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Multiple accountabilities, institutional legacies and policy disruption: territorial governance controversies

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ABSTRACT

Fiscal purging, austerity urbanism and 'push' politics are altering the nature, form and contours of city-regional governance. Of central concern to this paper are the interconnected issues of democratic engagement, accountability and legitimacy. The renegotiation of systems of city-regional governance are challenging traditional normative principles and engendering their reinvention. From an English perspective, important concerns have been expressed by a variety of actors concerning the accountability of city-regional systems of governance, with evidence disseminated in the popular media in late 2016 highlighting widespread conflicts of interests, and the severity of potential abuses of power and misappropriation of public resources. Investigating recent English practice, including the introduction of both soft and hard spaces of governance (e.g. Local Enterprise Partnerships and Combined Authorities, respectively), we trace the evolution of city-regional governance and accountability mechanisms in Greater Manchester and Greater Birmingham. The former can be characterized as benefiting from a legacy of institutional memory, embedded patterns of working and cross-party and cross-sector collaboration, whereas the latter has been prone to fractured political relationships, policy disruption and more fluid territorial configurations. Empirical insights are analyzed through a post-positivist interpretive framework, which draws upon the collation and analysis of case specific documents and 47 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with a broad range of state and non-state actors over the period May to November 2016. The study sheds new light on intersects between formal and informal systems of governance and accountability mechanisms.

Key words: accountability, institutional legacies, territorial governance, city-regions, United Kingdom

INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with the interconnected challenges of democratic engagement, legitimacy and accountability through the evolution of city-regional governance in England.[1] The research intends to speak to a broader international audience in view of a dominant global trend of institutional restructuring and the introduction of new modalities of urban governance (OECD 2006, OECD 2015, Ahrend *et al* 2014), which is often closely associated with a desire to reduce public sector expenditure whilst simultaneously maintaining and/or enhancing the provision of services (Romzek 2014). Moreover, such trends are often accompanied by a neoliberal discourse emphasising the need to shrink the size of the state and encourage private enterprise (Kitson *et al* 2011, Colomb and Tomaney 2016).

Over recent decades city-regions have emerged as key sites of processes of state rescaling which constantly restructure the contours of urban governance. Despite the notion of city-regions being mired by conceptual debate and fuzziness (Jonas and Ward 2007), Rodriguez-Pose (2008) identifies the core city linked functionally with a hinterland as 'the minimum common denominator of virtually all definitions of a city-region' (p.1027). For the purposes of this paper, we understand city-regions as non-monolithic (Ache 2000) entities that typically, although not

[1] This paper develops ideas and material presented at the European Urban Researchers Association conference held in Warsaw, June 2017.

exclusively, extend beyond the administrative boundaries of single local authorities (Hildreth and Clark 2005). Involving multiple localities within a functional geography, city-regions are often scripted in policy discourse as 'economic drivers'.

There is an emergent policy consensus that identifies city-regions as the preferred scale for economic governance, which is derived from the view that they exhibit strong economic flows and connections, including transportation links and travel-to-work patterns. City-regions have, therefore, been described as performing a 'locomotive function' (Scott and Storper 2003, p.581): the 'regional motors of the global economy, that is, as dynamic local networks of economic relationships caught up in more extended world-wide networks of inter-regional competition and exchange' (Scott *et al* 2001, p.16).

In the aftermath of the global economic and financial crisis, many countries introduced austerity measures, which typically resulted in fiscal purging and reduced spending on public services. As a result, expectations of delivering more outputs with less available resources became the norm, 'amount[ing] to more than a recycling of new public management diktats' (Lowndes and Gardner 2016, p.358). In this scenario of austerian politics (Peck 2014) that tend to push downwards budget-cuts as well as new responsibilities, local government has become one of the most affected by the crisis (Bailey *et a*l 2015). Alongside, there has been a search for alternative sources of finance and resourcing from non-public sources (Cochrane 2012). City-regions have therefore been encouraged to find new solutions and adopt new approaches, including a focus on securing maximum returns on investment, sharing risks and actively pursuing growth (Lowndes and Squires 2012). These trends have opened-up new spaces for the involvement of non-state actors in the governance, delivery and management of 'public' services (Pierre 2011). Nevertheless, such a situation has engendered a 'push' politics, where responsibilities, risks and costs are pushed down from central government to lower levels, such as city-regional configurations, without provision of adequate funding, making it all 'about 'others' pay' (Peck 2014, p.20).

Derived from our interest and concern with the interconnected challenges of democratic engagement, legitimacy and accountability, the focus of this paper is on city-regional governance in England. In particular, we investigate institutional and policy change since 2010, examining the practices of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), which are 'locally-owned' entities, chaired by a business actor and led by a governance board typically comprising different business interests, local authorities, a university representative and other civic actors. Since their inception, numerous concerns have been expressed with respect to democratic credentials, transparency and accountability of the LEPs, including to whom they are accountable to (Rossiter and Price 2013, Chadwick *et al* 2013), which 'remains shrouded in mystery' (Pugalis and Townsend 2013, p.711). In 2016, these issues boiled over when a variety of media outlets reported on widespread conflicts of interests, and the severity of potential abuses of power and misappropriation of public resources. In parallel with some international trends that show declining public trust in government, LEPs in an English context are at the centre of territorial governance controversies.

Investigating recent English practice, including the introduction of both soft and hard spaces of governance (e.g. Local Enterprise Partnerships and Combined Authorities, respectively), we trace the evolution of city-regional governance and accountability mechanisms in Greater Manchester and Greater Birmingham. The former can be characterized as benefiting from a legacy of institutional memory, embedded patterns of working and cross-party and cross-sector collaboration, whereas the latter has been prone to fractured political relationships, policy disruption and more fluid territorial configurations. Empirical insights are analyzed through a post-positivist interpretive framework, which draws upon the collation and analysis of case

specific documents and 47 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with a broad range of state and non-state actors over the period May to November 2016. The study sheds new light on intersects between formal and informal systems of governance and accountability mechanisms.

