Urban Politics and Space in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries
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This collection of essays draws on work presented to two conferences in the north-east of England during 2003, the Conference on Regional and Local History (CORAL) meeting at Teesside on *Urban Life since the Eighteenth Century: Regional Perspectives* and the Urban History Group meeting at Durham, *Reassessing Urban Politics*. The idea to collect the essays in book form was promoted originally by the CORAL executive and I received help and support in the early stages from Melanie Tebbutt and Tony Pollard. Maureen Galbraith of the Economic History Society and the Centre for Local Historical Research at Teesside provided logistical and financial support for the conferences whilst Bob Morris helped significantly with the academic programme for Durham. In putting together the book I have been assisted greatly by the other contributors who have responded to my requests promptly and kept faith in me. Richard Rodger and Graham Ford read and provided very helpful feedback on my introduction. Sue Hepworth organised the bibliography and Shona Davie undertook the formatting and copy-editing. I have received financial support for the project from the History Research Group at the University of Teesside, CORAL and the School of Social Sciences and Law. Thanks to Cambridge Scholars Press for taking on the project and giving clear guidance and support when necessary. As always in producing a book of any type, I have to thank my family, Ros, Fergus and Nuala, for their patience and support and my cats, Brodie and Spider, for being fun when things got tough.
INTRODUCTION

URBAN POLITICS AND SPACE
IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES: REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

BARRY M. DOYLE

This volume explores three inter-related themes in urban history – politics, space and region. Each remains of vital importance in contemporary Britain, with enduring debates about how much and what types of local democracy and local government are appropriate, especially in a world where participation in municipal politics continues to decline. Local politics has changed significantly since the 1970s, with the sustained challenge of the Liberals and Liberal Democrats to the post-war hegemony of the Labour cities and Tory shires, their popularity based on their championing of the public service consumer in the face of intransigent and inflexible bureaucracies and machines. Indeed, as the big battalions of public service recede into popular memory, local politics has become dominated by issues of space – clean and safe streets, order and disorder in town centres, regeneration through cultural quarters and the appropriate location of services, from hospitals to cinemas. Moreover, the players in these new politics are not just ‘the council’ and the central state, but partnerships which draw together local authorities, business, quangos, education and health care providers. Shaping and allocating this space and even deciding how and by whom it might be used, have sub-regional and regional implications. Funding, access, property rights, entrenched cultural preconceptions all influence the evolving regional shape of twenty first century Britain. The English, however, remain reluctant to engage with the possibility of regional government and democracy, seeing all local government as a charge on the community rather than as an opportunity to help shape and manage this major reallocation of space and power.

The essays in this book examine the ways in which local power, space and regional relations developed and changed between the early nineteenth
and mid-twentieth century. They focus on a number of themes that remain relevant today:

- the nature, structure and power bases of local elites
- the impact of gender
- the part played by voluntary activity in the management of the urban
- the influence of ‘modernity’ on the development of urban politics and policies
- the role of culture, party and other factors in determining municipal decision-making
- the possible presence of a British ‘progressivism’ on the American model
- the inter-relationship between cities and their regions.

Within each of these themes, space is a central organising thread, particularly relevant in understanding the engagement with modernity and the emergence of progressivism. More importantly, it is the issue that has been at the heart of local politics and democracy for the last two hundred and fifty years.

Politics has been a staple of urban history from the late 1960s, although recent years has seen the scope widen to incorporate a broader understanding of governance which accepts that not all elite control was exercised through elected representatives. Yet this widening of the study of urban politics has tended to emphasis the homogeneity of the elite, ‘the middle classes’, whilst diminishing the scale of the continuing and deep rooted divisions within the dominant groups in the nineteenth and twentieth century city. This volume will reintroduce and revise the history of party and competition, relating such competition to both space and region, each of which have been less well served by urban historians. Indeed, space has become more widely recognised as a suitable subject for study by historians. This reflects a growing awareness that the urban was not simply a location in which things happened, but that use, contest and debate around spaces and places within the town or city, helped to shape a range of urban identities: class, gender, ethnicity, race, politics and culture.

The interaction of space with both narrow and broad political actions, however, remains under-researched and in particular how discourses about urban space could be employed to bolster class identity and/or political ends. Furthermore, contests over space could and did spill out to the sub-regional and regional level, where conflicts between small and large urban areas, city and country, modernity and tradition were played out with implicit or explicit class and ideological ends. Despite this observation, urban history in a regional context remains in its infancy. The study of regions in England has been pioneered by economic historians and is more
advanced for the industrial revolution and post Second World War eras than for the period in between. Explorations of the Victorian City, or the transformation of the urban during ‘classic modernity’ (1890-1940), have tended to focus on individual towns and their relationship with the centre, rather than with other adjoining towns or even the wider economic or cultural region. Towns are rarely presented as providing a regional focus, as they have been in Germany or the United States, with urban resistance to the conurbation and fierce town pride frequently observed. Nevertheless, towns and cities clearly did help to shape regions and present positive, as well as negative, images of nascent regional urban identity and interest. It was at this level that politics, space and region could come together most forcefully; with urban figures either uniting to promote the collective interests of the region or, more often, to defend the culture and fabric of the region against the predatory tendencies of the big city. The rest of this introduction will explore these phenomena in more detail, addressing the emerging and changing historiography of urban politics, urban space and urbanity and region, illustrating the way that the chapters reflect and advance these debates.

