signal.

Of course, it raises some challenges that we'll go on to talk about, but it's a bold initial intervention that puts the, I think, the cat amongst the pigeon, and once these dynamics are out there, they're difficult to wind back, aren't they?

Nicola Headlam

I agree. The only slight worry is that those of us that have got all the institutional architectures of times past in our heads.

It is a clearing in the decks moment in a way.

And I think that's because our new Prime Minister, as we speak, Andy Burnham's entering his third week in the big chair.

He's actually done a lot of that work along with us, you know, in terms of certainly, you know, the city regional agenda maturing around him and the Manchesterism, God forbid, whatever that is...

And in a sense, it feels like, yeah, you're right, a seven page kind of statement of principles

It so welcome, because again, it's just been such a two years of this, two years of that, reverse this, revert that, institution's in the bin after less than 10 years, you know, it's been, there's been so much detail, it may be we really are moving to a different place.

Prof Martin Jones

Yeah, and as you know.

There's been 55 changes since 1974 of structures and functions of local growth.

I'm of course talking about the National Audit Office document that came out 10 years ago that was revised three years ago that charted 55 changes.

Your previous guest on this broadcast Glenn spoke about it, didn't he, around what Andy Westwood and colleagues called chop and change.

The Bennett Institute have analysed this.

There seems to be an element of stability that's come up from the last five years.

So this is about putting the power of place back together, stitching it back up where I think civil servants and policymakers and analysts are, I think, tired, but also given the fact there's been 55 changes, things have gone round and round about so many times that there's little left.

We'll come on to talk about this, about what we would want to do.

So for me, I think this current era over the last couple of weeks is about solidifying and consolidating what we could call the power of place.

So one way that you could read Manchesterism the rollout of a particular power of place model, the extent to which Manchesterism then gets rolled out successfully across England and then challenges the devolved nations of Scotland, Wales and beyond is an interesting one that we can come on to talk about.

But certainly for me, I read this positively around the power of place.

We can come on to talk about what place means.

Place is interesting because I think we use the word place without problematising it.

And of course, place has to make sense. I mean, there's an agglomeration of places.

There's a particular scale of place that has to make sense for the economy.

But also there's a cultural, social role of place as well in human geographers, as you know, talk around a sense of place.

Doreen Massey talks about progressive sense of place that makes sense for one's imagination.

It has to make sense for the residents, doesn't it? The folks that live in places.

And of course, place making has been thrown into the air through local government

You know, there's a debate there around certain names that folk don't agree with, you know, recasting boundaries, redrawing identities, not just about where your bins emptied and who buy, but there's a new geopolitical geography out there that comes with the twin acts of local government reorganisation and devolution.

And that map is, of course, was redrawn, as you've commented yourself, effectively in the early 70s with the last major round of local government reorganisation.

And it's that kind of cutting down to bigger places raises challenges, I think, for the identity of folk in place.

Some places probably will make more sense than others.

For me, the key thing around the power of place to think about when we look at this agenda of devolution is how places relate to places.

And of course, then I'm bound to raise the issue as a geographer around uneven development.

So what is the relationship between places when we start to roll out a devolution agenda on the back of local government reorganisation?

Will we still have equalisation and levelling measures between places?

Can we talk around redistribution?

What is the growth agenda, err, like because I fear, Nicola, that one of the counter forces of talking around the power of place is that you activate everywhere at the same time and you end up then in a zero-sum game of inter-place competition where everybody's running after the same thing, isn't it?

It's like watching folk chasing a 20 pound note across a car park blowing everywhere and everybody's running after it.

So I think the power of place making done effectively raises an important question around how places relate to places.

And there was a recent, I think, blog post I think that Jack Shaw put out, didn't he, talking around how strategic authorities and mayoral authorities work with each other to form bigger regional agglomerations, where placemaking is collaborative rather than competitive.

And of course, you know, if you're down in the weeds of local government, you'd like to kind of like probably out compete your neighbour, wouldn't you?

But that 'beggar thy neighbour' politics, of course we know about through the neoliberal lens, does not lead to effective growth.

So some real, real interesting dynamics.

But also if you look at election turnouts, I mean, you know, the recent mayoral election in Manchester tells you with a 25% turnout is there's a lot of work to be done around engagement and place.

So certainly does devolution allow folk to be re-engaged and be proud in their place?

A lot this depends on, as I said, is whether that place makes sense.

In my own geographical context in Staffordshire, cutting Staffordshire into a north and a south and a middle and then dividing 10 local authorities into two raises some really, really interesting questions of around scale and efficiency, which you can agree with.

But as you know, the debate around Newcastle Borough Council, and of course the leader of that council is one Jonathan Gullis, talking about historic borough counties.

This umm, next 10 years or even three to five years before that is around recasting.

I think we can talk around the power of place in ways we haven't been able to talk about as a community.

I think using new ways of looking at that and thinking progressively about place.

And of course we know from geography and social science literature that we must see places as relational open.

Things flow through boundaries and borders, don't they?

And it's around celebrating the power of place and not being defensive about things.

So I think this new era of placemaking is exciting, I think, for our policy community.

Nicola Headlam

I agree. I'm really excited.