In theoretical terms, the paper utilizes applies Romzek's conceptual framework of informal accountability in multi-agent collaborative settings (Romzek *et al* 2012; 2014). While Romzek's framework is embedded in the settings of nonprofit organizational networks, the particular value of our contribution is rooted in city-regional governance settings. To date research has been dominated by examinations of formal accountability structures and dynamics. Therefore, our research analysis provides unique insights on understanding of informal aspects of accountability, especially in view of inter-organizational and interpersonal behaviours of network governance actors. Research findings are anticipated to be of interest to both public and private policy stakeholders.

The rest of paper is arranged as follows. In section one, after initially introducing the debate on democratic engagement, and discussion on legitimacy and accountability we present Romzek's theory of informal accountability. In section two, we explain the research approach and provide some background to the case studies. In section three we discuss our findings in relation to the core elements of Romzek's framework. In the final section, we conclude with an alternative model of the dynamics of informal accountability.

THEORY, LITERATURE, AND PRESENTATION OF THE MAIN CONCEPTS

Our understanding of the topic is informed by various strands of literature, namely (1) debate on accountability, legitimacy and transparency, (2) accountable city regional governance and lastly, (3) formal and informal accountability and informal accountability dynamics (Romzek *et al* 2014).

Accountability, legitimacy and transparency debate

There is limited consensus regarding the concepts and practice of accountability, transparency and legitimacy (Steets 2010; Schillemans and Bovens 2011, Bovens *et al* 2014, Dubnick and Frederickson 2011). The result being what Bovens refers to as the construction of 'ever-new shades of meaning' (Bovens *et al* 2014, p.2). Understandings of accountability, transparency and/or legitimacy are complex; a matter of individual perception within a highly contextualized process. The involvement of an elaborate mixture of non-state actors in public service delivery has led to a number of challenges that were less apparent in more traditional systems of governance. Consequently, accountability seen as a backbone of democratic governance has become the subject of reconsideration (Vu and Deffains 2013, Holmen 2013), and 'new forms of horizontal accountability are being created to fill up the gaps in democratic control caused by the horizontalization of government' (Michels and Meijer 2008, p.169). As responsibilities are dispersed across 'many hands' (Sullivan 2003, Thomson 1980), this can result in a blame shifting game (Hood 2011) or buck-passing (Mulgan 2003), involving inchoate lines of responsibility (Gray and Jenkins 2007), competing interests (Ingram and Schneider 2006) and multiple accountabilities (Liddle 2016).

In this complex scenario of multi-agency collaboration and decision-making, practice often 'seems more puzzling and ambitious than often presumed in the literature' (Willems and van Dooren 2016, unpaginated). Hence, clearly identifying and assigning responsibilities and

contingent accountabilities is extremely complex (Sullivan 2003). In this context, traditional institutions of representative democracy have been undermined (Norris 2014). This raises an ongoing dilemma about the implications of limited democratic accountability and legitimacy that no longer appear to be suitable (Norris 2014; Papadopolous 2007; van Kersbergen and van Waarden 2004).

Representative democracy is built on the basis of elected officials representing a group of people, which differs from direct democracy within the context of which people decide directly. Manin (1997) lists four main principles of a representative democratic regime which include appointment by election at recurring intervals, undertaking the trial of debate of public decisions, freedom of expression and political orientation without being control-subjected of governors and maintaining a level of independence from the electorate's wishes. Manin highlights that representative government features election as the central institution and argues that 'politicians generally attain power because of their media talents, not because they resemble their constituents socially or are close to them. The gap between government and society, between representatives and represented, appears to be widening' (Manin 1997, p.204).

Accountable city-region governance: Local Enterprise Partnerships and approaching the research

Accountable city-regional governance is a topical issue. Concerns of limited accountability within the environment of the LEPs have been captured by the public media which recently expressed a number of concerns which reveal lack of transparency and understanding of the decisions taken, undermined accountability and prioritization of private interests rather than acting in the interest of people (Svedin 2012) and value for money (NAO 2016). Consequently, LEP board actors have been publicly accused of allocating the contracts to their own companies (Faulkner *et al* 2016, Bristow 2017). At least 276 cases were identified, which equate to over £100 million of public money. Faulkner *et al* (2016) argues that LEPs were unable to provide information regarding at least 3.7 billion they have been given, which constitutes nearly a half of the total of money allocated to all LEPs under the Growth Fund scheme. As further argued, not only the actors were not monitoring the situation properly or at all, but also were surprised that this activity is part of their remit. Consequently, Barkham argues that 'LEPs do all their work on aspirations for economic growth without considering the environment or social impacts but also without any public input. There's no consultation, there's no accountability' (Barkham,2016, unpaginated).

Application of Romzek's model to city-regional governance

Formal accountability structures include a set of institutional arrangements that mainly include rules and procedures such as statues, laws or regulations. These are communicated and enforced by the state or bodies that act on behalf of the state (Vu and Deffains 2013). Formal approaches of ensuring accountability involve standards and reporting relationships, and oversight. On the contrary, informal accountability is linked to activity of media outlets, NGOs, institutions of independent character, social networks or civil society and highlights the value of interpersonal dynamics (Romzek *et al* 2012). The main premise of informal accountability are shared norms of interaction, which develop over time and through networks (Romzek *et al* 2014).

Despite the fact that research to date has emphasized the formal aspects of accountability, 'which only constitute a partial picture of the tangled web of accountability relationships'

(Romzek *et al* 2012, p.443), understanding of importance of informal elements is on the rise (see for example the work of Vu and Deffains 2013 or Romzek *et al* 2012; 2014). Romzek *et al* (2012; 2014) takes particular interest in researching informal accountability in collaborative settings and present a model of informal accountability dynamics. Research builds on the conceptual model of informal accountability developed by Romzek *et al* (2012; 2014). We apply the broad categories of the Romzek's model, which are shared norms, facilitative behaviours, challenges and manifestation of accountability relationships to city-regions of Birmingham and Manchester.

