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Creating Public Value through Caring for Placeⁱ

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Abstract

This essay argues for a relational approach to place qualities and their governance. The argument, linked to a pragmatist view of the formation of publics and the articulation of public value, is developed through a discussion of firstly, the meaning of place, its significance to human flourishing and the resultant demands for collective attention to place qualities as a shared resource; secondly the relation of such collective attention to the formation of publics and the quality of the civil sphere of a political community; and thirdly the challenge of developing moral frames among such publics within which complex judgements about conflicting perceptions and values about place qualities can be situated. Promoting public value through caring for place in this way could act as a significant learning arena for renewing practices of democratic engagement.

Keywords: place governance, publics, political community, civil sphere, commons

Introduction

In this essay, I argue that a political focus on place and its qualities can play a significant role in enriching democratic practices. A substantial literature in the social sciences now supports the claim that places and their qualities matter to people (Lewicka 2011). In response, governments have periodically promoted place-focused policies, as in the community development projects of the 1970s, the area-based regeneration initiatives of the 1990s and 2000s, and, in the UK, the emphasis on 'localism' and neighbourhood planning of the 2010s (Imrie and Raco 2003a, Beatty et al. 2010, Gallent and Robinson 2012, van Ham et al. 2012). But there has been little awareness in the policy literature of the conceptions of place which are mobilised in both practical politics and the analysis of place governance initiatives. In the fields of geography and planning, there has been increasing attention to how place is conceived and in particular to the potential of relational approaches to

place, spatial connectivity and governance dynamics. This essay explores the implications of such approaches for conceptions of the formation of publics, public value and political communities in relation to place governanceⁱⁱ.

A political focus on place raises attention to our surroundings and ourselves within them, as they appear in the everyday flow of daily activities, in our memories and our imaginings. Such concern gets mobilised into claims for public attention when we feel that place qualities are being neglected or threatened. Through such mobilisation, a public may come into being, generating forums demanding action and debating problems and solutions. Such demands and debates about places and their qualities surface difficult questions about our capacity, as citizens within wider political communities, to acknowledge and manage our co-existence with 'neighbours' (Sandercock 2000). The tensions and concerns arising from the formation of such publics often challenge and disturb the established agendas and practices consolidated in formal government discourses and practices, while in turn generating resistances to new policy initiatives. Struggles and debates about places and their qualities thus provide a theatre of experience through which people get drawn into thinking about what it means to be a member of a political community, to have a public voice, acknowledge differences and to work out what they might value 'in common' about their surroundings.

Public value arises from such efforts in two ways: firstly through the creation of a public, bringing concerns about place qualities to the attention of other members of a political community; and secondly, if such efforts are translated into actions to promote what such a public cares about, through the creation of goods, services, social activities and environmental attributes which such a public values. I thus understand public value as broader than merely what public agencies produce or the rights, benefits, prerogatives and obligations which a citizenry should expect from such agenciesⁱⁱⁱ. By public value, I refer to what a 'public', a community of citizens in some form, have come to 'care about' collectively and seek to produce and sustain as qualities and resources available to them.

Recovering this sense of the formation of publics and the creation of public value has an important contribution to make to the enrichment of democracy, at a time when there is a widespread perception in western democracies that governments are a distant 'them', apart from 'us' in all our diversity, and when predominant cultural and political discourses emphasise individual responsibility rather than shared concerns. In this essay, as a foundation for this argument, I expand on three core themes – the meaning of 'caring for place' and its collective action or governance implications; the

meaning of 'public' and its relation to political community; and how discursive frames set the value parameters within which collective caring for place qualities can be translated into place visions and specific actions. Underpinning my development of each theme is a relational understanding of socio-spatial dynamics (Massey 2005, Amin and Thrift 2002, Pierce et al. 2011), an interpretive approach to political analysis (Wagenaar 2011, Bevir and Rhodes 2015), and a pragmatist recognition of the challenges of policy-making (Ansell 2011, Healey 2009).