I keep on thinking, actually, I was talking to colleagues who worked a lot on the pottery recently and we were laughing about, we're at place making, can you do it on a rainy night in Stoke?

The challenge is; it isn't for, in a sense, well, we can talk about this for a million years, but the big trick of Manchesterism was for the 10 boroughs to put apart their sense of natural competition, loathing, in pursuit of cash, and buy into a banner they were content to march behind for most purposes and discuss.

Where it gets pokey, of course, is when you come to things like spatial frameworks, actual planning powers policy.

Actually, even the 10 boroughs haven't managed to march in step to create a spatial development perspective for the 10 boroughs.

There's a couple of boroughs that have stepped back from the actual spatial plan.

And again, that's partly the beauty of a very plastic Manchesterism, where it behoves them to collaborate, they do.

And when they want to go alone, they can as well.

But also, and again, my PhD is 15 years old, but you can draw maps that say that the proper economic geography or the sensible economic geography for governing the conurbation is much more of a sort of cell neck, a sort of melted Lancashire, because

there's far more prosperity to the south into Cheshire than there is in the 10 borough solution.

So I always say to people, Manchesterism is kind of a great thing to pick apart.

We have none of us got the same kind of take on it.

But one thing it isn't is a hardly bordered 10 boroughs.

It's definitely extremely soft and as you describe in that more sort of Doreen Massey sense, Manchester identity is an attack brand as it were, but actually in terms of the harder powers, it is much harder to put them into those different baskets.

So rather than this being a kind of side thing at the RGS or whatever, I think this is coming to the main foyer of Durstic politics.

Prof Martin Jones

Yeah, I would highlight listeners to the recent City-REDI paper on institutional thickness by Anne Green and colleagues, which looks at, Click calls it an institutional thick, and institutional thickness, as you know, was a body of literature whereby, you know, you've got the presence of institutions, but you've got the regulation of road behaviour, i.e. everybody agrees externally for political purposes that there is something you can call Manchester, a Greater Manchester city-region, everybody pulls together.

Now privately behind closed doors, they might hate each other, but publicly for the interests of policymakers, politicians and capital, you agree and you pull together and there's no dissent at all.

It's a classic proactive boosterist cluster, which that's one of the lessons from Manchester is a politics of sensibility.

You know, you make certain arguments at certain times.

Of course, it's a city that I know because I did my PhD there.

And you could see it from the post mid 90s onwards, this kind of like this model taking shape and it worked well in that particular space.

There are lessons and challenges, but that paper that the City-REDI put out is really worth reading if folk haven't read it, because it makes you think about issues of geography and capacity.

So the interesting question, we'll come on to talk about this later, is if you roll out a Manchesterism model, whether folk have the capacity to implement it elsewhere, well, that's an issue of geography and destiny that we'll come on to talk about.

Nicola Headlam

So we're beginning, we're feeling positive.

We think that place is taking on its correct kind of mantle in the centre of the domestic conversation.

What do you sense is the potential for this work reaching maturity and becoming fully embedded?

What could change as a result and what might the size of those sub-national prizes be?

Prof Martin Jones

Well, the size of the prize has to be economic growth at an aggregated national and local level, right?

Otherwise, why do it?

So if you look at, you know, this is kind of stuff that Richard Jones writes about on social media, if you look about it, is virtually no growth for a 15-year period, all it is redistribution of existing growth geographically.

So this has to be around growth, because you can't redistribute what you've not got.

So in a sense, I would always argue for redistribution coming from kind of a left of centre argument, but you can't redistribute unless it's growing.

And that was an exchange that Richard Jones had with me on LinkedIn around let's get things growing.

So the ultimate result end prize has to be growth, but then I think it's growth that's also quite inclusive and engaged.

So if it's place-based growth, it's not just certain geographical magnets as Peter Hatherington called it in the Guardian, was it yesterday talking about the growth of London? It's the decentralisation of the spaces of agglomeration that create growth.

The maturity model is interesting one because it invites you to make the argument and question the argument, can everywhere grow?

So if you look at the statement 'growth in every postcode' or 'good growth in every postcode', you think, is that actually theoretically possible?

Because growth normally comes at the expense of somebody else not growing, unless you think, well, what good growth is rather than growth.

So good growth in every postcode is a really interesting statement made by PM in several speeches prior to the seven page rewiring document. Because an academic would say you can't have growth in every postcode because growth needs exploitation and uneven development to make it work.

Or does it? Question mark?

And I haven't got the answer to that because it really makes you think on the spot because it throws things up and says, can you have good growth?

But your question is maturity. What would a mature model of the power of place be?

But I think it's folk thinking like they're on the receiving end of participating in growth and also benefiting from it.

So then you don't get the mantra of left behind.

As it's called in the academic and policy literature is places not being completely disengaged.

But also, I think there's an academic concept called capacity to act.

I feel like they've got the destiny, the ability to create their own strategies, implement them and see them succeed.

And that is the maturity, I think, of a place agenda on the back of devolution, the size of the prize, is ability to have the capacity to act.

But these are really big existential questions, aren't they?

Can everywhere grow? Or the other way of looking at this is everywhere doesn't grow the same.

It has functional specialism on where it grows. Everywhere, everywhere can't be leading AI, can it?

