

# Urban civic pride and the new localism

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Civic pride relates to how places promote and defend local identity and autonomy. It is often championed as a key value and aspiration of local government. This paper argues that civic pride has been under-examined in geography, and in particular the emotional meanings of pride need to be better understood. In response, I present an emotional analysis of civic pride and discuss its role in British cities, particularly in the context of urban regeneration and the UK's new localism agenda. In the latter part of the paper I provide a case study of Nottingham in England, where I employ a discourse analysis of recent urban policy and local media to examine how civic pride is being mobilised and contested in the city. Examining civic pride is important because it shapes and reflects the political values that local governments stand for and provides a basis for thinking about how emotions are used strategically (and problematically) in urban policy. This paper complements and challenges existing literature on cities by showing how civic pride shapes, but also obscures, the ideological politics of local government and how, as geographers, we might consider more seriously the ways forms of power, identity and inequality are reproduced and contested through emotions such as pride.

**Key words** civic pride; shame; localism; Nottingham; regeneration

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## Introduction

Civic pride is an integral feature of cities, but its meaning and importance can sometimes be overlooked. As a symbol of identity, or as an ideal of local government, civic pride is part of what defines and shapes cities, and forms an important lens through which they are imagined and governed. In Britain, recent cultural events such as the London Olympics (2012), the 'Grand Depart' of the Tour de France in Leeds (2014) or the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow (2014) might suggest that a spirit of civic pride is alive and well in many cities. But local government has been under considerable pressure and strain in recent years. Not least, the impacts of austerity (post-2008) and rising social inequalities are creating serious challenges for local government, and this may be damaging civic pride.

Within this context, debates about urban regeneration and localism have raised concerns about the capacity of local government to deliver economic growth and rebuild civic pride (Jayne 2012; Jones 2013). Geographers have tended to be critical about the virtues of urban regeneration and its ability to address social inequalities (Boland 2010; Ward 2003), while the recent localism agenda, which has culminated in the passing of the 2011 Localism Act by UK parliament, has generated both enthusiasm and scepticism over its potential to empower local government and increase civic pride. Prime Minister David

Cameron meanwhile has added his voice to this civic agenda by calling for Britain 'to be far more muscular in promoting British values and the institutions that uphold them' and to stop being so 'bashful' about its sense of pride (Cameron 2014).

In so far as urban regeneration and localism have been cause for both optimism and anxiety in recent years, there is a case for re-examining what civic pride means and what its role is in urban policy. Urban geographers in the 1990s and 2000s showed how ideas such as civic pride were being championed (and manipulated) by local governments to promote post-industrial regeneration (Hall 1997; Ward 2003). This has extended to more recent interest in how neoliberalism and austerity are reshaping the civic landscape (Darling 2009; Jayne 2012). Much of this literature tends to be critical about the ways in which local governments often sell certain images of civic pride to gain public support for policy and legitimate neoliberal reform. However, in much of this work, and across geography more generally, the term lacks theoretical insight. Not only is it often neither defined nor examined explicitly by geographers, but also the *emotional* meanings and values behind civic pride tend to be ignored or left unexamined.

Even following the so-called 'emotional turn' in geography in recent years, which has made important interventions into how emotions shape and configure urban processes (Davidson *et al.* 2007; Thrift 2008),

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civic pride has not been an explicit point of debate. This is perhaps surprising, although it may reflect a wider lack of interface between urban and emotional geographies, particularly in the context of local government. Urban geography (particularly studies of urban neoliberalism) has traditionally tended to favour more structuralist or political-economy types of approach, which tend to ignore or at least underemphasise the role of emotions (Bennett 2013; Thrift 2008). This emotional deficit within urban geography might be problematic if and when it assumes structures of power, identity and inequality in cities are only the result of functional, systemic (disembodied) processes, rather than processes that reflect human concerns, desires and aspirations (Jones 2013; McGuirk 2012).

Examining civic pride is important because it shapes and reflects the values and aspirations local governments stand for and represent. It provides a basis for thinking about how and why cities promote and defend local identity and autonomy, and how emotions figure within, and are productive for, urban policy. Highlighting the emotional aspects of civic pride in particular allows us to examine how emotions help sell and dramatise the virtues of urban policy in persuasive, but also misleading, ways. There is an important parallel to observe here between the ways in which emotions both reveal and hide people's 'true colours', and the ways in which urban policy selectively promotes and conceals certain 'truths' of the city for strategic (and ideological) reasons. In this way, part of what I am arguing is that civic pride is often shaped, but also conflicted, by forms of civic shame (i.e. features of the city that do not warrant or inspire pride), and that local governments often have to negotiate across a range of competing values and interests as they seek to promote and defend civic pride. Overall, the substantive claims made in this paper do not radically disagree with, or seek to undo, much of the existing analysis on urban neoliberalism – particularly in terms of how inequalities are produced through or concealed by urban policy. Instead this paper complements, but also challenges, current literature by providing a different, more embodied analytical focus – one that acknowledges how emotions and emotional discourses are (also) integral to structures of power, identity and inequality and deserve more critical attention (Anderson and Smith 2001).

