— PLAYING WITH THE RULES OF THE GAME:
Social Innovation for Urban Transformation

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Abstract

Innovation is perhaps the *buzzword in local economic development policy. Associated narrowly with neoliberal ideas, conventional notions of innovation—like its capitalocentric counterparts, enterprise and entrepreneurialism—may promise higher productivity, global competitiveness and technological progress but do not fundamentally change the 'rules of the game'. In contrast, an emerging field reimagines social innovation as disruptive change in social relations and institutional configurations. This article explores the conceptual and political differences within this pre-paradigmatic field, and argues for a more transformative understanding of social innovation. Building on the work of David Graeber, I mobilize the novel constructs of 'play' and 'games' to advance our understanding of the contradictory process of institutionalizing social innovation for urban transformation. This is illustrated through a case study of Liverpool, where diverse approaches to innovation are employed in attempts to resolve longstanding socio-economic problems. Dominant market- and state-led economic development policies—likened to a 'regeneration game'—are contrasted with more experimental, creative, democratic and potentially more effective forms of social innovation, seeking urban change through playing with the rules of the game. I conclude by considering how the play–game dialectic illuminates and reframes the way transformative social innovation might be cultivated by urban policy, the contradictions this entails, and possible ways forward.*

Introduction

Enterprise, innovation and entrepreneurialism are hot topics in local economic development. We can trace this from the original 'entrepreneurial urbanism' of the 1980s through to contemporary 'late-entrepreneurial' urbanism (Peck, 2017). Their enduring power over urban policy thinking is evident in our age of 'austerity localism' with, for instance, local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) and enterprise zones rolled out in the UK (Williams *et al*., 2014). These ideas—albeit interpreted differently—are also prevalent in counterhegemonic attempts to transform urban spaces and local economies, such as the 'community economies' approach and the 'social and solidarity economy' movement (Gibson-Graham, 2006; 2008; Miller, 2013; Scott Cato and North, 2017). At their core, enterprise, innovation and entrepreneurialism are about coming up with new ideas, or applying old ideas to new contexts, in ways which lead to useful outcomes, and have thus been reinterpreted through a 'social' lens more attuned to economic redistribution, political empowerment and social inclusion than greater efficiency, higher output and technological progress in the pursuit of profit. While social entrepreneurship relates to the micro, individual scale of the social entrepreneur, and social enterprise to the scale of the organization, social innovation has as its wider focus the scale of institutions and systems, processes of systemic and institutional change (Chalmers, 2012). This makes it an important avenue of enquiry for critical urban studies concerned with transformational approaches to local economic development and urban regeneration. Just as social entrepreneurship/enterprise have been conceptualized as

embryonic 'pre-paradigmatic fields' (Nicholls, 2010), so too can social innovation be understood as under theorized and highly contested. In this article, I explore how the concept of innovation has been mobilized in different urban policy approaches, and how a more 'maximalist' social understanding can contribute to progressive urban transformation.

Grand claims are made about the disruptive potential of social innovation— framed as a 'sixth wave' of transformational macro-level change, following the five familiar technological Kondratiev waves, from the industrial revolution to our nascent age of information and telecommunications (Nicholls and Murdock, 2012). Despite technological acceleration driving modernity, without concomitant transformations in societal structures, we seem to be reaching a saturation point of 'frenetic standstill' (Rosa, 2013); a 'post-political' condition of inertia (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014). Yet there are signs we are at the cusp of another seismic socio-economic shift, reflected in the proliferation of prefixes to describe what many see as a 'new economy'—'social', 'solidarity', 'collaborative', 'sharing' economies, to name but a few (Avelino *et al.*, 2015). Others point to Post-Post-Fordism (Murray *et al.*, 2015) and even postcapitalism (Mason, 2015; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). There is a growing sense among such commentators that what is needed to unleash the power of fast-evolving peer-to-peer digital technologies—and their transformative potential to circumvent mediating hierarchies of state-capitalist institutions and connect people in new democratic postcapitalist forms—are social innovations that reorganize social relations and the institutional configurations through which technologies flow and are in turn shaped. The spectres of a post-work economy and technological unemployment make social innovation an increasingly pressing concern for all with a stake in the future of cities.

This article explores the possibilities and problematics of building such a new economy at the local level, through social innovation aiming at institutional transformation in a particular urban context, the Liverpool City Region (LCR). Liverpool is an illuminating case as a laboratory of innovation, across economic, technological, civic and social domains. This is a city region at the coalface of macro socio-economic trajectories, through industrialization, deindustrialization, postindustrialization and, potentially, reindustrialization—developing fast in the nineteenth century to become a central trading node in a newly globalized colonial capitalism before 'falling from grace' in the twentieth century, with severe structural decline precipitating the loss of around half its population and much of its maritime-dependent employment (Sykes *et al.*, 2013; Southern, 2014; North, 2017). Through this period, LCR was at the forefront of various innovations: it pioneered the modern world's first enclosed stone dock, in 1715; the world's first inter-city passenger railway in 1830; and led the way in integrated sewerage systems, underground, overhead and overwater metro railways, cast iron churches, electric trams, and underwater road tunnels (Sykes *et al.*, 2013). The city region built the world's first municipal public park in Birkenhead in the 1840s; the country's first municipal housing in 1869 (including pioneering the use of prefabricated concrete); one of the first industrial-utopian model villages at Port Sunlight; and the world's first school dedicated to urban planning, the University of Liverpool's Department of Civic Design (Dockerill, 2016). Alongside these technical and civic innovations, LCR has long been a hotbed of political radicalism and cultural creativity. Often described as an 'edgy city', its cosmopolitan intercontinental culture has produced remarkable cultural creativity, not least Mersey Beat, the Liverpool Poets and the Beatles; while revolt and resistance has led to a flourishing of social innovation (Taylor, 2011).

Socially innovative projects emerged in Liverpool from the 1960s in response to state and market failure, inspired by local political traditions, notably the influence of anarcho-syndicalism from visiting Spanish seafarers (Southern, 2014). The city has long spawned innovations in the social economy, including the charities Citizen's Advice Bureau, Legal Aid and Age Concern and, more recently, among

the country's first city–regional networks of social enterprises and Social Stock Exchange (Heap *et al.*, 2017). In the 1970s, co-operative housing and community development trust movements were developed by working class communities in reaction to the destruction of docks-based employment from economic restructuring, the laying waste to many inner-city dockside neighbourhoods, and the lack of state intervention to provide sufficient public services to cope with consequent social issues (Taylor, 2011). Sykes *et al.* (2013) argue that this economic disaster was compounded by public policy mistakes: Liverpool City Council's so-called slum clearance programme removed hundreds of thousands of dockside residents to isolated housing estates on the metropolitan periphery, where the promise of new industries failed to materialize. Co-ops were established by residents, in co-operation with professionals, initially out of resistance to state-led displacement and the bureaucratic paternalism of public landlordism (Thompson, 2015). Weller Street Co-op members chose the architects with whom they worked closely to co-design, develop and then own and manage their new-build housing co-op—a first in British history. Out of this movement came the Eldonians who, in the context of mass unemployment in the early 1980s, reimagined their ex-industrial and contaminated neighbourhood as a 'self-regenerating community'—a vision realized with the establishment of the Eldonian Community and Development Trusts, which today employ over a hundred local people, support countless local businesses and social enterprises and manage a number of community amenities—leisure centre, day nursery, residential elderly care home, village hall and pub—as well as affordable housing. The Eldonians are cited as a pioneering exemplar of social innovation (Roberts, 2008).

Liverpool has also been at the forefront of policy innovation in tackling urban decline. As early as the 1980s, it was clear that the long line of regeneration experiments had largely failed to counteract socio-economic decline:

> Since the 1960s, the city has been the recipient, or victim, of every urban experiment invented, including Tony Crosland's educational priority areas, Jim Callaghan's traditional urban programme, Roy Jenkin's community development projects, the Home Office's Brunswick neighbourhood project, Peter Walker's inner area studies, Peter Shore's inner city partnerships, Geoffrey Howe's enterprise zones and Michael Heseltine's urban development corporation. Two decades' experience of those policies had not substantially improved the city's problems (Parkinson, 1985: 16).

The same can be said over three decades later. From 'Minister for Merseyside' Heseltine's International Garden Festival, kickstarting the 'festivalization' of urban policy (Peck, 2017); through more property-led approaches like City Challenge and Housing Market Renewal (HMR), whose rationale was concocted in Liverpool; to area-based initiatives targeting 'social exclusion', such as EU Objective One 'Pathways to Integration' and New Deal for Communities—all such experiments have mitigated but not significantly addressed the city's deep-seated problems. LCR is still the most deprived of all 39 LEP areas in England, while Liverpool and Knowsley are among the most deprived local authority areas in the country (respectively ranked fourth and second most deprived in 2015) with huge disparities between neighbourhoods (Southern *et al.*, 2017). By the time its economic fortunes picked up at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the city had adopted a distinctive entrepreneurial urbanism. This centred on attracting state and EU regeneration subsidies to pursue social inclusion strategies and physical renewal (Meegan and Mitchell, 2001; Sykes *et al.*, 2013; North, 2017), and on culture-led regeneration and export-oriented growth industries, while its rich history of innovation was commodified through spectacles such as the 2008 European Capital of Culture (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004). ECoC 2008 was a major boon for the city, responsible for

the proliferation of, through increased funding for, grassroots arts-based projects, some with socially innovative potential. However, critics contend that this period did more to 'capitalize culture' than democratize or radicalize it for transformative ends; revitalizing the city centre but largely overlooking the rest of the city region (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004; Boland, 2010; O'Brien, 2010).