Urban Politics

Over the past thirty years, understanding of urban politics and the study of urban management have changed significantly. At the beginning of the 1970s “party” was central to understanding how the city was governed, with the dominance and decline of urban Liberalism and the inexorable rise of Labour key areas of debate. Derek Fraser’s studies of the nineteenth century and Peter Clarke’s Lancashire and the New Liberalism were significant in setting the parameters of research whilst the literature exploring contemporary local government, such as that of Bulpit and Sharpe, influenced both political scientists and historians. Central to these works was the idea that, whilst the party politics of the nineteenth century was overwhelmingly structured by religion, early in the twentieth century this was replaced by class. The eclipse of religion by class and the ultimate triumph of Labour as the party of urban government were moulded by a deterministic view of political action. This tendency argued that, in the face of the challenge from working-class socialism, the middle classes united behind the Conservatives, squeezing out Liberalism along the way. This process was aided by the abandonment of the urban arena by elite figures, who surrendered their governing role to petite bourgeois and working-class activists, and by the rise of party as the main vehicle for conflict and ambition. In the ensuing battle for the city,
party conflict intensified whilst a form of politics shaped by culture rather than class, disappeared in all but a few odd places like Liverpool.15

As a result, during the 1970s and 1980s the study of urban politics concentrated on issues of class and the struggle for control of elected institutions. In particular, historians discussed the ‘classic’ bourgeois (usually Liberal) elite leadership of the middle decades of the nineteenth century (the era of the urban squirearchy), the extent, speed and effectiveness of Labour penetration of urban institutions, the political realignment of the urban middle class, elite withdrawal from the political, social and cultural life of the city and the impact of party and the change from ‘social leaders’ to ‘public persons’ in the management and organisation of urban political life.16 These discussions were shaped by a number of inherent teleological assumptions about ‘modernisation’ (including class determined political alignment, the novelty of party in local politics, the nationalisation of politics and political control of region and locality) which played down, or saw as aberrant, continuing manifestations of culture in political choice, local peculiarity, local initiative or evidence of party and ideology in earlier periods. Labour’s dominance of city politics in the last quarter of the twentieth century was read backwards, with their breakthroughs in the first third of the century assumed, rather than proven.17 Little attention was paid by political historians to the fate of middle-class politics in the early twentieth century, the complexities of middle-class realignment, or the enduring power of culture and ideology in political choice.18 Furthermore, concentration on elections, organisation and institutions meant that women played little part in the history of urban politics or governance, whilst the disenfranchised male was also largely absent given labour history’s focus on political institutions rather than popular politics.19 Novel approaches were apparent by the later 1980s, with seminal works by Patrick Joyce and Rick Trainor amongst others, refocusing the study of urban politics and suggesting the opportunity for a wider discussion of governance and participation.20 This approach was dominant by the end of the twentieth century, particularly in the field of Victorian urban history,21 yet its ascendancy raises some important questions about the nature of urban political competition. Just as the discourses of class and modernisation masked the heterogeneity of political affiliation through into the twentieth century, so studies of the elite, the middle classes or ‘governance’ have tended to create a new, undifferentiated world, in which conflict is down-played.22 Yet real differences of ideology and world-view existed within the middle class over religion, politics, temperance and attitudes to popular culture, as well as between the middle class and the workers.23
Conversely, much of the study of the city and its structures has tended to take place in a political vacuum, with a particular emphasis on social and spatial segregation. Although such work became increasingly sophisticated, it tended to reinforce ideas about emergent class-based politics which have only recently been challenged by Doyle and Moore. In other respects, housing and planning (which have been the main focus for modern British urban history) became locked into generalised debates about the merits of planners’ ideas and their dissemination and about the gradual nationalisation of planning and housing policy in the course of the twentieth century. Developing central control also shaped much of the discussion around urban welfare provision, with the Edwardian period seen as a pivotal moment in the eclipse of local voluntary welfare provision. Recent studies, however, have highlighted the strength of voluntarism and the power of local authorities to make policy and plan, as shown by the contributions of Bob Hayes and Peter Shapley, amongst others, in this collection.