Places and their management/governance

The qualities of the places which we humans inhabit, whether we settle down in particular places or meander nomadically in our daily and generational lives, provide bundles of possibilities and constraints – the material and socio-cultural opportunities, stimulations, barriers and oppressions, which infuse our quality of life and affect our chance to flourish. In public policy, places are often equated with municipal administrations, with clear boundaries of jurisdiction. In some forms of geographical analysis, they are treated as aggregations of statistical units arranged across a two-dimensional surface. Those promoting urban planning at the start of the twentieth century sought to identify the essence or spirit of 'place', as if there were some unifying cultural core which anchored a place-based community around some core values (Geddes 1915). Such an essentialist understanding lives on in some contemporary conceptions of community and neighbourhood (Imrie and Raco 2003b). Yet the relations which flow through and around the various social connections encompassed by municipal boundaries frequently stretch beyond them, generating linkages of diverse spatial and temporal reach. In the geography of London's financial industry, New York and Hong Kong are nearer and deeper in their intensity of interaction than neighbourhoods in nearby Southwark or Islington (Taylor 2004). A city administration which sets out to compete with other cities may find itself in quite different sets of relations if its focus is on attracting tourists rather than sustaining a specialist role in global engineering production relations. These days, we are very conscious of the dynamic variety of social relations to be found within any collection of people who find themselves neighbours in a place (Amin 2012, Tully 2008). The meaning of 'community' and of 'place' mobilised in a particular situation therefore cannot be taken for granted. Rather it is some kind of socio-political achievement.

A relational approach seeks to grasp this dynamic variety. It focuses on the multiplicity of webs of relations – social, economic, political, environmental, which transect and intersect each other, and the nodes, knots or assemblages which are brought into being at particular intersections (Thrift 1996, Amin and Thrift 2002, Massey 2005, Paasi 2013, Pierce et al. 2011). In this conception, places are understood as loosely-structured assemblages of people and other species, material objects and meanings, action arenas, physical forms and flows, possibilities and memories, emotional attachments and moral values, connected to other times and spaces through complex and multiple webs of relations (McFarlane 2011, Graham and Healey 1999). We humans are constituted through, move within and flow through these assemblages as we live our lives, actively contributing to the range and reach of such nodes and knots. They are the surroundings which infuse our being and which we often energetically try to shape (Ingold 2011).

Much of the time, we hardly notice what surrounds us, in the sense of bringing them to attention. Place-ness, the recognition of a place, results from our calling into attention the character and qualities of these surroundings. We are brought to notice social-spatial phenomena wider than our immediate selves. But we are not beings apart from our surroundings. Our sense of self, our identities and our sense of 'where we are' interact with the world around us and of which we are a part. As a result, place characteristics and qualities, once recognised, can become a powerful basis for recognising solidarity with others and a motivator of collective action, to defend, enhance and shape place futures.

This sense of attachment to place may be experienced individually but the place sensed cannot be individualised or brought into view as an aggregate of individual perceptions. To bring places into view involves generating some kind of holistic imaginary, giving identity, meaning and structure to some elements and relations within the assemblages which constitute our surroundings. Any such imaginary is inevitably selective, imposing order on the unknowable multiplicity of elements and relations through which we are situated in a world which is itself in flux. So however much we may attempt to give a place an objective definition, as some kind of coherent, bounded material phenomena, other aspects of the assemblage escape from this definition, often resurfacing as reminders of their omissions. The implication for governance is that, while collective action focused on place qualities matters a lot to people because our surroundings infuse our lives, we should understand places and place-ness in a particular way – not as a discrete object which can be individually owned and consumed, nor as clearly definable units which can be readily bounded for administrative purposes. Places are better understood as what surrounds us and which we are

immersed in - and contribute to shaping - through multiple webs of relations, each filled with materialities and meanings, nodal points and variable boundaries, which we share with others even if we perceive them differently. It is in this sense that places can be considered as a kind of commons (Ostrom 1990, Chatterton 2010, Dawney et al. 2016), which shapes our several attentions and identities as we acknowledge our recognition of them.

