THE PERIPHERY AS A COMPLEX ADAPTIVE ASSEMBLAGE: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ENHANCED COMMUNICATION TO CHALLENGE PERIPHERALISING NARRATIVES

Abstract

Despite much time and attention by academia and policy to bring about cohesion between core and peripheral regions, we still have large disparities of wealth and outcomes between them. Recent literature suggests that part of the problem lies in the ways that core regions represent peripheries in discourse and practice (Author. Forthcoming; Willett 2016; Lang et al 2015), meaning that peripheries need to find better ways to challenge negative core representations of place. This paper argues that a critical ontological perspective based on Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) affective assemblages can help to understand this phenomenon better. The paper uses this framework to explore the periphery as a complex adaptive organism – or a periphery-assemblage. Local government is identified as an important structure within the periphery-assemblage, potentially enhancing and facilitating better adaptation to changing environment. Using this perspective and a radical research methodology that uses creative techniques to uncover the meanings underlying performed responses, the study takes a case study of local government in Cornwall in the South West of the UK. The research was conducted between May – June 2016. The paper claims that one way for peripheries to challenge core representations more effectively would be for enhanced communications within local government, which can better channel and develop information flows within peripheral regions.

The Periphery as a Complex Adaptive Assemblage: Local Government and Enhanced Communication to Challenge Peripheralising Narratives.

Introduction

The problem of uneven development, and the need to support the social and economic activity of peripheries is an enduring one. As an example of the difficulties in providing economic cohesion between rich and poor regions, EU structural funds, which support regional development investment, have been slow to make significant improvements towards reducing regional peripherality (Cataldo, 2017; Rodriguez-Pose and Fratesi 2004).   Theoretical approaches towards understanding how to improve regional economies often look at structural issues. From this perspective, poorly performing regions need to develop clusters of innovation (see Bramwell et al., 2008); improve skills levels within the local economy (Lee et al. 2005); tackle poor communications and accessibility; encourage inward investment (Pike et al., 2006); endogenous growth (Rodriguez-Pose and Crescenzi 2008) and competitiveness (Herrschel 2010). Some of these approaches emphasise infrastructural development (Crescenzi et al 2016) in terms of improved communications either by transport or digital technologies, or providing specific business support. In other theoretical approaches, policymakers focus on developing human capital through aspects of community development to enhance social capital (Shortall 2004; Lee et al 2005), and educational programmes to raise skills levels to better enable individuals to participate in the modern economy.

Regional analyses that are based on critical theories that challenge orthodox, liberal perspectives, examine how cohesion between wealthy and struggling regions is problematised by the dynamics of contemporary neo-liberal capitalism, which pulls capital and resources towards a few dynamic poles, and away from spaces with lesser performing economies (Lang et al 2015). Human and financial capital move from peripheries to the centre, as talent seeks better opportunities, and the rational decision is to invest limited resources where returns can be maximised. This has an important impact on how regions are produced through the beliefs and practices of local inhabitants (Soja 1996; Massey 2005; Thrift, 2008; Cresswell 1996; Hetherington 2008; Sibley 1995), and how persons from outside of the region imagine that space (Willett and Lang 2018; Willett 2016; Bürk et al 2012; Kühn 2015; Kühn et al. 2017; Plüschke-Altoff 2018; Pfoser 2017)). Many of these are based on a post-colonial movement whereby powerful core regions dominate the knowledges and 'truths' that are known about

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weaker spaces, discursively producing, representing, and imagining a space in order to reinforce its 'inferiority' (Fannon 2008; Said 2003). Frequently, these studies take theories about otherness and combine them with Hechters (1975) internal colonialism, to claim that peripheries become 'internal others', discursively produced by core regions, in ways that are harmful to the development of the periphery (Bürk et al 2012; Willett and Lang 2018). For example, Eriksson (2008) discusses how peripheral, rural Norrland is discursively produced as an internal other, in ways that highlights its 'traditional', 'rural' and 'backward' characteristics in order to reinforce the 'modern' identities of the rest of Sweden. The periphery becomes the repository for the negative qualities that the broader whole seeks to reject (Jansson, 2003). More latterly, these theories have often been used to examine post-socialist spaces in Europe (Bürk et al. 2012; Plüschke-Altoff 2018; Pfoser 2017). Bürk et al. (2012) call this type of narrative characterisation of peripheral regions 'stigmatising', hindering attempts to project the dynamism and innovation that peripheral development initiatives have started to inject. This introduces us to the notion that regional identities and the characteristics that are ascribed to regions, are always an act of power (Paasi 2003) and that regional identities are constructed with regards to relationships with other groups (Paasi 2013).

Similarly, the concept of peripheralisation and the ways that peripheries are imagined is not static, but are constantly shifting. Peripheralisation refers to how the ways that peripheries are discursively constructed can impact on how such regions are able to economically develop (Kühn 2015; Willett and Lang 2018). Regional narratives, discourses, or identities might make a region appear more peripheral, or they might begin to integrate the periphery into core discourses. Therefore, peripheralisation is a process, which relies on knowledges about the region. Generally, these knowledges are constructed by core regions about the periphery, but in common with the post-colonialism on which they are based (Fannon 2008; Said 2003), they often become adopted by peripheries despite their harmful consequences (Eriksson 2008; Johnsson 2003; Bürk et al 2012). But these knowledges change over time (see also Paasi 2013), and the challenge for regional development is to find ways for peripheries to support new knowledges, which counter peripheralisation processes (Willett and Lang 2018).

