

Place-based Food Systems Conference

Richmond, British Columbia, Canada

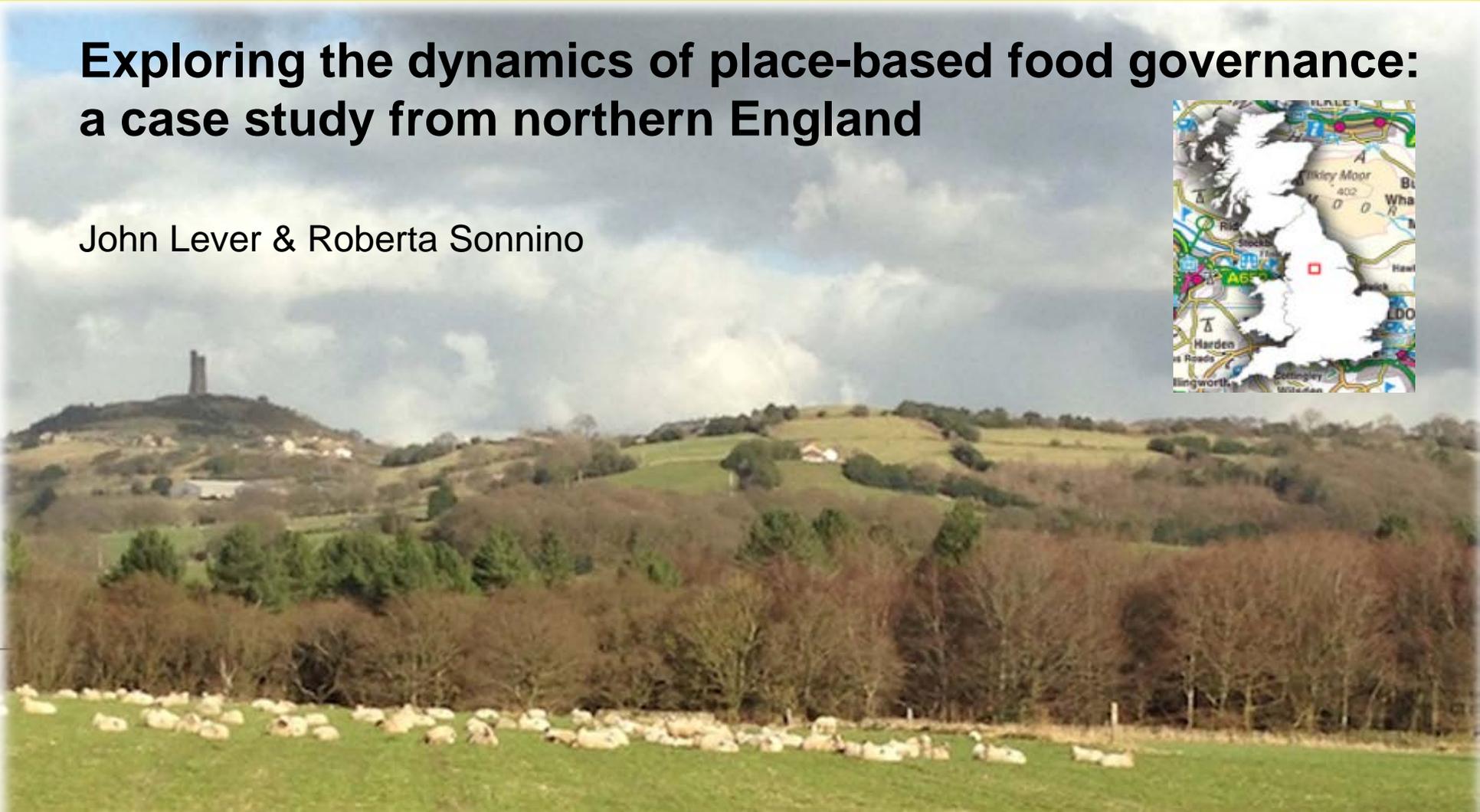
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Exploring the dynamics of place-based food governance: a case study from northern England

John Lever & Roberta Sonnino





Outline

- In this paper, **I explore the factors that potentially enable but also constrain the expansion of the relational networks** on which **placed based food governance** potentially stands...
- **Theoretically**, I draw on **insights from figural sociology...**
- **Empirically**, I draw on two periods of research: **1) 2014-15, and 2) 2016-2018**
- I conclude with **some reflections on what has been learned** from the research process and how this can inform the work of practitioners.



