



## New Localities

Martin Jones & Michael Woods

To cite this article: Martin Jones & Michael Woods (2013) New Localities, *Regional Studies*, 47:1, 29-42, DOI: [10.1080/00343404.2012.709612](https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2012.709612)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2012.709612>



© 2013 The Author(s). Published by Taylor & Francis.



Published online: 08 Nov 2012.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 4586



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 21 View citing articles [↗](#)

# New Localities

MARTIN JONES and MICHAEL WOODS

*Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD) and Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University, Aberystwyth, UK. Emails: msj@aber.ac.uk and m.woods@aber.ac.uk*

---

(Received December 2011; in revised form June 2012)

JONES M. and WOODS M. New localities, *Regional Studies*. During the mid-to-late 1980s, ‘locality’ was the spatial metaphor to describe and explain the shifting world of regional studies. The paper argues that the resulting ‘localities debate’ threw this baby out with the bathwater and rather than invent new concepts to capture socio-spatial relations in the twenty-first century, the paper urges a ‘return to locality’ to enlighten regional studies. The paper offers three new readings of locality, which when taken together constitute the basis for thinking about regions, society and space through the lens of ‘new localities’. It further suggests that for locality to have analytical value it must also have both an imagined and a material coherence, and it puts a ‘new locality’ framework to work in research on devolved regional economic and social geographies.

New localities    Locality    Region    Relationality    Devolution    Wales

JONES M. and WOODS M. 新的地域性，区域研究。1980年代中期至晚期，“地域性”的概念便做为区域研究描绘并解释世界变迁的象征。本文认为其所导致的“地域性辩论”如同将可取之处与废物一同丢弃一般，与其创造新的概念来捕捉二十一世纪的社会空间关系，本文则主张以“回到地域性”启迪区域研究，并提供有关地域性的三种新式阅读，三者整合起来将形成以“新的地域性”之视角思考区域、社会与空间的基础。本文并进一步提议，地域性的概念若要具有分析价值，则必须同时拥有想象与物质层面的连贯性，“新的地域性”并将成为研究中央权力下放下的区域经济和社会地理的崭新研究架构。

新的地域性    地域性    区域    区域性    中央权力下放    韦尔斯

JONES M. et WOODS M. De nouvelles localités, *Regional Studies*. Du milieu à la fin des années 1980, la notion de ‘localité’ constituait la métaphore pour décrire et expliquer l’évolution des études régionales. L’article affirme que ‘le débat sur la notion de localité’, qui en a résulté, a jeté ce bébé avec l’eau de bain et, plutôt que d’inventer de nouveaux concepts afin de capter les relations socio-géographiques du vingt-et-unième siècle, l’article prône en faveur d’un ‘retour à la notion de localité’ pour améliorer les études régionales. Cet article fournit trois nouvelles appréciations de la notion de ‘localité’ lesquelles, prises ensemble, constituent le bien-fondé des opinions sur les régions, la société et l’espace dans l’optique des ‘nouvelles localités’. De plus, on propose que la notion de localité doit avoir une cohérence à la fois imaginaire et réelle pour justifier une valeur analytique, et on met en branle un cadre de ‘nouvelle localité’ dans la recherche au sujet des géographies économiques et sociales régionales dévolues.

Nouvelles localités    Notion de localité    Région    Relationnalité    Décentralisation    Pays de Galles

JONES M. und WOODS M. Neue Lokalitäten, *Regional Studies*. In der zweiten Hälfte der achtziger Jahre handelte es sich bei der ‘Lokalität’ um die räumliche Metapher zur Beschreibung und Erklärung der veränderlichen Welt der Regionalwissenschaft. In diesem Beitrag wird argumentiert, dass in der daraus resultierenden ‘Lokalitätsdebatte’ das Kind mit dem Bade ausgeschüttet wurde; statt neue Konzepte zur Erfassung der sozialräumlichen Beziehungen im 21. Jahrhundert zu erfinden, wird eine ‘Rückkehr zur Lokalität’ zur Aufklärung der Regionalwissenschaft gefordert. Angeboten werden drei neue Lesarten der Lokalität, die gemeinsam die Grundlage für die Betrachtung von Regionen, Gesellschaft und Raum durch das Objektiv der ‘neuen Lokalitäten’ bilden. Ebenso wird argumentiert, dass die Lokalität nur dann einen analytischen Wert bietet, wenn sie sowohl eine imaginäre als auch eine materielle Kohärenz aufweist, und es wird ein Rahmen der ‘neuen Lokalitäten’ zum Einsatz in der Forschung über dezentralisierte regionale Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeografien geschaffen.

Neue Lokalitäten    Lokalität    Region    Relationalität    Dezentralisierung    Wales

JONES M. y WOODS M. Nuevas localidades, *Regional Studies*. De mediados a finales de los ochenta, la ‘localidad’ era la metáfora espacial preferida para describir y explicar el mundo cambiante de los estudios regionales. En este artículo sostenemos que el ‘debate de localidades’ resultante acabó tirando el grano con la paja; en vez de inventar nuevos conceptos para captar las relaciones socio-espaciales en el siglo XXI, aquí instamos a ‘volver a la localidad’ para esclarecer los estudios regionales. En este artículo ofrecemos tres nuevas lecturas de localidad que juntas constituyen la base para reflexionar sobre las regiones, la sociedad y el espacio a través del objetivo de las ‘nuevas localidades’. Además sugerimos que para que el concepto de localidad ofrezca un valor analítico, también

debe tener una coherencia imaginada y material, y establecemos una estructura de ‘nueva localidad’ para la investigación sobre geografías regionales con las competencias transferidas desde una perspectiva económica y social.

Nuevas localidades    Localidad    Región    Relacionalidad    Transferencia de competencias    Gales

JEL classification: R

## INTRODUCTION

Locality has suddenly emerged as one of the more popular ideas in social science, especially in sociology, geography, urban and regional studies, and political science. A content analysis might reveal the term vying for place with structure, and cause, if not yet approaching the use levels of class, status or gender. But it is an *infuriating idea*. It is one that seems to signify something important, and indeed most people seem to know – roughly – what it signifies for them. *Yet few would care to explain what locality (or is it a locality or even the locality) actually is.* Even fewer, I suspect, would agree on the result – even if there was one. (DUNCAN, 1989, p. 221; added emphasis)

‘What is locality?’ asked Simon Duncan in 1989 when commenting on the locality debates of the previous five years. As discussed below, these were certainly productive and extensive debates on social and spatial relations, occurring at a time of intense economic restructuring and written across landscapes of deindustrialization. ‘Locality’ was that buzz-word of the mid-1980s, even a ‘new geography’ (COCHRANE, 1987), used to frame research on economic geography. It filled the pages of human geography journals and, it could be argued (also COOKE, 1990), contributed to the intellectual development of regional studies. Reflecting on this, COOKE (2006) went as far as to argue that this was

the most heated yet illuminating wrangles in human geography since those over ‘environmental determinism’ in the 1950s and the ‘quantitative revolution’ in the 1960s. The soul of the discipline seemed to be at stake ... (p. 1)

For Duncan, locality was being used as a catch-all term, somewhat misleading and unsupportive (or even that ‘infuriating idea’), to describe the local autonomy of areas, case study areas, spatially affected process (social, political, economic, cultural), spaces of production and consumption, the local state, and so on. In a classic paragraph, DUNCAN (1989) wrote that:

Localities in the sense of autonomous subnational social units rarely exist, and in any case their existence needs to be demonstrated. But it is also misleading to use locality as a synonym for place or spatial variation. This is because the term locality inevitably smuggles in notions of social autonomy and spatial determinism, and this smuggling in excludes examination of these assumptions. *It is surely better to use terms like town, village, local authority area, local labour market or, for more general uses, place, area or*

*spatial variation.* These very useable terms do not rely so heavily on conceptual assumptions about space vis-à-vis society.

(p. 247; added emphasis)

Social science debates rapidly moved on (post-Fordism, post-modernism, new regionalism, politics of place) ... this material was not advanced, theoretically or empirically, few cared to continue with locality, and instead today there are other spatial concepts such as territory, place, scale and network to capture the regional world of socio-spatial relations. As charted below, the locality concept baby was effectively thrown out with the locality studies bathwater to make space for new ways of seeing the regional world.