The model used, pictured in Figure 1 below, presents dynamics of accountability and the factors that affect it. Romzek *et al* (2014) list *shared norms*, *facilitative behaviours*, *challenges* and *manifestation of accountability relationships* as the main features of the model that interact with one another in an iterative way and are mutually dependent. Authors developed the interdependencies of the model as the process is iterative, cyclical in nature which means that effectiveness of the process flows depend on achieving a virtuous cycle of the constituent factors (Ansell and Gash 2008). Shared norms represent the informal rules that guide individual behavior in a group settings and provide basis for understanding of acting in social situation, *facilitative behaviours* involve to the factors that assist and ease the process of informal accountability and thereby, help to accomplish the tasks set, *challenges* refer to the factors that test the ability of the process to be effective which leads to sanctions or rewards as an end result of *manifestation of accountability relationships*. The first two components of the model, namely shared norms and facilitative behaviours are presented as mutually reinforcing elements in relation to generating rewards and sanctions of informal accountability. In fact, their significance is paramount- they lay the foundations for constructing informal accountability (Romzek *et al* 2014). The model also presents a number of pressures and challenges that are also embedded within informal accountability framework. These factors such as staff turnover, hierarchy, financial pressures, competition and turf battles, rhetoric-reality competition, and informal and formal accountability tensions have the potential of having detrimental implication on efficiency of the network as a whole. Model concludes with the component of manifestation of informal accountability dynamics that take the form of sanctions and rewards.

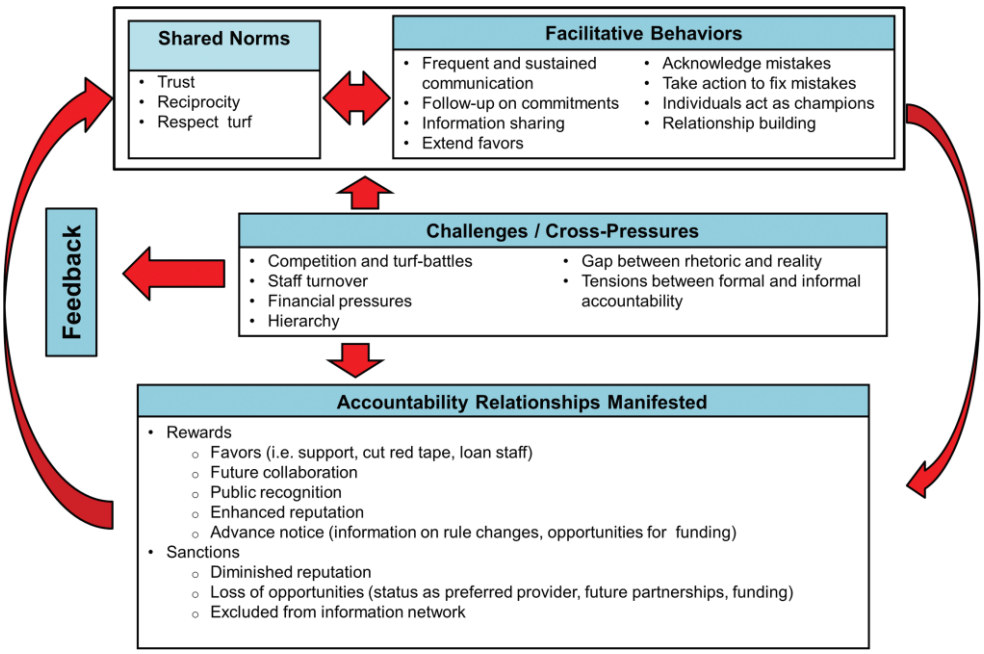

Figure 1. Model of dynamics of informal accountability developed by Romzek et al (*2014)*

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is framed by a qualitative approach, which aims to understand and explore in depth the meaning individuals assign to a particular phenomenon in the subjective way (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 2005, Crotty 2007). A qualitative approach is a dominant paradigm for investigating aspects of accountability. Yang (2014) argues that accountability is a deeply embedded concept, which is characterized by intangibility, which makes it particularly applicable for the qualitative approach. Moreover, accountability is a dynamic phenomenon within which individuals not only create the accountability structures but also are limited by it. Fieldwork was conducted over the period May 2016 to November 2016 in two English city-regions: Greater Manchester LEP (GM LEP) and Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP (GBS LEP). Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews of approximately 45 to 60 minutes were conducted with a range of city-regional actors, including private and public sector representatives from the GM and GBS LEPs, city leaders, representatives of growth and marketing-related bodies and local councillors who are members of Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). In total, 47 interviews were conducted: 26 related to GM and 21 to GBSLEP. Analysis of documentation, including local assurance frameworks and minutes of meetings, was also a useful source of information.

The case studies were selected as they share some similarities as well as differences. Each LEP is varied in terms of their legal structure, priorities, size and other factors related to their geography, history and working patterns (see Table 1). Importantly, both, GM and GBS have established Combined Authorities (CAs) as part of their city-regional governance apparatus. In GM, the geography of the LEP and CA are coterminous, whereas this is not the case in Birmingham/West Midlands.

GM often serves as a test-bed for new policy initiatives, innovations and experiments and has access to senior government ministers. Indeed, GM city-regional governance is viewed positively across central government, who typically hold 'team Manchester' in high regard. Moreover, other places – both nationally and internationally – look at as they seek to learn lessons and emulate practice (Ravetz and Warhurst 2012). Additionally, Deas (2013) points out to the response from one of the respondents of his study who stated that 'we had LEP before the LEPs were even thought of' (p.13). While being at the forefront of the devolution agenda, GM has also faced criticism relating to openness and transparency within the deal-making negotiations (Jameson 2016).