Gender

As the foregoing suggests, the study of urban politics requires a reassessment in the light of important changes in the historical profession in recent years. First and foremost, to date most work on politics, the elite and space has paid little attention to the issue of gender. In particular, discussion of political involvement and elite withdrawal has tended to ignore the part played by women in continuing the role of elite families in the management of the urban. Undoubtedly, important research has highlighted the part women have played in conventional party work and the role of suffrage activity at the local level; whilst it is clear that women played a significant role in the nascent Labour party and could be very important players amongst local Labour activists. Mike Savage has even suggested that sensitivity to gender issues was vital to Labour success at the local level in the 1920s. Gender has also emerged as significant to the study of the use and control of urban space, with Lynda Nead, Judith Walkowitz and Krista Cowman all exploring the interaction of gender, sexuality and the politics of space utilisation. However, the role of women in the continuation of elite power structures in the twentieth century remains largely ignored. Initially raised by Doyle, it has received recent attention from James Hinton, who has highlighted the way women both took on increasingly important roles in existing voluntary organisations and created and developed their own associations as vehicles for managing women’s increased position in the urban sphere.
Voluntarism

These findings help to broaden our understanding of the process of elite withdrawal and its part in the apparent decline of voluntarism. Voluntarism had been a central part of elite culture and an essential element in the effective operation of urban politics for much of the nineteenth century. Not only were local politics entirely voluntary – in the sense that no one was paid either for serving on elected boards or even within party hierarchies – but much of the work which would later be seen as the responsibility of the state was actually undertaken by voluntary bodies. Welfare and charity, health-care (especially hospitals), education and even elements of policing and ‘reform’, were all provided and managed by voluntary organisations. Much leisure, most religion and a whole array of social networks, including clubs, literary and historical societies, complex organisations like friendly societies along with trade unions and employers’ organisations, were all in the hands of those willing to give freely of their time and energy and often their money. In nineteenth-century urban Britain, civil society was vast and voluntary.

Yet most observers accept that voluntarism was in crisis between the wars (if not before), undermined by both state intervention and elite withdrawal. But this is, at best, simplistic. Undoubtedly some voluntary organisations went into decline in the twentieth century, especially general relief charities like the Norwich District Visiting Society, which saw its income fall from £300, from over 180 subscribers in 1903, to just £50, from 24 (corporate) subscribers by 1935, whilst the transformation of the Charity Organisation Society in the town was similarly precipitous. Others saw their role change, including friendly societies, whilst others still experienced change accompanied by growth, especially the voluntary hospitals. Furthermore, there were significant new editions to the voluntary sector, for example new types of generalist body, like Round Table, but also a whole tranche of female orientated and run voluntary bodies such as the Women’s Institute, or the Towns’ Women’s Guild, often providing a secular version of the services previously delivered by female-run religious bodies. Moreover, voluntary bodies provided a continued site for debate and conflict. For, far from the middle class abandoning these organisations, as suggested by Savage and Miles and others, they were often keen to hold on to power, especially in the voluntary hospitals, either through managed incorporation or implacable defence. Thus, voluntarism, even pan-class voluntarism, remained a central plank of urban governance until the 1970s, although in a highly diminished and almost invisible form. Indeed this scholarly invisibility
was a product of a modernisation theory which privileged state welfare services whilst often regarding any continued role for the voluntary sector as a failure of policy.41

The Urban Elite

The role of the elite and its changing structure has been an important element of recent urban history, in particular, discussions of the ‘quality’ of urban leadership and the relative merits of producers, professionals and the petite bourgeoisie.42 However, whilst production has, in recent years, given way to consumption as the main preoccupation of many social historians, again this is not particularly evident in the writings about urban politics.43 This is unusual, given much has been written on the development and specialisation of retailing as Britain developed as one of the most advanced consumer markets in the world.44 Although the limited literature on the politics of consumption in a British context has been dominated by discussions of the cooperative movement,45 food quality and regulation,46 Matthew Hilton and Frank Trentmann have begun to address more institutional and ideological responses through their work on debates around access to food, the morality of consumption and organised consumer groups, including those at local level.47 For urban historians, however, the debates have been less focused on issues of consumption, per se, and more on the significance of the shopkeeper in politics. In particular, two standard tropes in the literature of urban elites are the assertion that large-scale manufacturers gave way to shopkeepers in the council chambers of England and that shopkeepers were invariably parsimonious and conservative in politics.48 The triumph of the shopkeeper has usually been seen negatively, yet such a response privileges production over consumption and ignores a number of key changes in urban life in the course of the period. The growing prominence of retailers within the urban elite reflected a greater sophistication within the urban economy.49 In Middlesbrough, for example, the decreasing part played by the original ‘Ironmasters’ in the politics of the town reflected the development of a broader elite, as the town grew from just 20,000 people, at the time of incorporation in the 1850s, to almost 100,000 by the outbreak of the First World War. This growth created new stakeholders within the middle class, including professionals, managers, and retailers, some of whom, like the grocer, Amos Hinton, were major employers of labour who dealt on a daily basis with a much wider cross section of Middlesbrough society, including women, than did the old Ironmasters.50 Thus, retailers like Hinton, or Duckworth in Rochdale, were not only
prominent businessmen, but also reflected the gradual shift taking place from production to consumption in British daily life. Viewed in this way, the increasing dominance of the retailer in municipal affairs should not be seen as a dilution of elite activism, or a slide into insular ‘shopkeeper politics’, but as a manifestation of profound urban change. It is important, moreover, to recognise that whilst British retailers, particularly those we might term ‘retail entrepreneurs’, may generally have turned to the right, they rarely moved outside the mainstream. Many remained Liberals and most were only ever poorly organised, and then for economic, rather than political ends. By the 1940s, the renegotiation of the urban landscape in the wake of the war and the drive for planning, put retailing high on the political agenda as planners saw the rationalisation of shops as a major goal. In such a hostile environment the shopkeeper was bound to be politically active, especially when his competitors in the Co-op might have strong allies in the newly-triumphant Labour party.

