



*Liquid modernity as an analytical framework: a study of isolated northern towns*

BRIGHT, Janis Blackmore

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Liquid modernity as an analytical framework: a study of isolated northern towns

Janis Blackmore Bright

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## **Abstract**

To live in an isolated town in recent years has been to experience contradictions. The quality of life in such towns can be high, and their popularity is shown by often strong in-migration. But this can co-exist with low wages, a 'hollowed out' and ageing population, high house prices and deprivation.

This study examines the situation of isolated towns in the North of England. It seeks to fill a 'gap' in knowledge concerning such towns, which are an under-researched academic area. It contends that the towns have been subjected to competitive forces without the tempering social action that other areas attract.

The thesis uses Zygmunt Bauman's liquid modernity concept to examine the case of selected towns in the context of New Labour's 'third way' politics. It focuses on the towns' governance authorities and their relationship to regional and central government. Housing and prestige projects are used as exemplars. Bauman contends that we have moved into a new phase of postmodern capitalism in which the 'winners', whom he calls tourists, dominate by controlling time. The 'losers' – vagabonds – are trapped in the old paradigm of space, meaning location and distance. In a world of globalisation and opportunity taking, the vagabonds must act as consumers but the choices they make are futile.

An interpretative approach with semi-structured interviews and three case studies is applied. The findings offer significant insights into the recent experience of town authorities. The conditions of liquid modernity and the competitive political ethos are found to be significant driving forces for respondents. Geographical isolation is significant, but is also interpreted as a social construct in which isolated towns are characterised as 'far away'.

Analysis using the tourist and vagabond ideal types is extended to apply collectively to the town authorities, revealing unequal relationships of power. The study seeks to establish a conceptual location for town authorities within liquid modernity, and offers developments to Bauman's concept in terms of methodology, typologies and analysis.

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## **Candidate's declaration**

I declare that this thesis, 'Governance and housing policy: a case study of isolated Northern towns', is the direct result of my own work except where referenced to others, and that all references cited have been appropriately acknowledged in the work. This thesis does not include work that forms part of a thesis presented for any other degree.

Portions of this thesis were published as conference papers and presentations as follows:

*Governance and smaller towns: their response to political change, demographics and housing markets since 1997*

Paper for Housing Studies Association annual conference 2008

*Responding to a shifting policy agenda: the case of small towns*

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*Need or opportunity? Exploring councils' approach to housing strategy*

Paper for Housing Studies Association annual conference 2009

*Does geography matter in a liquid modern world? Reflections on Bauman in a study of isolated towns*

Paper for Housing Studies Association annual conference 2010

*Reflections on Bauman's liquid modernity as an analytical framework: a study of isolated towns*

Paper for European Network for Housing Research new housing researchers' colloquium 2010.

## 1 Introduction

To live in an isolated town in recent years has been to live with inescapable contradictions. The quality of life can be high and such towns are desirable places to live, often with strong in-migration (Powe, Hart and Shaw 2007, p1). And yet the signs of low wages and poverty in many towns are very evident from a walk down the High Street or a visit to an event. A trip to the nearest city at any time over the last decade, to see new buildings, artworks, thriving high value shopping centres and populations of younger working people, would serve to reinforce the feeling that our towns were slipping further behind in the prosperity stakes.

These are only surface impressions. But an observed anomaly has often served science well in prompting investigation. My own curiosity about these phenomena crystallised into a feeling of ‘something here is not right’ when I saw the newly launched Northern Way economic and spatial planning blueprint (Northern Way Steering Group 2005) and saw for the first time that document’s ‘purple haze’ map of the North’s city regions (Appendix 5). As the map plainly showed, large areas of the North had been left blank because they were not considered part of the new city regions policy and therefore would not receive the concentrated funding and other resources anticipated.

A sense of social injustice began to stir, yet the contradictions remained. Some towns are undeniably wealthy and largely free of deprivation. Others may seem prosperous, having low unemployment for example, but their inhabitants work long hours in unskilled, insecure jobs. City areas may themselves have a two-speed economy with extremes of poverty and wealth (Cole, Hickman and Reeve 2004). This study therefore came about as an attempt to uncover what had actually been happening to Small and Medium Sized Towns (Smestos) in recent years, and whether they had indeed suffered disadvantage compared with other urban areas. In practice, it became a much deeper analysis once a theoretical framework and methodology was adopted, as this chapter explains.

Smesto is a term coined by the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (2006, p27) for its research on freestanding towns with rural hinterlands. This study comprises a group of these types of town in the North of England, where the Northern Way covers all three northern regions. A contention is that Smestos are a policy subject that has been largely overlooked by national government. They have therefore been subject to strong national competitive policies with little in the way of tempering social

investment. A further contention is that efforts to analyse the challenges Smestos face have been hampered to date by sparse academic research on the topic.

The northern regions have performed less well than the English average over the last decade and the gap in prosperity appears to be widening (see, for example, Dorling et al 2007, Dorling 2007). Within the northern regions, rural areas containing substantial towns have performed less well than average as measured by gross value added (Rural Development Programme for England 2007). Development of the UK government's city regions approach risks further marginalising areas that are more geographically remote, according to Ward (2006). The current study includes the interlinked areas of economics and housing, using housing as a sectoral example of the changing situation of Smestos. The period being examined, beginning with the advent of New Labour government in 1997, includes changes in demographics and local government, and the rise of regional politics and organisations. Fieldwork was completed in October 2009 so does not take account of the effects on Smestos of the change of UK government in 2010.

The selected approach to the study is an analytical framework based on the 'liquid modernity' thesis of Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman 1998, 2000). Liquid modernity is a phase of late capitalism with characteristics of globalisation, competition, mobility and uncertainty. Bauman argues that we are currently living in a time when people can be divided into the 'winners' who have shaken off geographical limits and instead live by controlling time (an ideal type whom he calls tourists) and those who are still trapped by geographical space in terms of location or distance (vagabonds). The second group are said to be forced to make consumer choices without having any real control – they are 'fated' to make choices.

After an outline of the main issues and the analysis methods, the study moves on to set out the findings concerning what responses local governance authorities are able to make to the emerging political and economic situations in their main towns, and what responses they believe they have at their disposal. Here, the differences in the way town authorities present their situation and their possible responses are examined.

The study claims contributions to academic knowledge in areas of theory and methodology, as well as offering insights into policy and practice. A particular aspect is to examine whether Bauman's ideal types, designed to analyse individuals' situation, can be applied in a collective way to Smesto authorities.

## 1.1 The key arguments of the thesis

Towns and the district authorities that govern them offer an interesting area for research. They are a somewhat neglected area academically with few studies published, and as yet no agreed definition. Though there is a large national and international literature on the related topics of urban studies, territorial rescaling and institutionalism (see Chapters 2 and 3), there appears to be only one comprehensive published study of market towns (Powe Hart and Shaw 2007).

Government has similarly tended to overlook towns as a policy topic. Frost and Shepherd (2004, p351) for example criticised the New Labour government for its ‘chaotic conception of market towns ... in bundling together towns with dissimilar functions, characters and histories into a common grouping linked only by their population size.’ That is despite their importance as service hubs and as a focus for wider regeneration (Taylor 2008) and their substantial collective size: the narrowly selected group of towns considered in this study has some 1.1 million inhabitants in total (ONS 2010).

Smestos are also in a somewhat novel situation. They are generally regarded as desirable places to live, yet many have also been the focus of regeneration programmes in recent years and the decline of some in terms of retail and industry has been documented (Powe, Hart and Shaw 2007, Maff 2000, Taylor 2008).

Smestos are different from either large conurbations or fully rural areas. They are urban in nature, suffer urban problems, and yet hold attractions similar to those of rural areas. Their connections to city conurbations vary, but in many cases are less direct than those existing within the urban core. They should therefore be regarded in policy terms as something different, but the inability as yet to agree on a definition has contributed to their lack of political profile.

There is considerable quantitative and some qualitative evidence of the difficulties and economic disadvantage experienced in many country or coastal towns (Beatty and Fothergill 2003; Powe, Hart and Shaw 2007). The government’s rural white paper (Maff 2000) said: ‘Many rural areas are prosperous with high growth rates, high employment and attractive as a business location. Others - particularly in remote rural, coastal and coalfield regions - have serious economic difficulties with declining towns, loss of younger people, high unemployment, low wages and low investment: seven out of ten English counties with the lowest GDP per head are predominantly rural.’

Smestos tend to miss out on area-based special funding streams because they lack the critical mass to qualify on deprivation or similar measures. The competitive ethos enshrined in The Northern Way spatial and economic planning blueprint poses difficulties for those areas left outside the city regions where funding is planned to be concentrated.

Housing is a key part of the economic picture, providing greater wealth than any other part of the economy and driving spatial polarisation (Thomas and Dorling 2004). Cameron and Shucksmith (in Powe, Hart and Shaw 2007, p92) contend that the strong limitation on new housing allocations across the North under New Labour, combined with a focus on the conurbations, has proved damaging to isolated towns. They say: 'It is localities outside of the major urban areas, including that market towns, that tend to feel the squeeze of limited regional allocations of housing on the one hand, and the concentration on regeneration and development within the main urban areas on the other.' Mullins and Murie (2006, p80) note that authorities that have transferred their housing stock to a housing association may suffer disadvantage. 'After transfer local housing authorities often have quite limited staff to develop their strategies and may have lost their best senior managers to housing associations in a process aptly described as "intellectual asset stripping".'

A contention therefore is that Smestos have been subjected to the competitive side of government policies over the last decade combined with liquid modern conditions as outlined above, but with little of the tempering social inclusion or regeneration measures that have accompanied such policies in other urban areas. A task of the current study is to uncover the experience of those living through these times, to establish their perspective.

The political and economic background is examined, focusing on the 'third way' programme of New Labour. New Labour recognised before taking power that governance rescaling at sub-UK levels would be a key theme of its time in government (Labour Party 1997) and it quickly established a series of legislative programmes to achieve it. Early in its tenure, the government created nine regional development agencies (RDAs) as what it said was a means of shifting power from the national level, a stepping stone towards elected regional governance in England. The RDAs in reality took on a different function, however, as part of the drive for national economic competitiveness. Stephen Hall (2003, p268) shows how this type of spatial policy is designed to promote economic growth in all regions, because only through optimal performance by each can the national objective be achieved. In this sense it is a policy

to tackle economic opportunities forgone rather than stemming from previous Labour governments' belief in redistribution on the basis of social justice. The regional tier of governance became more a case of *deconcentration*, the apparent transfer of power that in reality shifts power away from localities (Goodchild and Hickman 2006). The Northern Way in particular has attracted criticism from academics on two fronts: that its conception is not well founded and contradictory, and that it is not likely to succeed even on its own terms (*ibid* 2006, Ward 2006).

Debates on public services, highly relevant to the current study, are also examined. New Labour's attempt to forge a new kind of public services, coupled with an emphasis on rights and responsibilities, depended on managerialism to transform the bureaucracy. Academic analysts such as Mullins and Murie (2007, p131) and du Gay (2000, p112) found that New Labour borrowed New Right ideas on new public management (later called entrepreneurial governance) in which public institutions are reconstructed along market lines.

The liquid modernity thesis of Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman 1998, 2000) was chosen as an appropriate lens for viewing a political and governance issue with a strong spatial dimension. Bauman seeks to mark an important shift in contemporary society, brought about by the dominant political and economic paradigm at international level. He has particularly concerned himself with spatial economic differences and inequalities.

The wide ranging nature of the thesis in offering explanations of events and conditions from the global to the very local and individual has been extremely useful in that it does not exclude one or the other but integrates both into the same analysis. By paying attention to all levels, Bauman is able to encompass the structure/agency debate without compromising on his central claim that structure, in the form of strong outside forces, is the driving force for current conditions.

These were in part the reasons for selecting Bauman for the analytical framework in the current study. Other possibilities including Foucault's governmentality (1977) and geographers such as Harvey (1988, 1996) were considered. However, Bauman's attention to space-time compression, together with his contrasting of modern and postmodern times in his analysis of our current situation, were preferred for their breadth of scope and opportunities for a significant new contribution.

Bauman's work considers questions of space and time, which he contends are central concepts in understanding current spatial inequalities. He seeks to show that space is now being overtaken by time as the dominant factor in our society. He analyses

how the prevailing condition that he terms liquid modernity leads to particular behaviours and attitudes by social actors.

The 'liquid' aspect of the term indicates the dominance of mobility. Bauman's claim, drawing on Marx, is that currently time is annihilating space. This is not the same thing as the fragmentation and plurality often described as characterising post-modernity (Bauman 1988b, p225) but a particular type of force that is a tool of domination. Bauman believes we have entered a time where speed of movement becomes the dominant factor (Bauman 2000, p151), so those who can move quickly – either physically or by moving capital or reinventing themselves – will have power.

This effect, he believes, leads to social and spatial polarisation (see the Whewey (2006) study of gentrification for an example of this effect). Those able to move can disengage from communities, or move their business elsewhere. Those trapped in geographical space cannot use time in this way and are increasingly disadvantaged. Bauman adds: 'Fluid modernity is the epoch of disengagement, elusiveness, facile escape, and hopeless chase. In liquid modernity it is the most elusive, those free to move without notice, who rule (*op cit*, p151).' His claim for how domination is exerted by the tourists over the vagabonds, in the form of time, has helped to highlight the role of time in the identification of ideal types. It also aids understanding of isolation as a social as well as a geographical construct.

In the current study, the background of the New Labour government's third way politics is examined against Bauman's thesis. The government's approach in responding to globalisation, in which it is accepted as a given with the only possible reaction being to join the competition, is seen to resonate with Bauman's claim of a globalising force toward competition and consumerism.

The issue of the role of the bureaucracy, and bureaucratic ethics, emerges as a highly contested area. Bauman posits that all four of his postmodern ideal types share a tendency to shift moral duties and ethical judgements either elsewhere or out of the equation altogether (1996, in Hall and du Gay, pp18-36) – as does the bureaucracy as an institution. In contrast, du Gay highlights the virtues of the bureaucracy and warns that its essential qualities– objectivity, rationality and impartiality, justice – are being degraded and actively denigrated in favour of a world view that places individualisation and personal development as higher goals. He directly criticises Bauman for his antipathy towards the bureaucracy and bureaucratic ethos as a case of 'soulless instrumentalism' that obliterates morality (Bauman 1993, p33-35, quoted in du Gay 2000, p57).



Bauman's positioning of the bureaucracy within his thesis gives rise to an unanswered question. In attributing characteristics to it, he locates the bureaucracy as a pillar of the modernist era. This is contrasted with the postmodern, or liquid modern, era that is said to be dominant currently. Yet bureaucratic and local governance institutions clearly still exist, and must be peopled by the ideal types: so can we establish their location within liquid modern conditions? This is something the current study seeks to address.

## **1.2 The structure and content of the thesis**

The thesis is divided into two main sections, followed by conclusions. The research questions are set out within this introduction. Section A, comprising four chapters, sets out a discussion of the literature covering the situation of Smestos and third way politics, and then the analytical framework. The methodology and methods for the study follow. Section B sets out the findings, divided into three chapters covering the three subsidiary research questions in turn. The conclusions chapter summarises the findings and addresses two overarching thematic questions for the study. It makes the case for this study's contribution to academic knowledge.

The study begins (Chapter 2) with an outline of the nature and political situation of Smestos. Smestos are little studied and as yet not clearly defined. Possible definitions based on population, function or other criteria are detailed. Economically, Smestos can be seen to span a full range from wealthy and largely free of deprivation to suffering multiple deprivation, low wages and falling populations. Isolated locations far from a city region are shown to have lower average prosperity, measured by gross value added (GVA). The North of England is found to have lower prosperity than the South, and within the North, rural areas with isolated towns have lower prosperity than the conurbations.

Research suggests that during the last decade economic inequalities in the UK have continued to widen. Dorling *et al* (2007, pxiv) show that while most people became better off, socio-economic inequality has continued to rise since 2000, with an increase in the numbers of 'breadline poor'. The geography of this inequality shifted as well, with the very wealthy concentrated in fewer areas, mainly in the South.

Towns within the two-tier local government system face particular difficulties and have undergone a series of challenges under New Labour. They are found to have limited capacity to respond to initiative overload, high inspection costs and increasing

centralised control. They have been subjected to the competition policies of New Labour and conditions of liquid modernity with little of the tempering social inclusion or regeneration measures available to other areas.

In order to understand the situation of Smestos in recent years it is necessary to offer a national and regional context via the politics of the time. Chapter 3 considers New Labour's third way, which politically defined the period from 1997 to 2010. Debates on the meaning and nature of the 'third way' have explored globalisation and its acceptance; the promotion of competition; and the demand for self-improvement from citizens (Freeden 1999, Reich 1999, Hall 2003). New Labour is seen to focus more on equality of opportunity than equality of outcome, in a break with the party's past.

New Labour placed policy emphasis on regional issues and attempted devolution within England (Humphrey and Shaw 2004, Hickman and Robinson 2006). The hybrid system that eventually emerged contained unelected regional bodies and embryonic city regions, together with other institutions at a variety of scales and complexity. In keeping with the government's competitive ethos, prestige projects and special funding streams were available through bidding processes. In housing, the emphasis remained on ownership and asset wealth, which is seen to deepen the economic and geographical divides (Thomas and Dorling 2004, Malpass 2006). Housing management is viewed as an aspect of the new public management favoured by New Labour to transform public services. However, frequent initiative churn and reorganisation brought difficulties for governance organisations with limited capacity to respond.

The analytical framework (Chapter 4) establishes the lens through which the situation of Smesto authorities, and the political and economic background, will be viewed. Bauman's thesis is offered as an appropriate framework in the light of the political and geographical nature of the study.

This chapter covers the meanings of the term liquid modernity and the main aspects of Bauman's thesis concerning globalisation, mobility as in 'a society on the move', and competition including individualised consumerism. Linkages to areas of academic debate including human geography, governance and politics are discussed. Bauman's use of ideal types to draw out issues of power by time domination is outlined, with reference to its academic antecedents. The location of the bureaucracy and local governance institutions within liquid modernity is debated. Bauman's contention is that local governance is weakened as power moves upward, and local institutions therefore become disengaged: this claim is central to the current study. Resonances are found

between Bauman and the academic literature on subjects including geography, politics and the bureaucracy.

Chapter 5 gives the methodology and methods for the empirical study. Given that the aim is to uncover the experiences of people in Smesto governance authorities, the approach adopted is interpretative. The study seeks to establish whether Bauman's conditions of liquid modernity – globalisation, competition, mobility – are a driving force for people working in Smesto governance authorities, and whether these lead to uncertainty and anxiety as he claims. Housing and prestige projects are used as exemplars.

Bauman offers no empirical guide to how his thesis should be applied or tested in practice, allowing a range of possibilities for the researcher. For this study, the ideal types of tourist, player, stroller and vagabond are identified in theory and applied in practice as tools to uncover relationships of power. Two developments are included. The first is to add a 'public service overlay' to the ideal types, to take account of the fact that respondents are acting on behalf of their locality, not only as individuals. The second is to apply the types first to individual respondents and then collectively to the governance authorities of a town. It is argued that these applications of Bauman's theory can help to locate bureaucratic institutions appropriately within the liquid modern era.

Semi-structured interviews with three groups of respondents are the main source of data for the study. This chapter sets out details of the groups, namely regional stakeholders, a selection of senior officers from councils covering Smestos in northern England, and a wider variety of respondents from three detailed case studies of towns. The analysis methods are then established.

The study then moves on to Section B, the findings. Chapter 6 addresses the first subsidiary research question, concerning the conditions of liquid modernity. Data from all respondents in the study are included in this chapter. Globalisation, 'a society on the move' and competition are explored, together with the posited outcomes of uncertainty and anxiety. This section includes respondents' views on their relationships with other agencies and with central government. A key question is whether the respondents feel power has been moving away from them through globalisation and governance rescaling, framing and limiting their responses.

Chapter 7 deals with the second subsidiary research question, on whether the ideal types can be identified. Here, individual responses are considered and data is assigned to each of the four ideal types. As Bauman predicted, the vagabond is the predominant

type, often knowingly having to make repeated responses that they know will not bring success. The player type is also much in evidence among local governance respondents, who see their role as ‘playing the game’ as well as possible. Respondents’ comments highlight the divisions of power, and the anger and frustration of trying to work within prescribed frameworks, that are a large part of their working lives. Yet futility has not taken over, the study finds.

Chapter 8 contains the final synthesising group of findings. Here, the ideal types are applied collectively to governance authorities for the three case study towns in turn, revealing issues of time domination. Questions of historical and fiscal time arising from these findings, together with data from the whole study, are examined. The chapter then considers evidence on a social construction of distance, where ‘near’ and ‘far away’ are juxtaposed concepts given political force by the resource mechanisms of regional and local organisations.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 9, first summarises the findings before moving on to address the two overarching thematic research questions of the study. The first seeks to establish what has been the experience of town governance authorities under the conditions of liquid modernity and third way politics. The second evaluates the success of applying Bauman’s thesis to a practical study. Policy implications from the study are offered.

Finally, the contribution to knowledge and opportunities for further study are explored. This study is one of very few to consider the situation and responses of town authorities in England. It is also among very few that have applied Bauman empirically. It offers insights into a type of spatial entity that generally attracts little attention, and attempts to situate respondents and their towns within the current political and economic framework. In doing so, it develops a modified version of Bauman’s ideal types that can be applied in recognition of the ‘public life’ ethos of governance authorities.

### **1.3 The research questions**

The literature suggests that Smestos and their governance authorities have been profoundly affected by the circumstances of liquid modernity and third way politics. This section considers the gaps in knowledge, and the research questions that flow from this review.

The study argues that Smestos are important spatial entities, acting as service

hubs, as a focus for regeneration and as contributors to growth. They have been economically disadvantaged by being subjected to competitive forces, largely without the special support initiatives that could have helped them to self-improve. However, there is a significant gap in knowledge concerning Smestos with very few qualitative studies published, and equally little policy attention. This means that when examining the question of how Smestos and their authorities have responded to their circumstances over the last decade, relatively little is known. This study sets out to fill that gap in knowledge by exploring whether the forces of liquid modernity and third way politics have indeed influenced town authorities over that time. It examines the recent economic and housing situation of Smestos, and what actors in governance authorities consider they can do in response. It asks whether they have become disempowered and disengaged by their experiences as Bauman predicts.

The chapters on Smestos, the politics of New Labour and the analytical framework of liquid modernity establish that this study is dealing with spatial inequalities, the promotion of competition, and whether some players in the structure might be cast as ‘winners’ while others are ‘losers’. In Bauman’s tourist and vagabond ideal types, we see evidence of social actors responding to the current national and international economic climate, with some exercising power while others are subjected to it. The research analyses interviewees’ responses to their situation and explores the conditions in which some might become ‘winners’ as controllers or creators of their situation, while others are ‘losers’, being subjected to those conditions.

The experiences and views of those living through this particular set of circumstances are central to the research. Bauman’s thesis spans not only the political and economic framework but also how individuals make and remake their lives in response. A set of research questions is formulated to draw out the perceptions of participants about significant economic and housing issues affecting their towns, viewed through the lens of the liquid modernity thesis.

This dual approach of the situation of the towns and the analytical framework is reflected in two overarching research questions. The primary research question is:

- What has been the experience of Smesto authorities in response to their economic and political situation under the New Labour government?

The secondary question is:

- Can Bauman’s thesis of liquid modernity be used as an effective tool to examine the situation of Smesto authorities?

Three subsidiary questions explore the town authorities' responses in more detail. First, the questions address the overall conditions of liquid modernity, then move on to Bauman's ideal types and 'choice as fate'. Finally, exploring the extent to which the thesis can this be applied to local governance organisations collectively, the research questions address whether Bauman is correct in predicting disengagement of local organisations.

The subsidiary research questions are:

- Are conditions of liquid modernity found as a significant driving force for respondents in the study towns?
- Using Bauman's contention of 'choice as fate', can we identify his ideal types of tourist, player, stroller and vagabond to illuminate the study?
- Are town authorities 'disengaged' and powerless to act, as Bauman predicts? Do they believe so?

These three questions are addressed in turn in Section B which presents the study findings, with one chapter assigned broadly to each. The wider thematic questions are addressed in the final chapter (Chapter 9) which draws conclusions on the study overall and on the empirical findings.

#### **1.4 Content summary**

This is a study of isolated Smestos in the North of England, as they lived through significant political and economic change. The situation is viewed through the eyes of governance authorities for the towns as they grappled with the strong forces of global competition and frequent political reorganisation, with little of the tempering social measures available elsewhere.

Bauman's liquid modernity thesis offers a framework for analysis that pinpoints time as the tool of domination within the current political and economic era, replacing geographical distance or location. He highlights the divide between the winners and losers according to who can best use or control time. His analysis of globalisation, competition and frequent change carries many resonances with New Labour's third way politics.

This study attempts to add to the sparse academic knowledge concerning Smestos and to apply Bauman's thesis to the particular situation of their governance authorities.

Smesto authorities are found to be disadvantaged by their relative inability to control time, and to *feel* disadvantaged, but they have not succumbed to a sense of futility.

## SECTION A: DEVELOPMENT OF THEMES

### Introduction

This study consists of a political research project that considers the economic and political situation of towns with rural hinterlands, or Smestos<sup>1</sup>, in recent years. It includes places in the North of England, where the economic and spatial blueprint The Northern Way (Northern Way Steering Group 2004a, 2004b) covers all three northern regions. The timeframe for the study is that of the New Labour government, 1997 to 2010. Fieldwork was completed in October 2009 so does not take account of the change of UK government in 2010.

The selected approach is an analytical framework based around the ‘liquid modernity’ analysis of Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman, 1998, 2000). Very briefly, Bauman argues that we are currently living in a phase of late capitalism that carries particular characteristics including a paradigm shift from geographical space or distance to one in which time is the tool of domination. Facets of this liquid modern world include globalisation and its acceptance as a given, the rise of competitiveness and individualised consumer values, and the shift of power away from localities. Within this thesis, Bauman argues that people can be divided into ideal types of the ‘winners’ who have shaken off geographical limits and instead live by controlling time (whom he calls tourists) and those who are still trapped by geographical space (vagabonds). The second group are said to be forced to make consumer choices without having any real control or hope of success – they are ‘fated’ to make choices.

This section of four chapters develops the themes of the situation of Smestos in England, the politics of New Labour, and liquid modernity. It establishes the methodology and methods for the study.

The first chapter, Chapter 2, examines the situation of Smestos and particularly those in the North, during the study period. The relatively sparse academic literature on Smestos includes a lack of clear definitions, and this issue is debated. Information is offered from those academic and government sources that do exist, plus data from the Office of National Statistics and regional economic strategies. Two exemplars are used

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<sup>1</sup> Small and medium sized towns, a term coined by the European Spatial Planning Observation Network for its research on these places (Espon 2006)



in the study, namely housing and prestige projects, and the main issues here are outlined.

In the second chapter within this section (Chapter 3) the analysis is broadened to offer the national and international context of relevant aspects of the political situation affecting Smestos since 1997. This chapter considers the New Labour government's 'third way' politics, including the rise of competition policies and opportunity taking, equality of opportunity to replace equality of outcome, and the requirement to self-improve as part of the rights-and-responsibilities agenda.

The following chapter (Chapter 4) sets out an outline of the analytical framework, in order to establish the lens through which the political and economic background and the case study will be viewed. Here, the liquid modernity thesis of Bauman is examined, together with related literatures on topics including human geography, politics and governance.

This section argues that the combination of liquid modernity and third way politics has profoundly affected Smestos. The themes of disadvantage and disempowerment give rise to the set of research questions for the study, consisting of two overarching thematic questions and three subsidiary, empirical questions, set out in the introduction.

Chapter 5 consists of the methodology and methods applied to gather and analyse data for the case study. It includes the approach used to applying Bauman's ideal types for empirical study. In the current study the ideal types are applied to Smesto local governance institutions using a modified Bauman analysis.

## **2 The nature and political situation of Smestos**

This chapter focuses on the study subject, isolated towns in the North of England.

Towns and the district authorities that govern them offer an interesting area for research since they are in a somewhat novel situation: as this chapter argues, they have been subjected to the competitive side of government policies over the last decade, with little of the tempering social inclusion or regeneration measures that have accompanied such policies in other urban areas.

Smestos are a rather neglected area for academic research. There are few studies of them and, as yet, no agreed definition of them (Powe Hart and Shaw 2007, p11). The related fields of urban studies, territorial rescaling, regionalism and institutionalism do have a wide international literature (for example, Castells 1977, Sandercock 2004, Harrison 2006) as well as a UK focus (Stoker 2000, Coaffee and Healey 2003, Gonzalez and Healey 2005) but again there is a tendency to debate cities and regions rather than towns specifically.

The relative lack of both academic and government attention to them should not obscure the importance of Smestos. Taylor (2008, pp120-122) decries the ‘false premise’ that economies in rural areas are not important and that their economic activity is only ‘traditional’ so should be treated differently. He offers five reasons why Smestos and the countryside are ‘crucial’. These include: tackling social disadvantage and exclusion, opportunities to work locally, revitalising the wider local economy, maintaining diverse and attractive landscapes, and helping strengthen the national economy. The towns considered for this study alone (see Appendix 2) are home to some 1.1 million people, or almost 8% of the North’s population (ONS 2010).

This chapter outlines some of the social and economic background to the situation of the types of towns chosen for this study, together with some of the more relevant political developments affecting them. Academic studies are cited where available, and the chapter also draws on official statistics, government policy documents and other reports as evidence.

### **2.1 The literature on Smestos and their role in policy**

Few academic studies of Smestos have been published and generic studies (ie of towns as a whole) are particularly sparse. In addition, Smestos have been a somewhat neglected policy area for government, which tends to focus instead on either large

conurbations or fully rural areas. Nevertheless, a small number of studies have been conducted that consider some of the eclectic group of Smesto types, such as market or coastal towns. This section summarises the available studies, while the following section moves on to consider the evidence on policy approaches.

Powe, Hart and Shaw (2007) have produced a comprehensive academic study of market towns. Their book is a study of data from more than 200 English market towns, and focuses in part on 11 of these. The book explores contemporary roles within the national policy framework; issues and challenges; and their future prospects (*ibid*, p3). They comment (*ibid*, p11) that ‘little is known in a systematic manner about [market towns]’ characteristics and the challenges they face’ and that the lack of an agreed definition has been one of the hampering factors.

The researchers find that market towns play a pivotal role, not only as service centres for large rural areas, but as a focus for government regeneration efforts in those areas (*ibid*, p148). However, many ‘are struggling to re-invent themselves in the face of increased mobility and other changes challenging their role as rural service centres’. The study finds widespread problems in market towns including an ageing population, decline in retail competitiveness, low incomes and unaffordable housing.

Powe, Hart and Shaw is highly relevant to the current study, though its focus is generally on smaller towns: their limit is 2,000-30,000, while this study encompasses populations of 10,000 to 90,000 (see methods, Chapter 5). Other examples among the very small number of other research studies into towns are given below.

Adam (2006) is a study of suburban towns in Germany. This found that smaller German cities in urban areas close to larger centres can compete both economically and in terms of lifestyle attractiveness, though they are ‘in an inferior position to smaller towns with regard to retail trade or living in one- and two-family houses (land price mechanism)’. This could suggest that smaller towns that are not in close proximity to competing larger cities might have an advantage in attracting people to live there, though this could still be compatible with a finding of lower economic activity. The research must be treated with caution when used for comparison with an English context. It might, for example, be applicable only to the German situation with greater political and economic devolution, and a different approach to housing tenure from the UK.

Whewey (2006) studied gentrification of a midlands market town. Again, the town is rather smaller than in the current study, and was within very easy commuting distance of a conurbation. The focus was on households in the private sector. The study

has some relevance in understanding in-migration and house prices, but concerns a town that is in a different geographical situation from the current study of isolated towns where commuting is a small factor.

Beatty and Fothergill conducted a large scale study of 43 UK coastal resorts (2003), and a study of tourism in 121 resorts (Beatty, Fothergill, Gore and Wilson 2010). The first of these (*op cit*, p102) found that economic growth in seaside towns varied according to region, not individual size. The 'greater South East' resorts fared well, and the authors noted: 'The differences between seaside towns underline the extent to which the strength of the local economy often cannot be divorced from the regional context. This is clearest perhaps in South East England, where relatively strong growth in employment and population owes much to the prosperity of the South East economy.' Within the study areas, towns tended to be worse off than their rural hinterlands in terms, for example, of unemployment (*op cit* 2003, p20).

The second report (*op cit*, pp9-10) covers 121 resorts, towns and holiday parks where there is significant employment in the tourism industry. It finds that tourism employment has increased since the late 1990s but 'GVA ... is low in relation to the industry's substantial employment because of the prevalence of low-wage and part-time employment.'

Schmied (ed, 2005) analyses rural areas of Europe, in this case meaning large geographical territories such as Ireland, or the mountainous areas of Spain. The book charts the geographically uneven effects of contemporary economic and social change and highlights familiar problems of an ageing population, loss of traditional industries and the effect of neighbouring centres of economic power (in this case sometimes whole countries). The increasing speed of change and globalising processes affecting rural areas, together presenting a significant political challenge, are also examined.

Gloucestershire University (2005) explored the economic linkages between smaller towns in Scotland (under 10,000 people) and their surrounding rural areas. Their investigation of the spillover effects of investment into the rural area or small town found that these did exist but were very limited.

Discussion of rural areas leads to a question as to what is meant by 'isolated'. The idea of isolation is widely used in biology and the study of species/genes, and researchers use a mathematical formula to measure isolation (see for example Barrai *et al* 1984). A related measure has been adopted for some studies of populations (Abramson, Tobin and VanderGoot 1995, p4), to assess how exposed to other groups a population is: a 100% isolated neighbourhood or group of people is one in which all

residents are members of the same group. Conversely, a city that is fully integrated would have members of a particular group (low incomes or a racial group, for example) evenly spread geographically.

In terms of geographical areas, isolated and remote tend to be used synonymously in academic literature, suggesting that this is a relational definition: places are remote or isolated *from* something. This can mean remote from centres of economic growth such as cities, and the range of employment that goes with them (Gkartzios and Scott 2009, Moss *et al* 2004); or isolated from services that others have access to, such as transport or hospitals (Henderson and Taylor 2003). ‘Peripherality’ is similarly used to signify geographical relationships that are founded in the idea of peripheral places being *not* core places. In Ottaviano and Puga (1997, p5), drawing on economic agglomeration theory, core and periphery become respectively rich/industrialised and poor/de-industrialised areas.

In some cases the issue of services is seen as more relevant than actual geographical distance, which of course will vary according to the country or region being studied. In other cases, generally drawing on Cristaller’s (1933) central place theory, distance from a significant centre of population is the main determinant of service location. Places classed as remote or isolated are those furthest from a population centre (Henderson and Taylor 2003, pp364-365).

In social science, isolation strongly features in literature on rural areas. It is generally seen as a negative state that is associated with disadvantaged groups such as older people, those with disabilities and those with mental health problems (Ekos Ltd 2009, p4). Again, lack of access to employment, services and social activity is seen as defining isolation, which is seen as different from and more difficult to overcome than isolation within a city (Gkartzios and Scott 2009, Moss *et al* 2004). For the current study, isolation is initially established in this chapter as a geographical and economic phenomenon, principally concerning places that are relatively far from centres of economic growth, employment and services. Other social meanings of isolation are explored in the findings.

The studies above, limited in number as they are, point to a general picture in which Sместos of various types have been facing challenges in the changing economic and social climate. Some have seen economic growth while others have declined; all appear to have undergone social, economic and demographic change. Their relative isolation geographically is seen as a significant factor in terms of incomes, employment and services. The next section considers government policy responses to change.

### 2.1.1 *The policy approach to Smestos*

Smestos have been a neglected policy area for government, and they largely remain so despite some recent recognition of their difficulties. Occupying a rather hybridised position, they are urban in nature, suffer urban problems, and yet hold attractions similar to those of rural areas. As this section will show, policy makers have tended to overlook them in favour of a concentration on either large conurbations or rural areas, and they therefore fall into a policy gap. Despite this, there is some evidence for increasing policy interest in Smestos, or at least in some types of Smesto such as coastal resorts. This section reviews the evidence, beginning with the problem of the policy gap.

Several commentators have criticised the New Labour government for a perceived failure to recognise Smestos as an entity. In an experimental study on the use of geographical information systems to map service provision in market towns, Frost and Shepherd (2004, p351) criticise the government for its ‘chaotic conception of market towns ... in bundling together towns with dissimilar functions, characters and histories into a common grouping linked only by their population size’. They found 1274 ‘freestanding’ towns in England with populations between 2,000 and 30,000 in 1991. Powe, Hart and Shaw (2007, p11) also criticise the lack of analysis of market towns, despite their increasing policy relevance:

‘Policy in this area contrasts sharply with urban areas, where within government the work of the Social Exclusion unit and the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, supported by academic study, has provided a basis for analysis, explanation, policy development and evaluation. The absence of a framework for analysis and evaluation seems a serious shortcoming and is surprising given the current emphasis on performance measurement in most areas of public policy.’

The Commons Communities and Local Government Committee’s coastal towns report (2007) came to a similar view:

‘The DCLG’s evidence drew upon data from a sample group of 30 coastal towns, while the views expressed by the DWP appear to be based on evidence from 17 selected coastal towns. Such variations have implications for policy development. It is difficult to see how a unified, Government-wide understanding of coastal towns can be developed without a common evidence base. The Seaside Economy report<sup>2</sup> states “Seaside towns are the least understood of Britain’s ‘problem’ areas”. We concur with this view and believe the Government does not sufficiently appreciate the needs of coastal towns.’

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<sup>2</sup> ie, Fothergill and Beatty 2003

Smestos have gained some recognition in government policy under New Labour, despite the general direction of urban policy being on cities. Hart (in Powe, Hart and Shaw 2007, p43) draws a distinction in that the policy towards towns is primarily concerning their role as local service hubs, and not as with the cities as engines of growth.

Gilroy, Brooks and Shaw in the same publication (*ibid*, p80) summarise the difficulties of rural areas with an ageing population and a fragmented policy approach from government: 'As the populations of many market towns and their rural hinterlands grow older, the problems created by centralisation are shown in sharper relief. Policy discussion continues to acknowledge the need to link people to services, but money does not follow policy.'

The New Labour government devoted much attention to the state of urban areas, initiating in May 1998 the Urban Task Force, and then producing an urban white paper in 2000 with a parallel rural white paper (Maff 2000). Lord (Richard) Rogers, who chaired the task force, commented on the driving force behind these initiatives (Urban Task Force, 1999, p3): 'The overall quality of life in English cities has been diminishing for a long time and compares very poorly with other European cities ... our urban environments are seriously eroded, often ugly and sprawling, with little sense of vitality or community.'

The difficulty here was that at the same time as creating some limited initiatives directed towards Smestos, the government promoted other initiatives that carried the risk of further marginalising them. Although the task force makes repeated reference to 'towns and cities', it is clear that its real thrust is about revitalising cities and large conurbations. Rogers points to European city regions 'operating globally under huge competitive pressures' (*ibid*, p3) as the new economic order. The task, therefore, was to attract people and employment back into the larger urban areas.

Ward (2006) cited another example, offering this comment on the government's policy to promote city regions (discussed more fully in the next chapter): 'All places beyond what sometimes gets called the urban core of the city region (including all types of towns and smaller cities, as well as rural areas) risk being marginalised from this process. Having places 'beyond the city region' risks a two-speed, twin track approach to regional development, in which the positive benefits that flow from increased rural-urban relationships and interdependencies go unrealised and under exploited.'

The rural white paper referred to above (Maff 2000, pp73-88) did in fact devote an entire chapter to market towns. It summarised the issues as:

‘Many rural areas are prosperous with high growth rates, high employment and attractive as a business location. Others – particularly in remote rural, coastal and coalfield regions – have serious economic difficulties with declining towns, loss of younger people, high unemployment, low wages and low investment: seven out of ten English counties with the lowest GDP per head are predominantly rural.’

It identified market towns as vital for a focus for growth in areas that need regeneration, and more generally as service centres and hubs. The importance of knowledge industries and access to high quality IT was recognised in a section headed ‘What is broadband?’ (*ibid*, p85), a question some in rural areas may still be asking.

The white paper promised, among various actions, a Market Towns Initiative as a form of community action that could kickstart regeneration and help with future funding bids. It is described in more detail later in this chapter. By 2008 however, rural and market town problems were still evident and probably becoming more acute. The government commissioned the Taylor report (Taylor 2008) to recommend a new generation of actions to revitalise these areas. The report focused particularly on the then government’s plans for large numbers of new homes, which would have a ‘dramatic’ impact on market towns (*ibid*, p6). It called for carefully planned new housing, action on unaffordability and work opportunities to overcome low wages.

The first part of this chapter has argued that Smestos have been a neglected topic for both academics and policy makers. The relative lack of attention to them has both policy and practical implications as they fall into the gap between urban and rural policies, and between competitive and needs-based approaches. This study contends that Smestos have largely missed out on the area-based government initiatives that have been available to other areas. The section below details some of those initiatives.

### **2.1.2            *Government initiatives***

The sections above have detailed some of the more pressing problems for Smestos. If the types of problems are broadly apparent, however, potential remedies are less so. This section outlines some of the main special government funding streams available during New Labour’s term of office. As will be seen, these initiatives have largely bypassed isolated towns. Cameron and Shucksmith (in Powe, Hart and Shaw (eds) 2007, p89) sum up the difficulty for Smesto authorities: ‘The issue facing market towns



is they may face ‘urban’ problems of disadvantaged households and communities and economic decline without access to the regeneration funding regimes that are available only to larger towns and cities.’

Below are detailed a small number of the special funding initiatives relevant to regeneration and housing during the last decade.

### ***‘Worst estates’ agenda***

This housing-led policy from early in the New Labour government identified the 1370 ‘worst’ estates in England, with a view to directing resources to improve them. The identification was based on Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) ranking and only included estates where more than half the households were council tenants. According to Mullins and Murie (2006, p263) the approach had several weaknesses including choice of IMD which tended to skew the results towards estates in London.

### ***New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund***

The new Labour government recognised that poverty has complex components, and sought to understand its causes via a series of policy action teams debating aspects of social exclusion. This led to the New Deal for Communities (NDC) in 1998 which funded 38 local authority districts with £800m, and then the national strategy to tackle social exclusion with the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), worth £1.875 billion over the five years 2001/02 to 2005/06. This provided extra resources for 88 local authority districts.

This time, the rules were much less stringent but pathfinder estates had to be of at least 4,000 households (Mullins and Murie (2006, p263) – which ruled out many smaller towns. Of the 88 areas, about 19 contain smaller towns and 16 are classed by the government as rural districts (Defra 2005). Lee (in Malpass and Rowlands (eds) 2010, p191) comments: ‘The launch of the New Deal for Communities emphasised the competitive element of regeneration policy, which had been a feature of City Challenge and SRB<sup>3</sup>, in effect creating a competition between “poorest neighbourhoods” for investment.’

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<sup>3</sup> City Challenge and the Single Regeneration Budget were begun under the previous Conservative government. They were area based regeneration initiatives awarded in a competitive bidding process

***Working Neighbourhoods Fund***

Introduced from 2008, this fund replaced the NRF. Three criteria were used for eligibility. The first two were on IMD and Employment rankings in National Statistics. The third used employment and benefits percentages to form a ranking. It can be seen from this third ranking that the system militates against areas of high employment but low wages (Communities and Local Government 2008b).

***Local Enterprise Growth Initiative***

This fund aimed to ‘release the productivity and economic potential of our most deprived local areas and their inhabitants, through enterprise and investment’ (Communities and Local Government 2008a). It shared £100 million a year among competitive bidders. Only areas eligible for the NRF could apply and only 20 areas were awarded funding.

***Housing Market Renewal***

In 2002, after lobbying by local authorities and other housing organisations, the government designated nine housing market renewal areas to receive £500m special funding to tackle areas of unpopular housing. The criteria for designation included that in each case, at least two adjacent local authorities with low demand housing must form a partnership. This again made it difficult for rural authorities with ‘urban’ problems to apply. Later, three areas including West Cumbria which contains isolated towns were added to the HMR scheme and received limited funding of £65m among them. These areas were not designated as pathfinders (English Partnerships 2008).

Cameron and Shucksmith (in Powe, Hart and Shaw 2007, p91) point to the problems that this policy has brought for rural areas. ‘Clearance and redevelopment within the northern cities is increasingly seen as a means to modernise their housing stock and the environment in order to facilitate economic regeneration ... The Northern Way strategy of city regions [see next chapter], with cities as the main drivers of regional economic development, reinforces this concentration on new development within major urban areas.’

***Market Towns Initiative***

The Countryside Agency began its market towns initiative (MTI) regeneration programme in 2002 in response to the pressures it recognised of demographics, low

GVA and decline of public services such as transport. It commented on ‘the great potential of market towns as centres of rural enterprise to act as hubs of sustainable growth’ (cited in Yorkshire Forward 2007b).

The MTI funded ‘healthchecks’ for 234 market towns (generally of population up to 20,000) in the period to 2004. The rural white paper of 2000 (Maff 2000, p74) estimated there were 1,000 such towns in England. Central government funding of £37 million was provided towards a package that was expected to reach £100 million.

The aim was to use the healthcheck to draw up an action plan. Towns then had to bid for funding for their projects. An assessment of the programme was generally favourable (Countryside Agency 2004, p5) but pointed to ‘the misconceptions that there are significant funds available’ which could ‘tarnish the MTI’s image’.

The RDAs took over the MTI in 2003. Yorkshire Forward, for example, then relaunched the scheme as the Rural and Market Towns Programme (RMTP). This latter initiative included a range of smaller towns chosen by Yorkshire Forward after it identified about 80 towns in its area of that size and in need of regeneration (Yorkshire and Humber Assembly 2004, p16). In parallel, and in common with other RDAs, it began a ‘renaissance towns’ initiative in 2002, covering a range of ‘mid-scale urban places’, some of which are Smestos in remote locations.

An evaluation of the RDA-led programme in Yorkshire (Yorkshire and Humber Assembly 2004, p22) found that between £60,000 and £384,000 had been paid to consultants for each town and a further £137,000 to £325,000 on capital projects, with the exception of one multi-town project which received £2.24 million.

It is apparent from the lack of both academic studies and policy initiatives directly addressing Smestos that gaps in knowledge concerning them exist. However, the evidence from those studies and reports that have been produced allows a broad picture to emerge. The challenges for Smestos in decline or undergoing economic and social change have not always been recognised in government policy. Urban and rural initiatives have tended to bypass Smestos while those funding streams directed to them have been very limited. The following sections consider the evidence in greater detail.

## **2.2 A brief note on defining Smestos**

Smestos are different from either large conurbations or fully rural areas. They are urban in nature, suffer urban problems, and yet hold attractions similar to those of rural areas.

Their connections to urban conurbations vary, but in many cases are less direct than those existing within the urban core. They should therefore be regarded in policy terms as something different.

But defining what that ‘something different’ might consist of is difficult. There is no official UK definition of a Smesto, and two longer term projects to find a definition (Champion 2006, Espon 2006) had yet to be completed at the time of writing.

Both Powe, Hart and Shaw and the work underway by Champion construct definitions based on typologies of towns. These typologies take account of their functions – for example, as a tourist destination, commuter/dormitory, or retirement. This approach places less emphasis on population size and more on demographics, location and amenities. Powe, Hart and Shaw used characteristics such as level of services, tourism, economic structure, commuting, demographics and affluence or deprivation to identify groups within their study of 202 ‘market towns’ in the 2,000 to 30,000 size bracket (Powe, Hart and Shaw 2007, p21).

Alternative approaches are also possible. The Social Exclusion Unit (2001) approached the evidence at ward level, avoiding any confusion over naming spatial

### **Figure 1: Defining Smestos by population**

A way frequently used by government departments to classify spatial entities is to group towns and districts by population. Sometimes different names are given to the groupings derived in this way, leading to overlaps and different namings in different aspects of government policy. Some of these are listed below.

#### ***Rural districts***

Until 2004 districts were classed simply as rural or urban under the ‘Tarling’ definition. However, Shepherd (2004) outlined the limitations of this approach and further work for Defra led to the new classification of six types of district (Defra 2005). These were: Major Urban, Large Urban, Other Urban, Significant Rural, Rural-50, Rural-80. This definition was later simplified again to class any settlement with more than 10,000 people as urban (Taylor 2008, p85).

#### ***Market towns***

Dating from the Rural White Paper (Maff 2000), the government defines these towns for funding purposes by population size of 2,000-20,000.

#### ***Mid-scale urban places***

These are funded by Yorkshire Forward under the renaissance initiative (Yorkshire Forward 2010). Their characteristics are not defined, but they are towns and cities that vary in size from 38,000 population (at the 2001 Census) to more than 200,000.

#### ***Cities***

The government used a definition for its 2006 report (Communities and Local Government 2006) of a population greater than 125,000.

entities. The statistics were then used to draw conclusions at regional level.

A fairly straightforward way to classify spatial entities is by population, and this is an approach long favoured by government (see Figure 1). However, this cannot capture commonalities and differences that cut across this type of definition.

None of the commonalities suggest that Smestos are all the same in nature, and there are of course many other ways to classify towns. In fact, as this chapter will argue, different towns show the range of extremes from highly prosperous to deprived. Although these extremes may have existed already, the increasing disparity of wealth and poverty seen between and within some of the towns, and the economic and housing issues some are currently facing, could be viewed in terms of two political and social developments: the recent changes in society that Bauman calls liquid modernity, and the New Labour government's third way approach which highlighted competition and opportunity taking. These issues are explored in the next two chapters. Powe, Hart and Shaw pose a simple question (2007, p1): 'If they are so desirable, why, as has been the case for much of the past decade, should these same market towns have become the focus of government policy initiatives to regenerate rural areas?' The next section explores this issue.

### **2.3 The economic and social evidence**

This section considers first the evidence of economic disadvantage in Smestos, and then the issue of geographical inequalities. It then moves on to discuss in detail the economic situation of northern Smestos.

There is considerable quantitative evidence of the difficulties and economic disadvantage experienced in many country and coastal towns. As already indicated, the rural white paper (Maff 2000) found some towns were declining, with a loss of younger people, high unemployment, low wages and low investment.

The Defra rural strategy (2004) found that despite strong economic performance nationally by rural districts, some districts were as weak as the poorest urban areas. The paper noted the correlation of poverty, social exclusion and poor housing in these areas. Yorkshire and Humberside, the North West, Lincolnshire, East Anglia and the South West contained rural districts with the lowest economic performance. The research noted: 'These areas are typically remote from major urban economic centres and have often seen decline in traditional industries such as agriculture, fishing and mining.'