The grounds for selecting the GBSLEP is based on the proactive approach in relation to strengthening accountability structures and implementation of extra accountability mechanisms. IPPR research findings (Broadbridge and Rikes 2015) recognized the efforts of GBSLEP in encouraging private sector and community involvement while at the same time clearly defining the governance structure and accountability mechanisms. As discussed, GBSLEP was only 'one of only a handful' (Broadbridge and Rikes 2015, p.16) of LEPs that actually put aspects of transparency and accountability at the forefront of its agenda.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section provides a discussion on the findings of the study in relation to dynamics of informal accountability. It takes the model developed by Romzek's *et al* (2014) as a benchmarking line, and checks for factors developed by the authors against our empirical examples. Research findings are then complemented by additional proxies- the factors that we find applicable when elaborating on the informal accountability of the English city-regions. The discussion is presented in four sub-sections which are shared norms, facilitative behaviours, challenges and manifestation of informal accountability.

Shared Norms

Literature is in agreement about the importance of trust as an essential element in the collaborative, multilayered relationships of any informal structure (see for instance Hahn *et al* 2006, Vangen and Huxham 2014, Lowndes and Skelcher 1998). When elaborating on significance of trust, Ansell and Gash (2008) refer to it as a long-term commitment that is an essential requisite to attain outcomes in a collaborative manner. Aligned with a number of studies (see for instance Ansell and Gash 2008), trust building in the context of collaborative networks is challenging. The results of our study reveal that the process of gaining trust and building real relationships is long-term. As seen later in the analysis, the theme of trust is overarching in our analysis an cross-cuts across a number of other aspects of informal accountability investigated. While local authorities within GM have matured as a collective entity since 2010, GBSLEP must still 'learn to walk before we can run' [B22], according to one interviewee. Especially, the city region of Manchester has been emphasizing strong relationships linked to the informal character of linkages based on trust which is illustrated in the comment below

> 'when we all push together we get this result. We got the Combined Authority, we got the city GM, we got the devolution and I think that's the lesson that other places are finding it hard to catch up because trust and relationships take time. You can't just say, "Oh that's a really good marriage, I'd like that. Would you like to marry me?' The fact that you can see it working as a model doesn't mean that you can immediately adopt it. Whereas in Greater Manchester we had years, probably too many years, of talking and not necessarily doing a great deal but building up that knowledge and that trust' [R14].

Facilitative behaviors

Romzek's *et al* model (2014) cites *frequent communication* and *information* distribution as crucial elements of the framework. As seen in the literature (see for instance Emerson *et al* 2012), the factors of communication and distribution of information are linked to the engagement, and are therefore linked to the concept of trust, as pictured by the following quote that comes from the respondent of our study:

> 'if all of the board members, recognised that they are representing not just their own organisations but also sectors and therefore, you know, if there was scope for them to try and manipulate things for their own unfair reasons or to promote a particular company or whatever, or activity, at the expense of the strategic objectives, instead of the board as a whole, they would be frowned upon and it would not happen. And I think we gonna give some credit here to Andy Street, who is the chair of the board […]. So, engaging with the LEP I have never felt that it's a group of old boys, you know, old boys network who are just looking after themselves and their own interest or looking to promote some sectors or communities at the expense of others' [B06].

However, Emerson *et al* (2012) argues that face-to-face dialogue is 'advantageous at the outset', but does not function as a crucial element in facilitation of the process when in a situation when 'conflict may be low and shared values and objectives quickly surface' (p.10). Romzek's *et al* model (2014) refers to the two elements, communication and information distribution, as outward-oriented, meaning that efforts are mainly directed at keeping the general public informed, not the LEP board members themselves. However, we claim that orientation towards people from outside of the governance framework does not rule out the importance of communication within the framework and is equally important importance. Indeed, data reveals that sub-boards as well as additional groups that have been charged with particular tasks communicate internally within the members of those groups (or sub-boards) as well as externally with the board and the chair, as illustrated by the quote below:

> 'So there are three different levels of communication; you've got the subgroups focusing on the different areas where there's a number of representatives around the table, but there is that sort of two way/three way dialogue making sure that authorities feed into a number of different processes' [R19].

The link between accountability and transparency has been widely discussed in literature, also in the context of imposing sanctions on stakeholders (see for instance Koppell 2005). In his five-fold typology of the dimensions of accountability Koppell (2005) suggests that *transparency* should be perceived via the lese of 'the literal value of accountability' (p.96), a key apparatus that allows for assessing performance of the organization. Significance of transparency cannot be undermined as it 'is is also an end in itself. Belief in the openness of government to regular inspection is so firmlysanction ingrained in our collective consciousness that transparency has innate value' (Koppell 2005, p.96). Main value from this dimension of accountability stems from the fact that transparency leads to regular questioning and review of governance actors, and concerns revealing the truth related to the performance of the organization. Importance of communication and information distribution is linked with the transparency of actions.

> 'I don't think that is deliberate on LEPs to hide things. It is just that the way they work, a lot of the information is hidden. And in a world that I work in where we are supposed to be clean, open and transparent, because of the perceptions that people have that the decisions are being made behind the closed doors, in smoky rooms etc, it would help if the LEPs were more open' [B06].

While actors at both, Manchester and Birmingham recognize the importance of transparency in holding LEPs to account for its actions, they admit that transparency can still be referred to as 'work in progress' [R13]. One of the public sector representatives on the main LEP board claims that 'public sector side sees the accountability as almost our responsibility to make sure that the information is out there' [R14]. Both of the LEPs are enlarging the base of transparency mechanisms which already consists of external and internal informational events, publication of the information on the LEP website, monthly newsletter, public annual AGM Assembly in terms of Birmingham city region as well as public hearings of the LEP meetings in case of Manchester.