Much of the body of Peripheralisation literature is dedicated to understanding the peripheralising narratives through which regions are constructed, the mechanisms through which these are upheld (Bürk et al 2012; Pfoser 2017; Pluschke-Altoff 2017; Horton 2008; Kühn, 2017), and the effects that this has on the region and people living within it (Meyer et

al. 2016; Eriksson 2008; Jansson 2003; Willett 2016). What scholarship does not yet do, is look at how peripheralisation narratives can be challenged and changed.

For Willett and Lang (2018), peripheries need to have the agency to create their own knowledges about their regions, independently of peripheralising core representations of place. They propose imagining the region as an assemblage (see Delueze and Guattari 2004), which they describe as a 'dense network of deeply interconnected objects, symbols, meanings, institutions, nuances, and narratives which contribute to our knowledges about our worlds' (Willett and Lang 2018: 261). Power comes from a multiplicity of different sources within the system, enabling even those formerly characterised as 'weak' or 'powerless' to have the agency to be able to shape their environments. This improves on the current body of scholarship which has a tendency to rely on a theoretical movement which emphasises the powerlessness and victimhood of peripheries (Bürk et al 2012; Pfoser 2017; Pluschke-Altoff 2017; Horton 2008; Kühn, 2017; Meyer et al. 2016; Eriksson 2008; Jansson 2003; Willett 2016 However, what Willett and Lang (2018) do not do, is to explore the mechanisms through which the region as an assemblage can enable peripheries to challenge peripheralising processes.

This is the problem that this paper will address, developing the concept of the periphery-assemblage as a way of actualising the power and agency latent within peripheries, thereby supporting peripheries to challenge peripheralising narratives and knowledges. The paper will be organised as follows. In the next section I will explore the idea of the periphery as an evolutionary adaptive assemblage, using the concept of affect to provide a language to help us to consider the deep interconnections of the region. This enables us to think through about which spaces can help new knowledges to flow around the system, potentially challenging peripheralising narratives.

The latter half of the paper identifies community government as an important site for this transfer of knowledge. Using a case study of Cornwall in the UK, the study uses the concept of the periphery-assemblage to diagnose the blockages to communication within the periphery. The research suggests ways of improving communication techniques, enabling new narratives to be developed in the region.

The Periphery as an Evolutionary Organism
Imagining economies as an evolutionary complex adaptive system is well established as a way of understanding the complex interactions between people, regions, their environments, institutions, knowledges, and economies (Meekes et al. 2017; Boschma and

Frenken 2011; Boschma 2015; Bristow and Healey 2014; Dawley et al. 2010). Kenneth Boulding (1981) provides a useful set of metaphors for understanding the evolutionary economy, which compares the innovation and development of products and services by organisations and enterprises as being similar to biological organisms. For Boulding, a crucial similarity is the requirement to take in information about our environments in order to best figure out where an organism is best suited to be – or in other words, what our particular evolutionary niche *is*, and how we might best adapt our products and our niche to shifts in environmental conditions. No single entity within the complex adaptive system of the evolutionary periphery exists in isolation, and nothing is more important than any other element. In common with flat ontological perspectives (Brassiere 2015), this means that human activity is merely a part of a bigger system which assigns equal weight to non-human and non-sentient activities (see also Bennett 2010). Whilst analysts might find human activity more visible due to their subject position, evolutionary economic geographers recognise that economic adaptation is a complex interaction between all human/non-human, biological/non-biological, sentient/non-sentient organisms in a globally connected system (Meekes et al. 2017; Boschma and Frenken 2011; Boschma 2015; Bristow and Healey 2014; Dawley et al. 2010). Successful adaptation is a morally free phenomenon. For some evolutionary economists, it refers to successfully adapting an enterprise or organism so it can grow well within a neoliberal economic system (Witt 2008). For others, it relates to adapting regions in order to be socially, environmentally, and economically resilient (Dawley et al. 2010). Therefore, it is not the adaptation, or evolution that makes a moral claim, but the goals of the actors who seek the adaptation. The role of economic development is to create the context or conditions for a region to flourish, rather than a particular desired end-goal (Meekes et al. 2017).

Following the Darwinian principle, successful enterprises or regions are not necessarily those with the best or most technologically advanced knowledges, innovations, or ideas. Instead, success is about being the best *adapted* to a specific environment. To illustrate this, we can take the example of Cornish mining engineer Richard Trevithick, the inventor of the steam locomotive (Nuvolari 2004) which was to revolutionise early 19th century transport globally. However Trevithick failed to popularise his invention because it was developed before there was adequate metal technology to make iron of sufficient strength to carry the locomotive on its rails. Every time someone bought the technology, the rails buckled under the weight of the machine. It was not until several years later that metallurgy caught up, that George Stephenson was able to capitalise on the available technology, and take the credit for the invention of the steam train. To return to Boulding, although Trevithick had the best (or

earliest) know-how, he did not have an adequate available niche within which his work could survive and flourish. Consequently, we see that evolutionary theorising takes a philosophy of time which is very different from the linear progress narrative underpinning traditional liberal (and neoliberal) thought (Smith and Jenks, 2005). Instead, the future emerges from the present, and is inherently unpredictable (Bedau and Humphries 2008).

This example enables us to see that peripheral development can be viewed as an interraction between the activities of people, available technologies, and the economic structures and practices that already exist. Economies and communities grow incrementally, and successful developments are those that evolve in a complex negotiation with all of the differing aspects of the social, political, and knowledge environment. It means that peripheries do not have to rely on the support of the dominant core regions, but are able to consider the processes through which they may better adapt to the changing social, political, environmental and economic environments. In this way, evolutionary theorising provides peripheries with the agency to make changes to their own regions, without being dependant on an oppressive core (See Willett and Lang 2018).   . Later in the paper I will argue that this is where local government has the potential to facilitate interaction, communication, and thereby, adaptation.