For this paper, I examine the role of civic pride in relation to urban regeneration and the new localism agenda orchestrated under the Coalition government in the UK. Debates about urban regeneration and localism provide two interlinked contexts with which to examine civic pride in a post-industrial (post-austerity) context. In short, urban regeneration provides a context within which we can explore the economic and cultural function(s) of civic pride, while localism provides a basis for examining civic pride's more formal, political

dimensions – but the two are closely linked, as I show. I also want to explore how localism has actually been 'localised' in cities, and how forms of opposition against austerity by some (particularly Labour) civic leaders reflect or provide support for alternative articulations of civic pride.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. The next section explores how we can define and analyse civic pride in more emotional ways and better theorise its meaning and role in cities and local government. I argue that in order to understand what civic pride means and how it functions, we need to understand the emotional meanings and nuances of pride, and its relationship to shame, and bring these values into creative tension. I then move on to discuss civic pride's role in urban regeneration, suggesting that current literature provides a useful grounding to critically explore civic pride as a feature of urban neoliberalism, but currently lacks sustained (emotional) analysis. I then discuss the new localism agenda, examining the potential opportunities and limitations this may have for local government. Here I argue that the Coalition's aim of reviving a 'Victorian' spirit of civic pride in Britain has value in principle, but is unrealistic in the context of neoliberal austerity. Then in the third and final section, I present a short case study of Nottingham, and explore how Nottingham City Council is currently negotiating issues of regeneration, localism and austerity, in the name of civic pride. My analysis is underpinned by a discourse analysis of local government policy and local media, in which I pay specific attention to how emotions and emotional discourses shape and obscure wider political agendas. While geographers have employed a range of methodological approaches in relation to emotions (including phenomenology, psychoanalysis and non-representational theory), the focus on discourse and representation here specifically emphasises how emotions get used in the language of local government policy and by local politicians themselves in the media, in ways that help produce, mediate and conceal structures of power, identity and inequality (see Bennett 2013; Thrift 2008). Nottingham presents a revealing case study for understanding the political challenges involved in promoting and defending civic pride within local government, and shows how civic pride can be used in both progressive and conservative ways.

## Negotiating pride and shame

Civic pride has been integral to the history of cities. It has both shaped and been shaped by a fundamental belief that cities constitute distinctive political communities where people share a sense of identity and common purpose (Mumford 1961; Hunt 2004). From the Athenian polis, to the Italian city-states, to the

cities of the industrial revolution, to the post-industrial cities of today, civic pride has represented a key value and aspiration of local government, bound up in notions of self-determination, cultural identity, citizenship and belonging. Civic pride has also connected with a history of rivalry and competition between places, and the different ways local communities construct and control territorial and social boundaries (Harvey 1989). It is perhaps surprising then that the term has had limited debate in geography. Why this might be is open to speculation: it must in part be attributed to a historic lack of engagement with emotions in geography and in particular the political role of emotions in cities. But it might also reflect a certain tendency to conflate civic pride with other related terms, such as 'community spirit' or 'civic boosterism', for instance. For Wood, civic pride represents 'a shared and cohesive city image' but 'does not represent an exclusively well defined and understood construct' (2006, 169). Ritter equally charges civic pride as a 'vague' and 'imprecise' construct that can 'serve widely divergent purposes' (2007, 251). Urban historians meanwhile often attribute civic pride to the realm of architecture, where grand public buildings are often said to convey civic pride (Shapely 2011). It is clear there is a degree of ambiguity in the term. But as a result of this, it is often the emotional meanings of pride and (by extension) the emotional politics of civic pride that get left unexplored and unexamined in many accounts. Put simply, there is a lack of understanding about what kind of 'pride' civic pride is.

Pride is a complex emotion to define. Usually it refers to a feeling of self-worth or self-respect and the different ways people value or praise their identity or community. Pride can also mean a feeling of triumph or superiority. In Western philosophy, pride has tended to be bifurcated into two, broadly opposing types – one that links pride to a sense of self-esteem, confidence and integrity, and the other that links pride with arrogance, aggression and stubbornness (Tracy *et al.* 2010). Different meanings of the term can therefore represent different traits and behaviours, and these can be shaped by particular cultural beliefs about what one can and should be proud of (Smith 1998; Dyson 2006).

One important quality of pride is that it is aspirational. It is aspirational to the extent that people with pride tend to place high value on self-improvement and achieving the best for oneself or for society. Pride, in this sense, is a value that tends to generate certain ideals or expectations to live up to. Failure to live up to these ideals or expectations can damage or afflict one's pride, and in some cases lead to feelings of self-doubt and shame. Probyn (2005) discusses how pride and shame are closely linked and have a dialectical relationship – for just as shame seems to embody the very opposite of pride (i.e. a lack of self-worth, a lack of

aspiration, guilt etc.), pride also needs to assert its distance or at times actively deny shame in order to retain its virtue and integrity. In this view, shame can be both the force that galvanises pride and the shadow that haunts it (Munt 2000). The two are therefore often co-dependent and bring each other into visibility.

A corollary of this pride–shame tension is that pride often tends to celebrate the positive and ignore or deny the negative – such that pride often appears strong and self-righteous (Wind-Cowie and Gregory 2011). As studies of nationalism have shown, pride often grows stronger when people feel their identity is under threat, and this often results from or leads to people being defensive about their beliefs and values (Fortier 2005). As I demonstrate later on in the paper, the spectre of change and uncertainty brought about by issues such as global capitalism, austerity and the loss of political autonomy in cities is to some extent creating the conditions for a resurgence of civic pride in these kinds of defensive ways. The danger here is that too much pride may encourage people to be resistive to change or blind to alternative viewpoints, thus limiting any drive or imperative to be self-critical or reflexive about what one's pride means and what it represents.

The analytical task here is to observe how pride as an emotion connects with civic pride as a political value, and how different expressions of civic pride are promoted and defended within local government. The *civic* aspect is clearly important, because it is the spatial-political frame within which different forms of pride are expressed and mobilised. The word 'civic' itself may sound, to some, rather ceremonial and authoritative, but there is something critical (emotive, even) in the way civicness constructs and celebrates places as sites of *shared* meaning, with supposedly shared values and aspirations; that civic pride is not just a matter for local government but something that represents a wider sense of unity and collective responsibility in the city (Mumford 1961). This idealism may of course be problematic, or misleading, if and when certain images of civic pride fail to incorporate or account for local division and conflict in the city, or fail to acknowledge that some people may *not* be proud of their city. Civic pride itself may be cause for division or conflict if people have different aspirations over what their city's 'civic pride' should be and represent – or when policy, promoted in the name of civic pride, serves the interests of some people more than others.