Space

The contest for control of retailing sites in the era of planning highlights the growing significance of the politics of urban space in recent years. Orthodox discussion of both the urban and its politics have tended to see towns and cities as neutral stages upon which politics happened, or locations in which local and national politicians acted to reconfigure the shapes on the ground, a particular characteristic of studies on the transformation of politics in the early twentieth century. Yet, as the collection of Gunn and Morris has shown, space was a vital element of urban politics, with contests over specific areas leading to major conflicts and places within towns acquiring deep political meaning. In particular, historians have focused on how mapping and labelling space within the urban played a significant part in the promotion of policy whilst discourses about such themes as slums, tradition, heritage and the big city, all helped to shape types of urban identity, which cut across simple determinist models of class formation. A number of the contributions in this volume inform this debate in important ways, with Timmins, Luckin and Shapley illustrating the manner in which discussions about housing and its inhabitants acted as a prime engine in urban reform, but also the ways in which such physical and cognitive mapping led to struggles within towns, between town and country then, ultimately amongst historians. Identification of how urban space was arranged and employed – often inflected by censorious top-down attitudes – allowed both contemporaries and historians to develop critiques of the nineteenth and twentieth-century
urban environment and look for solutions in suburban and semi-rural developments which frequently overlooked the desires and needs of the affected population. Furthermore, as Sheeran shows, gender was an important element in the new configuration of urban space, contemporaries viewing with trepidation the appearance of a female urban crowd in the streets and squares of the new textile towns of the early nineteenth-century Pennines, creating disquiet and raising issues about control and management of such a novel and potentially dangerous manifestation. Art, literature, popular culture and social investigation, were all employed to record and tame this new manifestation and restore some male order to the disrupted streets of the town.

Modernity

This contest for control of the urban sphere forms a major part of recent discussions around the impact of modernity on British life. The historiography of British modernity remains rather limited, although very important work has appeared on modernity and urbanity in Germany. That of McElligott raises some key questions for the study of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century city, especially around gender, consumption, youth, class, circulation, public health, leisure and the physical expansion and management of the city. Despite these areas being vital to British urban politics, historians have so far failed to come to terms with many of them, still tending to see modernity as synonymous with modernisation. Yet modernisation should be seen as a process – urbanisation, technological change, expansion of local and national government, rationalisation and planning – whilst modernity relates to how modern life was experienced by people, especially in the urban sphere, in the first half of the twentieth century. This neglect is unfortunate, as the British experience of urban modernity is both longer and more extensive than that of Germany, affecting the lives of the vast majority of the population by 1900. Discourses of modernity and the desire to deal with its manifestations are apparent in most aspects of urban politics in the nineteenth and twentieth century, whether in the expansion of policing, slum clearance policies, the control of leisure – both traditional and modern – or the restructuring of space. They should also be recognised in assessments of the cultural politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the growing literature on the management of both crime and health policy, especially habitual offenders, inebriates and the mentally ill. These themes are touched upon directly by Bob Hayes, Shane Ewen, Geoff Timmins – and in a slightly different way by Tim
Cooper – although the challenges of modernity are implicit in all the issues discussed in this volume.