Conceptualising the region as an evolutionary organism has other benefits too. It can allow us a means to explore how to improve peripheral economies whilst paying attention to the dynamic interconnectedness that is at the heart of regions as economic spaces. Moreover, this redefines what we mean by a 'periphery'. Rather than being an economically poor area at the fringe of the global economy, we can here conceive of it as a space which, for whatever reason, has not been adapted to changing global economic and political conditions. This removes some of the well documented negative connotations that exist alongside of the ascription 'peripheral' (see Eriksson 2008, Bürk et al 2012; Jansson 2003; Willett 2016). The above processes mean that an evolutionary theoretical metaphor is better able to utilise the fluidity and mobility of regional identity (see Paasi 2013), in order to challenge the peripheralising narratives which come from dominant core regions (see Eriksson 2008, Bürk et al 2012; Meyer et al. 2017). The goal of successful development is to ensure that these changes help to facilitate both social and economic adaptation to local and global environments.

Whilst Boulding provides us with a framework for analysis, we still need a means of understanding the interconnectedness amongst and between regional actors in order to be able to challenge peripheralising processes and narratives. For this we turn to the affective

assemblage of Giles Delueze and Felix Guattari (2004), to develop the concept of the region, or the periphery-assemblage.

The concept of the affective assemblage is a means of describing how knowledge, ideas and power flow within an ideational evolutionary organism. It explores power as coming from a multiplicity of different sources, capable of being harnessed by a range of political actors, and not just those who are traditionally conceived of as 'powerful'. This means that their ideas can be valuable for finding a means of shaping social and political spaces by the marginalised (such as peripheries, see Willett and Lang, 2018). Similarly, the assemblage is a way of imagining the complex interactions amongst and between all aspects of our lived experiences.

The affective assemblage and Bouldings evolutionary economics are mutually complementary. Delueze and Guattari (2004) borrowed heavily from Deluezes' reading of the evolutionary philosopher Bergson (Delueze 1991). Bergson's perspective on the concept of time holds that rather than having the teleological endpoint of mechanistic science, the future emerges out of the present, and this future cannot be predicted (see also Bedau and Humphries 2008; Smith and Jenks 2006; Connolly 2002). As in the case of Trevithick's locomotive, this does not imply that the future means progress. Instead the future evolves with regards to the niches which exist in the present. The goal of regional policy within the peripheral-assemblage, is to ensure that successful adaptation is able to occur through the development of what Deleuze and Guattari call 'spaces of possibility'. Later, I will argue that local government represents a space of possibility to help to distribute knowledge around the periphery, and facilitate challenges to peripheralising narratives.

Consequently, the region or periphery-assemblage is made up of institutions, practices, ways of speaking about, economies, physical and conceptual structures, thoughts, and knowledges. In fact all that we encounter; know about the world; how it works; and our place in it; is a part of a mutating network of assembled and mobile ideas, concepts, structures, practices and institutions grouped in particular ways, at particular times, and around particular objects and ideas. We might here follow Latour (2005) and make the claim that change is so deeply systemically embedded in the evolutionary ontology of being within the assemblage, that scholars would do better to analyse the flows of information which create connections, rather than phenomenon themselves. For peripheral development, if change is always going to happen (see Paasi 2013; Willett and Lang 2018; Bürk et al 2012), this means that the challenge is to facilitate change that can improve the adaptive capacity of the periphery-assemblage. For an inquiry into how to challenge peripheralising narratives, this means that it is important to

look at the institutions and organisations which act as conduits for information flows (Latour 2005).

There are four different concepts which can act as tools for understanding these knowledge flows within the periphery-assemblage, and help us to better understand the connections within, between, inside and outside of our periphery-assemblage: lines of articulation; affect; feedback loops; and spaces of possibility. Lines of articulation refer to the flows and connections that form between and within the periphery-assemblage, binding some (perhaps disparate) objects and ideas together. These lines of articulation might develop into a long-term flow or interconnection; they might wither away as quickly as they began; or alternatively they might remain, but offer only a tangential connection.

The concept of affect is important for understanding why lines of articulation form. Affect is based on the post Epicurean philosophy of Spinoza, and literally refers to the capacity of some things, ideas, or practices to affect or impact others (Ahmed 2004; Bennett 2010). It transfers an impact to whatever surface it comes into contact with, attaching to and permanently changing almost anything (Anderson 2014). There is no mechanical relationship between the capacity of a phenomenon to create impact or affect (see Bennett 2010). Sometimes, a tiny occurrence will have a huge impact that ripples and amplifies throughout directly connected assemblages, whereas other much larger affective impacts might have minimal consequences (see also Connolly 2002).

The reason for this disproportionate impact is rooted in the phenomenology which Deleuze and Guattari take from Bergson (2004), rejecting a mechanistic perspective on power (Prigogine and Stengers, 1985; Smith and Jenks 2006). Here, because of particular histories, some affects 'resonate' (Connolly 2008), whilst others do not. For example, Connolly traces the rise of the evangelical Christian right in American politics, and explores how particular narratives tap into a seam of emotion that resonates with the experience of a large group of people. The affective impacts that this creates reverberated throughout US politics, which became amplified out of proportion to the strength of the original, evangelical narratives (Connolly 2008). This process created new and often entirely unpredictable and emergent lines of articulation, making previously unimaginable connections between different narratives, groups of people, and political actors. Connolly shows us that it is entirely possible reshape the contexts, emphases, and practices within nearby assemblages, initiating self-perpetuating feedback loops between and within connected assemblages, embedding particular flows and interrelationships. For an inquiry about how to challenge peripheralising narratives, this means that the ability to transfer knowledge and ideas around the periphery-assemblage provides

greater opportunity not only for information to be shared, but also for new knowledges to develop. Affect helps to drive this process, as long as adequate information exchange structures are put in place. The cautionary note from Connolly (2008) is that the emotionally charged affective responses can be fuelled by negative emotions such as anger and resentment, as well as positive ones like optimism and enthusiasm.