Romzek's model (Romzek *et al* 2014) highlights influential role of *relationship building* and *champion behaviors* in the entire process. Both of the components are very applicable to the settings of both, Birmingham and Manchester city-regions. Champion behaviour is mainly demonstrated via the presence of the chairman who is the leader of the network and skillfully ensures the inclusivity of the process and equal participation in collaborative settings. Literature cites leadership as a key factor in relation to collaborative working (Huxham and Vangen 2000, Harris 2004, Emerson *et al* 2012). Ansell and Gash (2008) refer to the leader's function as to

'steering them [stakeholders] through the rough patches or the collaborative process' (p.554) and puts it in the context of being a crucial factor in building trust, especially in the context of asymmetrical distribution of power and resources and low willingness of participation in the network. In line with Keohane (2003), our findings suggests that individual characteristics of fair leader are of paramount importance and are linked to strengthening accountability. The leader also generates crucial implications on the personal interest in the successful collaboration and its accomplishment. The chairman sits at the top of the structured pyramid and adds a layer of extra accountability to the operating systems due to the fact that 'he is very transparent and so far as it can be, and, you know, he is very open to challenge' [R11]. Moreover, as pictured in the quote below, the chairman performs the function of placing of informal sanctions, as explained by one of the respondents of the study:

> You know clearly the chairman is entitled to say so sorry you know we feel that you are behaving inappropriately and you are now off the board and there is no, because there is no limited company there is no directors, there is no employee contract, it's a sort of virtual LEP, there is no employee on contract, in that sense you know it's not difficult to say sorry you have not been invited to any more meetings [B03].

As far as the remaining elements of the Romzek's framework are concerned, analysis of the data have found no applicability of the element of *extending favours* on the dynamics of the accountability. Likewise, no acknowledging of mistakes, taking actions to fix the mistakes has been identified whereas in contrast those factors were identified in Romzek's model *et al* (2014). Continuing the analysis data reveals that *commitments* and following up on activities is very important for the LEP actors and it serves as an important element in the relationship and trust building process. This is highlighted by one of the respondents who states that

> 'we have learnt an awful lot in a relatively short period of time. I think we've learnt how to find and support the right board members, make sure that they stick to the commitments that they made when they joined' [B04].

Interestingly, the respondents of the study in Birmingham city-region have almost automatically made a reference to Manchester and its *history of collaboration* as a crucial element of facilitative acting and thereby, setting it as an example of an entity that features collaboration and of pioneering functions. Trajectory of history of collaboration is a well-known defining feature of successful outcomes in collaborative settings (Christiansen and Lægreid 2007, Mattessich and Monsey 1992). Ansell and Gash (2008) highlights the importance of history of previous cooperation between entities and argue that lack of history of collaboration or a track of conflict leads to creation of a 'poisonous' environment (p.553).

Challenges to informal accountability

It is widely understood in literature (see for instance Page 2004, Romzek 2014; Romzek *et al* 2014) that malfunctioning of informal accountability is normally linked with development of the conflict within which factors such as multiple stakeholders, organizational mission, culture, overlapping accountability relationships and priorities functioning as main potential conflict-triggers. Margerum (2002) denotes that the conditions of historical trajectory of collaboration or antagonism between the stakeholders either significantly hinder or ease cooperation.

Particularly, the challenge that is reinforced as the findings of the study relate to *competition* and *institutional turf*. When analyzing the aspect of competition, our data from the English city regions seems to be aligned with the views presented by Romzek *et al* (2014) that despite

collaborative character of working, individual organizations strive to retain organizational autonomy and identity. This is aligned with the opinion of one of the respondents of the study,

> 'I think it's important that we work together as the three LEPs and that we retain at least now our distinct approach to the individual areas so Black Country, Greater Birmingham and Solihull and Warwickshire LEP. So I think it's a time for concentrating on the alliance within the 3 LEPs but also retaining our own identity' [B15].

Emerson *et al* (2012) argues that one of the rationale factors beyond collaborative action is interdependence- a situation where stakeholders cannot achieve the goals by individual actions. However, it is worth emphasizing that despite the common goal, entities 'are fiercely independent about their own cities and their own boroughs. They will fight their corner if they don't think something's right' [R1], as summarized by one of the study respondents. This view is supported by another interviewee who stated that

> 'in lots of other cities the leaders of vying city councils argue with each other publically in the press. People often talk and say it's amazing how Manchester is so unified on things, it's not always unified, there are lots of debates had but they don't happen in public. So when the final presentation either to the public or particularly to government is made you imbue the people you are speaking to with a huge amount of trust because here comes a group of people who've sorted all their differences out and now come to us with a united vision for what it is they want to achieve' [R22].

The fact that stakeholders have to compromise and negotiate the representative role to parent organization as well as the new entity (Liddle 2016) effectively situates them in the scenario of dichotomy within which they have to balance (sometimes conflicting) interests (Ingram and Schneider 2006). Koppell (2005) explains that there is the risk that by trying to accommodate various accountability demands, the organization might intend to be accountable in the wrong sense, or in every sense. As further warned by the author, 'organizations trying to meet conflicting expectations are likely to be dysfunctional, pleasing no one while trying to please everyone. Ironically, this may include failures of accountability- in every sense imaginable' (Koppell 2005, p.95). Therefore, Koppell (2005) presents the typology of multiple accountabilities disorder (MAD) which refers to accountability in multiple senses as result of the organization is subjected to the actors being displeased. Our study presents different attitudes to this conflict of the entities- while Birmingham city regions presents a still partially fragmented picture of unity, Greater Manchester presents a different standpoint featuring lack of 'washing their dirty laundry in public' and takes a very unified approach. The study reveals that in case of Manchester institutional differences and organizational turf do not come in the way in this process as the wider good of the region, not the good of individual entities is sought.