While it can be difficult to define emotions precisely and translate them into writing, geographers should recognise how they are active components of how places are imagined, governed and contested – and that emotions like pride play a role in shaping and configuring political imaginaries and spatial practices (Thrift 2008). As I show, it is not simply a question of how civic pride gets mobilised within and through policy and

political discourse, but how issues of pride and shame within the city are managed and (re)appropriated in the name of civic pride.

### Urban regeneration and civic pride

If geographers have asserted any kind of overarching paradigm to describe and explain the changing nature of cities in the past few decades, it has been the rise of neoliberalism and the increasingly entrepreneurial nature of local government (Harvey 1989; Boyle 2011). This shift towards neoliberalism has involved a fundamental re-imagining of local government – no longer are local authorities simply conceived as ‘managers’ of local services and welfare, they now (also) represent strategic players in the post-industrial economy, facilitating growth and leveraging new forms of public and private investment. The gradual decline of Keynesianism, the loss of industry and jobs, the flight of the middle-classes to the suburbs – leaving an ailing inner-city in many places – had by the 1980s and 1990s signalled a new demand for urban regeneration in Britain, and an opportunity for local governments to restructure local economies and restore civic pride. As McGuirk notes, geographers have approached this rise of the post-industrial neoliberal city in different ways, but most accept the contention that

through rescaling the geographies of governance, the urban itself is taken to have become an increasingly important strategic scale through which neoliberal accumulation and a complementary array of regulatory strategies can be institutionalised and advanced. (2012, 259)

Given this broad context, my focus is on how civic pride is mobilised in the context of cultural regeneration strategies, and how different dimensions of pride play a role in shaping these strategies and their outcomes. I claim that civic pride can be used as a ‘soft tool’ by local governments to leverage investment and persuade local citizens about the positive impacts regeneration can offer; at the same time, however, such efforts to promote civic pride can also undermine a city’s ability or willingness to accept ‘shame’ and address issues of inequality and exclusion.

Cultural regeneration has served a number of purposes in cities – to promote local culture and identity, attract business and tourism, combat unemployment, foster cultural and creative enterprise, and increase consumption (Boland 2010; Florida 2012). Cultural regeneration has been a way of orchestrating a revival in urban culture – both to escape (and forget) the scars of industrial decline, and to refashion urban centres around new ideas of culture, creativity and the arts. Critical accounts have highlighted how such strategies often promise much in the way of new jobs, tourism growth, and improved cultural infrastructure,

but often result in many negative consequences – a commercialisation of culture, a lack of trickle-down benefits for local people and, as Boyle notes, a scenario where ‘local welfare budgets ... become [increasingly] diverted into often-speculative city marketing projects, hallmark events and downtown aesthetic make-overs’ (2011, 2674). Under such conditions, cultural regeneration tends to invest in and privilege certain forms of culture and creativity more than others, and tends to exclude lower income groups that are unable to afford the new cultural consumerism on offer (or feel alienated by it) (Boland 2010). However, as others have shown, cultural regeneration may also lead to the emergence of more alternative and radical interpretations of what local culture and pride should do, say and represent – exposing a more diverse and fragmented civic landscape (Jones 2013; Jayne 2012). Such alternatives may be the grit in the civic oyster for local governments who want to uphold a particular image of the city, but how far such alternatives ultimately reshape the politics of civic pride is less certain.

Urban geographers have tended to describe how civic pride operates as a legitimisation tool within cultural regeneration – a rhetoric to help promote a ‘shared vision’ for the city and promote the positive impacts of regeneration. It has also been considered a ‘bread and circuses’ type of rhetoric to help increase public support for policy and steer attention away from its more negative implications (Harvey 1989; McCann 2013). But rarely do geographers expand on what civic pride is (or means) here, how it is being used and reformulated under cultural regeneration, and what the role of pride is as an emotion. This may limit our analysis of why civic pride is important for local governments and why it is being mobilised in the service of neoliberalism.

Harvey, for instance, in his ground-breaking paper on urban entrepreneurialism, states how ‘the orchestrated production of urban image can if successful ... create a sense of social solidarity, civic pride and loyalty to place’ (1989, 14). Although it is not the paper’s main point of focus, Harvey does not explain what civic pride is, show how it is different to social solidarity and loyalty, or fully explicate why feeling proud and showing pride for one’s city was important for the rise of urban entrepreneurialism. The point he does briefly make is that concepts like civic pride became important in places like Baltimore in the 1980s as a defensive, unifying rhetoric for local government to use to convince urban communities that local identity and prosperity were not being eroded or undermined under changes in global capitalism. But while Harvey recognises how this produced ‘mechanisms for social control’ within cities, his de-centring of civic pride as a more minor outcome of neoliberal processes obscures the ways in which the emotional, the political and the

economic were working together under urban entrepreneurialism – particularly in terms of how civic pride was also a necessary driving force behind ‘the orchestrated production of urban image’ in many places, and helped make certain narratives of urban change more meaningful (and more convincing) to local people.

Hall’s (1997) study of cultural regeneration in Birmingham similarly shows how discourses of civic pride were part of Birmingham City Council’s re-imaging plans in the early 1990s. But here again Hall does not really explore what civic pride is or was in this context, and how pride (the emotion) figured within the discourses he describes. Hall cannot, to my mind, adequately examine how ‘local mythologies of industrial pride’ were important to wider regimes of change if the emotional and political meanings and nuances of pride are missing from the analysis. However, in fairness, he does show how different constructions of civic identity and acts of civic commemoration through public art can serve to produce uneven narratives of social and historic change, and that cultural regeneration can be orchestrated in such a way so as to close off more critical voices and alternative practices.