For the periphery-assemblage, lines of articulation, affect, and feedback loops provide a set of conceptual tools that helps us to visualise how knowledge and information move around the region. In lines of articulation we see the innovation behind connecting ideas together in new ways, and affect shows us why some new ideas stick, and others do not. Feedback loops show us how some affects, innovations and ideas amplify and reverberate in the periphery, whilst others do not. Crucially, we see here the importance that information flows around the region if new knowledge is able to happen, facilitating better adaptation of the periphery to the contemporary external environment, and challenging peripheralising knowledges, narratives, and processes.

This provides the opportunity to abandon old practices, structured patterns of behaviour, and path dependencies, which inhibit adaption to emerging niches. However it is important to recognise that these are only spaces where change *might* occur, given the right information and inputs but there is no guarantee that it *will*. For our periphery-assemblage, this means that peripheralising processes will not only be challenged by having adequate information flowing through the system, but the community needs to be able to actualise this information in ways that ensure effective adaptation. Moreover, the affective impacts within these flows need to resonate with persons within the periphery-assemblage if they are to move freely.

Affective assemblages help this study in a number of ways. First, they improve on the existing body of peripheralisation research (Bürk et al 2012; Jansson 2003; Erickson 2008; Willett 2016) by provide us with a way of understanding the periphery which takes account of the deep levels of interconnections, interrelationships, and networks between people, things, institutions and infrastructure. This contributes to the recognition that peripheral identities and economies are shifting, fluid, and mobile (Paasi 2013; Willett and Lang 2018). Second, it offers an analysis which considers the ways and means by which these interconnections circulate information throughout the region, what these information flows incorporate, and how it facilitates adaptation to social, political, and economic niches (see for example, Latour 2005). Thirdly, in emphasising the importance of interconnectivity it offers suggestions for challenging peripheralising narratives, by considering the extent to which all aspects of the

periphery are embedded within the knowledges and flows within the region-assemblage (Willett and Lang 2018; Thrift 2008; Connolly 2002). Such embedding would mean that people can become aware of, and involved in changes that are happening as part of development processes; can feedback impacts, concerns, and opportunities to improve investment efficacy; and contribute to a vibrant and dynamic civil society and social capital. In the next part of this paper I am going to claim that a well-functioning local democracy can provide this kind of amplificatory space.

Local Government and the Periphery-Assemblage

In the context of this paper, local government refers to formalised institutions of government which operate on a local, or community basis. Recent research has shown (in this instance, with regard to infrastructure investment), that local government that is responsive to community needs is crucial to the success of development projects because they are less subject to competing individual interests, and are better able to take a holistic view about what is good for the community (Crescenzi et al., 2016; Collins, J. Neal and Z. Neal 2014). At the bottom line in these studies, local government provides a connective and communicative role within the periphery-assemblage, which enables it to take an overview about the collective good, in order to create spaces of adaptive possibility, which helps to facilitate regional adaptation. In practice, the quality of local government is also important for attracting human capital; people who can contribute positively towards local social and economic adaptation (Ketterer and Rodriguez-Pose 2015); and improving quality of life and social capital which impacts positively on the locality (Shortall 2004; Casey and Christ 2005; Evans and Synnett 2007; Lee et al. 2005). On an individual level, political participation in local or community government improves life satisfaction (Chan, Ou, and Reynolds 2014; Kelly 2013) and health outcomes (Boulianne and Brailey 2013). Consequently, the democratic processes involved in local government offers the potential for collecting together many different assemblages within the periphery, incorporating individuals, community groups, businesses, and interest organisations. It also provides a space for sharing information around the periphery-assemblage.

In terms of the periphery and for peripheralisation, there are a number of matters going on here. Firstly, local government that has a high level of citizen participation and engagement can act as a conduit, facilitating flows of information between differing parts of the periphery-assemblage. It can collect, collate, and disseminate knowledges about the local environment

and provide what Boulding (1981) might call 'multi-parental' responses to community problems and decision making. What Boulding means by this relates to the number of different ideas (or what he refers to as 'genes') which are inputted into problem-solving. In echoes of Delueze and Guattari, a wide and diverse gene-pool of ideas is essential in order to create knowledges which are sustainable in the long term. Too narrow a pool restricts diversity, fails to challenge bad ideas, and reproduces unhelpful path-dependencies, problems or flaws (Connolly 2005). This inhibits the ability of the region-organism to adapt successfully to changes in its environmental conditions. Consequently, having some kind of space through which to channel and filter communication and structural decision making is vital for a peripheral development that is better adapted to the social, economic and political environment which it finds itself in. For example, Meekes et al. 2017 show through a case study of tourism in Frysland, the Netherlands, that   In this respect, it is unsurprising that Crescenzi, Cataldo and Rodriguez-Pose (2016) find that infrastructural investment is more effective in regions with strong local government.

Some of the additional effects of the interconnections and interactions formulated and fostered in the local government assemblage, is that it can help individuals and groups to make contacts and connections. This opens up new lines of articulation and spaces of possibility which contributes to regional social capital (Shortall 2004; Casey and Christ 2005; Evans and Synnett 2007; Lee et al. 2005) and with it, adaptation to emerging niches. Done well, the important nature of good local government and its close connections and overlays with other assemblages within the region, means that it can amplify positive affects and interactions, creating ripples and feedback loops throughout the periphery-assemblage, making their own spaces of possibility, enabling new mutations and adaptations to occur. This means that strong local democracy is crucial not just as an abstract notion of democratic systems, but also for its utility with regards to the community's ability to actualise itself effectively and realise its potential.