Place qualities matter to people because, through the possibilities they offer, our surroundings provide material and affective opportunities and constraints as we flow through and dwell among them. The disposition of our surroundings at any one time is an expression of the human power relations and other natural forces which shape the physical and social worlds of those who inhabit and use these possibilities. Aspects of these relations and forces are brought forward when people recognise and mobilise conceptions of a place and its qualities out of the surrounding assemblages. Inherently, as individuals we share the places we call to mind with others, both human and non-human, and with the wider forces of nature (Metzger 2016). Any changes to the disposition of our surroundings, especially where our perception of them has been consolidated into a holistic imaginary of a place and its qualities, potentially bring into attention not only what people care about and consider significant qualities of a place, but conflicting views about what matters about them. Such processes generate a 'public', anxiously asserting and debating particular place qualities (Donaldson et al. 2013, Inch 2015). And it is this collective attention to place which generates place governance activities to promote and care for such a resource. Conflicts over place qualities, extensively recorded and analysed in the academic literature in planning and urban studies, bring into focus the socio-political machinery through which place qualities are governed. Planning 'systems' and other governance mechanisms both shape and generate the content and performance of such conflict (see the reviews and cases in Gualini 2015, Gualini et al. 2015). Place governance activities thus impose and intrude upon the many ways people care about a place and its qualities, while selectively reflecting and shaping the multiple values – around resource opportunities, convenience for daily life, financial return, emotional attachment, aesthetic enrichment, cultural expression, held by those sharing a surroundings. This is why place governance activity is so politically charged.

Place governance activity is not directly about delivering some material product to individuals, though place management practices are often inspired by a concern for achieving material benefits to property developers or providing material opportunities for those neglected by market processes. Instead, it involves bringing into collective attention some concept of a place, as a shared imaginary

and resource within a community which links together aspects of the experience and appreciation of the recognised place. The generation of such holistic framing concepts serves to focus governance attention on producing and sustaining environments which afford opportunities for, and co-ordination among, multiple activities and flows. It involves imagining and acting to create and sustain the richness of the possibilities afforded by a shared commons. Place management works through creating imaginaries which act as frames of reference for strategies and detailed plans, for the promotion of physical and social transformation projects, through the detailed regulation of local environments, and through the criteria used to arbitrate between conflicting claims and values (Healey 2010). Place imaginaries, sometimes translated into formal visions and strategies, but often lurking in the taken-for-granted assumptions built into governance mentalities and practices, create in themselves an immaterial resource, a collective expression of the surrounding commons of a community. They act as a form of integration between diverse activities and flows and between diverse perspectives by bringing a place into focus and expressing values about what is important, what needs to be changed and what to be created. In this way, such imaginaries express what those engaged in place governance care about as they think about a place. Because these place and governance imaginaries have an ordering effect on our surroundings, enabling and preserving but also constraining, and because conflict over such imaginaries is widespread, it is important to consider whose imaginaries and whose flourishing is promoted in such place concepts, where their political legitimacy comes from and how they relate to the multiple values which infuse the way we care about our surroundings. For the potential for intense conflict over conceptions of a place and its qualities is substantial.

Conflict is an inherent part of a vibrant democracy (Tully 2008, Dikec 2012). Attempts to squeeze out conflict about imaginaries, projects and regulations merely leads to the tensions popping up elsewhere, and in particular as citizens act as voters. The same fate awaits attempts to focus place-based strategies on achieving a single dimension of place possibility, such as 'economic growth', and intervention aimed to 'de-politicise' procedures (Flinders and Wood 2014, Metzger et al. 2015). Formal adjustments made to narrow the agenda of considerations, reduce the potential for conflicting viewpoints and the time for their expression do not remove the inherent multi-dimensionality and conflict potential over place qualities in our society.