Boland’s (2010) analysis of Liverpool as European Capital of Culture provides another example in which civic pride surfaces within the analysis but remains undefined and under-explored. Through analysing different perceptions and experiences of the Capital of Culture project across the city, Boland ‘challenges the hyperbole of culture-led transformation to reveal different geographies of culture, different cultural experiences and different socio-economic realities’ (2010, 640). There is clearly a lot of pride and shame bubbling under the analysis, but because he does not explicitly employ an emotional lens, nor provide a close-reading of the participant quotes he uses, the emotional nuances and psychological dimensions of people’s experiences are left un/under-explored. The contrast he conveys between the optimism and aspirational language of the city’s leaders and officials from the Liverpool Culture Company (who managed the project) and the pessimism – and anger – of those residents in the city who felt spatially and culturally excluded from the spectacle (such as the residents of Toxteth and Norris Green) is convincingly illustrated, however. But again, my point would be that a more serious examination of pride might tease out some of the underlying dynamics of why the Capital of Culture project was so divisive and why different perceptions and experiences of the project spoke to different understandings of civic pride and different experiences of civic engagement.

The executive summary of the original Capital of Culture bid for Liverpool in fact shows that one of the objectives was ‘developing a positive profile and image

of the city in the region, Europe and internationally, and increasing the confidence and pride of its citizens’ (Liverpool Culture Company 2002, 301). It clearly did not increase the confidence and pride of some citizens if Boland’s observations are anything to go by. As Boyle (1997) more tentatively suggests, this should encourage us to think critically about the way pride can be used (too easily, perhaps) as an empty buzzword or ‘woolly metric’ of impact within urban policy, and how this may mask or steer attention away from issues of social exclusion, deprivation and disengagement.

In these ways, current literature on urban neoliberalism might benefit from this more emotional perspective in order to better understand the underlying logic (s) and mechanisms(s) behind urban policies, and how emotions can be used in ways that help serve or protect ideological interests. Clearly there is a certain advantage to be gained from the slipperiness of emotional terms like civic pride, because they can be used in such a way so as to be purposefully fuzzy and vague to suit a particular purpose (Ritter 2007). It then becomes difficult to hold local governments accountable for ‘succeeding’ or ‘failing’ on civic pride – which is precisely why we need to scrutinise the politics of civic pride carefully and understand who the winners and losers are. However, as I demonstrate later in the context of Nottingham, civic pride represents no fixed political agenda – it can operate across a range of ideological interests and values. Just as certain discourses and representations of civic pride can serve to hide, conceal or limit an awareness of the uneven consequences of neoliberal urban regeneration, civic pride can also be promoted and defended in other, more progressive, more antagonistic ways and re-appropriated in the name of localism.

## Localism and civic pride

I now want to examine how civic pride is being promoted and defended in the context of localism and austerity. This section outlines how civic pride is not simply a neoliberal ‘tool’ within urban regeneration strategies, but connects to and helps shape a much wider political philosophy, connected to the freedoms and constraints local governments operate within and contest over. There are critical linkages between urban regeneration and localism that are relevant for understanding the nuances and subtleties of civic pride – linkages that further reveal how the emotional dimensions of pride can both shape and obscure the ideological politics of local (as well as central) government.

The nature of local governance in British cities has changed markedly over the past few decades. Local economic partnerships, strategic authorities and growth coalitions for instance have been established in most

major cities, a range of city-regional bodies and national programmes have emerged (such as the recent Core Cities and City Deal programmes), while globalisation has significantly enhanced the operating scale and strategic oversight required of local government (Harvey 1989; Boyle 2011). Despite the increasing complexity and multi-institutional nature of local governance however, the overall planning and direction of urban policy, and the political accountability this assumes, still remains much the prerogative and responsibility of local councils and local authorities. While British cities, like most cities in the world, have become inextricably dependent on and productive for the global market and the state, it is local government that still represents the institutional identity and autonomy of local places and the people living there.

The 2011 Localism Act was a ground-breaking but controversial moment for local government and democracy in the UK (Featherstone *et al.* 2012; Lowndes and Pratchett 2012). Although devolution debates had been going on a long time before 2011 within British politics (see Clarke and Cochrane 2013), localism emerged formally as a policy framework and legislative package with the release of the Coalition's green paper 'Local growth: realising every place's potential' (DCLG 2010). This called for more decentralised powers and freedoms for local government, and an end to a culture of 'Whitehall knows best' (2010, 3). The Act is wide-ranging in its remit: it includes, among other things, new powers for councils to adjust tax and business rates, powers to protect local assets and powers for community groups to have more say over local planning issues and service provision. While critics have attacked the ideological underpinnings of localism as a smokescreen for neoliberalism, and as an excuse to withdraw state welfare funding, for others localism offers hope in strengthening local democracy, fostering civic engagement and facilitating local enterprise (Featherstone *et al.* 2011; Evans *et al.* 2013). Indeed, the green paper proclaims

[w]e believe that these changes will not only help produce a growing economy, but also heighten civic pride, with businesses and communities increasingly enabled to help themselves grow. (DCLG 2010, 9)