This paper argues that ‘locality’ remains an important vehicle in and through which to conduct social science research and when re-energized through a multilayered theoretical framework locality can enlighten and energize regional studies. The authors would like to suggest that recent exchanges over the nature of socio-spatial relations in the social sciences (JESSOP *et al.*, 2008; JONES, 2009; JONES and JESSOP, 2010; MERRIMAN *et al.*, 2012), and the ongoing debate between territorial versus relational perspectives on this, notably in human geography (JONAS, 2012; MACKINNON, 2011; MCCANN and WARD, 2010, 2011; PAASI, 2010), but also related concerns in the social sciences, arts and humanities (BRENNER, 2004; HART, 2010; JONES, 2010; SASSEN, 2006; SMITH and GUARNIZO, 2009), would benefit significantly from returning to this missing spatial metaphor.

The paper discusses the ‘locality debate’ of the 1980s, then turns to discuss the new regionalism in the 1990s, which extended some of this ground, before focusing on relational notions of space that have stretched the regional geographical imagination further, and the debates and counter debates on relationality. It takes stock and reintroduces locality as a bridging concept, whereby through three readings, the ‘new localities’ lens offers a way forward for regional studies by firstly reconciling some of the tensions in the current use of spatial metaphors and, secondly, offering a research agenda and methodological framework for advancing this.

The paper argues that, firstly, locality can be seen as bounded territorial space, which is recognized politically and administratively for the discharge and conduct of public services, and for the collection and analysis of statistical data. Secondly, locality represents a ways

of undertaking comparative research analysis, linked to processes occurring within the locality and also processes shaping the locality from the outside, and most importantly connecting localities. This also allows for the historical analysis of a given locality over time. Thirdly, locality can be used to read spaces of flows for numerous policy fields, which in turn exhibit spatial variations due to interaction effects. The object of analysis here is the policy field and not the locality per se. This reading of locality is sensitive to localities being defined by their cores rather than by the total area, such that the boundaries might be flexible and fuzzy. In addition to this, it is argued here that for any given locality to have analytical value it must have both a material coherence and an imagined coherence, and this distinction is unpacked.

The paper concludes by briefly illustrating how the 'new locality' framework has been put to work in a research programme exploring the contemporary economic and social geographies of Wales, undertaken by the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD).<sup>1</sup> The paper does not discuss the research programme or its findings in detail (HELEY *et al.*, 2012; HELEY, 2012; HELEY and JONES, 2012b; HELEY and MOLES, 2012), but rather it seeks to move from the particular to the general and highlights how principles from the 'new localities' approach have been engaged to allow meaningful representations of 'locality' to be constructed and mobilized through the research.

### REMEMBERING SOCIETY AND SPACE: CURS AND THE LOCALITY DEBATE

MASSEY's *Spatial Divisions of Labour* (1984) was pivotal to starting what became the locality debate. This was written during an era of intense economic restructuring and challenged how geographers thought about 'the local' in an increasingly internationalizing and globalizing world fuelled by the collapse of Fordist–Keynesian compromises. The economic background is critical with five trends taking place in manufacturing across local areas in North America and Western Europe: slowing productivity, declining output, trade deficits, collapsing profitability and reductions in employment (MARTIN and ROWTHORN, 1986). This was happening at the same time as changes in the monetary conditions of exchange (inflationism to anti-inflationism). Added to this, Massey emphasized three interrelated mechanisms driving local economic restructuring under advanced capitalism: intensification (increasing labour productivity and obtaining the same output with a reduced workforce), rationalization (cutting capacity in response to intensification and/or relocating capacity elsewhere geographically), and technical change (labour-saving methods of production such as mechanization and manufacturing improvement). This, in turn, influenced three spatial structures of production: locationally concentrated and

vertically integrated, cloning branch-plants, and part processing systems. The net impact of all this was inevitably job losses, with a geographical anatomy of uneven development and distinctive localities emerging under globalization and economic restructuring, which MASSEY (1984) (also LOVERING, 1989) sought to uncover by way of a 'restructuring approach' based on five principles:

- Linkages need to be made between local economies and processes operating at regional, national and international scales.
- Local economic factors and economic changes need to be linked to constellations of social, political, technical and cultural concerns.
- Critical focus has to be placed on the role of labour (and class relations) in the location imperatives of firms.
- Analysis of local and regional economic change should begin with broad economic processes and then examine impacts on localities, thereby identifying a two-way relationship between local conditions and broader processes (the specific and the general).
- Over time, and across space, the links between 'the local' and 'the global' produce different 'rounds of investment', which build up in layers and influence the role 'the local' plays in the next wave of restructuring and investment.

The intellectual goal was to tease out the dialectic between space and place by looking at how *localities* were being positioned within, and in turn help to reposition, the changing national and international division of labour. For MASSEY (1991), 'the local in the global', of course, is not simply an area one can draw a line around; instead, it is defined in terms of sets of social relations or processes under consideration. This highly influential 'new regional concept of localities' (JONAS, 1988) influenced two government-sponsored research initiatives in the UK, delivered through the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC): the Social Change and Economic Life programme and the 'Changing Urban and Regional Systems' (CURS) programme. Both were given substantial funding and charged with remits to uncover the effects of international and global economic restructuring on local areas and why different responses and impacts were reported in different places. Locality research, independent of these programmes, was already taking place at Lancaster University (MURGATROYD *et al.*, 1985) and at Sussex University (DUNCAN, 1989), which fuelled an interest in this important topic, although as BARNES (1996) highlighted, notions of 'locality' differ across all these interventions and focusing on the CURS programme is most helpful in getting behind the meaning of locality.

In seeking to put 'the local' into 'the global', the CURS initiative set out to undertake theoretically informed empirical research in seven localities between 1985 and 1987. The goal was to examine the extent to

which localities themselves could shape their own transformation and destiny as agents and not be passive containers for processes passed down from above. A series of mainly metropolitan de-industrializing towns/regions and rural areas being encroached by restructuring were selected as case studies for this analysis – Swindon, Thanet, Cheltenham, Middlesbrough, East Liverpool and South Birmingham – with the results being published in two edited books (COOKE, 1989a; HARLOE *et al.*, 1990). Each book contained detailed chapters on each locality, with research teams uncovering (with varying degrees of success) the impacts of globalization and economic restructuring on ‘the local’ through different ‘rounds of investment’ occurring over time and with local politics producing locality interactions.

Particularly worthy of note here was the work of HUDSON (1989, 1990) and BEYNON *et al.* (1989), whose research closely followed Massey’s theoretical and interpretative framework. Their account of economic change in Teesside seemed to demonstrate a ‘locality effect’ of local particularities in global times, that is, the different ways in which ‘rounds of investment’ can be read in the local economic landscape, how local politics played a role in international investment decisions, and in turn how attempts to cope with de-industrialization by either building a service-based economy or using state-sponsored local economic initiatives to create employment opportunities were working themselves out on the ground. This economic strategy, of course, had questionable sustainability due to the volatility of global production regimes (HUDSON, 2000; SADLER, 1992).

As argued by GREGSON (1987), DUNCAN and SAVAGE (1991), and BARNES (1996), there is a fundamental difference between locality research (the CURS findings) and the resulting ‘locality debate’ across human geography and the social sciences, which was fuelled by a rethinking of how one theorized socio-spatial relations across these disciplines (itself bound up with a transition from Marxist to poststructuralist research enquiry) and shifting research methodologies and practices (such as the rise and fall of critical realism; PRATT, 2004).

With all this in mind, things were inevitably going to be messy and the journal *Antipode*, between 1987 and 1991, published a series of often-heated exchanges on the whereabouts of localities (for summaries, cf. COOKE, 2006; and PRATT, 2004).

The initial assault came from North America by SMITH (1987), who bemoaned the perceived shift away from (Marxist) theory to a critical realist-inspired regional world of empirics, worthy of nothing more than a ‘morass of statistical data’. Smith famously said:

like the blind man with a python in one hand and an elephant’s trunk in the other, the researchers are treating all seven localities as the same animal.

(p. 63)

This was supported, to a differing degree, by HARVEY (1987), who saw these projects as refusing to engage in any theoretical or conceptual adventures, the consequences of which, for SCOTT (1991), encourage

a form of story-telling that focuses on dense historical and geographical sequences of events, but where in the absence of a strong interpretative apparatus, the overall meaning of these events for those who live and work in other places is obscure.