If you have the industrial model that the British political economy was founded on, there was functional specialism in certain places.

But I think by forcing a growth agenda on the back of devolution and for places to come up with growth strategies makes that argument possible to dissect and look at.

Nicola Headlam

So again, it is early days for the new Prime Minister, but I wonder if he hasn't missed a bit of a trick in some public statements that he's made about an end to neoliberalism and the place-based conversations seem to be coming from slightly different places.

And to me, in explicit, again, you don't get on the BBC talking about an end to neoliberalism, far from it, but explaining and breaking down, that place-blind growth is neoliberalisation.

The processes of neoliberalisation produce place-blind entities, whether that is extractive capitalism back to the [inaudible] Miliband language, whether it's ownership beyond your shores

whether there's neoliberalisation ends you up in place blind accumulation forms of capital.

Now, is it possible that by invoking the power of place, plus the end to neoliberalism, you end up with place-full or place-informed or place-making and shaping, offering a way through and maybe that's the needle that needs to be threaded, an end to neoliberal extractive logics and much more implicitly productive growth.

I think that's kind of what you're saying. I've been struggling to kind of come up with.

Have you got a natty soundbite for something like that?

Prof Martin Jones

Yeah, sorry, you're right.

The statement was made in 40 years and I will end the 40 years of the neoliberal model.

I mean, that is a joy quote for every academic paper, isn't it?

I mean, the amount of times that's going to get quoted, you couldn't make it up, would you?

So I think Andy Burnham, he's writing a diagnosis of the problem.

There is a gap on what that solution is.

But give him credit, he's only been there a month or so, and even less than that.

So he's right to actually chart the problem.

It's a fundamental challenge to sort that out.

And you're right, you're not going to do it by a few statements on rough sleeping or vape shops in high streets, but it's a start of something.

Nicola Headlam

You're absolutely right to use the word sort.

It's about spatial sorting, isn't it?

Prof Martin Jones

Yeah, exactly.

So using the language of place-blind or place-based, if you could call it place sensitive. A place sensitive model might challenge neoliberalism because place sensitivity takes you more to a community wealth building model that the likes of CLES and Neil McInroy and the foundational economy literatures might lend you to.

Stuff around the circular economy, encroach development in a particular place that starts you look at your circuit of flows, rather than extracting value out of place, you build place value and hold it in, not building a wall around it, but the community wealth model that Neil McEnroy and folk were looking at, as you know, when he's globally promoted that, is talking around, isn't it, about basically looking at contracting and links around local government, procurement, supply, looking at capital flow, looking around building connections in place to quote, I think as Ammon and Thrift would call it, hold down.

Hold down the forces of globalisation.

And you could call that a place sensitive model.

It doesn't leak. Of course, it will always leak, but it leaks less.

So if you look at the crudest critique of the Manchester model, if you look at the data, it's just basically city centre property led regeneration that did nothing for Tameside.

If you look at the uneven developments of the Greater Manchester over time, and there's a great paper in Urban Studies in the last couple of months that does this, it questions the value of it.

I'm more comfortable with the language of place sensitive as a way of trying to correct the market logics and illogics with 40 years of a neoliberal model that wasn't built, of course, overnight.

It took a long time to do. But it does encourage it.

The fact that statement's been made means that the PM needs to be held accountable to it, but folk need to come out with clever ideas on what to do about it, because it's bold to put that down, because, of course, as soon as you put that down, you're going to be held accountable to it, aren't you?

Nicola Headlam

I did listen to Jeremy Gilbert's good podcast about how Jeremy Corbyn didn't make that statement, didn't feel that he was able to and defend it in a way that he was obviously under fire from all corners.

Whereas Andy Burnham is completely comfortable.

I mean, partly, I mean, let's face it, it's easy to kill the dragon once he's lying on the ground bleeding.

If neoliberalism, God forbid, had produced robust growth over the last 20 years, it's much harder to kill, right?

The fact is that it's failing to deliver more than a percentage point of growth since the global financial crisis.

And as you say, you can't redistribute what you don't have.

So it's the shibboleth of variegated version of capitalism that we have had, has been bleeding out.

So the time is absolutely right then to kind of think about what British variety of capitalism that maybe isn't neoliberalised looks like once it's in a political economy of progress and of potential.

Again, it's hard to emphasise how different that is from business as usual in terms of Westminster elites of all flavours and colours.

Prof Martin Jones

And some of this is about, of course, as the Chancellor will be looking at, some of this is about around the power of London, it's the role of finance capital, the bond market, you know, those forces that promoted Brexit in certain ways, because it's about deregulation, further deregulation of financial services and the role of London in all this.

This is where that recent piece of my Peter Hetherington about the magnetism of London is really, really important, because you're challenging, you know, that 40 year model neoliberalism is about this around the city of London and finance and how finance dominates the industrial model that drives.

So the fact now you've got a minister with re-industrialisation in the title is exciting, because it makes you think of what kind of model have you got here?

What are we going to do around the financing of all this?

The joy of that would be watching the autumn budget for some of the work, some of those challenges that Treasury officials put out there.

But rather than ignoring it, it has been flagged, so credit to whoever wrote that section of the speech.