In addition there is evidence that Smestos that are more geographically remote from the core of city regions are have lower economic prosperity – measured by GVA – than those inside the boundaries (SQW and Cambridge Econometrics 2006). In 1994 the Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (now Defra) had designated areas covering a third of rural England as rural priority areas where spending would be concentrated. The areas were ones with ‘a concentration of poverty and social exclusion’ and therefore in greatest need (Defra 2002, p80). The map of these areas is a good fit with a map produced by SQW and Cambridge Econometrics (2006, p14) showing least well-performing districts.

This latter research into the effect of city regions on rural districts considered the productivity of rural districts within and outside city regions. It found that productivity in those inside a city region was 8% higher than that of those outside city regions, of which 5% is attributed to the location. The residents’ earnings difference is 18%. Moreover, performance of rural districts within two or more city regions is generally higher than for those in one. The authors comment (*ibid*, p1v):

‘The extent to which city-region models which were founded on the planning regimes of the past are likely to be perpetuated into the future should be tested rather than assumed, especially given growing concerns with regard to sustainability. In this context, the need for locally generated growth in rural areas – whether these are within city-regions or not – must be a continuing priority.’

### 2.3.1 *The geographical divide*

There is evidence that during the last decade inequalities of wealth in the UK have widened, and that there is a strong spatial dimension to this continuing disparity.

Dorling *et al* (2007, pxiv) show that while most people became better off, socio-economic inequality has continued to rise since 2000, with an increase in the numbers of ‘breadline poor’. The geography of this inequality shifted as well, with the very wealthy concentrated in fewer areas, mainly in the South. Those areas that were already wealthy ‘have tended to become disproportionately wealthier’.

The Social Exclusion Unit (2001) confirmed the locations of highest concentrations of deprivation at ward level. These were:

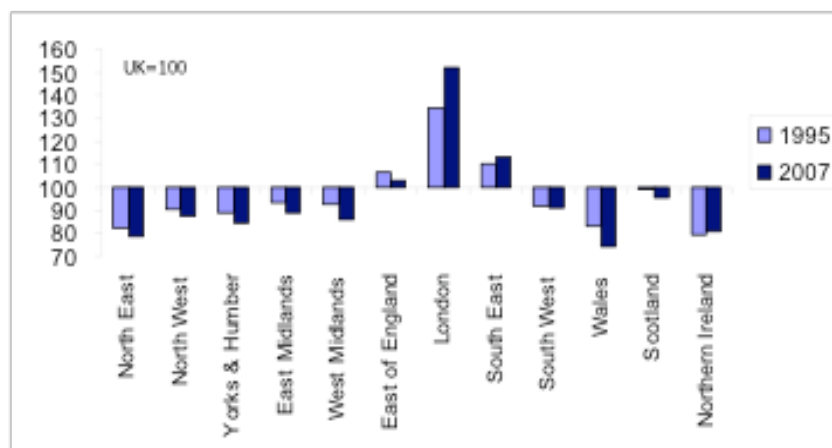
‘The North East (19 per cent of the most deprived wards), the North West (25.7 per cent), London (18 per cent), and Yorkshire and Humberside (9.4 per cent). The proportion of the regional population living in the most deprived wards in these regions is 35.9 per cent in the North East, 28.4 per cent in the North West, 18.8 per cent in London and 21.6 per cent in Yorkshire and Humberside. ‘82 per cent of the most deprived wards are concentrated in 88 local authority

districts. Most of these wards are in urban areas, one-industry or no-industry towns, and coal mining areas. However, at least 16 of the 88 most deprived districts contain substantial rural areas. The new Indices of Deprivation 2000 take more account of rural poverty than their predecessors.’

Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity (2005), the ODPM’s five-year plan, admitted that ‘regional disparities in growth are significant and increasing’. The document, with deputy prime minister John Prescott’s personal endorsement, set a key challenge: ‘To promote strong economies in all regions, narrowing the economic divide and boosting the economy as a whole (*ibid*, p14).’ However, as the same document shows, the government’s actual target was (and remained) only to narrow differences in the rate of growth, leading to greater disparity (see Figure 2). The finding appears to confirm Beatty and Fothergill (2003, p102) which also found that economic growth varied according to region.

Evidence from the ONS indices of multiple deprivation (Office of National Statistics 2010) confirms the apparent paradox of some towns appearing wealthy, while others appear in tables among the most deprived. A strong note of caution must be sounded on using the indices to track change over time: they are not fully comparable as the measures have changed. In particular the 1998 ranking counted jobless claimants only while the 2000 one included broader economic inactivity, such as incapacity benefit claimants. This meant, for example, that coalfield areas moved up the rankings (the top meaning most deprived). Refinements have continued.

**Figure 2: Change in GVA by region, 1995-2007**



Source: ONS Regional, sub-regional and local gross value added report 12 December 2008

Rae (2009, p1860) challenges the statistical basis of the IMD rankings because they ‘ignore Tobler’s first law of geography in a formal sense since it cannot account for the way in which “everything is related to everything else”.’ He says it is important to consider the wider spatial context in which a neighbourhood or place is located, as isolated areas of deprivation within affluence will have different prospects from those within wider areas of deprivation.

Taking account of these caveats, broad analysis of the IMD rankings suggests some indicators of the situation of Smestos:

- The towns (districts) in more isolated locations in the North are clustered in the top (worst) half of the table.
- District councils are found in both the most and least deprived rankings. This suggests that two-tier local government cannot of itself be responsible for disadvantage.
- Geographically, there is confirmation that those towns that are more deprived tend to be more remotely situated.
- Most of the relevant towns (ie isolated northern Smestos) in the lower half of the table are either holding their place or moving up the table: they are not significantly improving their ranking (ie with less deprivation relative to other places).

All of this complements the evidence already cited that the relative position of each area has not greatly changed, and that polarisation appears to be happening: the already affluent areas are becoming more affluent, while others are either staying the same or losing their place (Dorling *et al* 2007). It also appears that London and the South East has been gaining in affluence relative to the rest of the country, as confirmed in academic research (Leunig and Swaffield 2008, Harding and Nevin 2005).

### **2.3.2 *Towns in the northern regions***

The literature cited above points to a situation in which Smestos are disadvantaged compared with other spatial entities, and where Smestos in the North are doubly disadvantaged by a shift in wealth and productivity towards the South. This section considers in more detail the economic evidence concerning the North and northern Smestos.



The relative lack of research into towns, and northern towns in particular, means it is necessary to build a picture of their situation largely from quantitative sources. This section explores, among other evidence, the ONS indices of multiple deprivation (Office of National Statistics 2010), established from 1998 under New Labour, and other evidence from Regional Economic Strategies and similar documents to establish broad parameters of poverty, wealth and presence or lack of deprivation.

The hollowed out demographic profile of isolated northern Smestos, with fewer than average younger working age people and fewer well qualified workers, is addressed in a report by John Thompson & Partners (2002, p57). They cite labour market factors as exacerbating spatial polarisation in the North. They draw on US research on the emergence within the expanding service sectors of a dual labour market of ‘core’ managerial and professional staff with a ‘periphery’ of part-time and contract clerical and sales/service staff. ‘The core/periphery model is, increasingly, a feature of the UK labour market. Clearly competitive places are where core staff are located,’ the report notes. For this reason, they say (*ibid*, p11) the economy of peripheral towns is ‘holed below the waterline’.

### ***2.3.3 Evidence from Regional Economic Strategies***

This section considers the evidence from three northern sub-regions containing a number of isolated Smestos and largely or wholly two-tier local government. Obtaining comparable information on towns can be challenging for several reasons. The level of detail in the different statements varies greatly, and often different geographical scales are used, such as ward or output area or district, or percentage of total population. For some towns there is no information readily available that is separate from district or sub-regional figures. Taking account of these caveats, however, some information can be presented as an exemplar of the general economic situation of Smestos in the North.

#### ***Cumbria***

The Cumbria economic assessment produced in 2006 (North West Development Agency 2006) summarised the sub-region’s position as increasing in wealth, but at the same time falling further behind relative to other places and with persistently low wage levels. In fact, Cumbria had the slowest growing economy in England from 1995 to 2005. The document comments:

‘If this assessment is correct then Cumbria faces a (not easy) choice. Does it accept a low relative growth scenario, in which (presumed) national growth continues to trickle down into Cumbria but not at a rate which prevents Cumbria’s own output value and earned incomes falling further behind the average – thus, balancing growing economic disadvantage (but slowly increasing wealth) against the virtues of a strongly-conserved environment and social stability? Or should it attempt to generate a more dynamic wealth-creating environment?’

A table from the Cumbria Sub-Regional Implementation Plan (Rural Development Programme for England 2007, p3) illustrates the way in which economic growth relative to the region and UK fell behind over a decade before stabilising in the following year (Table 1).

The commentary adds (*ibid*, p3):

‘The Gross Added Value statistics indicate that Cumbria’s economy is stabilising at a new base level well below the national and regional average. It is known that neither unemployment, (which has exhibited a downward trend in Cumbria over the past few years), nor the total number of jobs in the county or the size of the working population, (both of which have remained steady over the past few years) lie behind the long-term reduction in the GVA per head of population. The cause of the relative decline is far more likely to be as a result of the reduction, relative to other areas, in the number of jobs in high value added sectors such as manufacturing and a commensurate growth in low value added sectors such as retailing and tourism. There has also been an increase in the proportion of part time jobs in the county.’

**Table 1: GVA comparisons 1995–2004**

GVA per head of population	1995(£)	2003(£)	2004(£)	Change 95-04%	Change 03-04%
West Cumbria	9,507	11,157	11,655	+22.6%	+4.5%
East Cumbria	10,448	13,435	14,262	+36.5%	+6.2%
Cumbria	9,988	12,344	13,017	+30.3%	+5.5%
North West	9,729	14,230	14,994	+52.5%	+5.4%
United Kingdom	11,037	16,549	17,451	+58.1%	+5.5%

Source: Office for National Statistics sub regional accounts 2006

In common with other isolated and rural areas, Cumbria has experienced strong in-migration – but the population is ageing and the proportion of 16-30 year olds has fallen significantly (*op cit* 2004).

### ***Yorkshire and Humber***

According to the RES (Yorkshire Forward 2006, 2008), incomes in four North Yorkshire districts are ‘not a major issue’ although in three districts – Craven, Richmondshire and Scarborough – they are below the regional average. These districts are the most remote from the city regions. The document confirms: ‘Incomes are highest in those rural areas closest to and with high commuting levels to main urban centres – Harrogate and Selby. Earnings are lowest in those areas with more limited access to larger employment markets.’

Within the same region, the Humber sub-region also experiences low productivity and low incomes. The Northern Way (Northern Way Steering Group 2004a) makes this statement:

‘GVA per head is significantly below the UK average and has shown a steady relative decline since 1996. The latest data show the sub-region at only 83% of the UK average. Before 1998, the Humber had higher GVA per head than Yorkshire and the Humber but has since fallen below the regional average. Looking at areas of the city-region, the East Riding of Yorkshire has a particularly low GVA per head; in 2001 the index was down to just 66 compared to a sub-regional average of 83.’ The document concludes that in the East Riding, ‘wealth and opportunity (particularly skills levels) are not evenly spread and the level of people claiming working age benefit has remained static, despite a significant increase in jobs’.

This section has drawn on examples from three sub-regions in the North that are illustrative of the type of towns and districts in this study. In broad terms, it can be seen that while economic prosperity has generally increased, these types of area have tended to fall back relative to other areas which have increased their economic status faster. Low incomes are a particular problem in peripheral areas. The population in the more remote or isolated districts is ageing and there is a loss of younger working age people. The next section considers housing.

## **2.4 Housing issues in Smestos**

Housing can be seen as part of the ‘offer’ a place makes to desirable mobile population groups who have choices on where to take their wealth-generating capacity. This

housing offer forms a critical part of attempts to regenerate the North: The Northern Way spatial planning document (Northern Way Steering Group 2004b, p34 – see next chapter), for example, says: ‘To create a world-class economy with superb quality of life the North must offer a wide choice of communities that are desirable places to live.’ This must be done, it says, to improve the North’s ‘attractiveness’.

The Northern Way, in contrast, argued it was essential to line up housing investment with the competitive economic idea of backing winners (Northern Way Steering Group 2005, pp34-35). It said it would use its own investment package ‘to ensure new homes are located in the right places for economic growth’ and reinforced this under a heading of ‘locating homes in the right places’: ‘Methods will be proposed linking housing markets analysis and economic prospects so that in future homes will be located in the right places.’

The Housing Corporation supported this approach. Its document *The Housing Corporation’s offer to the Northern Way* (Housing Corporation 2004, p16) says: ‘If the economic competitiveness of the North is to improve, then its housing markets will need to deliver accommodation that both attracts and supports inward economic investment.’

The document cites affordability problems as one of the key problems to be tackled. The measure used is the ratio of price for semi-detached houses to an average teacher salary, and prices are said to be unaffordable where they are at least four times this salary. This supports an analysis that affordability is lowest in the Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle city regions (*ibid*, p6) and that investment needs to be located there.

However, this is a limited picture. Housing investment is clearly required, but where this should take place is contested. Cole, Hickman and Reeve (2004, p2) argue that investment should be focused on areas in transition – ‘areas experiencing the frictional costs of different levels of economic growth around the city, or emerging as marginal or peripheral areas, or struggling to maintain erstwhile popularity as a locale’.

The parliamentary select committee report on seaside towns (Communities and Local Government Committee 2007) found: ‘Housing in many coastal towns appears to be characterised by a dual economy, with high house prices, often fuelled by inward migration and second homes, alongside a large, low quality private rented sector. A large proportion of the accommodation in the private rented sector is composed of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).’ The report notes that deprivation is widespread and economic regeneration is ‘critical’.

In rural towns and districts, house prices *may* be lower but these areas suffer from a low-wage economy in which, for example, a teacher would be considered relatively well-off. Ryedale District Council in North Yorkshire (Ryedale District Council 2005, p4) cites affordability as a serious problem:

‘[The] gap between household wage levels and house prices is greater in Ryedale than in any other part of Yorkshire and the Humber, and is amongst the highest nationally. The problem is extremely acute in some rural parts of the district where house prices are over ten times the average household income.’

Cumbria’s Regional Economic Strategy (North West Development Agency 2006) notes that house prices were about £8,000 higher than the North West average in 2006, yet wages were lower than average in all districts except Copeland. The RES adds:

‘Cumbria faces a severe shortage of appropriate, affordable housing which fails to meet the needs of the population and stifles economic growth. In many parts of the county, housing costs far exceed the incomes of local people, whilst in localised areas such as West Cumbria, the market faces structural problems, with outdated housing stock and a shortage of decent, attractive modern family homes. The problem looks set to intensify over time, with a maximum allocation of 1,500 net new dwellings per annum 2007-2016 comparing against predicted population growth of 2,450 per annum for the same period.’

Despite low productivity and low incomes (Northern Way Steering Group 2004a), house prices in East Yorkshire are significantly higher than the regional average. The Regional Spatial Strategy for Yorkshire and Humber (Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber 2008, p170) paints a similar picture of the problems in the North Yorkshire sub-region. Here, house prices in 2006 were the highest in the region at an average £200,000 compared to £132,000 in neighbouring West Yorkshire. The document notes: ‘The variation in prices for detached and semi detached housing, essentially family housing, will make it more difficult for York and North Yorkshire to attract those with young families. The consequence may be that a higher proportion of those moving to the sub region will be older.’

But policy at regional level is to push investment elsewhere. The regional housing statement (Yorkshire and Humberside Housing Forum, 2002, p25) notes that the regional planning guidance aims to divert growth pressures from the ‘golden triangle’ area of Leeds/Harrogate/York into older and regeneration areas of West and South Yorkshire. It adds: ‘For the policy to be successful, the house price differential between North Yorkshire and the preferred alternative growth areas will probably have to widen still further.’

At the same time as facing economic difficulties, many Smestos have experienced

strong in-migration and rapidly rising house prices (Wilcox 2006). Housing is a key part of the economic picture, providing greater wealth than any other part of the economy and driving spatial polarisation (Thomas and Dorling 2004, p12).

Social housing investment significantly increased during New Labour's term of office, after an initial fall (Wilcox 2006). This public housing investment has increasingly been directed to 'successful' areas where prices are high. The table below shows how the share of resources has changed, partly in response to the increasing cost of building in the South.

**Table 2: Changing Housing Corporation investment 1996-2004**

Region	1996/97 HNI allocation %	2004/05 allocation (cash %)	1996/97 allocation cost compensated %	2004/05 allocation (units %*)
London	25	48	34	35
SE	12	18	11	23
Y&H	9	4	8	4
NE	4	3	3	3
NW inc Mersey	15	7	13	4

\*This table uses the unit allocation as a proxy for cash allocations that in the past used a cost compensation formula to recognise differing regional construction costs

Sources: Housing Corporation ADP statement 1996, NAHP statement 2004

The same effect at national level appears to be repeated, to a lesser degree, within regions. Housing Corporation policy statements (see, for example, Government Office for Yorkshire and Humber 2007) confirm that increasing shares of the development budget have gone to economically 'hot' areas such as Yorkshire's 'golden triangle', to provide housing for those marginalised by the effects of growth. In Yorkshire and Humber for example, the Housing Corporation split its 2006-08 investment programme with 59% going to improve access, ie where housing is otherwise unaffordable, and 41% to demand issues. In North Yorkshire, the access figure was 100% (Government Office for Yorkshire and Humber 2007).

Cameron and Shucksmith (in Power, Hart and Shaw 2007, p92) contend that the strong limitation on new housing allocations across the North under New Labour, combined with a focus on the conurbations, is proving damaging to isolated towns. They say: 'It is localities outside of the major urban areas, including that market towns, that tend to feel the squeeze of limited regional allocations of housing on the one hand, and the concentration on regeneration and development within the main urban areas on

the other. Within the northern regions, additional housing allocations are seen as a resource for regeneration but are a resource that is scarce and contested, and in the competition rural areas and the market towns within them tend to lose out.’

Under New Labour the housing stock transfer programme was accelerated (see next chapter). District councils had been the first to begin transfers, partly for ideological reasons and partly because they were in a stronger position to do so, having a positive value to their stock (Mullins and Pawson in Malpass and Rowlands (eds) 2010, p78-79). As the New Labour decade continued, increasing numbers of smaller districts transferred because they forecast that they would not be able to balance their accounts in the longer term. By 2010 this meant that, for example, of 44 district authorities in two-tier areas of the North at the point of local government reorganisation in 2009, 29 had transferred their stock (Communities and Local Government 2010b).

Mullins and Murie (2006, p80) note that authorities that have transferred their stock may suffer disadvantage. ‘After transfer local housing authorities often have quite limited staff to develop their strategies and may have lost their best senior managers to housing associations in a process aptly described as “intellectual asset stripping”.’

This effect is confirmed in part by Groves and Sankey (2005), who found a much depleted private sector and strategic housing function in local authorities across England: ‘Over half (54 per cent) of all local housing authorities employed fewer than five full-time members of staff on private sector housing renewal activity and 26 per cent of authorities had less than three people undertaking such work.’ This is despite the fact that 72 per cent of England’s housing stock is in private ownership. Groves and Sankey concluded: ‘Private sector housing renewal has a very low political priority locally and many housing authorities in the country are not adequately staffed to carry out their obligations under the RRO<sup>4</sup> and the Housing Act 2004.’

The Taylor Review (Taylor 2008, p56) considered the conflicting demands for housebuilding numbers and place-shaping<sup>5</sup>. It said: ‘The messages about place shaping aren’t being listened to as assiduously as those about speed and volume of house building. Local planning authorities have, in many cases, either been unable to gear up their planning departments to deal with the scope of the new demands being made upon them, or they do not have the time, capacity or resources to focus on issues of place shaping.’ Government recognised this wider capacity problem and responded with

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<sup>4</sup> Regulatory Reform Order, introduced in 2002 to grant greater powers to local authorities

<sup>5</sup> The strategic role for local government, defined as ‘using powers and influence creatively to promote the well-being of a community and its citizens’ (Lyons 2007, p3)

attempts to merge smaller district councils, with mixed success. The next section develops this point more fully.

This section has suggested that housing can be viewed as part of the competition ethos of government. The question of where housing investment should be located is contested, with some arguing for social investment while others prefer investment to support economic growth. Smestons suffer a variety of housing problems from high prices to poor quality private renting. Restricted investment in the North and a focus on the conurbations has disadvantaged towns and rural areas, according to some. Stock transfer has limited the ability of smaller authorities to run an effective housing function.

## **2.5 Local government and the bureaucracy**

Towns in rural areas are generally still part of the two-tier local government system of districts and counties. Governments from 1974 onwards have made repeated efforts at governance rescaling with reforms to local government boundaries, initially consolidating many urban and rural district councils into larger entities and more recently in the 1995-98 period under Sir John Banham to create unitary councils out of either larger metropolitan counties or large towns formerly in the two-tier system (Fenwick and Bailey 1999, pp249-261).

One of New Labour's early changes, under the Local Government Act 2000, was to require local authorities to choose a new internal structure involving three choices: mayor and cabinet, leader and cabinet, or mayor and council manager (Wilson and Game 2006, pp101-102). Shire districts with populations under 85,000 were allowed to remain in a modified version of the existing committee system, and participants in the current study that had opted for this generally referred to themselves as 'fourth option' councils.

The same legislation brought in Local Strategic Partnerships, part of New Labour's shift from local government to governance and a necessity in tackling the complexities of poverty and social exclusion, the government said (Wilson and Game 2006, p147). For two-tier districts, this meant working at county, or sub-regional, level, though some later set up district wide LSPs as well. A variety of other partnerships were also created at various spatial levels, notably the private sector-driven economic partnerships. Wilson and Game note that accountability is necessarily weakened by the move to a variety of partnerships and networks, and their benefits including value for



money cannot be quantified (*ibid*, pp151-152). These were also findings of Sullivan and Skelcher (2002, p25), together with added complexity and resource demands, in an otherwise supportive thesis.

In 2007 the government brought in a further change when unitary councils were created (beginning at April 2008) from some of the former two-tier counties, this time generally favouring the county level and removing districts. In the North, Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Lincolnshire are all to remain two-tier for the present while Cheshire, Northumberland and Durham have become unitary in different forms (Communities and Local Government 2007b). The proposal (Communities and Local Government 2006a p5) stemmed from dissatisfaction with the two-tier system. The CLG outlined its view of the weaknesses as making it 'harder to achieve that strong leadership and clear accountability which communities need. There are risks of confusion, duplication and inefficiency between tiers, and particular challenges of capacity for small districts'. A literature review for the CLG (PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2008, pp5-6) found that larger authorities do have better service performance than two-tier districts, but 'fare worse in terms of community empowerment'. The review found no clear relationship between size and strategic leadership.

The two-tier system sits uncomfortably with later developments such as local area agreements (from 2004, see Wilson and Game 2006, p375) which are drawn up at county level but must span a variety of districts with differing circumstances. A number of local strategic partnerships may be involved in drawing up the county LAA, some of whose members will have a local interest only.

It appears that district councils are caught in a dilemma whereby they lack capacity or power on their own to tackle large-scale problems, but when they work (and are compelled to work) at higher levels such as the region, they may lack influence via formal structures. The problem is demonstrated in the workings of regional assemblies which until 2009 were charged with drawing up regional spatial strategies. An evaluation of one regional assembly by Arup (2007, pp5-8) found 'those with real clout and influence are involved' and noted:

'There is general consensus that those who sit on the executive board are from key regional organisations and are of sufficiently senior status. Members are drawn from regional leaders and influencers, a mix and profile that are essential if the regional board is to act as the regional strategic decision-making body.'

However, power through this board is diffused by a system of group representation in which district councils have no seat but are represented via other

organisations (Yorkshire and Humber Assembly 2007).

Towns in two-tier areas may be especially constrained in terms of the decision making available to them on public investment. Wilks-Heeg and Clayton's (2005) study of two northern towns in such districts, Harrogate and Burnley, found local authorities controlled as little as 5 per cent of total spending, and only 53 per cent (Harrogate) or 40 per cent (Burnley) of public spending. About 30 quangos in each area had some role in controlling spending. The findings resonate with a complexity and confusion of government funding streams found by other researchers that is discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

An evaluation of the government's modernisation agenda (Martin and Bovaird 2005), whilst generally favourable, raised four specific concerns relevant to the type of smaller authorities in this study (quoted in Wilson and Game 2006, p378):

- Initiative overload, particularly among smaller authorities
- What is seen as the increasing level of central control over local councils
- The ways in which the provision of more joined-up services is made more difficult by what is perceived to be a lack of joined-up working in central government and the inspectorates
- The costs of inspection.

Political lobbying by market towns is done via a variety of different organisations, reflecting the lack of homogeneity of the group. District councils caucus within the Local Government Association; the Association of Market Towns, supported by the Countryside Agency, is a voluntary membership organisation; and the Association of Retained Council Housing has a strong representation within its ranks from districts. Some counties or sub-regions, such as the South West, have set up market and coastal town associations to further regeneration projects such as the MTI. It would be wrong, therefore, to suggest that market towns are not represented in political lobbying, but it could be argued that their voice lacks cohesion because their different circumstances and interests do not naturally bring them together as a single group. In a competitive situation where other groups with greater influence and resources can lobby more effectively, market towns' interests could be pushed aside.

In the functioning of local government, economies of scale found in larger conurbations may also elude smaller towns. A study by Pricewaterhouse Coopers (2007) examined the costs to local councils of central government reporting requirements. It found Doncaster Metropolitan Council (annual revenue budget £209m)

had a reporting cost of £3.2m (1.5%) while Telford and Wrekin unitary council (annual revenue budget £106m) recorded £1.6m (1.5%); and Sevenoaks district (annual revenue budget £16m) had a reporting cost of £0.37m (2.3%).

Public sector efficiencies under the government's 'Gershon' agenda (requiring annual cash or quality gains following a report by Sir Peter Gershon) also appear hard to realise for smaller places. An analysis of reported local authority gains by Williams (2006) found that on the forward look (forecast gains) for housing in 2005/6, district councils were by far the least likely type of authority to report any gains – just 75 of 145 with a housing revenue account (53%) compared with between 72 and 83% of other types of authority. They also reported the lowest gains per property.

In summary, Smesto authorities can be seen as something of an anachronism when retained within the two-tier system and exempted from organisational change yet subject to the same government requirements as other places. They are undoubtedly closer to their populations than larger authorities, but lack the resources and possibly the influence to work at higher spatial levels.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has set out the main relevant issues concerning Smestos and their governance organisations. In economic terms, the performance of Smestos is seen to vary widely. While some are among the most wealthy and desirable places in the UK to live, others are well below the average for productivity and some are in population decline. Proximity to a city region has been identified as a key determinant of economic health on this measure.

Isolated Smestos that are far from the core of a city region are therefore at a disadvantage. In recent years this economic inequality has grown, with wealth moving towards the South of England and towards the conurbations. Data from the northern regions suggests that common features of isolated Smestos include high house prices in relation to the relatively low wages available; a hollowed out demographic profile with an ageing population and fewer than average working age people.

In housing, Smesto authorities are increasingly required to work at sub-regional or regional level, but have few resources to do so. Their allocations of new housing have been restricted, and funding for social housing has increasingly been channelled to areas that are economically above average. Most authorities in two-tier local government areas in the North have transferred their own housing stock, further restricting their

capacity for housing strategy activity.

Smestos in isolated locations are generally, though not always, part of the two-tier governance and administration system. This has itself been subject to consultations on rescaling and, for some, major change to unitary status during the time of this study. The two-tier authorities may face difficulties in addressing or influencing developments under New Labour such as local area agreements drawn up at county level. They also find it difficult to realise the economies of scale available to larger authorities.

Smestos in the North therefore face a series of economic and social problems related to their location and authority size. However, they have generally not been able to access the special funding streams such as housing market renewal or neighbourhood renewal fund because they lack the critical mass of deprivation, or similar criteria, to trigger eligibility.

It can be seen that most of the available information concerning Smestos is quantitative. Despite their importance as spatial entities, Smestos are found to be an under-researched topic area. Relatively little is known in research terms about individual Smestos or how they have responded to their circumstances. A research theme that focuses on the experiences of those living through the recent situation and responding to it is therefore suggested, to bridge a qualitative gap in the literature. The particular economic disadvantage of northern Smestos and the presence of the unifying Northern Way government approach offer a focus on the North. The period of New Labour government offers a timeframe, and as will be seen in the next chapter, a context.

The primary research question concerning the experience of isolated northern Smesto authorities will be set within a wider context in the next two chapters. First, in Chapter 3, the political environment of New Labour and the third way establishes recent developments affecting Smestos. Then Chapter 4 outlines the 'liquid modernity' lens through which Smestos' situation and authority responses will be analysed.

### 3 New Labour and the third way

Smestos were deeply affected by political developments during New Labour's tenure, particularly in the areas of competition, reform of public services, and governance rescaling. Regional issues became an abiding theme of the party's time in government as part of a series of rescaling and devolution initiatives. In order to understand the localised effects of national and international politics and set them in context, this chapter explores the wider theme of what was called 'third way' politics.

Labour returned to power in the UK in 1997, restyling itself New Labour on the promise of a new kind of politics that its leadership called the third way (Blair 1998, Giddens 1998, 2000). This was in reality modelled on an international political ideology notably promulgated by the US administrations of Bill Clinton from 1992 to 1998 but also encompassing a European version (Reich 1999). Much has been written about the nature of the third way at that time and since (see, for example, Rubinstein 1997, Finlayson 1999, Giddens 2000), and this chapter outlines some of the main arguments concerning strands of ideology and policy that are most relevant to Smestos.

The two exemplars of housing and prestige projects are also outlined. Two further aspects of New Labour government affecting Smestos and other spatial entities, new public management and initiative churn, are examined via the available academic literature. The chapter begins with an overview of the third way.

#### 3.1 The meaning of 'third way'

Early debate on the third way concerned the conception of a politics that by its nature is 'not' something else: a third way must always be described relative to two other ways (Blair 1998, Reich 1999). The basis and particular emphasis of policy developed during the lifetime of the Labour government, giving rise to further debate on the government's 'real' intentions and whether it had in fact followed the third way as originally outlined (Giddens 2000; Coutts, Glyn and Rowthorn 2007). More latterly, evidence has emerged of a country that is increasingly socially and economically divided, and the debate has shifted again to consider whether this is a side-effect; intentional; unavoidable; or merely that the statistics are misleading (Russell 2009, p34; Clark 2009, pp20-21; Dorling 2007, p321). This section considers the main themes of third way debate.

A special issue of the magazine *Marxism Today* in 1988, written by Stuart Hall, encapsulated and analysed important changes in late capitalism, including the decline of large scale, mass employment industries leading to a similar decline in class-based politics. Hall titled the new landscape post-Fordism (Finlayson 1999, p272).

The post-Fordist argument concerned, in part, the loss through industrial and social change of a large core of working-class people who might make up Labour's heartland. In future, the emphasis would have to be on individuals and their aspirations, with flexible policies that tuned in with ideas of choice and liberty. This is clearly in line with Bauman's analysis of the 'significant shift in emphasis' (see Chapter 4) within modern capitalism, in which the individualised, consumer driven liquid modernity becomes dominant while the previous era of 'heavy' modernity declines.

Reich (1999, p2) in outlining the tenets of third way politics points to the acceptance (as in Bauman) that globalisation is inevitable; and this is a theme strongly argued by New Labour during its time in government. A key example here was Prime Minister Gordon Brown's disowning of the financial crisis and collapse of UK banks from 2007 as being caused by international factors beyond the control of the national government, and requiring a global response (Summers 2009).

In fact, New Labour's version of the third way relied on a series of givens, as outlined by Giddens (Hutton and Giddens, 2000, p2). In conversation with Will Hutton, he points first to globalisation of trade and communications, and second to the weightless or knowledge economy, itself increasingly globalised. Hutton agrees: 'What is different is the sense that this is all-encompassing and carries a new inevitability; its momentum is a superior power to any other, even that of the state. There is an interlocking between the technological advances, a more aggressive capitalism prepared to drive change along globally and a political leadership that sees no alternative but to allow the process to continue.'

Reich notes (1999, p3) that the European version of the third way, contrasted with that in the United States, contained a strong element of social justice. The idea was that sharing of economic growth spurred by free market policies can be realised if those initially hurt by them are given the means to adapt. Tony Blair and colleagues in the leadership of New Labour picked up on this idea of marrying liberal economics with creating opportunities for people to help get themselves out of difficulty or dependency. They called it stakeholding. Fairclough (2000, pp86-93) charts what he believes is the first mention of the term, in a Blair speech to business leaders in Singapore in 1996. Blair in his speech compared UK society to a company, urging

people to get on board a project for a mutual national purpose, in a relationship of trust called the stakeholder economy. This, he said, would ensure that ‘each citizen gets a stake ... a sharing of the possibility of power, wealth and opportunity.’ That opportunity would be based on merit.

Overall, New Labour was seeking to bring together policy strands from across the political spectrum in order to meet in a pragmatic way what it saw as conditions brought about by globalising forces beyond nation-state control. This marrying up of apparently unlikely, even contradictory, ideas became another central aspect of the third way; in fact, it was a rhetorical device that enabled New Labour to make some bold claims. Take this for example, from Blair’s Fabian pamphlet (1998, original emphasis): ‘My vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is of a popular politics reconciling themes which have been wrongly regarded as antagonistic – patriotism *and* internationalism; rights *and* responsibilities; the promotion of enterprise *and* the attack on poverty and discrimination.’

Fairclough (2000, p45) contends that not only do lists such as these defocus the question of how the themes are to be reconciled, the lists obscure by giving a sense that quite different pairings of themes are equivalent when in reality fundamental differences of interest and power are involved.

Returning to the New Labour ‘rights and responsibilities’ combination, a subtle but fundamental change in the approach to social issues emerges: the ‘responsibilities’ tenet meant, as Freedon (1999) comments: ‘The replacement of the socialist “right to work” with a puritanical “duty to work”, amid references to human beings as a resource, or as capital.’ In a clear break with previous Labour values, Blair painted the welfare state not as an achievement of past governments, but as a negative (in Fairclough 2000, pp86-93): ‘The old means of achieving [the sharing] on the left was through redistribution in the tax and benefit regime... But really a life on benefit – dependent on the state – is not what most people want. They want independence, dignity, self-improvement, a chance to earn and get on.’ Thus, New Labour placed emphasis on opportunity taking, in which disadvantaged places and people are expected to self-improve. Similarly, Johnstone and Whitehead (2006 p16, their emphasis) argue: ‘In terms of urban policy, the creation of a more equitable society now seems to depend upon the creation of an *equality of opportunity* rather than more traditional programmes of income distribution.’

Under New Labour, new rights for citizens to receive decent public services were balanced with a range of responsibilities, and over time, the government increasingly

portrayed the responsibilities side in terms of individuals' behaviour rather than as wider social problems. Mandelson (2008, pp5-7) in part criticised this approach, admitting that structural inequalities would not be overcome merely by making opportunities available. His solution was, however, for individuals to change. He called for a 'mutual guarantee state', in which for example: 'Regeneration of deprived communities depends on new investment, but ultimately renewal must come from within ... The role of government is to forge this [new social contract] by equipping individuals and communities as best they can to meet their responsibilities.' The emphasis throughout was firmly on enterprise and business, and he advocated benefit cuts for those who did not take up their opportunities. This line of approach found a resumption in 2008 with incoming housing minister Caroline Flint's view that social housing tenancies should be dependent on the occupants seeking work (Hilditch 2008).

The contradiction of equality of opportunity when people's exercise of it will necessarily deny others that same opportunity in future is just one of a number of incompatible elements in New Labour's approach, according to Rubinstein (1997, p342).

Giddens (2000, p88) addresses this problem by arguing that social diversity is 'not compatible' with a strongly defined egalitarianism of outcome. Third way followers should therefore embrace that fact and celebrate that opportunity offers greater chances for diversity. He goes further, turning issues of wealth and poverty into ones of subjective reality. 'Equality and inequality revolve around self-realisation. What matters isn't economic deprivation as such, but the consequences for individuals' well-being. People who choose to live frugally are in quite a different position from those whose existence is blighted by unwanted poverty.'

This section has outlined significant themes of third way politics and the way in which the New Labour government applied them. Competition is seen to dominate, though social justice did receive attention. Individuals are expected to self-improve, whether or not they have the resources to do so. The next three sections consider specific policy aspects of New Labour government that are relevant to Smeston and therefore to this study: regional issues, prestige projects and housing.

### **3.2 Spatial governance and regional issues**

New Labour recognised before taking power that regional issues would be a key theme of its time in government, as shown in its 1997 manifesto (Labour Party, 1997). Early



in its tenure, the Labour government created nine regional development agencies (RDAs) as what it said was a means of shifting power from the national level, a stepping stone towards elected regional governance in England (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2000). The RDAs in reality took on a different function, however, as part of the drive for national economic competitiveness. Hall (2003, p268) shows how this type of spatial policy is designed to promote economic growth in all regions, because only through optimal performance by each can the national objective be achieved. In this sense it is a policy to tackle economic opportunities forgone rather than stemming from previous Labour governments' belief in redistribution on the basis of social justice. Etherington and Jones (2009, p252) say this policy approach almost perversely ends up conceptualising the North as 'an economic millstone around the country's neck', requiring it to 'pull its socks up'.

New democratic structures for Scotland and Wales were created, followed by a new governance settlement in Northern Ireland. English devolution faltered, however, and the country was left with RDAs, unelected assemblies and a new version of the traditional Government Offices all operating at the regional level (Cole 2003).

As with other aspects of New Labour, the devolution project encompassed opposing political ideas. Though the government said it was devolving power downward (and this is part of Giddens' theoretical take on the third way (Giddens 2000)) in reality much of what was devolved consisted of responsibilities, not power (Hickman and Robinson 2006, p167).

At the same time, the government was taking a more centralised grip on many aspects of civil and public life (Mullins and Murie, 2006, p138). Discussing housing policy, Hickman and Robinson (2006, p168) comment: 'New structures and tiers of governance might be presented as a devolution of power and responsibility, but they can also serve as a means of maintaining control in an increasingly complex housing system ... the "going local" agenda has been used as a mechanism for passing the responsibility of "government", and all the problems that this entails, from itself to regions and communities.' The range of new national inspectorates also ensured that local control was minimised. Goodchild and Hickman (2006, p124) use the French term *deconcentration* for this *apparent* transfer of power: 'A means whereby central government can establish a national spatial strategy, with regionally specific variations, whilst keeping this beyond the control of elected local authorities.'

Humphrey and Shaw (2004, pp2184-85) pointed up the emphasis in regional devolution on economic issues at the expense of genuine democratic renewal. They

challenged the idea that regional governance would intrinsically be closer to people, not least because of entrenched structures of power – constituting in the North East a ‘one party state’ – that would be hard to change.

The role of regions in governance has been part of a wider debate that could broadly be called new regionalism. Lovering (2001, p350) defines this as ‘an attempt to spatialise an influential set of business discourses’ whose core concerns are ‘globalisation and business, not regional development in any coherent, comprehensive sense’. Commentators such as Morris (1987) and O’Brien (1992) argued that the breakdown of Fordist industrial patterns was allowing previously ‘peripheral’ regions to become growth centres. But Rodriguez-Pose (1994, pp4-9) found an ‘overemphasis on innovation and dynamic elements in the restructuring process’ produced ‘the widespread impression that a new and distinctive post-Fordist spatial configuration was emerging’ and that the idea that ‘location no longer matters’ to growth was premature.

Sandford (2005) commented on the relative diminution in hierarchical systems of government and the rise in their place of governance, with its characteristics of networks and partnerships. Stoker (2000, p5) highlights the difficulties for local authorities in dealing with the new challenges: ‘A successful and stable “post-Fordist” regime to structure state-society-economy relations has not emerged. British local authorities lack the power and institutional capacity to develop a sufficiently broad-ranging response to the challenges they face. Moreover, their spatial scale and boundaries make them unsuitable for the task.’

### **3.2.1 City regions**

One aspect of the New Labour government’s approach to regional issues within a competitive economic framework has been the development of city regions. These are defined by Scott *et al* (2001) as ‘metropolitan-scaled clusters of socio-economic importance’. Based on large conurbations, and with eight designated in the North, the concept is highly relevant to Smesto authorities who must find their place in this new spatial hierarchy.

According to Etherington and Jones (2009, pp248-249) the city region concept dates back perhaps half a century, with international political interest periodically increasing in the wake of ‘failed attempts to build stable ‘regional units’ of state intervention’. In its manifestation under New Labour, the original aim was to help overcome spatial inequalities through competitiveness (see new regionalism above),

but the authors claim this new level of governance can actually reinforce uneven development.

In the early years of New Labour, some of the old industrialised cities, notably Manchester and Birmingham, began to voice frustration at their lack of independent financial and policy levers to achieve regeneration. The freedoms for local government hinted at by New Labour in opposition had materialised only to a limited extent. New Labour on taking office applied the spending plans formulated by the previous Conservative government, which involved cutting budgets for some ministries including housing.

The group of local authorities that became known as the Core Cities Group felt an urgent need to deal with problems of economic decline, population loss, transport, housing and anti-social behaviour. Their membership of the Eurocities group (with Birmingham as chair and Manchester as vice-chair) showed them the possibilities for what could be achieved by city regions with greater devolved powers as are present in some European countries. They also believed that they needed to make their voice heard directly by EU institutions on the increasingly central issue of EU capital funding streams. Leeds, for example, says: 'Leeds joined Eurocities in 1991 to help get Leeds citizens the best deal in Europe' (Leeds City Council 2007). The group began to feel that the UK government was lagging behind this agenda for change. Pierre and Peters (2000, p125) find that such attempts to bypass the nation state can become components of a global-local model of governance that has been explored in a number of countries.

The government was in fact addressing competitive issues in reports commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2003a, 2004, 2006b) that saw improving the competitiveness of English cities as a means to social and physical regeneration. As Lee notes (in Malpass and Rowlands 2010, p195), part of the strategy was 'to target knowledge-intensive industries and promote housing, planning and regeneration policies to attract and retain knowledge-intensive workers and the creative class'.

At the same time, the Labour government was wrestling with its stalled plans for devolution to elected regional assemblies, based on the Government Office regions. City regions seemed to offer a viable way forward that would fit with the economic competitiveness policy and would not require an extra layer of government.

Out of this thinking on city regions came The Northern Way, a spatial planning blueprint drawn up by the three northern RDAs to foster economic growth, and based on eight city regions (Northern Way Steering Group 2004a, 2004b). The 'purple haze'

map for these regions (Appendix 5) illustrated the choice the RDAs had made in favour of neo-liberal economics, backing the likely ‘winners’ and excluding the rest.

According to the RDAs, the Northern Way covers 90% of the population in the North (Northern Way Steering Group 2004a). The approach, which would concentrate investment in the city regions, required other areas to make sacrifices: something that would be difficult to achieve within a democratic framework of local authorities (Harding and Nevin 2005). Northern Way Steering Group (*op cit*, p19) defends this position: ‘It is essential that we focus on our city regions ... To do otherwise would dramatically lessen the impact of our efforts.’ The business plan calls for joint working to improve ‘the rural offer’ but it is left to individual city regions to deal with this.

The Northern Way has attracted criticism from academics on two fronts: that its conception is not well founded and contradictory, and that it is not likely to succeed even on its own terms. Goodchild and Hickman (2006) conclude that while The Northern Way was an innovative attempt to combine economic housing and spatial measures, amongst others, it suffered serious flaws:

‘The Northern Way can, in part, be understood as an attempt to define which areas of the North should be demolished and which areas should be developed. The policy assumptions are similar at a national and regional level: support growth where it occurs, retrench and withdraw elsewhere ... It is the logical consequence of a policy based on the prioritisation of growth and the separation of sustainable and unsustainable communities.’

Ward (2006) noted that the city region concept was already influencing regional planning, ‘in advance of anyone really having a clear sense of what city regions are’. Failure to explain and justify it properly made it look like ‘a faddish idea imposed from on high,’ he added. And on the practical implications: ‘All places beyond what sometimes gets called the urban core of the city region (including all types of towns and smaller cities, as well as rural areas) risk being marginalised from this process. Having places ‘beyond the city region’ risks a two-speed, twin track approach to regional development, in which the positive benefits that flow from increased rural-urban relationships and interdependencies go unrealised and under exploited.’

Gonzalez (2006, p3) also found that the city region idea was ‘a concept in search of an agenda’, and that the Northern Way was focused almost entirely on competitiveness. She added: ‘If the city regions were to be the new scale for resolving the output gap and talking pan-northern issues, more emphasis should be placed on the relationships and linkages between these city regions and the areas that fall outside them.’

The RDAs have more recently recognised that the prospect for ‘trickle down’ of wealth is not likely to succeed in persuading those outside the city regions to give up their chance for investment. Yorkshire Forward (2007a) states:

‘We also recognise that the so-called ‘trickle-down effect’ of increased wealth gradually making its way to the most deprived individuals is not enough. The team works with colleagues ... to help ensure that our investments in business development and rural and urban renaissance deliver the maximum benefit to those groups and communities most in need of support.’

In 2010 the National Audit Office reported on the performance of the eight RDAs outside London (National Audit Office 2010a, pp6-9). It found that their task was hampered by a variety of different funding streams controlled by different departments – the RDAs under New Labour were responsible to the Business Innovation and Skills department but other bodies reported to Communities and Local Government, Health, Defra and so on. RDAs were required to support CLG spatial projects aimed at tackling deprivation and ‘these objectives may not always be readily compatible when deciding on potential investments’ it said. In addition:

‘It is reasonable to conclude that the RDAs’ activities have been beneficial overall. However, we are unable to conclude that the regional wealth benefits actually generated were as much as they could and should have been, and are therefore value for money. Weaknesses which, in many cases, undermined the RDAs’ ability to make decisions and set priorities to maximise regional economic wealth do not support such a positive conclusion. These weaknesses included poor project economic analysis and appraisal, pervasive optimism bias, and weak evaluation. In particular, most RDAs were unaware, until 2009, of the types of projects which yielded the best and most enduring benefits.’

Local democratic institutions have been weakened with power transferred to the ‘networked’ or ‘appointed’ state (Skelcher 1998, Sullivan and Skelcher 2002). The exemplars outlined in the next two sections, prestige projects and housing, illustrate the effects of competition and transfers of power.

### **3.3 Prestige projects**

New Labour in power continued the previous government’s concentration on special funding projects that must be bid for competitively by local authorities and their partners.

Loftman *et al* (1994) chart the rise of a culture in which promotional prestige projects are adopted by cities in response to the perceived need to attract ‘desirable’ residents and international investment. Drawn as it is on the US model, city boosterism

is designed to overcome restricted local authority finance while encouraging and aiding the private sector to take a greater role in economic growth of localities. According to the authors (*ibid*, p1), local democracy has become marginalised in the process ‘increasingly focused on the provision of prestige property developments and cultural property investments such as convention centres, opera houses and large scale leisure facilities’. They are scathing about the effects of this type of strategy:

‘The growth of promotional strategies based on prestige projects has had an impact on the delivery of other services, resulting in a withdrawal of funds from the basic needs of the urban poor. ... The pursuit of physical photo-opportunities results in the neglect of the basic social infrastructure on which the long-term future of cities depends. Any benefits which are created are distributed unevenly, increasing social inequalities and inhibiting social justice.’

Loftman *et al* (*ibid*, p13) refer to research by Lawless that found that, even at a then relatively early stage in the competitive ethos for UK government, only 10% of the Action for Cities special programme budget was subject to local authority influence. Action for Cities marked a departure in government thinking because it hugely increased the ratio of public funding to the private sector compared to the public sector. This investment was topsliced from existing government budgets.

Loftman *et al* attack the portrayal of cities as centres of consumption rather than production. Amid the ethos of competition among cities, they say (*ibid*, p17), ‘the divided local authorities are falling over themselves to compete for the reduced funds which are available, thereby contributing to the government’s efforts to undermine them’. They point out that residents, investment and visitors won in this way are just as likely to move on to another place of greater attraction, reversing the gains in the previous locality.

What began in cities has also spread to isolated towns. As will be demonstrated in later chapters of this study, prestige projects are playing a central role in the thinking of the governance authorities of Smestos.

### **3.4 Housing issues**

This section cannot encompass all aspects of UK housing policy and therefore focuses on those policies and practices pursued by New Labour in government, that are relevant to this study and to the liquid modernity thesis. It begins with consideration of inequalities, and then moves on to aspects of New Labour’s choice agenda in housing, regional policy and social housing investment.

Housing is a key part of the economic picture, providing greater wealth than any other part of the economy and driving spatial polarisation according to Thomas and Dorling (2004). In their paper for Shelter, they argue that housing is the key issue in determining poverty and wealth, and that it brings about much of the polarising effects described. Owners in the wealthiest areas are gaining asset wealth far faster than those in the poorest areas, while renters of course have no asset wealth at all. Not only that, Thomas and Dorling find that the unequal flow of housing wealth to children, rising 20 times faster in wealthy areas than the poorest, will ensure further extremes of wealth and poverty in the future.

They conclude (*ibid*, p12):

‘For children, wealth and in particular housing wealth is a national lottery of their accident of birth. Increases in direct income taxation, in inheritance tax, in benefits paid to the poor would have little influence on the results of this lottery given the sums of money involved and the abilities of the wealthiest families through trusts and other means to avoid such redistribution. Any action to reduce housing wealth inequality would have to be far more radical than is currently politically acceptable to be effective. Given that, perhaps we should expect the future to be one of 100 fold inequalities in housing wealth.’

Roger Tym and Partners (2008, Part 2 p20) also argue that unaffordable housing increases inequality and intensifies polarisation. They say: ‘The gap between those who can access home ownership and those who cannot has increased. This acts to hard-wire unequal access to the private housing market into the system.’ In this case, housing as an asset value that is locked up in the longer term constitutes one aspect of inequality, but a greater inequality could be said to result from the advantage available to some asset-holders being able to gain mortgages or release the asset value on sale (Harvey 1988, 1996).

Malpass (2006) suggested that the government’s reluctance to dampen increases or stabilise house prices came about because the increasing asset wealth in housing was a facet of neo-liberal economic policy. He proposed that the UK might already have entered a post-welfare state in which individuals must use their housing as an asset to replace collective welfare state provision. This, Malpass said, was an unstated but fundamental part of government policy. ‘The current government’s enthusiasm for yet more home ownership is all about increasing the numbers of people with housing assets, which can be put to work in due course as the need arises.’ The practicality of the use of assets as a replacement for inadequate pensions was investigated by the Pensions Commission (2005). It reported that there was no match between those with

inadequate pension rights and those owning more valuable houses. It appears the policy, if correctly interpreted, would therefore tend to increase inequalities.