(pp. 256–257)

In a more balanced manner, the resume by DUNCAN (1989) saw locality – in the wrong hands – as a form of reified uniqueness and ‘spatial fetishism’, that is, in what sense can localities act, or is it the social forces within these spaces that have this capacity? Duncan then questioned the relationships within a defined territorial unit and in two brilliant papers with Savage made of the first serious interventions on the relationships between spatial scales (SAVAGE and DUNCAN, 1990). Duncan concluded with some thoughts on three ways forward for research on locality: considerations of spatial contingent effects (processes contained in places), propositions on local causal processes (locally derived forces of change), and the notion of locality effects (the combination of the previous two, affording a capacity to localities to act). WARDE (1989) recognized the value of locality for empirical research but also highlighted that the scale of locality changes according to the object of analysis under question. COOKE (1987, 1989b), the Director of CURS, took a more defensive and ultimately pragmatic line, arguing that CURS was about seeking to make some general claims from multi-site case-study research, even if this was about nothing more than local labour markets and its boundaries. The CURS findings were, therefore, empirical and not empiricist (COOKE, 2006).

A special issue of *Environment and Planning A* offered further critique and extension, and showed that locality was still a valuable concept to be grappled with. For JACKSON (1991), unsuccessful and at times dangerous attempts were being made to read cultural change and political change from the economy, rather than seeing these as being embedded in each other’s presence. PRATT (1991) took a similar line and suggested that one needs to look at the discursive construction of localities and their material effects. PAASI (1991), much inspired by the ‘new regional geography’ material that the locality debate uncovered and which brought regions back into the room as a consequence, encouraged scholars to take ‘geohistory’ more seriously and offered the idea of ‘generation’ to distinguish between the concepts of locality, place and region. DUNCAN and SAVAGE (1989, 1991) pushed what they saw as the missing agenda of place formation and class formation and the interconnections of these within and between localities. COX and MAIR (1988, 1991) offered an interesting US account of localities as arenas

for economic development coalitions and ways of exploring the fixing and scaling of socio-spatial relations. They took the debate forward and brought agency and scale to the fore through notions of 'local dependency', the 'scale division of labour' and the 'scale division of the state' – concepts that highlighted the location and mobility of actors at different times. Cox and Mair claimed this avoided 'spatial fetishism' (a criticism levelled by SAYER, 1991) as locality is seen not in physical terms but as a 'localised social structure'. COX (1993) pushed this further in work on the new urban politics. This claimed that capital was not as hyper-mobile as globalization theory was arguing at the time due to the territorial organization of the (probably peculiar in relation to capital-labour relations in Ohio) US local state system. Cox, however, probably pushed things too far by claiming that localities could ultimately act, as opposed to the social relations in these strategically selected spaces acting (MACLEOD and JONES, 2011).

As COOKE's (2006) excellent retrospective commentary notes, because CURS and the locality debate became so quickly conflated in these debates, jettisoning the notion of locality for some twenty-five years was somewhat inevitable. Debates moved on and during the mid-1990s economic geographers became preoccupied not so much with localities per se but rather with the links between space and place as a way of looking at the 'local in the global'. BEYNON and HUDSON (1993), reviewing the locality debate and noting the gaps over missing politics, made some interesting points on our local-global times: 'space' for these authors captures the rather abstract domain of capital, with 'place' being 'meaningful' situations established by labour. 'Meaningful' was never fully defined or demonstrated, apart from reference to historically contingent economic identities and attachments, and the important point that 'place-based' is not necessarily reducible to notions of 'place-bound' (cf. MASSEY, 1991).

MASSEY, commenting on related themes, wrote an extension to the debate in the journal *Marxism Today*, reprinted in his collection of essays entitled *Space, Place and Gender* (1994). This was an early application of the 'thinking space relationally' approach. For Massey, of course, globalization is happening, but probably not as we know it. Time-space compression (the shrinking-world thesis) is socially and spatially differentiated due to the different mobility potentially of people in place. 'Power geometries', a metaphor for capturing geographies of power, exist and therefore constrain some and enable others. This makes generalizations about the powerlessness of 'the local' in a globalizing world unwise: one needs instead to understand and see localities as 'global senses of place' – they are interconnected nodes in spaces of flows, stretching back and forth, ebbing and flowing according to how these are positioned by, and positioning, socio-spatial relations. Localities as 'global senses of place' are *relational* in the sense of seeing the local as an unbounded mosaic of

different elements always in a process of interaction and being made. In short, one cannot explain locality or place only by looking inside it, or outside it; the 'out there' and 'in here' matter *together* and are dialectically intertwined (MASSEY, 2005, 2007).

### TOWARDS 'NEW LOCALITIES': THE NEW REGIONALISM AND RELATIONAL SPACE

In the early 1990s, 'region' certainly replaced locality as the spatial metaphor for doing economic and political geography. Academic trends tend to mirror closely political and policy events (COOKE, 1995, 1998; COOKE and MORGAN, 1998) and economic geographers started to get very excited about what they saw as the re-emergence of regional economies and new spaces of economic governance across the globe. These spaces had, of course, been initially flagged by writers talking about post-Fordism and the geographies of flexible accumulation. The pace of generalizing from this though, to paint a 'regional world' (STORPER, 1997) picture, increased. SCOTT, for instance, in his *New Industrial Spaces* (1988) offered a new way of looking at agglomeration and the development of distinct local territorial production complexes or industrial districts. Whereas Fordist accumulation was favoured by and grew in accordance with economies of scale and vertical integration, economic development after-Fordism was seen to be linked to spatially specific economies of scope resulting from the vertically disintegration of production and the development, amongst other things, of flexible working practices and shared support mechanisms. The geographical extent of this phenomenon and its reproducibility and sustainability was discussed at length in various edited collections (STORPER and SCOTT, 1992) and, inspired by this, debates gradually shifted throughout the 1990s to examine the governance of local economies in global contexts through a 'new regionalist' perspective – as part of a broader 'institutional-turn' in economic geography. A parallel set of debates, also drawing on 'new regionalist' thinking, took place in political science on 'multilevel governance' – driven by the so-called hollowing out of the national state and the 'Europe of the Regions' thesis (KEATING, 1998; SCOTT, 2001) – advancing these scalar claims further. For COOKE (2006) this was important for locality studies.

Probably the longest-lasting legacy of locality studies has been the rise of so-called 'new regionalism'. Already spotted around the time of his return from Australia by Nigel Thrift (1983) this theorised regional political economy analysis was gaining ground rapidly as we have seen, in the new times of 'global localisation.

(p. 10)

This orthodoxy and alleged theoretical coherence referred to above by Cooke has, of course, been subjected to piercing academic critiques. In a similar

manner to some of the critiques of locality, philosophically (via critical realism) the new regionalism is deemed guilty of ‘bad abstraction’ – it ignores the role of multiple and contingent factors (both economic and non-economic) that produce regions. For this reason LOVERING (1999) argued that the region is becoming a ‘chaotic conception’; generalized claims are being made based on selective empirical evidence to support the centrality of this scale for stimulating economic growth. Consequently, Lovering argues, this approach is a theory led by selective empirical developments and recent public policy initiatives. It is

a set of stories about how *parts* of a regional economy *might* work, placed next to a set of policy ideas which *might* just be useful in *some* cases.

(LOVERING, 1999, p. 384; original emphasis)

These arguments have been developed and extended by others (MACLEOD, 2001a, 2001b; HADJIMICHALIS, 2006a, 2006b; HARRISON, 2008, 2010; PAINTER, 2008) and the present paper will return to issues of ‘regional method’.

New regionalist thinking on what one might want to call ‘socio-spatial relations’ has, in turn, been challenged by relational approaches to space, where – building on the work of MASSEY (1991, 1994) above – geographies are made through stretched-out and unbounded relations between hybrid mixtures of global flows and local nodal interactions that are interconnected (for a summary, see MURDOCH, 2006). No longer is space a container or independent backdrop for existence, nor is there a concern for a distance between points; instead, uncovering networked, nodal and open place-based relationships is where it is at. This argument, of course, has been clearly articulated by those advocating a ‘thinking space relationally’ approach to geography (AMIN, 2004; AMIN *et al.*, 2003; also MARSTON *et al.*, 2005). In the ‘unbounded’ or ‘relational region’ thesis there is no automatic promise of territorial integrity. An ‘alternative regional geography’ of ‘jostling’ (MASSEY, 2007, p. 89) is argued for, where spatial configurations and boundaries are no longer necessarily or purposively territorial or scalar, since the social, economic, political, and cultural inside and outside are constituted through the topologies of actor networks which are becoming increasingly dynamic and varied in spatial constitution (AMIN, 2004).