Next element of the informal accountability, *competition*, takes the form of competition between the local authorities, and it does not refer to the competition of individual firms in the region per se. While the competition can also be fierce, local authorities as well as the companies present within those authorities play fair and help one another to achieve higher rates of growth as the recognition that the bigger economy and bigger market implies more benefits to everyone. As pictured by one of the respondents,

> 'we all want the size of the cake to be bigger than taking a bigger slice of a smaller cake I guess, recognizing that it is not a zero sum game, so that is why our strategy at [names company] is about helping the region become more successful (…) if I can grow the economy there is more for all of us'

Staff turnover which according to Romzek's study has been related to as 'an important element of instability' (Romzek *et al* 2014, p.829) that can weaken informal accountability has in fact been identified by our study results as a positive factor in the dynamics matrix. As LEP board members function within the LEP structure voluntarily for a limited time period, this helps to 'draw a new blood into the LEP body so we avoid just getting the usual suspects' [R16]. Hence, limited membership terms that the board members are subjected to strengthen accountability and ensure the flow of new ideas and perspectives. One of the respondents highlighted the value of membership renewal by stating that

> 'it's refreshed in the sense that we have different people who are on, different times, people come in and go, so, you know, I think actually, in refreshing it, in refreshing their cycle, it does actually keep the cutting edge' [B04]

Surely, changes to the board can also pose some challenges to the functioning of the entity such as temporary instability or limited efficiency during the initial phase of forming or storming in relation to the involvement at the entity (Tuckman 1965). However, developing maturity and increasing ability and effectiveness of the network actors is a natural part of the process. The painstakingness and diligence of this long-term process of developing maturity is illustrated by one of the respondents who stated that

> 'One of GM strength is that when we talk about Manchester we refer to Greater Manchester historically being metropolitan area of the ten districts of Great Manchester. There is historical, there is the legacy thing of working in partnership so it's not something that happen overnight it develop over a good few years, and I would always say that one of the things with being within Great Manchester is the fact that people do work together and that they can see that something benefits the whole of the conurbation and they would then try to make whatever works for wider area' [R21]

However, while membership renewal is perceived as mainly a positive change to the informal dynamics of the informal accountability, negative implications ~~to it~~ are also in place. In this respect the findings of our study are parallel to the findings of the ones of Romzek *et al* (2014) who state that relinquish of individuals who perform the role of the champions is particularly difficult to handle and leads to a number of uncertainties, as in the words of one of the respondents who argues that 'So you've got a very very charismatic, influential chair there, who drives the LEP and single handedly ensures the LEP has a place and I think taking that away, you lose most of that' [B14]. Strengths of champions are manifested via a number of platforms and include functions such as outside network representation and promotion, in-roots to the government, provision of inclusivity, driving the entity forward.

Data reveals relatively little relevance of the aspects of *financial pressures* and *policy funding constraints* on the dynamics of informal accountability. While limited funding surely is a challenge in the austerity milieu and local authorities have been severely affected by the public sector cuts and consequently are encouraged to find alternative ways of funding, these exogenous factors are taken as facts and not challenged. They are not believed to impact on the informal dynamics of the collaborative arrangements as LEPs were set up with no core funding. As one of the respondents argues, 'when they started there was no funding at all. There is now funding through various routes, both our own funding and also Local Growth Fund. I think they've taken on a broader role than they had originally' [R12]. The research concludes that while lack of financial capacities is a factor that LEPs had to deal with since their inception, it cannot be analysed in the light of informal accountability as LEPs right from the start were funded minimally. However, analysis of the LEP scenario are aligned with the belief of Romzek *et al* (2014) that funding constraints have the potential of exacerbating competitive pressures as individuals can be more likely to be inclined towards achieving benefits for the entity they

represent and have been voted in by, and not the wellbeing of the entire city-region that they are a part of. This in turn can limit positive implications on informal accountability and can damage the dynamics of informal accountability.

However, the results of the study reveal that that limited public expenditure and resources can function as triggers to substantial public service restructuration as

> 'we are in an environment now where local government has to innovate, has to do things differently. They haven't got any bloody money anymore, you know money is being taken away, they have got more demands on their services. And they are having to think differently, they are having to rip up the role book, in how they have always delivered their services. And redesigning, you know, public sector reform, how they use their property, how they engage with the public' [B20]

As far as the challenges to informal accountability are concerned, *hierarchy*, *gap between rhetoric and reality* as well as *tensions between formal and informal* accountability are not of particular applicable to the English city-regions. Instead, the study reveals that *potential of vested interests* as well as *political persuasions* as challenges to the informal dynamics of accountability.

We add to the existing knowledge by arguing that that *political tensions* are capable of reducing efficiency and consequently, negatively impacting on the informal accountability dynamics. Analysing the data from Birmingham city region it is evident that although diminishing, political persuations are still in place. A common view is that political aspects are becoming to be of secondary importance and over the years the role of political persuasion has reduced is in place. This changing situation, and therefore two opposite ends of the spectrum while analyzing the importance of political fractions has been illustrated below:

> 'some local authorities still display a very immature approach and at the end political aspects tend to get in the way at the cost of efficiency'[R12] ,and

> 'So, what you will have in the context of the Greater Birmingham LEP is that you have largely a major metropolitan area such as Birmingham which is Labour-led, Labour formed, you have Solihull which is Conservative led but I think there has been a good coalescence of common interest around economic priorities that I haven't seen any kind of party, political, over the party of political tensions emerge'[B04].

Moreover, we put the argument forth that *potential of vested interest* is a very significant challenge to the informal dynamics of accountability and can have a very negative impact. This is highlighted in an explicitly truthful manner by one of the respondents who stated the following:

> 'it's just important to get the right people. No, it is important to get the right people now, I mean the LEP's great in, you know, you are on the board and you have access to information, you get networks to people and all that stuff but actually you are there to *do* something important, and so, it's important that number one, that's what you are there to do, not to serve your own ends. But number two, that you have got the qualifications and credentials in order to enable you to do that, so I think it's appropriate' [B20]

Our data analysis argues that the risk of can be mitigated by a number of factors such as strong and fair leadership, history of collaboration, or integration in a wider framework of governance. While the first two elements are described elsewhere in this paper, the latter argument in particular is reinforced and illustrated by the happenings at the GM LEP. GM LEP is not a standalone entity and it operates on the back of the Greater Manchester machinery. It discharges its functions effectively, and works very closely with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Manchester Growth Company. Positioning of the LEP as one of the actors in the

governance machinery gives it multiple protection layers when attempting to secure democratic accountability and legitimacy.