Place as historically constituted...

- There is widespread agreement amongst scholars that **place is historically and geographically constituted** -- both as a site of meaning and as a tool with which **the powerful can manipulate present and future action** (Creswell (2004)).
- However, the **interplay of global forces and local issues has remained largely absent** from accounts of **place-making** (Jackson et al. 2009).
- In this paper, we look at the issues involved through an exploration of **local food governance on the vertical and horizontal dimensions** in a region of **northern England**.





Insights from figural sociology...

- From a figural perspective, **the actions and ways of working that emerge within a governance context in particular places** are always **dependent on networked forms of agency and the asymmetrical power relations** involved across the **global-local** divide.
- On this account, the position of an established group within a figuration is **strengthened not simply because of an accumulation of *power*, but because of an increase in the number of coordinated positions** within a figuration.
- It follows that ***power* can be equated with control over the social and natural environment** and with the attempts of competing social groups to control this relationship (Lever and Smith 2013).



Local food governance in Kirklees...

- Located in northern England, **Kirklees** covers **408.6 km²** & has a population of **431,020**
- A **diverse urban-rural** region **socially and economically**, to the west **Kirklees** is bordered **Manchester** and to the north by **Leeds/Bradford**, where that some of the borough's **most deprived areas are located**.
- On average, **residents in urban north Kirklees live up to 4.9 years less** than residents in the more **rural and prosperous parts south Kirklees**, which has a long established agricultural and horticultural sector
- This is the context in which Kirklees Public Health launched its ***Food 2020: From Farm to Fork Strategy*** (Kirklees 2014) to improve the **health** of local people, the functioning of the **local economy** and the **environment**.

1st period of research 2014-15 – fostering horizontal collaboration?