This take certainly stretches the imagination of economic geography in local–global times, but those working within state theoretic frameworks and more grounded approaches to economic geography have taken issue with the *realpolitik* of ‘the local’ grappling with the challenges of globalization. For example, it is important to consider the ways in which cities and regions can be categorized as a ‘problem’ by the state and those seeking to direct resources to different geographical areas. It is also important not to lose sight of the ways in which ‘contentious politics’ (LEITNER *et al.*, 2008) are being played out

across the globe. One instance of this in recent years has seen the distinguishing of territorially articulated spaces by those campaigning for devolved government and cultural rights. These spaces are not out there waiting to be found, but they are being mobilized and managed in the era of the post-national political constellation. Such spaces become central for conducting territorial political struggles over economic and cultural identities (JONES and MACLEOD, 2004; MACLEOD and JONES, 2007). Pushing this further, for TOMANEY (2007) and MORGAN (2007) localities are more than the local articulation of global flows and concerns with territorialized culture need not necessarily be atavistic, archaic or regressive.

JONAS (2012) suggested that the distinction between territorial and relational can be ‘registered obsolete’ if critical attention is paid to matters of territory and the nature of territorial politics, both of which are products of bounded and unbounded forces and the balance/form this takes is contingent and requires empirical investigation. The way forward, then, is ‘further examples of both relational thinking about territorial politics and of territorial thinking about relational processes’ (JONAS, 2012, p. 270). This requires some empirical hard work, which is welcome, and there are good examples of how this might be conducted (BEAUMONT and NICHOLLS, 2007; GONZÁLEZ, 2009; JONES and MACLEOD, 2011; SAVAGE, 2009; MCCANN and WARD, 2010, 2011).

Significant outstanding issues remain when dealing with socio-spatial relations since the inception of the locality debate, and it would be foolish to suggest that notions of ‘locality’ can provide a solution to all the remaining concerns of space and spatiality in human geography, regional studies and the social sciences more broadly. It could be contended, though, that when fused and energized by the material contained within debates since then, locality can be taken forward with analytical value and clarity to answer the challenges thrown up by the rise and fall of the new regionalism, the relational turn and the territorial–relational backlash. It could be concurred, in part, that the power of locality rests on its regional method. Locality offers a ‘comparative methodology that allow[s] spatial variety to be explained within a coherent and satisfying theoretical framework’ (COOKE, 2006, p. 10).

To summarize the position to this point, there are two key issues at stake. First, following a line from critical realism, if locality or any other substantive spatial concept as it happens is to the explanation of action of any kind, it is because it constitutes a context, or configuration, which delimits such actions.

The emergent properties of the spatial distribution of social objects with causal powers appear as contexts for action. Context doesn’t determine action, but it delimits action.

(WARDE, 1989, p. 280)

Second, localities, like regions, are only ever semi-coherent in their concrete realizations. Localities are always constructed out of the tensions and grapples between spatial fixity and flow. MASSEY'S (2011) recent statement on this is a helpful resume.

Territories are constituted and are to be conceptualized, relationally. Thus, interdependence and identity, difference and connectedness, uneven development and the character of place, are in each pairing two sides of the same coin. They exist in constant tension with each other, each contributing to the formation, and the explanation, of the other.

(p. 4)

Going beyond Massey, the issue is to think not so much of the processes that help bound space into discrete localities, but rather to undertake research that investigates where, why and how the processes of 'locality making' are negotiated, constructed and contested, becoming semi-permanently fixed or, equally, dissolving together (JONAS, 2012). These agendas are taken forward to the next section, which discusses a 'new localities' research agenda.

#### A 'NEW LOCALITIES' RESEARCH AGENDA

SAVAGE *et al.* (1987, p. 30) argued that '[g]reater clarification of the concept 'locality' should start with an analysis of the significance of space in general'. This approach has certainly been lacking – with the exception of relational space, but at the same time this reading is disconnected from other philosophical positions (JONES, 2009) – from all the debates discussed so far in the paper. The authors agree fully and offer three readings of 'new locality' which can initially be formulated from the three commonly understood notions of space in general – absolute, relative and relational – which, as HARVEY (1969, 1973) has highlighted, can coexist at the same time. In absolute understanding of space, the local in the global, for instance, is treated independently, that is, locality is a discrete space around which a line can be drawn and where a loose spatial determinism has some purchase. Concerns with *relative space* then lead one to consider the relationship between localities in an increasingly internationalizing world of processes and patterns. Last, as noted above, *relational space* is a truly radical attempt to collapse analysis into networked concerns such that there is no global and local to talk about, only unbounded and networked geographies of 'jostling' (MASSEY, 2007), 'throwntogetherness' (MASSEY, 2005) and becoming (WOODS, 2007). Sites become the sources of analysis, but how sites relate to each other is not clear, such that research needs to pay attention to power and policy relations flowing through localities.

It could be argued that these three notions of space can be deployed to inform different ways of identifying localities as objects of research. Three readings of 'new locality' follow:

- From the perspective of absolute space, localities can be presented as bounded territories, such as local authority areas, which are recognized politically and administratively for the discharge and conduct of public services, and for the collection and analysis of statistical data. They are not naturally occurring entities (though some may be contiguous with natural features such as islands), but they do have a stable and precisely delimited materiality that can form the focus for traditional, single-place-based or comparative case study research (BENNETT and MCCOSHAN, 1993).
- From the perspective of relative space, localities can be seen as connected containers for spatial analysis. Here localities are identified by their cores, not their edges, and are not necessarily consistent with formal administrative geographies. In this perspective, the boundaries of localities are relative, fuzzy and sometimes indeterminate, contingent on the processes and phenomena being observed, and shaped by dynamics within, outside and between localities. Such a notion of locality forms the basis for research sensitive to connective forms of enquiry, including, for example, work on city-regions and nested hierarchies (ETHERINGTON and JONES, 2009).
- From the perspective of relational space, localities are nodes or entanglements within networks of interaction and spaces of flow. They are not bounded in any conventional understanding of the term, but have a topography that is described by lines of connectivity and convergence. Localities transgress inscribed territories and are not necessarily discrete, sharing points of coexistence. Such a conceptualization of locality lends itself to counter-topographical research (KATZ, 2001; also HELEY and JONES, 2012a), or the practice of a 'global ethnography' (BURAWOY, 2000).

Unlike earlier locality debates, the 'new localities' approach does not seek to adjudicate between these different representations of locality, but rather recognizes that all are valid ways of 'talking about locality', and each captures a different expression of locality. New localities are, therefore, multifaceted and multidimensional. They are 'shape-shifters' whose form changes with the angle from which they are observed. As such, the identification of localities for research can be freed from the constraints of the rigid territoriality of administrative geography and should move beyond the reification of the local authority scale that was implicit in many previous locality studies. WARDE'S (1989) comments of twenty plus years ago on this remain critical:

Deciding on an appropriate spatial scale depends initially on the research problem. If we want to know about foreign policy we might choose states; if voting behavior, constituencies; if material life, perhaps the labour market; if everyday experience, maybe the neighbourhood. Greater



difficulty arises if we want to know about the intersection of several of these, the burden of the restructuring thesis. (p. 277)

In recognizing the relationality, contingency and impermanence of localities, it is those notions of 'intersection' that are important to uncover. The new localities approach accordingly focuses attention on processes of 'locality-making', or the ways in which semi-stabilized and popularly recognized representations of locality are brought into being through the moulding, manipulation and sedimentation of absolute, relative and relational space within ongoing social, economic and political struggles (JONAS, 2012; PIERCE *et al.*, 2010). Indeed, it is in these 'acts of locality-making' that localities are transformed from mere points of location (a description of where research was conducted) to socio-economic-political assemblages that provide an analytical framework for research.

For the concept of locality to have analytical value, it must be possible to attribute observed processes and outcomes to social, economic and political formations that are uniquely configured in a given locality, and this, it is argued, requires a locality to possess both material and imagined coherence.<sup>2</sup> By material coherence the authors refer to the social, economic and political structures and practices that are uniquely configured around a place. Thus, material coherence may be provided by the territorial remit of a local authority, by the geographical scope of an economic development initiative, by the catchment area of a school or hospital, by a travel-to-work area, by the reach of a supermarket or shopping centre, or by any combination of the above and other similar structures and practices. Material coherence hence alludes to the institutional structures that hold a locality together and provide vehicles for collective action. By imagined coherence it is meant that residents of the locality have a sense of identity with the place and with each other, such that they constitute a perceived community with shared patterns of behaviour and shared geographical reference points. Imagined coherence therefore makes a locality meaningful as a space of collective action. There are territorial units that exhibit material coherence but lack a strong imagined coherence – notably artificially amalgamated local authority areas – and there are territories with an imagined coherence but only a weak material coherence, either through fragmentation between local authority areas or integration into larger socio-economic-administrative structures. The authors would not consider areas falling into either of these categories to be strongly functioning localities.