**Cultural Politics**

These trends have generated a questioning of modernisation theory’s rejection of cultural influences and explanations in the shaping of urban politics.66 Most historians agree that culture was central to the politics of the nineteenth century city, with the result that much of the debate surrounding the decline of the Liberal party in the early twentieth century focused on the increasing dominance of class in determining political affiliation and behaviour.67 In recent years, however, the cultural turn in history has had some impact on the study of urban politics and the behaviour of elites. Historians, such as Joyce, Lawrence, Trainor, Doyle and Morris, although not all influenced by post-modernism, have recognised the significance of the cultural environment in which elite politics were formed, focusing on aspects such as associations, personal networks, residential patterns and business culture, to show that the culture of the middle class was far from uniform.68 Simon Gunn, in particular, has pointed to a range of cultural rituals and performances – funerals, promenades, processions – and their part in buttressing elite control of the urban. His approach suggests that these cultural activities served to solidify the middle class and middle-class identity, although he also provides evidence of enduring divisions around religion, occupation and party politics.69 Ritual and culture are also central to Lawrence’s analysis of Wolverhampton politics in the late nineteenth century, where Conservatives exploited Liberal attacks on working-class culture to their advantage,70 whilst older work by Joyce and Steadman Jones emphasised the importance of working-class culture to the shape of nineteenth-century urban politics.71 The chapters in this volume foreground the enduring significance of culture in two ways – by demonstrating how the culture of the municipality and the sub-region influenced routine political processes and by highlighting the manner in which history and tradition became a central plank in political discourses from the later nineteenth century onwards, especially in areas where rural and urban came into contact. Thus, Ewen and Nick Hayes demonstrate the importance of municipal identity and civic culture and their promotion by the local press, in defusing party antagonism in the course of routine council business, challenging orthodox views about the damaging nature of “party” in local government. Trainor draws on similar themes and ideas in his assessment of “Black Country” politics, showing how pride in the achievements of
local men, irrespective of party, could be utilised to promote the idea of the district and to locate it within the midlands and the nation. Conversely, both Cooper and Shapley illustrate the way that ideas about the identity, history and heritage of a place could be employed by conservative opponents of urban development, especially around the large conurbations.

**The Role of Party**

The articles in this collection also help to reinforce important revisions in the more traditional view of urban politics and space. They challenge the accepted wisdom that party became an increasing manifestation of and influence on the conduct of local politics. Although it is now accepted that party was deeply embedded in the politics of the larger boroughs from the early nineteenth century onwards, the influence of party in the day-to-day running of the municipality remains unclear. Thus, it has usually been assumed that the rise of Labour after 1900 led to a profound politicisation of the council chamber, with widespread and acrimonious conflict at all turns, yet, as both Ewen and Nick Hayes demonstrate, such analysis is simplistic. As with Liberal domination of the boroughs and the structures of municipal government (mayoralty, aldermanic bench, committee chairs) in the early nineteenth century, so the anti-socialist parties of the inter-war period did, initially, attempt to exclude Labour from power but as with their Liberal predecessors, such an approach was relatively short-lived and, in most cases, patronage and office were shared by the end of the 1930s. Similarly, in the field of policy formation and execution, party did not matter nearly as much as we have been led to believe, except in a few areas and even then the picture was by no means uniform. In areas like health, hospital provision and especially housing and policing, party was often unimportant, with economic prosperity, traditions of civic intervention and strength of local voluntary activity usually of far greater importance. Admittedly, party was very important at election times, when even nineteenth century campaigns could be vitriolic, whilst policy divisions did exist, especially over licensing in the nineteenth century or direct labour in the twentieth. Yet these observations notwithstanding, the fact remained that up to 90% of local government business was routine and non-controversial and that, in most towns and cities, civic culture was such that the good governance of the city overrode party antagonism. In such circumstances, the appearance of new groups challenging for power could often be incorporated into the civic apparatus, as long as they were willing to play by the established rules of the game.
(the persistence of civic ritual and civic regalia after both 1835 and 1935 being a case in point). Thus, the arrival of Labour was fairly easily accommodated whilst Labour, in turn, rarely abused power or rejected tradition as evidenced by the treatment of the Conservative Alderman George Poole in late 1930s Coventry. Conversely, the refusal of new political actors to “play by the rules” did lead to conflict, for example the failure of Barrow’s communists to incorporate in 1920, encouraged the established parties, including Labour, to pull together to restore acceptable boundaries of political behaviour.79

Policy Drivers

The research in this volume also bolsters our growing awareness of the relative weakness of central government in determining policy in urban areas.80 Historians, like contemporaries, have often been critical of the permissive nature of much nineteenth and early twentieth-century local government legislation, seeing central intervention as a sign of quality control, equalisation and efficiency.81 Conversely, others have lamented the increasing control of Whitehall over the boroughs, regarding the nationalisation of local government as leading to a loss of local autonomy, rigid uniformity and the multiplication of bureaucracy.82 Recent research, however, confirmed by many of the papers in this collection, has shown that boroughs continued to maintain significant control over most important areas of policy until at least 1946. Even after that, how they met government directives in areas like housing, was usually left to the discretion of the council.83