You're right, if the far left of the Labour Party wouldn't put it in.

It's a bold move to try and question it.

And it will make academics in the genres that you and I grew up in.

They'll be putting it on every PowerPoint slide across every conference on the globe, won't they?

It'll make people think about it.

He's thinking about it.

And as you probably know, I was...

Nicola Headlam

Hard delete on levelling up and yeah.

Prof Martin Jones

Delete, yeah, you know.

Nicola Headlam

OK then, let's give them some help.

Prof Martin Jones

You know, it's an exciting period to start to think of it, those things.

So rather than closing them off, they're up for debate.

Nicola Headlam

Absolutely.

So let's think then. In your career, you've come across a lot of places trying this kind of work.

I'd like to just shift focus now on something that you think worked well.

So spotlight on solutions.

And what's really fascinating is when people tell a story about something that's worked brilliantly in the subnational space, it's normally either about being able to deploy resource, about the people involved,

about a political commitment that goes beyond an electoral cycle, longevity.

I just wonder what characteristics of sort of success in the sub-national space you can think of.

Prof Martin Jones

Yeah, best example I'll give, and if folk are interested, it's in chapter 4 of my book that you cited, the Cities and Region in Crisis book, chapter 4.

I was part of an evaluation team in 1999.

I was part of a group of folk that evaluated prototype employment zones, PEZs.

PEZs were in the early stages of New Labour's at the time of the welfare to work agenda.

There was a rollout of prototypes and I was part of the evaluating team.

I covered the North West Wales prototype employment zone.

Why this was interesting and I'll tell you also why it failed as well, there's a story there.

It was about removing the barriers of existing policy branches of government.

So everyone who had an interest in the employment and welfare space, they were pulled and pulled together through partnerships.

This partnership was North and West Wales.

It cut across three local authorities

It covered everything from welfare to work and employment and skills, but also it was about bending money within Treasury rules, but also challenging Treasury at the same time.

And the goal of employment zones was ultimately to develop individual learning accounts.

Labour had an interest at the time in individual learning accounts and also personalised job accounts.

And this was a prototype initiative that tried to, quote, pull together resources covering employment and welfare and skills to try and identify barriers

to work employment and unemployment, but also to bang the heads of various agencies locally, nationally and regionally together into solving the problems therein of this.

And this was a prototype that ran only probably for a year because what happened is, and I'm talking this about 1999, 2000, so before the next kind of election around that time, is that Cabinet Office PM office officials got really nervous that the numbers weren't being delivered quick enough.

The money had been invested in this initiative.

There's a lot of good activity and qualitative reports produced.

I authored some of these with colleagues on how great it all was.

But folk were saying, where's the numbers?

Where are the numbers?

The numbers weren't come through quick enough.

And there was a fax, if you remember faxes at that time, there was a fax from a senior official in No. 10 to the kind of what become then DWP regionally in northwest Wales saying, you need to then move this along more quickly.

We need numbers and need results and need results.

And that sensitivity around the ability to deliver quickly led to a rollout model called fully fledged employment zone, FFEZs, that reintroduced compulsion.

You know, some of the worst parts of welfare and what was called workfare at that time crept back in and it killed this model.

Because as soon as you introduce an element of compulsion, it changed the politics of all these agencies that were involved.

And it was a classic tension between central and local relations on the time horizon for delivering that actually killed it because the prototypes were quickly wound up

because they weren't delivering quick enough because certain powers to be and you can understand that it's about accountability for public money but also cross-examination around select committees and across the House of Commons floor wanting to know where all these evaluations have gone and so it's the inability to deliver quickly.

So the characteristics of the story that was successful was one around partnerships, local empowerment capacity acts and space and place locally.

What killed it, I think it was a tension between that model of local capacity to act and a hype and probably oversensitivity to deliver results seen as numbers, not people's lives.

It was around kind of classic governmentality around crunching data quickly where you were trying to deal with probably the kind of long structural, long-term generational problems around employment and work.

And so it was a classic kind of battle between different mindsets and it was a story of something that probably could have been.

Interestingly, some of those debates are coming back again in terms of some of the ways of thinking within the DWP and how to challenge NEETS and models of employment and unemployment.

Nicola Headlam

Brilliant, a whole case study and I guess that that's what's interesting is that push and pull between central requirement and local preference and of course experience of how to deliver and where to deliver and with whom.

That's where it gets very, the rubber really hits the road of central local, doesn't it?

If you've got particularly a changing, I remember describing it as the first time ever, you know, a Secretary of State stands up at the dispatch box and says,

"I've got no idea it was a devolved program. They worked it all out. I'll read the papers, same as you" kind of thing.

In fact, if we could ever get to that point in terms of scrutiny of central priorities and local places, it's a really good place study.

And I do recommend it in the book if you haven't read it.

So in a similar vein then, can you think of a good international lesson?

We're not ashamed to import or steal.

We're not just going for cut and paste, we're going for graft and grow.

But where else have you come across on your travels?

Prof Martin Jones

Yeah, so this is a trap that most policymakers fall into, isn't it?

Trying to steal something elsewhere.

Of course, when we steal policies from elsewhere, they often get sick on the plane and don't land in the same place.