Both material coherence and imagined coherence are also important in fixing (through multiple intersections) the scale at which localities can be identified. The imagined coherence of a locality is framed around perceived shared behaviours (such as using the same schools, hospitals, railway stations, supermarkets; being served by the

same local authority; supporting the same football or rugby team; or attending the same 'local' events or joining the same 'local' branches of organizations) and shared geographical/historical reference points (recognition of landscape features; knowledge of local 'characters'; memories of events in 'local' history), but it is 'imagined' in that it is not founded on direct inter-personal connection (cf. ANDERSON, 1991). In this it differs from the social coherence of a neighbourhood – which may share some of the above attributes but is framed around the probability of direct interaction between members – and from the imagined coherence of a region – which is a looser affiliation that draws more on perceived cultural and political identities and economic interests.

Similarly, the material coherence of a locality should be denser and more complex than that found at a neighbourhood or regional scale, since the material coherence of a neighbourhood will be restricted by its situation within a larger geographical area for employment, administrative and many service provision functions, and the material coherence of a region will be fragmented by the inclusion of several different labour markets, local authority areas, sub-regional shopping centres, etc. SAVAGE's (2009) work on 'granular space' is illustrative of these concerns. Savage argued that

People do not usually see places in terms of their nested or relational qualities: town against country: region against nation, etc. but compare different places with each other without a strong sense of any hierarchical ordering. I further argue that the culturally privileged groups are highly 'vested' in place, able to articulate intense feelings of belonging to specific fixed locations, in ways where abstract and specific renderings of place co-mingle. Less powerful groups, by contrast, have a different cultural geography, which hives off fantasy spaces from mundane spaces.

(p. 3)

The attributes of localities outlined above though do not easily translate into discrete territorial units with fixed boundaries. Labour market areas overlap, as do shopping catchment areas; residents may consider themselves to be part of different localities for different purposes and at different times; the reach of a town as an education centre may be different to its reach as an employment centre; and so on. The boundaries that might be ascribed to a locality will vary depending on the issue in question (WARDE, 1989).

All this has a bearing on how localities are identified, defined and constructed for case study research. The authors note here the argument of BEAUREGARD (1988) on the 'absence of practice' in locality research, which was a call for both methodological and political interventions to strengthen locality research. The application of the approach discussed logically leads the authors to start by identifying localities by their cores – whether these be towns or cities or geographical

areas – rather than as bounded territories, and working outwards to establish an understanding of their material and imagined coherence. This process will necessarily require mixed methods, combining cartographic and quantitative data on material geographies with qualitative evidence of imagined coherence and performed patterns and relations. However, the authors do not envisage this as an exercise in boundary-drawing. Whilst it may be possible to identify fixed territorial limits for the reach of a locality with respect to certain governmental competences or policy fields, the authors anticipate that all proxy boundaries will be permeable to a degree, and that localities may be configured differently depending on the object of inquiry. The following section provides an illustration of this process as applied to locality research in Wales.

### DOING ‘NEW LOCALITIES’ RESEARCH

This final section provides a short illustration of how the principles of the ‘new localities’ approach might be deployed in practice in localities research by briefly describing the establishment of a ‘Knowing Localities Research Programme’ by the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD).<sup>3</sup> The consolidation of Wales as a regional/national space of social and economic governance with increasingly sharp territorial definition since the introduction of devolved government in 1999 has refocused attention on the dynamics of spatial difference within Wales. Persistent uneven geographies of socio-economic performance as well as seemingly entrenched geographies of political and cultural difference suggest the existence of locality effects within Wales and present challenges for the delivery of policy. However, the shape of the constituent localities is far from clear. Although Wales has a sub-regional tier of twenty-two local authorities, these have only been in existence since 1995 when they replaced a two-tier local government system established in 1974. Moreover, the administrative map is overlain and cross-cut by a plethora of other governmental bodies including health boards, police authorities, transport consortium and economic development partnerships – to name a few – that work to their own territorial remit. An attempt to produce a more nuanced and process-led representation of Wales’s internal geography was made with the Wales Spatial Plan in 2004 (updated in 2008), but subsequent efforts to align the initially ‘fuzzy’ boundaries of the spatial plan regions with the hard boundaries of local authority areas demonstrates the accretional power of fixed institutional geographies in shaping the representation of localities (cf. HAUGHTON *et al.*, 2010; HELEY, 2012; HELEY and JONES, 2012b; WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT, 2004, 2008).<sup>4</sup>

The Knowing Localities Research Programme was designed to develop understanding of the form and effects of localities in Wales. In keeping with the

wider objective of WISERD to build social science research capacity, the programme aimed to develop analyses of localities that could serve to contextualize future case study research, and to test locality effects in the processes and practices of policy-making and delivery and in wider social and economic experiences and dynamics through a series of focused pilot studies. The programme incorporated elements of the ‘new localities’ approach from the outset, including the need to examine both the material and imagined coherence of localities, as reflected in its key research questions (Table 1).

The programme was, however, immediately faced with a paradox. Although studying the shape and constitution of localities was intrinsic to the research design, it was also necessary to select the geographical areas in which the research would be undertaken. This was resolved by adopting the strategy proposed above of defining localities by their cores, with the limits initially undetermined. In this way, three localities were selected as the foci for the programme, none of which was based on a single local authority. The *Central and West Coast* locality was loosely based on the ‘Central Wales’ region described in the Wales Spatial Plan, and included the local authority areas of Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire, and the historic county of Montgomeryshire, each of which could be potentially be identified as a locality in their own right (HELEY *et al.*, 2012). The *North Wales* locality took as its core the A55 transport corridor, with an influenced

*Table 1. Implementing a new localities research strategy: research questions for the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD) Knowing Localities Research Programme*

---

How do people come to ‘know’ locality?
What are the relationships and barriers between universal, public, elite and local knowledges and how are these articulated and acted upon in everyday discourse, policy and practice?
How does locality condition and contextualize knowledge production and utilization? And how does this lead (or not lead) to effective local-level community action in tackling regeneration?
What are the possibilities for generalizing local knowledge and experience?
How can we map communities of knowledge and the related interrelationships between economic and social welfare within local settings?
How do knowledge of locality and local knowledge shape practices of citizenship and community participation, and contribute to the development of new ‘localist’ forms of governance through ‘place-shaping’?
How is local knowledge and experience enrolled in strategies for economic development, regenerations skills capacity building, and how does knowledge of locality shape engagement with exogenous capital and fluid labour market dynamics?
How can knowing of locality and local knowledge be harnessed in addressing questions of sustainability?
How do the ways in which people ‘know’ localities intersect with ways of knowing national and regional identities and territorialities, and how do these shape practices of citizenship and civic engagement?

---

potentially extending across territories of the five local authority areas that it transected, as well as neighbouring Wrexham (MANN *et al.*, 2011). The *Heads of the Valleys* locality in South Wales focused on a 'place' whose cultural identity had grown since the opening of the Heads of the Valley road in the 1980s, and which had been recently territorially defined as part of the establishment of a regeneration initiative, but which was not consistent with formal administrative boundaries. Responsibility for research in the three areas was led by a different participating university and this short discussion focuses on the *Central and West Coast* locality studied by Aberystwyth University.