Formal governance systems are by no means the only institutional sites where these challenges are faced. Nor is place governance a specialised sector of governance activity, the remit merely of 'planning systems'. Place governance initiative can arise from and create many possible institutional

sites in a governance system. Whether and where it is occurring is therefore an empirical question. Since caring for place is an integrative, holistic governance project of bringing place into focus and emphasising particular qualities relevant to a political community, it cannot be owned exclusively as a skill by a particular group or profession. It is an activity in which all in that community, and maybe in others too, have a stake. How it is done, by whom and with what mix of values are therefore intensely political questions.

Publics, Political Community and the Civil Sphere

I have so far argued that the activity of place governance is about articulating, maintaining, defending and promoting particular conceptions of places and their qualities. Inherently, this involves some kind of selection among possible conceptions and hence is a form of imposition upon the assemblage of relations in question. In political communities which claim to be democracies and to promote the flourishing of all citizens, governing conceptions have to be justified in terms of some idea of a collective concern with how to shape the commons of a community. Yet what is the community in question, who articulates such governing conceptions and how are they held to account?

Politics is involved wherever there is contestation over values and actions, and over how such conflict should be resolved. All societies have historically-formed cultural norms and institutions which provide processes and arenas for dealing with political conflict, and continually adjust them in the face of new demands, pressures and conflicts. In Western European democracies these days, the political community of the nation state is cut through with other 'political communities' built around a cause, a social group, a community of particular interest or an attachment to a place we share with others. These political communities come into being as recognition of shared attachments become the basis for mobilising attention and creating a 'public'. As Dewey (1927/1991) argued many years ago, publics are not a solid mass with stable opinions and agendas. They are multiple and in continual formation, overlapping across issues and scales in complex ways. The agendas of a group may, through protest or media exposure, burst through to infuse the thinking of a wider sphere of political attention – within a nation state but often beyond it. Just as place qualities come into focus as we recognise aspects of our surroundings, so political communities develop, create and are shaped by a sphere of discussion and contestation about what is at stake, who should take responsibility, who has rights and what actions should unfold. Formal politics, government and law

in turn both nest within and shape this wider civil sphere (Alexander 2006, Habermas 1996). In a democracy, in theory, this civil sphere provides the heart of any political culture, shaping our political attachments and identities. But how this heart beats is very variable in breadth and quality.

We had thought, in the west, that our political cultures were vibrant models for others to follow. Now we talk about the need for civic 'repair' (Alexander 2006, Amin 2006). In the academic literature, there is much discussion of 'diminished democracy' (Skocpol 2003), a 'democratic deficit' and a 'disconnect' between citizens and the machinery of formal government (Stoker 2006, 2010). In the UK, although we have a richness of civil society activity, and access to a vast array of knowledge and discussion, the quality of debate within our civil sphere is diminished by the continual assertion of crude stereotypes and use of extremes as if they were normal, generating fears and anxieties which shape our responses to political choices. Politicians at national level then find themselves forced into responding to the latest set of anxieties, on a case by case basis (Flinders 2012). This makes it difficult to build the understanding and solidarity across difference which a political project of caring for place qualities requires. In effect, the civil sphere of our national political community, rather than sustaining any sense of commonality across differences, is a complex, interwoven and muddy stream of multiple causes promoted by multiple publics, vying for attention. Within its whirlpools and cascades, there seems no space to pause and rediscover what we citizens might have 'in common', rebuild some trust in the governance needed to promote what we value and build some resilience against future challenges^{iv}.

In this context, mobilising political attention to place qualities has become a very difficult challenge. If the spatiality of the nation state could be imagined as a three-dimensional aggregation of discrete places across the territory and political community of the nation state, with a unified public interest and a culturally homogeneous citizenry, then a centralised hierarchical model of formal government might be able to articulate principles for place management which could apply to the very varied places to be found within a country. But none of these assumptions now hold and never really did. Instead, in countries such as England, while vestiges of hierarchy live on, especially through the control of public finances and regulations, the governance landscape is fragmented, with shifting agencies and responsibilities. Governance attention to place qualities, in this context, demands substantial efforts in building and rebuilding relationships and networks, across a churning institutional landscape.