Through this period, a more 'capitalocentric' (Gibson-Graham, 2006) conception of innovation took centre stage, informing an approach to local economic development focused on exogenous investment and export-oriented innovation industries and large-scale state-led urban renewal, which, I argue, has largely failed to contend with the socio-economic marginalization of most LCR residents. Part of this apparent failure reflects a lack of realism in expectations placed on place-based policy solutions to problems that are structural in scale (Wilks-Heeg, 2016). Austerity localism has created an urban policy vacuum—exacerbated by Brexit—which might be filled by renewed experimentation from below (Williams *et al.*, 2014). In this context, social innovations are emerging, largely from outside the state and capitalizing on the crisis conditions and opportunities opened up post 2008, in multiple neighbourhood-based projects aiming at urban transformation. This article explores four such examples, their role in catalysing a new economy and the insights they provide for a different approach to local economic development and urban policy.

In what follows, I review the literature on social innovation—and its enterprise and entrepreneurship counterparts—by contrast with conventional, capitalocentric conceptions, exemplified in the LCR Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)'s Growth Strategy. I then tease out the differences between more or less transformative—maximalist/minimalist—notions of social innovation, and argue for a more maximalist understanding. After examining this literature, I explore, through the recent work of Graeber (2015), the notions of play and games to throw a different light on transformative social innovation—as something rooted in spontaneous creative play. This, I argue, comes up against the relative rigidity and path dependency of institutions—the 'rules of the game' (Lowndes, 2005)—whose dynamic transformation is the object of social innovation. The image of a game is a useful construct to show how persistent urban problems in LCR—unresolved by conventional game-like, state-led urban policy—may be tackled more effectively by more playful experiments in social innovation. I argue that Liverpool's policy obsession with entrepreneurial urbanism—including entrepreneurialism in securing EU and UK state funding for regeneration programmes––has become a self-serving 'regeneration game'. I ask how we might start playing another policy game altogether, one which draws on the creative capacities of resident social innovators. Changing the game, however, remains particularly challenging in light of the inherent contradictions of social innovation—as a dynamic movement for disruptive change seeking to become institutionalized in enduring forms—which makes it problematic as a field of action and research and, especially, as a phenomenon for urban policy to initiate, cultivate or replicate. In this context, I explore in the discussion how urban policy may nonetheless promote and scale up social innovations, and suggest how the play–game dialectic provides a constructive framing for understanding transformative institutional change.

The article is based partly on doctoral research (2011–15)—a qualitative study of Liverpool's recent history of community-led housing movements, including semi-structured interviews and participant observation; ongoing action research with Homebaked Community Land Trust; an eight-month secondment (February–September 2016) to the LCR LEP where, as a policy advisor, I gained first-hand insight into policymaking processes in helping design and write the so-called Growth Strategy (LEP, 2016); as well as more recent empirical research investigating the scale, scope and value of the LCR social economy (Heap *et al.*, 2017) and developing an alternative, more inclusive industrial strategy for the city region (Southern *et al.*, 2017).

Contesting capitalocentric conceptions of innovation

Enterprise and entrepreneurialism have long been the discursive domain of neoliberal urban policy (Peck, 2017). From the 1980s cities began experimenting with new policy approaches to local economic development, such as enterprise zones, which foregrounded enterprising and entrepreneurial capacities of the private sector, as part of the deregulatory, pro-market logic articulated by neoliberalism and deepened through austerity—evident in recent British policy initiatives such as LEPs and (resurrected) enterprise zones (Williams *et al.*, 2014). This mirrors more recent policy obsessions with creativity—a close relation of innovation—expressed in New Labour's doomed love affair with the 'creative industries' and the rise of Richard Florida's ideas around attracting the coveted 'creative class' as a panacea to the economic problems of deindustrializing cities (Peck, 2005). Similarly, innovation is most commonly associated with capitalism—predicated in the popular imagination on technological invention and organizational change to produce efficiency gains and new growth opportunities (Drewe *et al.*, 2008). Such concepts are reified as post-political 'floating signifiers' within neoliberal ideology (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014). Across 'economic' ideas and values, therefore, the dominance of capitalist discourse ensures their close association with strictly formal understandings of economic life as essentially competitive and individualistic. This is what Gibson-Graham (2006; 2008) describe as 'capitalocentrism': relating all forms of life to capital, making other practices invisible. In the next section, I illustrate how this capitalocentric conception of innovation underpins the hegemonic entrepreneurial approach to local economic development in Liverpool, before exploring counter-hegemonic conceptions of innovation.

Capitalocentric innovation in Liverpool

In 2015, Liverpool's two largest universities were commissioned by the LCR Combined Authority (CA) to take a barometer reading of the city's socio-economic trajectory, resulting in a lucid diagnosis acknowledging recent achievements towards economic recovery yet highlighting enduring problems (Parkinson *et al.*, 2016). The latter are summarized starkly as 'gaps' with other core cities: notably a wealth gap (£17,852 gross value added [GVA] per head against £23,755 national average); a jobs gap (lowest employment rate of 63 largest UK cities, just 61.2%); and a skills gap (15.9% of working age residents lack any formal qualifications, only 25.7% attain high-level qualifications). The report also makes recommendations for resolving Liverpool's severe socio-spatial problems built around a rather conventional notion of local economic development centring on innovation. 'Innovation and knowledge are perhaps the most crucial characteristic of a successful city region', states the report, which defines 'innovation' as:

> The introduction of new or changed processes, services or forms of organisation into the market place … Knowledge and innovation are two of the most significant drivers of the productivity and competitiveness of city regions (Parkinson *et al.*, 2016: 8).

This common conception reduces innovation to a narrowly 'capitalocentric' notion: the drive for technological change or organizational efficiency in products or production processes to improve the competitive position of firms or places in increasingly global export markets. This, argues Blake (2010; Blake and Hanson, 2005: 684), results in a distinctly *place-less* idea, in which 'the concept of innovation has been silently … entwined with export-base theory', as 'changes in a product or in production that lead ultimately to the creation or exploitation of large, extra-local geographic markets'. Blake and Hanson (2005) demonstrate how innovation is defined and treated almost unanimously across the grey literature as directly related to economic growth. Policymaking in Liverpool is no exception.

'The state of Liverpool City Region report' (Parkinson *et al.*, 2016) was highly influential in developing the 'Single growth strategy' (LEP, 2016). This was commissioned by the LCR CA and produced by the LEP to consolidate the multiple overlapping strategies across the six constituent LCR local authorities, as an economic guide for newly devolved city-regional governance. The single growth strategy highlighted seven key 'growth sectors'—advanced manufacturing; digital and creative; financial and professional services; health and life sciences; low carbon energy; maritime and logistics; and the visitor economy—those with the most potential for future growth through investing in innovation. This orientation towards pursuing highly 'innovative' industries was already embedded in LEP policy, their Innovation Plan 2014–2020 bearing all the hallmarks of the place-less notion of innovation:

> In seeking to address the structural challenges in the City Region, innovation plays a key role in realising wider economic potential. In sophisticated market economies, innovation is increasingly the key to success … Innovation helps provide the new, fresh thinking, products and services with which our businesses, people and place need to meet the challenge of relentlessly increasing competition. Innovation also helps us to develop solutions to the so-called Grand Societal Challenges of population growth, climate change and resource availability (LEP, 2014: 3-4).

Common to the innovation plan and single growth strategy alike, then, is the belief that investment in highly innovative industries and other knowledge-intensive innovation assets is the most effective way to close the 'gaps' identified by The state of Liverpool City Region report. However, improving productive and innovative outputs of the most successful sectors alone does little to tackle perhaps Liverpool's biggest structural problem: the spatial concentration of unemployment and intergenerational deprivation in the inner city and metropolitan periphery. Residents here will continue to remain disconnected from job opportunities created by such 'innovation assets' unless the skills gap and associated social problems are directly targeted. Possibilities for addressing these issues are narrowing: for the first time since 1968 the UK lacks an urban regeneration policy of targeted area-based initiatives and 'the outcome is almost certain to be that the gap between affluent and deprived neighbourhoods continues to grow' (Wilks-Heeg, 2016: 10). This means more onus on local economic development to generate new jobs in places currently disconnected from labour markets. In Liverpool, policymakers have chosen the 'pick the winners' route to local economic development, focusing on high GVA industries with most potential for productivity growth over those with greatest capacity for new employment generation or capacity building in areas of multiple deprivation. In addition, these high-tech sectors will not produce significant new future employment due to technological displacement of human capital, suggesting we need to innovate new ways of organizing production in a 'post-work' economy (Mason, 2015; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). Here, innovation has been conflated with productivist growth over other possible interpretations as a source of creative problem solving and socio-economic transformation.