In this context, it was the local municipal politicians and their officials who shaped policy.84 Undoubtedly, they could be constrained or even deadlocked by party conflict, especially when oppositional political groupings were finely balanced or where party control was unstable, as in Leeds in the early 1930s.85 They were more often constrained, not by visceral ideological battles, but by financial weakness, by strong pressure groups or by the presence of well-founded and entrenched competitors.86 Furthermore, as the contributions by Bob Hayes and Peter Shapely reveal, other local authorities could often prove the greatest stumbling block to the expansion of services, or as has been illustrated elsewhere, might themselves be the catalyst for reform.87 Moreover, the party system was often over-ridden by strong civic traditions of intervention inherited from the nineteenth century – seemingly the case in Birmingham and Liverpool – and by wider concerns to improve the urban fabric, sometimes stimulated by a local disaster, national emergency or even by civic
boosterism. Nor were policies always the work of a single party. In the nineteenth century parties were often divided within themselves over the extent of their responsibilities whilst in the unstable world of the 1920s and early 1930s, alliances could be forged across party lines to push through reform.

A British Progressivism?

These alliances raise important questions about the social bases of reform and anti-reform coalitions throughout our period. As has been observed, we should not underestimate or denigrate the politics of the shopkeeper, the most consistent single group on councils throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nor, as Nick Hayes makes clear in this collection, should we swallow pessimistic narratives about the declining quality of urban municipal governors. The reduced prominence of major manufacturers on borough councils from the mid-nineteenth century onwards is, indeed, indicative of a partial democratisation of the council chamber, but more importantly of the diversification of the elite in the light of the growing maturity of towns and cities and the more complex requirements of local government. Whilst Jacobin uprisings by small business as in Birmingham and elsewhere in the 1870s or Leeds in the 1890s, can be seen as a temporary triumph for small government and parish pump politics, the more significant trend in the thirty years before the First World War was the growth of professional representation on municipal bodies as families and firms diversified. Elite representation changed as professionals became integrated, socially and economically, with the business elite and as the demands and spoils of local governance became more applicable to the professional classes. It is conceivable that this marrying of big business and the professions produced a form of progressivism in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century England which mirrored developments in the United States’ urban sphere. Doctors, lawyers, architects, accountants and educationalists could all bring something to the management of the expanding areas of local governance, as well as seeing personal benefits. They could work together with the more powerful businessmen to shape the urban environment and manage the demands of modernity, such as urban expansion, the need to provide utilities and health services and to reshape the city in a more healthful and efficient manner. This desire for urban efficiency and the management of modernity often brought them into conflict with less wealthy businessmen and the representatives of other lower-middle-class groups, especially property-owners fearful of rising
rates, interventions in daily life and municipal indebtedness. Furthermore, it could bring them closer to those on the Labour benches who sought the same ends, albeit for different reasons, although Labour members could also be found siding with conservative moralists on issues such as contraception, licensing policy or the Sunday opening of cinemas. Reform at a regional or sub-regional level could be held back by traditional conflicts between parties, for instance, Tory towns in Lancashire resisting attempts by the County Council to create county-wide institutions in the early twentieth century. But internal party division could also arise between local authorities, as was common in the nineteenth century and certainly remained evident well into the twentieth century, as Shapely’s contribution illustrates.

Whether or not this group of businessmen and professionals who were promoting reform in the fifty years after 1880 were Progressives, in an American sense, it is clear that the challenges of the city in this period brought forward some important new responses, most of which came from within the traditional urban elite. Their discourse of modernity and their desire to control the excesses of the urban environment saw them implement a range of policies that drew their inspiration from an amalgam of traditional moralism and modern scientific and social scientific methods. These developments are most apparent in the chapters presented by Bob Hayes and Bill Luckin, who show how the work of the new scientific moralists underpinned housing policy and the drive for institutions, such as those for inebriates. Older fears about urban protection were given a modern gloss in the realm of policing and fire services, whilst Walthamstow’s brand of suburban progressivism was firmly rejected by traditional semi-rural elites who wished to limit, rather than embrace, modernity. The failure to recognise the importance of progressivism in English cities between 1880 and 1940 has arisen largely from the earlier fixation with class politics and a predominant, teleological discourse about the rise of Labour. This has led those historians who were willing to deal with progressivism to treat it as a brand of socialism, rather than a specific middle-class political response to the demands of the modern urban world.