It is in this context that arguments for devolution to some kind of more local level of governance has been strongly advocated in such countries. But, as recent contributors to this journal have noted, devolution by itself does not necessarily improve trust in governance or its quality and responsiveness to local conditions (Tang and Narisong 2015, Wouter et al. 2016). Municipal administrations appear to be more locally-responsive than national governments, but may reflect only one of the geographies of spatial connectivity relevant to the relations which flow across, within and around their areas. What are described as metropolitan areas typically sprawl across multiple municipal jurisdictions. The urban complex of Milan stretches into Switzerland (Balducci et al. 2011). Within such a vast urbanised area, for some people the place of a street, or a neighbourhood, may be much more significant than the urban complex they live within. Townshend (2000) has shown how variable are the perceptions of the city of Newcastle among different groups of inhabitants. When called up in people's minds, a city may mean little more than a label, or just the city centre, or where sports and leisure events are held. Then there are all the people who care about a place, because they once lived there, or value a particular experience about it, or who, living far away, have property or business investments in it. There are thus all kinds of people and groups who may have a 'stake' in a place. Their attachments to a place may be more forcefully articulated through a 'community of interest' such as a heritage association, a community enterprise or a social movement of some kind rather than through the formal politics of parties and representation that is supposed to sustain electoral legitimacy.

Mobilising attention to place qualities is therefore a socio-political project which involves drawing in multiple communities of interest, and creating from this a public and a political community focused on place. Such a political community finds expression not just in the formalities of representation and position, but in the qualities of its civil sphere and how this brings to attention a sense of a shared commons centred on a place and its qualities. To have effects, such a community must generate framing imaginaries, possible action programmes and appropriate regulations not just about the place-in-focus and its qualities but about the distribution of rights and responsibilities within that community in relation to the future of this collective resource.

In this relational perspective, just as imagining place involves drawing together from many webs of relationships a node of attention within which a place and its qualities become visible, so building a political community focused on 'caring for place' requires building a nodal force, drawing in not just diverse individuals, but multiple socio-political groupings with their pre-existing imaginaries and attachments. Examples of such processes can be found in some strategic planning initiatives, such as

those in Portland, Oregon (Abbott 2001, Ozawa 2004), and in efforts to create a place-identity in neglected locales in urban areas, for example, the Ouseburn area in Newcastle (Gonzalez and Vigar 2010). In neither case does a place, and a political community to care for it, exist as a fixed entity. Their 'thingness' and 'objectivity' are the result of a continual social process of attention-shaping and their qualities are in continual formation as imaginaries shape actions and as both are contested and re-shaped. What matters is not just whether, in any situation, there is a place-focus in the processes through which places and their qualities are produced and perceived. It matters also what values inform place-focused governance activity and how these are legitimated. This means looking not just at the initiatives and agencies actively doing governance work. In a society with any claim to democracy, it also means looking more broadly at the wider civil sphere which comments on and evaluates the 'theatre' of governance (Majone 1987, Hajer 2009, Parkinson 2012). Yet, as argued above, this civil sphere in many western countries is itself in need of 'repair', in the form of expansion, enrichment and leverage on formal government.

Building a place-focus could be a productive way to engage in such repair work (see also Amin 2006). It forces strangers to recognise each other as neighbours, acknowledging what they share but also how they differ (Sandercock 2000). Initiatives in place governance are thus potential learning arenas for making connections and understanding the multiple dimensions of the strife between us. The issues in conflict typically have visible, material dimensions, or are expressed in examples of how others behave, yet are positioned in multiple imaginaries. This concreteness helps our understanding. And, in the struggles over what to do, there is the possibility to meet up in face-to-face encounters which enable us to grasp the feelings and commitments of others as we articulate our knowledge and our particular sense of attachment to some aspect of a place. Through processes of active debate and lively public discussion, of continual interaction where the personal and the political are in play in face-to-face interaction, through joint exploration of possibilities and potentials, a public may get to form which has some sense of shared destiny, some trust and even pride in what is being done collectively in their community to manage the qualities of the place they share.