Reappropriating innovation

In response to capitalocentric dominance over economic common sense, Gibson-Graham argue critical theorizing tends towards 'strong theory'—a negative, paranoid, conspiratorial perspective reducing all phenomena to expressions of some fundamental threatening thing, often neoliberalism—and that such 'reading for dominance', in being blind to difference, ironically reinforces the status quo, dampening and discouraging postcapitalist possibilities. Against essentialist 'strong theory', Gibson-Graham (2008: 619) call for an anti-essentialist 'weak theory' to 'read

for difference', more attuned to the emergence of novelty, possibility and creativity; 'to yield something new' rather than simply critique. In this way, they embrace innovation in their process of theorization and empirical investigation. They build upon Polanyi's (1944) critique of 'formalist' economic reductionism—that the dominant, formalist view of the economy as a disembedded, self-regulating market composed of exchange relations is politically constructed and makes invisible three other principles structuring the 'substantive' economy: householding, redistribution and reciprocity. Likewise, more 'social' approaches to enterprise, entrepreneurialism and innovation employ a Polanyian method of redescribing apparently strictly 'economic' terms. Teasdale (2012) describes how growing British policy interest in 'social enterprise' was sparked by London's co-operative movement, rooted in more radical anticapitalist and mutualist traditions, coming together in the late 1990s to strategically reorganize themselves under the moniker of Social Enterprise London; making room for manoeuvre within neoliberal discourse. Southern (2014; Southern and Whittam, 2015) deconstructs the concept of the enterprising individual—Schumpeter's 'heroic' entrepreneur—and rearticulates entrepreneurial behaviour within a collectivist rather than individualist frame that emphasizes the co-operative, disruptive and transformative power of the 'entrepreneurial activist'. Taken together, social enterprise, social entrepreneurship and social innovation help constitute the social and solidarity economy (Scott Cato and North, 2017), pointing towards more co-operative economic relations based on the Polanyian principles of redistribution and reciprocity rather than exchange.

Likewise, innovation is being disentangled from its capitalist couplings, reappropriated for progressive social change (Drewe *et al.*, 2008; Moulaert *et al.*, 2010; 2013; Avelino *et al.*, 2015; 2017). Characterizing this growing field of social innovation is the observation that hegemonic discourse marginalizes broader notions of innovation: different ways of thinking; creative problem solving; exploitation of a good idea; artistic or intellectual novelty (Blake, 2010). Whilst capitalocentric conceptions conflate innovation with invention, contemporary social innovation literature makes a clear-cut distinction between 'invention'—the discovery or creation of a new thing or idea—and 'innovation'—the practical application of invention to new contexts (Jessop *et al.*, 2013). Distinguishing the *social* character of innovation is the focus on public interest and social empowerment rather than organizational efficiency or technical progress (Drewe *et al.*, 2008). Social innovation was first coined in early nineteenth century France as a derogatory label criticizing the naivety of early utopian-socialist experiments, for ignoring the structural constraints of capitalist dynamics, envisioned by Fourier, Saint-Simon and Robert Owen (Moulaert *et al.*, 2013). The concept re-emerged in the revolutionary wake of May 1968; French researchers rediscovered the role of everyday life and small-scale solutions in social change. This culminated in a reconceptualization by Chambon *et al.* (1982), which formed the foundation for the contemporary urban studies strand. These historical origins in French praxis firmly situate social innovation in the domain of radical collective action. While the literature suggests social innovation begins in *reaction* to desperate situations—needs being left unmet by the state or market—these political origins indicate the missing complementary part in the dialectic: *proactive* and playful visions and imaginaries of how the world could be different.

By the twenty-first century, the concept had become bound up with entrepreneurialism, increasingly embraced by governments, agencies and think tanks as a policy panacea for market failure and public sector reform. We can see this in the Young Foundation and NESTA's championing of distinctly entrepreneurial conceptions in the UK, spearheaded by their (former) Chief Executive and New Labour policy guru Geoff Mulgan (2007); in the US where Obama instituted a Social Innovation Fund and an Office of Social Innovation within the White House (Chalmers, 2012); and its incorporation into policymaking in Quebec, Latin America and especially the EU

(Avelino *et al.*, 2015). Interestingly, much of the recent research that resuscitates a more radical conception has been funded by the EU.

One of these more radical contemporary strands is rooted in urban studies, coalescing around the territorial dimension (Drewe *et al.*, 2008; Moulaert *et al.*, 2010; Oosterlynck *et al.*, 2013). Neighbourhoods are seen as the increasingly salient site of deprivation—spatially-concentrated poverty in marginalized areas suffering from market failure and territorial stigma—and its resolution via social innovation in the absence of effective state intervention. Largely germinated by Moulaert's (2000) studies into potential planning solutions for 'disintegrating areas'—post-industrial places where orthodox 'boosterist' policies have failed—this research was the initiator in a series of EU-funded projects conducted in response to growing political concerns around uneven urban development and inner-city decline in European cities. The most extensive of these was SINGOCOM ('social innovation governance and community building'), running 2001–06, producing an 'alternative model of local innovation' (ALMOLIN) (Moulaert *et al.*, 2005), which sought to provide answers to the question: 'Can neighbourhoods save the city?' (Moulaert *et al.*, 2010).

ALMOLIN conceptualizes social innovation dynamics as beginning with the deprivation of human needs, differentiated across three domains: economic or 'material' basic needs (housing, employment etc.); cultural or 'existential' needs (self-expression, creativity); and 'political' needs (participatory citizenship, self-government) (Moulaert *et al.*, 2005). These deprivations lead to various forms of harm—exploitation from material deprivation; alienation from existential; and social exclusion from political—which sparks a reaction among affected groups, who may, under the right social, institutional and political conditions, mobilize as a movement for change. Social innovation then proceeds through three dimensions: addressing unmet social needs ('content' dimension), requiring 'changes in social relations, especially with regard to governance' ('process'), which together—if these changes are to remain durable over time—lead to new institutional configurations ('empowerment') (Moulaert *et al.*, 2005: 1976). This strand positions social innovation as driven fundamentally by social movements in civil society pursuing experiments in self-organization, often in direct opposition to dominant institutional logics of state bureaucracy and market capitalism (Moulaert *et al.*, 2010).

More recently, social innovation has been explored from a 'sustainability transitions' and 'systems change' perspective (Avelino and Wittmayer, 2016). The latest EU-funded research project on the subject is TRANSIT ('transformative social innovation theory'), running from 2014 to 2017, with 12 partners across Europe and Latin America (Avelino *et al.*, 2015; 2017; Pel and Bauler, 2014). This project takes a broader perspective on social innovation as a global network of transformative trans-local movements. Its greater scope, and its EU funding, reflect growing political interest in systemic transformation and various 'new economies'—'sharing', 'collaborative', 'social', 'solidarity', 'green', 'gift', 'peer-to-peer'—which all converge around the idea that the current dual state-market, public–private system is in escalating crisis and an alternative, third direction is progressively navigable. 'Transformative' social innovation is distinguished as that which 'contributes to *transformative societal change*, for example towards new economic systems' (Avelino *et al.*, 2015: 2, original emphasis).

TRANSIT identifies four metanarratives that describe global movements towards transformative social innovation: first, 'degrowth and localization', focusing on ecological justice, low-carbon transitions, circular economies, such as eco villages and transition towns; second, 'social entrepreneurship and the social economy', focusing on connecting and incubating social enterprises through coworking spaces, innovation labs, impact hubs, accelerators; third, the 'collaborative economy' of sharing and redesigning goods through decentralized networks, digital fabrication, open source and peer-to-peer technologies and hackerspaces and makerspaces; and fourth, the 'solidarity economy',

aiming for participatory democracy and political institutional change, including movements for a universal basic income, the right to the city, participatory budgeting, and collective governance of assets through community land trusts, among others. It is this latter metanarrative where we might locate ALMOLIN and the urban studies strand.

Social innovation is a fluid and contested conceptual spectrum—with the Young Foundation, NESTA, EU, OECD and Obama's Office of Social Innovation at one end, and those movements studied by ALMOLIN and TRANSIT at the other. With so many diverse agents and agendas competing to define its shape and scope, social innovation is—like social entrepreneurship—a 'pre-paradigmatic field', one whose rationale, problem definition, methods and epistemological boundaries are subject to contestation (Nicholls, 2010). Here, it is important to distinguish between Unger's (2015: 236) 'minimalist' and 'maximalist' definitions: one confined to the 'third sector'; the other aiming for change encompassing 'the whole of society, of its institutional arrangements, and of its dominant form of consciousness'. Similarly, Gorz distinguishes 'reformist reforms' from 'non-reformist reforms' (Meehan, 2014). This echoes Lefebvre's (1991: 372) notion of postcapitalist 'differential space' and his distinction between 'induced'/'minimal' difference, 'generated by iteration or recurrence', and 'produced'/'maximal' difference, emerging 'from the chasm opened up when a closed universe ruptures'. This distinction—between 'capitalocentric' and 'social' innovation and, in turn, between conventional and transformative social innovation—is encapsulated by Martinez (2016: 224) as two forms of struggle: 'the struggle to succeed according to the values of a particular game and the struggle to decide which game is being played'.