Case Study and Methodology

The case study takes research conducted in Cornwall about Parish Council involvement in the UK in the summer of 2016. Using Cloke and Edwards (1986) definition of peripherality, Cornwall is a remote rural region, which has been underperforming economically for many decades (Willett, 2013). Since 1999, it has been in receipt of the highest levels of European Union Structural Funding, designed to flatten the inequalities between peripheral and core regions (Willett, 2013). The ascription of peripherality is one that local people accept due to the underperforming economy and poor infrastructure connecting Cornwall to core areas in the

southeast of the UK (Willett, 2016). Indeed, it has been very important for gaining additional investment (Willett, 2013). However, the negative, stigmatising, and peripheralising stereotypes that can follow the label of peripherality are fiercely contested (Willett and Lang, 2018). In Cornwall, a heavy reliance on the tourism industry has resulted in a popular (core, peripheralising) imagination of the region as following a slow pace of life, not part of modernity, and more akin to times gone by rather than a place where innovation and dynamism can happen (Willett 2016). Part of the reasons for this is that Cornwall demonstrates the how mobile peripheralisation processes are. Core regions cannot expect to always remain as core, and peripheries do not have to remain peripheral.   In the 18th and 19th centuries, it was a dynamic and innovative mining region at the forefront of innovation in the British economy. It's geographical and maritime pre-eminence meant that, in the days of sea-based communications, it even got the global news before any other part of the UK (Payton, 1991). However, seismic shifts in technological development outstripped the regions ability to adapt, and were compounded by changes which stripped the region from its geographical advantage. Consequently, the slow reversal of fortunes from the late 1800's culminated in an identity crisis about how to move forward. As a consequence, cultural memory in Cornwall contains echoes of its previous importance to the national economy, whilst also adjusting to the extreme relational poverty experienced from the latter part of the 20th century (Payton 1991).

Local government in Britain is a somewhat confusing and hierarchical patchwork that has developed incrementally over many centuries (Kieth-Lucas 1980). Broadly, at the top of the tier are Local Authorities (which might be based on a city, large conurbation, county – or even a part of a county level). Those Local Authorities that have not become Unitary Authorities have a layer of District Councils immediately below them. The level of government closest to ordinary people is that of Parish Councils, which exist at a small city, town or village level. This means that they are the most accessible to individuals and organisations. Historically, Parish Councils have had very little executive power or responsibility, and mainly provide a level of local administration of central government policy. However local government reforms in the UK under the Localism agenda, mean that they will have more to administer in coming years (Buser 2013; The Localism Act 2011. McIntyre and Halsall (2011:270) call this 'devolving responsibility from Whitehall to Town Halls'. Under the Localism agenda, many Parishes have accepted responsibility for services as diverse as local green spaces, car parks, public toilets and libraries. All Parish Council positions are voluntary roles, although they will be supported by a paid clerk. For small Councils, the clerk

will work only a few hours a week, whilst larger Councils might employ several office staff and other personnel to manage the various services that the Council provides.

This research seeks a space whereby knowledge and information are able to flow more freely throughout the periphery-assemblage, facilitating the development and propagation of new knowledges which challenge peripheralising narratives. Community Councils – Parish Councils in the UK, provides such a space. As the smallest level of government they are also potentially the most accessible to members of the community, and therefore well placed to circulate knowledges which can challenge peripheralising narratives and processes.

However, in practice, there are many structural issues which Parishes need to address. A primary problem is that of representative democracy. In common with all layers of British government, membership of the Council should be subject to a popular vote, with councillors holding office for a period of four years, after which they seek re-election. However, far from being assemblage-hubs of action, interaction, and new ideas, in the May 2015 elections only 20% of Councils contested their Council vacancies in an election (NALC 2015). In some cases this will have been because there were not enough candidates to fill the vacancies, or in many instances, a lack of candidates means that vacancies may go unfilled. Frequently, sitting councillors will rely on their personal and professional networks to gain candidates, limiting the 'gene' pool (Boulding, 1981) of available ideas and the ability of ideas and information to form affective resonances with the broader population (Connolly 2008). Moreover, and perhaps reflecting a failure to capture the public imagination, turnout at local elections can typically be very low. This indicates some kind of structural breakdown with regards to the ability of Parish Councils to act as a conduit and communicative space for a diversity of ideas and information flows within the community or periphery-assemblage, creating and actualising spaces of possibility and generating new lines of flight; which can contribute towards a more successful economic development. The next part of this research seeks to understand what is going wrong within the community led government of Parish Councils, and consider what needs to be done in order to make knowledges flow better around the periphery-assemblage. This is essential if the periphery is to be able to share new knowledges about community developments, challenge peripheralising narratives, and successfully adapt and develop new niches. In the remainder of this paper this study takes research aimed at understanding more about this popular disconnect between members of the public and Parish Councils in a peripheral region. The purpose of this is to use the model of the peripheral assemblage to diagnose what should be done in order to improve this important site of possibility.

The research needed to generate discursive data that most reflected how participants understood Parish Councils, in order to explore the lack of participation which contributes to blockages in information flows within the periphery-assemblage. This discursive data would then be read and analysed with regard to the peripheral assemblage. For this study, it was important to gather data which understood what people really feel, rather than what they say that they feel. For this purpose, the data was gathered using a methodological approach informed by phenomenology and symbolic interactionism (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969; Goffman 1959). Mead (1934) discusses attitudes and perceptions as a series of linked actions and responses which people make at a subconscious level. We might imagine this as a set of 'performances', whereby individuals adopt a specific language or action when faced with particular, familiar situations (Goffman 1959). To look beyond performed statements to uncover and explore the meanings that lay beneath, a conversational approach was required that provided the space for individuals to discuss their perceptions with an otherwise unattainable level of depth (Flick 2004). To ensure that the conversations went to a deeper level than in conventional conversational methods, the research introduced an element of chance, which could challenge path dependencies of participants 'performance' (Goffman 1959; Mead 1934). The aim was to gather data that was 'rich' enough to be able to explore the range of materialities that connect the periphery-assemblage, in the analysis phase.