It is within this experience of the formation of a richly-engaged public that a place-focused political community could evolve, able to understand that democracy involves the appreciation of both the collective and the individual, and aware that, while strife and conflict are inherent in any political community, yet there needs to be some stability, some 'temporary resting place' (Rorty 1982:xli, Healey 2009, Ploeger 2015) to enable collective sensibility to be converted into action. Similarly, in

such a scenario, those doing governance work need to accept continual multi-dimensional interaction with, and critical comment from, the public and political community that sustains their work. Mobilising attention to a place and its qualities thus helps to create public value by sustaining and enhancing place qualities as valued by a place-focused 'public' and by enriching the civil sphere of public debate in the political community which forms that public. But it also matters a great deal what 'value' and values are embodied and expressed within each and every place-focused political community.

Discursive frames and public values

Our values, whether held as individuals or as those we associate with as members of a wider political community, express what we care about. They are experienced as embedded in discursive frames and emotional attachments, a part of our identities and sense of self. The values we hold individually or collectively are full of potential inconsistencies and conflicts. They are not a fixed quantum of preferences, but instead continually evolve and revolve in our thinking as some challenge calls them to mind. Creating a place-focused political community which acknowledges multiple concerns and values but yet can set some parameters within which conflicts can be played out is thus a complex political task. It involves setting a moral position among multiple values and positions asserted by individuals and groups within the community. It also requires attention to the connection between the political community and public associated with attention to a specific place and its qualities, and all the other political communities with which those involved are associated (Amin 2006). These may range from neighbouring localities to regional, national, supra-national and global scales and to multiple special interest communities. Because no place is an island, but is inevitably linked to many other places through the multiple relations which create the assemblage from which a sense of place is created, no place-focused political community can ignore these wider connections. A key quality of such framing is therefore how the relations between a group of people and their place is positioned within a wider landscape of political attachments as well as among the terrain of local conflicts. The challenge, then, for a richly-democratic place-focused governance initiative, is to mould a collective frame which carries what the public in question considers as of value to promote in common. How, from the potential mass of values, can this be done? (Bozeman 2007, Campbell and Marshall 2002, Moroni 2004, Tait 2011).

One way is to avoid the integrative dilemma by creating a political programme and public around a single value which trumps all others. The single-minded promotion of economic growth, or social justice or environmental protection over all other values are examples of this strategy. Such an approach undermines democratic politics as it suppresses recognition of all the other dimensions of the human condition. It also often leads to political programmes which are counterproductive to their declared goals, since achieving economic growth, social justice or environmental sustainability all involve interaction with other dimensions of the world in the particularities of specific situations. Any political community sensible to human dilemmas and human flourishing cannot avoid some effort in acknowledging that multiple relations and multiple values are always in play.

Current debates in political philosophy provide us with three ways to approach the moral balancing act which such acknowledgement demands. The first is to assume a unitary 'public interest', articulated by elected representatives of the relevant political community. This assumes that there are either universal values to which such representatives can appeal or an accepted common understanding within which a unitary interest can be grounded. Despite the critique discussed earlier in this essay, this idea lives on in UK public policy, most notably in recent appeals to 'evidence' and 'science' as a grounding. Yet we are also aware that scientific inquiry is just as riddled with conflicting interpretations as everyday life (Ayres and Marsh 2013, Davoudi et al. 2015). Meanwhile, media presentations and attitude polls hardly convey the diversity and mobility of viewpoints as people respond to specific experiences and the debates which reverberate in the various arenas of our shared political discourse. When it comes to articulating a common understanding about our surroundings and how to care for them, the scale and diversity of our differences is unlikely to create a situation where politicians, or the nexus of elite government, can rely solely on their own knowledge to articulate a discursive frame which has meaning for the rest of us in all our diverse places. Without such a resonance, this kind of approach is likely to suffer from all kinds of knowledge deficiencies, resulting in implementation failures, and to lack the enduring support and long-lasting attention needed to shape place governance interventions over the longterm.