It would be difficult to argue that civic pride forms any kind of mechanism or policy *within* the new localism agenda, as though it were a legislative instrument for local governments to use or implement. Rather, as the quote above alludes to, localism has the potential to heighten civic pride, but also recast the meaning of civic pride as a kind of nostalgic, noble pursuit. For as some have contended, what is distinctive about the new localism agenda is that it appears to be harking back to a 'Victorian' spirit of civic pride; of a

time when cities and towns were sites of fierce municipal autonomy and local leadership (see Stanley 2011; Shapely 2012). The Victorian city represents, in this view, a model of civic pride and local enterprise, when local government was free from the grip of Westminster and when civic leaders had the ambition and purpose to expand the civic realm and reap the benefits of industrial expansion (Hunt 2004). The new localism is thus a kind of 'neo-localism' recast from the Victorian era, predicated on the notion that it is local, not central, government that can best represent and serve urban areas and revive civic pride. As Bennett and Orr describe,

The localism position might be said to position local government as a key vehicle for forming a sense of identity and direction for communities. This view incorporates a notion of civic pride, or what Joseph Chamberlain (1885) called 'local spirit' or 'municipal patriotism'. It implies a correspondence of interest between the institution and the locality, and emphasises councils' role in shaping identity, protecting local interests and expressing local values. (2013, 6)

As I have suggested in relation to urban regeneration, there is a certain narrative of revival and transformation here that helps legitimate, but also obscure from view, the ideological values underpinning this neo-localism agenda. As we read into the subtleties of this narrative, and the politics at stake, we should pay attention to how pride, as a word, and as a sentiment of nostalgia and aspiration, helps romanticise the government's intervention and steers the narrative in particular ways. For example, on criticising what he saw as a gradual decline in municipal power within Britain, the former Communities and Local Government Minister Eric Pickles championed localism in 2011 by suggesting,

It's no surprise that as powers have been leeches from local government, English cities have declined and stagnated ... Can you imagine Joseph Chamberlain sitting meekly filling in forms so that some remote civil servant could measure his performance? Everything that this Government is about is about putting power back where it belongs in City, County and Town Halls ... I am not advocating some kind of 'Back to the Future' municipal power. We need to go even further – 'Chamberlain plus' ... [We must also recognise that] the building blocks of great cities are strong and cohesive neighbourhoods – where people have a strong sense of belonging and pride. (2011, np)

It is not only important to note here Pickles' reference to pride as a 'building block' of great cities, but the way in which the speech subtly draws on the moral dimensions of pride to help authenticate the Coalition's intervention. For instance, Pickles makes reference to the legacy of Joseph Chamberlain as a figure of inspiration and someone that local govern-

ment leaders today should aspire to – intimating that Chamberlain's own 'pride' would not have stomached today's levels of central government oversight and bureaucracy. Pride, as I have shown, often places high ideals and expectations on an individual or society to live up to – it compels people to excel and aspire to more. Pickles thus states explicitly that '[w]e need to go further – "Chamberlain plus"', in effect pronouncing localism as not just a project of revival but of (superior) transformation. We might caution against reading too much into Pickles' intentions here, as though pride was worked into the speech explicitly. But we can at least infer here that, in subtle ways, emotions and emotive discourses can help make policy sound more persuasive and commanding, and draw attention away from other, less popular, issues such as austerity (Bennett 2013).

For, of course, the fundamental 'flaw' of the new localism agenda, as it currently stands, is that recent austerity measures have vastly limited the capacity of local government to embrace this historic return to civic pride, let alone sustain local services and welfare (Featherstone *et al.* 2012). At the same time the Conservatives are calling for 'Chamberlain plus' and 'putting power back where it belongs', they have drastically cut local government finances and forced local populations to pick up the pieces (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012). This illustrates an important point about how civic pride and localism are not simply 'willed in' by local government, but are dependent on, or rather built on the foundations of, the economic security and cultural vitality of places as self-governing entities. The real engine of civic pride in the Victorian cities was not simply a heady enthusiasm for municipal patriotism, but the immense financial power of urban elites who shaped (and profited from) this civic expansion – particularly the leading industrialists, businessmen and philanthropists who helped finance the new 'civic gospel' (Hunt 2004; Briggs 1963). It seems that for all the Conservative's nostalgia for reviving a lost heyday of civic pride in Britain, they have perhaps forgotten that it was as much the financial autonomy of cities and the localism of industry itself that enabled this civic expansion.

The Coalition's aim (now continuing under Conservative leadership) of reducing the budget deficit and cutting back on welfare spending has encouraged a backlash from many city councils across Britain, who fear that vital public services are under serious threat. In 2012, for instance, three northern city council leaders (representing Liverpool, Sheffield and Newcastle) published a letter to the government in the *Observer* warning of the dire consequences that could result from the scale and pace of austerity. It warned of how

the unfairness of the government's cuts is in danger of creating a deeply divided nation ... [w]e urge them to stop what they are doing now and listen to our warnings before the forces of social unrest start to smoulder. (*Observer* 2012, np)

There have been many other warnings and protests like this since, across the local authority sector (including, more recently, from Conservative-led councils), which have resonated with a much wider grassroots and trade union-led anti-austerity movement (see: Featherstone *et al.* 2012; *Observer* 2015). It would perhaps be romantic or beside the point to claim that this resistance to austerity shows a rising up of 'civic pride', but such acts do speak to values of civic solidarity and political defiance, which themselves speak to, if not represent, pride's resistive and aspirational qualities. The urban poor may not need 'civic pride' as much as they need good jobs and housing, but these kinds of messages are important because they let local communities know that their local government is (or appears to be) taking matters of social justice and welfare provision seriously. These messages may be ineffective in the short term in limiting the impacts of austerity, but may in the longer term serve to strengthen the reputation and political credibility of local governments as the flag-bearers and defenders of civic pride and local interests (Bennett and Orr 2013). What this suggests is that, while urban regeneration and localism provide contexts in which we might be critical or circumspect over the way civic pride is being mobilised and manipulated within local (or central) government, civic pride connects with multiple political projects and movements within local government that can be as much antagonistic and progressive in their outlook as they can be conservative or neoliberal, or used for political gain (Newman 2013). The geographical task is to understand how these processes are rooted locally and how local articulations of civic pride shape and reconfigure wider political processes and social outcomes.