This image of a 'game' recurs in the TRANSIT literature, which characterizes social innovation as a process of change composed of 'multi-player games' played by various actors and 'stabilized and channelled by institutions, the rules of the game' (Pel and Bauler, 2014: 2). TRANSIT incorporates the transition dynamics of a multilevel perspective to conceptualize transformative change as occurring through various interdependent 'levels': from the microscale of 'niches', places or projects of innovative practice; through the mesoscale of 'regimes', hegemonic institutional ensembles; to the macroscale of the wider 'landscape', historical exogenous trends (Avelino *et al.*, 2017). Transition from one system to another occurs when all three levels coevolve and reinforce each other. Thus transformative change transpires through various 'shades' linked to these levels: social innovation within niches, such as particular neighbourhoods; system innovation within regime subsystems, such as healthcare or housing; and 'game changers'—'macro developments that are perceived to drastically alter the rules, the fields and the players in the 'game' of governance interactions' (Pel and Bauler, 2014: 7). Game changers might include politicoeconomic events, such as the 2008–9 financial crisis, austerity and Brexit, but may also include longer-term structural changes, such as globalization, digital disruption and technological unemployment.

Playing around with the rules of the game

Social innovation, then, is about contesting and experimenting with 'the rules of the game' that define a particular institutional field (Lowndes, 2005)—or, in a Bourdieusian sense, 'a kind of arena in which people play a game which has certain rules, rules which are different from those of the game that is played in the adjacent space' (Bourdieu, 1991: 215). To understand how social innovation might succeed in changing the rules of the game it is useful to explore the 'playing a game' construct. Graeber (2015: 191–2) sets out his distinction between play and games:

> True, one can play a game; but to speak of 'play' does not necessarily imply the existence of rules at all. Play can be purely improvisational. One could simply be playing around. In this sense, play in its pure form, as distinct from games, implies a pure expression of creative energy … [P]lay can be said to be present

when the free expression of creative energies becomes an end in itself. It is freedom for its own sake. But this also makes play in a certain sense a higher-level concept than games: play can create games, it can generate rules—in fact, it inevitably does produce at least tacit ones, since sheer random playing around soon becomes boring—but therefore by definition play cannot itself be intrinsically rule-bound.

When we play games—'pure rule-governed action' (Graeber, 2015: 190)—we play within the rules set by the game. We are more familiar with playing games, playing *within* the rules, than playing *around* with them to create new games. The latter is what transformative social innovation tends towards. Intuitively, innovation involves experimentation or 'playing around' with existing configurations; the emergence of novelty through creativity. Woodyer (2012: 322) reveals how invention—and by extension innovation—is ultimately rooted in playing:

> Through its playing with limits, experimentation with rules, roles and meanings, and mimetic behaviour, playing contains transformative potential. It is an area ripe for rupture, sparks of insight and moments of invention, which presents us with ways to be 'otherwise'.

Graeber (2015) argues that this seemingly unique capacity of play—to bring new things into being, create rules for playing games and the conditions for changing them without necessarily being bound by them—is shared by only one other social phenomenon: sovereignty. In some sense, then, social innovation—in attempting to transform the relatively unchanging institutional ensembles that govern urban life through playing with the rules of the game—is engaged in the struggle for new kinds of sovereignty. This is its most transformative potential. We can see this in more radical emergent social innovations prefiguring the logic of the 'social', which Davies (2015) conceptualizes as a third category of societal organization distinct from the 'public' (state/law/normative sovereignty/hierarchical relations/'Leviathan') and the 'private' (market/economics/ spontaneous order/exchange relations/'Invisible Hand'). Where the state attempts to mediate social relations through judicial authority, and the market through calculative price mechanisms, the social bypasses these mediations through direct peer-to-peer interaction, such as via social media (Davies, 2015)—containing both utopian and dystopian possibilities for new forms of sovereignty. For instance, Blockchain technologies—underpinning cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin—have the potential to 'enable modes of large-scale collective action that bear very little resemblance to government as we've known it', by circumventing the hegemonic medium of money and its ultimate arbiter, state power, through a radically decentralized, accountable and transparent digital ledger system (Greenfield, 2017: 161). New production processes around digital fabrication—enabled by the technological innovation of 3D printing and embodied socially in makerspaces (Greenfield, 2017)—have the potential to short circuit capitalism by making the production of commodities approach zero marginal cost, thereby undermining the commodity form (Mason, 2015; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). Makerspaces provide tentative infrastructures for more collaborative production (van Holm, 2017) and 'open innovation', which transcends closed, vertical control by powerful corporations (Chalmers, 2012).

More tangibly, perhaps, common property regimes such as co-ops and community land trusts (CLTs) can be seen as institutional articulations of the 'commons'—a manifestation of the social—which transcend our conventional public/private conception of ownership and rights (Thompson, 2015). Private property rights are hierarchically structured around individual rights bearers related to each other only by their shared vertical relationship with the ultimate authority, the state—reflecting the dominance

of what Gilbert (2013) calls the 'Leviathan logic' of (neo)liberal political thought since Hobbes. The commons represents a break with Leviathan logic, in that commoners are related in a horizontal structure where rights are (self-)legitimated through the very act of their mutual negotiation (Gilbert, 2013). Reflecting the prefigurative potential for creating autonomous collective self-governance, collective property organizations, particularly CLTs, have been reconceptualized as 'governance shims': '(typically nonstate) organizations that can act as a wedge [or "shim"] between existing scales', between the household and formal local government (Williams and Pierce, 2017: 796). Their unique capacity to own and manage land and resources in a locally democratic and publicly accountable way while acting as community anchors—'stewardship' over ownership (Thompson, 2015)—sets CLTs apart as capable of providing 'an *emergent authority to govern*' (Williams and Pierce, 2017: 804, original emphasis). I explore this transformative potential through empirical examples below—particularly of CLTs and makerspaces—but first draw attention to conceptual limits and fundamental institutional constraints.

The Latin root of innovation suggests 'novelty' (Nicholls and Murdock, 2012) but novelty always demands a context, just as 'freedom [play] has to be in tension with something [rules], or it's just randomness' (Graeber, 2015: 192). In the context of urban institutional change there is no blank slate to play with, but rather deeply embedded institutional arrangements, cultural norms, material forms and historical path dependencies shaping governance practices and processes—the 'rules of the game' (Lowndes, 2005). While play is dynamic and spontaneous—the sovereign source of creativity—institutions appear to be relatively fixed and solid, the vessels of durable social reproduction, despite their dynamic nature over time (Lowndes, 2005). Indeed, the etymological roots of 'institution' indicate something 'inert', something standing relatively strong and still against the accelerative forces of modernity (Rosa, 2013: 92)—an inertia set against the dynamic change of innovation. Institutions describe 'frameworks of norms, rules and practices which structure action in social contexts' from the most enduring—the labour–capital relation (mode of production) and nuclear family unit (social reproduction)—to more historically/contextually contingent and progressively malleable governance cultures, processes and practices (González and Healey, 2005: 2058). Institutional structures are fundamental for governance and social reproduction, and provide the essential material for social innovators to play with; but they can be more or less conducive to playful innovation for the production of more or less socially just outcomes.

Bureaucracy—the ideal-type form of a rule-based institution—is likened by Graeber (2015: 190) to a tightly rule-bound game resistant to play: 'a bureaucracy is anything but playful. Mechanistic and impersonal, it would appear to represent the negation of any possibility of playfulness'. My focus here is not on bureaucracy or bureaucratic processes *per se* but on a particular urban policy regime which possesses this same tendency of bureaucracy to embody the hallmarks of a game, in opposition to play. Graeber (2015: 190) provides a neat definition of an ideal-type game:

> First, [games] are clearly bounded in time and space, and thereby framed off from ordinary life. There is a field, a board, a starting pistol, a finish line. Within that time/space, certain people are designated as players. There are also rules, which define precisely what those players can and cannot do. Finally, there is always some clear idea of the stakes, of what the players have to do to win the game. And, critically: that's all there is. Any place, person, action, that falls outside that framework is extraneous; it doesn't matter; it's not part of the game.

Shaped by a prevailing culture of neoliberal entrepreneurialism, the configuration of governance processes and policy programmes that has become hegemonic within the Liverpool City Region is often described to me by its participants and commentators as

'the regeneration game'. In what follows, I show how it embodies the characteristics of a game as set out by Graeber above, exhibiting technocratic tendencies that constrain innovation and more playful approaches, becoming self-serving for certain institutional players; whose rules prove resilient even in the face of repeated failure to produce favourable outcomes, but nonetheless remain possible to transform through path-breaking social innovation in moments of crisis. In this way, the play–game construct can help tease out the dialectics of institutionalizing transformative social innovation within urban policy regimes more or less resistant to change.