The next stages of the research followed the principles of the 'new localities' approach by assembling and examining evidence for the material and imagined coherence of the locality, as well as for the networks, flows and relations that transgressed its proxy boundaries. Firstly, published secondary data were collated to test the material coherence of the locality. These included information on the scale, remit and boundaries of local authorities and other governmental agencies; the territories and provisions of economic development designations; the pattern and focus of strategic and policy delivery partnerships; and the fit of statistical units used to approximate socio-economic dynamics, such as travel-to-work areas. In Central and West Coast Wales this evidence pointed to a fragmented material coherence. 'Central Wales' itself, as represented in the Wales Spatial Plan, exhibited limited material coherence, with no coterminous administrative authority, and an economy differentiated by only partial inclusion in the European Union Convergence Region of West Wales and the Valleys. The individual local authority areas within the Central Wales and West Coast locality certainly held a greater material coherence; but in practice this is being increasingly destabilized by an increasing tendency for inter-authority partnership working. Driven forward in accordance with the desire to increase efficiency (in terms of both cost and accountability), the extent to which joint-authority models of service delivery have been forged and implemented varies according to policy area – as does the geographical orientation of these relationships. For example, Ceredigion and Powys work together as the Central Wales Waste Partnership, where the neighbouring authorities share landfill sites, and facilities for food waste collection and recycling.<sup>5</sup> The highways departments in these two authorities also have a memorandum of understanding and maintain a close operational agenda. By contrast and in respect to children's services, Ceredigion County Council works rather more closely with Pembrokeshire County Council, and the two authorities have established a joint advocacy service catering for the needs of young people in need and in residential care.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in a variety of public and private organizations

to examine the significance of institutional geographies in shaping practice and to explore perceptions of imagined coherence. Again, the interviews produced differentiated results. Institutional settings exerted significant influence over individuals' spatial imaginaries, such that interviewees – perhaps unsurprisingly – tended to identify spatially with the territory of the organization for which they worked. However, at the same time, individuals acknowledged discrepancies between administrative territories and the imagined coherence of the local population (including popular attachment to historical entities such as Montgomeryshire), as well as expressions of imagined coherence with neighbouring areas, in some cases forged through experiences of partnership working. For example, interview data collected by the Knowing Localities Research Programme supported those claims made in official policy releases regarding a strong working relationship between Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire in the area of children's services. With stakeholders working for both authorities making reference to heightened levels of communication and the sharing of resources, this was widely attributed to a shared physical landscape. Specifically, stakeholders made marked references to the predominantly rural character of both counties, and to the particular aspects of community, culture and accessibility.

Thus, thirdly, the interview data, together with other secondary sources, provided evidence of the extended relational geographies of the localities concerned. Interviewees asserted the material and imagined coherence of their institutional territory, but they also described narratives of engagement in their everyday work that reached out beyond this delimited space to multiple external sites. For example, interviewees in Ceredigion talked not only about places within the county, but also about neighbouring areas of Pembrokeshire and Gwynedd, the administrative centres of adjacent local authorities, and the Welsh capital, Cardiff. Furthermore, detailed geographical information system (GIS) analysis (ORFORD, 2012) reveals that these described relational geographies varied between policy sectors: being most constrained for crime, and most extensive for education; skewing to the north for language and culture, but to the south for employment and training.

Highlighting the highly fluid and contingent nature of localities, their representation and their ongoing (re) production, it is also important then to reflect on the legacy of past institutional and policy forms, and the role of these forms in shaping and mediating current spatial imaginaries. For example, a considerable number of interviewees working in the Central and West Coast Locality referred to the ongoing influence of Dyfed County Council. Broken up in 1996 under the terms of the Local Government (Wales) Act; with the ancient counties of Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Cardiganshire (renamed Ceredigion) being restored for administrative purposes; the influence of Dyfed is still felt beyond its ceremonial retention as a

Lord Lieutenantcy. Thus, stakeholders working for Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire authorities across a range of policy areas recognized the agency of Dyfed in terms of creating lasting organizational ties (although many council workers of the Dyfed era have retired or left post), and as a lasting, semi-coherent, spatial imaginary. In this way, we are reminded of the importance of ostensibly 'past' political spaces, the creation of boundaries and institutions through of simultaneous rounds of restructuring and sedimentation, and their role in shaping the form and function of their successors (MACKINNON and SHAW, 2010).

### CONCLUSIONS: 'REHEATING THE PUDDING'<sup>7</sup>

[S]electing a pudding requires considerable thought. Cooke's pudding, the heavily battered one made with self-raising flour, is a bit shapeless. Duncan and Savage's alternative recipe seems to have overlooked the sugar and spice, a rather insipid dish of nouvelle cuisine proportions, scarcely pudding at all. A good pudding should have substance, which requires careful choice of ingredients. Probably Cox and Mair's not-quite-frozen jelly is the best on the menu. But beware, too much pudding can make you sick.

(WARDE, 1989, p. 280)

The above quotation is from Warde's classic 'recipes for pudding' analysis of the different menus on offer for doing locality. The analysis offered for the opening night of 'New Localities' will be that whilst concepts such as 'region' and 'place' have been resurrected and reinvented by the injection of new theoretical perspectives, 'locality' has been largely neglected. Yet, it is argued here that locality still has potential as an explanatory tool to analyse dynamics and contexts that are not adequately captured by 'region' or 'place'. In short, locality still matters; it is tasty and good for you.

This paper has proposed a new approach to thinking about localities. This recognizes that localities not only exist in absolute space as bounded territories, but also have expression in relative space and relational space where boundaries are at best 'fuzzy' and permeable. Whilst each representation may be legitimately employed to frame localities in particular contexts, taken together they point to a new understanding of localities as multifaceted, dynamic and contingent entities that change shape depending on the viewpoint adopted. These arguments are analogous to the thinking of relational space by authors such as MASSEY (2011). This paper's contribution is to advance this further by recognizing that constructing localities as frames for the analysis of social, economic or political phenomena requires investigation of actual 'acts of locality-making' using the vehicles of imagined coherence and their material coherence, which collectively make a locality meaningful and create a capacity for action. The paper

explored this empirically and has moved from the seemingly specific to the broad-ranging. The world is much more complicated than other theories of it (PAASI, 2008) and this paper has thus tried to bridge the divides between theory, methodology and empirics in the analysis of 'thinking space relationally'. The current research is developing this further to 'do space relationally' and one could point to the importance of qualitative GIS analysis being conducted by ORFORD (2012) and others (DODGE *et al.*, 2009) to get a handle on those 'intersections', 'jostlings' and 'granular' descriptions of the regional world. In short, one needs the new locality concept primarily to free the study of places from the shackles of fixed boundaries, but at the same time extreme versions of relational space, where 'all is flow and connectedness' (MASSEY, 2011, p. 4), only tell part of the story. New localities emphasize contingency *and* relationality and this paper has discussed some of the ways in which this can be uncovered.

To summarize, then, the 'new localities' approach has at least three implications for geographical research. Firstly, it provides a revised model for understanding locality effects that does not take localities as a given bounded spatial unit, but which instead emphasizes the contingency and relationality of localities. Secondly, it therefore requires the identification and description of the locality to be incorporated as a core part of the research process, rather than treating locality as a taken-for-granted context that can be lifted off the shelf. This approach further recognizes that the shape, reach and orientation of a locality might differ according to the research questions being examined. Thirdly, it consequently demands a new body of research concerned with establishing the material and imagined coherences of localities, employing mixed-method strategies and framed around the kind of questions described in Table 1. The challenge is to uncover 'knowledge regimes' on the locality-making process and, paraphrasing JONAS (2012, p. 265), to investigate the ways in which these are 'negotiated, constructed and contested', and whether localities become 'semi-permanently fixed' or, conversely, 'dissolve together'. Through these mechanisms, it is argued here, 'locality' can be reclaimed as a meaningful and useful concept in social and economic research. In its resurrected guise 'locality' can be freed from the shackles of fixed boundaries and take on new life as a dynamic shape-shifter, which means that any return to locality studies must recognize that locality boundaries will also be indefinite and permeable. As such, whilst locality research can be spatially focused, it should not be spatially constrained, and needs to be prepared to follow networks and relations across scales and spaces in order to reveal the full panoply of forces and actors engaged in the constitution of a locality. This requires detailed and careful empirical work and the brief study of devolved Wales has sought to demonstrate the possibilities of thinking about new localities.

**Acknowledgements** – This paper develops ideas explored in ‘The local in the global’, a chapter by Martin Jones published in LEYSHON A., LEE R., MCDOWELL L. and SUNLEY P. (Eds) (2011) *The Sage Handbook of Economic Geography* (Sage, London). This paper is based on research supported by the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD). WISERD is a collaborative venture between the universities of Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, Glamorgan and Swansea. The research to which this publication relates was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (Grant Number RES-576-25-0021) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). The authors would like to thank the three anonymous referees for their insightful comments and also Andy Pike for his brilliant editorial steer. The authors would also like to thank the Research Fellows at Aberystwyth University – Jesse Heley, Laura Jones and Suzie Watkin – for stimulating discussions on the notion of locality. The usual disclaimers apply.