## The pride of Nottingham

This case study of Nottingham demonstrates how we might approach civic pride empirically and examine it within the context of local policy and politics. As I outlined earlier, I employ here a discourse analysis of urban policy and local media in order to examine how and why civic pride both shapes and obscures the ideological politics of local government. The material draws from a wider PhD research project I undertook between 2012 and 2015 that explored the meaning and importance of civic pride across the city according to different stakeholders. For the purposes of this paper, I gathered a range of materials and documentary evidence covering the period of c. 2003–2015 – including

local policy documents, media releases, news articles and census records – and conducted a content search of pride and civic pride within this material. This involved searching for key terms such as civic and pride (and other related words and phrases), and examining their emotional and political meaning and resonance (or absence thereof) in the context of Nottingham and wider civic issues. My aim was to triangulate local government statements, strategies and policies that mention or explicitly use civic pride with the city's current political and economic development and trajectory, in order to assess how much (and at times how little) civic pride is being mobilised within local government and what its impact may be. As I show, this period of Nottingham's recent past and present demonstrates how a mixture of context, political expediency and entrenched civic values can produce multiple forms and expressions of civic pride within local government, which resonate with wider urban processes and struggles.

Nottingham is a city in the East Midlands region of England; historically a more provincial second-tier city, it is now officially recognised as a 'Core City'<sup>1</sup> within Britain's national economy. It has a city population of over 300 000 and a metropolitan population of over 700 000. The city is known, among other things, for its sport, associations with the legend of Robin Hood, 19th-century manufacturing prowess and a somewhat under-celebrated literary heritage (its associations with Lord Byron, D.H. Lawrence and Alan Sillitoe, most notably). 'The city has a long and proud history', claims the council's *Nottingham Plan to 2020* visioning strategy, but concedes 'poverty persists in many communities, side by side with prosperity' (One Nottingham 2010, 6). The strategy laments how 'for some, aspirations are low; too many people do not share the city's optimism' (2010, 6).

Inequalities have grown significantly since the economic downturn of 2008. Research from the Office for National Statistics showed that in 2010 Nottingham had the lowest average per-household disposable income level of all UK cities (ONS 2012). This is partly due to a high student population in the city, although post-recession labour market figures suggest that 'residents employed in Nottingham ... fell by 7% between 2008 and 2011, compared to a fall of less than 1% for all of the Core Cities' (ESRB [Economic Strategy Research Bureau] 2014, 4). The ESRB's report suggests that although Nottingham has emerging strengths in sectors such as healthcare and pharmaceuticals, bio-science research and creative industries, the city is stifled by so-called 'low value' employment concentrations (i.e. a lack of financial and professional sector work) and a marked lack of skills and qualifications.

The city has also had a reputation for gun crime and violence. In the early 2000s, a few fatal shootings and

an infamous *Panorama* television programme<sup>2</sup> about night-life in the city brought national media attention to Nottingham and left the city with the shameful title of 'Gun Capital of the UK'. It was shortly after, in 2003, that the council released their 'Respect for Nottingham' strategy, which aimed to tackle anti-social behaviour and other 'street crimes' within the city. The strategy aimed to 'clean up the City's streets, take an uncompromising stand against begging, street prostitution and drug dealing and restore civic pride in the City'. (Drug culture was cited at the time as one of the key causes of violence in the city). The Respect for Nottingham strategy (Nottingham City Council 2003), like the Liverpool Capital of Culture bid, does not define civic pride or explain why civic pride is in crisis or in need of revival in Nottingham – it simply assumes that by 'cleaning up the City's streets', civic pride can be restored. Critical geographers in the past have often interpreted this kind of 'cleaning up the city' rhetoric as typical of the neoliberal 'revanchist' movement that Neil Smith so powerfully described in the 1990s, although it is clear that by the mid-to-late 2000s, with Nottingham's economic ambitions at stake, both growing paranoia within the city council and genuine fears over safety in some parts of the city meant a new image and narrative for the city was needed – a narrative in which, one could say, pride needed to triumph over shame.

In response to concerns over the city's reputation, the Labour-run council began in c.2006 to rebrand the city with a new slogan of 'A safe, clean, ambitious Nottingham: a city we're all proud of' – a slogan that, in various formats and styles, became branded across the city, in policy documents, on buses, on street banners and on the council's website. Pride effectively became emblazoned onto the city. The Labour Party meanwhile, who currently have a strong majority in the council, have recently released their 2015 Manifesto with the leading tagline 'Proud of Nottingham: a positive politics from Nottingham Labour'. Typically, however, the Manifesto contains no definition or explanation of what 'Proud' means, nor does it describe any kind of civic pride policy (other than urging the residents of Nottingham to 'take pride in and responsibility for their neighbourhoods'); the Manifesto instead presents a much broader set of policies and aspirations for the city. As I noted earlier, pride is an emotion that can sometimes discourage or undermine people's willingness to question or criticise themselves and the values they stand for – by its own nature, pride tries to circumvent scrutiny by appearing to speak for itself (which, in the adjective form here, almost works as a speech act, or performative, to pronounce Nottingham as being collectively 'proud'). While the precise ruminations of how and why the word 'Proud' became so central to the council's strategy are unclear

without further empirical insight, it is reasonable to suggest that it helped (re)emphasise the council's political authority and integrity, and act as a visual signifier for the city's new 'positive politics'. Reports have suggested violent crime in Nottingham has fallen in recent years (*Nottingham Post* 2015), which may come as a relief as much as a source of pride for the council – but whether this reduction in crime has led to an increase in civic pride among local citizens is another question, particularly given the extent of Nottingham's deprivation and the recent impacts of austerity.