A second option is to attempt an aggregation of individual viewpoints. This method is widely used in the many surveys of place attachment undertaken by researchers (Lewicka 2011), and by local administrations in an attempt to discover what people in their jurisdiction care about. But this assumes firstly that people will respond, and many these days do not. Secondly, such surveys are already structured by what those initiating a survey consider are important values, which they then

test against what a specific public thinks about them. Yet citizens of a jurisdiction are often not the only people who care about the surroundings of a place, and many people have not much idea what they care about until there has been some mobilising force to call an issue to their attention. Finally, getting an idea of the relative balance of people's attitudes to particular values still leaves open the issue of judgement – of how a holistic view of place qualities and priorities for action can be arrived at. A discursive frame is inherently holistic, though not necessarily logically consistent, and cannot be built up from constituent bits.

Faced with these challenges, a third option has been developing in recent decades which emphasises the importance of cultivating public discussion on issues and values in deliberative or collaborative ways (Dryzek 2000, Fischer 2003, Healey 2006, Tully 2008, Ansell 2011)⁹. Whether through processes of formal discussion, or through collaborative processes among affected stakeholders, or through some other version of debates 'in public' which involve people in discussing what affects them, such discussion provides a moral grounding within which those in governance positions set their policies and design specific actions. Encouraging rather than suppressing wide-ranging and critical discussion about the particular challenges which demand collective action helps to surface multiple issues, multiple dimensions and the multiple value claims in play. Through such debate, publics get mobilised into political communities within which the moral dilemmas they face as value conflicts come to the surface. As the dilemmas become more clearly recognised, their impact on particular issues and action possibilities comes into view. Such debates also help to clarify the distribution of responsibility for making judgements between competing visions and competing moral claims. For if there is no pre-given unitary public interest and no simple way to aggregate individual preferences into a single public preference, then all of us – whether as individuals in our own lives, or as citizens of a wider political community, or in the doing of governance work in any form, have to rely on judgement calls, situated in the particular circumstances where acting in the world is called for (Campbell 2006). The importance of vigorous public debate within a political community, and collection of overlapping communities, is to provide an evolving ground of knowledge and critique upon which situated judgement can draw, an evolutionary learning resource (Ansell 2011).

Creating political communities concerned with place qualities thus involves mobilising public attention, within a wider landscape of overlapping political communities with other foci and spatial reach, so that it focuses on what we care about with respect to our surroundings. Because place qualities are the product of so many different relations as they weave together and around our lives, continual effort is needed in any society which claims to be democratic in its politics to surface what

people worry about and care about as regards their living environments. This effort is partly the responsibility of those already acting as public representatives and officials. But even more important is the cultivation of active discussion and debate within the sphere of civil society, since it is here that the legitimacy of governance processes in a democracy has ultimately to be grounded. The democratic quality of place politics and place governance may thus be evaluated firstly according to the range and richness of the discussion within the civil sphere about particular place qualities, and how connections are made between the qualities of a particular place and other spheres of concern linked through multiple webs of relations. Secondly, such an assessment needs to consider how this discussion infuses the discursive frames upon which 'visions' for place futures are produced.