### NOTES

1. Established in 2009, WISERD brings together five universities in Wales with the proviso of developing the quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method research infrastructure. Part of the WISERD work programme is the ‘Knowing Localities Research Programme’, which considers the way in which place-based embedded

experiences impacts on personal, public and professional knowledge regimes. This strand is being driven around primary data collection in and across three localities, which have been chosen to reflect the diversity of contemporary Wales. The findings in this paper are derived from interviews undertaken mainly with local government stakeholders.

2. In positing the notions of material and imagined coherence, the authors are drawing inspiration from, but not seeking to deploy fully, cultural political economy. Cultural political economy emphasizes the interplay of economic and cultural ‘imaginaries’, that is, narrative elements that provide senses of coherence and identity. The ‘imaginary’ is not to be understood as opposed to or distinct from reality; it structures a landscape in which individual goals are situated and political projects can be pursued (JESSOP and SUM, 2001).
3. See note 1.
4. The six ‘area visions’ of the Wales Spatial Plan are: Central Wales; North East Wales (Border and Coast); North West Wales (Eryi a Môn); Pembrokeshire (The Haven); South East Wales (Capital Network); and Swansea Bay (Waterfront and Western Valleys).
5. See <http://www.midwaleswaste.org.uk/partners.php/>.
6. ‘Children and Young People’s Plan and Child Poverty Strategy 2011–2014’, Ceredigion Children and Young People’s Partnership.
7. This subtitle was suggested, with our thanks, by Gordon MacLeod.

### REFERENCES

- AMIN A. (2004) Regions unbound: towards a new politics of place, *Geografiska Annaler* **86B**, 33–44.
- AMIN A., MASSEY D. and THRIFT N. (2003) *Decentering the Nation: A Radical Approach to Regional Inequality*. Catalyst, London.
- ANDERSON B. (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, London.
- BARNES T. (1996) *Logics of Dislocation: Models, Metaphors, and Meanings of Economic Space*. Guilford, New York, NY.
- BEAUMONT J. and NICHOLLS W. (2007) Between relationality and territoriality: investigating the geographies of justice movements in the Netherlands and the United States, *Environment and Planning A* **39**, 2554–2574.
- BEAUREGARD R. A. (1988) In the absence of practice: the locality research debate, *Antipode* **20**, 52–59.
- BENNETT R. J. and MCCOSHAN A. (1993) *Enterprise and Human Resource Development: Local Capacity Building*. Paul Chapman, London.
- BEYNON H. and HUDSON R. (1993) Place and space in contemporary Europe: some lessons and reflections, *Antipode* **25**, 177–190.
- BEYNON H., HUDSON R., LEWIS J., SADLER D. and TOWNSEND A. (1989) ‘It’s all falling apart here’: coming to terms with the future in Teesside, in COOKE P. (Ed.) *Localities: The Changing Face of Urban Britain*, pp. 267–295. Unwin Hyman, London.
- BRENNER N. (2004) *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- BURAWOY M. (2000) *Global Ethnography*. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- COCHRANE A. (1987) What a difference the place makes: the new structuralism of locality, *Antipode* **19**, 354–363.
- COOKE P. (1987) Clinical inference and geographical theory, *Antipode* **19**, 69–78.
- COOKE P. (Ed.) (1989a) *Localities: The Changing Face of Urban Britain*. Unwin Hyman, London.
- COOKE P. (1989b) Locality-theory and the poverty of ‘spatial variation’, *Antipode* **21**, 261–273.
- COOKE P. (1990) *Back to the Future: Modernity, Postmodernity and Locality*. Routledge, London.
- COOKE P. (1995) Introduction: Regions, clusters and innovation networks, in COOKE P. (Ed.) *The Rise of the Rustbelt*, pp. 1–19. UCL Press, London.
- COOKE P. (1998) Introduction: Origins of the concept, in BRACZYK H. J., COOKE P. and HEIDENREICH M. (Eds) *Regional Innovation Systems: The Role of Governances in a Globalized World*, pp. 2–25. UCL Press, London.
- COOKE P. (2006) *Locality Debates*. Mimeograph. Centre for Advanced Urban Studies, Cardiff University, Cardiff.
- COOKE P. and MORGAN K. (1998) *The Associational Economy: Firms, Regions, and Innovation*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- COX K. (1993) The local and the global in the new urban politics: a critical view, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **11**, 433–448.
- COX K. and MAIR A. (1988) Locality and community in the politics of local economic development, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **78**, 307–325.
- COX K. and MAIR A. (1991) From localised social structures to localities as agents, *Environment and Planning A* **23**, 197–213.
- DODGE M., KITCHIN R. and PERKINS C. (Eds) (2009) *Rethinking Maps: New Frontiers in Cartographic Theory*. Routledge, London.
- DUNCAN S. (1989) What is locality?, in PEET R. and THRIFT N. (Eds) *New Models in Geography: Volume Two*, pp. 221–254. Unwin Hyman, London.

- DUNCAN S. and SAVAGE M. (1989) Space, scale and locality, *Antipode* **21**, 179–206.
- DUNCAN S. and SAVAGE M. (1991) New perspectives on the locality debate, *Environment and Planning A* **23**, 155–164.
- ETHERINGTON D. and JONES M. (2009) City-regions: new geographies of uneven development and inequality, *Regional Studies* **43**, 247–265.
- GONZÁLEZ S. (2009) (Dis)connecting Milan(ese): deterritorialised urbanism and disempowering politics in globalising cities, *Environment and Planning A* **41**, 31–47.
- GREGSON N. (1987) The CURS initiative: some further comments, *Antipode* **19**, 364–370.
- HADJIMICHALIS C. (2006a) Non-economic factors in economic geography and in 'new regionalism': a sympathetic critique, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* **30**, 690–704.
- HADJIMICHALIS C. (2006b) The end of Third Italy as we knew it?, *Antipode* **38**, 82–106.
- HARLOE M., PICKVANCE C. and URRY J. (Eds) (1990) *Place, Policy and Politics: Do Localities Matter?* Unwin Hyman, London.
- HARRISON J. (2008) The region in political economy, *Geography Compass* **3**, 814–830.
- HARRISON J. (2010) Networks of connectivity, territorial fragmentation, uneven development: the new politics of city-regionalism, *Political Geography* **29**, 17–27.
- HART M. (2010) *Nations of Nothing But Poetry: Modernism, Transnationalism, and Synthetic Vernacular Poetry*. Oxford University Press, New York, NY.
- HARVEY D. (1969) *Explanation in Geography*. Arnold, London.
- HARVEY D. (1973) *Social Justice and the City*. Arnold, London.
- HARVEY D. (1987) Three myths in search of a reality in urban studies, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **5**, 367–376.
- HAUGHTON G., ALLEMENDINGER P., COUNSELL D. and VIGAR G. (2010) *The New Spatial Planning: Territorial Management with Soft Spaces and Fuzzy Boundaries*. Routledge, London.
- HELEY J. (2012) Soft spaces, fuzzy boundaries and spatial governance in post-devolution Wales, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2427.2012.01149.x.
- HELEY J., GARDNER G. and WATKIN S. (2012) Cultures of local economy in a Celtic fringe region, *European Urban and Regional Studies* DOI: 10.1177/0969776411431102.
- HELEY J. and JONES L. (2012a) Relational rurals: some thoughts and relating things and theory in rural studies, *Journal of Rural Studies* **28**, 208–217.
- HELEY J. and JONES M. (2012b) Devolution in Wales – fiddling with spatial governance while the economy burns, in WARD M. and HARDY S. (Eds) *Changing Gear – Is Localism the New Regionalism?*, pp. 56–64. Smith Institute, London.
- HELEY J. and MOLES K. (2012) Partnership working in regions: reflections on local government collaboration in Wales, *Regional Science Policy and Practice* DOI: 10.1111/j.1757-7802.2012.01061.x.
- HUDSON R. (1989) *Wrecking a Region: State Policies, Party Politics and Regional Change in North East England*. Pion, London.
- HUDSON R. (1990) Trying to revive infant Hercules: the rise and fall of local authority modernization policies on Teesside, in HARLOE M., PICKVANCE C. and URRY J. (Eds) *Place, Policy and Politics: Do Localities Matter?*, pp. 62–86. Unwin Hyman, London.
- HUDSON R. (2000) *Production, Places and Environment: Changing Perspectives in Economic Geography*. Prentice-Hall, London.
- JACKSON P. (1991) Mapping meanings: a cultural critique of locality studies, *Environment and Planning A* **23**, 215–228.
- JESSOP B., BRENNER N. and JONES M. (2008) Theorizing sociospatial relations, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **26**, 389–401.
- JESSOP B. and SUM N. L. (2001) Pre-disciplinary and post-disciplinary perspectives in political economy, *New Political Economy* **6**, 89–101.
- JONAS A. (1988) A new regional concept of localities, *Area* **20**, 101–110.
- JONAS A. (2012) Region and place: regionalism in question, *Progress in Human Geography* **36**, 263–272.
- JONES M. (2009) Phase space: geography, relational thinking, and beyond, *Progress in Human Geography* **33**, 487–506.
- JONES M. (2010) Limits to thinking space relationally, *International Journal of Law in Context* **6**, 243–255.
- JONES M. and JESSOP B. (2010) Thinking state/space incomposably, *Antipode* **42**, 1119–1149.
- JONES M. and MACLEOD G. (2004) Regional spaces, spaces of regionalism: territory, insurgent politics, and the English question, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **29**, 433–452.
- JONES M. and MACLEOD G. (2011) Territorial/relational: conceptualizing spatial economic governance, in PIKE A., RODRIGUES-POSE A. and TOMANEY J. (Eds) *Handbook of Local and Regional Development*, pp. 259–271. Routledge, London.
- KATZ C. (2001) On the grounds of globalization: a topography for feminist political engagement, *Signs* **26**, 1213–1234.
- KEATING M. (1998) *The New Regionalism in Western Europe*. Elgar, Cheltenham.
- LEITNER H., SHEPPARD E. and SZIARTO K. M. (2008) The spatialities of contentious politics, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **33**, 157–172.
- LOVERING J. (1989) The restructuring approach, in PEET R. and THRIFT N. (Eds) *New Models in Geography: Volume One*, pp. 198–233. Unwin Hyman, London.
- LOVERING J. (1999) Theory led by policy: the inadequacies of the 'new regionalism' (illustrated from the case of Wales), *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* **23**, 379–395.
- MACKINNON D. (2011) Reconstructing scale: towards a new scalar politics, *Progress in Human Geography* **35**, 21–36.
- MACKINNON D. and SHAW J. (2010) New state spaces, agency and scale: devolution and the regionalisation of transport governance in Scotland, *Antipode* **42**, 1226–1252.
- MACLEOD G. (2001a) Beyond soft institutionalism: accumulation, regulation, and their geographical fixes, *Environment and Planning A* **33**, 1145–1167.
- MACLEOD G. (2001b) New regionalism reconsidered: globalization, regulation, and the recasting of political economic space, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* **25**, 804–829.