Manifestation of accountability relationships

All of the elements of informal accountability dynamics impact on the manifestation of accountability relationships in mutual way. Romzek *et al* (2014) argues that their display takes the form of rewards and sanctions. The former is linked with the following behaviours: possibilities of future collaboration, public recognition, enhanced reputation and advance notice. The matter of sanctioning becomes blurry when speaking of arrangements within which private and public coalitions take the lead (Philp 2009) as presented by Papadopoulos (2010) who beliefs that

> 'with transparency (and with public debate) there is no guarantee for sanctions: accounts may be given, discussion may follow, and then nothing happens. Hence, even though transparency and publicity are often cited as a remedy for accountability problems, although necessary, they are not sufficient (p. 1034)'.

As Przeworski *et al* (1999) argue, 'governments are 'accountable' if citizens can discern representative from unrepresentative governments and can sanction them appropriately, retaining in office those incumbents who perform well and ousting from office those who do not' (p.10). Consequently, the traditional way of sanctioning would allow for 'rewarding' the actors with extended office period whereas 'sanctioning' would apply to removing them from the office for the future term. When applied to the empirical settings of Manchester and Birmingham city-regions none of the factors listed above (possibilities of future collaboration, public recognition, enhanced reputation and advance notice) are of particular importance to the dynamics matrix. Instead, rewards in the informal accountability model are mainly manifested via the means of overall improvement of the area, its success and growth. The rationale of involvement at the LEP board and therefore the rewards this involvement brings are presented in the following two quotes below:

> 'I genuinely believe that everyone who sits around the table does it out of willingness, of course they think that they will benefit individually in their businesses and but hopefully not in a direct way but more like an indirect way and actually, what they want their area to do better and that will reflect on their organization or their businesses' [R09];

> 'But I think there is a high level thing here, which is why do I give up so much time for my business to do this role. It is because we want to improve the lives of the people that we serve' [B19].

As far as the sanctions go, Romzek *et al* (2014) cites diminished reputation, loss of opportunities and exclusion from the information networks as the main negative consequences. Our study results reinforce Romzek's *et al* (2014) findings and also make a significant link to the literature in place. Peer pressure and monitoring, as well as the subsequent fear of facing reputational sanctions are of prime importance in terms of evaluating actors in collaborative arrangements. In particular, LEP board members relate to the concept of accountability via the 'accountable by reputation' [R12] mantra. 'I think part of that as well, is the fact that am a business man, and my reputation is everything for me as I'm sure it is for the other directors. I think that's always kind of taken into account' [R19]. This finding has been further elaborated on by Scott (2006, p.180) who stated the following rationale behind sanctioning of stakeholders in collaborative surroundings:

> The fear of 'naming and shaming'yields disciplining effects on them because 'free riders' or unreliable actors risk loss of reputation in the network, and their partners will not continue to trust them in the future, or might even ostracise them'.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The chart illustrating the core concepts of informal accountability dynamics that we developed is presented in the Figure 2. below. Refinement of Romzek's model that served as basis for analysis proved to be a useful explanatory device for analysis of the dynamics of informal accountability. While the skeleton of our analysis is parallel to the ones of Romzek *et al* (2014) and includes *shared norms, facilitative behaviours, challenges and* resulting *accountability manifestation*as the main elements of the informal accountability dynamics, more in depth look proves that our model differs to its counterpart. Application of the model to empirical surroundings of Manchester and Birmingham city regions where coalitions of private and public actors are united in governance reveals the need for extending the Romzek model by *history of collaborative* (facilitative behaviour section), *potential of vested interest*, *political persuasions* and *novelty of the entities membership renewal* (challenges/cross-pressures section) and *overall interest in wellbeing of the region* and *personal contribution* (manifestation of informal accountability dynamics). Furthermore, our model extends the model by history of collaborative working as one of the new factors. Following the Romzek's model, our analysis presents *shared norms* that include trust, reciprocity and respecting turf in network arrangements as pivotal in the dynamics of informal accountability. Empirical analysis of English city region confirm the known in literature finding that trust is of crucial importance in terms of successful dynamics of informal accountability networks.

Romzek *et al* (2014) argue that shared norms and facilitative behaviours are reciprocal and reinforcing, and constitute the backbone of analysis of informal accountability dynamics. While our views are aligned with Romzek's *et al* (2014) standpoint, we find it of particular value to emphasise the crucial role of trust in this informal accountability model. Literature shows that there are many benefits of trust-driven actions and behaviours (Vangen and Huxham 2014, Lowndes and Skelcher 1998). Our study confirms the belief that *trust* in governance arrangements and trusting people who are involved in those structures can mitigate against self-interest and domination by a select group of elite interests. This is aligned with the view of many scholars (see for instance Dahlstrom and Lapuente 2017) who argue that trust performs a preventive function when it comes to the opportunistic behavior and acting in self-interest. Our study reveals that while the hypothetical risk of vested interest is always in place, the history of collaboration, strong sense of unity and high levels of trust in governance structures can help to reduce this risk. Our data analysis establishes personal satisfaction of contribution, and general interest in wellbeing of the region as the extended proxies to the rewards of the accountability relationships. These mutually reinforcing factors have been especially explicit in case of the Manchester city-region which is capable of being reunited behind one common vision and speaking with one unified voice, despite the tensions that occur in the background and not discussed publicly. Study has found no relevance of extending favours as an element resulting in accountability manifestation whereas factors of potential of future collaboration, public recognition, and enhanced reputation and access to information, while present in analysis, are of smaller significance than the remaining contributions which were important in the base model produced by Romzek *et al* (2014). Likewise, the sanctions in place are mainly limited to risking loss of reputation which is of very high importance to the governance actors.

Comparing with the Romzek's *et al* (2014) findings, loss of opportunities and exclusion from the information networks are not applicable to our study results.