Social housing, the redistributive damping mechanism that offsets the negative effects of competition, fared less well in terms of resources in the initial years from 1997 before gaining pace in new building in the latter years of the New Labour government. The government's emphasis on strong control of spending led to a specific pledge in the manifesto: 'Stick for two years within existing spending limits,' (Labour Party, 1997). In other words, Labour applied the spending plans formulated by the previous Conservative government, which involved cutting housing budgets. This was offset to an extent by the government's release of £5 billion worth of capital receipts from the right to buy (Mullins and Murie 2006, p67), but it was not until 2002/03 that housing investment returned to 1997 levels (Wilcox 2006). Spending then began to rise, as did evidence of shortages in social housing and the numbers of homeless people in temporary accommodation (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2003b, pp8-9). In 2006 the government responded to the Barker Review (Barker 2004) with plans for significant increases in new social housing built (and still greater increases in new private sector housing).

Other continuities with the previous Conservative government were apparent in the form of right to buy, additional options for transfer of local authority stock and acceleration of the programme, the convergence of social housing rents to better reflect market differentials, and housing for key workers in high cost areas (Mullins and Murie 2006, pp67-68). The increasingly stringent requirements on local authority housing standards, says Zitron (2005), coupled with increased financial demands, levered most of the council housing out of council hands for management or full ownership. Above all, New Labour continued Conservative policy in promoting home ownership throughout its time in office as part of its agenda of individual choice (see, for example, Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions 2000, p18; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2005, p32).

All of these competition enhancing policies can be viewed as part of an ideology of the market and individualisation. Those with skills were expected to move to where the best economic and housing 'offers' existed, and it was essential for authorities and providers to attract them (Housing Corporation 2004, p16). Under the New Labour government's long-term rent restructuring and housing benefit reforms, social and private tenants were expected to make housing choices using market incentives in parallel with the ownership sector (Raynsford 2003). Political institutions were also



expected to follow the market, placing public investment where it was most able to underpin private investment (Northern Way Steering Group 2005).

The Sustainable Communities Plan (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2003b) addressed the divergent problems in the North and South of England, which crudely amounted to unaffordability and price inflation in the South, with low demand and unpopular housing in the North. But as Mullins and Murie comment (2006, p76), ‘the disparity in the size of the resources initially allocated for these two agendas highlighted the extent to which housing and planning policy was driven by the problems of the South East. The intention was to respond to the problems occasioned by economic drivers in the South East while doing nothing to damage the economic competitiveness of that region internationally.’

The management of housing as a topic evolved over the decade from embryonic attempts under the previous Conservative government to separate landlord and ‘enabling’ functions. Mullins and Murie (2006, p10-11) see this as an aspect of the way in which networks and markets increasingly displaced older hierarchies at local level. Their analysis can be seen from the viewpoint of a more fluid state where old institutions dissolve, to be replaced with more nebulous competition-driven relationships.

At the same time as competition was being promoted, strategy making at sub-regional and regional level with governance authorities expected to cooperate with each other continued to grow in importance. From 2003 regional housing boards consisting of Government Offices for the regions, English Partnerships, the Housing Corporation and others were appointed to plan for and allocate housing capital investment. They were answerable to non-elected regional assemblies. Mullins and Murie (2006, p77-78) note that this involved a significant shift of power away from local authorities and other institutions:

‘Typically there were attempts to consult with and involve a large group of local authorities, housing associations and other stakeholders who were more used to operating at the district level. On the one hand this led to consultation fatigue ... on the other it led to a sense of exclusion by stakeholders who had previously enjoyed considerable local power and saw regional and sub-regional agendas as a threat to their positions. Other stakeholders – including the voluntary sector, the private sector and perhaps particularly community groups and tenants’ groups – were now further from the centre of power and their influence was weakened.’

Regional strategy making continued to develop over the decade (see for example Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2003b, Communities and Local Government 2006b), with further changes resulting from the government’s Sub-National Review Of

Economic Development and Regeneration (CLG 2007c). This time the regional assemblies created in 2003 were abolished and plans were laid to integrate regional spatial strategies (including housing) with regional economic strategies in the hands of the RDAs. Multi-area agreements covering some of the conurbations with multiple local authorities would direct resources for those areas, again combining cooperation and competition. Lee (in Malpass and Rowlands (eds) 2010, p196) comments: 'The proposals represent a rescaling and integration of housing into the broader canvas of the city-region in order to achieve competitiveness.' This view is confirmed in the Housing Corporation's 'offer' document to the Northern Way, which details how investment will be channelled to the city regions (Housing Corporation 2004, pp12-18).

This may have been the aim, but whether housing could be assimilated in this way is contestable. Cole (2003, p229) noted that Regional Economic Strategies were heavily focused on competitiveness, inward investment and an optimistic growth-oriented approach, while regional housing statements or strategies were more interested in problems of unaffordability and 'failing' markets. Cole also notes (*ibid*, p232) the increasing nationalisation of housing policy and diminution of local discretion despite the advent of regional governance.

Mullins and Murie (2006, p80) comment that overall, 'regionalisation could be seen as a more subtle process [than previous policies] that on the surface assimilated both local and central government but in practice reduced local influence still further'. The analysis carries strong echoes of Goodchild and Hickman's *deconcentration* (2006).

The economic downturn and credit crunch from mid-2007 had a dramatic effect on housebuilding, leading the government to abandon its target for new supply (Murie, p238-241 in Malpass and Rowlands 2010). Murie argues that this left a 'policy vacuum'. Nevertheless there has been a rediscovery of housing policy by government that has led to the healthy abandonment of some orthodoxies. These include the idea that the 'housing problem' has largely been solved and that housing is merely an aspect of welfare policy. Other orthodoxies remain, however, including the desirability of home ownership and the restricted level at which housing should be funded.

The three sections above have outlined particular aspects of New Labour policy (regions, prestige projects and housing). Competition emerges as the dominant and driving force in all three areas. The next section turns to a more general issue of politics and approach that is relevant to this study of Smestos, namely New Labour's public management and where ethical values might lie within it.

### 3.5 New public management

On taking office, New Labour was keen to offer the electorate a significant break with 'old' Labour on the provision of public services (Hudson and Lowe 2009, p56).

Coupled with the emphasis on rights and responsibilities, the approach depended on managerialism to transform the bureaucracy that would deliver a new kind of public services. Finlayson comments: (1999, p274): 'The design of a new politics became dependent on a particular interpretation that saw the benefits of autonomy and individuality deriving from trends inherent within contemporary capitalism. The critique of capitalism ... ceased being a political claim and became a managerial one about how to run things better.'

Mouffe attacks this type of 'post-ideological' politics (Mouffe 2005). She warns that the third way's attempt to create a consensus, smoothing over opposing ideas, concentrating on individualism and accepting greater inevitables of the market, is destructive of democracy itself. She says politics is by nature adversarial and conflictual (*ibid*, p119) and that to try to remove this aspect both denies the proper practice of politics and gives the opportunity for the rise of right-wing populist movements.

Mouffe's argument against consensus has a long pedigree, dating back at least to the French revolution when visions of the urban ideal on how to organise both society and the spaces in which we live quickly became not just how we might live, but how we should live (Osborne 2007, pp324-340). As Popper pointed out in the aftermath of the Second World War (1995, p169), such consensual ideas have a tendency to become authoritarian, to first set out ideas that no-one could possibly disagree with, and thence move to ideas you must not disagree with.

Mullins and Murie (2006, p131) find that New Labour borrowed new right ideas on new public management (later called entrepreneurial governance) in which 'public bodies are depicted as exploiting their monopoly power to maximise budgets unless they are broken up into smaller units operating under market-type arrangements to facilitate greater consumer choice.' This led to 'the increasing ability of governments to impose these theories and tools on public services by strengthening the role of management over other interest groups such as professionals, unions and local councillors,' they argue.

Examples of this approach under New Labour (and often as a deepening of previous Conservative government policies) can be found in the health service, where patients were offered choices by extending government subsidy to private sector organisations, breaking the monopoly of the NHS (Hudson and Lowe 2009, p141). The shift from local government to governance can be seen in this light, with multiple centres of power replacing the traditional council and especially in the UK, a government-driven emphasis on ‘efficiency’ and ‘enabling’. (*ibid*, p137). Under New Labour, cost savings and outsourcing were driven by a central government department within the Treasury called the Office of Government Commerce (Office of Government Commerce 2010).

Other commentators go further. Du Gay (2000, p112) argues that entrepreneurial governance means reconstructing public institutions along market lines. The ‘discursive reimagination’ of public management into a simple formula of financial efficiency ‘serves to incapacitate an institution’s ability to pursue its ongoing projects by effectively redefining its identity and hence what the nature of its projects actually are.’

The current study directly concerns elements of the bureaucracy in the civil servants at regional level, local government officers, and those working for some public sector partner organisations. As set out in the analytical framework in the next chapter (Chapter 4), conceptual issues of politics, bureaucracy and ethics can be employed to examine New Labour’s managerialism and public services. The outline above demonstrates that this is a contested area that could benefit from empirical investigation.

### **3.6 Initiative churn**

The previous section has considered New Labour’s approach to new public management, also called entrepreneurial governance, and issues of competition and asset value (Harvey 1988, 1996). A related topic that came to prominence during New Labour’s term of office was the fast turnover of initiatives by central government, the initiatives being implemented in general by the bureaucracy at various levels.

A report for the National Audit Office, for example (NAO 2010b, p4) found: ‘There have been over 90 reorganisations of central government departments and their arm’s length bodies between May 2005 and June 2009: over 20 a year on average. We estimate the gross cost of the 51 reorganisations covered by our survey to be £780 million, equivalent to £15 million for each reorganisation and just under £200 million a

year ... No departments set metrics to track the benefits that should justify reorganisation, so it is impossible for them to demonstrate that eventual benefits outweigh costs or materialise at all.' The report calls for a slowdown in reorganisations.

A significant part of the initiative churn derived from New Labour's attention to standards and regulation with a view to improving public services. Jones and Ward suggest that regional changes including the creation of the RDAs, plus constant reorganisation at national level, intensified the problem with 'policy messes and tangled hierarchies' (in Johnstone and Whitehead 2006). What this combination produced in practice was a myriad of special projects covering localities, particular target groups of people, or policy headings, created and directed at national level with a vast range of methods and outcome targets surrounding them. The result has been what then communities minister Jeff Rooker (2003) called 'a bowl of spaghetti', with highly complex networks, funding streams, and spatial coverage, and questionable accountability to the democratic structure or the people who are the targets of the policies (Wilson and Game 2006, p91).

The government continued in this way to place responsibility for achieving national objectives (sometimes with constrained powers as well) at regional or local levels, but without tackling the larger question of its national competitiveness approach. It did more latterly recognise the need for 'joined-up governance', and called for 'clear lines of sight' through policy initiatives at all levels (GOEM 2006), but continued to rely on this arising from the more localised geographical levels where capacity is likely to be most limited. Hall (2003) terms the government's economic approach a 'bootstraps response, akin to expecting the most disadvantaged communities, with limited means and assistance, to catch up with the most dynamic' (Stephen Hall 2003, p275).

The decade-plus saw the continuation and expansion of special funding streams designed to direct resources to the areas or groups most in need or where opportunities for growth were available. This culminated in a network of initiatives and targets so complex that it was difficult to map. When the Government Office East Midlands attempted to track the funding streams and targets for just one town, Nottingham, it found 90 separate funding streams, with hundreds of targets attached. As well as increasing centralisation, this created waste and bureaucracy, as each stream had monitoring and funding mechanisms attached to it (Government Office East Midlands 2006). The government responded by trying to simplify the system via another new

initiative, local area agreements, which reduced the number of targets (Communities and Local Government 2006c), followed by a similar initiative titled Total Place.

Similarly, Wilson and Game (2006, p92) report on an attempt to map the governance structure of the West Midlands. This found some 50 public bodies responsible for expenditure of £22 billion a year, none through elected bodies. In contrast, the 38 local authorities had a budget of £6 billion, of which three quarters was controlled by central government via grants.

The churn of ideas and initiatives under New Labour has been found to hamper the progress of local governance rather than improve it. Although factors such as organisational capacity, culture, and risk aversity were found to cause difficulties internally (see, for example, HQN 2004, Audit Commission 2002), government ‘initiative-itis’ or the constant initiation of new policies was by far the strongest external factor cited as causing difficulties for local authorities.

## Conclusions

New Labour promised a new kind of politics on taking office in 1997, but its policies rested on a continuation of neoliberal approaches from the previous government. These emphasised competition and the responsibility of citizens to self-improve by seizing opportunities, whether or not they had the resources to do so. The government accepted globalisation and took the view that the only possible response to it was to ‘go with the flow’, particularly in developing the global knowledge economy.

Throughout its time in government, New Labour tempered its competitive ethos with a policy strand aimed at social justice. It initiated welfare programmes and special projects for areas in need. But these were an amelioration of the main third way occupation with competition, not a replacement or rebalancing. Rhetorically, quality of opportunity replaced equality of outcomes.

New Labour paid much attention to English regional policy and established powerful regional structures of governance. These in turn developed into a city regions policy that favoured the large urban cores. Academic debate suggests that instead of devolving power to localities, the approach was more one of *deconcentration*, the apparent transfer of power.

Special funding streams controlled by central government continued to dominate the resourcing of public funding to localities. Cities and towns were encouraged to engage in boosterism to attract desirable residents and visitors.

Analysis of housing policy also suggests continuities with past Conservative government policies under New Labour, particularly in promoting the idea of individual asset wealth as a means of economic self-sufficiency. Housing emerges as a key part of the economy, and also as a key determinant of wealth inequalities – not just currently but in succeeding generations. Housing strategy making developed strongly at regional and sub-regional levels, diminishing the powers of local government.

The approach to housing issues was part of a wider managerialism under New Labour that aimed to transform public services, in part by reconstructing them along market lines. Initiative churn and continual reorganisation became a strong feature of this government. This made for difficulties for local government in resourcing and responding to the changes.

Inequalities both among individuals and geographically continued to grow. As the previous chapter demonstrated, Smestos in the North have been among those who fared economically less well. The next chapter sets out the analytical framework through which the situation and experience of Smestos, within the context of national and international politics, will be viewed.

## **4 The analytical framework: Bauman's liquid modernity thesis**

As outlined in the previous two chapters, this study concerns Smeston in the North of England, and the political forces that have affected them since 1997. Taking into account the political and geographical nature of the study, the 'liquid modernity' analysis of Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman, 1998, 2000) has been selected as an appropriate means of exploring the primary research question set out in the introduction. This chapter sets out the main relevant points in his thesis in order to establish the framework for analysis, and to allow the political, economic background to be viewed through that lens.

Bauman seeks to mark an important shift in contemporary society, brought about by the dominant political and economic paradigm at international level. He has particularly concerned himself with spatial and temporal economic differences and inequalities, and seeks to identify the driving forces for those differences.

Bauman's work considers interpretative and dialectical questions of space and time, which he contends are central concepts in understanding current spatial inequalities. He seeks to show that space (distance and/or location) is now being overtaken by time as the dominant force in our society. He analyses how the prevailing condition of liquid modernity leads to particular behaviours and attitudes by social actors and organisations.

This chapter establishes the meaning of the term liquid modernity, and the characteristics of the era. It sets Bauman's work within the academic context of debate. Bauman's distinctive analytical tool of four ideal types, which are deployed in the current study, is outlined. Specific analysis by Bauman of political institutions and the bureaucracy is debated with particular reference to issues of ethics. First, the chapter offers a broad outline of the liquid modernity thesis.

### **4.1 What does the term 'liquid modernity' mean?**

Bauman has been described as a postmodernist, but he has largely discontinued using the term (Bauman 1988b, Abrahamson 2004). More recently he has coined liquid modernity to describe and analyse the current socio-political situation. For him, there has been no decisive break with the past, but rather 'a significant shift in emphasis' (Bauman 1988b, p232), so that we are living in the modern era of capitalism, but under conditions of postmodernity. The modern era has not disappeared but co-exists with



postmodernity, the latter coming to dominate (Smith 1999, p17). An essential difference is that we have exchanged security with its negative side of oppression and control for greater freedoms accompanied by fragmentation and uncertainty. This creates a sense of ambivalence to all aspects of society (*ibid*, p193). For Bauman, the hopes and ambitions of the modern era, namely ‘the possibility of a reason-led improvement of the human condition’ can still be viable under postmodernity (Bauman 1988b, p231) though it has to be said that he paints a dystopian picture of our current society.

Turning to the ‘liquid’ part of liquid modernity, this has two aspects. The first is to seat the term within the Marxian tradition, since it derives from Marx’s prediction that ‘everything solid melts into air’, or that juxtaposed concepts such as time and space, or labour and capital, would eventually become more fluid in their relation to each other. In particular, the term re-emphasises the Marxian idea that we are not in a fixed situation, and indeed we are lacking stable institutions, so that everything today consists of process (Abrahamson 2004, p171).

The second aspect of the term is to indicate the dominance of mobility or ‘a society on the move’. Bauman’s claim, once again drawing on Marx, is that currently time is annihilating space. This is not the same thing as the fragmentation and plurality often described as characterising postmodernity (Bauman 1988b, p225) but a particular type of force that is a tool of domination. Bauman believes we have entered a time where speed of movement becomes the dominant factor (Bauman 2000, p151), overcoming space by use of time, so those who can move quickly – either physically or by moving capital or reinventing themselves – will dominate time and thus have power.

This effect, he believes, leads to social and spatial polarisation (see Wheway’s 2006 study of gentrification for an example of this effect). Bauman draws on Weber’s concept of the ‘iron cage’ in which, he says, capital and labour were both imprisoned in a symbiotic relationship under ‘heavy modernity’ (or Fordist industrialism). That concept is now modified, he argues, because ‘light [liquid] modernity let one partner out of the cage’ (Bauman 2000, p120). He adds: ‘Fluid modernity is the epoch of disengagement, elusiveness, facile escape, and hopeless chase. In liquid modernity it is the most elusive, those free to move without notice, who rule.’

A further relevant aspect of Bauman’s work is his analysis of distance as a social construct. Bauman says with the ‘time of communication imploding and shrinking to the no-size of the instant, space and spatial markers cease to matter, *at least to those whose actions can move with the speed of the electronic message.*’ (Bauman 2000, p13, my emphasis). Thus, he claims, we can confidently talk of the end of geography, and he

suggests the way to view distance today is instead as a social product. The focus needs to be shifted to the juxtaposition of ‘near’ and ‘far’ in that social context.

‘Near’, close to hand, says Bauman, is ‘primarily what is usual, familiar and known to the point of obviousness ... ‘near’ is a space inside which one can feel *chez soi*, at home; a space in which one seldom, if at all finds oneself at a loss, feels lost for words or uncertain how to act ... ‘near’ stands for the unproblematic’ painlessly acquired habits will do’ (*ibid*, pp13-14).

This is contrasted with ‘far away’, which signifies ‘a space which one enters only occasionally or not at all, in which things happen which one cannot anticipate or comprehend, and would not know how to react to once they occurred ... to find oneself in a ‘far away’ space is an unnerving experience; venturing ‘far away’ means being beyond one’s ken, out of place and out of one’s element, inviting trouble and fearing harm.’ Once again, says Bauman, the result is hesitancy and uncertainty.

## 4.2 Academic debate on Bauman’s themes

Broader academic work in the field of spatial and human geography has relevance for the situation of Smestos. Harvey (1988, 1996, 1999) has developed a thesis on the geographical aspects of crises in capitalism, while Sayer, Massey and other geographers have argued for spatial significance over a linear historical view (see Johnston 1997 for an outline of the various arguments in this field).

Bauman’s ideas on time domination are contested by some of these geographers, who argue that spatial difference remains dominant or is reasserting its dominance under conditions of postmodernity (Soja 1989, Massey 2007). Massey argues that what we have is a huge variety of coexistence that makes up our differentiated ‘now’ and that far from being annihilated, space is the central component in the new configurations under construction.

Massey argues that proponents of the theory of domination of time over space, such as Bauman, are evasively turning geography into history: a matter of time before the lagging places catch up. In this narrative, we become ‘one historical queue’ in which progress is linear and there is only one path to take: those ‘behind’ must follow where those in front lead.

Massey contends that instead, specificity – the uniqueness of place – should be accepted (1994, p8): ‘Globalisation (in the economy, or in culture, or in anything else) does not entail simply homogenisation. On the contrary, the globalisation of social

relations is yet another source of (the reproduction of) geographical uneven development, and thus of the uniqueness of place.’ Johnston (1997) explores academic dialogue on space and time in some depth, posing the deliberately provocative question: does geography matter? In response to Johnston in an earlier edition, Sayer (1994, p109) comments: ‘The difference that space makes in concrete situations can never be ignored, and therefore in that sense ‘geography matters’.’

Bauman’s linking of geography and power finds some support in Allen, Massey and Cochrane (1998, p51), who argue: ‘Space is the product of social interaction. This means that places/regions are characterised by the nature of the social relations that link them together. And social relations, necessarily, are full of power. So uneven development is not only about unequal levels of distribution; it is also about the geography of power.’ Clearly then, the issue remains contested and the question of time dominance is explored further in the current study.

Bauman accepts the premise that globalisation is a given that we (all people except a tiny elite) can only react to, not control. He says: ‘Globalisation is not about what we all ... hope *to do*. It is about what *is happening to us all*.’ (Smith 1999, p206 original emphasis). He pinpoints the fragmentation of collective identities in society and their replacement with individualisation. Under this liquid modernity, individuals are expected to self-improve (Bauman 2000, p135), by moving or gaining market readiness or other means. Abrahamson (2004) elaborates on this theme of mobility (in this sense meaning freedom to act). The emphasis, he says, has shifted from people as producers to people as consumers, ie ‘a person on the move and bound to remain so’ (Bauman 1988a, quoted in Abrahamson 2004). Society has become increasingly stratified, and the greatest determinant of those divisions is the degree of mobility.

Bauman is by no means the first academic to comment on globalisation. As long ago as 1935 political scientist Harold Lasswell titled a book ‘World politics and personal security’ (Lasswell 1935) and the theme has continued to be debated ever since (see, for example, Held and McGrew 2000, Hutton and Giddens 2000). Much of that debate is not about the fact that globalisation is happening, but about its effects and how to deal with it. Hudson and Lowe (2009, pp17-39) outline three main current approaches to the topic: scepticism, essentially asserting that globalisation is a myth; hyperglobalism, which argues that the world has been changed into a single global economy; and transformationalism, which accepts globalisation as a new type of social force. Bauman can be placed within this last approach, since he argues it is a marker of the new social, political and economic order that is liquid modernity.

Hudson and Lowe's summary of the nature of globalisation is remarkably similar to Bauman's (*ibid* 2009, p38):

'Globalisation is not a single force pulling in one direction ... it affects and forces the reinvention of all the major institutions of social life and the political state ... it is, as Giddens describes it, an 'in here' experience that challenges every human being to find for themselves, more reflexively, their own self-identity as the old certainties of status, class and tradition crumble. It affects every person and challenges them to define who they are in a world replete with choices.'

Bauman has formed a distinctive analytical approach to that effect on individuals, and this is set out more fully in the next section (s4.3). First though, the debate on another thread in Bauman's thesis, and also concerning individuals, is considered: that of competition.

Bauman suggests that the liquid modern world is one of unleashed competition. No longer is the nation state, and in western Europe the welfare state, in the driving seat, organising labour and protecting the disadvantaged. Instead, in this globalised economic and political situation with weakened institutions of 'heavy' modernity, individuals must compete for their place. Liquid modernity both requires individuals to self-improve and act as consumers, and takes away the ability of some to compete in that market. The economic shifts and uncertainties brought about by, for example, international firms moving their production sites, leave those on the receiving end with little or no resources to compete.

The idea of the competition state has been coined by Cerny and Evans (2004) to mark the change from the post-Second World War consensus politics of economy and welfare. Quoted in Hudson and Lowe (2009, p53), the argument is that issues concerning welfare were regarded as an autonomous policy field, not linked to wider economic concerns (this is itself contested with arguments that the welfare state was a subsidising of the means of capitalist reproduction – see Pierson (2006, p2). But to return to the Cerny and Evans argument, recent decades have changed that consensus to 'The emergence of the 'competition state' where government focuses its efforts on laying the conditions for economic success and looks to use all tools of policy – including its social policies – to promote this objective.' This involves rejection of Keynesian economics and increased marketisation of public services. Jessop (1999, also quoted in Hudson and Lowe, p55) also argues that Keynesian demand side support has been replaced with 'a Schumpeterian approach in which the demands of an open economy mean that the emphasis is on supply-side policies that promote flexibility, innovation and economic competitiveness.'

Hudson and Lowe reject ‘extreme’ positions of argument that the world has become an unfettered market place or that everything is at the level of individuals acting only from self-interest (2009, p123). The task, they say, is to take a pluralist approach that steers between the two – though Bauman argues that our current situation does encompass both.

A further development in institutionalist thinking is Sullivan and Skelcher’s (2002) ‘networked state’. Here, in line with Bauman’s claim of formerly solid institutions melting into a constant state of process, local governance breaks from its hierarchical traditions into a series of formal partnerships and less formal networks. One significant component of this networked state is the ‘appointed state’ (Skelcher 1998, pp1-18) in which a wide range of organisations is located as a type of quango. The networked state can innovate and bring a wider range of expertise to bear, but as Bauman warns, it is often difficult to discern who is leading. If the networked state is a manifestation of liquid modernity, the tourist type will thrive in this environment. Sullivan and Skelcher (*op cit*, p225) comment:

‘Collaborations establish new jurisdictions – functional and geographical domains – for public action. Yet there is little debate about their rationale, nor the implications for existing jurisdictions such as local councils ... nor the impact on local political systems. This suggests that governance is perceived as an essentially negotiative process in which first movers can gain advantage by creating or mandating collaborations and others must then accommodate to them.’

In a further echo of Bauman’s thesis, Stoker (quoted in Cole 2003, p224) posits ‘fatalistic’ governance, or ‘governance by lottery’ whereby government creates confusion about its intentions, and a confused range of partnerships or networks, in order to exert power and retain control over its programme.

The next section considers Bauman’s distinctive approach to analysing liquid modernity’s effect on individuals.

### **4.3 The ideal types**

The divide among individuals under liquid modernity, says Bauman, is so great that it amounts to people living in two different worlds: the ‘winners’ who have shaken off geographical limits and instead live by controlling time (termed tourists) and those who are still trapped by geographical space (vagabonds). The mobile tourists have annihilated space and live instead in time. The vagabonds are stuck in space, yet they

are still fated to be consumers. In fact, says Bauman, they are ‘failed consumers’ because they have few resources and are therefore not wanted by the market (Bauman, 1998, p93). Vagabonds are said to be forced to make consumer choices without having any real control – they are ‘fated’ to make choices.

The tourist and vagabond are ideal types used by Bauman to facilitate analysis and understanding of his liquid modernity concept. He also uses two others: the player and the stroller. The player is also a user of time though with fewer resources than the tourist. The player ‘plays his hand to the best of his ability’, seeing luck and misfortune as merely moves in the game. He attempts to stay one step ahead by anticipating his adversary’s moves. The stroller is a somewhat more nebulous ideal type, one who lives life as a series of episodes and somewhat detached from reality or engagement with others. The use of types can be traced to Weber (Kalberg 2005, p15) who developed this methodology to study the patterned action of people in groups and the societal forces at work.

Using the ideal types, Bauman explores the power relationships in his concept of choice as fate. Most people, he says, are not in a position to make real choices because they are not the rulers of liquid modernity: they are pushed into vagabond status. Their choices are illusory and become, simply, something they have to do – though they have lost faith in the effectiveness of any action so progress gives way to separate life episodes (Bauman 2000, p137). As a result, he argues, society’s recent past has been characterised by uncertainty, and anxiety about social issues such as unemployment and lack of security (*ibid*, p171).

Bauman is among the latest in a long line of theorists to address questions of human emotion, and a brief comparison with Kierkegaard’s theory of anxiety can help to uncover meaning. Kierkegaard posited that anxiety (or ‘fear that has lost its object’) derives from possibility: ‘Temporality ... is the time which situates us in a life of possibility, of freedom ... Our freedom becomes available to us through the anxious experience of temporality (Anz in Rée and Chamberlain (eds) 1998). Thus anxiety for Kierkegaard could be interpreted as coming from the human possibility of freedom to choose.

Bauman also relates anxiety to choice. The tourist, for example, fears the vagabond because the latter is the embodiment of what he might become should he make the wrong choices. But within the theory it is the requirement to make choices even though they are futile that adds another dimension of anxiety, and this is the territory of the vagabond. As Smith (1999, pp151-154) explains, ‘People need

reassuring that they have chosen wisely and that they have assembled their identities competently. They need a pat on the back.’ The tourists and others with access to expertise can buy that assurance, but the poor (the vagabonds) cannot. Bauman’s ideal types are deployed in a modified form in the current study, as explained in Chapter 5.

#### **4.4 Political institutions and governance**

Bauman has commented on the effect of liquid modernity on political institutions, though his ideas are fragmented across a series of publications. He has devoted almost an entire book to the role of the bureaucracy in the particular context of Nazi Germany (Bauman 1989) and two to ethics (Bauman 1993, 1994); all of these pre-date his liquid modernity thesis. He also comments on ethics in relation to the bureaucracy, and to his ideal types.

Bauman sets his comments on local political institutions within his analysis contrasting modern and postmodern times. First, a little context is needed to understand Bauman’s stance. He regards the ‘rationalising’ bureaucracy as a pillar of modernism (Smith 1999, p137), complete with its oppressive side in creating order, and linked intimately to the fortunes of the nation state.

Under the postmodern conditions of liquid modernity, Bauman says, local political institutions obviously still exist but are stranded in a world with a different kind of logic from the one that created them. The nation state is weakened, and local institutions in turn are rendered ineffective, and become disengaged. The power has been taken out of local politics (Bauman 2000, p133) but it is not clear who is leading: agency is missing from the scenario. Local organisations feel they are waging a battle they cannot win, because free enterprise rules (Bauman 2000, p150): ‘The nuisance power of local governments may still put vexing constraints on capital’s freedom of movement. But capital has become extraterritorial ... and its already achieved level of spatial mobility is in most cases quite sufficient to blackmail territory-bound political agencies into submission’. Communities are equally loosely tied together, and those individuals able to use liquid modernity can opt out as they choose (*ibid*, p169).

Bauman describes the cities of the world (Bauman 2007, pp85-86) as becoming the ‘dumping ground for globally conceived and gestated problems’. In this powerless state, he adds, ‘local politics – and particularly urban politics – has become hopelessly overloaded far beyond its carrying and performing capacity. It is now expected to

mitigate the consequences of a globalisation running out of control, while using means and resources that that self-same globalisation has rendered pitifully inadequate.'

In a further contrast between modernism and our current liquid modernity, Bauman comments negatively on issues of ethics. In the latter era, the emphasis has shifted from the collective to the individual, but it does not necessarily (or at all) bring about more ethical behaviour. He argues that all four of his postmodern ideal types have in common a tendency to shift moral and ethical judgements either elsewhere or out of the equation altogether (1996, in Hall and du Gay, pp18-36). 'All four intertwining and interpenetrating postmodern life strategies have in common that they tend to render human relations fragmentary ... they are all up in arms against "strings attached" and long-lasting consequences, and militate against the construction of lasting networks of mutual duties and obligations.' Individuals *might* choose to act in a moral way, but the conditions of liquid modernity free them from moral duty (Bauman 1993, p242).

Hugman (2005, p111) adds: 'Ethics in both is reduced to rules of conduct - in bureaucracy these are procedural, in business they are contractual. Both make strangers out of people who should be able to see themselves as being in relationship where discretion and moral responsibility go hand in hand.'

Bauman is uncompromising on the subject (1994, p10): 'Bureaucracy strangles or criminalises moral impulses, while business merely pushes them aside ... Neither modern organisation nor modern business promotes morality; if anything they make the life of a stubbornly moral person tough and unrewarding.' As noted above, Bauman regards the 'rationalising' bureaucracy as a pillar of modernism (Smith 1999, p137). In this aspect its main feature is that it distances individuals from their innate personal morality. Bureaucrats are therefore able to take decisions without regard to the consequences.

Du Gay warns against this construction (or reconstruction as he calls it) because, he says, the essential qualities of the bureaucratic ethos – objectivity, rationality and impartiality, justice – are being degraded and actively denigrated in favour of a world view that places individualisation and personal development as higher goals. He strongly criticises Bauman for his antipathy towards the bureaucracy and bureaucratic ethos as a case of 'soulless instrumentalism' that obliterates morality (Bauman 1993 p33-35, quoted in du Gay 2000, p57). He adds (*ibid*, p76): 'The bureau represents an important ethical and indeed political resource because it serves to divorce the administration of public life from private moral absolutisms.'



Bauman's comments on political institutions can be set within a wide academic field of governance study that encompasses, among others, the governmentality of Foucault (1977), institutionalism (Hudson and Lowe 2009, Rhodes 1990), and political science (Lasswell 1935, Lukes 1974, Reich 1999). Some of these have been briefly explored above. The current study does not explore these standpoints in depth, being mainly concerned with Bauman's thesis, but draws on this body of work for essential background knowledge. Bauman himself draws on poststructural analysis including Foucault to consider issues of power, also tracing his work back to Bentham and Weber (Bauman 1998, p34; *ibid* pp48-49).

#### **4.5 Liquid modernity and third way politics**

Bauman's thesis can be related to significant themes of third way politics and the way in which the New Labour government applied them. Under New Labour, competition is seen to dominate, though social justice did receive attention. Individuals were expected to self-improve, both complementing and contrasting with Bauman's thesis where it is apparent that the forces of power in liquid modern society prevent most from exercising real choices or making real gains.

Setting New Labour's approach to regional issues within Bauman's thesis, it is clear that the requirement to self-improve, and to compete for funding, has become dominant within the structures created. Once again, localities and organisations are required to act as consumers, but some will lack the ability to do so and will be rejected by the market – either the private sector, or within public systems, the fund givers. Regional structures have not necessarily brought decision making closer to localities: as Bauman predicts, power has been moving away from local institutions.

A strong thread of paired opposites in the rhetoric of Tony Blair as leader of New Labour is also a feature of Bauman's writing, in his case surely emerging from his academic background in Marxism and critical theory. Blair's approach contrasts with Bauman's juxtaposed opposites such as tourists and vagabonds, in that Bauman, like Fairclough (2000, see Chapter 3), at heart seeks to identify who exercises power over whom, and how.

On the third way theme of choice and opportunity, Bauman's analysis has clear resonance. He too paints a picture of the previous era of 'heavy' modernity in which solid institutions offered certainty, though with strong central control and loss of individual freedoms. Liquid modernity offers greater freedoms and flexibility of

systems, but at the cost of being driven by the market. What for Blair was people's wish to self-improve is for Bauman the fate they are presented with: they must attempt to compete even though most are doomed to fail.

Bauman sees two aspects to New Labour's 'rights and responsibilities' agenda. The first is to emphasise the individualised requirement to self-improve: the directive for opportunity taking described above. Seen through the lens of liquid modernity, the New Labour emphasis on responsibility to self-improve, that is, to take the opportunities on offer, is both a central feature of our current times and part of the process by which the 'winners' dominate the 'losers': those subjected to liquid modern life cannot lift themselves out of their position because those with power will not allow it:

'And so the pressure to pull down the last remaining barriers to the free movement of money and money-making commodities goes hand in hand with the pressure to dig new moats and erect new walls ... barring the movement of those who are uprooted, spiritually or bodily, as a result. *Green light for the tourists, red light for the vagabonds.*' (Bauman 1998, p93).

The second aspect of 'rights and responsibilities' is when Bauman directly comments on the way in which this political approach emphasises control and criminalisation of individuals' behaviour. He draws on post-structuralism, particularly Bentham and Foucault, to analyse the disciplinary aspect of responsibility-led welfare (Bauman 1998, pp103-127).

Prestige projects in towns can be seen as a core example of Bauman's thesis in which competition and market-driven principles come to dominate, and in which the winners are those who can move their capital or resources at will. Promotional prestige projects are adopted by cities – and towns – in response to the perceived need to attract 'desirable' residents and international investment (to attract the tourist ideal type, under Bauman). But Bauman concurs with Loftman *et al* (1994) on the at best temporary nature of such gains (Franklin 2003, pp 208-209):

'I have in mind certain aspects of the tourist condition and/or experience – like being in a place temporarily and knowing it, not belonging to the place, not locked into the local life 'for better or worse'. ...

Much follows, of course, from that characteristic. First of all, and perhaps the most important, is the looseness of ties with the place (physical, geographic, social): There is no firm commitment, no fixed date of staying; it's all 'until further notice'. Presumption of temporariness is built into the way of being and behaving. ...

Another feature of the tourist syndrome is 'grazing behaviour'. A flock of sheep graze on one meadow, and when the grass is all eaten up they have no reason to stay and move, or are moved, to another ... Tourists have by definition

‘pure relationship’ to the place they visit – ‘pure’ meaning that it has no other purpose than the consumption of pleasurable sensation and that once the satisfaction wanes, it wilts and fades as well – and so you move to another relationship, hopefully as ‘pure’ as the last one. The world of pure relationships is a huge collection of grazing grounds, and living in such a world is shaped after the pattern of wandering from one succulent and fragrant meadow to another. ...

And then let us not forget the frailty of relationships which tourists enter into wherever they go. As they are a priori temporary and reduced to the consumption of (limited and fast shrinking) sensations, the effort to construct a hard and tough frame of mutual rights and obligations and mutually binding rules of conduct is completely redundant – a waste of time and energy. We don’t trust the relationships to last, we have no idea how long we (tourists, workers, partners) will stay there.’

The adoption of prestige projects constitutes an example of the competitive aspects of liquid modern times, and illustrates the likely outcome of geographical inequalities according to who can best wield power and use time.

On housing, Malpass (2006) suggested that the government’s reluctance to dampen increases or stabilise house prices came about because the increasing asset wealth in housing was a facet of neo-liberal economic policy. He proposed that the UK might already have entered a post-welfare state in which individuals must use their housing as an asset to replace collective welfare state provision (and Bauman’s proposal of a shift in capitalism is again echoed here). New Labour’s various competition enhancing policies can be viewed through the liquid modernity lens of market and individualisation. Those with skills are expected to move to where the best economic and housing ‘offers’ exist, and it is essential for authorities and providers to attract them. The imbalance of competitive and social justice imperatives in housing resonates with Bauman’s prediction of geographical and time-based inequality.

Another topic that came to prominence during New Labour’s term of office was the fast turnover of initiatives by central government, the initiatives being implemented in general by the bureaucracy at various levels. Under New Labour, this initiative churn took on an aspect that could be analysed as part of the fluid shifting of previously more stable institutions that characterises liquid modernity, giving rise to uncertainty and limiting their power to act. For central government it can be seen as a time-controlling use of power that protects its dominant role. Just as Bauman suggests liquid modernity has brought new freedoms (for some) at the cost of stability and certainty, initiative churn and reorganisations have the potential to create new ways of working but in practice have tended to create confusion and instability.

Here an apparent contradiction arises. Bauman and other commentators on

globalisation point to the weakened nation state as the market takes greater power. As this section has shown, however, central government has at the same time been taking greater power at the expense of local institutions. The scenario can perhaps best be analysed via Bauman's shifting nature of the liquid modern world, in which organisations and individuals compete for power. National governments might be weakened on the global stage but they still retain considerable powers over local institutions. In contrast, the power of the market is felt at all levels.

An example of the way in which time is used by the centre to retain power can be seen in strategy making. Central government and its agencies can slow or speed up local activity by imposing or lifting process demands. The time-based flow of resources is in turn dictated by the strategy process, because funds must follow the strategy. The government's demand for individual consumer power means councils and LSPs must continually engage local residents in consultation exercises to review an existing strategy or develop a new one – on a timescale set by central government. Seen through liquid modernity, 'initiative-itis' can be conceptualised as a melting of previously solid local institutions, with power moving away from localities as they are driven by the push factor of time-based events.

Also in common with New Labour, Bauman refers to technological advance of knowledge industries. For New Labour, this is the means by which the UK will, and must, compete in the future. Bauman sees the same industries as part of his thesis on time domination. The internet, he says, has rendered distance (or space) irrelevant because space-time compression is reduced to zero. Crucially though, only some inhabitants of liquid modernity can take advantage – the tourists who dominate by using time in this way. Taking the example further, it is possible to argue that most internet users will be consumers, failed or otherwise, fated to make choices from an ever greater array. Those without internet access will, of course, become increasingly excluded.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has considered the analytical framework based on Bauman's liquid modernity thesis, with its key components of time domination, globalisation, individualism and competition. In Bauman, the current era of liquid modernity is contrasted with the previously dominant phase of late capitalism which he calls heavy modernity. By pointing up this contrast, Bauman shows how fluid processes and the

disintegration of formerly stable institutions has given rise to uncertainty, albeit with greater freedoms for individuals.

Bauman has used ideal types to identify the winners and losers of liquid modernity, and the way in which failed consumerism, uncertainty and anxiety affect those with vagabond status. The tourists dominate by being able to use time, and have cast off their ties with any locality. At the other end of the winner/loser scale, the vagabonds are pushed by circumstance. They are still rooted in place and cannot use time in the same way as the tourists. They must still compete, by means of self-improvement, but they are failed consumers: they are fated to make choices but the choices are futile.

Bauman's analysis of political and local institutions reveals organisations that are disempowered and disengaged, trapped in their existing systems while the postmodern tourists claim power through the use of time. The bureaucracy, as a pillar of modernism, is painted as a bastion of negative and oppressive rationality that pushes aside moral values. So too the liquid modern ideal types remove ethics from the equation, morals becoming an individualised issue.

Bauman's thesis and his sources cover a range of academic literatures spanning sociology, human geography, governance and politics, as well as their various subsets and linkages. His views are contested by some human geographers who assert the role of space, and by some social scientists concerned with governance who dispute his view of the bureaucracy. Globalisation emerges as a key issue, with wide ranging academic debate on its effects and possible responses to it. The next chapter sets out the methodological approach to the study.

## **5 Methodology and methods**

In this chapter, the qualitative methodology adopted for the study and reasons for its selection are detailed. Bauman offers no practical guidance on how empirical research using the liquid modernity thesis as an analytical framework might be conducted. His sources at theory level are eclectic and his work resists categorisation. For the current study, since the aim is to uncover the views and experience of participants, an interpretative approach is seen as appropriate and the study draws on the hermeneutical tradition of the twentieth century as well as being informed by recent theorists including Habermas (Harrington 2000) and Giddens (Giddens 1984, Moses and Knutsen 2007).

The methods adopted are intended to complement the methodology. Three groups of interviewees were selected, to give first region-wide views of governance in the North; second, views from a group of local authorities representing isolated towns; and third, case studies involving a range of participants from each of three isolated towns.

Semi-structured interviews were the principal data gathering method, and published texts such as strategy documents were also used as a resource. The interviews, treated as texts, were coded and analysed using approaches suggested by Geertz (1973), Silverman (2006), Coffey and Atkinson (1996) and Sacks (in Silverman 2006). The focus on significant issues in the study is found by combining Brennan (1986) and Habermas (Outhwaite, 1987, p87) in looking for the ‘collision points’ where government policies meet the ‘lifeworld’ of people working in local authorities or other agencies. These points might be expressed in another way as those where politics, history and ideology meet the practice world of professionals.

The approach to analysis of the study data is outlined, with particular attention to the way in which Bauman’s ideal types are adapted for empirical research. The findings from the empirical research analysed using the methodology and methods set out in this chapter are given in Section B.

### **5.1 Methodology**

This study is qualitative in nature, though it draws on some limited quantitative data, mainly for use as evidential background on economic performance and for use in selecting case studies. It seeks to inform primarily about experiences, culture and the ‘why’ of our social world, rather than the ‘what’ and ‘how many’ of quantitative research. It does not seek the type of causality found in positivism. The distinction

drawn here follows Winch (1958, p144) who argued that reasons cannot be understood as causes of action.

The research follows the interpretative tradition, and specifically hermeneutics – a theory and methodology for interpreting cultural meanings in language, particularly written texts. This approach is well suited to the study of historical and policy positions that change over time. It also offers a strong tradition in the study of cultural and institutional values and the subjective experience of individuals (see, for example, Geertz, 1973). By constantly ‘tacking’ between the particular case and the wider picture, it lends itself to case studies involving different spatial or other levels such as local, regional and national politics (see, for example, Levinson and Mailloux 1988, Szabo 1996). Hermeneutics in its modern incarnations takes on board the reflexive nature of our postmodern times via the ‘double hermeneutic’ of Giddens (Moses and Knutsen, 2007, p185).

Hermeneutics has been criticised for underestimating powerful societal forces. Marxism and critical theory seeks in contrast to point up relationships of power and class, and the contradictions and tensions inherent in capitalist society. Recent theorists including Habermas (Harrington, 2000) and Bauman (2000) have successfully drawn on both traditions in their work. Ricoeur (1973, in Delanty and Strydom 2003, p173-176) finds ways in which hermeneutics can indeed critique ideology and decries the ‘false antimony’ between the two. The differences, he claims, are really only ‘regional preferences of emphasis’ between ‘the recollection of tradition and anticipation of freedom’ (*ibid*, p180).

The study examines the situation of Smestos in northern English districts, with particular reference to housing and prestige projects. This includes exploration of regional issues to establish context and gain other perspectives. Throughout, although the present tense is used in the research questions, the study explores perceptions both about the current situation and the whole period of New Labour government from 1997 (concentrating on the time from around 2001 when regional structures and the move to regional housing strategies got underway, since these are the main relevant changes).

The approach is to undertake an instrumental case study (Stake 1995, p17) in that the framework of broader issues (third way politics, liquid modernity) is used to examine the case (Smestos, individual authorities) and exemplars (housing, prestige projects). The research questions are therefore issue-based rather than solely questions of information on or evaluation of the case (*ibid*, p19).

As the study places the theory of liquid modernity at its centre, the most pertinent issue concerns Bauman's claims about 'choice as fate', a core theme and one that drives his arguments on the rise of consumer society, the ability to overcome space with time, and what holds those who cannot mobilise themselves. What role Smesto authorities believe they can take within the current political and social power structures is also a key theme, and the study also explores how these authorities are presenting themselves to government and its agencies (and what lies behind their choices).

These choices draw limits to the study, which does not explore the perceptions and situation of individuals *as* individuals living in or working (outside the worlds of housing and public service) in the towns described. The focus is instead mainly in the political actions and perceptions within governance organisations, and how they interact with each other. These form the 'collision points' described above.

In conclusion concerning methodology, there is a need to take account of the problems raised by Barbour (1998, p352) about mixing methods within a paradigm and the need for care with triangulation. Her conclusion that 'analytical rigour would be strengthened by acknowledging and addressing the potentially contradictory assumptions on which one draws when seeking to combine qualitative methods' is reminiscent of Feyerabend's dictum that 'anything goes' as long as you acknowledge the choices you are making (Feyerabend, 1978, p70). The findings chapters in this study seek to acknowledge where paradigm shifts occur.

### ***5.1.1 The literature on interpretation***

The interpretative approach encompasses a wide range of possibilities on how to analyse text or interview data. Some exponents of hermeneutics, such as Gadamer (1986), reject any fixed methods such as coding systems or thematic categorising. There are other options that might be seen as (unfixed) points on a scale moving towards constructionist approaches. Geertz (1973) does not accept fixed categories but coined 'thick description' for his approach to tacking between case and whole to uncover the way people form systems of belief or culture. Habermas moved more towards categories with his theories on communication concerning 'lifeworld' and 'system' (Outhwaite, 1987, p87). This section outlines the approaches considered, with their advantages and disadvantages, and details the selected interpretative methods.

The underlying reasoning from interpretative researchers is that people are engaged in acts of creating meaning in the social world in the way they communicate



with each other. This contrasts with, for example, constructionists who are searching for ready-made types of meanings in the social world and in our relations to each other. Wilson and Hutchinson (1991) carried out a comparative study of hermeneutics and grounded theory approaches for a nursing study. They find that the two approaches are so incompatible that it is necessary to conduct a set of interviews twice, analyse them separately and then bring together the findings via triangulation. For the hermeneutics study, interviewees get a simple request to talk about day-to-day and longer term decisions they have to make (ie, their experiences). For grounded theory, they ask a set of prepared open questions that are more focused on *what* happened. Their hermeneutical analysis focuses on three elements: paradigm cases that reflect the whole, shorter exemplars or vignettes to capture meaning; and excerpts showing evidence of a theme (p272).

While this paper is illuminating, and the three elements are used in the study, the overall description is a somewhat self-limiting view of hermeneutics and is also rather impractical: interviewees in this study did not know in advance what ‘stories’ we needed to discuss, beyond the broad topic areas. Silverman (2006, p126) notes that the ‘tell me the story’ approach can leave interviewees unsure as to what is relevant to recount. Interviewees in this study could not be asked to take part in two interviews and for this, plus other conceptual reasons, triangulation with grounded theory was not used.

Rubin and Rubin (1995, p229) say analysis should: ‘Provide a description of the norms and values that underlie cultural behaviour’. Texts – in this study, transcripts of interviews as well as published documents, see below – offer a highly useful opportunity to establish people’s views about current and past events, and to interpret their meaning currently. Here again, modern hermeneutics is an appropriate tool to use, and as background the analysis draws on the approach of academics specialising in interpreting the US constitution including Brennan (1986), Bobbitt (1991) and Brest (1988). This may initially seem a distant subject, but the approach, which includes ways of re-interpreting text and ways of accepting, modifying or rejecting arguments on ‘the intentions of the framers’ is pertinent. The approach is effective as the study in part considers how the policies set out in documents such as regional housing strategies and the Northern Way have been applied in practice and what meaning the interviewees ascribe to them.

Interviews are useful in getting beyond published policies to explore stakeholders’ interpretations and beliefs (in other words their culture), by means of Geertz’s ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973). This is essential as the task in the study is to explore what

powers actors *believe* they have to bring about change, and what ‘stories’ of their towns they present in terms of opportunity and need when seeking investment. It is also essential to exploration and explanation of what has already happened over the period of the study.

As already noted, in third way politics there may be overt, latent or hidden actions as in the case of Goodchild and Hickman’s ‘deconcentration’. In Wodak and Meyer (2001, p134), Fairclough elaborates theories about the way neo-liberal world economics are presented as inevitable, and how this legitimises a new social order and sustains unequal relations of power. This study concerns third way politics with its emphasis on the inevitabilities of globalisation and competition, a situation explored by Bauman. Wodak and Meyer (p3) say three concepts are central to analysis of political texts: power, history and ideology.

Habermas argued that because of relationships of power and domination in society, meanings in texts may be repressed (Held 1980, p315). This point was taken up by Levinson and Mailloux (1988, pxii), who raise the question again of whether objective study of a text is possible. This study therefore takes an approach that seeks to draw out latent meanings with reference to power, history and ideology as part of the overall interpretative approach. The temptation for analysts to second-guess meaning or ‘fill in the gaps’ is apparent and this is taken account of and examined in the findings.