There are literatures in political science around policy borrowing or policy mobility.

As you know, Kevin Ward and colleagues in geography have been developing literature on policy mobility, things that are mobile and aren't.

If I was a senior policymaker or politician, the easiest thing to do is to look elsewhere and try and steal it.

But things, when they are stolen and uplifted, are culturally embedded in political, economic and social circumstances, and they're very difficult to transplant.

So it's a challenge, but one of the easiest things to do, and there are teams of civil servants that are sent around the globe looking for things, aren't there, rather than develop organic solutions.

That said, I think it is worth looking around.

I'm not suggesting we aren't myopic, we need to be mindful to the fact that things are variegated and work in certain geographical circumstances and they're difficult to transplant.

One thing that I have looked at, and again, I've written on this before, is a Danish employment scheme called job rotation.

JR was a scheme that was developed in the Danish paper industry in the 1980s and 1990s that tried to look at the link between in-work and out-of-work and productivity and skills.

The notion of rotation in that model, in the Danish

this job rotational model is, is if you take a company, if you imagine a company and there are folk in work that need reskilling, i.e.

to give them in-work progression to enhance productivity, one of the problems of the British model we know is productivity and skills acquisition.

If that company needs to grow, often a company will say we can't release X, Y, Z person because who's going to do their job whilst they upskill.

What job rotation does is release a person in work to increase their skills capacity through training and reskilling and it backfills their role via folk that are unemployed.

So in a sense, there's a backfill relationship of a rotational model where one or more unemployed person is then released into the job whilst that individual is then released in skills.

So the rotational model, if you think about the metaphors around supply and demand in terms of labour and skills and skills acquisition, again, employee glamorising how it works.

It works effectively in the Danish case study because of trade union involvement as well as employee group involvement, as well as the fact that the local authorities are there play a critical role in the employment insurance and welfare scheme.

So it's a classic social partnership Nordic model that kind of works in that model in that way that links in work and out of work and progression.

You'll see if you Google it, you'll see various European evaluations of this.

Nicola Headlam

I've been thinking a lot about the poor old NEET groups, not least because I've got nieces who are all your general, your GCSE level, to get into doing A levels really anywhere, you need to get your 6, 7, 8 at what we would call A to C because the schools are under so much pressure to demonstrate their kind of, and the push factors that are pushing the NEET right up into all manner of pretend shibboleth on the right of the three generations of workless household, that doesn't exist.

We completely debunked that.

All kids really risk these high cliffs in terms of attainment.

So you can see how there's a million kids in nothing because it's the consequence of even the most kind of routine of state education becoming increasingly elite and increasingly results focused.

It does leave an awful lot of kids behind.

And that, I think, the spatiality of disenchantment in that way.

There are kids in every postcode for whom the system is not working whatsoever.

And imagine some scenario under which people being able to reskill and then you have a pipeline of talent pipeline that comes in would be such a good way.

I mean, anything like sort of work shadowing and all those kinds of things.

I mean, that's in the Milburn Review.

Prof Martin Jones

Job rotation is a schematic, systematic way of making that work.

It's an actual model, right?

It requires pending of funding.

It works, it's structured, but also, and this is most folk on the right don't like that, it's heavily linked to trade unions as well.

It's union contextualised rather than regulated, right?

Because there's a trade union watch of it to make sure that precarious work practices of the likes of the Shirebrook model of Sports Direct that was in the Special Select Committee report on it, that those exploitative practices don't happen in those left behind places.

It's a challenge.

It challenges neoliberalism.

If you look at the model, it's like putting a spanner into the cogs of a neoliberal model because it challenges exploitation, because how it works in certain places depends on employers.

You need a particular scale of an employer model.

So this obsession at the minute with the technical route that you can see where that's coming from.

I think it's wrong to blame the education model just for this, which is supply side.

A lot of this is the attitude and behaviour of firms as well.

Outside the growth and skills levy, previously apprenticeship levy, they don't train.

So in a sense, you need a buoyant, dynamic private sector, public sector model.

Because the good thing about job rotation, if you think about it, and there were some evaluation pilots in East London on this, is it works in the public sector.

You can use the public sector as a machine for doing this.

I've tried to do it in HE as well, where you can actually create placements by releasing your staff for training and backfilling.

In my case, using the Unitemps model, Unitemps being that Warwick model of temporary work using students as well.

And so, yeah, it's just how it's more holistic.

Non-exploitative way of thinking of the economy really at the same time.

But it requires some clever thinking.

You need partnership, you need a multi-agency approach to partnerships to build it because there are so many different cogs in there.

Nicola Headlam

I think also so much of this kind of Mittelstand, again, we're going to hear a lot more about the Mittelstand coming, having robust kind of engaged SMEs who are drawing from workforces in peripheral places.

It's completely outside of the issue of being German being federal, the second tier in Germany, but that tier of good business is best able to have quite an activist economic impact in the subnational.

It's not even about incentives, it's more about, I think, recognition.

And that would definitely be SME led.

It's not about big corporates. That sounds brilliant.

Just the same way that, as you say, public procurement can be ticking the kind of economic development boxes that we spoke about before, but also the ways in which employment can be managed as a public good through the public services.