The image of play and games raises a number of contradictions at the heart of social innovation. First, for transformation to occur, new social practices, relations and institutional configurations must be innovated through creative acts that have more in common with free play than with playing a game. Yet for these new forms to be effective, they must endure over time and therefore become institutionalized as new sets of rules. This dialectical tension between creative rupture (play) and institutionalization (embedding new rules of the game) cannot be fully resolved. The image of free-form play versus rule-bound games helps illustrate how social innovation is always pulled in opposing directions, with the greater pull from existing rules, making innovative projects vulnerable to capture and co-optation before they can sediment as new configurations.

Second, social innovation is torn between free-form play, without bounds, as the source of creative social change, and a more instrumental means of problem solving in a certain bounded context with specific ends. Graeber (2015: 192) quotes Visvanathan, who suggests that 'A game is a bounded, specific way of problem solving. Play is more cosmic and openended ... A game has a predictable resolution, play may not. Play allows for emergence, novelty, surprise'. Imagining the institutional field of social innovation as a game allows for this contradiction—between play and instrumentality—to be held in creative tension: games are there to be played, within certain predefined rules, but amenable to change and transformation through innovative collective action. However, psychological research (Stokes, 2006) suggests that creativity is fundamentally dependent on constraints; that imaginative innovation is impossible without at least some boundary making. The play–game tension must therefore be seen as an interdependent dialectic rather than outright contradiction, whereby creativity paradoxically requires some form of rule setting, problem definition and instrumental problem solving. The question remains what institutional conditions are most amenable to innovation.

This positions social innovation in an ambiguous relation to a parallel trend for 'urban laboratories', increasingly mobilized globally as policy solutions to a whole range of urban problems (Karvonen and van Heur, 2014). Urban labs mirror the concept of innovation in their ubiquity as a contemporary buzzword; a metaphor borrowing from experimental science with its rigorous, replicable methods and controlled laboratory conditions (Gieryn, 2006). Laboratory studies scholars attempt to collapse the distinction between 'lab', a placeless site of knowledge production, and 'field', highly contextual spaces embedded in wider institutional and cultural dynamics (Gieryn, 2006; Karvonen and van Heur, 2014). However, urban labs encapsulate the central tension between top-down policy and grassroots action. While labs are associated with conscious experiments conducted by (social) scientists in a bounded site with specific instruments, social innovation is a more open-ended and immersive process conducted by people living in the experimental 'site', the field itself. The deliberate, calculated intentionality of laboratories runs against the grain of spontaneous creativity: approaching a problem with a pre-chosen methodology and set of tools conspires against the production of novelty. Their instrumentality as bounded spaces of scientific investigation suggests urban labs tend to, in a Lefebvrean sense, induce differences within a closed universe of rules rather than produce maximal difference through their rupture. When social innovation becomes more systematic, deliberately programmed

and externally induced by researchers or policymakers it begins to take on the character of an urban lab.

This helps explain why so much social innovation literature—notably the urban studies strand (Moulaert *et al.*, 2010)—locates its source in everyday life, civil society and social movements, outside and opposing the state and market. Such a position resonates with Scott's (1999) critique of the technocratic logic embodied in 'seeing like a state'—parasitic on and stifling more informal, playful processes of everyday life. As a counterbalance to abstract knowledge, *episteme*, and technical knowledge, *techne*—both embodied in state projects and scientific labs, and relatively impervious to context—Scott (1999) posits *mêtis*: vernacular practical wisdom and knowhow, acquired in response to contextual challenges. Social innovation aligns most closely with *mêtis*—but ideally mobilizes all three approaches to knowledge production. This is captured in 'trans-disciplinarity', methodologically central to social innovation research (Jessop *et al.*, 2013), which reconfigures the role of the researcher towards highly reflexive, embedded and politically oriented participatory action research, working closely with both practitioners (*techne*) and residents (*mêtis*); breaking down traditional boundaries between theory/practice, observer/observed, expert/user, science/art, top-down/bottom-up, induced/produced, and instrumentality/play.

Along transdisciplinary lines, the TRANSIT literature takes a multi-actor approach (Avelino and Wittmayer, 2016) that sees social innovation emerging through distributed agency, 'initiated by any kind of actor, in any kind of context' (Avelino *et al.*, 2017: 5). Although, problematically, this disavows the unique contribution of civil society actors, it nonetheless recognizes the importance of forging alliances between active agents of innovation—the 'bees', in Mulgan's (2007) famous ecological metaphor—and the 'trees', those institutional agents of validation, such as universities, companies, local authorities and other 'anchor institutions'; alternately articulated as the 'butterflies' and the 'elephants' (Oosterlynck *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, it recognizes that agents of social innovation are distributed across different sectors. Building on social enterprise/entrepreneurship scholarship, the TRANSIT literature identifies four main institutional logics: 'state' (public, formal, nonprofit), which can be translated, in Polanyian terms, as the redistribution principle; 'market' (private, formal, for profit), as exchange; 'community' (private, informal, nonprofit), as reciprocity; and a hybrid 'third sector' of nonprofit associations (private, formal, nonprofit), balanced between all three principles. Because of its disruptive potential to reconfigure these sectoral relations—and its preparadigmatic, unstable identity as a 'boundary concept', sufficiently flexible to bridge social worlds (Pel and Bauler, 2014)—social innovation most likely emerges from the interstitial spaces between institutional fields, before becoming institutionalized, often in the third sector. Highly transformative social innovation, however, succeeds in reconfiguring these institutional logics before becoming captured by them, moving from 'niches' situated within particular fields and places towards 'regime' change. In the next section, I discuss how this institutionalization process has played out in Liverpool, in the governance context of the dominant game in town, the 'regeneration game'.

Playing the regeneration game in Liverpool

In the late 1990s, inner-city Liverpool—like many deindustrializing northern English cities –experienced severe manifestations of economic decline in low demand, housing vacancy and neighbourhood abandonment. Liverpool City Council commissioned the original research of 'neighbourhood sustainability' that underpinned their successful lobbying for the entire Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Pathfinder programme across nine northern cities—£2.3 billion funding from central government (Webb, 2011). Certain actors were designated as legitimate players to work across the city region's four 'zones of opportunity'—intriguingly known as ZOOs (Thompson, 2017)—in which preferred housing associations and private sector developers worked

in partnership with the council. 'Land banks' were created through large-scale zoning with sufficient economies of scale to make redevelopment viable and profitable for the main players, but preventing any experimentation outside the rules of the game imposed by the monolithic development logic. According to one regeneration consultant, these zones were like a 'chessboard' of strategic land parcels, to be divested of residents so that development players may 'shift pieces around' according to changing dynamics of the 'regeneration game' (interview, 2015).

Here, we see striking similarities with playing a game, as defined by Graeber (see quote above). Just as in a game of, say, monopoly or chess, a regeneration scheme zones an urban area off from ordinary life and bespoke rules govern how players can act, especially in relation to property, such as state-imposed compulsory purchase orders (CPOs), while foreclosing other ways of acting. And just like a board game, there are a number of predefined players, some understanding the rules of the game better than others or better placed to capitalize on a good starting position, creating unequal chances for winning or losing. Indeed, the 'regeneration game' metaphor has long held currency in describing various area-based initiatives (de Groot, 1992; Oatley, 1995).

In the case of Liverpool's HMR Pathfinder, powerful players determined the rules of the game. The council had a direct financial interest to sell land recouped through CPO to developers and housing associations, pocketing the difference and generating higher council tax revenues in the long run (Thompson, 2017). Likewise, housing associations had a financial stake in seeing their assets revalorized; their ability to borrow private finance for housing development is based on the value of their stock, which in inner-city Liverpool at the time was very low, producing perverse incentives to deliberately run-down areas to demonstrate their need for regeneration subsidies (Webb, 2011). This state-led process of exacerbating the very territorial stigma then targeted through regeneration is beginning to be documented elsewhere, notably Edinburgh (Kallin and Slater, 2014). Despite HMR being cancelled midway through its proposed programme in 2011 by the incoming coalition government, there are now, in the context of fiscal austerity, greater incentives to continue asset stripping to plug the widening gap in funding for basic pubic services following some 58% budget cuts to Liverpool City Council.

The 'regeneration game' is a term employed by actors in Liverpool to describe more than just time-restricted, spatially bounded renewal projects. A former housing officer and regeneration consultant turned social entrepreneur explains:

> I talk about the index of multiple deprivation … Liverpool's been really good at winning that competition, because we can attract EU-backed money … It's a money competition really, so we've come top of that tree for a long time. But now that competition's changed, it'll be interesting to see what the city does, because it's a quite an entrepreneurial city in its own way … Maybe people have been misunderstanding what game, what league, Liverpool was playing in, because actually if the biggest prize was European money, we won it … Who else was gonna invest that much in the city? We not only got Objective One, we got it for three decades on the trot and the [HMR] transition programme: no other city's got that have they! … So you could even describe it as the most entrepreneurial city—even Canary Wharf didn't get as much as us in terms of European investment (interview, 2014).