Silverman (2006, p154) advocates the study of texts for their richness, relevance and effect. In addition, they are naturally occurring data without mediation from researchers, and they are readily available. He warns against using texts as a researchers’ resource, and points to a commonly used model that goes: ‘The documents claim x, but we can *show* that y is the case.’ This approach veers towards positivism in trying to establish the facts of the case – what ‘really’ happened, by comparing text and interview, and preferring the interview data.

For this study, a problem with using the texts available, such as community plans and regional housing strategies, is that they are built to a formula set by central government and reinforced via ‘best practice’ around the country. They are therefore of limited use in illuminating the culture and thinking of Smesto authorities. For that reason the texts are not approached as topics in themselves for study but are a resource for exploring the situation of the Smestos. They are not, as Silverman warns, used to ‘prove’ or ‘disprove’ interview data.

### 5.1.2 *Analysis techniques*

The form of the text analysis in qualitative research is usually by content, or narrative structure (Silverman, 2006, p164), or by refined techniques such as critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, in Wodak and Meyer, 2001, p134), or hybrid forms of post-structuralism such as Richardson and Sharp (2001, p194). The various methods and their appropriateness to the subject of this study, the analytical framework, and the overall methodology were considered. The conclusion was that the most useful approach would be to use a light form of thematic coding to allow consideration of recurrent ways interviewees or texts create meaning, but to resist any strongly pre-constructed sets of meanings that the data could slot into. Bauman does of course offer pre-constructed ideal types (see Chapter 4) but these are loosely drawn and without an empirical methodology for assigning meanings. The preferred line for this study combines Brennan (1986) and Habermas (Outhwaite, 1987, p87) in looking for the ‘collision points’ where government policies as shown in published texts and academic critiques, and described in interviews, meet the ‘lifeworld’ of people working in local authorities or other agencies. This might be expressed in another way by saying the study considers those points where politics, history and ideology meet the practice world of professionals.

One established way to uncover how meanings in texts are constructed is to use Sacks’ membership categorisation device (MCD) technique, described at length in Silverman (2006, pp181-194). MCDs, says Silverman, have the advantage of avoiding the ‘inert classificatory instruments’ found in more rigid forms of content analysis and the constructionist approach. Instead, Sacks has found a way to uncover the way in which speakers/writers and the hearers build and re-form meaning that can encompass ‘particular actors with motives, desires, feelings, aspirations and sense of justice’.

The technique involves showing how the speaker/writer places actors into categories, then applying a set of organisational rules to show relationships among actors and their actions. As Silverman comments, Sacks wanted to avoid treating people as ‘cultural dopes’ after Garfinkel’s memorable phrase. Instead, Sacks found a means of ‘approaching culture as an inference-making machine’. For the current study, a simplified version of the MCDs technique was used, adapted to avoid confusions over ideal types and other memberships. Its use is described in more detail at s5.4.2.

In the current study, professionals are taking actions, either in response to what they believe is demanded of them locally, or in response to what they believe the government demands of them. In addition there will always be an overlay of the historical meanings or lessons the interviewee has created. To apply Bauman's tourist/vagabond tools, the analysis needed to consider what meanings the actors were creating at these 'collision points' requiring action: were they fatalistic, engaged in 'futile action', disengaged from the process, or perhaps believing they had some form of control over their organisation's destiny? Were they 'working up' contexts and meanings with half an eye to a particular audience (Gubrium and Buckholdt 1982, ix)? It was not possible to avoid forming some categories for exploration of Bauman's ideas but these were treated as pre-judgements, to be reviewed and re-formed, rejected or accepted as the study progressed (Gadamer, 1986, p235-237).

## **5.2 Fieldwork methods**

This section sets out the parameters of the empirical research, including the selection of cases, data gathering process and analysis. In adapting Bauman's thesis for practical study, some compromises and decisions on interpretation are necessary, and these are discussed. A brief section dealing with ethical issues introduces this section.

### **5.2.1 *Ethical issues***

The nature of this study is that it deals with relatively small organisations, with few staff members dealing with housing or economic issues. Similarly, within the councils there will be only one portfolio holder dealing with housing, one leader and so on. In order for interviewees to feel able to talk freely it was felt important that they should have anonymity in this report. In the event, several respondents sought reassurance during the interview that their names should not be used, confirming that some issues or comments were perceived as sensitive.

Regarding the towns as a whole, some difficult issues were certain to arise when respondents were asked to comment on their relationships with regional or national government. The town authorities' efforts to secure funding could potentially be affected by reported comments. In addition, it was felt that the 'tourist' and 'vagabond' ideal types used in the study could be misunderstood: it would not be appropriate to label a named town or organisation in this way. For these reasons, therefore, the case

study towns are also anonymised in the study to 'Caslon', 'Garamond' and 'Audubon'. Case files were stored electronically with coded names, the code key being stored elsewhere for security.

This decision is not without difficulties. Anonymising can lead to a 'flattening' or homogenizing of place. In addition, there are practical difficulties because towns and organisations are individual and have their own characteristics which in some cases might be well known. Nevertheless, in this study it was felt important to offer anonymity despite some disadvantages.

### **5.2.2 *The interviews***

It would be possible to study a town by talking to its inhabitants. This study, however, seeks to consider perceived changes in the political and economic landscape, and the regional or sub-regional structures of bureaucracy that have emerged in recent years. Therefore it seems sensible to talk to people who have dealings with those structures. In addition, Bauman discusses the disengagement or disempowerment of local agencies as power moves elsewhere, and this creates a direct opportunity to test out his theories through the eyes of those working in local agencies.

Interviewees were selected because they work for district and parish councils, LSPs and other organisations representing the study towns or having a specialist housing interest. This includes housing associations, development or renaissance organisations, and to a lesser extent the private sector. People working at various levels in the councils were selected, to establish how far attitudes and views are shared. This approach gains some support from geographers who have claimed the relevance of place (or locale, or locality) since the early 1980s. Johnston (1997, pp244-247) sums up the debate – see Chapter 4.

The fieldwork began with a series of interviews with 11 stakeholders at regional level, as this has been the level at which many of the changes in power and responsibility in recent years has taken place, for example with the establishment of regional strategies and funding streams (see Chapter 3). The interviewees consisted of senior officers from the northern regional development agencies, Government Offices, regional assemblies or housing fora, and representative bodies. Two invited organisations did not take part. One political leader was invited to do an interview but asked an officer to take part instead. The mix of organisations was intended to offer a variety of perspectives from people who have been involved in the development of

regional policies, especially housing, in recent years. Two of the interviews were treated as pilots for the study.

Eight of the interviews were conducted by telephone and three face to face. They were semi-structured using a topic list to direct the conversation but keep it from being too rigid with fixed questions. This allowed a chance to look for the narratives by which interviewees make sense of their world as part of the regional structures and how they negotiate with other players (Benton and Craib, 2001, p103, p169). Topics for discussion included: city regions, housing/housing strategy, housing markets, ‘auditable bodies’ – inspection and regulation, and local responses to policy initiatives.

As part of the discussion, regional stakeholders were asked if they could suggest Smesto authorities that might fit the Bauman tourist/vagabond ideal types, which in shorthand was described as being highly active players achieving for their areas or being disengaged from wider concerns and apparently achieving less for their areas (the terms ‘tourist’ and ‘vagabond’ were not used – see section above). Fitting the ideal type was described to the stakeholders as being less relevant than finding towns where there were perceived differences in approach. Most of the stakeholders put forward suggestions.

The suggestions from regional stakeholders were added to a simple matrix containing secondary data on northern towns as it was not feasible to construct a detailed typology of towns (see references to Champion 2006 and Espon 2008 in Chapter 2). The list of towns was chosen using a map to identify those that are freestanding and at least 15 miles from a large conurbation. This simple definition is in line with central place theory (Henderson and Taylor 2003, pp364-365, see Chapter 2). Only those with a population over 10,000 at the 2001 Census were included. This corresponds to the Defra/Countryside Commission/CLG simplified definition that classifies settlements over 10,000 population as urban (Taylor 2008, p85). An upper limit of 90,000 population was selected. In Frost and Shepherd’s estimate which excludes location (2004), this could comprise 74 towns; this count finds 36 towns in 32 local authority districts, though it is admittedly somewhat subjective (see Appendix 2).

The matrix contains headings of gross value added as a percentage of national average, Audit Commission comprehensive performance assessment rating, deprivation index ranking, whether council housing has been retained or transferred, and population (not all measures relate directly to towns). This material is useful but offers no clear-cut patterns among the districts that could link geographical location to performance or deprivation.

Using the matrix of characteristics with the suggestions from regional stakeholders, a 'long list' of 11 towns was established for the next round of interviews. Of these, eight had been suggested by stakeholders and another three were added to give extra dimensions to the mix. Specifically, one was a unitary council, two had retained council housing, and two were authorities consisting essentially of a single town, ie without several towns and a large rural hinterland.

In each case the chief executive of the local authority for the town was invited to take part in a telephone interview. Nine authorities took part; interestingly, two authorities identified subjectively by stakeholders as 'less capable' or less engaged were the two that did not take part. Neither actually declined but despite repeated requests nobody was found to participate. Of the nine participants, four were chief executives and the rest were directors/managers from the next two tiers of seniority. Two sent additional comments by email. Topic areas included: profile and context of the council, governance structures, housing function, regional connections, relationships with partners and funding streams, engagement or otherwise with national and regional bodies, national versus local priorities and the room to manoeuvre, and capacity.

The study then moved on to three case studies chosen from the 'long list', to acquire more depth. The three were chosen to offer a variety of circumstances: two had retained council stock, one was a seaside resort, one a traditional market town, and one an industrial town. Political control varied and had changed in all three in recent years. The towns' positions on the IMD varied from suggesting severe deprivation to suggesting local wealth. 'Long list' interviewees from each of the towns had said their authority would be willing to act as a case study, as had three others (the rest were to be abolished in local government reorganisation).

Each of the case study towns was visited at least twice, and interviews with staff and politicians from the local authority and its partners were conducted either face to face or by telephone. The views of other partners in local networks, such as senior housing association officers, were sought as recent times have seen a move away from traditional hierarchical systems of local democracy and action towards networks with 'communities of influence'. Three private sector and five social businesses were included. Two private sector organisations declined to take part. One LSP conference and one planning event were attended. Most of the interviewees were senior staff but more junior staff in housing and regeneration were also interviewed. Some interviewees held more than one post. Nine interviewees were politicians. Topic areas, modified for each individual, included: role of person in organisation, discussion of recent or current

projects, issues concerning the town, regional dimensions including strategy, issues of geographical remoteness and relationships, changes since the advent of regional structures and funding, Bauman concepts of power and disengagement, and a wider question of what the interviewee would like to achieve in terms of town improvements.

In summary then, the fieldwork included interviews with 55 people. Two of these were interviewed twice, once for the ‘long list’ and once for a case study with different topic areas. Because a small number were interviewed together, the interviews generated a total of 54 separate files for coding purposes.

Interviews with regional stakeholders	11
Interviews with ‘long list’ authorities	9
Interviews for Garamond case study	12
Interviews for Caslon case study	11
Interviews for Audubon case study	14

In addition, material from the case study towns was collected as a resource, including: community plans, housing strategies and similar documents, policy statements, promotional material for the areas, selection of estate agents’ house prices. One interviewee writes a blog and material from this has been used.

Other methods of data gathering such as a questionnaire or focus groups were considered but not used. The varying situations of Smestos and the cultural nature of the research do not lend themselves to a questionnaire, and the focus groups could be unfeasibly small – some authorities may have only one senior officer dealing with housing.

### ***Conduct of interviews***

The researcher cannot remove their own presence from the work, and I engaged with my interviewees as someone who is at least partly within their world – someone who has a knowledge of the subject (Haraway 1985, p155). It is appropriate therefore to take a stance that we were actively creating meaning in the interviews, through our discussion. In order to allow people ‘the freedom to talk and ascribe meanings’ (Silverman, 2006, p110), open ended interviews were conducted, which Silverman characterises as requiring ‘flexibility, rapport with the interviewee, and active listening’.

The task was to discover what meanings the interviewees were engaged in creating, and how (ie context), more than researching the interviewer’s own meaning-



creation. Some of the meanings the interviewees created will be historical, or already-held, while some aspects appeared to be created anew through the conversation.

To unpick meanings in the conversation texts, Winch (1958) was taken as the starting point, to try to understand interviewees' explanations of situations and relationships, as opposed to their reasons for certain actions. A set of prepared topic areas was used, but only loosely, allowing the conversation flow to take us in different directions while ensuring the main topics were covered.

Interviewees were asked not only about events that had happened to them, but also about their views on various developments: the meanings they ascribed to those experiences. Silverman (2006, p116) points out that interviews do not tell us directly about people's experiences but instead offer indirect 'representations' or accounts of those experiences. This could render a traditional form of hermeneutics somewhat inappropriate, since past exponents tended to concentrate on events only; however, later developments such as Habermas' lifeworld and Giddens' double hermeneutic do bring in a sense that we are creating meanings from pre-analysed information. It quickly became clear from the pilot interviews that pre-analysed or created messages are present in many of the conversations and the research attempts to draw out this aspect, considering the 'second take' meanings created.

### **5.2.3 *Town descriptions***

Brief descriptions of each of the three case study towns are given below. Their names are anonymised to Caslon, Garamond and Audubon. Audubon lies within a large unitary authority area called, for this study, Palatino. In the findings, large cities are anonymised to 'Metropolis', since they are generally used by respondents as cyphers for any city.

#### ***Caslon***

Caslon is a traditional market town with a large rural hinterland. It has a large number of small traders catering for visitors and residents, some small industrial activity and much farming. It has good road connections and a mainline railway station. It is a long distance (about 40 miles) from the nearest substantial town and is not within the catchment area of a city region. Commuting is very limited.

The population of Caslon shows a hollowed out profile with an above average and increasing proportion of older people while there are fewer than average younger

working age people. Education standards are good but there is no higher education available in the area (this could change in the near future). There is no general hospital within the district. Unemployment is low but so are incomes.

The district scores low on the government's index of multiple deprivation (IMD) rankings, suggesting there is little deprivation. However, house prices are high, and very high compared to earnings, making affordable housing an important issue locally. The council has recently made housing its top priority issue and aligned its resources accordingly. It transferred its housing stock some years ago.

For local government the district is in a two-tier area. Residents voted not to have a town council. As well as Caslon the district contains two smaller towns and a large number of villages. Political control is currently from an Independent group, though members of this group have a free vote on all issues (ie there is no whip). The council only recently changed from the committee system to a cabinet, which contains more than one party/group. At election time, some seats have been retained unopposed.

The district and county each have an LSP. There is also an economic development organisation at county level, with more locally based sub-boards. The town has a group formed from local residents and business people that is working on regeneration. A large scale regeneration project was begun but then stalled because of the economic downturn. During the period of study attempts were being made to re-start the project in a modified form.

### ***Garamond***

Garamond is an industrial town located within a large rural area. Its fortunes have always been based around manufacturing but has suffered devastating job losses in the last 20 years. It has a rail connection but this is not good, and its road connections are also not good. It is a substantial sized town in its own right but is not within the catchment area of a city region, being some 70 miles from the nearest. There is some in-commuting from rural areas and very little out-commuting.

Garamond suffers from a range of 'inner city' type of problems. Educational attainment is below average and until recently no higher education has been available. There is widespread poverty and the town has had one of the highest Invalidity Benefit rates in the country. Much of the housing in the private sector is poor quality and in need of refurbishment or replacement. Partly as a result of falls in the population, prices are low: a selection of two-bedroomed houses was on offer at under £50,000 each during 2009. Garamond scores high on the IMD rankings, confirming the levels of

deprivation. There is a general hospital that is part of a trust covering a wider area and with its headquarters elsewhere. Services are currently rated as 'fair'.

The district of Garamond is almost the same as the town itself: it has little hinterland and no substantial other towns within the local government area. There is no town council. The council area is two-tier. Currently the council is Conservative held after a long period of Labour rule. It remains a 'fourth option' council with a committee structure. The authority has retained its housing stock.

There is an LSP at both district and county level. There is also an economic development organisation at county level, with more locally based sub-boards. There is an urban regeneration company that recently took on a role as one of these sub-boards. There is also an enterprise agency. Garamond is one of few Smestos that did receive NRA funding, and it also received secondary funding from the housing market renewal programme. A large scale regeneration programme is at the late planning stage and has been somewhat affected by the economic downturn but a key private sector partner has stayed involved. A large scale housing regeneration programme is in its final stages despite widespread further need.

### ***Audubon***

Audubon is a traditional seaside resort. Like many such places it has lost ground since the 1960s as fewer visitors spend their holidays there. It has had some manufacturing but recent job losses in that sector have hit the town hard. The retail sector is under-performing, and studies have shown there is much 'leakage' of expenditure to other centres.

The population of Audubon shows a hollowed out profile with an above average and increasing proportion of older people while there are fewer than average younger working age people. Many people retire to Audubon from elsewhere, and without this migration the population would be falling. Education standards are fair but there is no higher education available in the town or district. There is a district hospital run by a health trust based elsewhere which has had a troubled history, currently has 'fair' performance ratings and recently announced serious job cuts. Unemployment is low but so are incomes. There is relatively little commuting.

House prices are high compared to earnings, and there are also problems with the quality of some of the private sector stock. There are large numbers of HMOs in the town.

The district overall scores low on the government's index of multiple deprivation (IMD) rankings, suggesting there is little deprivation, but this masks high levels of deprivation in particular wards. Life expectancy for men in parts of Audubon is 10 years lower than in the wealthiest wards of the district. As one respondent in the study put it, 'A lot of people will relocate. It may be they're out of work on the dole and decide they'd rather be in Audubon out of work, than [in a conurbation]. A lot of people retire to Audubon; so it's very much a place of affluence or people that have very little money at all.'

For local government, Audubon is within a large unitary authority called Palatino. It is by far the largest of four main towns, and there are a large number of villages as well spread over a very large district. Audubon and other places have parish or town councils. Politically, the unitary authority had no overall control until recent years when the Conservatives took a strong majority. They currently hold all seats in the cabinet. The political makeup of Audubon town council is different. The local authority has retained its housing stock. It invests heavily in economic development work, 'strategy' of various types, and streamlining its own functions for efficiency.

Since the mid-1990s the town has had a 'transformational' regeneration project running, and in recent years with support from the RDA this has been titled renaissance. There is a board made up of local people, and eight officers are employed. They are Palatino Council employees, based in Audubon, and funded by the RDA. The renaissance project suffered a serious setback when its plans were rejected at a planning inquiry. Since then it has developed a new plan, which all involved concur is much better than the previous one, and the work is in progress with substantial RDA and EU funding.

In recent years residents have narrowly voted to establish a town council for Audubon. The town council has had problems in finding its feet, and seems to lack a definite role. It is cautious about taking on responsibilities and councillors are concerned that they are being pushed to take on work that the unitary council should do (and has the funding for). Both the unitary council and the renaissance project have been pressing the town council to take on a more ambitious role, and to support the regeneration work in the town more actively.

There is an LSP covering the whole of Palatino, and this has in the last two years established local action teams, made up of public sector representatives and local councillors, to ensure a link between each main town or area and the projects of the district as a whole.

### 5.3 Analysis

This section outlines the way in which the analysis was conducted and findings produced. Considering the subject matter and research questions, the starting point for analysis was to produce a set of code headings into which data could be inserted. The methodologies outlined above for interpreting text were used to help ensure data was assigned to codes as accurately as possible. They were then used to help derive meaning and to identify which issues were considered the most relevant or significant.

Within this framework, analysis was carried out in three stages. The initial stage was designed to address the first research question on whether the conditions of liquid modernity were found in the study as a whole and draw conclusions on their significance for respondents. This involved selecting data from relevant code headings and using techniques such as tacking, finding ‘collision points’ and so on to produce an interpretation. Data from all 54 individual interview files was used at this stage to formulate the findings.

The second stage of analysis addressed the second research question, as to whether the Bauman ideal types could be identified in the study as a whole. Data from the regional stakeholders was less relevant to this part of the study, and data from the other two groups was more extensively used. Again, individual responses were used and relevant codes selected. This part of the analysis required some conceptual and practical decisions to move from Bauman’s theory to practice, and these are outlined below.

The final stage of analysis focused the findings on data from the three study towns. Here, the final stage of moving the analysis from individuals to organisations and institutions was completed, and again this involved some conceptual decisions. Identification of particular ideal types with each case study town was used to create further interpretation of Bauman’s concept of time as the dominant paradigm under liquid modernity. Once more, relevant codes were selected and the technique of membership categorisation to aid analysis was used (see s5.4.2 below).

#### 5.3.1 Coding

Coding was undertaken using HyperResearch software. This package allows each interview to be treated as an individual ‘case’. There were therefore 54 cases in the

study. The package allows any number of codes to be created from pieces of text, and these are not nested in a hierarchy so it is easy to move and group code headings.

A number of codes were created initially that were known to be required. These included 'issue' topics such as distance and isolation, competing, change and initiatives, and unfairness. Further codes were created for topic areas including housing and iconic projects. The four ideal types of tourist, player, stroller and vagabond were coded. A set of six 'expressions' or argument headings was created, and this is explained in s5.4.2 below. Then a sample from each of the three groups of interviewees was read through and further codes created according to what the data suggested, without pre-set expectations. This gave a total of some 50 codes which were then grouped into a final set of 24 headings. All of the interview data was then coded, with minor adjustments to the code headings and the addition of code definitions as reminders as the coding progressed.

The full list of codes was:

Expressions of opportunity	Response – vagabond
Expressions of legitimacy	Delivery versus strategy
Expressions of competence	Fears
Expressions of need	Change and initiatives
Expressions of VfM	Democracy
Expressions of prevention	Housing
('stitch in time')	Iconic projects
Competing	Resources
Regions distance	Unfairness
Local community town councils	Apology for negativity
Response - tourist	Example or story
Response - player	Time in post
Response - stroller	

It was then possible to examine data both under the code headings, using proximity coding to find affinities, and also continue to consider each interview as an artefact in itself. Tacking was used to verify findings and provide context.

In practice, the HyperResearch software was useful and did what was asked of it efficiently. It is very easy to learn. With the large volume of texts generated in the study, coding was necessary to manage the data. The process of coding contains a series of dilemmas. First, the number of codes needs to be relatively small to be manageable, yet this will mean that some code headings are catch-all and must later be unpacked for

meaning. The aim therefore is to make a subjective decision to have as many codes as is manageable but not too many. Second, even with fairly selective coding the volume of data within any heading can be considerable. The temptation is to cut this down by selecting shorter extracts, omitting the questions, and so on. This can be counter-productive as it can detach the words from their meaning in context and requires greater use of tacking to verify. Again, achieving an optimum balance must be the aim.

### ***5.3.2 Use of membership categorisation devices***

This section outlines the way in which MCDs (see s5.1.2 above) were used to illuminate relationships between organisations and to establish the social position in which respondents placed themselves, on behalf of their town. The approach adopted was to construct a typology of arguments used by respondents. This was then used in two ways during analysis. The first was to aid interpretation by illuminating relationships, particularly power relationships, between Smesto authorities and regional or central agencies, a key theme outlined in the methodology section above. The second was to underpin the identification of the ideal types.

Initial analysis of published texts and the pilot interviews suggested that local governance organisations see the making of arguments as a critical part of their work. They argue to their sub-regional partners, to regional organisations and to central government, making their case for resources. This process has grown increasingly important during the time of New Labour government as competition has become integral to the political landscape and strategy making in housing and other areas has both increased in importance and moved to a different spatial level. The analysis, using the MCD approach already outlined, suggested that the respondents were ascribing meaning to their ‘argument work’ by placing themselves and others in relational categories. For example, one respondent told a story of how his town had, he felt, been unfairly treated in an allocation. He said it was unfair and undemocratic because the town had great need, though this might not be immediately apparent to an (unelected) outsider. The story therefore places the respondent as losing out, as having legitimacy through need and democracy, and as powerless in relation to the fund giver. The arguments can therefore be analysed according to type.

Six types of argument were identified that the local authority and partners might make in their quest for resources. These arguments can be associated with the Bauman

ideal types for analysis and are therefore important to an interpretation of the data. Quantitative results for frequency of argument types associated with the Bauman ideal types are given in Chapter 7. The argument typology was also used throughout the study findings to interpret respondents' experiences. The arguments were created as code headings, titled 'Expressions of need', etc, to aid further analysis.

The six types of argument are:

### ***Need***

This is the social justice argument and relies on demonstrating that the town or district's need is greater than that of another claimant elsewhere. The authorities in Caslon argue that their housing need is great because prices are very high and there is a low wage economy, creating unaffordability. Rural districts will tend to lose out on this argument because they cannot usually show large numbers of people and households affected. They may also be reluctant to voice needs based on deprivation, because they rely on tourism and want to create an impression of a thriving town. Garamond and Audubon argue their need primarily on the basis of index of multiple deprivation figures, where some wards rank among England's worst 3% and 10%, respectively.

### ***Opportunity***

The argument that chimes with New Labour's third way politics and the basis of the city regions. The government's policies are built around seizing opportunities for economic growth and therefore this type of argument is likely to find favour. However, again the benefits of investment cannot usually be shown to affect large numbers of people as would be the case in a city. In the Audubon/Palatino case study for example, there is an acceptance from the authorities that inward business investment on anything but a small scale is not a realistic goal for Audubon, but is realistic for at least one better geographically placed Smesto in the district. The opportunities for Audubon are thought to lie more with the tourism and conference industries. Regional stakeholders make the case for city regions on the basis of opportunity, coupled with a call for Smesto authorities to self-improve.

### ***Legitimacy***

The local authority argues that as it is democratically elected, and embodies the needs and wishes of residents, its voice should be heard by those in RDAs and other



institutions that are not elected. This is not a type of argument that promotes competition among districts for investment but rather one that is designed to secure the authority a place at the decision making table. It is likely to have more resonance with local people than with the RDA, because the RDA is itself unelected.

Arguments of legitimacy can be associated with the vagabond type, especially where lack of trust from those in power is perceived. The legitimacy argument is more strongly associated with the player – especially in the particular circumstance of ‘pulling rank’. In the Audubon study, for example, one respondent argued legitimacy on the grounds that the RDA was developed after the other structures (and might be abolished first). This knowledge appeared to give the speaker a perspective that allowed a stronger player stance; an attitude that the RDA is not all-powerful.

### ***Prevention***

Some market towns such as Caslon are at a point where they could fall into decline, according to respondents. The argument is that some level of public investment now could avert worse problems in the future, and therefore represents a better option; a ‘stitch in time’ approach. For Garamond, the pressing issue is that large amounts of public and private money have already been invested. If the funding is removed now, the authorities argue, the town could slide back to its previous state and the gains made would be endangered. Other reported issues where prompt action would be beneficial include bringing forward projects quickly to claim grant funding that is time limited and would therefore not be available later. City regions feature strongly in this type of argument, as respondents from isolated Smestos fear they will lose, and are powerless to turn themselves into ‘winners’ in this competitive scenario. This type of argument is based on uncertainty and anxiety about the future, and some recognition of powerlessness.

### ***Value for money***

A respondent gives an example of a regeneration project designed to help 5,000 people in Liverpool. He estimates that for the same amount of money spent, Caslon could benefit many more people in low-key but vital projects such as improving the energy efficiency of housing or supporting small businesses in the recession. For rural authorities, the argument is that a little goes a long way.

### ***Competence***

This is an argument about trust. As confirmed by two regional stakeholders, regional authorities seem more willing to invest in an area where they regard the local authority and its partners as competent to carry through the programme. This is particularly true where smaller pots of money are found part-way through the financial year and they need to be spent. An authority with a project ready and which the RDA trusts to deliver successfully appears more likely to get the funding. Authorities that do experience problems with a particular project appear more likely to retain the support of the RDA or GO if they are regarded as generally reliable. The authorities therefore seek to show that they are competent and reliable.

Respondents from three towns in the study were particularly emphatic in their arguments of competence and reliability. The empirical outcome may not always correspond with the assertions, in that two admitted cases where they had not managed to ‘deliver’, but that seems not to be strongly relevant. What is more pertinent is the creation of a firm belief of competence, not only in the minds of the Smesto authorities but in the minds of the resource givers, and the firm and repeated assertion coupled with a generally good track record and prompt remedial action appears to overcome occasional problems. This is essentially a question of trust, and positive expressions of trust are coded under this heading. Comments on lack of trust are seen as a different type of argument according to the underlying reasoning, usually expressions of need or prevention.

The six types of argument can be analysed in relation to Bauman’s four ideal types, which are explained in detail in the next section. In the coding framework for this study, ‘vagabond’ and ‘need’, for example, are coded independently of each other but it is possible to use proximity coding within HyperResearch to find overlaps between any two (or more) codes. Results of this analysis are given in Chapter 7.

### ***5.3.3 Bauman’s ideal types***

Application of Bauman’s ideal types to practical study was perhaps the most challenging aspect of the research. This section describes the approach adopted for the second part of the findings, in which the ideal types are introduced and the attempt is made to apply them beyond individuals as Bauman envisaged, to organisations and local governance institutions.

The first issue is how to identify the ideal types, and the techniques used are outlined. This includes a development of the Bauman types to take account of the circumstances of local public sector organisations and their partners, working on behalf of their localities. A further issue is whether it is legitimate to move from individuals to institutions for the purposes of this research, and this is also explored. Finally, this section addresses the nature of the towns and the way in which the study was conducted.

Returning to the current study and to recap, Bauman says all people are ‘on the move’ in our globalised world, either physically or metaphorically, tourists having shaken off geographical ties and vagabonds having to ‘move’ involuntarily (Bauman 1998, pp77-102). He outlines the characteristics liquid modernity in terms of overall effects:

- globalisation as a given
- constantly on the move
- acting as consumers
- uncertainty, anxiety
- requirement to self-improve
- disengagement and powerlessness of local institutions

How liquid modernity affects each group is very different. This study used a comparison of the more obvious features (as detailed in Bauman 1998, pp77-102): see Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3: Summary of ideal type characteristics**

<b>Tourist</b>	<b>Vagabond</b>
No geographical ties/commitments	Stuck in place, or <i>having</i> to move
Able to move capital and resources to gain advantage	Few or no powers within capital system
Able to seize opportunities	Having unmet needs
Acting as consumers	Failed consumers, unwanted by market
Belief they are in control of own destiny	Fatalistic
Making real choices	Making futile choices
<b>Stroller</b>	<b>Player</b>
Life lived as episodes	Plays hand to best of ability
Detached from reality or engagement	Luck/misfortune seen as moves in game
Mis-meetings, strangers seen as surfaces	Guesses adversary's moves and anticipates
Doing the minimum	Stays one step ahead

Bauman points to the uneven spatial development and increasing polarisation that results from this unequal state, and in particular to the increasing lack of communication between the two groups. Yet, he says, the two are locked together: tourists could not exist without vagabonds, and ‘the vagabond is the alter ego of the tourist’ (*ibid*, p94). The current study sought to discover whether such characteristics and relationships were found in the selected authorities, and the types of relationship meanings the actors are creating with regional and central government bodies. It should be strongly noted here that the categories are not fixed: actors and authorities may present, or choose to present, a particular characteristic at particular times to gain a perceived advantage, and the study sought to understand how they go about this task.

Instances of behaviour or views conforming to the four ideal types were coded. Each interviewee could (and did) at points during the interview offer comments conforming to different ideal types. This is itself in accordance with Bauman’s thesis, when he says:

‘Each of the four types sketched above contains a solid dose of ambivalence of its own; in addition, they also differ from each other in a number of respects, and so blending them into one cohesive lifestyle is no easy matter. No wonder there is quite a generous pinch of schizophrenia in each postmodern personality – which goes some way towards accounting for the notorious restlessness, fickleness and irresoluteness of practised life strategies.’ (Bauman 1996, p32)

In Bauman’s thesis, his characterisation of tourists is intended to refer mainly to the classes of super-rich people who live anywhere and nowhere in the world and can move themselves and their resources at will. To suggest that any such people would be based in the study towns would be a contradiction, since by their nature tourists have no fixed base. Certainly none of the respondents could be placed in such an international class – but the effects of the behaviour of tourists, via the industries they control, are certainly felt in the study localities and by the people living there.

A second problem with the tourist category is that local authorities cannot, by their nature, move their boundaries or relocate somewhere else. For the purposes of this study, and in line with Bauman’s thesis, tourist behaviour is taken in a broader sense to mean ‘fleet of foot’, capable of and willing to take risks and seize opportunities, and above all acting as Bauman specifies, ‘in order to’ (ie exercising free will) rather than ‘because of’ (ie only reacting).

These circumstances of the study, focused on people working in governance authorities, suggested that in all likelihood there would be relatively little that could be

classed as tourist behaviour. A modification to Bauman would be required to code 'tourist' for behaviour by people working in aspects of public life and the bureaucracy. A different quality of motivation was suggested by behaviour that might have been opportunistic, but *only on behalf of the locality*. It might be called an ethical stance, and this is explored in more detail in Chapter 9.

In the study interviews, the tourist type was suggested not only by behaviour and attitudes, but also by the language used. Some respondents showed a strong preference for using business or private sector type of language, and this was associated with stories where the respondent described decision making, and opportunity and risk taking.

The stroller ideal type was the most difficult to code as although the description is easily comprehensible, such behaviour is rather elusive to identify in practice. Generally in the study, respondents were found to be highly self-aware and highly reflexive. The relative absence of that quality can therefore be seen as a signifier for stroller behaviour. Its manifestation was identified in interviews as one or more of the following: holding-type responses, not engaged in partnerships, not looking ahead, mixed feelings about change, exaggerated self-reliance, does not engage over policy and practice tensions.

Returning to the practicalities of text analysis, Rubin and Rubin (1986) offer ways to ascribe meanings from texts and particularly interviews, which can be helpful in identifying the ideal types. Some of the techniques used include (pp229-234):

- Looking for places where the interviewee tried to call your attention to a major point or argument. This could offer a pointer to the collision points mentioned above
- Unusual vocabulary
- Frequent phrases
- Use of opposites
- Stories, often with moral themes
- Maxims and generalisations.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p61) suggest looking for stories that end with a chronological rounding-off – 'that's what happened' – often followed by a coda. The coda will often encapsulate the narrator's view of success or failure, or perhaps a moral. The coda also marks the end of a narrative and a return to the present, possibly a transition point.

The lack of absolute consistency in the evidence confirms that no single person 'is' entirely either a tourist or a vagabond. Rather, each person was likely to have a tendency, or affinity, towards one ideal type though not exclusively so. This could be

likened to Heidegger's 'attunement' or attitude or predisposition towards a way of seeing the world (Magee (ed) 1987, p264), though this is to acknowledge a paradigm shift (Feyerabend 1978) in moving from an exclusive view of Bauman's thesis that social conditions create the ideal types to one of accepting a human predisposition outside the circumstances. This attunement must in any case be considered alongside the circumstance of the organisation or town, and the relationship of these two elements.

#### **5.3.4 *From individuals to institutions***

This study attempts to apply Bauman's ideal types to local institutions as well as individuals as he envisaged in his liquid modernity thesis. The basis for making this novel application must therefore be examined, and this section briefly offers a theoretical grounding before moving on to the practical study.

A starting point is to return to the theorist who did most to develop the use of ideal types in analysis, Max Weber. His approach specifically rejected the notion of using ideal types to apply to individuals, preferring to conceptualise them as 'patterned orientations of social action and social relationships by people in groups' (Kalberg 2005, p15). Actions by the ideal types as a whole can be seen to have an influence in society, and therefore their study can reveal social relationships, including relationships of power.

Bauman places individuals within a structure of strong political and economic forces in a globalised society (Bauman 1998, p2). His focus is on those individuals *as groups or types* and in particular on the way that those on the losing end of the new paradigm will fare. He says (*ibid*, p2): 'What appears as globalisation for some means localisation for others; signalling a new freedom for some; upon many others it descends as an uninvited and cruel fate.' The structure of society is therefore the dominant factor in creating those conditions – but what is the nature of that structure?

Andras and Charlton (2005, p1) define the structure of society as being 'the totality of all human communications', while humans are the 'units' that produce those communications. For illumination on how organisations and institutions work, and their relationship to individuals, we can turn to Giddens. Giddens' theory of structuration (1984) seeks to mesh together the concepts of structure and individual agency in society by showing the way in which institutions are sustained by the everyday repeated practices of individuals (an organisation being one type of institution).

Johnston (1997, pp238-239) explains: ‘Structuration, as an example of a contextual approach, clarifies the falseness of any distinction between social relations and spatial structures; as Gregory and Urry (1985, p3) express it, “spatial structure is now seen not merely as an arena in which social life unfolds but rather as a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced.”’

Spatial structures could take many forms, and one of these will be the organisations where people work together – in the case of my study, on behalf of a particular town and its residents. Johnston refers to Pred’s comment (1984, p258) that ‘biographies are formed through the becoming of places, and places become through the formation of biographies’.

Local authorities are the bodies charged with promoting the economic prosperity of their towns and the well-being of their residents. These are statutory duties that are not shared by other bodies, even those tied to place or functioning in the democratic process. In addition, local authorities are generally the ‘responsible body’ that for accounting purposes receives special funding such as RDA ‘renaissance’ or HMR pathfinder allocations (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002, p158). The towns in the current study are linked to national and regional politics most directly by their district and county councils. In addition, council representatives hold seats on Local Strategic Partnerships in the name of local residents. The way councils fulfil their statutory duties has been changing, but the duties have not evaporated. It is therefore appropriate to study the towns via their councils and other institutional partners.

### **5.3.5 *Attitude and circumstance***

A central requirement in defining from Bauman’s descriptions of the ideal types is to distinguish between attitude and circumstance. After much consideration of this question, the current study has been orientated in the following way. Bauman is describing a system of domination in which strong forces give rise to the ideal types. The ideal types in turn both perpetuate and suffer the consequences of the liquid modern state. Circumstance is a vital ingredient: the tourist must find themselves in a position of opportunity in order to take advantage of it. Similarly, the player must first be in the game before he can play his hand. A tourist who did not always manage to take advantage could be regarded as more in the player ideal type, playing his hand for better or worse. A tourist or player who always played badly would be better classified as a

vagabond, since their choices would soon deliver them into that state. Similarly, a tourist or player who is vulnerable to events will not retain their status for long.

This is why Bauman describes the vagabond as the ‘nightmare’ of the tourist: ‘Just as no life insurance protects the policy owner from death, none of the insurance policies of the tourist’s life-style protects against slipping into vagabondage ... The sight of the vagabond makes the tourist tremble – not because of *what the vagabond is* but because of *what the tourist may become*.’ (Bauman 1998, p97, original emphasis). For defining the tourist and player types then, circumstance and attitude are both necessary but circumstance is primary.

The stroller is a different kind of type signified first by attitude, in seeing life as a series of events. Success or otherwise is a secondary consideration, though it could be argued that unfavourable circumstance might lead the stroller to adopt this attitude as a defence.

The vagabond is the ideal type that Bauman defines as being blown about by circumstance, always having to move ‘because of’, reacting to the strong forces of domination. Therefore attitude is secondary: whether the vagabond is highly self-aware and continues to make active choices, or makes choices simply because they have to, the choices do not lead to advantage. Therefore circumstance dominates over attitude in identifying this ideal type.

For the purposes of this study, then, circumstance has been used as the primary locator for the vagabond, player and tourist ideal types with attitude used to help define them more closely. Attitude has greater prominence in defining the stroller type.

This section has considered the various techniques used to create codes and assign data to them to aid interpretation. Achieving accuracy in interpretation is always challenging but the use of well established techniques, together with tacking to check context, helps ensure the findings produced are as faithful as possible to the task of uncovering meaning.

## Conclusions

The methodology for this study was designed to gain an understanding of how people ‘produce coherent and plausible constructions of their world of experience’ (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p84). The approach to interview and text analysis was to try to draw out the meanings actors in the study towns and at regional level place on their situation, relationship and communication with others. An interpretative framework was used,



with data from semi-structured interviews as the main source. Ethical considerations were addressed.

The data was analysed to discover whether characteristics to support Bauman's thesis of liquid modernity were present or otherwise, and the focus was on the 'collision points' where people's experience in their work locally meets government policy. Particular attention was paid to issues of history, ideology and power. The techniques were selected from well-tried methods of narrative, text and conversation analysis as outlined, avoiding a rigid constructionist framework.

Some practical difficulties were encountered in applying Bauman's thesis to an empirical study. The first of these was in assessing how far the necessarily briefly sketched ideal types could be applied to the data. Here, the membership categorisation technique was found to be helpful, as was the process of fleshing out the ideal types with greater detail from the data. Disentangling the complex issues of attitude and circumstance was also beneficial in assigning data to the ideal types.

A second challenge was to move from seeing the ideal types solely as individuals, as in Bauman, to applying them to town governance structures as a whole. Here, justification for the relationship between individual and collective or institutional action was found in Giddens. As the findings chapters of this study will demonstrate, this theoretical grounding was successfully used in practice.

This chapter has outlined the approaches to methodology and methods used in the fieldwork for this study. The next three chapters detail the research findings derived from the approach taken.

## Conclusions: Section A

Bauman's liquid modernity thesis offers a wide ranging view of the stage of late capitalism through which we are living. He posits a world in which everything is in flux, where previously fixed and solid institutions can only be regarded as temporary, and in which many aspects of our lives are in a constant state of change.

He suggests the liquid modern world has three main characteristics: globalisation (and its acceptance as a given), a society on the move, and the rise of consumer attitudes and competition. These characteristics lead in turn to a further characteristic: a perpetual state of uncertainty and anxiety for individuals.

Bauman contends that time has overtaken space as society's dominant paradigm. Society has become increasingly stratified, and the greatest determinant of those divisions is the degree of mobility. Those with the greatest affluence and mobility – the tourists – are able to gain advantage and seize any opportunities on offer; the rest, with little mobility and either stuck in a place or forced to move by circumstance, are the vagabonds.

Seen through the lens of liquid modernity, New Labour's project in government can be viewed as a dialectical and rhetorical exercise attempting to marry neoliberal ideas with those of social justice. Third way politics brought an emphasis on competition, on opportunity taking, and on a requirement for individuals to self-improve: all with strong echoes of Bauman's thesis.

Regional policy created new organisations ostensibly to bring power to a more local level and to improve the fortunes of economically lagging areas. But much of the change consisted of 'deconcentration', or the *apparent* transfer of power while in reality many aspects of local governance had become more centrally controlled. Some powers moved from local authorities to the sub-region, region and city region level. Bauman suggests that local authorities will inevitably become disempowered in this situation with power moving away from them, and will become disengaged. The government continued to place responsibility for achieving national objectives (sometimes with constrained powers as well) at regional or local levels, but without tackling the larger question of its national competitiveness approach. Commentators such as Ward voiced fears that 'peripheral' areas risked being marginalised.

New Labour's attitude to public services was one of a managerialism aimed at ensuring services run better in an efficiency sense. However, that aim was itself made less cohesive by the frequent churn of initiatives, regulations and departmental changes

creating instability and uncertainty. The government's extensive move into regulation and inspection helped ensure more central control of local services. Coming from a different standpoint, Bauman also criticises the public service bureaucracy for pushing aside ethical values – though his views are contested.

In housing, much of the New Labour policy suggested continuity with the previous Conservative government. Home ownership was promoted and the stock transfer programme accelerated as a result of the Decent Homes programme. Housing came to be seen more in the context of wider regeneration policy and the Sustainable Communities Plan (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2003b) began a new recognition that different policies were needed in different regions. However, the emphasis in funding terms remained (and accelerated) on meeting the demands of growth via new provision, primarily in the South.

Smestos were in no way exempt from this competitive ethos and a contention is that they have been profoundly affected by the combination of liquid modernity and third way politics. Academic study of towns is limited but suggests that they have suffered losses both economically and in terms of the previously high quality of life in recent years, leaving some in need of regeneration. Evidence from published statistics and other reports points to situations of wealth in some Smestos and poverty or decline in others. A determinant of prosperity is the location of the Smesto: those that are far from city regions have lower average GVA than others. In addition, Smestos in the North form part of the wealth divide that has channelled increasing shares of national wealth to the South East and to the conurbations. Smestos have tended to fall into a policy gap in which they were subjected to the competitive forces of third way politics but often did not meet the criteria for the tempering social inclusion measures applied to other urban areas.

The background of liquid modernity, competitive politics of the third way, and situation of northern Smestos suggest two overall research questions, the first concerning whether Bauman's thesis can be applied to Smestos and the second concerning the experience of governance authorities in those localities.

To explore these questions, an interpretative research project was devised. The focus was primarily on the experience of participants from a 'long list' of nine towns, with intensive development of three case studies from among them. Nine regional stakeholders from government, lobbying and other organisations were also interviewed.

Analysis of the data obtained drew on hermeneutical traditions and made extensive use of the tacking technique to establish context. A foundation for applying

Bauman's ideal types first to respondents and then more widely to the Smesto governance authorities in the three case study towns was devised. Here, Bauman's thesis was adapted to allow appropriate analysis of responses from those holding public office, taking account of issues of ethics. A typology of arguments was identified that respondents could potentially make for funding, and this was used to facilitate identification of the ideal types.

This concludes Section A, the development of themes for this study. Section B moves on to the fieldwork and findings, divided into three chapters to reflect the subsidiary research questions. A final chapter then draws conclusions and addresses the two overarching thematic questions.

## **SECTION B: THE FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

This section sets out the findings from the study of northern Smestos. To recap, Smestos in more isolated locations have been found to have lower prosperity than other areas, particularly in northern England. They have been subjected to competitive third way politics but generally without the social investment that other urban areas could receive. On the question of how Smestos and their authorities have responded to their circumstances over the last decade, relatively little is known. This study sets out to fill that gap in knowledge by exploring whether the forces of liquid modernity and third way politics have indeed influenced town authorities over that time. The findings chapters examine the recent economic and housing situation of Smestos, and how actors in governance authorities have responded – including the limits to what they feel they can do in response.

The situation of Smestos and the third way political background are viewed through the lens of Bauman's liquid modernity. Analysis uses Bauman's ideal types of tourist, player, stroller and vagabond to consider respondents' experiences in tandem with the strong social and economic forces at work.

Section B is divided into three chapters corresponding to the three subsidiary research questions set out in the introduction concerning the situation of Smestos and perceptions of participants. Chapter 6 addresses the conditions of liquid modernity and explores whether, and to what extent, these can be seen as a driving factor in the situation of Smestos, in the eyes of respondents. This chapter pays particular attention to respondents' experiences of globalisation and their acceptance of it, mobility in the sense of 'a society on the move', and the rise of consumer attitudes.

Chapter 7 introduces the ideal types, encompassing at this stage all respondents in the study and applied to individuals. The ideal types are used to illuminate respondents' experience of liquid modern conditions and the power relationships they imply: whether respondents can be seen to be using circumstance to their advantage, or pushed by the conditions prevailing.

Chapter 8 condenses the use of ideal types to the three case study towns and explores whether this tool can be applied collectively to the governance authorities.

The results are used to consider the central issue in Bauman of time as a tool of domination. Different aspects of time, including historical and current time, and the meaning of geographical distance as a social construct, are explored.

The application of Bauman's ideal types in the unusual context of the governance authorities of a locality is applied in stages as outlined. First, the ideal types are established and applied at an individual level to respondents. Then they are applied collectively to the three case study localities, using data from respondents' perceptions and background on the political and economic situation. It should be reiterated here that ideal types are just that: they are not intended to label people or institutions, but rather are a tool for analysis.

This section begins with a findings chapter giving broad consideration to liquid modern conditions in the study.

## **6 Findings: The conditions of liquid modernity**

This chapter contains the first part of the empirical findings of the study, and addresses the first subsidiary research question on whether the conditions of liquid modernity are found as a driving force for respondents in northern Smestos.

Bauman offers a description of the liquid modern world as having three main characteristics: globalisation (and its acceptance as a given), a society on the move, and the rise of consumer attitudes. These characteristics lead in turn to a further trait: a perpetual state of uncertainty and anxiety for individuals that affects their responses and ability to respond. Later in Section B, findings are offered on whether Bauman's prediction that anxiety and uncertainty, combined with other liquid modern conditions, leads to disempowerment and disengagement of local institutions.

This chapter explores what evidence exists from the study to confirm that these tenets of liquid modernity are present in the Smestos being studied. Evidence from participants concerning competition, resources, isolation, housing, prestige projects, and fears for the future are drawn on in particular for this part of the findings. The chapter begins with globalisation.

### **6.1 Globalisation**

This section considers the evidence found in the study concerning Bauman's thesis on globalisation, and the perceptions of the participants about it. The section begins with views on the actions and attitudes of the private sector before moving on to discuss the perceived role of central government as it affects Smestos. Here, the issue raised in governance literature that globalisation drives governments to reimagine their role and and reconstruct their identity along market lines (see Chapter 4) is raised. Bauman's claim that as part of the globalisation process power is moving away from localities, also claimed by academics as a process of governance rescaling, is also explored in terms of participants' experiences and views.

#### ***6.1.1 Behaviour of the private sector***

There are three main private sector activities in the case study Smestos. These are manufacturing, retail, and other services. In Caslon, as well as some of the 'long list' towns, farming has also been a significant sector. Manufacturing and farming have

declined in the long term. There is a strong belief among respondents that public investment is crucial to attracting private investment in manufacturing, services and construction – though there are conflicts over what should be done, and where. In some cases, closures and job losses in recent years have followed earlier rounds of public investment to attract the private sector. This corresponds both to Loftman *et al* on prestige projects (Chapter 3) and to Bauman on the ‘grazing’ habits of those with the power to move resources (Chapter 4).

There was acceptance that the role of the public sector is to step in where the market does fail, and take a lead – not necessarily to be a provider itself, but to support further private sector activity. There was also acceptance that to attract industry in the first place, the town must present itself as a good candidate.

There's a lot of demand for the sites but in the present market we haven't got developers to build the units. In the past, on this site for example, there's been a public sector to build units and I think that's what's going to happen here because we've got low property values.

Senior officer, Garamond

You had several major redundancies happen because there'd been several big firms attracted into Audubon using other forms of financial incentive years before, they all went one by one, but then there was a sudden, almost like an exodus, and that really brought it up to the fore.

Senior officer, Audubon

There is a general acceptance from respondents, in line with Bauman, that the private sector is not beholden to a particular *Smesto* or area, and that the larger firms are not attached even to a particular country. As Bauman described (see Chapter 4), large private firms dominate localities through their ability to move resources at will, at any point in time. Respondents regard this as a situation that they have little or no control over, and therefore accept, though most of those from *Smestos* who commented spoke of the situation with regret. That is because they perceive that their town loses out in the national and global competition. The authorities continue to lobby for their towns to win work or retail but respondents generally acknowledged that the key decisions at least on large scale investment will be taken elsewhere. That is a view that seems to be endorsed by regional stakeholders, who suggest with acceptance that opportunities for private sector development are very limited in isolated *Smestos*.