Prof Martin Jones

The recent statement by Andy Burnham on using British jobs to British people on government contracts, that statement of, was it late last week, wasn't it?

This could work in terms of putting that in because you are doing that, you know, that's a step, it takes it and this is how you do it, you see.

So that was, understand where that's coming from as a statement, but how you basically do it?

Nicola Headlam

Less wrapping it in the flag though.

Yeah, exactly.

I think we can be pro-SME without being utter flag shaggers don't you think?

Prof Martin Jones

I agree completely, yeah.

Nicola Headlam

I mean, that's back to the sort of size of this whole prize.

Populism does not do well where in the deep soil of local economies that are well tended and well managed, it does well in the thin soil that we've had, you know, of late.

That's my view, is that it isn't just that.

We're talking about virtuous circle upon virtuous circle, aren't we?

Prof Martin Jones

Yeah, it takes hold in areas where there's less deep-rooted connections to an economic model.

The historical model of it, even goes back to fascism and then roll it forward.

Kind of some of the populist writings I felt right about neoliberalism, you know, it can fall on different ground depending on the roots and depth of the local economy.

Nicola Headlam

And that is another argument for activist local economic development.

Again, you know, a nerd preoccupation until recently, but we're going to hear an awful lot more about it.

I mean, it just really feels like we're sort of hitting a stride in terms of domestic policy being done in a muscular fashion has to work on a number of levels.

It has to work for growth, it has to work for identity of areas.

And then that works in terms of there being more of an economic future.

And again, it cuts off at the knees, populism, really.

Prof Martin Jones

Yeah, and what do you call that?

Would you call it proto-Keynesianism?

What would you call it? If it's not neoliberalism, what is it?

And that's the kind of key thing, I think, for listeners to think about.

If it's definitely not 40 years of neoliberalism, what can you call it that's catchy enough and meaningful enough?

Otherwise, it's slogan rhetoric, isn't it?

Nicola Headlam

Place first, local economic growth.

SME led, answers on a postcard listeners, what do we call this next phase of British capitalism?

Right, what are you working on next, Martin?

Prof Martin Jones

Okay, so I'm halfway through writing a paper on rewiring the state at the minute.

So I'm, rewiring the state is a re-wakening of some of the arguments that I've been making around political economy of space and territory and growth.

I'm working on a geographical project, I'm rolling out the rewiring agenda.

So if you look at it, you know, there's a huge intellectual agenda on the geographies of subnational economic development, coming on the back of the rollout of the existing model from the last government around, you know, mayoral combined authorities, strategic authorities, how they're made, because each of them is slightly different, depending on how they pull in different people from different previous organisations.

And so the subtext is uneven geographies, uneven capacities, question mark.

So there is, I think, a huge opportunity to look at how this is playing out.

So in real time, how is it being made across mayoral authorities and non-mayoral that have got strategic authorities, they're going one way or another.

Each one's slightly different because the personalities and people are different.

The organisations that have come together to produce these new models are also different.

And you can see this, can't you, the way the Manchester model was made out of, MIDAS and all the pre-existing agencies that came together.

The powers and the personalities, the West Midlands model again is similar but different.

How it gets made in different places is similar but different.

But then the intellectual question is whether these different structures that are different does that produce uneven capacities to act, i.e., can they achieve the same things, right?

And this is really the dynamic of devolution, isn't it?

Because successful places will start to demand more as the model gets rolled out, but also there'll be reaction then, and you can see this in some of the work done by academics in Wales as well at the minute I'm looking at how the more devolved places of 20 years ago then might react.

So I'm looking at this, I'm just thinking about how to frame this, because it's such a big project, you know, you could apply for a massive chunk of funding from the ESRC or elsewhere.

Or you could just intellectually watch this.

So I'm halfway through writing around this.

And the closest project to this was the previous book that I did with colleagues around 2012-13.

I did a book called Rescaling the States, Geography, Devolution of the Geography of Economic Governance with Mark Goodwin and Rhys Jones.

And we were all at Aberystwyth at that particular time.

And we looked at the role out of that model.

The framework in that book is probably can be applied to this.

And that was a real time monitoring project of that model of devolution, looking at structures and functions of growth.

Specifically answering that question.

So that should keep me busy for the next few years, unless somebody decides, three, four years in, Nicola, that the state has been rewired and it's game over.

But I doubt whether that's the case.

Nicola Headlam

I think more research is definitely needed.

I'm interested actually in asking you about the Welsh example, because the LPIP structure is the Birmingham gang, and that's Anne Green and others, Bec, working on our kind of core love, which has always been the trichotomy of local places.

And you know, as you know from background in the RDA, straightforward local economic functioning.

And there's four national projects, one of which is on rural Wales, and there's another one on water, which is in the Scottish context.

I think it certainly seems to me that Welsh devolution particularly has matured to the point where it can kind of carry itself.

And the thing we're missing the most is any form of feedback loop out of the devolved agencies back into the kind of Westminster model, which is an enormous error when the things were built.

But there is practice to boast about in all the corners of the UK and we are lacking a kind of coordination mechanism.