- MACLEOD G. and JONES M. (2007) Territorial, scalar, networked, connected: in what sense a 'regional world?', *Regional Studies* **41**, 1177–1191.
- MACLEOD G. and JONES M. (2011) Renewing urban politics, *Urban Studies* **48**, 2443–2472.
- MANN R., PLOWS A. and PATTERSON C. (2011) Civilising community? A critical exploration of local civil society in North West Wales, *Voluntary Sector Review* **2**, 317–335.
- MARSTON S. A., JONES J. P. III and WOODWARD K. (2005) Human geography without scale, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **30**, 416–432.
- MARTIN R. and ROWTHORN B. (Eds) (1986) *The Geography of De-industrialisation*. Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- MASSEY D. (1984) *Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production*. Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- MASSEY D. (1991) The political place of locality studies, *Environment and Planning A* **23**, 267–281.
- MASSEY D. (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*. Polity, Cambridge.
- MASSEY D. (2005) *For Space*. Sage, London.
- MASSEY D. (2007) *World City*. Polity, Cambridge.
- MASSEY D. (2011) A counterhegemonic relationality of place, in MCCANN E. and WARD K. (Eds) *Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policymaking in the Global Age*, pp. 1–14. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN.
- MCCANN E. and WARD K. (2010) Relationality/territoriality: toward a conceptualization of cities in the world, *Geoforum* **41**, 175–184.
- MCCANN E. and WARD K. (Eds) (2011) *Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policymaking in the Global Age*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN.
- MERRIMAN P., JONES M., OLSSON G., SHEPPARD E., THRIFT N. and TUAN Y.-F. (2012) Space and spatiality in theory, *Dialogues in Human Geography* DOI: 10.1177/2043820611434864.
- MORGAN K. (2007) The polycentric state: new spaces of empowerment and engagement?, *Regional Studies* **41**, 1237–1252.
- MURDOCH J. (2006) *Post-Structuralist Geography: A Guide to Relational Space*. Sage, London.
- MURGATROYD L., SAVAGE M., SHAPIRO D., URRY J., WALBY S., WARDE A. and MARK-LAWSON J. (1985) *Localities, Class, and Gender*, pp. 245–250. Pion, London.
- ORFORD S. (2012) Mapping interview transcript records: theoretical, technical and cartographical challenges. Paper presented at the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD) Conference, Bangor, UK, March 2012.
- PAASI A. (1991) Deconstructing regions: notes on the scales of spatial life, *Environment and Planning A* **23**, 239–256.
- PAASI A. (2008) Is the world more complex than our theories of it? TPSN and the perpetual challenge, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **26**, 405–410.
- PAASI A. (2010) Regions are social constructs, but who or what 'constructs' them? Agency in question, *Environment and Planning A* **42**, 2296–2301.
- PAINTER J. (2008) Cartographic anxiety and the search for regionality, *Environment and Planning A* **40**, 342–361.
- PIERCE J., MARTIN D. G. and MURPHY J. T. (2010) Relational place-making: the networked politics of place, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **36**, 54–70.
- PRATT A. C. (1991) Discourses of locality, *Environment and Planning A* **23**, 257–266.
- PRATT A. C. (2004) Andrew Sayer, in HUBBARD P., KITCHIN R. and VALENTINE G. (Eds) *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, pp. 245–250. Sage, London.
- SADLER D. (1992) *The Global Region: Production, State Policies and Uneven Development*. Pergamon, Oxford.
- SASSEN S. (2006) *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- SAVAGE M. (2009) *Townscapes and Landscapes*. Mimeograph. Department of Sociology, University of York, York.
- SAVAGE M., BARLOW J., DUNCAN S. and SAUNDERS P. (1987) Locality research: the Sussex programme on economic restructuring, social change and the locality, *Quarterly Journal of Social Affairs* **3**, 27–51.
- SAVAGE M. and DUNCAN S. (1990) Space, scale and locality: a reply to Cooke and Ward, *Antipode* **22**, 67–72.
- SAYER A. (1991) Behind the locality debate: deconstructing geography's dualisms, *Environment and Planning A* **23**, 283–308.
- SCOTT A. J. (1988) *New Industrial Spaces: Flexible Production Organisation and Regional Development in North America and Western Europe*. Pion, London.
- SCOTT A. J. (1991) Book Review: Philip Cooke (ed.), *Localities: The Changing Face of Urban Britain*, *Antipode* **23**, 256–257.
- SCOTT A. J. (2001) Globalization and the rise of city-regions, *European Planning Studies* **9**, 813–826.
- SMITH M. P. and GUARNIZO L. E. (2009) Global mobility, shifting borders and urban citizenship, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* **100**, 610–622.
- SMITH N. (1987) Dangers of the empirical turn: some comments on the CURS initiative, *Antipode* **19**, 59–68.
- STORPER M. (1997) *The Regional World: Territorial Development in a Global Economy*. Guilford, New York, NY.
- STORPER M. and SCOTT A. J. (Eds) (1992) *Pathways to Industrialization and Regional Development*. Routledge, London.
- THRIFT N. (1983) On the determination of social action in space and time, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **1**, 23–57.
- TOMANEY J. (2007) Keep a beat in the dark: narratives of regional identity in Basil Bunting's Briggflatts, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **25**, 355–375.
- WARDE A. (1989) A recipe for a pudding: a comment on locality, *Antipode* **21**, 274–281.
- WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT (2004) *People, Places, Futures: The Wales Spatial Plan*. Welsh Assembly Government, Cardiff.
- WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT (2008) *People, Places, Futures: The Wales Spatial Plan 2008 Update*. Welsh Assembly Government, Cardiff.
- WOODS M. (2007) Engaging the global countryside: globalization, hybridity and the reconstitution of rural place, *Progress in Human Geography* **31**, 485–507.