The big decisions in [international firm] aren't made in Garamond. I mean, [firm] are contemplating a consortium to build units for the new generation of power stations ... But that decision won't be made in Garamond, that's a decision that will be a global decision. It will be made in the UK I suspect but it won't be made locally. It won't be because the local manager is pushing the case. That's an example.

Senior officer, Garamond

There's some quite, very successful businesses grow from small things here, you know, good examples of that where one and three people operations pull in quite a few people. But they tend to get sold for a few million pounds and it becomes, you know, global companies come in and take over. So what you've got now is, and it's the same everywhere, is where we used to have locally owned industries, like the shipyard was locally run, now they are international, global organisations and the decisions are made somewhere else.

Senior officer, Garamond

Part of the inducement regarded as necessary to attract private investment is to shape the town, particularly through land assembly, in a way that makes sense to the private sector. As one respondent outlined, this will involve offering opportunities that do not give advantage to rival organisations and do not involve unnecessary expense beyond the core business. In this scenario, there was no expectation that a private sector investor, probably based elsewhere, would wish to commit to enhancing a town for the sake of the public good. There was, however, an expectation that the local authorities, and especially the planning system, should facilitate private sector investment – even where the outcome is not what respondents believed was wanted or needed.

And things that are stopping it are things like the pattern of land uses, there's a very fractured land use pattern in the town centre, so lots of different ownerships. And which makes it harder for a developer to create a site of a sufficient scale to warrant their attention and it's very hard to put together sites. And secondly, there's an issue around infrastructure and the quality of public realm also. And those things are public goods, they are things that you can't stop people consuming, so if the environment sector did want to, you know, widen the road and create a new station plaza, then there's no benefit to them in doing so because if one private enterprise can get it, you know, all the other businesses and all the other people operating, would benefit just as much as they did but didn't have to contribute towards the cost. So it's a disincentive.

Private sector respondent

Most town authorities in the study are attempting to replace at least some lost manufacturing capacity by switching away from production towards being a site of consumption in the form of tourism and retail. Transformational projects are being pursued in all three case study towns in support of this aim. Retail in the town centre is

seen in all localities as an essential ingredient of what the town consists of – its identity and the face it presents to residents and visitors. This is a wholly private sector activity, but it too is strongly affected by globalisation, according to interviewees, creating a tough competitive climate. During the time of this study, Caslon and Audubon were each at different stages of plans to try to attract well known High Street chains because the perception was that certain types of retail spending were ‘leaking out’ to other places for want of well known brands. In Caslon, this was done with apprehension, because respondents generally recognised that the small independent retailers that give the town centre its current character could be threatened by the encroachment of large chains with no attachment to the town. Garamond was already struggling with the effects of decisions made elsewhere by such retailers to close their branches in the town.

That's the same for some of the town centre shops, of course. Locally they are doing alright. Nationally the chain's not doing well, make a decision, close x number of outlets. And you get a cold from that.

Senior officer, Garamond

There's a kind of centralisation almost, in peoples' shopping patterns and there's a bit of vacuum pull in, people are going towards the bigger centres, which have been the target of firms mixed in with investment and that's the same in pretty much every region. And then there's those kind of smaller to mid-size centres which did used to have a fairly broad range of, you know, comparison shopping as well as convenience shopping. Now, a lot of that is kind of drifting off. And there's a necessity to think about what happens ... what comes in behind it.

Private sector respondent

Garamond has retained a strong belief in manufacturing and has supported hi-tech developments that employ a skilled workforce, though the number of jobs is far fewer than in the past.

As one of the original sites of consumption, the town being a seaside resort, Audubon and its authorities might be expected to treat the idea of tourism as a saviour with scepticism born from many years of decline. That is not the case, however, and a central aim there is to develop the town once again as a resort but offering a different tourism experience that is aligned with current tastes. This is a continuation of the town's historical approach to tourism: it began its prosperity as a genteel resort for the better off, successfully shifted to a mass market appeal in the twentieth century, and is now shifting again. Caslon too is developing its tourism ‘offer’ as a place associated with countryside and outdoor activities, which are thought to attract better-off visitors.

A problem across the North, according to regional stakeholders, is that the region lacks enough highly paid jobs and therefore lags behind the South in this regard. That is particularly true in the study towns, which have a 'hollowed out' demographic profile with fewer than average younger working age people. A small number of respondents were concerned that the type of jobs being created in Smeatos are typically low paid and seasonal, because they are in tourism, retail and call centres – the last locating in isolated towns because labour is cheap and turnover low. Equally, some interviewees pointed to the chicken-and-egg situation that isolated towns often lack skilled, highly educated workers which is a deterrent to business investment.

They are all in a similar boat. There's a remarkable commonality in terms of industrial decline between the areas because we're all reliant on heavy industries, it's all about coal, steel, ironworks, steelworks, and the shipbuilding. And there's been relatively little to replace that kind of activity.

Senior officer, Garamond

And the debate in the town, through the papers, was quite interesting. From people didn't want it to change and who felt that that development would actually destroy other parts of Caslon and fundamentally change its nature and not for the best. And others who thought no that's good because if you want a particular kind of shopping you go [elsewhere]. Because Caslon can't offer more expensive High Street chain stuff. There was a good case there for saying lets keep that money in Caslon and it was creating some jobs, not highly paid jobs but some jobs.

Senior officer, Caslon

Private sector housing development is widely accepted as being a necessary element in attracting and retaining industry and its workforce: it is a secondary driver of the local economy, as several respondents said. It is an area of difficulty for several reasons. The building industry is dominated by a small number of national firms, with few others having the capacity to take on anything but very small developments. Developers are not only dependent on the housing market for sales; as the recent downturn has demonstrated, they are also dependent on loan finance from a reluctant globalised banking industry. The credit crunch severely affected private housebuilding during the period of this study, and social housebuilding was also affected as a result. In Garamond, the choice of developer on an important scheme made a crucial difference in that the firm stayed committed instead of cutting losses as a larger firm might have done, and was independent of the banks' lending policies: globalisation's effect was noted in an isolated town. Two respondents drew attention to what they saw as local

organisations' superior ability to respond quickly to global events, compared with large or national organisations.

Capacity is a problem because if you are implementing policy stuff, well we have [only] two policy people. But then there is oil tanker syndrome. We can respond to change better than the big authorities.

Long list respondent

Now, some organisations, and there are a few in the North, can respond very quickly and actually can take action very quickly because they can turn it round in their board processes really, really quickly. Larger organisations, thinking of some of the old traditional developing associations, it takes them so much longer to actually get to the point of taking local action that will make a difference.

Regional stakeholder

But globalisation cannot be taken as a *fait accompli*. Private sector presence in the study towns is not confined to multi-nationals and nor is it entirely built on self-interest. Of the eight business or social enterprise organisations interviewed, all of which were involved in housing and/or regeneration, seven had roots in the locality and had a commitment to it. They saw a business advantage in a brand identified as local, and it was also apparent that their leaders had a personal commitment: they liked the towns where they worked (and five lived there). One respondent said a multi-national had retained its commitment to the area, because it valued its workforce.

Involvement of private sector firms in planning for the study towns was patchy. Two interviewees said they were involved in discussions with, for example, the local authority, but one was not. Strategy for social issues such as housing at county level, local strategic partnerships and the like were seen as remote by these respondents and they appeared to be completely disengaged with this type of activity, despite government hopes. Each case study area did have an economic partnership of some kind that was private sector led, though these invariably operated at a wider level than a town.

I read a lot of stuff that comes out from [the economic development organisation] and stuff like that, I mean I've got some stuff on my desk now, I've got the economic plan, the sub-regional action plan from 2008 to 2012 and the economic strategy 2009-2019, all produced by [them], and it just gives me an overview which is all I want really, at this stage. We should have more to do with the local authority but they certainly never approach us and we haven't approached them, I guess as far as they're concerned we're not a big player, I don't know who they talk to.

Private sector respondent

To sum up, the private sector is accepted as being beyond local control and not beholden to a locality. Respondents felt their towns were obliged to create attractive conditions for rootless national and international business. The sector plays a vital role in both the practicalities of job creation and loss, and is also central to the image of a town in terms of the town centre and its retail. Some private sector organisations do have loyalty to a town, partly as a branding opportunity but also substantially because the workforce is valued and the leadership has a personal commitment. Respondents from town authorities feel obliged to shape their town as an ‘offer’ to attract the private sector, and accept that public sector resources must be available to attract inward investment.

### ***6.1.2 Power and the behaviour of central government***

There has been much discussion of the role of central government and whether it has centralised power during New Labour’s tenure (see Chapter 3). In this study many respondents, including some regional stakeholders, suggested that far from ‘hollowing out’ at national level, power has been drawn to the centre, and away from localities. This was seen as a central issue in the Smesto authorities’ current difficulties, leaving them little room for manoeuvre.

Two respondents from Garamond made it explicitly clear how strongly their local activities were driven by central government and the power it holds through the special funding streams that form a substantial part of Smesto public resources. The reach of central government is not only into outcomes but equally, or even more so, the way to achieve them – the process.

The first speaker pinpoints a timeframe for the worsening of his Smesto’s position.

Whatever the government and the pundits say, I have seen a draining away of power and authority and ability to get things done, move away from local to central. Let me give an example. European regional development fund. We used to have an ERDF allocation for [the county]. Right? And that ERDF allocation we had local decision taking. When I say local, [county]-wide decision taking as to which projects go forward and which don't. All gone. It's a regional programme now controlled by the RDA. So we have no real local input, frankly, and no local decision taking on that. And I have seen this centralisation and increasing complexity and disempowerment of decision taking. So yes, I mean if I got into a real black mood and contrasted how we operated in the mid-1990s which I thought was difficult enough, with how we operate now, I would see ourselves as

far more bureaucratically constrained, more inflexible, more target-driven, and less inclined to trust and entrust the people doing the work.

I think that what we're getting is confusion of bodies and initiatives. Whereas at one time you would say the local authority, quite clear what you got from the local authority, quite clear that they were the local authority. They were local, and they had authority. Now they are circumscribed and constrained, you have regional development agencies, you have local strategic partnerships, you have learning and skills councils, you have Business Links etc. So we've made the world more complex, but that complexity still comes back to government control.

Senior officer, Garamond

Well we made the change because we were driven by NRF ... In all our dealings with GO, the NRF money, we had to achieve floor targets and GO made it perfectly clear to us where we should be focusing our effort. And we would focus our effort exactly where they wanted us to: employment, health, education, housing.

Senior officer, Garamond

A perhaps surprising finding was that respondents pointed to the way central government and its agencies can often mimic the private sector in actions that resemble Bauman's globalisation thesis. Decisions on where services and the jobs that go with them will be based are taken at national or regional level, without recourse to their views according to study participants. The effect can be the same as if, for example, a national retailer decides to close its store in an isolated town in favour of retail outlets in larger conurbations. In the public sector, this is done in the name of efficiency and value for money but as two respondents pointed out, the net result is to increase deprivation in certain localities. The finding resonates with du Gay's 'discursive reimagination of public management' to a marketised form (2000 p112, see Chapter 3).

There was also deep concern at the rise of process compared to outcome (also cited by Bauman) and a homogenising effect at national or regional level. This, in respondents' eyes, took away the very thing that is needed for localities to prosper, namely local people with determination and drive.

The public sector in particular, when they want to centralise, they either centralise them sub-regionally or regionally. They centralise them to where it suits them. So all that does is, it means that you end up in these places with the lower paid jobs in the public sector. Right. And that feeds deprivation in itself. So if we can't convince the public sector to relocate here, what bloody chance have we got with the private sector?

You are moving away from people having a passion and a drive for their locality and seeking to do good, to a more process driven environment. And in that process driven environment you would say, forget about the deprived areas really, because we can get far more benefit by putting resources into the engines of growth. And then all we'll do is we'll just provide first aid to the deprived areas.

You know. There are always going to be basket cases. Really, in some respects what the Conservatives did with the coalfield areas. You know, they shut the coalmines down and they provided some after sales service to the coalmining areas. And they left whole generations of people to just rot. That's fundamentally wrong to me. I don't care what you thought about the miners, to leave whole generations of people to rot because you are concentrating on the profitable areas - that's what business does. Business shuts down the unprofitable areas and concentrates on the profitable areas. What we should be doing is concentrating on making sure the profitable areas keep profitable but looking at these areas and saying, we really need to get these areas restored to financial health, economic health, and have a passion about it. And it's like, can you be passionate about the North ...? Not really. It's an artificial construct. But I can be passionate about Garamond travel to work area because I live here, I can feel it, I can see it, and I can relate to it.

Senior officer, Garamond

However, there was a notable exception in the housing field. Here, many practitioners felt that although power was indeed centralising in other areas of public life, the situation was much the same as ever in their own specialism. Their work has, throughout the period since the Second World War, been driven strongly by central government. In some senses the housing sector has more freedom than in the immediate post-war period, not being obliged to use ministry housing designs, for example. In other ways, the present government has increased control (see Chapter 3). Respondents accepted the national constraints, particularly in homelessness legislation, and took heart from using what local flexibilities exist.

People that may be just on the general housing register, you can add value to that with looking at options for other sources of accommodation. Because obviously the social housing has dramatically reduced following the right to buy in the eighties. So we have to look at a wider range of options and try to be more innovative, but the hard-core part of the job is people that present as homeless. And you would assess their homeless in the strict framework of the Housing Act and the homelessness legislation and make decisions.

Housing specialist

The evidence in this section points to a situation in which respondents from Smesto authorities feel they are driven by the activities of central government and have only limited power to respond independently: their choices were by and large being made for them, they believed. They point to incidents where, they believe, central government has acted in a similar way to the private sector in creating or taking away local offices and jobs. The housing specialism stands apart as participants here felt the

situation had changed little over time, being already strongly controlled from the centre. The next section explores the issue of shifting power in more detail.

### ***6.1.3 Power shifts and governance rescaling: unitary status***

In Bauman's liquid modern world, a kind of globalisation affects local authorities and their partners with power moving away from each locality and moving towards the centre – first nationally and then internationally. The evidence from the previous subsection suggests participants do find this effect happening in their locality. This section explores an example of this change that was highlighted by almost all participants: the question of governance rescaling to create unitary status.

A current issue during the time of the study was an exercise sponsored by central government to change the territorial scale for governance and administration of basic local services including housing. The plan was to amalgamate district councils into a single tier authority, generally at county level. All two-tier areas in the North were affected by the proposals, and some did move to unitary status (Chapter 2). The issue brought serious tensions, however, with some districts accusing the county councils of trying to take them over. In areas where the two-tier system was eventually retained, relations between the county and district authorities were harmed by mutual suspicions over the process, which in one study area seemed to stoke up pre-existing local rivalries. There was a widespread feeling (among all three groups interviewed) that the issue of rescaling governance had not gone away for long. In those areas that were preparing for unitary status there was recognition that it would improve the areas' ability to compete politically and for resources, and that funding allocation would be streamlined, but there was also concern over the loss of local authorities, councillors, autonomy and local budgets. Some saw strong tensions between the efficiency of larger authorities and the 'place-shaping' agenda. Others were concerned about the health of local democracy in general, pointing to ageing councillors, seats held unopposed at election time, remoteness, and failure in some instances to take on local case work for electors.

Some interviewees already worked in unitary local authority areas, including those in the Audubon/Palatino case study. Here, unitary status and the larger governance scale are generally regarded as an advantage though there are some tensions related to the large geographical area covered.



And one of the fears for the districts was that control would simply drift up to [the county town] basically, and everything would filter down from there. And we would suffer. And so the district councils were opposed to it. The county council of course were for it. Which caused some friction ... And in part I think it was the fact that district councillors felt as though they were now being looked at as second class citizens in a way.

Local councillor

The worry for me is the strength of local democracy ... Because if local democracy gets undermined, and local authorities are the only wholly democratic body that represents your area, then resources will shift ... I do think that if the early recommendations of 'everything's going to the regions' and away from the local level, the worry for me is that the democracy we have, and the levels of representation in and around the area will just disappear. Because if you are looking at the relationship of the parishes and towns, they will be worried and have an issue about how they are represented and influence a sub-regional authority like the new authority ...

The amount of politicians that have been lost across the county, you know, you've halved the numbers effectively, or more. You've chopped two thirds off ... if those local issues aren't being responded to effectively, and people haven't got that inroad, they will get even more disenchanted than they are already with the political set up. You can almost ask yourself, well what are things going to look like in a post-democratic society if we turn people off any further from politics than what they are already.

Long list respondent

The relationship has been very poor since the case for unitary fell through ... a very great deal of friction but I would say that bridges are being mended, but in the district everybody thinks the county councillors are a complete waste of time, and there's been very, very little joint working. In the last year the [county and district] have made some progress in that direction so things are beginning to come together, but district councillors are regarded as very much the poor relation, you know, what can they possibly do, they've come on the earth with that attitude. Actually, it's probably warranted ...

Local councillor

This section has considered globalisation as the first of three main characteristics of liquid modernity, as set out by Bauman. Evidence from the study confirms that respondents accept the process of globalisation is happening and that they have little control over it. They suggest that some behaviours of central government can replicate the draining away of local power that is brought about by private sector activities. Regional structures and other features of governance rescaling have not necessarily brought power closer to localities: some believe they have helped to drain it away from the local level as *deconcentration* takes hold.

Interviewees' responses to their situation were clearly shaped by their perceived lack of or loss of power. They tried to shape their towns to attract a rootless private sector, tried to tailor their public activities to what they believed government and its agencies wanted, but ultimately were blown about by the intended and side effects of decisions made elsewhere.

The next section considers a second main feature of liquid modernity, the situation of 'a society on the move'.

## **6.2 A society on the move**

According to Bauman, the state of liquid modernity contains a requirement to be constantly 'on the move', both physically and in other ways. Movement is a key aspect of Bauman's thesis as it contains the means by which power is used or exerted over others by controlling time. It is also central to third way politics with its initiative churn and emphasis on opportunity taking. In subsequent chapters the difference in who exerts that power and who is controlled is explored more fully. First though, this section considers more generally the issues of a society on the move, which includes the notion of being 'fleet of foot'. The section covers a series of related issues: the ability to move and control resources; relationships between Smesto authorities and regional bodies; commonalities and rivalries; and issues of geographical isolation.

The ability to be on the move in liquid modernity is clearly linked with the idea of competing and being entrepreneurial, and the section begins with one respondent's views on whether government or the public sector can be seen in that light. The comments include a neat description of what marks out a user of power.

Well if I'm going to be brutally honest, I've never found any government to have much interest in wealth and job creation. They are far more interested in spending the proceeds on other activities, be they education or health or whatsoever. So I've never found any government to really understand, looking at it from my end of the telescope, the real importance of wealth creation before you spend it ...

Can you ever have a government that's truly enterprising? And certainly you would find it difficult to find an enterprising civil service, because the civil service is about process and procedure, not about being enterprising. Enterprising is a sort of cultural aspect of being flexible, dynamic, energetic, not process driven. Willing to actually go beyond the structure to achieve your objectives, and willing to seize passing opportunities and exploit them. ... My experience is that governments in of themselves are usually not enterprising and the structures they set up are anything but enterprising. Though they do talk a good talk about everyone else being enterprising.

Voluntary sector respondent

### 6.2.1 *Resources*

An aspect fundamental to the ability to be mobile, react quickly and have control is resources. For town authorities, dependence on resources that are controlled by government is central to their experience and in the study was an issue that respondents constantly cited as problematic. The first speaker criticises the increasing amount of red tape attached to funding.

Contract comes through. In order to actually be able to even entertain getting the contract, which is a critical element of what we do in economic regeneration, we've got a good track record, but because it's now all let by EU procurement rules, you know, process rules, I have to provide the RDA as a small enterprise agency, with a green travel plan for my employees. A survival plan. And a carbon footprint reduction plan. For a 25-person operation. Now I don't get funded to do that so I've got to take people off doing delivery and focus on the process. And in my years of working [here], more and more of the activity has had to be spent on process and less and less time - we're no different from the police force in that - more time on red tape and less time pounding the beat. And it's not getting any better, it's getting progressively worse.

Private sector respondent

### 6.2.2 *Regions, sub-regions*

A key relationship for town authorities and partners is with regional government bodies, and the regional offices of national government bodies. Generally, such bodies were seen as holding most or all of the power in the relationship, because they control the supply of resources. Even during the relatively short life of RDAs (less than a decade at the start of the fieldwork for this study) the organisations and their partner GOs had gone through two major reorganisations in the way they distributed funding. This brings about corresponding organisational changes at regional, sub-regional and authority level, and town authorities are expected to keep up.

One regional stakeholder suggested that regional structures have not increased local power or accountability because the new tier of governance has a tendency to 'suck things back up' rather than devolving down (*deconcentration*). This point was made in other ways by a variety of respondents who recognised their situation in being reliant on resources from regional bodies. Some saw a fundamental conflict in government policies between the demands of partnership and regional working, and the place-making agenda.

Those from the Audubon/Palatino authorities were noticeably more positive towards their RDA than other respondents, and saw the relationship more as one of equals, than other Smesto authorities. This seems to be partly because a large authority simply carries more weight, more capacity to do things, ie greater mobility, than a smaller one, and is therefore seen by both parties as more of an equal. Certainly this was seen as the main anticipated advantage from those areas about to become unitary.

In isolated areas, a question that arises is whether relationships are affected by distance, and this was widely commented upon because respondents seemed to feel they needed face to face meetings, and for regional officers actually to see the conditions in their Smesto. These were seen as important components in a good relationship and proper mutual understanding. Isolated town respondents certainly feel that they are at disadvantage in this respect, though as predicted by Bauman, it is not so much the distance that is at issue but the time expended: those from isolated areas cannot control their time effectively and must spend much 'wasted' time in travelling. This has cost and other resource implications, again an issue of control and mobility.

Some respondents in the study overall felt that it was difficult to get regional officers to come to the isolated Smestos and that therefore there was a bias in the minds of such officers towards their local or home cities. Within the case study towns views on this were mixed, with some respondents from a locality saying officers were generally good at attending while others thought they were not, and were somewhat detached from what was happening locally.

The negative bias that some respondents felt from regional officers was reinforced by a feeling that regional bodies, particularly RDAs with their business remit, were focused too much on immediate opportunity taking (again, in Bauman terms, exercising movement and control) associated with city regions as the engines of growth, at the expense of tackling local need. The competitive arrangements in the process of bidding for funds, which mimic the private sector opportunity taking role, were seen as further disadvantaging those areas already lacking power. Several said they felt 'forgotten'.

With a two-tier structure and us as a small district, sometimes you feel like the dirt on the shoes. We don't have the resources to influence at that level ... it's very difficult to respond to complex agendas. The districts have a joint approach but it is very difficult. The sub region feels outgunned on the Assembly and with the RDA ... It's hard to develop a mature agenda of co-operation. We can share or buy in to sub regional work but we can't drive the agenda. It's getting the geographical fit - the government is going bigger but a natural community fit is essential.

Long list respondent

I think the reality is that in the South of the region where there are bigger fish to fry and bigger issues, there's a saying that perhaps the RDA gets more bangs for its buck in those areas than in a relatively thinly populated area. So there's that argument to make on each and every occasion about, you know, our share of the cake.

Senior officer, Garamond

All respondents who commented on the issue emphasised their own reliability in spending grants and allocations (an expression of the ability to control time), so that the agencies could have confidence in them. This is one of the six 'argument' types identified (see Chapter 5). Three 'long list' respondents reported having snapped up regional monies left unspent towards the end of the financial year, by having relatively small scale projects ready to be implemented quickly. This was seen as helping the agencies out of a potential difficulty as well as getting extra resources for the town. In Bauman terms it is, again, an expression of the ability to control time – and the wish to be seen as having that ability. Respondents believed such activity stored up goodwill with regional agencies – and one pointed to the negative effects when a locality fails to keep its promises. Two regional stakeholders confirmed that they favour reliability.

Well we learnt years ago. We have a whole, in my filing cabinet here, we have a series of projects that we are working up, we spend a bit of money on project development cos if some money comes up at year end we say - yah! Ready to go.

Long list respondent

I mean it's one of the things you dread when you've got a budget to spend that you get trapped and have to hand it back. Because there's nothing worse than that, you know. To me that's a killer. So in terms of the regional support we've had, we've been very fortunate ...

Now we put in another bid for more funding to do another project and it was turned down. I still believe to this day that it was turned down because we didn't deliver [on a previous project]. And if an organisation has a limited budget and you've got other areas that are trying to get that funding, they will look at areas that will deliver. And I genuinely believe that. And it's not as if tiny [name] plays against tiny [Smesto] or wherever. It's tiny [name] playing against Metropolis, London, etc. And once you have failed to deliver it takes you a long time to get back to that stage where you can actually prove you can deliver what you are talking about. So delivery is important, it really is.

Local councillor

The larger shire counties represent a spatial and temporal problem for those trying to compete and realise opportunities at sub-regional level. Some are 100 miles across, and transport links tend to be poor. Regional meetings – crucial for setting out funding arguments – tend, according to respondents, to be held in the large centres and

conurbations. Travelling to regional or sub-regional meetings involves a large investment of time and can be costly. Those from district councils and small organisations face problems of capacity in sparing people to attend distant meetings.

My organisation is able to say my time to [attend sub regional meetings] is paid for. But there's an awful lot of third sector organisations that aren't in that fortunate position. And they either, well they either attend at their own significant cost or don't attend at all. Now it costs my organisation about £500 a day to put me in a room with partners. From the third sector point of view that's a significant barrier. And there's no arrangement to backfill that cost. So the vast majority of people say we can't afford to do it and don't.

LSP respondent

Some Audubon/Palatino respondents were noticeably more involved with their city/sub region than other respondents. This could be partly because the local authority headquarters was in a town close to the nearest city and there was a historical affinity. Certainly there are characteristics of a local rivalry present (particularly over city ambitions to expand), which suggests an engagement at least.

Whether the structures that have grown up at different spatial levels add up to more than the sum of their parts is a question addressed by most respondents working with or at that level. A great deal of energy is invested, so there was plenty of movement and activity, but beneficial outcomes were harder to identify.

Local strategic partnerships, a prime example of the governance shift from hierarchies to networks, were strongly favoured by a minority of respondents, for their ability to bring together organisations that would not otherwise have co-operated. (It should be borne in mind that LSP respondents in this study were in a minority.)

Blurred liquid modern institutions and responsibilities were evident. Three respondents said local strategic partnerships could be problematic because they are structured according to central government instructions that require them to set topic 'themes' with somewhat nebulous titles such as 'healthy, wealthy, wise' (Plymouth City Council 2008) as the priorities rather than the more traditional technical subject headings such as housing and planning. This could make it difficult to achieve a practical focus.

It's difficult ... It's like herding cats sometimes.

LSP respondent

You've got a local strategic partnership set up on the LAA model where the nearest we get is 'access to services'. But there is no berth for housing. What a lost

opportunity. Because the local strategic partnership could put together all the players under the one roof. We might come up with some quite innovative local solutions. That's been the excuse given, that we are just following the government model. But I don't know, it's frustrating that I don't think the government would be anti- relevant and valid challenges ... So there's an example of a government policy which is almost preventing us from doing more.

Voluntary sector respondent

The value subscribed to the partnership idea is that a strategic partnership brings public, private and third sector together. What you see in reality is very little private sector participation, because the vast majority of this partnership working actually takes place in really boring meetings. That a private business person quite rightly would see as a complete waste of their time. So I don't think these structures necessarily lend themselves to delivering the potential of wider partnership working ... It is very driven by one partner, the county council, who sort of set the agenda and drive it forward. Because they are the people with the time and resources.

LSP respondent

### ***6.2.3 Issues of commonality and rivalry***

Respondents in Garamond and Caslon (and elsewhere) felt that the very diverse needs and economic position of different parts of their county meant it was difficult to find common ground on which to draw up strategies or allocate funds. It appeared the best spatial scale for governance had not yet been found and the combination of cooperation and competition demanded by New Labour (see Chapter 3) was proving difficult to implement. In some senses the relationships have fossilised into immobility; in others there is a constant shifting of allegiances that produces tensions.

Many emphasised the difference in the nature of rural and urban areas. The sentiment here was that although rural areas might have investment needs, the type of urban regeneration on offer nationally, and which is very much needed in isolated former industrial towns, is not suitable to meet rural and market town needs. In the latter, access to services, low wages, hidden poverty and a hollowed-out demographic profile are more pertinent issues. Yet the two types of area are expected to cooperate on strategy and compete for funding when a legitimate comparison of need is very difficult.

One respondent each from Caslon and Garamond, plus a long list respondent, pointed out that job creation in one part of the county, for example, would have nil effect in another because commuting is not feasible – especially for the lower-paid jobs that are likely to be available (three of my respondents were long distance commuters, it

turned out, all of them in very senior posts). Spatial geography was seen as highly relevant but forgotten by those who inhabit a more mobile world.

There is some suggestion also that for districts essentially based on a single town such as Garamond and Caslon, there is little advantage in having a sub-regional structure. The blurring of priorities and lack of coordination between strategy and resource, with regularly shifting 'rules of the game' at sub-regional level were seen by some as undermining the work of their own more solid institutions.

You've got to have, frankly, the balls to prioritise what you genuinely believe are your priorities. And to some extent Janis I'd rather they said well stuff Garamond, we'll put it all in the rural areas. At least they'd be doing something which was clear!

Senior officer, Garamond

I think the fundamental problem really is a lack of understanding of rural issues. And the needs of rural areas. And it's very easy to focus on urban areas because you know you can go out and you can see the deprivation. Right. But you come into a rural area, you can't.

Long list respondent

[We have] always got more than we should get given our IMD ranking, which is again something that really annoys me, that people like the RDA just cling on to IMD as the holy grail for deprivation statistics, which you know they don't really cover all the issues. Especially not in the rural context.

Long list respondent

Respondents from all areas in the study report that local rivalries have been heightened in recent years because sub-regions are expected to draw up joint strategies on a range of economic and housing issues, then bid to their region for funding on the basis of those strategies. At times of reduced public funding, or significant shifts engineered centrally in the way funding is allocated, this can lead to turf wars.

It's virtually impossible to be honest ... if you look at any, the county council policy documents on economic regeneration, I understand why this is the case, but it's huge frustration to us that the documents always say, well, there are big problems in [name] and increasingly in [name]. But then again there are lots of problems in the rural areas as well, and you know, we need to strike a balance ... I keep saying, we're the second most deprived district in the country. What are you going to do about it? And it's oohummm.

Senior officer, Garamond

The politics on the county council are that most of the councillors are supporting small towns or rural wards. ... the feeling in [this area] is that the rest of the county wants to take our money basically.

Voluntary sector respondent



#### 6.2.4 *Issues of isolation*

Isolation of towns profoundly affects them; that is agreed by all respondents. In the context of 'a society on the move', the pertinent question is how the effects play out in places that have been relatively traditional and self-sufficient but are profoundly affected by recent change through globalisation and the politics of competition. On whether isolation is helpful or otherwise, there are two opposed views: that isolated towns are disadvantaged, which is much the more widespread view; or that their isolation brings certain benefits. This section explores the two types of view on this issue.

The first area of disadvantage, respondents feel, stems from the geographical location, which translates to an issue of time in terms of getting to and from other centres. This brings economic disadvantage in a competitive situation: one respondent said the issue in a nutshell is that such towns are 'remote from the engines of growth'. Another type of disadvantage comes from the lack of critical population mass, meaning there are few opportunities for higher education and high paid work that feeds the 'knowledge' and other moveable industries championed by New Labour and cited by Bauman as part of time domination. This in turn leads to issues of demographics, with fewer than average younger people though more than average older people. Four respondents pointed out what they see as a key issue, that unemployment or low pay are bigger issues in remote locations than elsewhere because those affected cannot self-improve by commuting. They must therefore remain in their situation or leave altogether.

Most of their settlements don't really have an economic reason for being any more and have either converted to being commuter settlements or small manufacturing settlements. Or if they are more remote and not connected they are really struggling to have any role or function, and getting social deprivation issues.

Regional stakeholder

Fundamentally, we sit in an area that is between the major conurbations and we need to connect some of those opportunities with local people. If we don't get some of the people who are most peripheral from the labour markets, some money in their pockets, then they are always going to be more detached or struggle with being the furthest away from being able to enter the labour market, they will suffer the greatest disparities and then suffer from the social problems ... and we know that people who earn £22,000 or less are unlikely to travel more than 5 miles to work.

Long list respondent

Audubon doesn't have that opportunity in terms of the relationship to the wider employment market, it doesn't have the opportunities in terms of investment decisions. People would be more willing to invest in [a town closer to motorways] because of the access to the main roads and the rail network and access to the neighbouring large urban areas. Clearly, Audubon doesn't have that, it's very much self-contained, it's very peripheral.

Senior officer, Audubon

There are three distinct viewpoints from respondents on the Baumanesque question of overcoming geography by cutting travelling time. For each of the three study towns, this would principally mean improving roads and/or rail, and one respondent suggested an airport. The first type of view is that such improvements are necessary for the town's competitiveness and they lobby for them. A second viewpoint is that such improvements are indeed necessary but pragmatically they insist that such things will not happen, and therefore no further energy should be wasted on lobbying for them. A third viewpoint is that better communications could worsen aspects of life in the town and therefore would not be helpful.

The members at the time thought the way to deal with the economy was to dual carriageway the road and it took me a fair amount of time to go through, well that shaves 15 minutes off, so you can get from the motorway to Audubon in an hour instead of an hour and a quarter, so that's not going to do it for them. And large scale distribution type businesses want [central Smeaton], they're not going to drive past there to go to Audubon and that was a hot subject for three or four years to be honest and then suddenly the members worked on the basis of you might be right possibly, but we need to do something locally as a town regeneration process. And then another four or five years later it doesn't even get mentioned anymore, because we've accepted it's a given, it's not environmentally sustainable and it's not economically fundable, so it isn't going to happen basically.

Senior officer, Audubon

A small number of respondents felt that their town's isolation gave it an advantage, particularly compared to suburbs within a conurbation where competition to attract consumers might be greater. There was a strong sense of identity in the towns, and a fear that this could be lost through development.

Geographically we are isolated. If we were just outside Metropolis we [venue] would not be here because of the commute time. We gain an advantage from being isolated. We would not have it as a suburb.

Voluntary sector respondent

It's a northern seaside town. There isn't the roads, it's inaccessible, it's quite a drive off the motorway but in a way that makes it rather unique for the people that chose to go there and chose to come back to it. I've spent quite a lot of time there

these holidays. It's delightful. It's very personal, it's not hugely commercialised, but it is a little bit if you know what I mean? Yes, I accept it has got run down because there isn't a lot of employment there.

LSP respondent

Temporal issues of place are also relevant, two respondents said, because a historically isolated community takes on particular characteristics that are regarded as solid in contrast with the fast-shifting and uncertain society elsewhere. There is a sense of pride in the very isolation that also brings problems in relating to the contemporary world. Or, as one respondent said, perhaps it is currently more about resignation. Three admitted that self-reliance can lead to people from isolated places being rather insular in their outlook.

I firmly believe that other towns would have died. I think the thing that saved us was, we tried to respond, because we are insular, we are isolated ... And that in a way has bred into us the ability to survive and take things on, and to be inventive.

Local councillor

In Caslon there is a culture of individualness and self-reliance. People tend to take pride in their self reliance and not asking for things. A feeling of being quite remote from the region.

Senior officer, Caslon

A lot of rural communities here have frankly given up. You know, they just don't worry about it now, they get on with it. You know. We live here. We get on with it. And we do what we can.

Long list respondent

It's not the strongest [leadership] and it wasn't before this either, the previous administration. And it's quite twee and lives in the past, I would say ... it's a very archaic committee structure still. Nothing as modern as a cabinet I'm afraid ... It's not like any other area that I've worked in when it comes to legalities. Things are done on the back of a fag packet and with a gentlemen's agreement and things like this.

Long list respondent

This section has considered Bauman's 'society on the move' and the power relations it captures. Participants felt constrained in their ability to be entrepreneurial by the rules, bureaucracy and funding restrictions placed on them by central and regional bodies. There were local rivalries as well that compromised the ability to act and in some cases tensions had been heightened by governance rescaling. Issues of isolation loomed large in the minds of respondents, who by and large felt that their town's

geographical location was a considerable barrier to meeting the demands of competition. A minority felt their town gained strength from its isolation in terms of self-reliance and stability, though these are not necessarily mutually exclusive ideas. The next section examines the third primary condition of liquid modernity, consumer attitudes.

### **6.3 Consumer attitudes**

Bauman posits liquid modernity as a state in which we all act, and are required to act, as consumers. We must self-improve to take opportunities as they arise, compete rather than share, and take part in the fast turnover or churning of ideas, resources and desires. Above all, we must constantly make choices. As outlined in Chapter 3, this is in line with third way political emphasis on choice in public services and the emphasis on opportunity compared with ‘old’ Labour need, though tempered by limited actions on social justice.

Only eight people in the study did not mention competition in some way. As shown earlier in this chapter, the need to try to compete on a private sector or markets basis was accepted, but equally important and more immediate was competition for public sector resources. In fact, this was seen as even more vital because there is widespread recognition that public funding leads or attracts private investment, and in isolated towns with their relatively weak economies the process cannot happen the other way around.

This section covers a key aspect of competitiveness in attracting residents, namely the jobs and housing combination that is seen as essential. It then moves on to discuss the development of city regions as a competitive force; the requirement on Smestos to self-improve; and the role of prestige projects. First though, some general views from Smesto and stakeholder participants on competition.

#### ***6.3.1 Smesto and regional stakeholder views on competing***

Several Smesto respondents gained a sense of pride from the idea of competing, and the same type of phrase ‘kicking/punching above our weight’ cropped up repeatedly. Others found the situation more problematic.

There are tensions - I was more aware [in a previous LA] of this as we were closely competing in the region. Here we are more successful.

Long list respondent

The RDAs are specifically established to promote economic growth. The notion that public investment should be concentrated on the areas offering most opportunity is built into the Northern Way model, and stated explicitly as discussed in Chapter 3. In the study, regional stakeholders including RDA staff and others were generally keen to stress the advantages of a competitive approach. A regional stakeholder identified the characteristics of 'opportunity areas', as opposed to those he predicted would lose out in future. The key features in his view were:

I think the characteristics of those areas are those that are close to universities, close to transport systems, and have good leisure, recreation and educational facilities attached to them. ... And I think the big thing starting to drive, or has been driving for some time, is an assessment to put investment where it doesn't just tackle housing need issues, but supporting economic growth. There is no doubt that investment for the public sector housing to support economic growth has been and will be an ever increasing theme. Now that doesn't mean it will be, you know, put in one area than the other, but it does need to show some joined up thinking about why you would invest in area b rather than area a and one of the big wins in this will be supporting economic growth. I ... support the concept of markets and markets working efficiently. The one thing the public sector has to be clear about is when it should intervene in a market and what the difference between intervention and interfering is. We will be spending more and more of our cash helping the markets to work more efficiently rather than attempting to countermand what the market wants.

Regional stakeholder

Among those respondents who foresaw the possibility of uneven spatial development resulting from an opportunity based strategy there was concern to avoid this problem, but little by way of an alternative. Generally among regional stakeholders, the inevitability of current trajectories and policies was accepted.

And I think we have got a real big debate going about the preparation for an integrated regional strategy ... particularly if you have got a regional development agency set up as business focused therefore market focused therefore economic development focused, where do you ensure that you take care of things like economic inclusion? Community needs are a very small part, a very, very small part of the types of operations of something like an RDA. In my experience.

Regional stakeholder

Strategic housing market assessments that have been carried out often focus very much on need, and perpetuate existing patterns. Whereas if you really want to think long term about sustainable economic growth and about the future aspirations of communities and children now or growing up, it's got to be much more about opportunity.

Regional stakeholder

JB: And is strategy only about markets? And should it be?  
>Now? No! [laughs] We've nationalised everything. We're doing Keynesian economics now.

Regional stakeholder

### ***6.3.2 The housing/jobs combination – competing for residents***

Most, if not all, of the study areas have a hollowed out population with fewer than average younger people. There is a widespread belief that there is a need to keep younger working age people, and attract new residents from higher skilled, higher earning groups. Some respondents referred to creating or fostering 'an enterprising environment' that involves a virtuous circle of business startups and expansion, attraction of a skilled workforce, and training and retaining young people. There was general agreement of a need to create 'café society' to attract such people.

It's also about trying to upskill, upgrade the town because people were coming from other areas, skills that we needed, and we didn't have the restaurants and the pubs, we just didn't have it. So basically we're starting from a very low base. We were, we didn't have a theatre ... we still don't have a theatre.

Private sector respondent

And you get residential sorting - those who can afford to move out, while those who can't get sucked in. And then you get social deprivation in concentration. And the stock isn't particularly attractive to a modern, knowledge-based, you know, aspirational type. So in housing, the restructuring of the stock is a key bit of trying to get the city regions with a 21st century residential 'offer' as it's called in the Northern Way stuff. Yeah?

Regional stakeholder

Two respondents from Caslon also voiced concern at a regional strategy that appeared to see the main function of rural areas as attracting visitors and being a playground for those living in the cities, rather than as communities in their own right. This touches on the whole issue of regional prosperity and the guiding Northern Way

idea of opportunity (see section below), with areas providing an ‘offer’ to attract the ‘right’ kind of people, ie those who will create or spend wealth.

There's a diversion of funding to quangos and making the competitive element. I've tried to instil in our officers not to chase funding for the sake of it. If they are not our priorities, it diverts resources. But it's the only way to get funding.

Long list respondent

Respondents clearly see a need to make an ‘offer’ that will attract desirable residents. To do that successfully, as the next section outlines, they must fulfil another of liquid modernity’s conditions: to improve themselves.

### **6.3.3 *The requirement to self-improve***

In the state of liquid modernity, where everyone must act as a consumer, inevitably there will be differences in the opportunities available to different people, organisations and places. Within the paradigm, as with third way politics, the solution for those starting out at a disadvantage is self-improvement: a requirement to ‘pull yourself up by the bootstraps’ (Hall 2003). Regional stakeholders supported this concept, suggesting that Smesto authorities must learn to compete.

I think the challenge in Audubon is almost more it's a transformational agenda that's coming up with some different rationale as to why Audubon is there.

Senior officer, Audubon

The biggest problem is capacity. We've got to address that. With the sub-regions, they have all got to get themselves to a certain level. It's crucial with the HCA because they want to talk to groups. They are going to have the 'single conversation' at sub-regional level. So if you aren't in you will get left behind.

Regional stakeholder

Among the difficulties of achieving self-improvement is when local organisations have little influence over private sector based elsewhere, or nowhere, as outlined in the first part of this chapter. A countervailing pressure to individual competition, particularly at local level, sees organisations banding together in order to compete better. This is necessarily an incomplete and difficult exercise within a competitive framework, but there is recognition that it is necessary and in some circumstances highly beneficial.

Well it would be a nonsense if an inquiry came along and [we] competitively bid. That would just be ridiculous. So what we tend to do is the two investment teams would sit down and they would agree what the best offer was, to meet the specification of the investor. I mean we all back whatever the best offer is. That actually works pretty well.

Senior officer, Audubon

Self-improvement can be seen to offer both a refuge for those with power ('they ought to help themselves') and a perpetuation of those power relations ('we can't help ourselves'). If localities decide they must take the route of attempting to self-improve, a prime way to attempt to overcome entrenched situations is via prestige projects. This is the subject of the next sub-section.

#### **6.3.4 Prestige projects**

For the purposes of this study, a prestige (or transformational or iconic) project is one that is focused on the regeneration of a particular town, strongly features infrastructure, and requires special funding. It will have various elements to it, including housing, and will combine public and private sector involvement. Such projects are termed transformational because they are intended to bring about a step change in the economy of the town by making it more competitive.

At least six of the 11 towns in the study were working on transformational projects at that time, including all three case study towns. Two respondents made pithy comments on these types of project that sum up both the dependency of town authorities on winning special funding for these projects competitively, and the feeling that they can take too much precedence over less visible projects (as in Loftman *et al* 1994, see Chapter 3). There were also problems with the commercial nature of the projects driving what was produced, which two respondents said was not what was ideally wanted in housing terms. The view that RDAs favour such projects was confirmed by a regional stakeholder.

There's a tension in as much as the RDA and the sub-regional partnership are interested in what they call transformational actions. They are after the things that will impact on GVA which is how they are judged. So the ability to take a more rounded view of what intervention is necessary is perhaps a little more difficult than it should be.

And a lot of the stuff around the labour markets and training, doesn't seem to have that same impact as those projects where you can expect a minister or



senior politician to cut a ribbon and point to something. ... And you know those are important, but they are not the only game in town.

Long list respondent

We're not looking for iconic buildings, we want affordable housing in villages. The key is sometimes to say we've got to have an iconic building to show we are doing something.

Long list respondent

The brief from the leader was, 'I want a wow factor, I want people to go into that building and the first time they see it they say wow' and they did. So of course when you're there promoting the next one suddenly people are paying a bit more attention, because the scheme that you were never ever were going to do because it had been promised for donkeys' years was now done and you did it.

Senior officer, Audubon

All of the transformational projects in the case study towns involve the local authority and partners. The local authorities are particularly active in technical aspects such as land acquisition, possibly with compulsory purchase of buildings. One of the projects was established at the behest of the RDA as a forum for community involvement, to develop as an RDA respondent said, 'from the grassroots up'. It is not noticeably different in terms of the infrastructure (ie, what is actually built) from projects that are not structured in this way, but community involvement is seen as a good in itself and is used to legitimate the project.

Prestige projects involve greater risk than usual, both financial and political. They involve complex groupings of funding streams and organisations that must be lined up and managed within tight timescales. Residents may become 'consultation fatigued' and begin to believe the promised changes are not going to happen. All three of the case study towns, as well as at least two others from the long list, had encountered problems with transformational projects once the economic downturn started. The first signs came with developers pulling out of deals the partners thought were agreed, particularly housing developments. Then central government began to take stock of the public finance elements and to question the basis of some projects. The result has been that some projects have been delayed and/or scaled back; others seem unlikely to go ahead at all. The case study authorities have been putting in huge effort to keep their developments moving forward, with some success, though the uncertainty over both public and private sector funding was causing great anxiety for some, pointing up their lack of power.

It's tricky. They've supported a lot of the big regeneration schemes that we've done fantastically, [but one] we've had to leave high and dry because our development partner have pulled out. So we are going to be struggling to meet our Corporation targets. It's a consequence through no fault of ours or the corporation's. [The developer] bugged around with it for so long, they were uncertain about it I think. It's a major, major scheme and last week they are saying they might do it, if they could revise the land offer by half. Shysters, Janis! This is what you get, you know, so the Corporation are on the other end of this saying, when are you going to deliver your bit of this site, and it's very difficult. I mean, our response is to try and get in control of the front of things.

Voluntary sector respondent

This section has covered issues of consumer attitudes and competition, the third and final prime component of Bauman's liquid modernity as examined in this study. Participants were strongly aware of the need to compete for desirable types of mobile residents and investment, and to make their towns attractive compared with other places in pursuit of that goal. They were also aware of the competitive nature of allocations of public investment (and the move to a more competitive ethos from government was confirmed by regional stakeholders), and the requirement on them to 'pull themselves up by the bootstraps'. Respondents felt Smesto authorities' ability to enter that competitive environment was constrained by their history, location and current image as well as their perceived lack of power relative to other larger authorities. In some senses, the respondents' perceived position in a national regime that favours competition, requiring their self-improvement, can be seen as an example of Bauman's 'choice as fate'. Respondents felt they must join the competition despite their belief that the odds were stacked against them.

It is apparent that respondents see these aspects of the liquid modern condition as powerful forces. The forces are not only present; they are fundamentally shaping participants' responses.

The next section of findings moves on to discuss a main condition resulting from the state of liquid modernity, namely uncertainty and anxiety. The section draws together the issues of the strong outside forces and the role of time as a tool of domination within liquid modernity.

#### **6.4 The creation of uncertainty and anxiety**

Bauman posits that the conditions of liquid modernity will bring about uncertainty and anxiety in those experiencing them (see Chapter 4). He suggests that the process of

institutions in flux (initiative churn), coupled with individuals being required to act as consumers, and constantly making choices – which for some will be futile choices – produces this condition of uncertainty. Thus the process of choice making itself becomes part of using power (domination) or being subjected to others' use of power.

The sections above have already raised the issue of resources within the liquid modernity thesis. This section considers the ways in which funding streams governed by time are used as a central tool of domination, creating uncertainty. Further sources of uncertainty and anxiety are also explored, including the 'initiative-itis' of third way politics, opaque decision making, complexity of structures and participants' fears for the future.

Uncertainty and anxiety are important within Bauman's thesis because they drive the choice-making process, thus perpetuating the conditions of churn and instability. They also lead to the critical factors of disempowerment and disengagement that are explored in Chapter 8 of this study.

All but 14 of 55 respondents directly mentioned resources issues, often in terms of the argument making typologised in the methods section. For many of those who discussed it, resource distribution and uncertainty of funding were key issues for the fortunes of their Smestos and organisations, and this issue recurs throughout the next section.

#### ***6.4.1 Initiatives and change***

Under liquid modernity, Bauman argues, there is an accelerated pace of change. The New Labour regime has been associated with churn or 'initiative-itis' (see Chapter 3) with a large volume of changes to organisations and funding streams for localities, target setting and inspection. Bauman suggests that those exposed to this accelerated climate of change, and the requirement to keep up with each new initiative, will become anxious. The repeated choice making that is necessary, within a very constrained framework for action, also leads to anxiety because these short-term choices can have longer term and unpredictable repercussions.

There was ample evidence in the study that the current situation is difficult for Smesto authorities and anxiety or fears for the future were evident (see below for more detail). That is despite the fact that in many cases funding increased under the New Labour government (falling back only recently). The suggestion therefore is that at least some of the anxiety and confusion arises from the number and complexity of initiatives,

and/or from a *relative* shift in resources away from Smestos. The first speaker draws attention to the problem of having to act while not knowing the basis for action.

Yeah, initiative-itis and interference-itis, I call it. [laughs] You know, I think housing allocations should be relatively consistent. They should be consistent unless there's a major change in government policy. If the government decides that such and such is now a priority then you would expect budgets to change. Other than that you know there should be some degree of consistency, but you know our housing allocation this year has been reduced by 35%. Our housing capital allocation has been reduced by 35% and no-one can explain to me why.

Long list respondent

This speaker raises the issue of 'policy-on' status that is time limited.

JB: And do you find that an easy way of working? Do you think that's better or worse than in the past?

>Frustrating. I mean, the point is in the past you would apply for government funding for a housing scheme. You know, you'd do your estimates, you'd provide the figures to the department, and you would get the green light to go ahead and borrow the money ... And you had a degree of certainty ... And the problem that you've got is that in the last few years the number of regional development agencies have had this problem that they sometimes over-stated themselves. And suddenly you find a situation where they are saying, hang on, slow a scheme down, because the money isn't available.