I know that wasn't, devolution was sort of viewed, I think, as a one-way ticket, but I think the way things are at the moment, there's certainly, there's good, so things like the Wellbeing Commissioner in Wales, the Universal Basic Income Pilot, which has survived the change of government.

There are really good examples coming back to us.

Since it's a policy that you know well, what's your take on Welsh devolution?

Prof Martin Jones

You're right, I mean, just rewinding a bit, so the LPIP project, that Mike Woods has got, I think is really, really important because of course that's global at the same time because he's got other pots of funding.

So that'll be fascinating because there'll be rural policy lessons from Mike's work that'll roll across to England at the same time.

I work with Mike previously, so that'll be a really interesting project to watch.

And there's a brilliant article in the Western Mail that was reprinted in LinkedIn by...

Dylan Jones Evans, if you saw it, on Welsh economic development, where he was arguing for a national coordination agency in Wales, because I think he sees policymakers in Wales getting nervous about England now.

So rather than sharing information, what's an interesting dynamic of some of this is it could produce a bit of a backlash the other way, in fear, but we've been wary of a Manchester model and fuelled by the fact that inward investment and competition is what fuels this still, in terms of wanting to get one's act together and probably not sharing something other way around.

So whether it will be asymmetrical devolution is around kind of hiding information rather than sharing it, could be an interesting one to watch, or whether it will produce an openness, because the Welsh model is more radical with the Future Generations Act, you know, some of the more, you know, the social solidarity principles behind it, and the fact some of that has been solidified and some of it is really, really proactive.

Nicola Headlam

Calvin's been doing great work on this, Calvin Jones within one of our other fellows.

And I think also, even again, the Scottish LPIP, which is on water, they don't have water companies in Scotland, they never went as far in terms of it's always been a public good in Scotland, so it's starting from such a different place.

I just think that where there are excellent lessons within the UK, partly it is universities can amplify that kind of work.

But the actual system itself, rewiring or not, it never wired back into the Westminster model, things that were tried elsewhere.

And I think that's to its demerit, actually.

Prof Martin Jones

Yeah, it is. And whether, you know, the fact that is, I mean, that's the configuration of the branches of government or Crown

Westminster Whitehall, which tells you, I think, why the LPIP is more powerful, because the world needs LPIP in that context, doesn't it?

Because there isn't, due to the fact that the apparatus of the state doesn't do that job for you.

So, yeah, this is where I think there is a real, you've got some powerful former academics that are committed to making that work through Calvin and others.

Calvin, of course, is well networked to Welsh Government and has produced briefing papers and he's producing impactful policy that shifted debates, hasn't he?

I mean, he's actually shifted things politically through, you know, just banging on the door for many years, so that would be the interesting space.

So the interesting question here is whether this kind of rewiring agenda produces increased or decreased collaboration between devolved contexts of Wales and the English regions or not, or whether they're mindful of the fact of sharing ideas because they don't want to be out, kind of squash by competition.

Nicola Headlam

It certainly is going to be a very lively space, I would say, going forward.

And you're right, whether that is in terms of researchers getting institutional funding to support it, whether it's those of us that have been interested forever

It's going to be a bumpy ride.

So from all the work that you've done, I've got two questions together.

One is thinking through the brokerage function.

And I should explain, it's not written down, but I see brokerage and place leadership as like Lego bricks.

Like your brokers can just be pure academics.

They don't need to be as in the trenches as most of the people that we know are.

You can be doing good brokerage across knowledge and across place and all those kinds of things.

And that might be as far as you take it.

When it really to gain the kind of legs that we're seeing now is when good brokers and good place leaders Lego brick themselves together.

So it doesn't need to be a person unless embodying brokerage function, embodying place leadership.

Like can you think of who you've come across that have kind of embodied those two different roles?

Prof Martin Jones

Yeah, so when you asked me these questions, I thought they needed to be combined because in order to be an effective place leader, you've got to be a broker.

So you just answered your own question on the first part.

I think leadership for me is about brokerage

They're not detached, they are joined folk. The best leaders, leaders I've worked with are folk that build communities around them, rather than autocratic, technocratic people who shout from the front.

So brokerage and leadership effectiveness are opposite sides of the same coin and vice versa, but broker, effective brokerage as a leader.

So yeah, I'm glad we agree on that.

They are different, they are different sets of the same issue, aren't they?

Broker as a leader and a leader as a broker.

And I can think of somebody, because he works as the city director of Stoke-on-Trent City Council, I don't mind championing him.

John Rouse CBE, February 2020, became the city director of Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

He started his civil service career off, he was the person that wrote the Lord Rogers.

He was he ran the secretariat to the Rogers Urban Renaissance Task Force.

You remember that report from 88 - 89, the one with the yellow cover, the Urban Renaissance.

John wrote that chunks of that report when he was in his early 30s as the civil servant in probably whatever that government department was DETR (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions) in them days, wasn't it?

DETR in Roseness (?) House.

Nicola Headlam

DETR, DLTR, ODPM.

Prof Martin Jones

John was there.

He then became Chief Executive of the Housing Corporation before going into local government in numerous local authorities.

And I know him from the work he's done in Stoke-on-Trent.

The reason why he's an effective broker and a leader is because he can actually articulate place to its positionality because he's operated outside the locality and inside the locality.