The challenge of creating political communities focused on caring for place qualities in a society which claims to be democratic is then to cultivate a richly-textured civil sphere which infuses into the judgements of those who find themselves in governance positions. It involves asserting the core democratic values of universal recognition and respect within that community, fairness of treatment to all members, and continual awareness of responsibilities to others affected by what people in one place do, and by the recognition that our surroundings are not just immediate to us but part of a wider planetary environment undergoing significant changes in part as a result of our human actions. This continually evolving and revisable understanding then provides the grounding within which those involved in governance activity come to judgements about how to stimulate activities, distribute resources and devise regulations within the context of a shared, but yet challengeable and revisable, sense of what people care about in a place. In this way, a political community which cares for a place and its qualities creates public value in two senses. In the first, it sustains governance processes which deliver material and emotional/cultural outcomes that are valued within that community. In the second, it sustains a holistic sensibility which keeps the qualities of our surroundings in view as a public asset, an expression of the particular qualities and emotional attachments which itself becomes a part of our surroundings and individual identities, contributing to our possibilities of flourishing.

In Conclusion

Refocusing governance attention onto problems arising from the practicalities of everyday living and rebuilding trust in governance are key challenges for contemporary western societies. The 'local' and

'place' are often promoted as a key institutional site for such repair work. In this essay, I have argued that such devolution and decentralisation initiatives need to be accompanied by a different, relational way of thinking about place and political community. Places are not coherent, material entities, but are drawn into attention from the assemblages produced by the intersection of multiple webs of relations with diverse spatial and temporal reach. Publics and political communities are cultivated through such processes of attention forming. Monological, one-dimensional ways of constructing conceptions of place, especially where produced by technical elites, rarely capture the multiplicity of people's lived experience of modern life. A relational understanding of place thus leads to a multilogical, dialogical approach to building political community (Tully 2008, Amin 2006). It is with such an approach that a place-focused politics could provide a positive arena for re-building trust in governance processes.

Some fear that a place-focused politics, if it emerges strongly, would fall into what has been described as 'the localist trap', creating an introverted, and sometimes exclusionary, political community that ignores connections and responsibilities to neighbouring places and to wider relations (Purcell 2006, Davoudi and Madanipour 2015). This has long been a focus of critique in the US, where the governance landscape provides much more power to the municipal level than in the UK. A relational view of a 'networked', multi-scalar governance landscape encourages attention to an alternative dynamic (Allen and Cochrane 2010). If places come into being through recognition of nodes of intertwined relations, then some consideration is needed to the spatial and temporal reach of the various relations. These connect one place to other places and political communities, at different scales. With these connections come claims to rights and responsibilities. Whether a place-focused politics develops around a neighbourhood or a city or a region or a wider territory which gets called up through political processes of recognition, it thus needs to be continually challenged to pay attention to its wider relations as well as its internal dynamics. The civil sphere of a place-focused political community thus interacts with and needs to be infused by membership of other political communities and civil spheres, including at the scale of a national political community. As many now argue, vigorous debate within multiple, overlapping civil spheres can make a difference by mobilising knowledge about these relations and dynamics, rights and responsibilities, in all kinds of dimensions, opening possibilities and honing political programmes and specific actions by energetic critique (Amin 2006, 2012, Tully 2008). For neither the political recognition of a place nor the existence of a public attentive to a place and its qualities nor the existence of a discursive frame which expresses what a place-focused political community undertakes for the collective benefit can be treated as fixed givens. Instead they are continually in formation, interacting with the evolving

knowledge and critique expressed in the wider debates. They are temporary stabilities, 'temporary resting places' in a complex governance landscape of multi-layered and overlapping political communities. Constructing, sustaining, revising and critiquing these temporary stabilities offers a rich arena for learning the multilogical, dialogical practices of a richer democracy than we have in western societies at present (Tully 2008).

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ⁱⁱ I draw on my own experience of practical involvement and research inquiry into place-focused governance initiatives, as well as an extensive empirical literature in both the planning and geography fields.

ⁱⁱⁱ See O'Flynn 2007 and Bozeman 2007 for useful reviews of the public value literature in public administration.

^{iv} See Amin 2006, Allen and Cochrane 2010, and Oosterlynck et al. 2016? for the bases for rebuilding solidarity across differences.

^v There continues to be a strident debate between those who reject any closure among conflicting positions, and those who promote forms of deliberation to find the bases for some commonalty or solidarity within an agonistic political community.