Local councillor

There is a suspicion from some respondents that regional and sub-regional working is promoted by government agencies at least in part because it makes their own lives easier (they can 'read one document rather than six', as one respondent said) and saves capacity, in that they need have discussions with far fewer separate bodies. One of the problems with this approach is that when decisions are made more centrally, the rationale for them can seem opaque to those who will be using the resources to fund programmes.

JB: you've got the RDA, and the Government Office, you've got the HCA coming in separately presumably - I mean, how do you relate to all of those?

>Well we don't. We don't relate directly to them I'm afraid, because we increasingly they are choosing to work on a sub-regional basis, it's easier for them. We don't want to have to talk to [several] district councils where, you know, we are small, you are many. My concern is that that is actually creating a gulf between housing providers, real housing providers, and the people who are controlling the purse strings in terms of investment. ...

And there's a kind of schizophrenia in there, because government still allocate money directly, I mean the secretary of state still writes to us once a year and says 'here's your housing allocation'. Now he gives us a capital grant to do something,

and then we have to ask someone, one of the other agencies, to give us more money to top it up because he hasn't given us enough. And you know, it's just becoming really quite wearisome to convince people that we should all be going in the same direction.

Long list respondent

The uncertainty over funding produced a marked sense of unfairness in several study town respondents, though notably not in Audubon. Even among some regional stakeholders there was a feeling that either central government or the large conurbations were exercising unfair power, reinforcing that uncertainty.

I am really cynical about that because although we talk about bottom up they are driven more by the centre, ie ministers. We feel like the tail that is being wagged.

Housing specialist

It would be about political clout as well though. Because as soon, you know, if there is any funding to be had you've always got the big players. You've got the leader of Metropolis ... he's got the ear of the minister, whereas we are very much low key.

Senior officer, Garamond

And every time we move to a different layer of regional, sub-regional government the cause and effect of any area gets diluted. Although they say we sit there as an equal with [the big cities], it is clearly not true ... Now, so in regional terms it's very difficult to punch your weight and get the spoils distributed. It's secondly, always always geared, the government is urban-centric, unitary-based. And I don't care whether you put that in at all, because it is true. They take no account. ... I find it really really frustrating to be able to access regional structures to make a case locally. You know, if they did act, you know if they thought regionally and acted locally I would really work on that, but they don't.

Long list respondent

#### ***6.4.2 Strategy versus delivery and other complications of bureaucracy***

Respondents from all the study areas complain of stifling bureaucracy from regional organisations that hampers their efforts to be more entrepreneurial. This effect is an important one in the liquid modernity thesis: while those able to dominate do so by moving themselves swiftly, they also exercise control by slowing down time for others, via bureaucracy. The process at the same time creates uncertainty about the future, even in the short term, because the processes can be changed frequently, and because the complex funding systems and timetables are difficult to coordinate.

There was a great deal of comment on issues of strategy compared with service provision, and it is a topic that arouses anger in some respondents. Strategy making has become an increasingly important function of local authorities and their partners under New Labour (in line with Bauman, see Chapter 4) but many respondents felt the process had gone too far, becoming too dominant over the 'bottom line' purpose of taking action to improve services and more widely improve life in their towns.

Strategy making is seen by respondents as what should be a relatively quick exercise designed to set them and their partners on a particular course of action. In reality, they say, it has instead become a continual process of churn that takes up resources and time in a disproportionate way. In Bauman terms, it has become another means by which time is used by the centre as a tool of domination, with central government and its agencies dictating the pace (see Chapter 4). Some organisations in this study, including LSPs and economic partnerships, exist only to develop strategy and policy, and are not involved in service provision or fund giving at all.

Respondents from small authorities feel they are disadvantaged in this process because they lack the staff numbers and time resources that larger authorities can bring to bear. One anticipated the difficulty of dealing from 2010 with 'the mother of all quangos' under the new SNR arrangements. Above all, they are frustrated that programmes designed for the long term and unachievable in the shorter term have constantly to be challenged and endorsed in the name of consumer choices before they come to fruition. This situation creates a perpetual state of uncertainty, yet at the same time some district authority respondents said they had no means to challenge regional or sub-regional strategy rulings that they perceived as unfair. They were expected to wait until a certain time had elapsed (in one case, five years) when the government rules would require a new strategy to be developed. A picture emerges, then, of strategy making that is at the same time in a constant state of flux, and having elements that are fixed and unchangeable.

It is my unshakeable belief that for a good 10 years this county, this region, has been long on strategies and short on action. I've got dozens of strategies, I've got strategies for strategies. And they actually don't deliver an awful lot. And very little, in my humble opinion, has been delivered over the last 10 years. I would say that there's a lot of people in the RDA, and other places, in good jobs with outrageous, I mean outrageous salaries, getting paid for attending meetings, writing strategies, making sure that things fit in with strategies and all this jazz, but when it comes to actually delivering things on the ground, they are completely out of touch.

Long list respondent

That's the disappointing thing with RDAs. They turn round and say they deliver. They don't deliver, they deliver diddly squat. They administer a funding programme, that's what they do, and that's all they do. They determine strategy and they administer a programme. And they were originally established as a strategic body and that's what they should continue to do. The integrated regional strategy is a step forward I hope, we'll have to see what happens there, but I hope that's a step forward in that they start and consider regional strategy as being their primary aim, and not strategic delivery, which they just don't understand, to be honest.

Long list respondent

And of course the public sector funding environment is very complex at the moment and very difficult, and it's doubly complicated because of the two agencies. Because the RDA is saying, well, actually a lot of it is about housing, and therefore the HCA should be involved. The HCA are saying, well quite a lot of this is about economic regeneration therefore RDA should be involved. And now RDA have told us that if HCA don't become involved they won't become involved either. And I'm saying, hang on a minute, this is a bloody regional priority in your strategy. And they are going, oo-oooh, different times, different times. [laughs]

Senior officer

#### **6.4.3 *Fears over loss and anxiety for the future***

Feelings of anxiety about the future were widespread among respondents in the study towns. Generally they crystallised into specific fears about an issue. This section has already explored some of the sources of uncertainty deriving from government funding streams and the bureaucracy. Three other main sources of anxiety or fears also emerged: worries about the future of public finance (shared by some regional stakeholders), political or democratic issues, and concerns that were more intrinsically about the towns themselves. This discussion begins with concerns over public finance, and here there was universal agreement that the next few years are going to be very hard indeed.

And you know this is an issue we have to confront and we are facing a restructuring of the authority this year. Erm, and difficult decisions are going to have to be made about what we'd no longer do.

Long list respondent

How things are going in the housing world is I think the question first of all. Er, [pause] I think we are in a very difficult situation. I think government is probably very worried about loss of capacity in the construction industry over the next few years, because of housing output in the private sector dropping dramatically. At the same time as public investment is relatively low. I think government will probably have to do something about that. The extent to which they will be able to

do something, in terms of public sector programmes, is difficult to judge because if they up public spending then they might have a run on the pound on their hands. But the real worry is what's going to happen in the construction industry. And er, three or four years along could see us with a very, very tiny and weak construction industry.

Regional stakeholder

Four respondents were particularly worried about the state of local democracy. There were two main concerns here, coming from opposing points of pressure. The first was that, central government having denuded localities of meaningful choices through centralisation (see Chapter 3) voters would not bother to turn out. This was a pertinent issue for one respondent in a district about to become a unitary county council, with the loss of two thirds of local councillors. The second source of concern, for two respondents, was that in their areas a number of council seats continue to be retuned unopposed, opening the door to extremism.

Absolutely, I think the BNP will put people up in every ward next time and they'll be banking on some getting in unopposed. Given that people are so elderly and given they have had such a hassle over [the prestige project] I think we'll just see a whole change in councillors.

Local councillor

Anxieties over the future of Smestos were almost always over the loss of what the towns already have. For some it was about the fear of losing a good quality of life. Several said they felt their town was 'at a crossroads' and had begun to slip from its former position of being able to sustain itself. In Garamond and to a lesser extent in Audubon, the worries were more about sliding back again after making recent gains through large scale investment. All three case study towns were concerned about demographics – the continued loss of young people and the increasing numbers/proportion of older people without the necessary infrastructure to support them. In Caslon, almost half the population is projected to be aged over 60 in 20 years' time. On this topic, the 'prevention' argument type was widely used.

JB: And when you're making your arguments to those regional bodies, what kind of arguments can you make to them for a just settlement, on this?  
>Erm, potential damage of allowing rural and market town economies to collapse. And mass exodus, which is already starting, of young and working population leaving the area to find homes. And indeed well paid employment in other areas. And the long term damage that's going to cause to the whole economy.

Senior officer



I've always thought of it as a very resilient little place. You know, it's supported a retail sector much larger than you would expect for the town's own population. It's been a very strong little centre in its own right. But in the last 12 months with the recession, Woollies closing, [prestige project] stalling, it does begin to look a bit stressed.

Private sector respondent

So I would like the town council to be able to do more to draw down a bit more of that precept, to be able to address some of those quality of life maintenance issues in the town centre to make sure that the things that we are improving on now, you know, the major public realm schemes are maintained for the future and that they do not begin to fall back into disrepair ... That's my biggest fear really. So it's gardens and public spaces and cemeteries and grass verges and that's only very small things, and tree planting, and the things that change your town and make it really attractive.

Voluntary sector respondent

## Conclusions

This chapter has explored whether Bauman's main characteristics of liquid modernity are found as a significant driving force for respondents in the study towns. Whether or how these might lead to his predicted outcomes of uncertainty and anxiety, themselves a signifier in Bauman for disempowerment and disengagement, was then examined.

Globalisation is, as Bauman predicted, accepted as inevitable and respondents from Smesto authorities feel they have little or no influence over its effects. The actions of central government were said to contribute to Smesto difficulties in sometimes replicating the globalising behaviour of the private sector. When asked for their views on the thesis of power moving away from localities and being centralised despite governance and administrative rescaling to create a regional level, two differing groups of respondents emerged. Housing staff, most of whom were at a less senior level than other respondents, generally felt that their own situation had not greatly changed during the post-Second World War period: a reflection of the strong national direction over the period in that specialism. In contrast, most other respondents, who were generally personally involved in negotiations at sub-regional, regional or national level, believed the centralizing tendency was worsening. Housing staff mostly also felt this was happening, outside their own specialism. Almost all agreed that the upward movement of power was a recognizable process in recent years, though equally almost all felt they retained room to manoeuvre at local level. This important factor is explored more fully

in Chapter 8. *Deconcentration*, with power moving to the regional level, was cited by both town respondents and regional stakeholders.

The second part of this chapter discussed ‘a society on the move’, an inherent condition of liquid modernity in which the degree of ability to move at will (physically or figuratively) determines the level of control available. This is a central part of Bauman’s thesis in which he argues that control over time is the main tool of domination within society. In the study, the main determinants of ability to move or control according to respondents were the allocation of resources, structures at sub-regional, regional or national level, and to a lesser extent commonalities or rivalries within the region (sometimes exacerbated by central government actions). Here, issues of isolation came to the fore and were found to be expressed less as geographical distance and more as problems of time. Some conceptual issues of isolation were regarded as positive by respondents, such as self-reliance and stability amid the political and social changes underway.

In the third section of this chapter, the rise of consumer attitudes and the making of choices was explored. Here, competition was the dominant factor: the need for *Smestos* to compete with each other for public resources, and to compete for ‘desirable’ residents and investment. Respondents from town authorities felt they were expected to self-improve on behalf of their districts, though there was general agreement that they lack the tools to do so. In housing, the requirement both to cooperate with rival areas for allocations of new housing or other types of housing investment was problematic for respondents. Housing as a ‘secondary driver’ of the economy was usually included in the prestige projects that most of the study towns were engaged in to improve their competitiveness and attract residents, investors or visitors. But prestige projects are themselves problematic and those in the case studies highlighted the towns’ vulnerability to outside economic or government forces.

It can be seen that the three main features of liquid modernity are found as significant factors in the study. Bauman’s ‘choice as fate’ can be traced as a thread running through the three topics: as respondents become aware of globalisation and of power shifting away from them, they feel obliged to attempt to compete. But they are conscious of their lack of capacity to compete and of the fact that they are being driven by outside forces. They try to respond because they feel they must, not necessarily from choice.

The findings then moved on to discuss whether, and how, the resulting features of uncertainty and anxiety are present. A prime source of uncertainty and anxiety for

respondents in the study towns was found to be the influence of ‘fiscal time’, or the annuity of public funding. This leads to stop-go planning for projects and makes for difficult relationships with the private sector, which prefers certainty. Coupled with a churn of initiatives under New Labour, or ‘initiative-itis’, the overall effect was to produce uncertainty over outcomes, but still with an imperative on the Smesto authorities to act – which in turn produced anxiety (and anger). The complications of bureaucracy added to the difficulties. When asked about the future, many participants expressed fears, and these were almost always about either the loss of something good they believe they have had until now, or the loss of recent gains made with great effort and public expense.

In summary then, the findings suggest that the conditions of liquid modernity are present and exerting a strong force in the minds of respondents from the study towns, and the regional stakeholders as well. These forces shape the responses interviewees felt they could make to their situation. The next chapter moves on to consider a second part of Bauman’s thesis, the application of ideal types.

## **7 Findings: Introducing the ideal types**

It can be seen from the previous chapter that evidence for the broad characteristics of liquid modernity can be identified in the study as a driving force for the respondents. This chapter moves on from the general findings to explore Bauman's use of ideal types within the liquid modernity thesis, and addresses the second subsidiary research question on whether ideal types can be identified among respondents as individuals, with particular reference to Bauman's prediction of 'choice as fate' for those subjected to the state of liquid modernity.

Bauman suggests liquid modernity gives rise to four postmodern ideal types (see Chapter 5 and below) and that these types both inhabit and perpetuate liquid modernity through their behaviour. Because power is vested only in tourists and to a lesser extent players, the other types (stroller and vagabond) are subjected to the conditions of liquid modernity, rather than using those conditions to their own benefit. The task in this chapter is to determine whether it is possible to identify attitudes and circumstances corresponding to the ideal types in the respondents.

The previous chapter found that Smesto authorities are highly dependent on public funding streams to achieve their aims for their towns; and that those funding streams are perceived by respondents as unreliable, being frequently changed, given and taken away, or time directed. As a result, the town authorities engage in argument to support their case for funding. The six different types of argument identified that the respondents make to try to secure funds and their relevance to this study are set out in Chapter 5 on methods: quantitative data from analysis of the argument types is set out here. Other significant factors such as circumstance and attitude are also employed as detailed. At this stage data from the respondents is treated at the level of individuals. It is important to reiterate that the identifications of ideal types are not labels: they are an analytical tool used to help identify the differential effects of liquid modernity on people in differing circumstances.

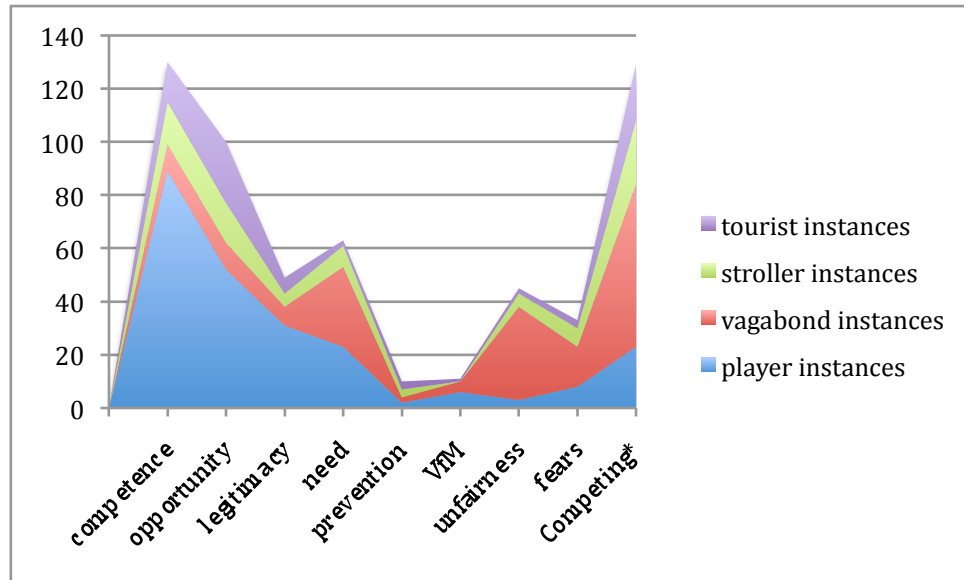
### **7.1 The ideal types identified**

This section begins with a quantitative analysis of the associations between the 'argument types' identified in Chapter 5 and the Bauman ideal types. The analysis then moves on to offer qualitative findings on the ideal types. Each interviewee could (and did) at points during the interview offer comments conforming to different ideal types,

though with the ambivalence noted in the methods chapter above. The next four sections outline the findings from the study for each of the four ideal types in turn.

### 7.2.1 *Quantitative findings on the arguments and ideal types*

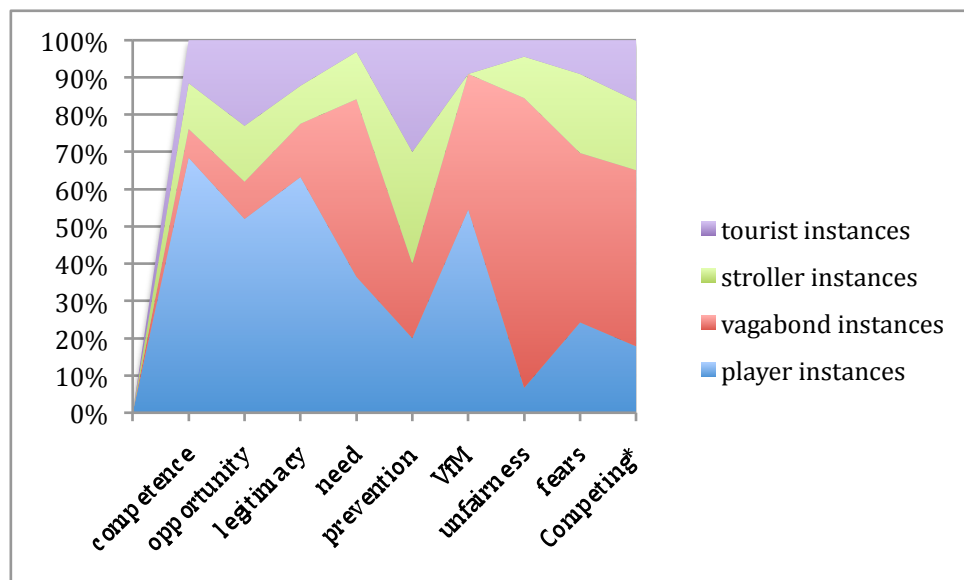
**Figure 4: Argument types and other expressions, by coded instances**



n = 570

\*All views whether positive or negative concerning competing are included

**Figure 5: Argument types and other expressions, by coded instances (percentage)**



n = 570

The figures above show the number of coded instances found associating the ideal types with the argument typology, plus comments on three other topics that the respondents might argue to a researcher (namely, unfairness, fears and competing) but were seen as different from the typology of arguments to funding bodies. Full quantitative analysis of the figures obtained is not appropriate for two reasons. First, the coding relies on subjective judgement. Second, the practice of coding inevitably leads to anomalies because the coder will sometimes place one longer section as a single coded item, and in others will take two or more smaller sections. This produces greater or smaller numbers overall.

Treating the numbers cautiously therefore and considering only the overall picture, the following broad associations are found from the 54 study files:

- In 32 of the 54 cases, no items were coded ‘tourist’. This confirms that there was relatively little that could be classed as tourist behaviour, even with the ‘public service’ overlay applied.
- Player is strongly associated with competence and opportunity, followed by legitimacy and then need.
- Vagabond is strongly associated with need, and less so with competence and opportunity.
- Vagabond is much more likely than player to be associated with unfairness and fears.
- Arguments based on need are primarily the territory of the vagabond ideal type. Strollers may also employ this type of argument.
- Arguments based on opportunity are primarily employed by tourist and player ideal types.
- Prevention is used by all ideal types, and is the most frequent argument of the tourist in percentage terms, but is the least used argument overall.
- All ideal types could employ the VfM type of argument but it is associated more with vagabond and player types.
- Stroller responses are more evenly spread across all of the argument headings except VfM.

The next section draws on the ‘argument’ typology as part of a detailed approach to identifying and using the ideal types.

### 7.1.1 *The tourist*

Bauman gives the following as characteristics of tourist behaviour:

- Moves in order to, not because of, ie on purpose, opportunity-taking
- In charge of situation
- ‘Seeking new adventures’ ie innovating (with safety nets)
- ‘Free from responsibility’

The findings from this study suggest an association with the ‘opportunity’ and ‘prevention’ types of argument. To reiterate, an overlay of ‘public life’ has been used to acknowledge the particular circumstances in this study where many respondents worked for the bureaucracy. This section examines the qualitative evidence from respondents.

First, let us re-examine comments from the first speaker in s6.2, who spoke about the enterprising culture. This speaker used a lot of business-type language and is very much involved in dealing with the private sector. In this comment, the speaker does not say so explicitly but is drawing a comparison of themselves and their own organisation with the government departments they deal with. The speaker goes on to praise the local council, which suggests this is not a case of being anti-public sector or anti-bureaucracy of itself: the criticism is specific. The speaker takes pride in positioning their own organisation to best advantage, and in their ability to forecast and shape the future. Asked to name a project that was ‘close to your heart’, ie one to take pride in, the speaker named an incident where an important local firm was helped out of difficulties. Overall, the speaker said their aim was to create a culture of enterprise, wealth and job creation. The speaker negatively contrasted the UK approach where economic development agencies ‘spend all [their] time trying to make sure things don't go wrong’, ie concentrating on the negative, and the US approach where they ‘accept that things will go wrong but focus on trying to make them go right’.

Enterprising is a sort of cultural aspect of being flexible, dynamic, energetic, not process driven. Willing to actually go beyond the structure to achieve your objectives, and willing to seize passing opportunities and exploit them ... Well it was far sighted on behalf of [the] council and the yards, to set up an organisation which was independent of political control ... And the idea of that was to essentially ensure that it got private sector support, you know, which it might not have done if the private sector people felt that this was a political operation controlled by politicians in the council ... we have to maintain that political impartiality ...

[A project] close to our heart: existing company, which is now owned by the Indian parent. Shades of Jaguar Landrover. So we have an Indian parent company which owns what was a local company. The local company overreached itself financially. Got into severe financial difficulties. The existing senior management were got rid of, new senior management brought in, and we've worked with the new senior management to construct a financial package including some financial support from ourselves to safeguard jobs.

Voluntary sector respondent

The next speaker again stressed enterprise and opportunity taking, and was involved in shaping the future. Here, the speaker recognised private market failure and was using public funding to mimic the market and draw private enterprise in.

We've got a marina which will, we know there's a demand. It's not there yet, these are the plans. And the marina because ... there's a big demand. Lot of yachties actually, who park in the channel. ...

This is a public sector building. It was Metropolis university and it was an incubation centre, and it didn't work. Went bankrupt. But it was set up using European money. Most of the units on here are English Estates or local authority or are public sector developments. Very few are private sector. Some have come in but only lately. Yet there is demand for units here but there is not a private sector developer who would be prepared to take on the risk at the moment. So the first development will be a [council] development that we will fund.

Voluntary sector respondent

The next speaker outlines how the local council decided to take the initiative when the private sector was acting in a predatory way that could, in their view, harm the area. Although the council was responding to a situation, the speaker's description of the decisions it took fit the tourist criteria of freedom to act and take control.

The desire to do [prestige project] came about by not wanting to have out of town shopping, supermarkets, just appearing wherever, unregulated. And so the council decided to look at a proper integrated shopping, retail, housing scheme. And that was where it came about because there was a lot of predatory work going on in supermarkets to say, well, they were looking at sites out of the town on the old market, looking at sites further down towards the motorway, and it, the council decided that, well, let's not allow this to happen just on its own, let's do something with this. There was also a recognition that while we had small specialist shops, market surveys showed that most people were going to shop in [elsewhere] because we didn't have the High Street offer that was required. And it was a response to that also.

Senior officer, Caslon

Two officers described how they and colleagues had taken the initiative and worked with others to produce a groundbreaking joint housing strategy that was



nationally recognised as innovative. This could be described as player behaviour (see s7.1.2 below), but has been classed here as tourist because the action appears to have gone far beyond playing one's hand well, and it is clear from the speakers' comments that this had great meaning to them as a success: it was not seen as 'you win some, you lose some'.

>I mean, some issues are very much based on spatial breakdown. So you've got issues on the coast that you don't have over this side. We've got affordability issues that they don't have. But some things are right across the whole county. So things like homelessness, accommodation needs for specific groups of people, looking at decent homes standards, that sort of thing. So one of the things about when we produced the strategy, that we split the county into what we call housing market areas, so we sort of broke down the district boundaries to say let's look at it geographically in terms of what the different needs are. And we've got 20 different housing market areas. So each one of those has got its own evidence base and its own action plan as to what needs to happen.

>And some of those straddle district boundaries don't they. So that's quite a strategic piece of work wasn't it, so it was a bit of a breakthrough.

>Yeah. And then when we had regional housing strategies being developed, the Assembly commissioned a piece of work very much based on what we'd done [here] across the whole region, and broke it down into housing market areas across the region.

JB: So they followed your lead?

>They did. Only because I was working there! [laughs]

Housing specialist

It can be seen from the examples above that risk taking, entrepreneurial behaviour that seeks to shape the future, not just react to it, does exist in the study towns. However, these examples are few and far between, because as has been demonstrated in the preceding chapter, the opportunities for Smesto authorities to act positively are highly circumscribed. It is likely therefore that most types of behaviour found in the study will fall into the other three Bauman categories of player, stroller and vagabond. The next three sections address the evidence for respondents' attitudes and circumstance conforming to those remaining three types.

### 7.1.2 *The player*

- Plays hand they have been dealt, to best of ability
- Luck or misfortune seen just as moves
- Guesses moves of adversary and anticipates: stays one ahead

The findings from this study suggest an association with ‘competence’, ‘opportunity’ and ‘legitimacy’ arguments.

Only nine cases had no coding as ‘player’, of whom six were regional stakeholders. The nature of the discussion with this group did not readily lend itself to ideal type coding, so the focus here is on long list and case study respondents. The widespread coding among these groups, and the large number of items with this code, suggests this ideal type fits Smesto authority activities well.

Coding for ‘player’ is associated most strongly with coding for arguments of ‘competence’ and ‘opportunity’. ‘Legitimacy’ and ‘need’ are also associated, though less strongly. Players relatively infrequently make arguments based on value for money, though this does feature quite strongly in percentage terms. ‘Player’ coding is unlikely to coincide with expressions of unfairness and there were few expressions of fears for the future in this coding group.

Several respondents who deal with the task of attracting public funding to their district for schemes emphasised the need to have priorities, and state them clearly so that everyone knows what the aim is. The language used to tell the stories of incidents became noticeably more macho as respondents cast themselves as skilled players in a high stakes, or grown-up game. At the same time, they acknowledged that they are not completely in control of events: this is, after all, a game of chance.

Everything is being dealt with now at a sub-regional level. Now, I think you've put your finger on one of the key issues here. And that's drawing up a coherent and sensible programme of sub-regional priorities that isn't simply spreading the jam across the country as far as it'll go ...

We own 120 properties down there now, something like that. What are we going to do, put them all back on the market? That would knock the bottom out of the housing market if ever there was a way of doing it! No, we have got enough funding to proceed with clearance of the units. ... I'm confident about that.

Senior officer

If you look around the country as you have you'll find that a lot of local authorities will have a lot of equal priorities because they can't face the issue of saying, this is more important than that and that it's more important than something else. We did a robust analysis of the social economic position. So you could absolutely pinpoint where there was need and what that need was and then you developed the strategy to address the need ... So when we then got to the point of prioritisation we said ... look, these are the sorts of initiatives we need to put in place and these are the priorities. ...

The Smesto issue was a simple issue, we sold a piece of land to the RDA, we got our million quid and together with the RDA we agreed we spend it in Audubon. I have to say it was a fairly warm conversation I had with Smesto Town

Council because I had to explain to them that the world is not so small that anything we do in Smesto must stay in Smesto, because it's a bigger place so get out and travel and we'll sort you out in due course ...

But also you've got to be robust about it ... that was a classic example where that conversation wasn't about taking prisoners, that wasn't about a compromise, there was to be no compromise ... So when the fur flies at member level which it did, the leader's armed with the answer and he said, well it's simple really the cabinet has agreed the priorities and relatively Audubon is a higher priority than Smesto. ... And it's sometimes difficult for members to say to local residents, well I agree with you but I've got to tell you the council is going to do this and what I say to local members is if you get in that position, blame me. Because that's fine, I'm a big boy, I can defend myself.

Senior officer, Audubon

One respondent had talked to professionals from an area about to become a unitary authority, who were concerned at the potential loss of localism. The advice to them was redolent of the player approach, trying to anticipate and stay ahead and not allowing any previous rounds of the game to distract them:

If you can get yourself positioned right you'll Hoover up. Also you've to ignore what's gone on in the past, don't harbour [the idea of] we're a district.

Senior officer

Here again, the idea of a game in which the player sets out to win but may well have to accept the setback of losing a round is openly discussed. The second respondent's comment, 'that's a good one', suggests the nature of the player, that a card in the hand may be good but there are others available should it be trumped, and a full hand yet to play.

And what we're saying is we need this to bring this forward, it's something we are adding to the offer we already have in terms of retail, in terms of housing ... And our case is that we are doing that around the university campus here. That's a wonderful opportunity for us, with the new university. We're building it around the new shopping and retail centre although that's stalled now.

Local councillor

It has grown worse but a step in the right direction is the university [coming] here. That's a good one ... but the key is linking in interesting and well paid employment prospects with qualifications. That needs to come. And as I've argued all along, I mean the HCA could be the answer, having English Partnerships and Housing Corp together. I really would like to tie in our programmes with economic development programmes. Gosh, if somebody wants, a major employer, needs to re-locate to Caslon and needs a range of housing, then we should be engaged in that.

Voluntary sector respondent

Where a setback actually has been encountered, the player type will reshuffle their hand, anticipate the new situation and then begin playing again to win. This response to the collapse of a transformational project epitomises player behaviour. Once again, the quality of being able to set aside what has already happened is present: the player is always looking toward the future.

We were disappointed ... and I would still say I think [the decision] was wrong but that's water under the bridge. What we did was we sat down with [the RDA] after that and said Audubon is still our number one priority for regeneration. They said, okay if that's the case then we see it as a high priority for regeneration as well and we said, look you're going to have to give us a bit of time to catch breath and just review the strategy, because the strategy on marina had fallen over. So we took a step back and the team looked at it and we came back and said, we think the approach to take is to look at, in effect, a master planning exercise for the town centre, which will lead you to marina as a follow-on project, but also to promote capital investment schemes where we controlled them.

Senior officer, Audubon

The more the future can be anticipated, the more it can be controlled – though the game will always need to be played.

I'd like us to be more ambitious for the long term. And that's probably a bit unreasonable in some respects because when you look at our community plan and various plans we are I suspect quite ambitious. But as I'm looking for a holy grail I think we should have some longer term targets. We are probably going to do something. We'll probably build up some techniques that we might use for a future base, something like that. To try and get us some sort of ambition, of where we want to be in 15 years' time. You can review it in a few years' time and if that's not really the road we should be going on we can change it. So flexibility. So I think that's probably a key issue for me and some work has started on that.

LSP respondent

Players are good at drawing together a team that can help further their aims. They are selective, though, about who should be on their team and what teams they may wish to join. Some authorities have worked hard to ensure they have an officer or member placed in key positions on other bodies at sub-regional or regional level, so that they can overcome distance problems through better information and position themselves to take any opportunities that arise. In Caslon, the authority has a very active housing portfolio holder who sits on a sub-regional body and represents the sub-region on some regional bodies, with a senior officer playing a similar role in drawing up sub-regional strategy. This happened partly as a result of criticism from the Audit Commission but the

authority has taken a lead in positioning itself to have more influence on housing issues, and respondents felt this had brought benefits.

Things are not being seen in isolation now, it's much more, I'm hesitant to use the word but it is that holistic approach. It's being adopted I think not because you've been forced to do it because of government efficiency targets or general diktat, but because it's the right thing to do. I think people see, you see again that movement towards that greater service integration.

I think in terms of the regional assembly, if I recall I think we actively withdrew as an authority, there wasn't the sense that there was added value that way.

Senior officer

So we pulled together to produce a housing strategy, which was the first and is still the only sub-regional housing strategy that has been fit for purpose. And we've got action plans in that, and that's given us a real sort of clear direction for the [sub-regional] housing group. And it's also given us some credibility, in the region. That we didn't really have before. And a sort of voice through our portfolio holder here. To represent [the sub-region] and particularly like when we're talking about allocations.

Housing specialist

But what we have to make sure is that they don't forget we're here. And I think that's why we've tried to get involved with the [region]. I did it, and I actually took the chair of one of the key priority groups at the time ... So to open our mouths and ensure that they do include us because they do tend to forget about us. Whoever it is, they tend to forget about us.

Local councillor

Players are innovators, but they always play within the limits of the game. This distinguishes them from tourists, who will try to invent their own game, and from strollers and vagabonds who will have relatively little ability to take part in the game. Housing officers work within a strong national framework but player type behaviour can still be found in using that framework to achieve local aims. Players take pride in their ability to bend the framework to their needs, in playing their hand well.

So there's different priority need groups within the homelessness legislation but over and above that you have other people that may be just on the general housing register, but you can add value to that with looking at options for other sources of accommodation. Because obviously the social housing has dramatically reduced following the right to buy in the eighties. So we have to look at a wider range of options and try to be more innovative, but the hard-core part of the job is people that present as homeless. And you would assess their homelessness in the strict framework of the Housing Act and the homelessness legislation and make decisions.

It's challenging, rewarding, if you want it to be. I think, like everything, to do something properly to the absolutely 'nth' degree requires resources that just

aren't available, and in that I don't only meaning housing stock, but obviously sometimes staffing levels, because it is very demanding, time wise and quite emotionally demanding as well.

Housing specialist

The other aspect of the housing option study was the political will to retain it even though you might have the resources to retain the stock in-house and secondly, is there a tenant drive to retain in-house or externalise and the tenants have had a good service and have a very high level of satisfaction with the service that they've got from the council and there was a political will to keep it in-house if we possibly could. I think unlike some local authorities where there was a political will but not the financial means. In this authority we have both means and the political will to do so.

Housing specialist

The examples outlined in this section, and the frequency of examples found, suggest that player type behaviour is found to a significant extent among Smesto authorities. Some respondents, more numerous in the Audubon/Palatino case study, seem to identify themselves strongly as players, even using the language of game playing to describe their activities. This is in line with du Gay's analysis of the best qualities of the bureaucracy (most respondents were officers) as 'an important political resource (see Chapter 2), with the ethical dimension strongly apparent among housing officers. The next section moves on to the third of Bauman's types, the stroller.

### **7.1.3 *The stroller***

- Human reality as a series of episodes, events without past or consequences
- Detached from reality or engagement
- Mis-meetings, talking to strangers as 'surfaces'
- Doing the minimum to get by

The findings from this study suggest strollers employ argument types fairly evenly, except value for money which is not often used. Within the code headings, 'prevention', 'competence' and 'opportunity' had the strongest association with the stroller type. The latter two are also arguments used by players; but the meaning revealed by the instances found is somewhat different. A speaker may express competence but generally the task is seen as maintaining the current situation rather

than, as with player types, trying to find advantage. The first speaker below reflects the ambivalence that action in one area can lead to disadvantage in another, and is aware of the tensions in the complex practice area of homelessness, but the issues are presented as a series of facts rather than problems to overcome. The 'push' factor for action is clearly present.

Since I was in the post, my focus was prevention ... it's perhaps been seen as good practice and between agencies to try and resolve the situations for people, rather than get to the crisis point. So I've seen that change, that shift ...

We link in the best we can with prisons, so we know in advance that people will be needing accommodation on release, obviously children leaving care ... we're aware of all of those peoples' needs. But if they were to all access the services by the traditional housing route, or the Homelessness Act, then that piece of work would possibly diminish, and I don't know if that's a good or a bad thing. I don't think it works particularly well simply because of the under supply of stock. I sometimes feel that these people, whilst they are in need, they maybe wouldn't match the full criteria of a homelessness decision, and consequently are almost, and if I dare say it in inverted commas, 'queue jumping' ...

But the man in the street still wants to access social housing because he's trying to set up a home with the girlfriend whatever, got a nice little job each but quite low paid... never ever got a hope in hell of getting something in the social sector.

And then you've got the other end of the scale who are people who do meet the full homelessness duty who will be housed, but ... then there's this group in the middle somehow that because they're involved with an agency that can put some... not pressure... but work in partnership with us, we're feel that we're doing great work, but who is it affecting on each side?

Housing specialist

Strollers are keen to stress the limits to possible courses of action. The next two speakers both adopt a line of 'we'll do it if we can' but there is no strong drive to achieve a particular outcome. Their storytelling incorporates caveats as a means of hedging against the need for action or the need to make a judgement. There is a tendency in the stories to create a sense of a continuous present, with less emphasis on the future.

And so we've committed to have at least two consultative meetings a year with them about mainstream issues, we've done that already, and there's more planned. And what's pleasing is that the partnership, the coordinating group as was, appears to be working. I had my doubts about it but it appears to be working ...

Pull people together and what is it we need to do to bring this to a conclusion, you know. Is it something we can affect or not? If you can't affect it, well, why waste energy on it? If you can affect it, what is it we can bring about in order to do it? ...

Politics gets involved as well doesn't it, there's always room for negotiation there, so ... no, I think we have some influence. But the LSP doesn't have any power ... the LSP is just, brings a group of people together, the movers and shakers, and making sure that their work is joined up. And that's one of the key reasons for establishing LSPs, was to make sure that the public sector organisations are joined up. And I think that, you know, by and large, there's a good improvement in that. ... But you know, they tend to change the names of things and we're beginning to change the names of our task groups, and we will, but it will still be the same task groups [laughs]. You know, it might be badged as a different thing but you still get the same people there ...

LSP respondent

Our staff are open to ideas and take things on but sometimes we can't improve it. The last government have been very much arguing for human rights and all their friends are lawyers. But there is not enough regard to citizen responsibility. I am straight talking: life is tough. Our role is about making people happy so if it is practical and reasonable we will do it. But people have an expectation.

Housing specialist

A recent incident where previously held government funding had been lost was mentioned by several Garamond respondents. Having exhausted 'argument-type' responses, the authority leadership decided to use drastic tactics of publicly expressing their sense of injustice. Two possible ways of interpreting this behaviour are evident. This respondent acknowledged in telling the story that the tactic was not likely to succeed, but appeared not to foresee later consequences of embarrassing the giver of funds: life was lived as a series of unconnected events. Alternatively, the tactic may have been about taking a principled stand akin to the Quaker concept of 'speaking the truth to power'<sup>6</sup>, confronting perceived abuses by the powerful regardless of the consequences.

Actually, I mean we just lost recently. Which we are going to take up politically with the government. There was some regional money for housing which was re-distributed to the extent that Garamond lost about £800,000. Now for Garamond to lose £800,000 that is a lot of money. It went mainly to Metropolis. To Metropolis it's peanuts. But Metropolis have got their hands on it, they won't let it go. The ministry won't intervene so we are going to have to publicise what's happening and try and embarrass them actually, which isn't going to be difficult. [laughs]

JB: [laughs] You think you can shame them?

>Well we'll shame them. They probably won't do anything but at least we'll get some satisfaction out of shaming them, that's the point.

Local councillor

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<sup>6</sup> An 18<sup>th</sup> century Quaker phrase used by them for a series of debates on world disarmament and pacifism in the 1950s (Society of Friends 1955, p1)



The next speaker could foresee the future, based on past experience, but awareness did not mean the episodic approach could be avoided.

I've been here a long time. When the government comes up with a new initiative what's frustrating is that you know it will be gone in a couple of years' time but you still have to do it.

Senior officer

Strollers show a certain ambivalence about the future. Several respondents were in favour of the prestige projects being undertaken in their town but at the same time were cautious about change.

The waterfront project, I think that will really uplift Garamond. I suppose there's advantages and disadvantages of that, because this area in many ways it's the world's best kept secret, because people have this perception of Garamond being the pits. Well it's a great place to work, and some of the country around, and the beaches, is absolutely fantastic. So like we're quite nicely isolated here, and it may just put us on the map. But really that is a good thing. But it has disadvantages. Well it's a nice quiet easy life at the moment. No, we are going to be offering all the good bits of the area to more people. And it's going to be good for business. So yeah, no I'm very much for all the regeneration work that's going on. It's just sometimes nice to have a bit of privacy but I think that will stop. Yeah.

Senior officer, Garamond

We've got - the university is talking about doubling the number of students it's got. We're not ready to be a university town. We can't cope with the number of students. We haven't got the facilities for them. We haven't got the night life, we haven't got the infrastructure there. We need to get that side of things sorted out. ... I actually never ever had the aspiration to being the leader of the district council. Never had aspirations to be a councillor. Just happened by default really.

Local councillor

Housing issues may push authorities and their partners into stroller type behaviour because, as one respondent commented, 'we seem to go round in circles'. Those with longer memories have found that, within the strongly directed national framework, housing issues are talked of in long timeframes but action and funding is short term. Some policies that seem appropriate one year can be found to have negative effects the next. An episodic, detached approach can seem the best in the circumstances, though it should be said that the stroller type is unlikely to anticipate far ahead.

Oh yeah, I'm not saying we don't contribute to the bigger picture or that we're not necessarily aware of some of the ways that the bigger picture impacts on us, but I

think we are quite introverted in housing services and probably more focused on actually getting on and doing the job, rather than thinking about why we're doing it. ...No, [the HRA] that's done at a totally different level. I know that we've got x million pounds in the HRA reserve but in terms of ... whether that's going to go up or down in future years, no I don't get involved in that at all ... I don't want to get involved, local government finance is a nightmare isn't it, I don't want to get involved in the HRA or the management of the HRA.

Housing specialist

Life lived as a series of episodes can be summed up with phrases such as 'see how it goes', 'doing my best'. The person may still be taking initiatives and putting in effort, but without a strong view of the future and how to get there, and with some sense of opting out – living in hope, perhaps. Stroller attitude sometimes suggests a yearning for things to be simpler, less complex and more transparent. One respondent with long experience had become an exponent of the 'let's see' approach.

And then we spent half a million on the skate park for the youngsters. So that doesn't seem to be going so well at the moment but I think we will have to look into it a bit more. I think we were maybe paying too much and they expected too much from it. So we shall have to see how it goes ...

We've just had a carry on which I raised at full council, for a roundabout, traffic's trying to get out of New Road and I raised that at full council. And they voted against me on that but they are referring it to environment and transport committee now. So we'll see how it goes ...

When you've had a Labour government for 10 or 12 years the Conservatives are strong. When we've had a Conservative government for 4 or 5 years they'll be very weak [laughs]. They always vote against the government. But it doesn't make no matter to me, I still get in, it doesn't matter which government it is. It's work you put in, if you get well known among people over the years you're all right. You can win any election. But if you are not in with the residents well you can pack up and go home. It's as simple as that.

JB: And do you feel that you've got enough of a say representing [the town], you and the other councillors, in getting your voice heard at [the unitary] council? You know, to get your fair share?

>Yeeeah, I don't think we do so bad ...

Local councillor

This interviewee was not quite 'on message' with the hi-tech, player image some organisations like to project.

JB: And if there's a meeting of the housing service that you need to go to will it normally be held at [the county town], it won't be here?

>Usually yes, because that's where the bosses are ... So if it was here, they'd all have to travel out, so... it gets me out of the office. [laughs]

JB: You've got this video conferencing?

>There is yes.

JB: How does that work?

> We've never used it. Like to see how it works!

JB: What's the matter with it?

> I don't know. I've not been used to video conferencing, so...

JB: You don't feel the need?

>No. To be honest with you, if someone needs the service they come in always ... But video conferencing, yes, I think it could be used if you've got someone presenting as homeless in the area ... To be honest we just do it here, housing officers sit in their offices and do it over the phone or we have surgeries ... So we've never really had the need to do video conferencing.

Housing specialist

As a rural authority, we don't score as highly by any means as urban areas do, but then on the other hand, we chose to live in a rural authority and I think it's rather nice where I live and I would rather live here than in [city]. So that's a choice I make and the people that live [here], that's the choice they make, and they're obviously not too dissatisfied with the service they receive.

JB: So this is something that goes with the territory, that people accept that?

>I think so. They know where they're living, they know it takes longer for an ambulance to get to you if you live in a remote village than if you're living in a town or a city. You do the best you can. I certainly do the best I can as a local councillor to get the best service I can for the residents, and I'll do that every time. It's rather good when you do make improvements but very often they're small and they take a long time coming, but gradually you get better.

Local councillor

This respondent outlines the problems of keeping focused in complex and changing situations.

Well we've a reputation for taking far too much on and not being able to say no to anything [laughs]. And you know this is an issue we have to confront and we are facing a restructuring of the authority this year. Erm, and difficult decisions are going to have to be made about what we'd no longer do. So partly we've made a rod for our own back in that, I don't know whether that's just peculiar to us.

... You know, the structures within local government don't lend themselves to responding rapidly. And you know, we're in the middle of a job evaluation exercise, changing everyone's salaries and that doesn't help matters either. So there are a lot of noises off, if you like, that tend to be distracting.

Long list respondent

Stroller types place emphasis on self-reliance and take pride in it. This could be seen in a number of ways. Perhaps it is a refusal to see reality, the Bauman 'not engaging' quality. Or it could be a means of protecting oneself from reality, a shutting out of difficult situations. Or perhaps it is another kind of disengagement, the creation of a romanticised version of a town and its inhabitants.

The people of Garamond are wonderful, they really are. They have this knack of just getting on with things. They do it and they have this thing where if you did something, like for example the town square and you said, I did that, they would call you a bighead. Because that's not what you do. You get on with it. And I believe that the people of Garamond can achieve anything they want. I honestly do. They are just so amazing. And giving them opportunities to me is the most important thing. Take them to the top of the mountain and let them see.

Local councillor

It always has been behind. [laughs] I mean it's just always been part of its sort of quirky attraction I suppose. It is a sleepy town with narrow minded, you know I don't want to say it but you just need to read the local paper at the weekend. There's a sort of certain paranoia about the place. That you know, it doesn't like change and it doesn't want to embrace change. The people have always been here, erm, and despite you know the good communication links that we have with the motorway and the rail network and everything, it's never sort of attracted a lot of 'offcomers' as they call them. So there's even a word for people like that.

... they think they are conservative with a small c. But they think they are coming to the picturesque villages and they move here and the first thing they do is complain about tractors at half past five in the morning, cows walking down the roads, smells ...

Senior officer

Stroller attitude proved more difficult to identify in the study than that of other ideal types, and the category appears to be more loosely drawn than the others. It is primarily based on attitude rather than circumstance. As a result, the stroller appears less coherently as a type and more as a collection of behaviours and attitudes, some of which would be present in each individual. Stroller behaviour is found more frequently in certain groups in the study, and this is explored further in Chapter 8. The next section completes the evidence on ideal types with the fourth type, the vagabond.

#### **7.1.4 *The vagabond***

- Moves dominated by push factor – moves because they have to
- Cannot settle, in flux
- Failed consumer making repeated futile choices

The findings from this study suggest an association with 'need', 'unfairness' and 'fears'.

Study respondents are very well aware of their own situation. Most referred at some point to being powerless in the face of globalised events, whether concerning

large retail chains or industrial firms. Natural events such as foot and mouth disease and flooding were also mentioned. At the time of the study the global banking crisis and subsequent credit squeeze was happening, and this was mentioned by many respondents as a lesson in the need to remember that such events are beyond the control of themselves, their organisation, their town or even the country they live in.

Vagabond was the second most numerous of the coding types found, both in the number of instances and in percentage terms (see Figures 6 and 7, Chapter 8). The number of cases, excluding regional stakeholders, was almost equal for players and vagabonds. This suggests that, as Bauman predicted, 'the world is re-tailoring itself to the measure of the vagabond' (Bauman, 1996, in Hall and du Gay, pp18-36); in other words, individuals are being drawn into vagabond status by the strong globalising forces at work in local society. It is important to note also the level of frustration, anger and passion that respondents expressed in describing their situation. The issues that collectively comprise the vagabond state are clearly of great importance to Smesto respondents and the strong reactions, compared with other types, suggest this is the dominant situation among them.

The first two speakers sum up the situation for Smestos faced with de-industrialisation and the attempt to re-invent their industrial base. The main concern is to meet local needs, but the feeling is that a town that has gained so much of its identity from a particular history and specialisation cannot quickly (if ever) change to being a different kind of place: opportunity-taking is not part of the fabric.

You can't win them all but in an area of need, you need to win more than you lose. And we're not. And that's a problem. So all it does is ... low paid jobs feed deprivation. And if all we are left with, we've got the shipyard where there is real good pay, but even in there, tradesmen in the shipyard are not well paid. There are people in there who can't afford to work overtime because they lose their tax credit. ... So what you've got now is, and it's the same everywhere, is where we used to have locally owned industries, like the shipyard was locally run, now they are international, global organisations and the decisions are made somewhere else.

Senior officer, Garamond

It's the skills, yeah. I remember when Margaret Thatcher did come for us. In the early 1990s. And the word that everybody used was oh, you can diversify and you can build other things. That was the big thing. But we had people, I mean you know, a shipyard can't build washing machines. We were geared up, and are geared up, to build certain products and our skills lie in those products.

Local councillor

We had two large industries that went down overnight, taking hundreds and hundreds of jobs with them, you know, there were several hundred people work there. That process happened and obviously we could do nothing about that then.

Senior officer, Audubon

One respondent felt that global events too often led to disagreements among people and organisations who should be pulling together. Especially in one northern region, there does appear to have been something of a Balkanising effect in recent years. Boundary changes have moved some towns and counties into new groupings that they are not necessarily comfortable with. The rise of sub-regional strategy making under New Labour has heightened tensions among the smaller districts and there have been difficulties over legitimate representation and allocation of resources.

The slightly frustrating thing is the amount of time people are spending pointing fingers at one another, rather than saying, actually there's a world economic problem and they've just got caught up in it.

Senior officer

Respondents demonstrating the problems of the vagabond often complained of the hoops they have to jump through to satisfy the bureaucratic processes of government. They felt this was a method of control, increasingly exercised, that they must comply with, even though it made their life harder and produced no noticeable gain for them. Notice the appeal to legitimacy in the comments below, where the speaker suggests those administering the bureaucracy lack experience or perhaps authenticity.