While providing a much-needed source of external support for Liverpool and its most marginalized residents, EU Objective One funding had problematic effects on the city's social innovation experiments. Through the 1990s, they became increasingly geared towards addressing top-down policy objectives around social exclusion and thus more 'minimalist' in orientation. Out of the massive EU Structural Funds investment

through the Objective One 'Pathways to Integration' programme, worth around £140 million, Liverpool Council implemented the Community-based Economic Development (CBED) programme in 1994 as a way to stimulate alternative employment creation consolidating a new network of social enterprises (Meegan and Mitchell, 2001). Since then, the transformative potential of social innovation has been constricted by further institutionalization and neoliberal reforms—creating a cottage industry of infrastructure support organizations and financial intermediaries in the city region—coupled with the gradual tightening of the social 'sector' around the New Labour agenda of ameliorating social exclusion (Teasdale, 2012). This co-optation of original principles reflects the calcification entailed through any process of 'scaling up' and institutionalization (Pel and Bauler, 2014); and the organizational isomorphism brought about by interaction and reliance on more powerful institutional logics, increasingly adopted by socially innovative projects in order to grow and embed themselves within existing regimes (Nicholls, 2010). In parallel to this process, LCR's tradition of social innovation has largely been forgotten, marginalized or else straightjacketed by the 'regeneration game'.

The regeneration game imposes perverse incentive structures that run against the grain of everyday life, as disclosed by this anti-HMR activist and resident of Anfield, a neighbourhood incurring huge demolitions:

> There was a big pot of gold ... In order to access this pot, the area had to tick so many boxes in the magical world of deprivation. So suddenly, we were told all the time that we were from this deprived area. And we were like 'I'm not deprived. I don't feel deprived. We have food and clothes, both parents work. How am I deprived?' But the more you feed that in: 'You're poor, you're this, you're that', you watch the standards drop; everything seemed to drop and it took about ten years, but they finally ticked that last box (quoted in Heeswijk and Jurgensen, 2014).

Anfield (L4) has been described by its inhabitants as a 'postcode with clinical depression', as 'people began to think of themselves in the same terms that had been used to describe their neighbourhood' (Southern and Whittam, 2015: 95). The social entrepreneur quoted above suggests thereafter the need to move away from 'competing in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation'—that is, the more poverty and dereliction demonstrated as 'evidence', the more funding received from EU/state programmes—towards playing the 'indices of multiple celebration!' This points to the emergence in the city of more positive, creative, forward-looking and socially innovative approaches to local economic development beginning to supersede more negative approaches that focus on problems, absences and exclusions in a 'glass half-empty' mentality (North, 2017) which, following Gibson-Graham (2008), is self-defeating—reading for dominance rather than difference.

Since the dominant games in town—export-oriented innovation, culture-led entrepreneurialism and the regeneration game, including those community projects and social enterprises funded through EU Objective One—have not made significant headway with resolving severe socio-economic problems, there is a rationale for experimenting with new approaches that might make more of a difference. In the next section, I explore four related case studies that potentially represent transformative social innovations, before drawing out in the conclusion the implications for LCR urban policy and social innovation theory more generally.

From the index of multiple deprivation to indices of multiple celebration

First, Homebaked, an arts-led regeneration project emerged in Anfield to contest its 'clinical depression', specifically HMR demolition of a Victorian terraced row opposite Liverpool FC's stadium. Homebaked began as a public arts project

commissioned by the 2010 Liverpool Biennial—an arts exhibition organization founded in 1998 during the ascendance of culture-led regeneration (O'Brien, 2010)—whose organizers invited internationally acclaimed Dutch artist Jeanne van Heeswijk to work with local residents to address the effects of HMR on lived experience (Liverpool Biennial, 2015). Out of initial interactions with residents, Jeanne created *2Up2Down*, a community-led participatory design project to reimagine Anfield's future, constructed through small-scale community-led alternatives to top-down planning programmes like HMR: a way for local people to 'co-produce their own futures' and 'make real social and physical change in their neighbourhood', in a participatory action research process van Heeswijk calls 'radicalising the local', by way of 'empowering communities to become their own antidote' (Heeswijk and Jurgensen, 2014).

Following residents' mobilization into the project, Homebaked Community Land Trust (CLT) was born, with an independent co-operative bakery and café sited below affordable community-owned housing. It has become an important community anchor sharing the same name, acting as a meeting point and source of social support for local people, many with multiple needs. Homebaked run regular training events and use a mentoring scheme for local volunteers who have learning difficulties or mental health issues, and who can work in the bakery without resorting to their special support allowance. The CLT is now a partner in the council's wider regeneration plans for 'Anfield Village', with a vision to regenerate the local high street, involving a new public square for experimental cultural uses, a food-growing project called Homefarm and incubation units for other community businesses, reinvesting any surpluses back into the local economy. Homebaked's slogan is 'brick by brick, loaf by loaf, we build ourselves'—developing a new holistic community-based economy, in which economic activity is deeply embedded in local life.

Second, in Granby, another inner-city neighbourhood targeted by HMR, a successful resident-led anti-demolition campaign evolved into a playful vision centred on the Granby Four Streets CLT—famous for being the first housing, regeneration or architecture project ever to win the prestigious Turner Prize, in 2015. Having saved hundreds of houses from demolition to be rehabilitated for community use, the CLT campaign began with residents subverting images of dereliction and enforced eviction with colourful art and murals; reclaiming their streets from what many saw as 'dereliction by design', through guerrilla gardening and a monthly street market, where residents celebrate together with live music and street food (Thompson, 2015). An indicative graffito on one of the buildings, which plays on the more familiar sign 'ALL BALL GAMES ARE PROHIBITED', bears instead an open invitation: 'GAMES (PLEASE)'. Granby Four Street's architects Assemble are a collective of do-it-yourself enthusiasts who work closely with the community to coproduce designs and renovations. Capitalizing on their Turner Prize success, they established the Granby Workshop, a social enterprise employing local artists and young people to reclaim materials and design new furniture and fittings as products for rehabilitated houses and sale online. It also provides training for residents to renovate their own homes. Though only a small step towards local economic recovery, this demonstrates the power of playful social innovation, initiated in reaction to the regeneration game.

The CLT model is often cited as a 'social innovation for reinventing real estate' (Midheme, 2013; Meehan, 2014). CLTs were first innovated by the US civil rights movement in the 1960s to promote black property ownership; since gaining popularity among activists and policymakers as a tool for providing affordable housing for local people, owned and managed democratically by the community rather than the state or absentee private landlords. Granby and Homebaked are among the first *urban* CLTs in the UK; pioneering the application of the CLT model to problems associated with disinvestment, neglect and urban decline rather than financial speculation and gentrification; and for more transformative ends other than just provision of affordable housing.

Third, The Beautiful North project was created by a range of governance actors to change perceptions of north Liverpool and from it emerged The Beautiful Ideas Co. (CLES, 2016). This Community Interest Company (CIC)—the relatively new British legal form for social enterprises—has secured the rights to the revenues generated by a temporary match-day car park for football fans. These revenues are reinvested in social innovation through The Beautiful Ideas Co. Launchpad, which invited local people to imagine new forms of local economic development to be applied collaboratively for social impact in north Liverpool, in an ideas competition funding 10–15 projects ranging from £300 to £30,000. The car park money is matched by £375,000 from central government's Public Sector Launchpad Accelerator. The creativity of north Liverpool communities is demonstrated by some 70 applications received by the January 2016 closing date.

Distinguishing Beautiful Ideas Co. from other small-scale incubators is their emphasis on relationships over contractual obligations. They work closely with applicants to scale up ideas into viable projects. Loans are offered at incredibly low interest rates and only repayable if the enterprise is successful; written off if unsuccessful; with an option to repay in social value rather than financial return. A revenue participation agreement entitles Beautiful Ideas Co. to 1% of total revenues, although this is capped at £10,000. The Beautiful Ideas Co. see this model of 'patient capital' as a means to inspire a different type of business mentality, one that contrasts with both exploitative commercial loan regimes and dependent grant culture, suggesting that 'the model breeds success through handshakes, not handouts'; that collaboration, co-operation, trust and an 'infectious energy' circulate outwards into communities 'like a handshake passing on' (interview, 2017). While still very much an entrepreneurial form of capitalism, 'patient capital' returns to the Latin root of 'credit': 'credo'; 'to believe in and trust'—positioning it as part of the co-operative ethical banking movement (Bollier and Conaty, 2015).

