



3LE Portfolio 2017

2017 has seen 3LE focus increasingly on specific strands of leadership and policy development for local and regional economic geographies – notably **industrial strategy**, **leadership and governance development**, **futures thinking and visioning**, and the **roles of universities in place**. The autumn also had a major ‘left field’ commission. I was asked to lead the UK Government team to assist with **long term strategic planning for the Overseas Territories (OTs) of Anguilla, British Virgin Islands (BVI) and Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI)** in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Unexpectedly, this exercise throws considerable light on and insight into challenges facing UK local leadership teams in the face of our own self-inflicted national crises as the UK moves into the Brexit negotiation period.

Industrial strategy: Government took from February to November 2017 to move from **Green Paper** to **White Paper** on their industrial strategy, and I produced the hyperlinked LGIU briefings at each stage of their process. In the intervening period I was pleased to work with a LEP, and with a number of local authorities, on industrial strategy work, and to assist the process locally as a member of the Greater Lincolnshire Innovation Council. This shall stand them (and 3LE) in good stead for the impending 2018-19 Local Industrial Strategy requirements of the White Paper.

Leadership and Governance Development: The May Mayoral elections might not have captured the imagination in terms of electoral turnout, but Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) present a huge set of opportunities and potential for local leadership of growth and development. These were contextualised in an early 2017 briefing on **devolution and local growth**, and elaborated further in a specific **Mayoral and MCA analysis**. Further specific work for and on the new MCAs followed, both directly in Greater Manchester, and indirectly in exploring local authority relations with them.

Concurrently, an alternative to moving towards a MCA in two tier areas is **local government reorganisation**. Throughout 2017 I advised a number of LAs on economic geography considerations of potential reforms – perhaps consolidated in the hyperlinked LGIU briefing; and also facilitated a number of strategic and corporate planning exercises at county, metro and district levels.

Futures thinking and visioning: Coping with the complexities and uncertainties of minority national government in the thrall of Brexit has to be partly reactive and opportunistic. But reactive opportunism is greatly enhanced if it is underpinned by a long term, forward and outward-looking vision. From the **Heart of South West Devolution prospectus** to **Gloucestershire 2050 Validity Framework**, to a piece of work for ADEPT on **digital innovation in transport systems**, I consider 3LE projects have broken new ground in using futures thinking to inform short and medium term policy and practice. This is already an area where there is much continued interest in 2018.

The roles of universities in place: Another major policy issue where 3LE is definitely at the forefront of thinking and practice is in exploring new models of ‘anchor institution’ policy. Building on the 2016 **University of Warwick Chancellor’s Commission**, and a contribution to **Leading Places** early in the year, a project with **Plymouth College of Art (PCA)** takes a different approach. Rather than ‘anchors’ as heavy objects that impede forward movement, it considers ‘loosener’ universities who disrupt incumbent models creatively. This has attracted a lot of interest, exemplified by this **WONKHE** and follow up blogs with **Regeneris**, and the **RSA**. Expect a major report and further 2018 initiatives in this important area of activity.



Commentary, conferences and events: I am particularly proud to continue to work as:-

- Visiting Professor of Practice at **CURDS, Newcastle University** – being a part of their 40th Anniversary celebrations in October, and collaborators with Louise Kempton of CURDS in the Gloucestershire project among others
- The author of a monthly Planning column for **Planning/Placemaking**, where, amongst others, I explored a number of the [megatrends](#) facing futures planning, including [aging society](#) and indices of [well-being and sustainability](#).
- An associate of the **Local Government Information Unit** - producing briefings this year on many of the topics mentioned above
- I am a regular speaker, facilitator and participant at conferences and events – these episodes being integral to the work and most of the projects described above.

General Election 2017

This would not be a 3LE portfolio, though, without relating all my professional practice to the wider political and societal changes driving the breakdown and break-up of the UK. Again my personal blog provided the outlet for the exasperation with our politics and the non-dom elites that control it.

From the comic lessons of '[Tango in Buenos Aires](#)', through the [voting irregularities of GE2017](#) to the [victory of 'Did not Votes' \(DNVs\)](#) analysis following the result, the terminal decline of our representative democracy and nation state was reinforced during the year.

If I have any belief in Britain, it is in the energy and dynamism of local places when guided by strong and inclusive leadership equipped with devolved powers and resources.

Perhaps a glimmer of hope at the end of the year? Not quite – but there might be opportunities for [city cultures to turnaround this age of national intolerance](#), if the Coventry City of Culture award is a catalyst for the sort of leadership in which I believe.