Research was conducted in three stages. First, I wanted to explore popular perceptions of Parish Councils. In order to generate a breadth of interviews providing a diverse range of positions but with limited resources, this phase was conducted at the Royal Cornwall Show (RCS). On a Saturday, the RCS attracts a wide cross-section of individuals from across Cornish civil society. The object of this research was not to provide representative data, but to understand the topic better, and a broad cross-section helped exploration of a range of views (Charmaz 2006).

In the first phase methods derived from theatre and performative research were employed, enabling imaginative conversations that challenged path dependent narrative performances, while also removing barriers to participation (See Heras and Tabera 2014; Orlu-Gul *et al.* 2014). The idea here, drawing on Goffman (1959) is to break down the structured expectations of questions and responses, providing a new space for individuals to look a little deeper into what they really think. The method used was to stop show-goers on a random basis and ask them to draw a picture of what they thought a Parish Councillor looks like. This provided a playful hook as a means of starting a conversation about people's perceptions of the

Parish level of government, and to encourage participants to move beyond more standardised responses and provide more nuanced and reflective responses. Full ethical approval was provided through my research institution, and potential participants were fully informed of the nature and purpose of the research, before being asked if they would like to participate and draw the picture. In practice, most participants chose not to draw but only to talk about how they perceived the Council, and many told anecdotes about their own experiences with their local Parishes. The *offer* to draw, however, captured their imagination. All participants included in this study filled in a consent form at the end of the empirical work. In this stage of data collection, twenty seven people were spoken to across seventeen separate interviews. Detailed notes were taken of the conversations which arose, meaning that data which was gathered in this primary stage consisted of notes and sometimes a drawing by the interviewee.

The second phase took the insights of phase one to inform much deeper interviews, enabling exploration of the issues in greater depth. This was conducted with a Parish Council in Cornwall which has been very proactive at engaging with government reforms, but which is facing a recruitment crisis of candidates for the next election (May 2017). A one-to-one interview was conducted with the Chair of the Parish Council to understand the changes that have happened over recent years, how the Council and the community have responded to these changes, and the challenges and opportunities that this has opened up. Finally, a focus group was held with 5 individuals who currently are reliable volunteers on Council matters, but who *do not* wish to become elected representatives. The purpose for this was to understand why people who currently volunteered in the community, were not interested in formalising this. Whilst the first phase often collected conversations from people who were not actively involved in their communities, the focus group worked with people who intimately understood what being a Councillor involved.

The detailed notes, drawings and transcriptions were coded for themes and regularities (refined as the analysis progressed), and drew lines of connection between the various aspects of the research (see Yin 2003; Charmaz 2006; Strauss and Corbin 2008). Codes were constructed with regards to the key issues that people experienced with regard to engagement with Parish Councils, and these codes were used to better understand the operation of the assemblage.

Findings and Analysis

There were two defining characteristics to how people experienced the local Council-assemblage. First, people found it to be too heavily structured around specific and particular patterns of behaviour that limited people's capacity to engage with town and Parish Councils. Second, people felt that the tools of communication that the Council used were ineffective for engaging with the general public, and lacked the capacity to facilitate and develop interactive affective feedback-loops between the Council as a body and the individuals and groups that made up the wider community and periphery-assemblages. In this section I show that a breakdown of information flows, affective impacts, lines of flight, and feedback loops has led to path-dependent knowledges, narratives and structures, which are difficult to challenge. Consequently, decisions are made using a limited range of knowledges, and emergent spaces of possibility do not arise. We will see how this deepens rather than challenges peripheralising knowledges, narratives, and processes by failing to allow new ideas to move around the periphery-assemblage.

The formalised structures of representative democracy are important processes to ensure openness, inclusivity and transparency; and they can also act as conduits that make it easier for people who are familiar within these assemblages to navigate the complex systems of local government (see also Moir and Leyshon 2013). However in the focus groups people felt more comfortable and familiar with the looser structures, fluidity and informality, of the participatory democracy of local campaign groups (See also Guertz and Van De Wijdeven, 2010). One community activist in her mid 30's described '*paperwork and things are one of the major reasons why I wouldn't want to be on a Parish Council. I'm not a pen pusher. I don't work like that'*. It also meant that people were finding reasons not to get involved in local politics, or once involved, (particularly working people) were unable to make the required number of meetings annually, and so were having to stop being Councillors. For example, one woman in her 40's related her husband's experience as a Parish Councillor for three years. '*He had to go to one meeting every six weeks or so. Everyone else was retired, and then he had to go away a lot with his job, and he ended up missing a lot of meetings. I think it was three in a row, so he had to step down'*. As a consequence, Town and Parish Council assemblages were made up of a limited demographic, which carries important implications for the capacity to make multi-parental decisions (Boulding 1981) and create emergent spaces of possibility for innovation to happen (Deleuze and Guattari 2004; Connolly 2008). Instead, people experienced the assemblage as if its boundaries were being policed and divergent ideas vigorously discouraged, rather than allowed to remain fluid and flexible. In some respects, this is to be expected given the poor levels of democratic engagement between local people and

Parish Councils (Willett and Cruxon 2018; NALC 2015). Low levels of political participation mean that it is easier for particular knowledges to become entrenched. Sometimes this can have disastrous consequences. In one instance, a former Councillor (female, in her late 30's) had felt that she had to move home after disagreements about turning a children's play area into a car park. Another (female, mid 30's) participant chose not to stand for the Council as she believed that she would clash with the different opinions of the strong characters already part of the Council. '*But there are a lot of people in this community that won't always back you and I don't feel like I'm in the right age bracket that fits the people that you need to back you sometimes. That isn't a majority, but there is a very, very small minority who you get in every community, who will niggle and pick with what you are doing*'. This, she felt, would add too much unpleasantness to her life in the village.