I often said that we sort of acted as an adaptor between the three-pin plug that was the community and the two-pin socket that was the various agencies like the RDA and GO. And I don't think that they have the first idea about what it's like on the front line ... And it was explained to me that for the same money they would get far more outputs in an urban area than they ever would in a rural area. So I said to them, right, in that case then you are saying that these people either move to an urban area and get themselves on a course or you are writing them off. And they got very uppity about that but that's basically what it was about. I mean, when you are in a competition situation like that, the ones with the most outputs per £ get all the money. Now in a rural isolated area like this you haven't got a prayer of winning anything like that. ...

If we put the best submission in that anybody had ever seen, it would have been turned down, because for the same money they'd have got three or four times the outputs in an urban area .... So basically we had to go back to the community and tell them that because of this obsession with getting as many outputs as possible, quantity rather than quality, erm, we hadn't got a prayer! And they didn't react terribly well to that, which isn't surprising.

Long list respondent

Some complained of the government's 'initiative-itis' which keeps churning programmes and structures, hampering consistent action.

I think more and more people are feeling, have a sense that they are extremely proscribed in what they can and can't do, often on a local authority basis. The RDA is going to change but at the moment it sometimes feels a bit more like a policeman than someone who's actually supporting you to achieve things. And it's there as a guardian of the public funds and tells you what you can and can't do. Now I think there's a recognition that that is the case. And certainly there's a move within the county that the RDA staff here have got to move from that position to one where they are actually much more supportive and engaged and involved in delivery issues. And once the basic structures and priorities have been agreed, that's their job is to make sure that happens, and the money gets spent. At the moment the RDA tends to come in a bit from left field and say, well, I want it done like this, and you've not got much grounds to argue with that. Because they hold the purse strings.

Senior officer

CORE<sup>7</sup> forms have to be done on every single letting. Housing associations used to fill in on their property to send off to the government, and authorities didn't have to do it. Now councils have to do that and they have to report on that as well, so there are loads of things that affect councils, that government do push towards us that we've got to complete to send back to them. And you think oh what are they doing, not more work!

Housing specialist

Even regional bodies themselves can feel powerless in the face of government initiatives and lack of information. These comments are from two regional stakeholders.

There's this proposal to make us the planning body ... No, we don't know what the government reaction will be. It was their proposal, nothing RDAs have asked for, but we're not quite sure whether they will implement it. They seem to be busy buying banks.

Regional stakeholder

The RDA budget was raided for the HCA for £300 million across the network. That went down like a lead balloon here! Government has taken the money for energy efficiency etc.

Regional stakeholder

Repeating actions that they know will not produce a result, but feeling obliged to continue doing them, is another aspect of vagabond behaviour. Just as this ideal type will continue to argue for funding to government in hope or on the off chance, other repeated but also knowledgeably futile behaviours will also emerge. These are prime

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<sup>7</sup> Continuous recording of data on lettings, sales and so on, required by regulators for the sector

examples of 'choice as fate'. In the first two cases below, the speakers wryly comment on this situation.

The old road into Garamond is lovely and you get a great impression coming down there. But coming in the industrial way doesn't give a fantastic impression. Come in the [other] way and you come to this wonderful roundabout with lots of flowers on. We do flowers well here. It's got welcome to Garamond. Course no-one ever comes in that way...

Senior officer, Garamond

>Our [HRA] is in surplus. And we are actually net contributors to the national pot.

JB: Oh that must annoy you.

> Intensely. We build up to annual letter to the government, 'outraged of -'. We haven't got very far on that!

Long list respondent

I've been going to the safer and stronger communities thematic partnership for several years now. At significant cost, with very, very little to show for it. ... Er well we do talk about governance but nothing seems to happen! Everybody is trying to make the best of a bad job I suspect.

LSP respondent

We've enabled development of a big new business park which the private sector are now developing on speculative units at the moment. Which is encouraging, it's filling up quite well. The only snag is it's filling up with a lot of businesses from the town centre! [laughs] Which wasn't exactly the idea.

Long list respondent

The vagabond is, says Bauman, the nightmare of the tourist who holds power. The self-aware vagabond must therefore be a particularly difficult entity to control, since their knowledge can present a direct challenge to that authority – in moral terms if no other. But since in the thesis of liquid modernity, ethics is absent, the tourist need only exercise power, not feel obliged to rationalise it. This increases the frustration of the self-aware vagabond.

Now the RDA have decided not good enough, we want now your job outputs broken down by gender, disability, age and ethnic origin. Well why's that? Don't ask us why, we are telling you to do it.

Senior officer

And I think, you know, you look at some urban centres where service delivery is relatively poor, and it would appear that you get paid to fail. It would appear you get significantly more per capita funding even though your services are poor. I



would argue, and I think a lot of people that are in rural authorities would argue that it's not a case of rewarding for success. And there are some fairly significant examples of some urban authorities, I mean, take education in one of our neighbours. Where they get about £140 per child more than we do. Extremely bad [results]. Ours aren't brilliant but they are in the top quartile. Not the bottom one.

Senior officer

The first speaker above raises the issue that local people are not able to, or allowed to, know the rationale for decisions. If information is power, withholding it reinforces the powerlessness of the person who is denied the information. With the frustration and powerlessness of decisions taken elsewhere, therefore, can come a suspicion that those with power are not telling a straight story. Note the sign-offs in each case to complete the comment.

That was the 10 year plan to try and develop the area and get some good housing down there. And I worry about, because we've planned that in the boom when money was being thrown at areas like this ... And now when it comes to a point where we need those investors coming in to invest in it, they are not there. So my worry is that we have all these plans in place and we're not going to get the money in to develop it all ... we are being told that unless that starts to happen very soon we could lose that. Unless you start using it, the government are looking at saving money all over the place aren't they. So I'm panicking and I think a lot of councillors are panicking about that 10 year plan and that development that the town so desperately needs, that because of the country's economic situation could lose out big style there ... Yeah I just wonder if the government has told the RDA to slow this process down because the money is just not flowing. I don't know. But I don't think it's going to get any better is it, because of the debt that we're in, either. So ...

Local councillor

Ridiculous. We're going through local government reorganisation as you know, and we had the farcical situation at the back end of last year where we were notified at the beginning of November, that we had to prepare a 5 year capital investment programme present that for the RDA so that they could come up with their own capital programme, so that they knew what was likely to be coming forward from [the county]. Erm, at a time when we were also in a parallel position dealing with the regional funding allocation consultations. We were given just over two months including Christmas, to respond to a five-year programme when the LSP itself won't exist on 1 April ... it's hard to explain ... you are at the beck and call of individuals, so if you've got somebody who doesn't really understand user needs, then it's just ignored. And very flippantly ignored, in some occasions because you are seen as not being strategic and that's the answer to everything - 'Oh, that's not strategic.' It's an easy one to hide behind, it's just they don't understand so if they don't understand it's easier to say it's not strategic. There you go.

Long list respondent

The vagabond type is associated in this study with the code 'fears', and concerns for the future are present in the comment above both about commercial outside events and the worry that tourist behaviour in the public sector may cause local problems. Vagabonds are able to project into the future, and they take a pessimistic view that things are getting, or about to get, worse. That is part of their inability to control events, and the self-aware view of the outside controlling events that are to come. The first speaker uses the repeated phrase for emphasis.

But it is frustrating. And it's going to get worse. I mean, there's no question about it. The RDA are under the cosh financially. There's no question about it.

Senior officer, Garamond

And another thing was that the college was looking to relocate from its location out to the North of the town, to this particular site, but that's fallen foul as I understand of the learning and skills council's funding cockup. Now there isn't the money. ... That's on the face of it now not going to happen, certainly not in the short to medium term ...

We are never perfect but we are quite self aware in terms of that. But increasingly it's having to realise what meaningfully can be done. And you know that local authority funding is going to go off a cliff in two years' time. And that is really scary. On all kinds of levels, you know, for anyone as a resident, for me as an employee, or others, I mean it was reported on the news this morning a recommendation that the NHS should lose 10% of its staff! OK fine, off you go.

Senior officer, Audubon

The only issue on the horizon for us will be the state of public spending. Comprehensive spending review 2010 I don't think is going to do the public sector any good at all. I think that's going to be difficult. And although it's going to be difficult for us as a unitary authority, I think it's going to be particularly difficult for some of the districts. Because they don't have the scale and capacity to handle those sorts of budgetary challenges. I think you do get to a point where it's impossible to cut any more.

Senior officer, Audubon

The vagabond type can exercise autonomy, but within limits. In this case the speaker identifies the freedom to do a good job, which they take pride in and enjoy, as being dependent on forces beyond their control. Though the speaker may have seen themselves as a player in the past, in this case the freedom is becoming increasingly limited and they are being pushed into vagabond status. There is no hint of any ability to circumvent or overcome the outside forces: they are accepted as a given. This speaker made the same point in several ways before offering the summing up 'in a nutshell' comment.

The members like to have an overview and they like to know what the big picture is. And they like to know that we're working towards that. And if they're happy with that then they just let us get on with it. Which is a nice relationship from that point of view, you know ... The problem we have in maintaining that relationship is that depends entirely on the flow of public funds and at the minute, because of a whole range of different issues, we feel as though in the past we've been masters of our own destiny in many ways, we've been given a sum of public funding by the RDA through an approved programme and we've managed that. And if there's any underspend coming in here we've brought projects forward, we've changed projects, so it's been a very flexible approach within a budgetary headline. But now that's all gone out of the window. There's no delegation now from the RDA, everything's done on a project by project basis, we've been dragged into the [county] morass frankly. [laughs] Which is my view! ... But that local flexibility has gone. And that in a nutshell, that's the problem.

Senior officer

Local councillors might be thought to have more power to make decisions and effect change. But the first speaker below, outlining what could in academic terms be viewed as an example encompassing Bauman, *deconcentration* and new institutionalism, suggests that local actors are losing power to Westminster. Again, there is the underlying suspicion that the exercise of power is not being done for honourable reasons, and heightened language – ‘meddling’ – reinforces the speaker’s own legitimacy. The speaker signals that they remain engaged, however, by stressing ‘we’ have not got the system right and ‘we’ need to act.

I wish people in the North, or the powers that be, would actually sit down and look at the structure of how we are governed ... When we went into the EU some of the powers that Westminster had went up and were taken over by them. So of course Westminster had very little to do. So they started taking the powers away from councils like this. And we have got MPs now meddling in what we were always automatically doing. So instead of them devolving down they have started taking it back to the centre again, because they have lost some of theirs, they are taking some of ours. And it's such a shame because you lose it in the communities and that's why they feel disempowered, because it is being done by central control.

I think it was France ... they had loads and loads of councillors but they were councils in little small areas. But they had a lot of power in these areas, you know. And why can't we do something like that. Because I do think you can't work without knowing your area and you can't know an area if it's a great big area. You've got to get it down to the lowest common denominator ... You need to have a knowledge of people and how they are living and what they are doing and they need to have access to you ... I just think it's the system we're in at the moment and it's wrong.

Long list respondent

You can't do much without that and also too affordable housing in an area as a councillor, you can have very little influence. If a developer doesn't come forward

with a particular project and it includes affordable housing there's very little can be done about that.

Targets and funding streams are so tight and the way they are, we know that we're going to be assessed on them. Match funding can distort your priorities. Members do feel disenfranchised. The role of members is restricted and they have to manage that complexity.

Local councillor

### *A sense of futility*

Bauman suggests that the disengagement and disempowerment of local organisations and the vagabond status of individuals will produce a sense of futility in them: they will give up and stop trying because all their efforts come to nothing as power moves away from them. In the study there is little evidence of this at individual level: generally, those showing vagabond status continue to have commitment to their work and the town and continue to work at making improvements. That is despite extensive evidence of the 'choice as fate' of failed consumers as they try to respond to the dominant political and economic conditions. Occasionally though, the frustrations and the reality of the constrained situation do produce expressions of futility. This must be placed in context: in the entire study, few examples of this are found. What is found much more frequently is a sense of injustice, and in the coding this is strongly associated with the vagabond type because it conveys the feeling of being at the mercy of outside forces.

The government is getting involved in all the small details, you have massive statutory guidance on every issue, performance targets, KLOEs from the Audit Commission. That's different from the past, they are micro-managing. Much more central control. Change and uncertainty doesn't help. It would have been better [on unitary status] if they had said, that's it, we are doing it - or not doing it, and stop, that's the decision. We don't think we are sustainable in the long term [as a two-tier district]. So the issue will keep coming back. That is because of: public expectations, government constantly gives us more things to do, funding is tight and will be very tight, and income is down. It is hard for small councils to implement everything they have to. We want to deliver our core business, not new initiatives. An example: we have new obligations on climate change so we have had to second one person part-time to that. But what can a district council do?

Senior officer

I think at regional level it's very difficult for us to make a case for rural initiatives when you are always faced with, "Ah yes that's great, but we are faced with even bigger problems of this sort."

We were faced with an argument the other week, just as an example, you get a whole document, [regional plan] to develop sites. They are going to be the

strategic development sites. And the criteria ought to fit. We have a huge need to expand and we've got an absolute prime location. Perfect. But ... it's done on the basis of where they feel they can get the best return. And also what impact it's going to have. Now the impact on us, the return on having the investment, will be lower. But it will have a major impact on the area. Yet having measured that impact it's all wrong. It's not all wrong, but it's very difficult to say ... They don't rural-proof anything, the government. They keep going on about it but they don't. You know, they don't do anything like that. So we feel regional bodies mask a lot of the issues. And it's very difficult for us as small rural authorities.

Local councillor

Caslon has felt the power of globalisation very recently when its prestige project was caught in the economic downturn. This speaker reflects the fatalism of vagabond status when confronted by far stronger forces over which there is no local control. In this case the attempt to harness that power and become more opportunistic had so far not worked well.

Since the credit crunch started they have pulled the plug on the development and we've just got a big hole in the town. And I'm sure someone in the council knows where we are up to with that but I don't. And that was how we tied together these things, both the aspiration and the need. But all our eggs were in one basket there.

Senior officer, Caslon

The uncertainty produced by being in a constant state of flux, driven by outside forces, was a typical theme of vagabond attitude identified in the study. One respondent described what is perhaps the ultimate expression of being at the mercy of events: applying two years in succession to the national lottery to fund a housing project. The respondent below uses heightened language, role play as the rule-giver and a non-apology to make the point. Again, frustration is mentioned.

But we only went down the route of really creating the county housing strategy because we were very much pushed by the Audit Commission, Housing Corporation and Government Office. Only to be extremely frustrated by the process that even before it was fully completed we had people from the Audit Commission saying, you need your own strategy as well. So it's like, well why bother then? Because, I don't mean to be callous when I say that, but you know one of the biggest issues for me is capacity. You know, we are a small borough. I have not got the capacity to engage with producing a sub-regional strategy - oh, and by the way, going back to the office and producing a local strategy in the way that we used to.

You know, we just, sorry I only work 40 hours a week. Nothing more obstructive in it than that. It's just the practical issue of managing your time and what time you have.

Housing specialist

Four respondents expressed their frustration at unforeseen outcomes, or what the Germans call a *Verschlimmbesserung* – an improvement that makes things worse. Here, the vagabond claims the high ground for their Smesto by having better awareness than the decision makers who are elsewhere.

They're always looking for statistics, which is fair enough, they're always looking for ways to show a reduction in things, and sometimes that feels that it's just a figures game. If you look at schools, the Ofsteds and all that, it's all similar, and it's changing the way that you report and record to produce figures that really might seem like there's improvements being made, but in reality, is there improvements being made? And I struggle with that one sometimes, because then I feel that 'oh great, we look wonderful on paper, or we look like we've improved, but is that going to further under-resource the demand that isn't being shown because of the way you want us to report it?'

Housing specialist

The way it works is that there's housing allocations for the region which are disaggregated to the metropolitan boroughs, unitaries, and the counties and then down to the districts. And that was our allocation. Which was laughable really. And then it was cut ... And the effect of cutting it almost sent the building industry into collapse. And new applications have virtually dried up ... So it's going to take 7 to 10 years to clear the present waiting list. And because of the increase in house prices, the list is getting longer.

Housing specialist

One authority in the study had a high percentage of non-decent housing stock, and had formed an Almo to access special funding to overcome the problem. The respondent from this authority traced the original problems to poor management – but the Almo had by that time also failed to reach the standard needed to release the special funding. It then emerged that even if this funding was available, it would only partly complete the task. But the speaker was optimistic that progress was being made.

Erm, the services that we had, particularly in terms of housing management, were not fit for purpose. We have had to go through a challenging period to restructure [the Almo]. It's still got to get its two stars. And so therefore hasn't had release of investment to put into decent homes perhaps like other LSVTs or Almos have. It's looking for re-inspection, or got an agreed date for re-inspection. And the new chief exec and his management team who've been there 12 months or so, probably a bit longer actually, are confident, optimistic that it can be achieved. So that will bring £117 million that's expected, and even if that's received it will still only deal with half of the estimated costs required to get all the stock up to decent homes standard.

Long list respondent

## 7.2 Ethics and the bureaucracy

Bauman is no respecter of bureaucratic ethos, and also insists that ethical values are irrelevant to his four postmodern ideal types (Chapter 4). In the study, there was little or no evidence of public sector staff behaving in the ways Bauman describes, of being as individuals detached from moral values or the needs of the people being served. On the contrary, most interviewees showed a strong commitment to what they were trying to achieve on behalf of their towns and the users of services, as well as a personal commitment to the towns. One housing specialist told the story of how he had used judgement to help an applicant in difficult circumstances where normally they would have been refused. He agreed that such flexibility is only possible within an organisation that would support its officers to make these types of judgements (within the general rules), and said he did feel supported to do that. This was a common characteristic among the housing specialists interviewed and was something they took pride in because it directly helped people by going somewhat beyond the bureaucratic. In this sense there was little evidence either of the distancing rationality of the bureaucracy cited by Bauman as a facet of modernism (see Chapter 4).

The presence of collective ethical codes and moral values can be seen most clearly in two other ways. The first is a sense of justice and injustice on behalf of the town, producing anger at perceived unfairness as outlined above. The second is a sense of fairness and proportion, in which interviewees sought not to overturn the current state of things but to modify it in what they saw as a reasonable way. It was important to some that they should be seen to be fair. Most respondents wanted to see greater public funding coming to their towns, but they accepted that other places also have legitimate claims.

You go to parts of Liverpool it's wall to wall deprivation. It's all about scale isn't it ... Now I don't have a problem with them having the lion's share, that's not what I'm saying. But I think what they do need is to say that at smaller levels of investment they can get a major impact on the rural problems. They don't have to invest at the same level of funding, as they do need to in the city.

Long list respondent

Regional work: it's time consuming and if you consider some of the other players on that regional field, who have literally hundreds of officers, and they can quite easily release two or three of them to work on, if you like, working on behalf of

those authorities on a regional basis. It takes a disproportionate amount of time for 4 to 6 people working in housing to do that.

Housing specialist

I think places do slip under the radar. But, you know, if you still actually compare somewhere like Audubon with, you know, some of the inner bits of Metropolis ... then I think by any measure, you would probably say we're probably doing a bit better here.

Senior officer, Audubon

## Conclusions

This chapter has considered whether the respondents' attitudes and the circumstances they describe themselves as confronting conform to the four postmodern ideal types set out by Bauman. The types are modified to add a 'public life' overlay to take account of the fact that individuals are acting on behalf of their locality. The findings demonstrate that there is little by way of genuine tourist type behaviour or circumstance but limited examples can be found with the 'public life' overlay applied. Respondents frequently attempt player behaviour, sometimes successfully. Some are strollers, taking events as separate episodes and somewhat detached from the wider reality of governance.

The predominant group however is, as Bauman predicted, the vagabond. The overwhelmingly strong economic and political forces acting on Smesto authorities leave relatively little room for local action, and the vagabond is well aware of this.

Participants' feelings of frustration, anger and powerlessness, and fears for the future, were strongly and eloquently expressed by comparison with responses conforming to the other behaviour types, and the kinds of issues and incidents recalled were clearly seen as important to the speakers.

Two caveats to Bauman's thesis were found in the study. The first is that a sense of futility among the vagabond ideal type was not found. That is despite extensive evidence of Bauman's 'choice as fate' in action, as interviewees attempted to respond to their situation. Their knowledge (or belief) that their choices and actions are driven from elsewhere and may well not produce the desired outcomes did not generally lead to them 'giving up'.

The second caveat is that an ethical or moral set of values is strongly found among interviewees, bringing into question Bauman's contention of 'missing ethics' in the ideal types. This issue is explored further in the conclusions, Chapter 9.

Despite the predominance of the vagabond ideal type, local differences are still present. It is apparent from the interviews that despite many commonalities, some



differences among respondents do exist, and that these differences can be linked to the different localities in the study. The next chapter therefore moves on to explore for each case study town whether it is possible to assign a Bauman ideal type, and what this might reveal about the town circumstances.

## **8 Applying the Bauman types to Smesto authorities to reveal relationships of power**

The previous two chapters have outlined the study findings, first in relation to whether the conditions of liquid modernity are a significant driving force for respondents in northern Smestos, and second in relation to whether we can identify Bauman's ideal types among individual study respondents.

This chapter draws on these findings to outline the significance of Bauman's thesis for northern Smesto authorities. It takes the analysis a step further, in making an application of Bauman types to Smesto governance authorities collectively. This analytical tool helps to illuminate central issues in the liquid modernity thesis: the role of time as a tool of domination, social concepts of distance, and disempowerment versus disengagement. This last topic area addresses the third and final subsidiary research question: Are town authorities 'disengaged', uncertain and powerless to act, as Bauman predicts? Do they believe so? The application of the ideal types helps to reveal differences among the localities related to their individual historical and current circumstances.

The following sections draw on the findings concerning the three case study towns and from the long list authorities. Some views from regional stakeholders are also included.

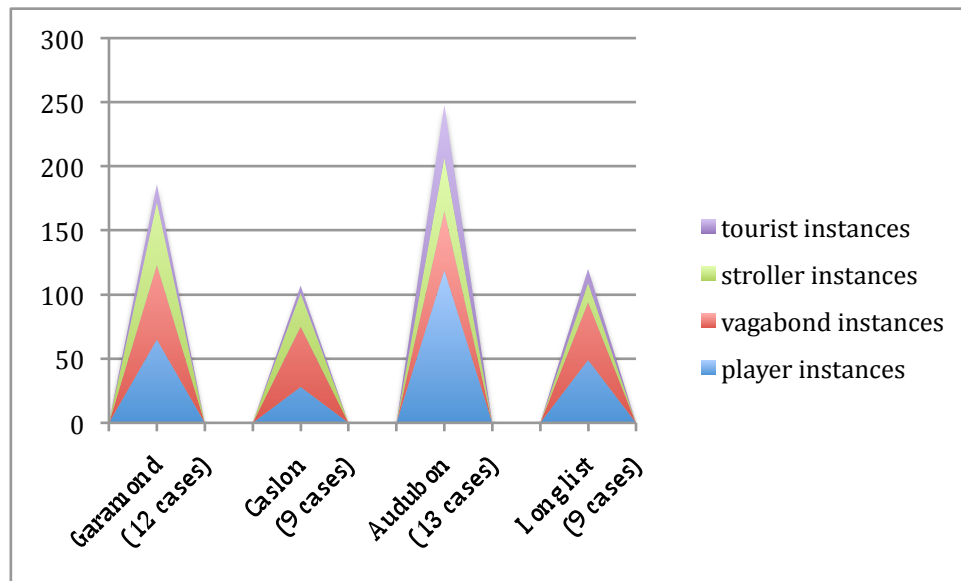
### **8.1 Can we associate ideal types with individual Smestos?**

The previous chapter considered whether the behaviour and attitudes assigned to the four postmodern ideal types set out by Bauman are found among the study respondents. The next part of the study findings examines whether the ideal types can be directly applied to individual authorities and towns, as a means of illuminating issues of time and space. Here the data is initially narrowed to only the three study towns. The interviews and supporting documents from each of the three case study towns are considered separately to analyse the situation prevailing in that town. First, a brief quantitative study outlines the overall findings for the ideal type codings.

A figure can be generated of the ideal type codings for each of the 54 cases, and these can be further grouped into the three case studies; long list; and regional stakeholders. Some of the regional stakeholder cases contained no ideal type codings. A

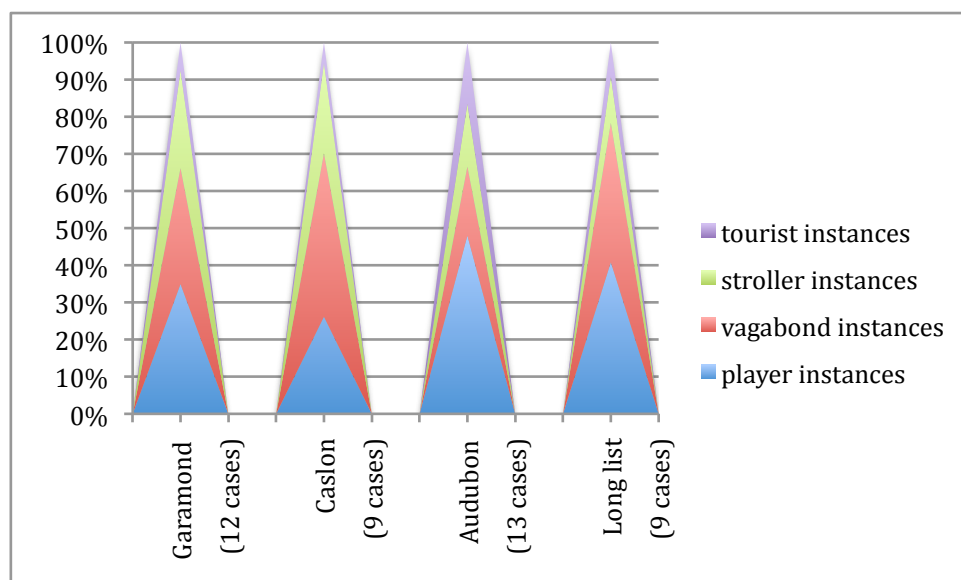
comparison of coding for the ideal types for the group of interviews covering each case study plus the long list is shown below. Regional stakeholders are excluded.

**Figure 6: Frequency of ideal type coding, by study group**



n = 570

**Figure 7: Frequency of ideal type coding, by study group (percentage)**



n = 570

It can be seen that across the long list authorities, player and vagabond ideal type behaviour feature strongly compared with the tourist and stroller types. In the Audubon/Palatino case study, player behaviour is found much more frequently than any other type. In the Garamond study, the types are more evenly represented, though there

is little evidence of tourist behaviour. The Caslon study also shows less tourist behaviour with the other types more evenly represented, but somewhat more emphasis on the vagabond type.

The figures can only provide a crude snapshot, and for more meaningful analysis it is necessary to return to qualitative analysis of the text material. Interpreting a respondent's comments within the Bauman thesis and applying the ideal types is best approached by methods akin to the ethnomethodology of Geertz (see Chapter 5), where 'thick description' is used to describe and analyse group cultures. For this purpose, interview texts have been viewed as an entity, with the segments found under code headings within HyperResearch used more as pointers than as conclusive evidence in themselves, to offer a more rounded context. Tacking has been used extensively to maintain context within the overall study, Bauman thesis, and set of town respondents.

The section begins with a summary of the situation of each case study town, as described by respondents and in published documents. A preliminary finding as to ideal type is reached.

### ***Caslon***

The impression from respondents is that for many years Caslon sustained itself economically, with good retail, modest industry, farming, and a buoyant housing market. The local authority had stability, with the same chief executive for many years, and the same political group leading. There was a strong sense of self-reliance that, for some respondents, can tip over into an insular and 'twee' outlook.

In recent years (say, the last decade) several changes have challenged the town and several respondents said they felt it was, in the words of one, 'at a crossroads'. Leadership and structure of the authority changed, according to respondents for the better, and a new chief executive arrived. But there are still council seats being returned unopposed and one respondent voiced fears that this could allow extreme political groups such as the BNP to gain a foothold.

Industry and farming began to decline, while tourism prospered. Housing unaffordability became the key issue for the town authorities as prices climbed steeply and did not decline much in the credit crunch. The local authority, together with all those in the county, was criticised by the Audit Commission for duplication and failing to take a strategic enough view; but then went on to take a leading role in producing a far-reaching piece of joint strategic housing work.

The town centre and its retail, which is portrayed as the beating heart of Caslon, was beginning to suffer in the competitive climate and as a result the town leadership felt something must be done. It began work on a transformational project that was intended to attract public funding, and was also an attempt to seize control of a situation where the market might produce harmful effects. It is most unlikely that the retail decline happened in a short space of time, but the issue became apparent during the recent period, producing fears about the future, and prompting action.

The town was preparing for the arrival of higher education in the form of a university campus at the time of the study. Again, this was seen as a strong move forward in preventing future losses of young people, but some voiced fears of over-reaching ambition. After the fieldwork was completed, the government announced cuts to university funding.

The picture therefore is of a town that could be characterised as a stroller type, not particularly looking forward or back but reacting to events as they happened – until a recent combination of factors prompted some thinking about the future. It is apparent from the changes in and ambitions of the authority and its partners that it wishes to move from that stroller type to become a player: it is taking far more interest than in the past in wider public structures and has been attempting to anticipate both the market and moves by central government.

However, the danger for Caslon is that the attempt to take at least some measure of control could produce a failure that would push it into vagabond status, continually making futile moves. The strategic work on housing had at the time of the study not yet produced practical effects because the global downturn, lack of public funding and potentially lack of building land were stronger forces than the town could overcome. As three respondents also pointed out, investment by the authority often depended on using money gained from the sale or transfer of council housing in the past. This was a once-only gain and its value made decision makers cautious about the danger of wasting it. It also produced a continuing revenue disadvantage for the authority, so that decisions made at one point in time continued to have repercussions into the future.

The transformational project had similarly run into difficulties in the downturn. The international bank supporting it had withdrawn its lending promise, and at the time of writing the project had been stalled for two years with only foundations on the site. One respondent suggested that ambitions had run ahead of reality on this, and that the financial shakeout would have a beneficial eventual effect in producing a scheme more in proportion to what the town could sustain.

Overall then, Caslon appears to be in transition. It could be characterised as a stroller town in the past and its attempts to become a player are now finely balanced. The attempt to gain more control by mastering time has produced unforeseen effects as outside forces in the same liquid modern world exert greater power. Nevertheless the town authorities have begun to position themselves to take advantage of some opportunities that arise and have had both some short term success (attracting substantial regional funding to rescue and complete one part of the transformational project) and were working on projects such as higher education in an attempt to capture a different future. The unresolved issue of the spatial arrangement of local government hangs over the town, producing further uncertainty.

### ***Garamond***

The last two decades have seen Garamond struggling with very abrupt de-industrialisation, and the economic and social effects that flow from it. This situation dominates every interview and is repeatedly raised as the overwhelming issue, far more important than any other. Town authorities are all too aware of the fact that this happened because of decisions taken elsewhere, and that they live in a globalised world. They are very much the vagabonds to the industrial organisations' tourists.

From that calamitous fall in employment, the biggest question has become how to improve the town's fortunes. Garamond did receive large amounts of special public resources to mitigate the effects of the de-industrialisation and set up special vehicles to support employment, training and business. It also received special funding to improve housing conditions. A project to amalgamate three schools (one of which had been in special measures) into one academy was underway during the fieldwork for this study. This was highly controversial, reluctantly supported by Labour politicians, and had led to several protestors being elected as local councillors. Latterly the authorities have engaged in a large scale transformational project involving business, housing and leisure that is designed to draw in new types of industry, residents and visitors. The local authority and its partners appear very well organised, coordinated and purposeful about what they are trying to achieve. But they constantly point to the difficulties of obtaining and retaining the necessary public funding, and getting it at the right time. The various sub-regional and regional organisations that have been developed under New Labour are seen as having some use, but mainly as creating bureaucracy and confusion over what would otherwise be a clear and consistent programme of work.

The Garamond authorities are highly self-aware, and highly aware of the wider national and international milieu they live and work in. Their skills and awareness are crucial to their purpose, but do not overcome the vagabond status of the town because it continues to be at the mercy of both private and public sector forces from elsewhere. It is possible to speculate that the situation in Garamond might be much worse without the efforts of its authorities, though this is not a topic of the study.

Currently a widespread concern for participants in the study is the need to hold on to gains made in recent years – albeit that these gains have been by way of retrieving the best from a very dire economic situation. Once again, the overall belief is that Garamond's fate lies with international currents in banking, economics, industry and politics.

### ***Audubon/Palatino***

The decline of England's seaside resorts can be traced for perhaps half a century, and Audubon has followed a typical trajectory. The changes have been relatively slow, and the town never had a dominant manufacturing industry to find itself in a post-Fordist era, so Audubon did not reach a sudden crisis point. Rather, the town remained a low-wage, fairly low house price economy but gradually losing its base of working age adults, business and investment.

The situation changed in 1996/97 with the advent of Palatino Council, a much larger authority able to control and shift resources and to prioritise within the district. As a large unitary, the authority carries greater weight with sub-regional and regional bodies, and has been able to gain substantial special funding.

The authority and its partners are highly organised to create a bureaucracy that works well, and that can make the most of its resources. The presence of a centralised strategy team helps to coordinate policy, ensure the various partners are working together and take advantage of any opportunities going.

This type of approach, where the local authority is effectively creating its own circumstances and innovating at some levels, singles Palatino out as a player type. Several participants actually used the language of game playing, or card playing, as a motif and this is clearly the way they see the district working.

However, there is a distinct change at local level with participants based in Audubon (which is not the county town) much less inclined to show this type of attitude. Plans for a very ambitious prestige project are underway in Audubon, led by Palatino in partnership. But the project has had serious setbacks over several years

before re-emerging in its current (and by all accounts much better) form. Nevertheless, or perhaps because of the previous disappointments, participants from Audubon show less inclination to player status, and show more of the cautious ‘see how it goes’ approach of the stroller. Demographic and economic data suggest vagabond circumstances. That is not to say the authorities lack enthusiasm or purposefulness: both of these qualities are present.

This section has explored the individual characteristics and situation of each case study Smesto. It can be seen that, within the constraints of liquid modernity, the town authorities show some differences (and these are also broadly reflected in Audit Commission CPA/CAA<sup>8</sup> ratings (Audit Commission 2009)). Garamond, despite highly aware and well organised actors, is pressed into vagabond status. Caslon appears to be emerging from stroller status, while Palatino shows player ability and circumstance, coupled with vagabond circumstances in the study town of Audubon.

One significant absence from the study should be noted here. Throughout both the case studies and the long list interviews, the knowledge economy, or digital/IT industries, that are central to the New Labour government’s view on future prosperity (DCMS and BIS 2009), were barely mentioned. No town in the study had any view of itself as overcoming the problems of location via significant private sector investment in these type of industries, from the interview data. Only one person even mentioned this idea, in relation to a single small enterprise. Three others mentioned use of IT to overcome public sector problems of geography.

The next section returns to Bauman to explore a possible explanation for the differences found among the towns, concerning historical and current time.

## **8.2 Time as a tool of domination**

Time takes two roles in this study. In Bauman’s thesis those who rule in the liquid modern world, the tourists and to a lesser extent the players, do so by controlling time. Bauman suggests that this force has become the dominant paradigm, overtaking space (or geography). But time also takes a role as an historical perspective on the social world, and the section first examines this aspect.

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<sup>8</sup> Comprehensive Performance Assessment, Comprehensive Area Assessment performance measures



### 8.2.1 *Historical time*

It can be seen from details of the three case studies that each town has suffered decline, but at different time periods. Audubon began its decline first, probably from the late 1950s or 1960s, and this has been a slow process. Garamond suffered sudden loss from the early 1990s, while Caslon is today said to be reaching a turning point.

A question therefore arises as to whether the differences found in the ideal types for each town might be associated with the time period of decline and its trajectory. It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate previous periods of time beyond the advent of New Labour government but it is possible to speculate based on participants' views of the past that each of the towns *may* have the stroller type as its state of equilibrium. Each has been successfully built around a particular industry over a century and more, but did not grow to the extent of becoming a conurbation. The towns found a level as freestanding centres of industry, commerce and consumption and were largely self-sustaining. In Garamond, several participants pointed to the fact that education beyond a basic level had not previously been seen as necessary because young people readily found work in industry. In Caslon, the variety of small shops and lack of chains was seen purely as an asset. Few if any of the study towns appear to have engaged until recently in the kind of city boosterism that the large cities took up from the 1980s (see Chapter 3). There was perhaps an attitude from residents and authorities of 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'.

Only when Garamond and Caslon faced a sudden decline (or the prospect of it) did they move to try to become players, taking on prestige projects, as this was thought to be a necessary response. But the act of opportunity-taking carries risk, and the attempt can push the town into vagabond status, making futile choices. As two respondents from Audubon/Palatino pointed out, as an authority with greater resources than a small district, they can marshall funding and staffing power to recover from difficulties in a way that others cannot.

In the case of Audubon the decline was long and slow, without an obvious trigger for change. Here, a significant change came instead with the move to becoming part of a larger unitary authority, with the increased resources and political power that accompany it. This brought a new dynamism and the town has been drawn along as part of that wider district. This is not to argue for large unitary councils in replacement for districts: that too is a question beyond the scope of this study. A countervailing

argument that smaller districts allow for closer working relationships was put by several respondents.

This section has considered historical time in the study towns; the next moves on to current time.

### **8.2.2 *Fiscal time***

The first findings chapter (Chapter 6) outlined the way in which respondents find the private sector acts to the disadvantage of those fixed in a town, in Bauman terms by using time. Government and its agencies also engage in this kind of domination they feel, by speeding up or slowing down funding streams, and through the churn of initiatives that must be complied with.

The nature of public funding streams is that it is invariably tied to annual budgets. Smesto authorities as well as all others; voluntary organisations; and even the private sector when involved in renewal and housing projects, are all therefore working within what might be called fiscal time.

The timing of resource provision can be viewed as a crucial aspect of domination within liquid modernity and this section explores the mechanisms. The economic downturn has accentuated the difficulties for Smestos; in one case an authority looks likely to have to choose between two important projects already underway. The pressure from government is to choose the high profile, more visible 'glamour project', as one respondent put it, that is expected to have long term economic benefits; but that would leave a more 'tried and tested' housing improvement scheme without further funding. Two respondents said they believed such prestige projects do little to change the basic situation of town residents.

Smaller authorities and organisations say they find it more difficult than larger ones to live within this regime, because they have reduced ability to pool and shift resources. Audubon respondents recognised their improved position in this regard, because the larger size of the authority means it can to an extent overcome time by using its greater resources to advantage.

We are still ... 20 years ago, 30 years ago, we bemoaned the fact as housing professionals that we were dealing with annuity. Annual budgets. You don't know how much money you have got until very close to the start of the financial year. You don't know what you are going to have the following year. Nothing has changed. That hasn't changed. People will tell you that there are three year programmes and that there's two year allocations. It doesn't exist. We don't know

from one year to the next how much money we are going to have to spend on our housing stock. No business would run itself in that way.

Long list respondent

We've now got eight staff altogether dedicated to delivering the programme for Audubon. At that time, 2004, the post was funded partly by the Regional Development Agency, and partly through EU funding. I mean so far we've had about nine and a half million of Objective Two to support a range of projects. ... But outwardly, I think, because of the council again, having the critical mass that it can smooth over those sort of short-term gaps if you like. So although there is stop start funding, we're able to manage that because let's say we've got a delay in getting some funding through from one of our partners, and I mean this was the same during Objective Two when we were bidding for projects, if we were held up for whatever reason in getting their confirmation support, we probably had enough from our own resources to be able to keep the continuity. We can't take our foot off the gas as it were.

Senior officer, Audubon

My experience is that when times are tight, people centralise and when there's more money around people tend to decentralise.

LSP respondent

The status of vagabond emerges as the dominant position for authorities in this study, because of their lack of ability to control time. Respondents from both the town authorities and regional stakeholders groups frequently pointed to problems of capacity for Smesto authorities, which was said to bring about their inability to respond effectively to the demands of central government. The comments below from regional stakeholders, with their undertones of failure by the Smestos, were typical.

The biggest problem is capacity. We've got to address that. With the sub-regions, they have all got to get themselves to a certain level. It's crucial with the HCA because they want to talk to groups. They are going to have the 'single conversation' at sub-regional level. So if you aren't in you will get left behind.

Regional stakeholder

Many a quangocrat has dashed their career on the walls of [Smesto], trying to get something to happen. ... One of the arguments for having unitaries is to take what are small districts with lack of capacity, you have a bigger council with specialists, like a property team, or a housing team, and pay people to do that. They'd probably get paid a bit more money, more staff, and they might have to cover a bigger patch but at least they'll know what they are doing.

Regional stakeholder

>If we go and have a conversation in [Smesto], and say well we'd like to do this business park development, or restructure the river frontage or whatever, you pretty much know that they will be able to deliver it. And you know, we can do a deal and we can put money in, and what they said will happen - will happen. And

then they will give us the outputs, the results, and it will all be done. You go to another local authority, and they just don't have the staff, they don't have the staff and the experience, they are really pushed just to deliver their core services. There's just not the capacity there to deliver. I mean the individuals in the council are, you know, are OK, they just haven't got enough - either enough bodies, or enough people with the skills and capabilities to deliver quite a big, complex property scheme.

JB: Right, so even if investment was available, you'd be a bit worried about putting it in because you don't know if it's actually going to happen.

>Yeah yeah yeah

Regional stakeholder

But is lack of capacity always what holds back the Smesto authorities? The case study authorities, especially in Garamond, showed tenacity and organisation, plus awareness, yet this was not enough to place them as equals in the competition for resources or, in their view, to overcome what they saw as unnecessary expense and time consumption in the bureaucracy ostensibly designed to support them. The widespread belief was that Smesto authorities are being asked to put in disproportionately to what they gain. The balance of power is, in their eyes, vastly to their disadvantage, and therefore the requirement to self-improve in these circumstances becomes somewhat difficult to achieve. Regional and national government bodies urge an ethos of opportunity-taking on Smestos that, as this study has shown, are primarily concerned with need. The ability to join the regional or national competition relies on circumstances, such as connectivity and the ability to attract inward investment and residents, that are not generally found in Smestos that are in decline or at a turning point. Even in the Audubon case study, respondents from the wider Palatino authority area openly accepted that inward investment by industry will not be a solution for the town's prosperity because its isolated location is 'beyond' other more desirable locations.

Geography can be said to be a significant issue for the Smesto authorities: it is mentioned frequently in terms of isolation as an explanation for the towns' relatively poor economic situation (as measured by GVA). But the study has already established that disadvantage, and vagabond status, is not only about geographical location: the catch-all term of isolation needs unpicking to understand how it is significant. The next section explores Bauman's conception of isolation as a social product.

### 8.3 Concepts of isolation

We have seen already that distance is an important aspect of respondents' conceptions of their towns and their organisations' task. The isolation of the towns and the time taken to commute to work or attend meetings, the cost to chain retailers and the lack of inward investment are all seen by respondents as significant factors in the problems the towns are experiencing. The positive factors of self-reliance and small retailing are not able to overcome these negative forces.

Bauman claims that with communication speeds reduced effectively to zero, we can confidently talk of the end of geography, and he suggests the focus needs to be shifted to the juxtaposition of 'near' and 'far' in a social context (see Chapter 4). This outlined how Bauman characterises 'near' as familiar and unproblematic, while 'far away' signifies trouble and doubt.

In the study, many instances of this near-far juxtaposition are found. Respondents repeatedly complained that the attitude of regional agencies is that they are more comfortable investing in and dealing with the conurbations where they themselves are based (with the exception of Palatino respondents). The attitude towards Smestos from those agencies, town respondents say, is that they are something unknown, something they do not understand and that they do not feel comfortable with. In this way the Smesto authorities are casting themselves as the 'other' or 'far away' place, seen through the eyes of the agencies. This is a wholly different concept from the straightforward economic tools that the private sector might use in deciding on investment, and explains why the Smesto authorities become frustrated and angry with the perceived attitudes of the agencies. With government resources underpinning it, the concept of near-far favours the near, allowing those with that status to prosper, and further disadvantages those cast as 'far away', pushing them into vagabond status. The argument-making and lobbying discussed in Chapter 5 can be seen as an attempt by Smestos to make themselves known and familiar to government agencies, bringing them 'nearer' than other less known, 'far away' towns in the competition for resources.

The attitude in places like Metropolis is, why the hell are we investing in a place like [Smesto], really? You know, ... this backwater? ... We should be putting more resources into the economic 'drivers' like Metropolis. That's the attitude. I think it's a strong one within the agencies.

Senior officer

Are the Smesto authorities correct in their perception that the agencies are casting them as ‘far away’ and therefore ‘other’, as a risky proposition, because they are an unknown territory? The data from the regional stakeholder respondents is relatively limited and so caution must be used. We have already seen in Chapter 6 that regional agencies favour reliability, and this has a rationality to it. Both regional stakeholders and Smesto authorities themselves point to problems of capacity and this must be accepted as a factor. But are the regional agencies at the same time *post hoc* rationalising what is actually a social concept of ‘far away’, ie more risky? There is some evidence to suggest that although this would not entirely negate reasons of practicality, it is indeed an aspect of how they view the Smestos and rural areas. Several talk of opportunity taking, with an unspoken assumption that this will not mean Smestos (other types of urban area are mentioned positively). One suggested the disadvantage of geographical location is a given that cannot be changed. In interviews when asked to discuss Smestos in rural areas, several regional stakeholders appeared to have difficulty envisaging actual places. Some named cities such as Newcastle and Liverpool to illustrate their answer, rather than a Smesto.

One regional stakeholder confirmed that local authorities would be asked (or allowed) to take on greater freedoms to act in future. But he said he feared that district councils in particular lacked the capacity to take on large projects. The reasons, he said, were: ‘because of their size, the level of individual ability hasn’t been appropriate or because they simply haven’t done that kind of thing for a long time’. The prime example of the problems, he said, was lack of skills in compulsory purchase, where in-house expertise had gone – and this was also mentioned as a problem by a second regional stakeholder. During the study one respondent involved in regeneration at a district council was asked about this problem. It was quite true that they had no in-house expertise in CPO, he said, but they just buy it in when needed, and this is more efficient. It was not seen as a problem. In this case the issue therefore appears to be one of perception rather than reality.

The comments below are all from regional stakeholders. Note also the calls for self-improvement from vagabond areas.

The economic data will be crucial to the LAs. We don’t like the idea of moving economic development to the local level. The onus will be on LAs to say what are their innovation priorities, how they will tackle local economic need.

Regional stakeholder

City regions are there to support economic growth. SNR gives a local framework ... Government says it is for the areas to resolve problems for themselves. Even the unitaries, I don't think are part of a political force. As for the district councils in the two tier system, well, I'm not sure they carry all that much weight ... it's a fact of geography - some parts of the country have got enormous conurbations and some parts haven't.

Regional stakeholder

If you divide the cake ever smaller you have not delivered the benefit.

Regional stakeholder

The HCA are talking about having a 'single conversation' with the locality about what needs to be done. And by single conversation they don't mean we'll meet you once and then you'll never see us again. They mean a single conversation about growth, renewal of the stock, affordability, and sustainability. So they will go to any locality, interestingly possibly at city regional or county level, not at local level, and have a discussion.

Regional stakeholder

One regional stakeholder who strongly supported the policy of investing primarily in the conurbation, while also supporting local communities, had this to say about the rationale:

If you live in the towns ... you may well probably still work in Metropolis or work in the conurbation. You are certainly going to travel into the conurbation for quite a lot of things, like as a minimum shopping, but you know, you might travel in for leisure purposes. So it's of benefit to the whole region if we can have this city region focus and improve the opportunities there. And it's a much more attractive offer. So I think inherently that's the case.

Regional stakeholder

The speaker went on to say that a regional transport policy could benefit jobless people in former pit villages – though with a strong caveat that local regeneration was also required. Yet several Smesto respondents spontaneously raised the issue of unrealistic regional or central government expectations on low paid people to commute for work. The respondents were scornful of those who believed creating jobs in one place would serve those in another town, seeing this as an example of lack of knowledge or understanding of rural areas, and wrong assumptions. Here is what one had to say:

I mean the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister – a few years ago and we had a visit from John Prescott, we was explaining about the housing needs of the county. Planning bias. This is going back five years I think. And eventually what came back, the solution is a big derelict MOD site on the outskirts of [Smesto 50 miles away]. And the view was that could solve the county's housing problems.

[laughs] We just reacted in horror - oh no, they can't really mean that can they? Sorry, if you live and work in [our area] are we saying that if you want a house, or need a job, then move to Smesto? So unfortunately we occasionally get that sort of response from regional and government agencies.

Long list respondent

Two Audubon respondents, interviewed together, put forward rational reasons to explain the RDA's willingness to invest in the town. These included reliability of the authorities in spending the resources and working to properly agreed priorities. Then one added another reason: the resort's positioning as 'near' in the eyes of RDA staff. The town had apparently overcome its remote geographical location in this sense.

Then there was the other factor which was there was a lot of people in both Government Office and the RDA who all remember going to Audubon as a kid and felt, oh it's awful that the place is ending up like it is ... I think there was a lot of people sat there in Metropolis making decisions who were using their hearts as well their heads, but we weren't going to turn round and say no.

Senior officers, Audubon

The near-far juxtaposition gains tangible power with the city regions policy in the North, where certain conurbations are selected for investment on the basis of opportunity (see Chapter 3). The next section explores this political development in more detail.

### **8.3.1 *City regions***

The state of liquid modernity, and the near-far juxtaposition, is captured well in the study by interviewees' comments on city regions. This New Labour policy, designed to assist economic productivity, epitomises the competitive ethos and the rejection of social justice or need as a basis for action. For Smesto respondents, the policy encompasses the concerns they have about resource distribution, isolation from power and growth, and fears for the future. Their reactions to the concept were strongly negative, largely because the concept points up their own vagabond status. In the typology of arguments outlined in Chapter 5, city regions feature strongly in the 'prevention' type of argument, which focuses on fears for the future in a competitive world. Again, the requirement to self-improve is voiced by regional stakeholders but as Bauman has shown, the vagabond has little ability to escape from the liquid modern relationships of power that hold him in place.



JB: Is there some kind of a trade-off, between within the city region and outside of it? That somebody has got to lose?

> Uh-huh. I think that's right, and I think we have had the debate at the RDA, the move to fewer, larger, more strategic projects. That's basically it. What the RDA's conclusion is. Since 1999 RDAs have been funding regional projects to improve regional economic performance and I think the conclusion is, by investing in fewer, larger, you have much more impact but there isn't more money to go round though so that means saying no to lots more things that can't demonstrate a regional economic impact. So small places get the wrong end of that ... And I think the challenge to the local authorities then and to the city regions and sub regions is to come up with those big ideas. And why shouldn't they?