Cities and Regions

Whilst many new and interesting ideas are shaping the study of urban politics, historians have been less keen to explore the history of English regions. There is a growing awareness of the diversity of economic regions and the cultural traditions evoked by the dichotomy of north and
south, although the ‘North’ is usually Yorkshire and Lancashire, the ‘South’ is the Home Counties, with the Midlands, the North East and the South West, as well as the capital cities of London, Edinburgh and Cardiff, fitting less easily into such a simple model. Some cities very clearly do form the core of regions – Newcastle, Glasgow and Birmingham incontrovertibly do – but urban historians of the modern period have tended to overlook this or have continued to isolate towns from their hinterlands, employing the city as the symbol of modernity in contrast to rural traditionalism. In part, this situation is a result of the move away from regional/county affiliations of towns and their elites. Many institutions of the late nineteenth century eschewed the traditional ‘City and County’ nomenclatures, whilst few adopted modern regional identities (Teesside, Clydeside) until well into the twentieth century. Similarly, historians have tended to study towns in isolation and respect the borders they set for themselves (a trend reinforced by the current popularity for ‘urban biographies’). More often than not, towns and cities have been set up in opposition to the surrounding countryside whilst elite figures who moved beyond the city boundaries are usually presented as ‘withdrawing’ from urban life, making a cultural, political and social statement about their rejection of urban modernity and civic and economic engagement.

Similarly, urban elite figures who adopted roles beyond the city boundary were usually characterised as moving to a national level, by-passing any extant or possible regional role. On the other hand, attempts to recover or shape a regional identity were usually the work of traditionalists and set up in opposition to the influence of the dominating town or city.

The Victorian and early twentieth century city, however, was more regional than this history suggests. Economically, most major towns and cities were linked with each other and with their hinterlands; some as markets, some as production centres, others, especially in the southern half of England, acting as both. Suburbanisation and counter-urbanisation took the city into the country, or to abut or co-mingle with adjoining places, which created sub-regions, such as Teesside, Tyneside and Merseyside. Most importantly, central places, especially what we might term the regional metropolises, impacted upon their hinterland through a range of deliberate and unintended actions which saw their influence spill out beyond the municipal boundaries that have constructed the work of most urban historians. In the process, they created a form of regional politics on an ad hoc basis with constantly shifting alliances cutting across conventional social, political and party lines. As the period under examination proceeded, more formal structures and institutions did emerge to address regional issues. The 1888 County Councils Act unified much of
London, sealed the boundaries of the large towns, while greatly increasing their power and provided the counties with recognised authority, structures and bureaucracies. In some important areas, joint boards appeared, especially for the management of waterways (for example the Tees Conservancy Commission) and for the building of bridges and tunnels (Mersey Tunnel, Newport Bridge over the Tees). Regional and sub-regional structures were increasingly created by Whitehall to address problems of unemployment and economic regeneration, whilst central government began to think ‘regionally’, at least in part, in the way they constructed statistics. Yet political regionalism remained weak, as John Davis has shown, and when regions became the basis for the management of much of the post-war utility structure, it was not on a democratic but a bureaucratic basis.

Despite the absence of democratic, representative regional politics in the period, it is clear that urban centres had very important consequences for their hinterlands which could be both beneficial and damaging, as a number of the articles in this collection demonstrate. As towns and cities grew in the nineteenth century and matured in the twentieth, their physical presence and activity affected the surrounding countryside, first drawing in local populations as migrants (very significant in the case of Middlesbrough), then pushing out people in an endless process of suburbanisation and counter-urbanisation. Towns drew in resources and produced not just goods and services, but also pollutants, often in vast quantities. Air and water were affected to the detriment of neighbouring populations, sewerage created and dumped, while industry, as well as housing, frequently encroached upon the open spaces, especially along roads and rivers. As Tim Cooper shows, the regional impact of London and the way its population swelled and spilled out into Essex, created social, political and cultural conflicts between the city and its hinterland. Nor did greater regulation prevent such clashes as, ironically, the age of planning actually increased the predatory scope of the big city as planners envisaged zones in which industry, housing, retailing and services and even transport networks would operate over a regional or sub-regional level. Cities were encouraged to think regionally, as is shown by Peter Shapely in his enlightening essay on Manchester’s attempts to plant new estates in South Lancashire and Cheshire, in both cases producing spirited defence from local populations, irrespective of party or social class.