Empirical data confirms the already known fact that creation of the GM LEP as well as the GMCA ultimately are a result of *history of working together*, and the resulting, and positions history of institutional legacy as one of the crucial components of the informal dynamics. Greater Manchester LEP (GM LEP) is a natural extension of the already practiced geography and a continuation of previously practiced arrangements. Entities grew organically in an informal way until LEP and the Combined Authority were established. The GM LEP is very deeply embedded in the structures that are present- not only it has been promoting cooperation between the 10 constituent Local Authorities, but it has been a partner within a framework of other organizations, the Greater Manchester Family and the Combined Authority and which gives extra layer of protection from acting in self-interest. On the contrary, lack of legacy of institutional memory and operation within new boundaries that have not been practiced before is a feature of the GBS LEP. It lacks history of cooperation, which make is more prone to fractured political relationships, policy disruption and more fluid territorial configurations. This paper claims that as a result of lack of institutional legacy and continuous political disputes GBS LEP has not allowed itself to build trust in the governance structures. Therefore, responding to the accountability pressures from both the government and the public, the GBS LEP has decided to implement a number of mechanisms that aim to strengthen the accountability, transparency and legitimacy of the entities. Our empirical findings do not consider elements that have been identified by Romzek *et al* (2014) as important in the informal accountability dynamics such as extending favours, acknowledging of mistakes, and taking action to fix them as the applicable to our settings and therefore removes them.

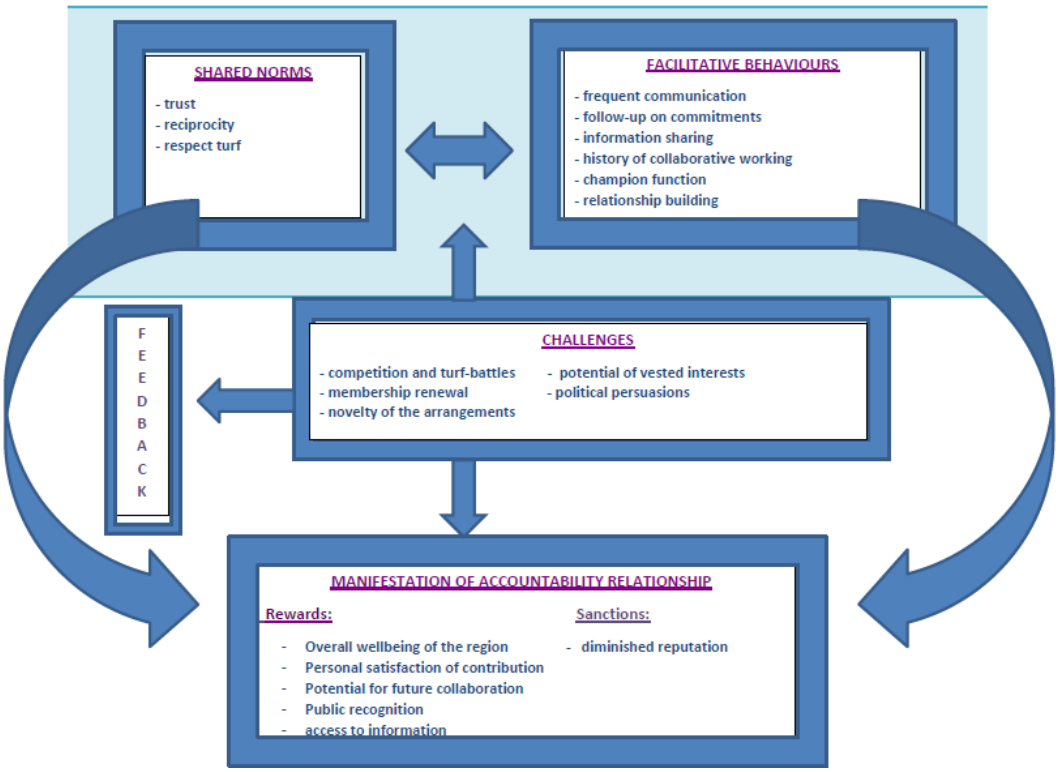

Figure 2. Chart illustrating elements informal accountability dynamics, our refinement of the Romzek's *et al* (2014) model

CONCLUSION

As a result of the the paradigmatic rearrangement in organizational and structural character of the public sector within which hierarchical and sluggish bureaucratic coordination giving way to more flexible and market-orientated forms of governance, accountability has become opaque and blurry. Non-traditional, polycentric entities reflect a number of features that are different from the ones presented by the hierarchical organizations, and which accordingly present new accountability challenges worth investigating as the traditional accountability mechanisms when applied to the contemporary settings provide inherent limitations

This research is in response to the growing concerns of accountability of contemporary governance, which examined the evolution of city-regional governance and accountability mechanisms in England. By investigating accountability practices adopted by Greater Manchester and Greater Solihull LEPs, we have analysed the intersect between formal and informal systems of governance and accountability mechanisms deployed in each case. The particular value of this research stems from exploration of less-formalised nature of accountability in the network governance settings. The analysis we produce refine the conceptual model of informal accountability proposed by Romzek *et al* (2014) which set the empirical surroundings of their study in the contracting for nonprofit settings. Thereby, the study concludes with a number of the factors that should be considered especially when analyzing the informal dynamics of accountability that not only can only be applied to the nonprofit settings, but also to the wider governance framework as it refines the benchmark model.

Analysing characteristics of English city-regions against the Romzek *et al* (2014) model, our findings indicate a number of overlapping findings with the 'parent' framework. Our data also enriches the model by introducing new dimensions that are applicable to the private-public governance settings. By doing so, our study contributes to filling in the significant gap in knowledge. Not only it makes a contribution by analyzing the under-covered aspects of informal accountability dynamics, but also it provides a framework for analysis in the network governance milieu where private and public actors collaborate with the aim goal of delivery of traditional public services and economic growth delivery.

We believe that the conclusions of our study not only provide interesting insights into the understanding of current dynamics of informal processes, but also are a starting point for further analysis of dynamics of informal accountability in a number of network governance surroundings. Particular strength of our findings is the model we developed which finds its applicability in governance settings that benefit from private-public collaboration. By developing a refined conceptual framework we contribute to the existing knowledge that to a great extent lacks understanding of informal aspects of accountability. Likewise, it is not abundant in understanding the concept accountability in empirical settings which also presents the reader with significant contribution.

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