**food
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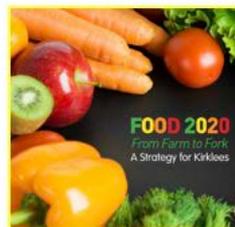


 **Soil Association**
FOOD FOR LIFE
CATERING SUPPLIER

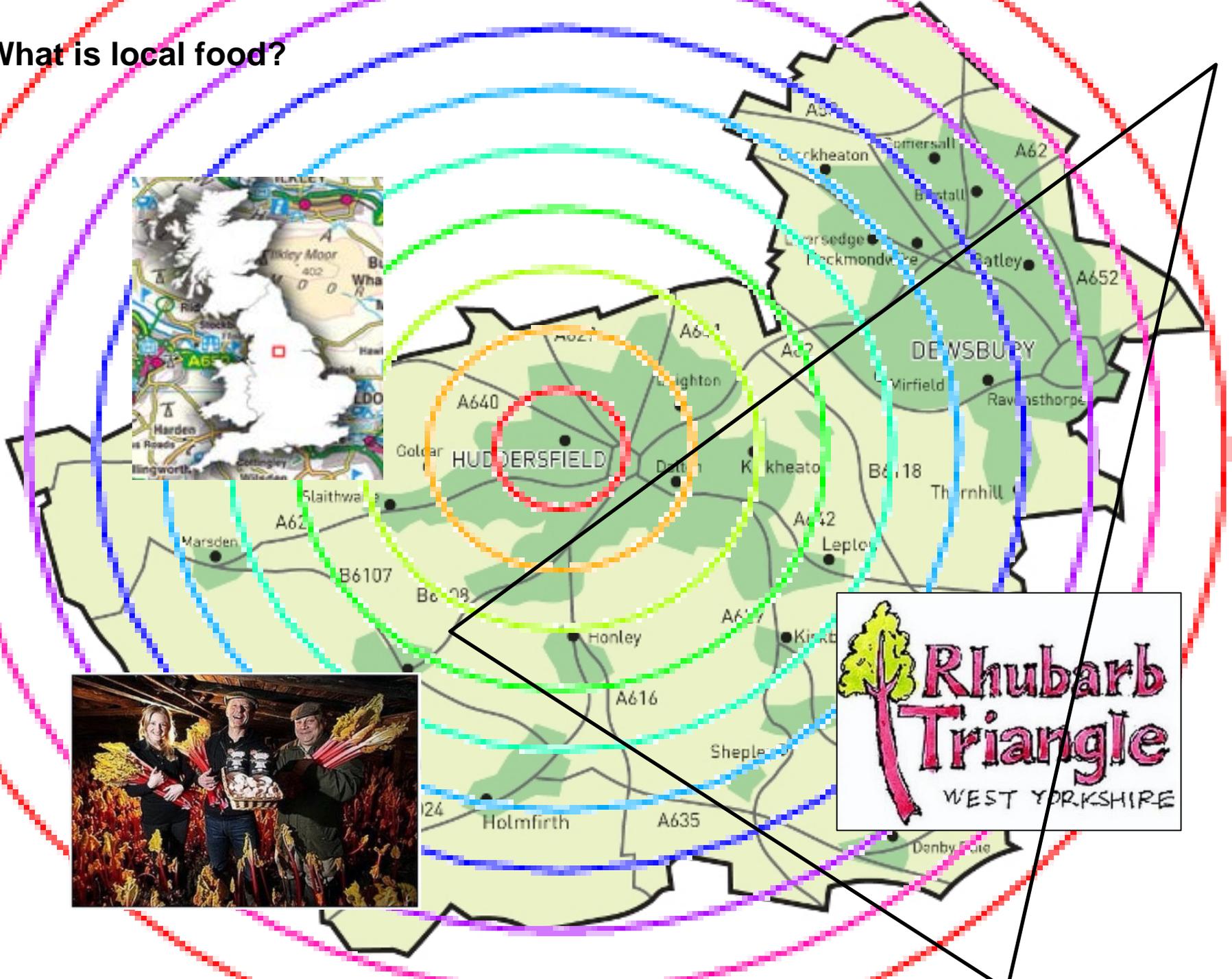


Benefits of growing food in Kirklees...

- *‘So growing food is one outcome, the food value, but you’ve also got the people who are employed on the land, so you’ve got local economic development potential... you’ve also got the social aspect of getting people with perhaps mental health issues onto the land, and then you’ve got things like managing land better... So you’ve got win, win, win.’*



What is local food?





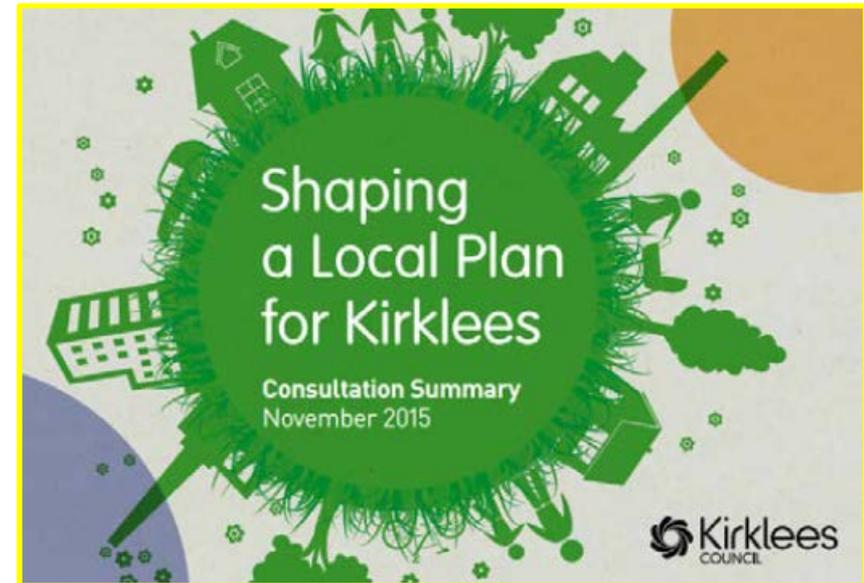
Local growers, producers and retailers...