Fourth, the first recipient of The Beautiful Ideas Co. Launchpad is Make Liverpool CIC, which was awarded £30,000 to renovate an old industrial unit in the north docks into a 'makerspace', a hub and coworking space for anyone—budding artists, builders, carpenters, designers, photographers, among others—to use collective tools and equipment. Make Liverpool are taking over a large space formerly home to an ambulance manufacturer and are hoping to build on local traditions of craft and manufacture, but focusing on emerging trends in the new economy, such as digital fabrication and 3D printing (van Holm, 2017). Just like the successful Baltic Creative CIC in the Baltic Triangle in the south docks—now the fashionable epicentre of Liverpool's digital, sonic and computer gaming industries—Make Liverpool will reinvest all rental surpluses into infrastructure for further local economic development. The hope is to stimulate new employment for not just young people, but older workers who lost their jobs with the decline of the docks.

Significantly, Make Liverpool is located in the 'Ten Streets' of run-down warehouses immediately behind the docks now designated as Liverpool Waters Enterprise Zone. While almost no redevelopment or economic activity has occurred in the enterprise zone since its inception in 2012, the Ten Streets are fast becoming a vital hub of new activity as creative companies and social organizations take advantage of cheap rents and large premises. Liverpool City Council has officially backed the Ten Streets as north Liverpool's 'Cultural Enterprise Industry Hub' to mimic the Baltic Triangle in the south. Meanwhile, the enterprise zone awaits commencement of a longstanding regeneration scheme by Peel Holdings, LCR's largest private property owner and progenitor of the ambitious Atlantic Gateway vision, aiming to develop Peel-owned land along the Manchester–Liverpool Ship Canal corridor, in the UK's first significant private-led regional development strategy (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2015). The stark contrast in progress between Liverpool Waters and Make Liverpool hints at Liverpool's economic future.

Discussion: how transformative, really?

The four cases presented above represent small 'niches' within a wider game of transformative social innovation (Pel and Bauler, 2014; Avelino *et al*., 2017). The challenge for niches like these is to translate discrete transformations in particular projects at the neighbourhood scale into transformations of regime subsystems at the city–regional/national scale, be that affordable housing or business development, and systemic change at a societal level. The CLT campaigns are beginning to provoke change in this direction, albeit slowly. Taking land off the market and into democratic local control is a potentially revolutionary move in land ownership—one which could transcend the conventional public/state–private/market binary. NESTA (2017) recently recognized both Homebaked and Granby as among 50 'new radicals'—radically socially innovative 'projects which, if scaled, could transform the lives of millions of people, and offer us a glimpse of a different kind of society'. Granby was shortlisted as a finalist in this year's BSHF-UN World Habitat Awards. Their growing media profiles may help them influence policy at city-regional and national scales, while inspiring replication through global trans-local networks. Likewise, The Beautiful Ideas Co. represents a radically new method of incubating and funding social entrepreneurship. Their particular brand of 'patient capital' is in many ways a reinvention of capitalism, restricting capital lending to socially productive nonprofit investment, limiting neoliberal financialization.

The big 'game changers' shaping these four projects are the 2008–9 financial crisis, precipitating the onset of austerity and the end of the 'regeneration game'; Brexit, which threatens to further curtail EU funding and leave Liverpool more vulnerable to global economic forces; and impending technological unemployment wrought by digital disruption. While the CLTs have capitalized on the first of these game changers—the policy vacuum opened up by the withdrawal of HMR funding—The Beautiful Ideas Co. and in particular Make Liverpool can be seen as early solutions to the latter, anticipating the changes wrought by new manufacturing technologies and more open and collaborative production. Makerspaces, in which digital fabrication technologies are being refined, have a potentially big role to play in future local economic development (Greenfield, 2017; van Holm, 2017) and are a key part of the 'collaborative economy', one of the four global movements of transformative social innovation identified by the TRANSIT literature (Avelino *et al*., 2015). Likewise, The Beautiful Ideas Co. is a member of a global network called Hub Launchpad, part of a growing movement of social entrepreneurs—another of the TRANSIT metanarratives. However, there are risks that with the rise of metropolitan coworking spaces with names like 'innovation hubs' and 'incubation labs', which purportedly encourage creative cross fertilization of ideas among socially *minded* entrepreneurs, parts of the movement are losing their political rationale and becoming a 'playground for the rich' (Steiner and Teasdale, 2016). Indeed, makerspaces tend to be used mostly by white, male and highly educated makers (van Holm, 2017). There is an important role, then, for the Polanyian domain of (state) redistribution as well as (grassroots/associational) reciprocity in developing social innovation: reciprocity requires redistribution for social innovation to flourish without reproducing existing inequalities.

The four case studies provide interesting insights into how transformative social innovations are catalysed and developed. Supporting the urban studies strand, the CLT projects were galvanized by anti-demolition campaigning among citizens in opposition to the state—an alliance of the directly deprived/dispossessed with the alienated/disillusioned (Moulaert *et al*., 2010). This lends empirical support to the thesis that social innovation tends to begin with political resistance. Both were heavily reliant on artists, activists and practitioners from outside the neighbourhoods and often from other institutional fields, notably the third sector. Moreover, the evolution of both projects proceeded through close interplays between different institutional logics, collapsing or blurring their boundaries. For instance, Granby's architects live onsite in a CLT-owned

house while they work with residents to develop and hone tools and methods on the job, breaking down boundaries between professional/amateur, expert/user, design studio/site; representing a distinctly transdisciplinary method of social innovation. Likewise, The Beautiful Ideas Co. originated through a partnership approach between councillors, activists, housing professionals and other stakeholders—a coming together of various institutional logics, supporting the TRANSIT multi-actor perspective (Avelino and Wittmayer, 2016). This was a more proactive endeavour that sought to collaborate with the state from the outset—demonstrating how social innovation contains a wide range of relatively more or less oppositional approaches to the state and market. In all cases, there are concerns over which class interests the leading social innovators represent, and how far their claims—that these social innovations empower other residents lacking their privileged access to cultural capital, professional knowledge and resources—can be substantiated. All cases eventually attracted the support of influential voices in the city region. This raises questions over the relationship between social innovation and political resistance: how politically subversive and disruptive acts are legitimated as playful acts of innovation, repositioned to gain traction in policy discourses; how far this translation process is facilitated through the role of powerful supporters in lending legitimacy; and what this means for less privileged communities of social innovators who, without such a voice, may be dismissed as 'unruly' rather than 'creative'.

The high-profile success of these projects highlights the deeply uneven urban geography and polarized politics of social innovation. These projects are all located in deprived neighbourhoods that have suffered severe, and therefore more obvious, urban decline, often with a long history of community organizing, or else attracting the attention of social innovators for being at the centre of controversial urban policies like HMR. Moreover, state funding and support have been incredibly important in each case. The ten houses codesigned, restored and now owned and managed by Granby CLT as affordable local homes were originally gifted by the City Council; while Homebaked was catalysed by Liverpool Biennial public arts funding. The Beautiful Ideas Co. received state investment through two sources: the car park leased from the Council, and the match funding from the Public Sector Launchpad Accelerator. Again, this underscores the importance of the state as an ally and crucial collaborator in the development of social innovation, despite the threat posed to its transformative potential by institutional capture and isomorphism. But it also raises troubling spatial justice questions: who decides where scarce public resources get spent; should certain areas deserve to receive special treatment simply because they have the creative capacity to attract it; what happens to those communities which lack the social and cultural capital to perform feats of civic volunteerism, or else are located outside the limelight cast by spectacular urban dereliction, marginalized from academic, policy and media attention as well as economic resources?

Such political questions are joined by more practical problems. In Liverpool, policymakers are slowly attuning to more socially innovative urban policy. After years of struggling to get the council to take their proposal seriously, Granby Four Streets CLT has finally won approval: Cabinet Member for Housing, Ann O'Byrne, publicly stating that 'Granby Four Streets is at the forefront of the Urban Community Land Trust movement in the North West—and we are proud to support it'. The council's aspirations for a 'Cultural Enterprise Industry Hub' in the Ten Streets is another example of this reorientation towards more socially innovative policymaking. However, there are already problematic implications. Make Liverpool and other social entrepreneurs in the area are concerned about the potential rise in rents and threat of property speculation arising from the council's designation. This highlights the contradictions of urban policy support, which often acts to accelerate processes of commodification and incorporation into neoliberal urbanism as opposed to incubating more disruptive or transformative social innovation.

These difficulties of incorporating into urban policy potentially transformative social innovations run deep in structural path dependencies and perverse incentive structures. Financial and political stakes in the 'regeneration game'—in Liverpool and elsewhere (Kallin and Slater, 2014)—are deepened by austerity and the desperate need for local authorities to find new sources of funding to keep basic public services running, even resorting to selling off public assets and exploiting the rent gap. However, local authorities and regeneration partnerships are only playing the hand dealt them by exogenous game changers, such as nationally coordinated austerity and global economic restructuring. The rules of the regeneration game are not set locally or democratically—that is part of the problem. At a recent event on alternative city economies hosted at Make Liverpool, one delegate accused local government of failing to 'keep up with the changes taking place 'at the pace of imagination' on the ground' (CLES, 2016). The resulting report highlights a 'glass floor' preventing local state and market actors from connecting with the creative small-scale solutions occurring beneath their radar. Indeed, Peel Holding's refusal to engage with social innovators and their alternative ideas for the Liverpool Waters enterprise zone is indicative of a more general reluctance among big development players. This is not something attributable only to local government or corporations like Peel; this relates to the activities of all anchor institutions, including universities.