The *Nottingham Plan to 2020* states that one of the council's policy aims (headed under the theme 'Neighbourhood Nottingham') is for 'residents to be proud of their city'. Here they urge people 'to take more control over their neighbourhoods and the services that are delivered there, helping to rebuild civic pride and establish better forms of governance for the 21st century' (One Nottingham 2010, 44). Once again, however, civic pride is not explicitly defined – neither in terms of its relevance to Nottingham, nor how or why taking control of local services will lead to greater civic pride. Again, why does civic pride need 'rebuilding' and who will benefit? We can infer that the council are attempting to capture the spirit of the new localism agenda here (or indeed the Conservative's 'Big Society'), of rebuilding local democracy and empowering citizens to have their own role in making civic pride. But without any explicit definition or explanation of civic pride, the impact or role this may have may be missed and will be crucially unaccounted for; more cynically, it reveals how austerity is encouraging the mobilisation of potentially hollowed-out 'empowerment rhetoric' to justify the cutting-back of the welfare state – essentially asking people to 'do more' and rewarding them with 'civic pride' (Featherstone *et al.* 2012).

A key structural difficulty Nottingham faces is the gap between inner-city areas of relatively high deprivation, such as Sneinton and St Ann's, and areas of lower deprivation outside the official city boundaries, in suburban areas like Rushcliffe and Gedling. This situation is not uncommon for most metropolitan cities, of course. The council's *Growth Plan* (2012), which lays out the city's economic strategy for the next 5–10 years, describes this as a 'standard pattern in urban economics', and gives somewhat tentative hope in the possibility that Nottingham might overcome this (seemingly inevitable) structural bias:

This is a standard pattern in urban economics ... The ability [to significantly] change the structural composition of the city away from this model is limited, but the Growth Plan can attempt to address the barriers that exist for many Nottingham core city residents to access higher-skilled job opportunities, by targeting training and employment support at these residents. (Nottingham City Council 2012, 12)

Unlike the *Nottingham Plan to 2020*, which is a much wider-ranging policy document, the growth plan does not mention pride or civic pride, even if the language and framing of the document largely reflects the city's positive aspirations. The absence of the word pride in the growth plan is perhaps noteworthy – especially given how frequently the word 'Proud' appears in other council documentation and publicity materials. It perhaps indicates that the council is taking a more 'sensible' and exacting approach to the economy – reining-in more 'fluffy' emotional words to suit a more credible economic narrative. Or more simply, it indicates that on certain matters of public policy, explicit appeals to civic pride may not be necessary or advantageous for local government, and are made more effective elsewhere.

The growth plan does however refer to an influential public-private investment group called 'Invest in Nottingham'. Invest in Nottingham is an agency operating on behalf of the council, promoting creative enterprise in the city. One of its flagship projects has been to profile the 'Creative Class' in Nottingham, borrowing explicitly from Richard Florida's influential work in this area. The project highlights creative individuals and companies, and celebrates their role and contribution in the city:

Building on [Florida's] concept ... Invest in Nottingham ... established the Creative Class to profile and celebrate entrepreneurs and companies [that are] essential for the growth of the city's economy. They are powerful ambassadors for the city and great role models for the next generation of entrepreneurs. (Nottingham City Council 2012, 41)

Florida (2012) himself has not said a great deal about civic pride's role within creative cities, although he would probably recognise the value of these 'powerful ambassadors for the city' for building a strong 'people climate' in Nottingham and boosting the city's competitive advantage. Invest in Nottingham is also involved in the city's plans to develop a 'Creative Quarter' in the old Lace Market area of Nottingham – a project launched in 2012 by the council. To date, the council is aiming to source and match-fund up to £60 million through the central government's City Deal programme to invest in creative businesses and promote growth in this area of the city. Again it is not easy to ascertain what the precise role or importance of civic pride is for the Creative Quarter from any of the released documentation, although the *Growth Plan* makes reference to how it is an 'incubator without walls ... to lead the development of Nottingham's new economy and serve as an emblem of our long-term aspirations for the city' (Nottingham City Council 2012, 59). Whether the Creative Quarter turns into an incubator with walls for those 'who do not share the

city's optimism' and do not have the high-value skills to command or benefit from this new creative economy is another question.

Although the Creative Quarter plans are still unfolding, it is clear that the city council is aiming to leverage the civic-mindedness of creative individuals to help promote the city and legitimate investment in this area (Boyle 2011). Are these the kinds of Victorian-style civic leaders the Coalition had in mind to take on the mantle of localism and revive civic pride? We perhaps should not assume that it is civic pride necessarily that is driving the Creative Quarter's aims or aspirations, nor indeed that creative individuals are necessarily 'proud' of their city. But to the extent that this a project based in promoting Nottingham's image, securing the city's competitive advantage among other Core Cities, and marrying creative and cultural enterprise with new growth aspirations, it may be worth stopping to ask what kind of civic pride narrative emerges from this project and whether it will help legitimate or undermine the role of the council in 'shaping identity, protecting local interests and expressing local values' (Bennett and Orr 2013). The council has given its reassurance that the Creative Quarter will target training and employment for 'core city residents', though one cannot help but wonder whether there might be a certain hyperbole to the rhetoric – especially given that the Lace Market area already contains multiple high-end businesses and residential properties and, in spatial terms, is to some extent insulated from Nottingham's ailing inner-city (Boland 2010).