Urban centres could also become involved, politically, in their regions and sub-regions, most obviously in the case of incorporation, where towns and cities attempted to bring in suburbs and villages, a process that often met with significant opposition from the outlying areas. Alternatively,
the distribution of governance and institutional controls could lead to important political developments. In the case of policing, Chris Williams has contended that it was the fear of falling under the police control of the county that encouraged Sheffield to seek incorporated status in the late 1830s. On the other hand, the attempt by Manchester to build estates in Cheshire and keep the revenue accrued for the City, was a clear case of political interference. Towns could also have an impact on the environment of their hinterlands. In the case of municipal water supply big cities, like Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow built large reservoirs in Wales, the Lake District and the Trossachs which impacted on the rural environment both positively, in terms of improving water supplies, but also negatively, in their physical, social and economic reshaping of the area. Similarly, cities and their local authorities gradually expanded their utility services, sometimes outwith the boundaries of the urban area – though legislation could be used to limit this, as in the case of electricity supply in the early twentieth century. Certainly there were many local and national groups opposing the expansionist ambitions of the big cities, especially other medium-sized towns, yet despite this, there were moves to create regional responses to some problems of the twentieth century, especially in the area of health-care provision. Specialist hospital care, such as that for infectious diseases, was increasingly centralised in the big cities, a process that, in turn, reinforced their power by attracting the best doctors and encouraging the appearance of other specialist and technical services. Even quite large sub-regional cities could be put in the shadow - Leicester remaining dependent on Sheffield, Middlesbrough on Newcastle and Preston on Manchester. This power fed into the NHS, which was set up with Regional Health Boards based on existing regional specialist centres. Health policy also encouraged a regional approach to the treatment and management of mental health and other behavioural problems identified at the end of the nineteenth century. This is shown very clearly in the chapter by Bob Hayes, which discusses the attempts to create provision for inebriates on a Lancashire-wide basis, highlighting the degree of independence displayed by the many urban areas in the county.

Urban regionalism, furthermore, was increasingly apparent at a virtual level with the development of the morning regional press, usually, though not always, based in the regional metropolis. Newspapers, like the *Eastern Daily Press* in Norwich, the *Scotsman*, the *Glasgow Herald* and the *London Evening Standard* creating an idea of the region in the minds of the readership whilst implicitly placing the city at the centre. This wasn’t always the case, particularly with the Darlington-based *Northern Echo* and the ambiguously positioned *Yorkshire Post*, yet overall, unlike the highly
Introduction

Parochial evening newspapers which largely served the urban area, these morning dailies, with their high circulations, helped to shape a shadow regional identity which recognised the growing importance of cities as the centre for ideas, services, consumption and political leadership. Regional networks of businessmen, urban professionals, local politicians and specialists served to reinforce this soft regionalism based on the city. Meeting to exchange ideas and best practice, to copy, to show off, even to distribute resources, these regional networks became more formal and sophisticated as the twentieth century progressed. Moreover, they reflected the extent to which towns had escaped their boundaries physically, economically and socially, yet in a way that was scarcely reflected in the political structures available to urban leaders. This search for some form of regional voice is reflected in Rick Trainor’s chapter which highlights the way MPs from within the Black Country could bury their severe political disagreements to present a united face to the outside world. This collection illustrates both the positive steps towards a regional political culture and the barriers experienced while attempting to provide services at a scale greater than the town or to expand the influence of the conurbation to a regional plane.

Conclusion

Together, the chapters in this volume begin a process of uniting political, spatial and regional perspectives in the writing of urban history. To address these issues, the book is divided into three sections: The Structures of Politics; Politics, Institutions and Urban Management; and Governance, Discourses and Space. In the first, Rick Trainor and Nick Hayes explore the sites of conflict and compromise in urban politics during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Class, party and locality all provided arenas for, sometimes violent, battles over political legitimacy, resource distribution and leadership. Yet they could equally be submerged when broader issues of civic or regional interest dominated. Moreover, as suggested in the chapters of section two, by Shane Ewen, Bob Hayes and Peter Shapely, locality could be a powerful factor in the resistance to expanding local state power. Party, even class, interest could be suspended to defend the town from the predatory expansion of the regional metropolis or the ‘joint board’. The persistence of such localism, even in the era of the centralised welfare state, raises important questions about the effectiveness of planning, rationality and scale in the organisation and delivery of services. Section three examines the importance of space, place and discourse in expanding and managing the challenges of urban
modernity in the period under review. The essays by Geoff Timmins, Bill Luckin, George Sheeran and Timothy Cooper, are all concerned with the way that language was employed to establish social problems and thus to find their solution. Space was not only managed with police, but also with words, which valorised and condemned physical environments and social practices, feeding back, as Peter Shapely demonstrates, into political action. Overall, these essays make an important contribution to revising how we approach key issues in the historiography of the nineteenth and twentieth-century city, bringing party, place and region together to challenge well-established views about the dominance of party and the weakness of region in modern England.


5 For the most comprehensive bibliography relating to urban history see R. Rodger, ed., European Urban History: Prospect and Retrospect (Leicester, 1993) and Urban History, 1992 onwards which contains an annual bibliography.


15 P.J. Waller, Democracy and Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool, 1868-1939 (Liverpool, 1981). Glasgow is an interesting contradiction, capable of expressing both class and cultural politics throughout the inter-war period. For class see, for example, A. McKinlay and R. J. Morris eds., The ILP on Clydeside, 1893-1932: From Foundation to Disintegration (Manchester, 1991) and for cultural politics, T. Gallagher, Glasgow, The Uneasy Peace: Religious Tension in Modern Glasgow (Manchester, 1987).