For social innovation to really make an impact in Liverpool, or indeed elsewhere, the support of anchor institutions, especially universities, is critical. In places where the social and solidarity economy is most successful and institutionalized, such as Quebec, Canada, and parts of Brazil and Argentina, universities are more active players (Scott Cato and North, 2017). Brazilian universities have been instrumental in developing 'social economic incubators' in low-income communities for the incubation and facilitation of 'solidarity economic ventures', which are co-operative and self-managed enterprises bringing new work, income and practical solutions to many favelas. These incubators are led by multidisciplinary teams of academics, students and practitioners who work closely with communities to develop 'social technology'—a hybrid of *techne* and *mêtis* perhaps. A similarly active role for universities is evident in the Community–University Research Alliance in Quebec. These represent a 'transdisciplinary' method for social innovation, whereby universities explicitly focus on the task of developing capacities for economic self-management and finding action-research solutions to urban problems; and importantly, facilitate exchange of academic (*episteme*), technical (*techne*) and popular (*mêtis*) knowledge through mutual learning. Assemble are doing something comparable in Granby, but without the support of anchor institutions. The question remains: what could be done *with* their support?

However, it must be recognized that the institutional structures of universities are not currently configured in ways conducive to the transdisciplinary production of social innovation. Universities in the UK at least are severely constrained by the hierarchical and competitive norms that govern the production of knowledge and their increasing marketization through such mechanisms as the Research Excellence Framework, the impact agenda and reliance on students as 'customers'. For socially innovative experiments to flourish through the support of universities, transformative innovation should be channelled *internally*, at university institutional structures, as much as externally into action-research projects.

In Liverpool, practical steps to be undertaken that draw on the resources of 'trees' and 'elephants' to support 'bees' and 'butterflies' (Mulgan, 2007; Oosterlynck *et al.*, 2013) might include digital mapping of all existing and potential social innovation assets, led by action researchers within universities. A first attempt at this for the LCR social economy has been completed by the Heseltine Institute for Public Policy and Practice (Heap *et al.*, 2017) in collaboration with the Social Economy Panel, a group of leading local practitioners. This could be replicated at a deeper level for the

collaborative and solidarity economies, as has been done elsewhere (Safri, 2014), as a means to identify and connect up social innovative projects, for their further interaction, collaboration and mutual support. Such a mapping exercise would aim to produce an open source digital platform for projects to network, communicate, learn from each other, attract sources of support and generate wider citizen participation. Establishing a democratically representative body at the emerging city-regional governance scale, in the LEP, CA and newly elected Metro Mayor's Office, would constitute a further step in this process. Out of these networks, 'solidarity markets' may develop between socially innovative projects which, if sufficiently scaled, could create new, alternative avenues of production and consumption prefiguring a postcapitalist economy (Miller, 2013).

A more systematic approach for the development of transformative social innovation would be to create new polycentric systems of governance of the commons (Foster and Iaione, 2016). This might involve experimenting with an Office for Civic Imagination, drawing on the successful prototype in Bologna, where a 'co-city protocol' and 'co-laboratory' have been initiated by action researchers to innovate new, collaborative and radically participatory forms of urban governance, in which citizens play a central role in developing imaginative projects for governing common resources, such as unused land, empty buildings, green space, infrastructure and public services (Foster and Iaione, 2016). This could build upon the emerging infrastructure of community anchor organizations, including Granby and Homebaked CLTs and The Beautiful ideas Co., which already act as hubs within deprived neighbourhoods for multiple functions: providing community meeting space, incubating social enterprise, managing collective housing and public space, and initiating community-led urban regeneration. Such governance 'shims' (Williams and Pierce, 2017) could become the nodes of a city-regional network of social innovation incubation and urban commons governance, coordinated democratically by a civic platform, an Office for Civic Imagination, supported by academic researchers and practitioners, and acting as a conduit through to devolved city-regional governance.

Conclusion

As Liverpool's recent history attests, limitations of successive state-led experiments—from area-based initiatives to enterprise zones—reflects the gradual tightening and exhaustion of policy innovation within an ever-mutating neoliberalizing urban regime: the trend 'towards competitively induced conditions of constrained institutional searching and experimentality, yielding a *narrowing* of development agendas, imaginaries and pathways' (Peck, 2017: 12). Now under austerity localism, the UK government, following HMR's premature cancellation in 2011, has all but abandoned area-based regeneration policy (Wilks-Heeg, 2016). In this context, social innovation represents both a widening of imaginaries and possible pathways, in its transformative potential, and a narrowing of political ambition, if it is indeed held up as an alternative to targeted state support. The 'return of social government'—replacing old 'socials' (security/policy/services) with new (enterprise/entrepreneurship/innovation/media)—is one way to inject capitalist dynamism back into a system fast exhausting its productive and creative capacities (Davies, 2015). Social innovation, then, contains highly contradictory dynamics and divergent political possibilities: embodying simultaneously an instrumental problem-solving strategy as an outsourced response to urban policy failure as well as a more expansive, playful, maximalist approach to innovating new institutions and political configurations that may help transform how, in a Polanyian sense, we see and reproduce the economy.

In this article, I have offered up play and games—borrowing from Graeber—as an original heuristic to create a different, potentially fruitful vantage point to frame and explore the contradictions and possibilities around institutionalizing transformative social innovation. The metaphor allows for certain state-led urban policy programmes

to be seen as a 'regeneration game', whose rules often foreclose more playful experimentation in the form of citizen-led social innovation. There are a number of overlapping senses in which social innovation incorporates elements of play: first, within projects themselves, by embodying play in socially innovative practices; second, by employing playful tactics in resisting and subverting the rules of the game; and, third, in developing and institutionalizing more playful approaches to urban governance, whose rules enable urban transformation. The first and second remain an interesting avenue for future research, contributing to an emerging field of 'ludic geographies' (Woodyer, 2012). Indeed, many of the case studies presented embody play in their practices and tactics; but it was mainly the third sense that concerned me here.

The play–games dialectic thus illuminates the 'constant interplay between creativity and codification' that the radical economist and social innovator, the late Robin Murray, diagnosed as animating successful industries (Murray *et al*., 2015: 196). This dialectic can be restated as that between social innovation and institutional configuration; between agency and structure; or, in Marxian terms, living and dead labour. Murray's warning—that '[t]he moment you lose the tacit, living labour, the codification atrophies' (*ibid*.)—is a useful reminder of the fragile dialectical balance between creativity and codification and the ease with which it can be lost as socially innovative experiments seek to scale up their activities and institutionalize their practices. The issue of scale is fundamental here. For place-based experiments working across various domains to flourish and eventually transform urban economies, those institutions that provide essential financial and legal support and political legitimation—from universities and other local 'anchor institutions' to legislative, funding and regulatory regimes—must also be transformed, their institutional codes played around with, to enable social innovations to replicate and grow without succumbing to isomorphism.

The legal domain—so often overlooked by political economists and critical urban geographers, myself included—should be highlighted as a mediating and adaptive institutional infrastructure that creates the pathways for innovation to occur just as much as it controls and closes down others. Theorists are now calling for the development of 'social law' (Davies, 2013) and 'radical transactionalism', where 'legal building blocks of property and capital can be reimagined and reconfigured' for supporting co-operative rather than financialized economic models (Morgan and Kuch, 2015: 586). The law has likewise been likened to a game, for its 'game-like' characteristics (*ibid*.), suggesting that the play–game dialectic might be a useful construct for critical legal studies as well as urban scholars and institutionalists. Davies (2013: 220) sees institutions as 'shared illusions with real effects' underwritten by law, and asks why so much social entrepreneurship (and social innovation) but so little social law? In the UK, the legal innovation of the CIC in 2005 provided some renewed support for the growth of social enterprises; but more transformational organizational forms, such as those of the sharing economy, require more radical legal invention (Morgan and Kuch, 2015). All of the four case studies presented here have benefited from this legislation, by incorporating themselves as CICs; what they lack, however, is readily available dedicated legal and financial advice attuned to their needs as social rather than public or private entities. In seeking to innovate organizational forms and social relations—and not merely products—these 'social entrepreneurs run up against life-sapping frustrations, such as the inability of regulators, auditors, banks and accountants to classify these new forms' (Davies, 2013: 220). What is required, therefore, is transformational change of the 'softer tissues' of regulatory and institutional norms as well as the 'harder' legal codes that help govern the institutional spaces within which grassroots innovations grow. Without concomitant innovations at 'higher' scales in political-economic and legal-institutional systems, these place-based initiatives risk remaining just that. If they do attempt to scale up, they too often succumb to isomorphic pressures to conform to institutional forms and requirements of funders, regulators and partners. The historical

growth, through EU Objective One funding, of social enterprise intermediaries in Liverpool provides a lesson in how scaling up can lead to codifications that constrain rather than enable creative urban transformation. Playing *with* the rules of the game all too easily slides into playing *by* the rules of the game.

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