He can connect to branches of Whitehall because of his career trajectory and he can actually connect a place that is left behind via accessing power and influence via his own personal connections.

But also he maintains the coherence of where he is at the same time.

So in academic literatures, you know, John Rouse can jump scale because he can take that place called Stoke-on-Trent elsewhere through his own political policy connections.

But also he's, most of the times he's kind of party neutral.

He'll work with all political parties because he's a skilled civil servant.

He's been there, he's in his late 50s at the minute, been at Stoke-on-Trent probably for kind of five years, probably hasn't been good enough to become perm-sec, took his career down a different route.

He lives in Trafford, was involved in the Manchester health debates, as you know, he was involved in devolution and health in Manchester before he went to Stoke-on-Trent, was part of that Manchester model, around Burnstein, Lee, at least in terms of health devolution, worked with that leadership before the Manchesterism got called.

Nothing but respect for him, I've worked with him on numerous partnership boards, the Futures 100 board on Stoke-on-Trent that I was part of, and I think he exhibits the link between brokerage and leadership.

So I don't mind naming him, Nicola, because he's kind of a colleague of mine.

Nicola Headlam

I tell you one thing, though, and he is excellent, but I must say the health and social care integration at the GM level somewhat foundered, didn't it?

I know that it's coming up.

That's another area that we're hearing coming up, the Prime Minister having learnt the hard way.

But I mean, I remember very clearly when Sir Howard, May He Rest, was still in his pomp saying in a meeting, "Well, I never thought I was going to grab the hospitals, but we'll run them too"

and thinking, wow, because essentially, if health and social care integration had worked at the Manchester level, I mean, it would be a very different story.

It doesn't work anywhere at the moment.

And that's what now is going to be attempted, apparently nationally.

And I mean, it's not an easy one.

Prof Martin Jones

It's a difficult one to do, perhaps, and it was probably as difficult to do in a locality context, but it would not take five years.

It'd take a lot longer, you see, but no, you're right, it's massive challenges out there, aren't they?

Nicola Headlam

Still, as I say, I think at least we feel like the government has read the exam question.

Whether they got the right answer, we'll wait to see.

Right, I'm going to let you have a wave of my place-based innovation magic wand.

Careful with it, it can grant a wish.

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Your change will be specific, measurable, actionable, recording, and transferable – SMART.

Magic is hard to get hold of at the moment and is subject to a 20% reducing multi-year budget settlement.

So, Professor Jones, you can have 10 million pounds, you can have half an hour with the cabinet and a slide deck, having deleted all your levelling up slides and start with your rewiring slides.

Editorial control of a tabloid, a clause to insert into a bill, I'm feeling generous, you can have a whole act of Parliament if you want.

A simple message to go viral on TikTok or social media.

Anyone as an advocate for this work, well we've got the most powerful advocate in the land, so maybe we don't need an advocate, we've got Mr Burnham.

Or the answer, and that is for the real, real nerds of all time.

What would you like?

Prof Martin Jones

What would I do?

I would go back half an hour to the conversation we had on job rotation and I would put £10 million pound into the rollout through probably mayoral authorities in JR.

You know, you might do a job rotation act.

I would roll out job rotation after a further evaluation and application to the British model because it could, you would use that model to do it by wage subsidies and it's the link between unemployment and employment, but also it's the link between productivity and skills.

And it would work in devolved settings.

It's perfect to do that because it's the interlocking nature of unemployment, business development, staff training, you know,

It's perfect.

It's an ecosystem model of how you do economic development, but also it's about disadvantaged groups in the labour market by providing paid work in placement, opportunities to improve vocational skills.

It's around that technical stuff that Burnham talks about, the technical pathways route.

It's HE and FE working together.

It's all the stuff that's in the speeches of the last month that puts it into a clockwork machine to make it work.

And it links off the back of the growth and skills levy.

I wrote a blog on it for learners and listeners.

If you look on website called ERSA, the Employment Skills Agency.

I wrote a blog four or five years ago called "Job Rotation and Policy, an idea whose time has come", wrote it with Jo Ingold, who's now in Australia, and David Etherington, who worked with me in Staffs and also in Sheffield.

Three of us wrote it off the back of COVID when on the job retention money was around in COVID days.

If you Google JR with our three names, you'll see a blog that we wrote trying to sell this to deployment maker.

Nicola, I think this is a model that's worth looking at it connects different parts of the paint by numbers model that I'm trying to work in my head.

I'm not saying it's not flawed, in places.

I think it's worth it.

Nicola Headlam

It's an act.

So if we have the King's Speech, we have the Job Rotation Act.

And again, you seem like a very powerful advocate.

It seems like a time. It's an idea whose time has come again.

Prof Martin Jones

Exactly.

And it's got enough hooks on it.

Yeah.

So thank you.

Nicola Headlam

Thank you so much for joining us.

We set out to mine insights from experts. That was you.

Some case studies. Yes, job rotation are us.

Practical tips, not so sure. Career advice, God forbid.

I've obsessed about these problems for more than two decades.

That's the only career advice we can give you.

And to spotlight solutions and as well as wave the place-based innovation magic wand and we have.

Thank you for joining us.

Prof Martin Jones

Thank you.