



3LE Portfolio 2017

Will any of us be able to look back on 2016 with any great fondness. For me, the loss of some of the great icons of my life – Fidel, Ali, a huge host of musicians and those in arts and culture – the murder of Jo Cox by a right-wing terrorist, and the global disgraces of the Brexit referendum and Trump election are the abiding and enduring legacy of this rotten year.

However, even amongst the dystopic one can develop and deliver professional work with relevance and integrity. I am grateful to clients and colleagues who enabled me to do this during 2016.

My two signature pieces published in 2016 were the [final report of the University of Warwick Chancellor's Commission](#) on the future role of the University in Coventry, Warwickshire and the Midlands; and a piece I co-authored at CURDS on "[Decentralisation: Issues, Principles and Practice](#)".

In many ways, these two pieces set the tone for the 2016 portfolio.

Universities are key to industrial, knowledge-based growth, and it was exciting to co-author "[How smart is England's approach to smart specialisation? A Policy Paper](#)" which captures considerable lessons from my work on S3 during 2014 and 2015; and to develop this further with a major exercise on synergies of EU funding (R&D and ERDF/ESF) for the NCUB and its Smart Specialisation Advisory Hub. More broadly, work on revisions of Strategic Economic Plans (notably Leicester and Leicestershire LEP); and on preparing the business case for establishment of the West Midlands Combined Authority Growth Company put the university/place interfaces into a broader context. The latter exercise also stimulated a [major briefing on internationalisation](#) locally and regionally.

On devolution, I was delighted with the progress achieved in the Heart of South West early in the year, in which I was both researcher, co-author of the [devolution prospectus](#) and facilitator for reaching agreement on it. In the autumn it was exciting to work with the Gloucestershire Economic Development Joint committee on their ambitions for growth and devolution. However, by the end of the year it was fairly clear that devo-momentum had stalled outside the impending Mayoral Combined Authorities, with bandwidth in Government focused increasingly on the Brexit morass.

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

- Visiting Professor of Practice at **CURDS, Newcastle University** – of which the Devolution publication above was probably the major product in 2016
- Research Associate at **Ashridge Business School** – where again it was wonderful to welcome the Swedish Local Government Senior Leadership development cohort – a professional relationship destined to become one of the first victim of the UKs Brexit disgrace
- The author of a monthly Planning column for **Planning/Placemaking**. This focused particularly post referendum on new models of development that required if places are to prosper in the impending breakdown. Key pieces in the latter half of 2016 explored [urban policy](#); [industrial strategy](#); [underperforming places](#); [Inclusive Growth](#); [regional rebalancing](#); and [rebirth of regeneration](#).
- 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 – of which an undoubted 2016 highlight was a British Council invitation to contribute to their Global Education Dialogue in Bogota, Colombia - See my [presentation here](#)

To end, though, where I began, it gives me no satisfaction to have 'called' both the referendum and the Fake President right early in the year. But the terminal decline and discrediting of representative democracy preoccupied my personal blog throughout 2016 – with strong links to the narratives established around the 2014 Scotland referendum and the 2015 General Election. Referenda and first-past-the-post elections to an all-powerful Westminster parliament are not the way to determine the future of UK – if we are to have one as a tolerant, progressive nation state at all!

Re-reading the pieces (in early 2018) with the benefit of some distance from the actual events, I remain proud of both the EU discourse and the Trump 'Plot against Europe' trilogy.

The referendum remains one of the most momentous and disgraceful political moments of the century as 17m England and Wales voters (under 27% of the population) voted for BREXIT. Through 2016, my personal blog covered referendum absurdities from April's "[Anxious, angry but always an European](#)" to May's "[Democracy in terminal decline](#)", the June tragedy of Jo Cox and "[crisis of June 23rd](#)", the July [unravelling of results \(and BREXIT lies\)](#) in the immediate aftermath of the vote, September reflections on '[the Sunderland question](#)', October comment on [the internationalisation absurdities](#), to November's round up of the duplicities of the Government in their dealing with [Nissan, CETA and Heathrow](#). I even managed to intersperse this with a serious allegation on LinkedIn of the disgusting [criminal incitement of hate crimes by our purported Justice Secretary](#).

I don't think the referendum was trumped by Trump, but nevertheless, if further proof of democracy's terminal decline was needed, he certainly provided it. The 'Plot against Europe' trilogy provides a perspective on the [Trump coup](#) in the US election, his inevitable '[Plot against Europe](#)' with UK government allies, and ends with thoughts on [strategies for the fightback](#).

I am often accused of angry polemic in these types of pieces. Rereading them now I admit I am still as angry as ever! But they are more than that. Each of them contains content that tends not to be reported or analysed in the mainstream media, and the pieces in the round try to suggest ways to turn back from and turnaround these crises.

I was pleased to see the end of a dismal 2016 – and entered 2017 with a glass-half-full optimism. Professionally, the 2016 crises leave a suite of work that needs to be championed if places are to ride out the consequences of the fake truths and fake presidents that now command the world stage. I have to believe that the leadership and great intentions of my best clients will enable this work to be progressed, and will enable me and 3LE to be a part of that process.