The impacts of austerity meanwhile have also been a major issue in Nottingham. In a similar vein to the aforementioned councils in northern England, the Labour Party have been highly vocal about the cuts. In a public engagement release for a recent Budget Consultation (2015/16), for example, the council website states:

the Council believes cities like Nottingham are being treated unfairly by the Government ... Nottingham has lost more in revenue spending power per household than places in the affluent south. (Nottingham City Council 2015)

Friction between the city council and central government has surfaced a few times in recent years – in 2013, for instance, the council was accused of spending local taxpayers' money to fund party-based union activities and propagandise against the cuts (one accusation was that the 'Proud' slogans used by the council were too similar to Labour Party communications). In 2011 the leader of the council Jon Collins rebuffed earlier accusations of the propagandising by saying 'I'm damn sure that at Nottingham City Council there is absolutely no political gesturing in the very tough budget decisions we've had to make as a result of the government's savage cuts' (*The Commentator* 2013, np).

As I have argued, the push towards rediscovering a 'Victorian spirit' of civic pride in British cities through localism has been largely short-circuited in recent years by austerity. But as councils like Nottingham, Sheffield, Liverpool and Newcastle are showing, austerity is not happening without a fight. The emotive, moralistic language being used within the anti-austerity movement illustrates once again how emotions play a role in dramatising public policy debates and legitimating ideological positions: the 'savage' cuts, places being 'treated unfairly', the 'positive politics' of the Labour Party being pitted against what the three northern leaders' letter describes as 'a brand of Conservatism that has no social conscience'. Such sentiments may tell us more about the combative nature of party-based politics than they do about civic pride, but as I have argued, such displays of solidarity and defiance from local leaders, while probably limited in halting the broader impacts of austerity, will surely bolster the political credibility (and negotiating hand) with which local governments might represent or mobilise civic pride in the future. In Nottingham's case, the council's rather bolshie stance to austerity may well be the kind of 'index of credibility' (Thrift 2008) it needs to secure future votes in the city and drive forward investment projects like the Creative Quarter.

In briefly examining how Nottingham City Council have negotiated issues of crime, urban regeneration and austerity in recent years then, it is possible to show how civic pride operates across a range of political values and projects, geographic scales and emotional registers, and that the inherent antagonism between pride and shame has an important, yet at times unrequited, bearing on wider social and economic struggles. The telling contrast between the entrepreneurial vision being put forth for the Creative Quarter and the apparent scepticism within the council to overcome Nottingham's ('inevitable') structural inequalities perhaps shows us that civic pride is not separate from, but is productive for, a neoliberal urban agenda; but as the council's spirited response to crime and austerity show, civic pride can also be a force for resistance and transformation, in both its message and through the actions it inspires. As it stands, however, the scripting of civic pride as a policy ambition, and the use of the word 'Proud' as an anchor for a new (anti-Conservative) 'positive politics' in Nottingham, perhaps needs much more fleshing out and direct demonstration of its meaning, use and value if it is to be productive and empowering for ordinary citizens.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that civic pride has been under-theorised in geography and that the emotional meanings of pride need to be better understood. In

response, I have examined what civic pride means, the different ways it can be conceptualised and mobilised, and its role within British urban policy and cities more generally. There is a rich history connected to civic pride, representing the different ways people promote and defend local identity and autonomy. But it is also a highly ambiguous term that can be constructed and mobilised in different ways to suit different purposes. While civic pride can help sell the virtues of urban regeneration and appeal to a unified image of the city, at the same time it can steer attention away from the inequalities associated with urban regeneration and legitimate often speculative neoliberal investment (Boyle 2011). The 2011 Localism Act meanwhile has provided a new legislative framework and policy agenda for increasing local autonomy and rebuilding civic pride in British cities. But the recent impacts of austerity, and the potential romanticism associated with reviving a Victorian model of civic pride that is arguably out of sync with modern global economies and local governance structures, may, in the short term at least, undermine the potential for localism to radically transform or increase civic pride. At the same time however, the anti-austerity movement within local government demonstrates how civic pride can also be shaped by, and constrained within, a much more antagonistic political landscape, from which more progressive civic agendas may emerge, based in values of social justice and civic solidarity. Civic pride has been an enduring feature of British cities, but it can form and mobilise out of past, present and future conflicts and struggles – exposing how often, where there is pride, there is also shame (or a distinct lack of pride), which should encourage us to consider what civic pride may be hiding or battling against as it seeks to unite the city.

This paper has sought to complement but also challenge existing literature on cities and neoliberalism by filling in some of its emotional gaps and showing how emotions configure, but also obscure, the ideological politics of local government. My case study of Nottingham suggests the beginnings of a much wider research agenda around civic pride and its role in local government. We might, for example, consider how Nottingham's civic pride differs or shares experience with other cities across Britain, how competition between cities affects civic pride and indeed whether there is a distinctly 'British' approach to civic pride. We could also explore how individuals and communities perceive and mobilise civic pride at more localised scales (neighbourhood or community, say), and how civic pride becomes contested within and beyond local government (see Darling 2009; Jones 2013).

Emotions are a challenging area for urban geographers because they cannot so easily be aligned to a straightforward theory of political-economy, historic materialism or social justice. They instead form something of a 'hidden centre' within urban policy and

political discourse; a set of complex, under-the-surface energies and value systems that are central to how policies and politics are dramatised, narrated and legitimated; challenging because they are often communicated through the actions and practices they inspire rather than through any direct words or images that attempt to explain their meaning. Emotions are something that urban geographers should continue to engage with because they shape how cities are imagined, experienced and governed, and underline the values for which local governments stand.

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## Notes

- 1 'Core City' status is an official status designated to members of the UK Core Cities Group – a local government leadership body that represents the ten largest regional economies in England, Scotland and Wales, outside of London.
- 2 BBC Panorama, 'Cldnt Give a XXXX 4 Lst Ordrs?', broadcast 6 June 2004 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/panorama/3742481.stm>) Accessed 9 January 2016.

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