In the local government assemblage, only particular persons, groups and organisations are being incorporated into the network, which instead of being fluid, dynamic and mobile, has become static and rigid. This was articulated by a man in his 50's who stated that the '*Parish Council are a closed group and they 'shun the non-believers, as it were'.*' A separate male in his 50's stated that '*there are some forward-looking Councils, but the vast majority are backwards-looking*'. As a consequence, power starts to become unilinear rather than multiple, focussing on a small rather than multi-parental set of ideas (Boulding 1981; Prigogine and Stengers 1983). This problematises the capacity of the Council and the communities that it incorporates to communicate adequately within the periphery-assemblage, or outside of it with the broader environment. As a result anti-peripheralisation processes, perceptions, and narratives are compromised by shunning new ideas that emerge from within, damaging the periphery's capacity to innovate and adapt to change and mutating niche. Instead, the bad feeling created then developed its own set of negative feedback loops and affective responses (Ahmed 2004; Connolly 2008).

Part of the problem here relates to the difficulties that Councils have in getting new Councillors. If a lack of interest means that few volunteer, existing Councillors have to use their networks in order to try to fill vacancies. This immediately restricts the multiparental (Boulding 1981) nature of idea generation, compromising adaptability by inhibiting the development of new lines of flight and spaces of possibility (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). In contrast, the inability to introduce new information fosters the maintenance of path dependencies which might no longer have a beneficial function in the successful adaptation of the region-assemblage (Bedau and Humphries 2008; Smith and Jenks 2006). What the above participants seem to be describing, is a situation whereby path dependencies or older

knowledges are upheld and aggressively policed because of a lack of diversity within the Councils. This lack of diversity over ideas means that it is difficult to challenge peripheralising narratives (Author forthcoming; Willett 2016; Lang 2015; Erickson 2008; Bürk et al 2012), as there is a privilege towards pre-existing (albeit harmful) ideas.

Most participants recognised the need to incorporate a broader demographic into the Council, but felt uncertain how to do this. This meant that practices, principles and structures emerged creating feedback loops which favoured affective responses towards, and communication within and between the dominant demographic. The result was that Council monocultures are replicated, further excluding different groups within the region-assemblage from participating by reproducing affective resonances which reinforce existing structures. One woman in her early 20's articulated these communicative issues by stating that '*we get a Parish booklet through the door, but I think it always goes straight into the bin. A Parish Facebook would be good though. I'd definitely read that as it would be right up in front of me*'. Here, attempts at communication were not in themselves affectively adapted to how younger people accessed information about their worlds. This meant that rather than opening conduits of information flows and creating feedback loops (Connolly 2002; Latour 2005), it blocked communications to significant sectors of the community.

Sometimes, the issues were about languages. In the RCS part of the research several people related stories about how they or their children/friends children had tried to engage with the Council to improve play facilities. Usually, they used the available narrative locally of wanting to develop a skate park within existing play area grounds. Unfortunately, the experiences of the young people were that the Council had been slow, ineffective, or at times, obstructive, rather than open to suggestions for positive change. In these instances, councillors had failed to recognise that regardless of the merits or otherwise of skate-parks, these young people had been trying to find ways of engaging in, and becoming an active part of, the peripheral community-assemblage. For instance a woman in her early 40's related the story of a boat-builder in her community, who had tried to work with the Council to improve play facilities. '*He has put a lot of personal effort in, with the children to get a skate park built. But it's getting nowhere, despite ALL the effort… The Parish Council have all the power to make changes, but they don't use that power.*' In not comprehending that this was a communicative invitation with the potential of creating affective spaces of possibility (Deleuze and Guattari 2004; Smith and Jenks 2006; Connolly 2008), this potentiality gets lost and generates affective responses built on resentment.

Moreover, at other times, the lack of capacity for effective communication created a series of negative affective impacts, which developed resentment and hostility amongst some members of the community towards Councillors. In this instance, the Council had installed some kayak racks which had the potential to be of significant practical use, and the instigator of much affective good-will. However, focus group participants felt that they had not known about the facility until it was too late to rent space. The community activist quoted earlier talked about this saying '*for instance, we locally have had a kayak rack down at the harbour. That was terribly advertised, for which I missed out on a kayak space and I'm gutted… and I'm like, if I had known about that properly, where was that advertised?*' This was interpreted to mean that members of the Council benefitted more than other locals, creating hostilities and blockages to communication, threatening the operation of the assemblage through divisions and narratives which undermine the relationship between communication and trust. We see here that communication difficulties within the assemblage has generated an affective situation of antagonism which dissipates collective activity potentially harms flows of information (See Ahmed 2004; Bennett 2010; Anderson 2014).