- Local producers argued that there needs to be much more discussion about sourcing and procuring ***'local food products'*** through local supply chains if a more resilient local economy is to emerge.
- Even if such products are slightly ***'more expensive'***, and the ingredients are from slightly ***'further afield'***, it was argued that they would be ***'better for the local economy'*** and ***'intangibly good for the area'***.



Tension between **health and well-being** and **economic** strategies...

*‘In terms of the **health and well-being strategy**, food’s right up there as... really important, but it’s got to be there in the **economic side** as well and reflected in your **planning policy**.’*





Food for Life & institutional provision...

- Despite the intensity of local food debates during the first period of research, **Kirklees was having great success growing food** *in* and procuring food *for* local schools through the **Food for Life Partnership**.
- To achieve a **gold award**, schools must be acting as **hubs for local communities**: all food served on site must be **healthy, ethical, and use lots of local ingredients**; it must also be **animal and climate friendly**.
- **More than 60% of pupils must be choosing** to eat school meals, be actively involved in the life of a local farm and in the planning and growing of organic food (Jones 2018).



Many benefits of working through FfL...

- **Enhanced awareness of the benefits of locally grown and organic food; significant economic benefits** in the form of new or enhanced business opportunities and job creation.
- **Wider community benefits – improved educational performance** associated with **better-quality diet; increasing job satisfaction for teachers**, as well as **wider engagement in community events such as markets**.
- For **national government**, there was the added benefit of **improved tax revenues** and **reduced welfare expenditure** (Jones 2018), *all of which suggest the benefits of relocalizing regional food supply chains through the development of a local food partnership were worth pursuing.*



But expanding these ways of working through partnership work was not straightforward...



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- There was a **severe lack of understanding amongst key players** about what was happening in **Kirklees** and of what could potentially be achieved through greater dialogue, understanding and collaboration.
- ***It is ‘important to find out what food ‘Kirklees... are using in the schools and the public-sector.’*** (Large farm)
- ***‘So it depends on what you are actually wanting, are they wanting to improve the health in North Kirklees, or are they wanting to build economic resilience from the agricultural and horticultural small business sector [in the rural south]?’*** (NFU Representative)
- But overall, there is **not much difference between competing world views** of those working to further **local food sustainability** and those working in the **global food system**, just different and often competing understandings & policy priorities...

Second period of research 2015-18 – vertical governance dominates!

Corporate power & supermarkets...

- The issues involved came to the fore during the **second period of research**, when funding for FfL ended and attempts to develop a local food partnership were suddenly dropped by Kirklees!
- Such were the **policy priorities/ funding cuts** emanating from **national government** during this period, **Kirklees Council** felt compelled to tackle local **food sustainability** by taking **corporate funding** to address food poverty through the **sharing of supermarket food waste, for example.**
- This arguably **individualized a range of food problems** linked to food poverty rather than **addressing food sustainability through progressive place-based policies** facilitated through FfL and greater collaboration, for example!



Concluding thoughts...

- **Established actors** in the 'global food system' **strengthen their power** and hold over socio-ecological relations **by controlling access** to relational networks/figurations of food provisioning and consumption – **vertical policy integration dominates!**
- Even when there is **very little difference between the worldviews of competing social groups**, this **hinders attempts to make connections to places not as distant as once thought** to facilitate the development of a **place based food system**.
- A **place-based approach uncovers the relational nature of the local**, thereby helping us to **identify the political and socio-ecological policies** that are needed **across place and scale to facilitate systemic change within the food system**
- We have **advised local practitioners/ policy makers to work more closely with competing social groups and to discuss food in different contexts** to generate greater understanding of what is possible...





Paraphrasing Bill Rees from yesterday...

- *Place based food systems are potentially a buffer and insurance policy against the worst aspects of global change...*

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Thanks for listening!