We see this affective hostility in evidence amongst the range of participants who discussed how difficult it was for the Councils and communities to hold conversations about a range of topics. Although Councils have a statutory duty to disseminate the minutes of meetings, these tend to be done via notice-boards, websites, and/or community newsletters. However little or no attempt is made to amend the format into something more easy to read for persons unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the formalisation of Council processes. Equally, few Councils use social media tools as a means of engaging with other locals in ways that are more familiar to (particularly younger) demographics. This creates something of a chicken-and-egg' problem, whereby the circulation of knowledges happens only within particular parts of the Council-assemblage, threatening its capacity to keep the disparate aspects of the assemblage collected together. In turn, this reproduces mono-linear power structures and harms the ability of the community to either utilise or convey accurate information to other parts of the periphery-assemblage, or to acknowledge emerging perceptions that challenge stigmatising (Bürk et al 2012) narratives. As a consequence, few emergent spaces are facilitated (Bedau and Humphries 2008; Boulding 1981; Deleuze and Guattari 2004), which means that there is little innovation or dynamism happening in the governance of communities, and therefore fewer possibilities for new lines of flight or lines of articulation (Deleuze and Guattari 2004; Connolly 2002).

For this periphery, we can see the potential damage that poor communicative practices within local government can have for the ways that information flows through and reverberates around the periphery-assemblage. Local government can have an enabling impact on peripheral development (Crescenzi et al., 2016; Collins, J. Neal and Z. Neal 2014). However in the case of this example the information flows, affective impacts, lines of flight and feedback loops have broken down, inhibiting the ability of the periphery to create dynamic spaces of possibility, and therefore challenge peripheralisation. The result is that potentially harmful or outdated path-dependencies, narratives and structures fail to be challenged, replaced or improved through the incorporation of new ideas (Bedau and Humphries 2008; Smith and Jenks 2006). It can create feedback loops of negative affects which inhibit successful flows of information, rather than positive amplificatory affects which can facilitate successful adaptation to national and global social, political, and economic shifts (Connolly 2008; Latour 2005). Local governance *can* provide a unique assemblage-space to collect, make decisions, and disseminate. However it, too, needs to be able to adapt to the shifting environments and niche within which it is embedded.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have made three interconnected arguments. First, I claim that effective and inclusive local government is a crucial space to challenge peripheralisation processes and facilitate adaptation to structural environmental changes (Crescenzi et al., 2016; Collins, J. Neal and Z. Neal 2014). Second, poor communication can generate peripheralisation processes within the periphery-assemblage. Local Councils provide a space of possibility (Connolly 2008; Deleuze and Guattari 2004) to actualise the power within the peripheral regions (Author forthcoming; Paasi 2013; Willett 2016). The case study above demonstrates how when this breaks down it can harm the function of the region as a periphery-organism. Finally, the overarching claim is that viewing peripheral regions as affective assemblages can help to identify the processes of peripheralisation that need to be challenged in order to successfully adapt to the contemporary environment (Bürk et al 2012; Lang et al 2015; Author forthcoming; Eriksson 2008). These processes include the linkages, reverberations and feedback loops can be better developed in order to evolve to changing socio-economic niche (Boulding 1981; Connolly 2008; Bergson 2004; Smith and Jenks 2008). In part, this can enable us to understand more fully the impacts that particular investments and opportunities from traditional approaches to peripheral development are having, and to identify

better, through a better understanding of the periphery-assemblage, how these affects can be amplified. The improved circulation of knowledges amongst all of the differing demographics of the peripheral-assemblage would have the effect of being better able to incorporate and include diverse sections of the populace into debate and dialogue about what is happening in the locality. Further, improved knowledges and communication can better challenge peripheralising narratives.

From the example of local government in the case study we see that people are fundamentally disconnected from strategic decision making, investment, and development within the locality. This has happened through a range of factors which includes modes of communication and unfamiliar formalised processes and structures. In contrast to informal political groups within the community, Parish Councils have many layers of coded knowledges about how to interact with them, and how the machinery of Parish government works. This alienated participants, and meant that the general population are badly placed to know about emerging adaptations, innovation, plans, opportunities and ideas (Bedau and Humphries 2008; Smith and Jenks 2006; Boulding 1981) which can challenge stigmatising and peripheralising perceptions about the region, and narratives of place (Eriksson 2008; Janssen 2003; Willett 2016; Bürk et al 2012; Lang et al 2015). As a result, affective resentments and outdated knowledges and perceptions allow peripheralising narratives to remain in circulation. This is not to blame peripheries for their situation. On the contrary, national government has an important role in helping to create the structures within which peripheral local governments can actualise their agency.

In the UK, the Localism reforms (MacIntyre and Halsall 2011; Buser 2013; The Localism Act 2011) provide some of the structure in order to do this, but it still requires much work in order to transform the ways that the various aspects of local government communicates throughout the region. Part of the problem lies in how representative local government operates and is perceived (Moir and Leyshon 2013; Guertz and Van De Wijdeven 2010). But this is necessary work in order to make it more inclusive, discursive, relevant to ordinary people; dispersing power throughout the periphery. The potential benefits to such a course of action extend beyond merely challenging negative perceptions (Eriksson 2008; Janssen 2003; Willett 2016; Lang et al 2015; Bürk et al 2012), but may include building, maximising or amplifying capabilities and capacities. This carries the additional advantages of providing tangible evidence to contradict peripheralising stereotypes, and would improve social capital, knowledge and skills, amplifying the capacity of traditional development approaches to make a difference. In working with the connectivity and capacity of people and communities within

the periphery, there are clear spaces of potentiality for enhancing the agency of people in the periphery to challenge the peripheralising narratives which can be so damaging to long term regional development (Author. forthcoming; Bürk et al, 2012; Eriksson 2008).

Finally, viewing the region as an affective assemblage helps us to better observe the processes through which ideas and investments impact on the regional economy. It means that we can see the interconnections and feedback loops through which apparently disparate phenomena interconnect, and which can be used to both observe, but also to maximise the effectiveness of large and small developments. It offers an ontological perspective whereby even small things can have a big impact. This provides a sense of agency to both individuals within peripheral regions, and to the peripheral region itself to better be able to challenge its physical and discursive peripherality.

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