Regional stakeholder

City regions are an important aspect of Smesto authorities' position in the competition to control resources. The requirement to compete is central to this issue, since city regions are fundamentally constructs of opportunity and business power. City regions, as opposed to regions, are generally opposed by those long list and case study respondents who commented on the issue, some vehemently so. Some found the way that city region funding can cut across other existing arrangements frustrating. Others thought the idea was nebulous, and perhaps something artificial dreamt up by central government without relevance to themselves. Another group feared that the city regions would draw resources and people towards themselves, leaving the peripheral areas further and further behind: consequently they make the 'prevention' type of argument against the idea. But two respondents from these interview groups were strongly in favour of city regions. Both worked at the regional and sub-regional levels, and both worked in areas primarily concerned with economic opportunities and markets.

Several respondents questioned the designation of some areas as city regions, because some are not really the economic powerhouses that others clearly are. To that extent they are seen as less of a threat to the areas 'outside'. One regional stakeholder suggested that the strong city regions would have existed anyway, without specific promotion by central government, because they are powerful and ambitious local authority bases.

Regional stakeholders were more in favour of city regions and in some cases were personally involved with them. They too see the purpose of city regions as primarily about taking economic opportunities that are present in large conurbations (the 'opportunity' argument type). Several confirmed that they see the cities as 'economic drivers'. What is not articulated in this view is why the cities should be seen in this

light. It is beyond the scope of this study to explore that question in detail but one possible answer appears to be that the cities are seen less in terms of their ability to provide manufacturing or other value added production functions than in terms of their success as sites of consumption – which is why the adjacent areas mentioned below may be threatened by large retail developments.

Now there is an issue, I suppose a threat and a rift that we recognised early doors, through work of Northern Way, that you know, a pro-city centric regional economic policy that equally is promoted by some of the work and research that the OECD have done in and around the region, does potentially give short to medium term threats for areas that are adjacent to the main areas of population, that need connectivity more than most areas. The likes of coalfield areas. To connect into those economies, otherwise you are going to broaden or deepen those disparities further if you do go for purely an economic model.

Regional stakeholder

Always frightens us you know, they are getting that northern route from Manchester right across to Leeds, and everything on that was going to get all sorts. And hey hold on a minute, [we] will be really out on a limb here ... we can see the funding starting to channel to that route because that's how they were talking at the time, you know, so I think we've been trying to put some feelers out there to say don't forget [us]. We were going to lose out big style there ... They've always been very skilled, Metropolis and places like that, at getting money and initiatives going. There's initiatives there it makes me laugh and it seems to go straight [to them].

Local councillor

City regions - now I'll swear for a while! They are OK if you are in one. It's not just a case of crumbs from the table, we're not even in the room. We will have absolutely no voice at regional level. I am utterly opposed to city regions, which will severely damage the future for [us]. They only think about the big conurbations. They have as much understanding of the moon [as they have of us].

Long list respondent

>What they call us is the 'rural hinterland' almost like we're bolted on to the urban area. And that's our place.

>We only exist as something that's located by the side of the city area.

Housing specialists

Metropolis, I mean they can do anything that they like there basically. And as you move outward what you can do becomes less and less and less and less. And by the time you get to here, you feel no effect of any investment in Metropolis at all. No ripples. But we're restricted from doing our own thing. You know. And it's immensely frustrating. ...

All areas outside the urban core have really been sort of written off and forgotten about, I would say ... Does Metropolis really need a heap of public money pumping into it? I don't think so. I think it's an extremely prosperous city.

And to my mind money should have been taken off there long ago and distributed to the more peripheral areas. Not saying everywhere, I know there's some terrible deprivation in Metropolis, and undoubtedly that needs support and help, but the ability of Metropolis to respond to regeneration opportunities is far greater than ours is.

If somebody was to say tomorrow they [city regions] won't exist I wouldn't be bothered. I think it would be fair to say they never really existed in the first place, thinking about housing and regeneration.

Long list respondent

Regional stakeholders were understandably more in favour of the city regions concept than Smesto participants. Two did seem to be taking a pragmatic rather than ideological line, however, in a reversal of the Smesto respondents' 'prevention' argument type.

If we think about [the area] as a city region we can get a stronger voice nationally and internationally than we can if it's individual local authorities working separately. And that stronger voice ... you can potentially attract more people in, you can attract money into the area, which then has knock-on benefits for all the local population ... You are certainly going to travel into the conurbation for quite a lot of things. So it's of benefit to the whole region if we can have this city region focus and improve the opportunities there. And it's a much more attractive offer. ... But on top of that because government policy, because they've looked at what's happened in Europe and they've seen cities as the driver for economic growth, central government is saying, because we want to think about city regions, it then becomes almost, 'well if we don't respond in this way locally, then the [region] will lose out'. So actually it's really, it becomes a self-reinforcing thing. ...

Regional stakeholder

I think it would ill serve those areas that aren't the core of the city region, or their leaders, to resist the policy or not join in with the policy, even though people do make the argument of well, we don't like this because it's all the focus is on the city. And I think maybe the region bit of city region is a really important word.

Regional stakeholder

I think it has led to a distraction in the sense of what future structures will be like. So at the moment our region operates very much on a sub-regional basis, now we are moving much more towards a city-region concept, I think that though has added some slight confusion and another layer in some respects. And also I think for some of the rural smaller authorities a lack of clarity about how their role fits into that broader city region role.

Regional stakeholder

### ***The Northern Way***

This pan-northern initiative (see Chapter 3) is overtly focused on business and competitiveness. It appears to have little relevance for most Smesto respondents. Regional stakeholders and long list respondents were directly asked about the Northern Way. Three regional stakeholders said it did remain a guiding principle, but most said it did not affect their work or thinking, though it may have done at its launch and some aspects of it may have been absorbed into existing initiatives. There was a suggestion that the economic downturn had changed government priorities. In one case the respondent had changed jobs to one where the initiative was less relevant. Two respondents spontaneously mentioned the Northern Way, one similarly saying it was no longer relevant and the other strongly in praise of it and insisting work on it was fully functioning.

Goodchild and Hickman (2006, p124) found that the Northern Way was a form of *deconcentration*, or centralising power while distributing responsibility. Some respondents did feel threatened by its premise of support for the opportunity takers, or city region engines of growth, because it left them feeling powerless. The near-far juxtaposition was evident again.

I mean it was there and it was mentioned and there was obviously a flurry of activity around it. I'm not sure where we are with that, I'll be honest, hand on heart. Because it's not something I track in my daily working life. It's not in my consciousness.

Senior officer

I don't think it's any less relevant now than it was when it was set up. I think it's lost profile. But it was very much aligned to the minister who set it up, John Prescott, it was his very high profile initiative.

The focus is very much a national and regional and local focus on how to help people in this really difficult time people are experiencing. Which is real. It's not a time for taking a huge step forward with a grand vision, it's a time to dig heels in, fasten your seatbelts, get ready for a rough ride.

Regional stakeholder

The main ambition for the Northern Way was to close the (then) £30bn productivity gap between the North and England's average. To date, the gap has widened, not narrowed (see Figure 2).

Is it realisable? Don't know. If it is, it's long term. And you have to look at what gives the biggest output and the biggest GDP. I think it was a good unifying cause

when it first came out. I'm not so sure how many people remember it. It was good for bringing things together.

They don't have the resources to do it. They don't have the levers to do it. There is subtle back tracking on that.

Regional stakeholder

One of the problems raised with city regions is the fact that they have fluid boundaries. This was made explicit in the Northern Way blueprint (Northern Way Steering Group 2004a, 2004b) to show that the city regions are based on markets and to allow the necessary flexibility to capture economic flows. This concept is still strongly supported by two regional stakeholders in the study: one said it was about 'finding an area that matches the geography of everyday life'. In reality however, the structures most closely supporting city region development are local authorities, and so their boundaries come to dominate. For most regional stakeholders in the study, this was desirable, mainly because it gives a definite basis for partnerships and activities and perhaps because in some sense it legitimises the partnerships. But the boundaries can change, according to the topic, which in turn can mean the funding channels become confused (or confusing). This led one long list respondent to describe the situation as 'farcical' and 'mad'. Another commented that some city regions had not even been able to agree on a name for their partnership.

It's because they haven't considered things in the wider, you know they have just seen, city region oh we'll give the money to the city region. Where the city region boundary will fall, not being daft they have made it as big as they possibly can ... things like that really get your goat, to be honest.

Long list respondent

JB: Can you just tell me what you think are the boundaries of [the city region].  
>[long pause and laughs] I'm going to be slightly careful about what I say ... I think there's great confusion in lots of people's minds including my own about the status or otherwise of city regions in England. And I think that's become even more confused by the development of city development companies or economic development companies. I think there's a degree of confusion frankly in my view about the role and the efficacy of city regions. Er ...

JB: Do you see that they have a clear role to play?

>I have to say I don't at all. [sigh]

Regional stakeholder

JB: Can you say what you think are the boundaries?

> [laughs] Excellent! [laughs] Erm ... [laughs] They are fuzzy boundaries.

JB: What do you think is the main function of city regions?

> Oh blimey! [pause, laughs]

Regional stakeholder

### 8.3.2 *Trust*

Respondents from all three case studies raised the issue of trust. It is associated with the ‘competence’ argument type outlined in Chapter 5. In a mutual relationship of equals, which is what the much-used term partnership suggests, there will be trust among participants. In these instances, trust is associated with ‘competence’, an argument type favoured by players.

A different aspect arises where respondents perceived a lack of trust – which was the case with respondents who commented on the issue in relation to central government and its agencies. In these cases, trust forms part of arguments of need or prevention that are more associated with the vagabond type. That is because this lack of trust is one-way, from government to them, they believed, and it results in certain repercussions for the towns or organisations. Trust therefore appears as an expression of ‘near’ and ‘far away’ and functions as a signifier of power and control. It appears strongly under the code heading ‘unfairness’, also associated with the vagabond type. The towns lack the ability to ‘move’ ie, be fleet of foot, because government regards them as ‘far away’: it does not trust them to do their job, they feel, and therefore does not allow them to exercise power and mobility in their own right. This in turn produces uncertainty and the undermining of a sense of longer term consistency.

We're not trusted. We're guilty until proven innocent. And you have to prove your innocence by filling all the forms in and doing all the process. But nor are we given, there's no slack which is cut for us on the basis of we have to do all this administration stuff. Which gets more and more onerous. And I'd like very much a situation that if you're ISO2008 quality assured, which is what we are, if you've got a pretty good track record in delivery, of course we cock up but then so do the government. So do the civil servants ... So we put our focus on the positive side. How we improve delivery on the ground. How we give the client a better service. Not how do we ensure that we've got umptyum records, you know, and how do we ensure that, ... as opposed to we just accept that we've got the right company and they've got a good track record and they've got their own audit procedures. They will screw up from time to time. We accept that, but we also trust them to do a good job.

Voluntary sector respondent

Several respondents contrasted central government's willingness to put money into banks, which were perceived as trustworthy (ie ‘near’), but not to trust local authorities to spend public money as they saw fit. This was a source of anger not only because the Smestos felt they could use the money and use it well, but primarily

because respondents felt an insult at the perceived lack of trust (ie, they felt cast as ‘far away’). This reinforced the vagabond’s feelings of powerlessness.

And I think frankly the government has no trust in local government any more. They are not prepared to give us the money to get on with the job. They are quite prepared to give it to unelected quangos that they feel they can control, but as subsequently proved, they can't. And they give it to banks.

Senior officer

The ‘far away’ casting of Sместо authorities suggests they feel disempowered. The next section explores this issue more fully, and asks whether organisations do indeed become disengaged.

#### **8.4 Disempowerment and disengagement of local organisations**

As the section on globalisation (Chapter 6) suggests, there was a general feeling that power has moved away from localities in recent years, as central government and its regional agencies strengthened their position relative to them. Private sector firms were, it was accepted, free to move their resources internationally at will.

Bauman’s thesis suggests that under conditions of liquid modernity, complete with globalisation and power moving away from localities, local organisations concerned with governance will inevitably become disempowered and disengaged. Their inability to control time and position of powerlessness in the face of those who do control it will, he suggests, lead them to be overtaken by feelings of futility in the face of these strong forces.

This section explores whether respondents in the study felt this way. Most were directly asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a brief outline of the thesis. Generally there was more of a feeling that, *within the highly circumscribed political and organisational climate* outlined in previous chapters, they do retain room to manoeuvre. This was significant because, however limited that power might be, it produced an opportunity to notch up successes and generate a feeling of pride and achievement – so the futility described by Bauman tended not to produce disengagement. Respondents found their situation deeply frustrating, and knew many of their choices were ‘as fate’, ie driven from elsewhere, but they had not given up. In many cases the solidarity produced from colleagues working together either within or between organisations seemed also to produce engagement that overcomes futility. Some found it very

difficult though, and almost all predicted that things would get worse for them and their towns as public resources tighten.

The next respondent is quoted at length because the issues outlined sum up the attitude of many. The speaker is angry and frustrated that his organisation and others working locally are not trusted to get on with a job they feel they are very good at. The speaker does bring in futility and says he (and others) have given up on some activities because they have become pointless. He is concerned about what he sees as a wider threat to democracy embedded in the current situation, a broad political situation that he is well aware of and within which he is well aware of his own position. And yet he continues to strive for his organisation and locality.

So if you look at the situation - if you did a time study of [enterprise organisation] activity and you said, OK what is [the organisation] all about? It is about making a difference on the ground. How much of their time is spent doing that, as opposed to reporting on what they are doing, being audited, working through the process, making presentations to various boards, etc? ... The way it's getting is that more and more is spent on the process stuff and less time is spent on delivery stuff.

... So I recognise [Bauman's thesis] and I think that not only is it dangerous for our economic health and wealth, it's dangerous for democracy as well. Because if people feel disenfranchised, disempowered if there is such a word, and they are less inclined to participate in the democratic process, then I think that's a real danger. If you feel that your local authority is not local and has no authority, why would you bother to vote? And I think, to me as a democrat, we have got a very severe case of taxation without representation. And I also think - the classic which has happened relatively recently is the European elections. At one time, you know, first past the post, we had an MEP, there was two that I dealt with, one Conservative one Labour, who looked after [the area]. So you went to one MEP if you had a problem with the EU, and you said look, I've got a problem here. And we went over to Brussels and he said oh we'll see what we can do. Now we don't even bother. Cos frankly you know we've got 3 MEPs under proportional representation, none of them have any loyalty or responsibility for any particular area. So in European democracy terms we are disenfranchised ... Politicians sometimes forget that the rest of us aren't politicians. And politics are not our be all and end all. We see politics as a means to an end to influence with democratic means what happens. And if we feel that we have no influence and no involvement and no responsibility, why bother to vote? We might riot but we wouldn't bother to vote. So I feel quite passionately about that.

... So I agree with him [Bauman] totally, and I think he's absolutely right because we've moved from local authorities, good local authorities, passionate about their area. We've dissipated their power into a bureaucratic process and structure where it's all about managing outputs.

Voluntary sector respondent



The near/far juxtaposition and perceived lack of trust, in the form of comments that rural areas have been ‘abandoned’ by RDAs, that RDAs are opportunistic at the expense of deprived areas and conversely, ignore the needs of deprived people in affluent areas, are all also found in a National Audit Office report on the performance of RDAs (National Audit Office 2010a, p14).

## Conclusions

This chapter has built on the evidence of the first two findings chapters on the conditions of liquid modernity and the ideal types inhabiting it. It has extended the application of this analytical tool in a novel way. The governance authorities of the case study towns are analysed as conforming to the vagabond, stroller and player types. Further Bauman concepts of time domination have then been brought to bear on the findings to illuminate the situation of each Smesto. Drawing on Bauman’s emphasis on time as a driving force in liquid modernity, this chapter considered two main aspects in the form of historical and current or fiscal time. The study speculated on whether historical time may be a factor in positioning Smesto towns as ideal types, and considered whether we can identify ideal types in the Smesto case study towns. Evidence was found for a limited identification. Current time as a tool of domination was found to illuminate the social concept of ‘near’ versus ‘far away’ which in turn reveals the power relationship of Smesto authorities to regional and central government.

Finally, this chapter considered Bauman’s claim that liquid modern conditions bring about disempowerment and disengagement of local governance bodies as power moves away from them and they are pushed into the futile choice making of the vagabond.

Though respondents did feel disempowered, in many cases angrily so, there was very little evidence of them becoming disengaged: with few exceptions, they were fully engaged in securing the best outcomes they could for their Smestos and organisations. That is despite their knowledge of their failed consumer status, making choices ‘as fate’. They also readily engaged in debate on these issues. Indeed, in the case of Caslon it seemed that the authorities were becoming more engaged with wider issues in recent times.

A conclusion from the study must be that participants remain engaged despite the forces of liquid modernity and despite their knowledge of those conditions. If the

speculation on the role of historical time and points of change in taking Smesto authorities out of the stroller type is correct, it could even be argued that the adversity of liquid modernity might in some way spur the authorities into action. This would not necessarily alleviate their vagabond status because the outside forces on them may be too great.

**Conclusions: Section B**

This section has presented the evidence concerning the three subsidiary research questions for the study. The questions related to the situation of Smestos in the eyes of respondents from the governance authorities, and to the application of Bauman's thesis to Smesto authorities.

In the first chapter, conditions of liquid modernity and in particular the effects of globalisation, competition and upward drift of power were seen to be highly significant factors in the minds of respondents. Their attitudes and actions were shaped by these economic and social forces and most of them strongly felt they were disadvantaged by their situation within the New Labour regional structures.

The second findings chapter applied the Bauman ideal types to all respondents in the study as individuals. This use of the types uncovered relationships of power in which the isolation of Smestos and their small authorities was found to bring disadvantage.

The concluding findings chapter refined the use of the ideal types. Here, the types were successfully applied to the governance authorities of each case study town. This allowed insights into the dominance of time in two aspects: historical time and fiscal time. Further, distance could be seen as a social construct that reveals embedded relations of power, again placing isolated Smestos at a disadvantage.

The next chapter draws final conclusions from these findings and addresses the overarching thematic questions posed in Section A. It considers the contribution to knowledge from this study and offers possibilities for further research.

## 9 Conclusions

This study of isolated Smestos in northern England has used Bauman's liquid modernity thesis as a lens through which to view significant political and economic changes affecting the towns over the last decade. The study seeks to contribute to academic knowledge in the areas of policy and practice, theory and methodology.

Key concepts in the study include the 'attention gap' into which Smestos fall between competitive and social inclusion policies. Economic difficulties by comparison with the South and with conurbations are also detailed. Questions on the role and structure of public services and the organisations responsible for them are debated. Viewed through the lens of liquid modernity, the conditions that produce 'winners' and 'losers', with time as the tool of domination, are considered.

The research set out bridge a significant gap in academic knowledge by illuminating the experience of those involved in the governance of towns in isolated locations, and analysing how the combination of liquid modernity and third way politics has affected them. By applying Bauman's thesis, the study could, it was hoped, offer insights into the forces affecting these Smestos and how the authorities responded. The thesis was intended to draw out issues of perceived inequality and how the levers of power operate in this particular situation. The study offers contributions to knowledge in typology development to take account of the particular situation of the bureaucracy.

This concluding chapter first summarises the thematic and empirical findings related to the three subsidiary questions:

- Are conditions of liquid modernity found as a significant driving force for respondents in the study towns?
- Using Bauman's contention of 'choice as fate', can we identify his ideal types of tourist, player, stroller and vagabond to illuminate the study?
- Are town authorities 'disengaged' and powerless to act, as Bauman predicts? Do they believe so?

It then draws conclusions on the primary research question of Smesto authorities' experience in response to their economic and political situation under the New Labour government. Reflections on the methodology and methods complete the discussion of themes. Reflections on the analytical framework of Bauman address the second research

question as to whether Bauman's thesis can be used as an effective tool to examine the situation of Smesto authorities. The chapter is completed with consideration of the study's contribution to knowledge and an exploration of possible further research.

### **9.1 Discussion of thematic conclusions concerning Smestos**

This section reviews the findings concerning Smestos and respondents' experiences. It draws thematic conclusions with regard to the primary research question as to the experience of Smesto authorities in recent years, viewed through the framework of liquid modernity. Findings on the three subsidiary research questions are summarised.

Smestos are important spatial entities but are an under-researched topic. Available information shows they vary widely from some of the most wealthy and desirable places in the UK to live, to well below the average for productivity. Many have strong in-migration, but some are in population decline. Proximity to a city region has been identified as a key determinant of economic growth and in recent years economic inequality relative to conurbations, and in the North relative to the South, has grown. Data from the northern regions suggests that common features of isolated Smestos include high house prices in relation to incomes, a hollowed out demographic profile with an ageing population and fewer than average working age people.

In housing strategy, Smesto authorities are increasingly required to work at sub-regional or regional level, but have few resources to do so. Their allocations of new housing have been restricted, and funding for social housing has increasingly been channelled to areas that are economically above average.

Smestos in the North therefore face a series of economic and social problems related to their location and authority size. However, they have generally not been able to access special renewal funding streams because they lack the critical mass of deprivation, or similar criteria, to trigger eligibility. They are therefore subjected to competitive forces but largely miss out on social justice measures.

Smestos' situation can be viewed in the context of New Labour's project to marry competitive or neoliberal ideas with those of social justice. Third way politics brought an emphasis on opportunity taking, and on a requirement for individuals to self-improve. Governance rescaling at regional level created new organisations ostensibly to devolve power and to improve the fortunes of economically lagging areas. But much of the change consisted of the *apparent* transfer of power while in reality many aspects of local governance had become more centrally controlled.

Within the theoretical framework, the situation of economic disadvantage for Smestos in the North suggested that isolated Smestos were likely to find themselves within the ideal types on the receiving end of domination by others (stroller and vagabond). They would display the characteristics outlined by Bauman in which they were unable to control time and were forced to make futile choices. Within the theory, this would lead to disempowerment and disengagement.

The findings in Chapter 6 confirmed that the conditions of liquid modernity are found as a driving force for respondents in northern Smestos. Issues of isolation were found to be expressed less as geographical distance of itself and more as problems of time. Some conceptual issues of isolation were regarded as positive, such as self-reliance and the ability to work together at a human scale.

Competition was the dominant factor shaping the actions of respondents: it drove the perceived need for Smestos to compete for public resources, and to compete for desirable residents and investment. This has a tendency to push town authorities towards prestige projects that they believed could tick boxes in the minds of funding agencies and excite their interest. New housing, as a 'secondary driver' of the economy, was usually included in the prestige projects that most of the study towns were engaged in. But prestige projects are themselves problematic and those in the case studies highlighted the towns' extreme vulnerability to outside economic or government forces.

The predominant ideal type found was, as Bauman predicted, the vagabond. The overwhelmingly strong economic and political forces acting on Smesto authorities leave relatively little room for local action, and the vagabond is well aware of this. Participants' feelings of frustration, anger and powerlessness, and fears for the future, were strongly and eloquently expressed by comparison with responses conforming to the other behaviour types.

Bauman has suggested that within the liquid modern situation, we can confidently speak of the 'end of geography'. The findings point instead to a transition: isolated towns are still dominated by their geographical location (whether expressed as distance or travel time), but the social meaning of that isolation has also taken on a strong relevance, because it contains a relationship of domination from elsewhere.

In conclusion, the time control of central government has pushed localities towards short term decision-making, with authorities being forced to deal with longer term repercussions of decisions or events only as they arise. Life thus has a tendency to be played out as a series of episodes despite the aim of a strategic approach. Far from devolving power to local authorities in the study towns, central government via its

emphasis on initiative churn, partnership working at a variety of levels and confused, overlapping responsibilities has created a situation where authorities have been expected to both cooperate and compete, but without the resources or capacity to do either effectively.

Inequalities of geography, played out via time domination and tourist behaviour, became more acute despite the efforts of local governance institutions. Governance organisations have by no means given up on their task but this study demonstrates the profoundly debilitating nature of the battle to self-improve with little by way of consistent support from the centre. As Bauman predicted, these liquid modern conditions produced anxiety and uncertainty in those subjected to them. A prime source was found to be the influence of 'fiscal time', or the annuity of public funding. Coupled with New Labour's 'initiative-itis', the overall effect was to produce uncertainty over outcomes, but still with an imperative on the Smesto authorities to act – which in turn produced anxiety (and anger). Respondents in the study overall felt they were being subjected to the strong forces of liquid modernity, coupled with the effects of third way politics. These two forces combined to produce an ethos of competition while at the same time placing the Smesto respondents at the back of the start line.

Several respondents commented that they saw their locality as being at a crossroads. The quality of life in the study towns is generally regarded as good, but there are strong fears for the future. The findings suggest that respondents from both regional organisations and from Smestos conceptualise isolated Smestos as 'far away', meaning something unknown and perhaps less trustworthy or more risky. In contrast, urban areas are conceptualised as 'near', meaning familiar and dependable. In the eyes of Smesto respondents, their difficulties in securing enough and consistent funding from regional and central agencies can be attributed to this conceptualisation in which they are bound to be the losers. Returning to the 'purple haze' map that sparked this PhD study, showing the northern city regions, this 'near/far' conceptualisation can be seen in action directing large funding streams.

The liquid modern state of uncertainty and anxiety pervades this research study, yet it is no greater than respondents' anger at perceived injustice. For the town authorities, the fairness they call for would not be to overturn what has gone before, but to preserve what has been gained and prevent further loss. This is a difficult concept to 'sell' in a system where opportunity taking is the 'modern' idea, tempered with acceptance of need only where widespread and deep social exclusion can be

demonstrated. Town authorities feel they fall down a gap in the middle that threatens the future prosperity, or in some cases even the basic equilibrium of the locality.

Participants remain engaged despite the forces of liquid modernity and despite their knowledge of those conditions. Here, the assertion from respondents that they still have at least some local room for manoeuvre could be significant. Disempowered authorities may still 'win' just often enough, and manage to make local difference often enough, to prevent futility taking over – though this would not of itself alleviate their vagabond status. It is possible that affection and loyalty – the ties of place – may have been underplayed by Bauman. It is possible too that a state of flux perversely gives everyone hope of the possibility of change: that one time among the futile choices 'my number will come up'. And perhaps too the anger, the sense of injustice through needs not met and the claims to legitimacy discussed in the findings of this study can act to drive individuals and organisations even when the conditions are very difficult. If so, that is a happy coincidence, because disengaged organisations would be in a poor position to serve their residents well.

## **9.2 Conclusions on the use of Bauman as an analytical framework**

Bauman's wide ranging liquid modernity thesis argues for three main components of our current socio-economic situation: globalisation and its acceptance as a given; a society that is 'on the move' and constantly in flux; and the rise of consumer attitudes with competition and choice. The components are deeply intertwined, of course. Seen as forces in society, they lead to further phenomena of the liquid modern condition: a rescaling with power moving away from localities, the requirement to self-improve, individuals becoming uncertain and anxious, and 'choice as fate' for those subjected to the demands of liquid modernity.

Within this globalised situation, Bauman suggests, four postmodern ideal types of individuals emerge: the tourists and players who control and perpetuate liquid modernity; and the strollers and vagabonds who are subjected to it. The powerless condition of the vagabond and the requirement to make futile choices in turn lead to disempowerment and disengagement both of individuals and of local governance authorities.

The liquid modernity thesis was chosen as an appropriate lens for viewing a political and governance issue and has provided valuable insights into the situation of isolated Smestos. Its wide ranging nature in offering explanations of events and



conditions from the global to the very local and individual has been extremely useful in that it integrates both into the same thesis. By paying attention to all levels, Bauman is able to encompass the structure/agency debate without compromising on his central claim that structure, in the form of strong outside forces, is the driving force for current conditions. His claim for how domination is exerted by the tourists over the vagabonds, in the form of time, offers tremendous possibilities for empirical investigation. In the current study it has helped to open a findings window concerning the role of historical and fiscal time in the identification of ideal types (and thereby, the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in liquid modernity), and concerning distance as a social construct.

The interlocking nature of the different features of liquid modernity gives rise to complexity in the findings. Therefore a question needs to be posed as to whether the thesis would still stand if some elements of it were found not to be present: is Bauman offering a grand theory, or a postmodern fragmented set of conditions? In the study, for example, disengagement was not found despite the other facets of liquid modernity clearly exerting power over the respondents.

Smith (1999, pp5-19) clearly places Bauman in the ‘grand narrative’ camp, as a commentator on the modern and postmodern worlds and their relationship. Yet liquid modernity consists of a fragmented, shifting, un-pin-downable and rule-free landscape. Bauman answers this conundrum in his assertion that the state of liquid modernity has a dialectical aspect (Bauman 1998, p2):

‘Once the social causes and outcomes of [space/time] compression are looked into, it will become evident that the globalising processes lack the commonly assumed unity of effects ... Globalisation divides as much as it unites; it divides as it unites – the causes of division being identical with those which promote the uniformity of the globe. Alongside the emerging planetary dimensions of business, finance, trade and information flow, a ‘localising’, space-fixing process is set in motion.’

Thus, if one element in liquid modernity is absent, this finding is likely to be a result of the other forces producing opposite reactions. To complicate matters further, Bauman’s liquid modernity co-exists with modernity, and is still in the process of taking domination over it (Smith *op cit*, p17). It is beyond the scope of this study to account for the action of all forces in liquid modernity but it would be reasonable to argue that the thesis does not stand or fall in its entirety on the presence or absence of one element. Rather, an absence could provide a stepping stone to further study to establish explanations for the finding.

The use of ideal types also brought dilemmas in applying them to an empirical case. There are three difficulties here. They are related to the narrow descriptive archetypes, confusions over attitude and circumstance, and the missing element of ethics.

The first problem is that some of the types can be more easily applied in practice than others, and specifically that the stroller type is somewhat loosely drawn. The description of the types is necessarily brief: it is a stereotype that cannot cover all possible types of behaviour. As discussed in Chapter 5, Weber's use of ideal types required them to be drawn as accurately as possible, focused on regular patterns of action that distinguish one type from another. This accuracy is essential to allow analysis of the orientations and relationships of the ideal types (Kalberg 2005 pp15-17). Therefore some decisions on allocating behaviour or attitude to an ideal type must be supplied by the researcher. In short, the classification for each study must be an act of interpretation.

In the current study, numerous examples were found that readily conformed to the player and vagabond ideal types as drawn by Bauman. Where multiple examples are present, it is easier to build a general picture of that ideal type as it becomes fleshed out in more detail: the researcher can 'get to know' the types. Tourist and stroller behaviour was less frequent, and therefore the examples found did not so easily add up to a convincing picture of each type. This in turn makes it less easy to assign data to a type, and care is needed to judge as accurately as possible.

The stroller type brought particular difficulties in moving from theory to practice. Bauman suggests for example that the stroller 'sees people as surfaces' and has 'mis-meetings'. It is easy to draw on our own experience and imagine what this *might* mean, but it proved more difficult to find examples from a given set of data. Again, it is necessary to make a best judgment based on awareness of the difficulties.

The question of assigning the ideal types is related to the second difficulty, that clarity is needed in defining from Bauman's descriptions to distinguish between attitude and circumstance. This issue was addressed in Chapter 5 but remains somewhat difficult to apply in practice, particularly as different types of behaviour may be shown by the same person. Therefore some generalisations and filling in of the gaps are necessary.

In the case of the stroller, this ideal type was found to be 'out of line' with the other three types in that it did not readily fit the gradings of power from tourist to vagabond. In this case alone, orientation or attitude was seen to be the main distinguishing feature and circumstance second. This difference makes it essential to

consider the two aspects of the ideal types together at all times, but bear in mind the distinction between them.

The third problem with Bauman's ideal types is his specification that all four are postmodern, meaning in his view that ethics is missing. This is a complex and contested issue that encompasses the bureaucracy under modernism, third way politics of new public management, and liquid modernity. Early in this study, ethics and the ethos of public life were found to be strongly present, requiring a review of the ideal types.

A separate category of ideal type, being a non-postmodern one, could have been created. However, this would not be particularly illuminating since the majority of respondents in the current study would probably have fallen into that type. Instead, a 'public service' overlay specifying that actions are *on behalf of the locality* was employed, and this allows differences among respondents to emerge. Using the modified ideal types for analysis, the contention that ethics is missing from the postmodern ideal types was found not to be the case in the particular circumstances of a study of governance authorities. Evidence was also found of an ethics for the locality among the selected private or non-profit distributing enterprises.

Returning to this part of Bauman's thesis, several speculative possibilities could help to explain the lack of confirmation for his contention. It is possible that Bauman's thesis is not fully confirmed – that he has underestimated the capacity and desire of individuals and collectives to be guided by ethical codes within his market- and competition-drive scenario. Or perhaps within his paradigm we have not yet reached the time when all types are postmodern and liquid modernity is fully realised. Bauman asserts that modernity and postmodernity co-exist, so perhaps within the group studied, postmodernity is not fully dominant. However, this would not be fully in line with the other study findings that time domination is strongly affecting the towns and their authorities and that they are effectively living in liquid modern times. A possible resolution of this issue is offered in the next section.

In conclusion, the liquid modernity thesis has proved a highly valuable analytical framework. Particular insights it has offered to this researcher include an understanding of the reach of globalisation into very small, localised places; and the way that 'near' and 'far' social casting works, and the particular way in which time, as a tool of power, interlocks with that situation. The issue of the bureaucracy is undoubtedly a thorny one, and not fully resolved here – yet it has been a fascinating exploration that could certainly bear further study.

### 9.3 Reflections on the research methods

The interpretative approach used in this study was an attempt to explore the experience of people living through liquid modernity as well as the structural forces at work affecting their situation and actions. A core aim was to discover whether people in the authorities working on behalf of Smestos *feel* disempowered and disengaged, and to what they attribute their situation. Interpretative methods have been criticised for undervaluing the power contained in structural political and economic forces, and the current study attempts to address this problem.

It happens that in the current study most participants were politically aware and knowledgeable about national and global socio-economics. Giddens' double hermeneutic (Moses and Knutsen 2007, p185) was frequently seen in action as participants digested, considered and reacted to pre-analysed or packaged political and practice information. Whether this was the case or not, all were interested in Bauman's theory, and willing to express views and engage in debate on aspects of it. This, together with their views on the history and meaning of local events that often had national or global aspects, meant that issues of power were frequently discussed.

The use of topic areas in an open ended discussion, rather than fixed questions, was highly useful. It allowed a free flow of conversation and seemed satisfying to participants as they had the comfort of knowing what topic was wanted (many would ask check questions such as 'is that what you wanted?' or 'does that answer your question?') while having the time they wanted to make their point or tell the story. Such an approach does sometimes rely on the researcher having subject knowledge, as a confetti of acronyms can descend on the interview.

The conversational approach in this study did yield great benefit in allowing the issue of prestige projects to emerge. This was not anticipated during the original design of the study but proved to be a central issue for Smesto authorities and offered excellent data on how liquid modernity affects the towns. It also allowed nuanced differences to emerge between, for example, specialist housing officers and those involved in economic development.

All participants were offered anonymity, and promised also that their towns would not be identified. This was necessary as discussed in Chapter 5, but does bring problems with it. In practice it is quite difficult to avoid identifying a town because each has particular characteristics that single it out. In writing up the findings, removing identification carries the danger of rather deadening the quality of the writing and

creating some suggestion that northern towns are similar to each other. The study has established that the towns have certain elements in common, but also that there are substantial differences among them, and this point must not be overlooked. For the analysis, Bauman's ideal types were adapted to reflect the particular situation of local governance authorities. This approach is discussed again below. The ideal types were identified partly via analysis of six types of argument found in the data. Accepting these developments to take account of practical needs, the analytical framework was highly useful overall and provided many insights into the situation and views of Smesto authorities.

The study was originally envisaged as exploring Smesto issues at the very local level of parish or town councils, as well as the district or unitary. In practice this did not work well, because only three of the study towns had a parish or town council. Garamond did not have one, and Caslon residents had twice voted not to set one up. Audubon had established a town council in recent years after a narrow vote in favour, but respondents agreed that it was not very active. This was not therefore a fruitful line of enquiry. Nevertheless, the focus on district and unitary councils, plus regional stakeholders, did work well and the depth of data gained from the range of interviewees in the three town case studies proved invaluable.

Other analytical frameworks have been used to good effect by researchers exploring, for example, planning issues. New institutionalism with its thesis on the hollowing out of power structures could have been an option to examine housing and other issues in the Smesto authorities and was considered. However, Bauman was preferred – in part because the liquid modernity theory specifically raises issues relevant to Smestos, such as isolation and its social construction, and time domination.

As outlined in Chapter 5, a methodology of critical realism might have been appropriate for studying a postmodern situation. However, for the reasons given it was not used. Bauman's emphasis on the ideal types lends itself to the traditions of interpretative research, and this was found to work well in practice.

This concludes the first part of this chapter. The sections below summarise the study findings before moving on to draw conclusions on the approach and findings overall.

#### 9.4 Contribution to knowledge

This section outlines the contributions to knowledge achieved from this study. The contributions lie in four main areas: filling two gaps in academic study of Smestos; providing an empirical test of Bauman's thesis; developing typologies as tools for analysis, and direct theoretical engagement with respondents. The four areas are dealt with in order below.

##### *Bridging gaps in academic knowledge*

Smestos are also an under-researched area, with very few studies available to date and no agreed definition of them (see Chapter 2). There is therefore a significant gap in the academic literature on the topic.

Among the extant literature, most studies are on specific types of town. Powe, Hart and Shaw (2007) is a comprehensive study of more than 200 English market towns. It is highly relevant to the current study, identifying similar problems of an ageing population, decline in retail competitiveness, and unaffordable housing. However, the former has its focus generally on smaller towns: their limit is 2,000-30,000, while this study included towns with populations from 10,000 to 90,000.

Other examples of research studies into towns included Adam (2006), a study of suburban towns in Germany. The research features towns with strong links to nearby conurbations in contrast with the isolated towns of the current study, and must be treated with caution when used for comparison with an English context. Similarly, Wheway (2006) studied gentrification of a midlands market town with strong commuting links to a conurbation, whereas commuting is a relatively small factor in isolated towns.

Beatty and Fothergill conducted a large scale study of 43 UK coastal resorts (2003), and a study of tourism in 121 resorts (Beatty, Fothergill, Gore and Wilson 2010). These studies are directly relevant to the current study in that some of the same towns are included. Relevant thematic findings on peripherality and regional difference, as well as background data on low incomes have been used to inform the current study. However, Beatty and Fothergill is a national study of a particular sub-group of towns that does not include those inland or Smestos as a whole.

Schmied (ed, 2005) analyses rural areas of Europe, in this case meaning large geographical territories such as Ireland, or the mountainous areas of Spain. The book charts the geographically uneven effects of contemporary economic and social change

and therefore has broad relevance to the current study but clearly the focus is on different spatial entities.

Schmied is part of a very wide literature on spatial and human geography and there are several on counter-urbanisation with relevance to towns and rural areas (Champion 1989, Halfacree 1994) though not directly about towns. Other academic work in the field includes Harvey (1988, 1996, 1999), Sayer and Massey. The related fields of urban studies, territorial rescaling, regionalism and institutionalism similarly have a wide international literature (for example, Castells 1977, Lovering 2001, Sandercock 2004) as well as a UK focus (Stoker 2000, Coaffee and Healey 2003, Gonzalez and Healey 2005) but once again there is a tendency to focus on cities and regions rather than towns.

UK government reports and policy documents have concentrated almost exclusively on the conurbations (Urban Task Force 1999, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2000) or rural areas (Maff 2000, Taylor 2009) and not on towns.

A contribution to knowledge from this study therefore has been to focus on Smestos as a spatial entity that has been little researched. The study has offered insights from a type of spatial entity not generally attracting attention, and has analysed a situation that is largely ignored in policy making.

### ***Contribution to policy and practice***

A consideration of the policy and practice contributions from this study of geographically and socially isolated towns could benefit from returning to consider Tobler's first law of geography (1970, p236): 'Everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things.'

Tobler used 'near' and 'distant' in the spatial geographical sense of location, but the current study has shown that distance is also a social concept that is used as a tool of power. Two issues arise: first, the requirement for an acceptance in the practice of governance that 'everything is related' and second, the need to overcome the social casting of distance. What these ideas might mean in practice is an approach by policy makers and fundholders that seeks to integrate all spatial entities – conurbations, freestanding towns and rural areas – rather than favouring one over another. The concept of trickle-down to feed prosperity from the cities is not regarded as viable either by town participants in this study or by the regional development agencies (Yorkshire Forward 2007a) and cannot be regarded as an adequate means of resource distribution.

This leads to the issue of what might be the optimum spatial scale for sub-national governance, a question that has been brought into topical debate with the change of UK government in 2010. In 2008 the New Labour government proposed a series of amalgamations from two-tier local government into large unitary authorities, generally at county level (Communities and Local Government 2006a). However, the incoming government in 2010 announced a halt to two unitary proposals (not in the North) and further moves seem unlikely.

The need for a broad perspective that acknowledges the relations among different types of area suggests that a form of regional or sub-regional governance will be required. For governance authorities, retreat from partnership or regional working could exacerbate the 'near/far' divide and deepen inequalities, yet greater involvement is costly and does not necessarily produce results. It is apparent that larger authorities such as Palatino have much greater freedom to act because they have funding and resources unavailable to smaller authorities. But to conclude that all authorities should become large unitaries would be simplistic. Larger authorities are found to have lower costs and better performance, but two-tier structures are more responsive and more empowering to local communities (PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2008, p6). With the size of UK local authorities already far larger than those in other European countries (Wilson and Game 2006, p121), it is a widespread concern among respondents to this study, and among some academics, that amalgamation would take governance authorities even further away from the people and localities they serve.

A re-imagined form of regional or sub-regional government, with its functions clearly set out and with lines of accountability, is called for. The functions could be divided in a number of ways such as a local tier for policy and administration and an upper tier for strategy only on particular topics that demand it, such as transport. An idea developed by Healey (2006, pp 533-535) to recognise 'relational complexity' could be used as a basis. Healey says the current tendency to treat territory as a 'hard-edged container' should be replaced with a recognition of concepts of discontinuous space and the multiple spatial reach of different networks, plus sectoral and other interests. Relational complexity, she says, focuses on 'fluidity, openness and multiple time-space relations'.

Whatever the arrangement, smaller authorities would need the assurance that their input to the broader level was acknowledged and was proportionate. Here again though, dilemmas would remain. The abolition of regional structures (see below) might seem a popular change for Smesto authorities, but in reality is likely to bring about many



respondents' worst fears. City region authorities had already begun by July 2010 to lobby to be the new intermediate level of governance and resource holding. One pertinent issue, asked by Midgley, Ward and Atterton (2005, p12), is to decide whether areas outside the city regions are gradually to be drawn in, or whether they are to develop as distinct and separate areas.

The question of resources and domination through fiscal time has been highlighted in this study. Central government's reliance on annualised budgets is unlikely to change fundamentally but experiments such as the (former) Housing Corporation's use of a two-year budget cycle could aid slightly longer term approaches. Where projects are long term, and this is the case with most regeneration work, there is a need for stability from central agencies in policy and practice so that objectives agreed with local governance organisations can be realised.

Stability appears hard to achieve, however. This study has commented on New Labour's initiative churn, and further changes took place in the government's final two years. In 2008 New Labour reviewed its regional structures and announced changes from April 2009. These included the abolition of regional assemblies and the end of separate regional economic and regional spatial strategies, overseen by the RDAs and assemblies respectively. These were brought together under the RDAs. In 2010 the new government announced the abolition of RDAs and Government Offices, and the creation of business support agencies. Housing and planning powers were to return to local authorities with the abolition of regional strategies (Pickles 2010).

Also during the time of the study, the Housing Corporation which had funded and regulated social housing by housing associations since 1974 was abolished. It was replaced by new regulator for all social housing the Tenant Services Authority and funder for all social housing the Homes and Communities Agency (Communities and Local Government 2007a). The incoming government in 2010 announced a 'review' of the TSA and return of 'co-location' of funding and regulation under the HCA (Shapps 2010). The Audit Commission with its housing and local government inspectorates is also to be abolished (Communities and Local Government 2010a). Organisational changes are an inevitable part of the political process consequent on a change of government. It is to be hoped that through this period of rapid change, a coherent and therefore stable structure of governance, funding and oversight will emerge.

Conversely, a shorter decision-making period by government agencies could help achieve what one respondent in this study called 'an enterprising environment' by focusing on 'the quickest route between the funder and the application of those funds'.

This would be something akin to applying a ‘systems thinking’ approach where unnecessary steps in the process are eliminated with the aim of improving service to the end user (Johnston and Wright 2006).

On a larger canvas, the question of local democracy is addressed by political commentators such as Mouffe (2005) and by academics such as Wilks-Heeg and Clayton (2005). Several respondents in the current study also voiced concerns about the health of democracy in their locality. In essence, the problem is that with little power held locally, residents need a reason to care enough to become engaged – to think that they can influence and change the circumstances of their town. To do that, localities must have decision-making powers beyond the current level. Clearly, this would need to be within the framework of legal safeguards that ensure, for example, that justice, education and homelessness, among a large number of responsibilities, are treated in the same way across the country.

The new UK government’s pilot of greater decision making and resource freedoms for four English local authorities (Cabinet Office 2010) – one of which is based on a northern Smesto – should begin to ease some of the difficulties outlined in this study and it will be instructive to discover if this does lead to revitalised local democracy.

### ***Development of Bauman’s thesis and applying an empirical test***

Bauman is often cited in theoretical study (see, for example, Abrahamson 2004, du Gay 2000, Massey 2007, Franklin 2003) but appears not to have been extensively used as an analytical framework for practical research. Only a very small number of other (as yet unpublished) PhD attempts to apply the liquid modernity thesis to an empirical situation have been found in reading for this study. When Bauman is referenced in academic work, as in the example of Franklin above, it is more often his sociology background and studies of identity that are highlighted, rather than his economic and political work on liquid modernity.

This study has demonstrated that Bauman’s thesis can be used for empirical study. The ideal types driving and being subjected to liquid modernity can be identified and are helpful in achieving ‘thick description’ of the differentiated effects of liquid modernity on people, institutions and places. However, the study suggests that the ideal types need development for particular applications and especially need modification for studies of governance, to ensure that bureaucratic institutions are appropriately positioned within both theoretical and empirical research.

### ***Development of typologies as tools for analysis***

Typology development covering three areas is claimed for this study. The first is in developing and then applying Bauman's ideal types collectively to town governance organisations. The second is in creating the 'public service' overlay that renders the ideal types operational for an empirical study of governance organisations. The third is in developing the typology of arguments deployed as part of the analysis.

The study has applied Bauman's ideal types, formulated as an analysis of individuals, in an unusual context. Here, they are used as an analytical tool for organisations and wider governance institutions covering northern Smestos. Bauman does comment on local institutions in his work, suggesting for example that they will become disempowered and disengaged as a result of power moving away from them in the process of globalisation. It must be acknowledged however that Bauman sees 'the bureaucracy', by which he means all aspects of the state apparatus, as a negative aspect of the age of modernity in which control was exercised by governments (see Chapter 4). This meant that individuals working in the bureaucracy were distanced from their natural inclination to exercise moral judgements.

As noted earlier, Bauman offers no guide to how his thesis should be applied or tested in practice, and therefore researchers have some freedoms to formulate their studies by adding limited caveats or developments. This proved necessary, and challenging, in the present study. I have outlined earlier in this chapter the decisions taken concerning how to develop the ideal types with extra depth, and how the related but separate issues of attitude and circumstance were resolved. The complex question of ethics, the bureaucracy and the ideal types was addressed by creating a 'public service' overlay that allowed practical application of the existing four types. All of these developments proved useful when applied to empirical data and have therefore stood the test as practical tools.

The four ideal types are of course an aspect of Bauman's thesis that is grounded in the idea of individuals making choices – futile or otherwise. Applying the ideal types to wider structures therefore attempts to make a link within the thesis between the actions of individuals and the institutions within which they are working. As outlined in Chapter 5, the study draws on the work of Giddens (1984) to offer structuration as a feasible explanation of the relationship between individuals and institutions based in particular localities, and therefore a legitimate basis for the current study.

Applying the ideal types to institutions involved some adaptation of what are necessarily fairly brief outlines produced by Bauman. The issue of moral values and ethical codes is addressed, since this spans both the postmodern ideal types and the modernist bureaucracy aspects of theory. Taking account of this qualified version of the ideal types, which is more in line with du Gay's analysis of the positive role of the bureaucracy, the study has successfully applied them to gain an understanding of the conditions of governance institutions in the Smesto case studies. The modified ideal types in effect become a bridging device to ensure that instead of being marooned in the modern era as Bauman suggests, local institutions and the bureaucracy can be situated appropriately within the liquid modern era.

The study offers the basis for a modified form of Bauman's ideal types as an analytical tool. Some adaptation to take account of the bureaucratic or 'public life' ethos is helpful in more accurately reflecting the situation of Smesto authorities and situating them within the liquid modernity thesis. The approach could be further tested and developed by myself or others working in the field of local governance. This is one of a number of opportunities suggested by the research that could contribute to future knowledge.

The final typology developed for this study is the 'six types of argument' described as a membership categorisation device in the methods chapter. During fieldwork it quickly became apparent that the making of arguments for resources was a core part of governance organisations' work. The differing types of argument and the context in which they were employed could, it was hoped, illuminate the relationships of power involved and help with interpretation of respondents' views. This was in fact a highly successful aid during analysis. The typology of arguments was further used as a means to help identify the ideal types, as particular types of argument were found to be associated to differing degrees with the four ideal types.

Other types of MCDs and categorisations are widely found in academic literature (see, for example, Propp quoted in Silverman 2006, p164). However, no other example of the particular typology of arguments has been found. This approach has proved both viable and useful in the current study and could therefore be further developed.

### ***Direct theoretical engagement with respondents***

The interviews for this study were designed with a section directly related to Bauman's thesis. Those with the regional stakeholders (except for the initial pilots) were intended to elicit comments on any authorities/towns that might represent the tourist or vagabond

ideal types. For reasons already stated, these terms were not used but a shorthand concept of capable and opportunity seeking versus less capable and less engaged was used. Bauman and his thesis were mentioned to give context. For the interviews with the 'long list' and case studies, Bauman's liquid modernity was named and briefly described, and participants were invited to comment. In particular they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposition that power has been centralising, and draining away from localities.

This engagement with the theoretical framework proved highly successful, with participants readily debating the issues (and not always agreeing with Bauman, whom none had heard of previously). The conversation was thus able to range over numerous topics of politics, geography, power and organisational relationships in an animated and nuanced way that allowed for reflection. For some, there was a suggestion that this openness might have helped to establish a rapport with the researcher.

An examination of textbooks on social science methods and interviewing (see for example Silverman 2007, Seale (ed) 1998) has found no reference to this technique. There is general advice on helping respondents understand what the study is about, but engagement with theory appears to be generally regarded as the preserve of the researcher (and would of course be inapplicable to studies that start without a prior hypothesis or theory). Denzin and Lincoln (2008, pp70-72) challenge the divide between researcher and interviewee via their 'action research' model. Here, they seek to establish 'cogenerative' inquiry in which researchers and local stakeholders collaborate 'to seek and enact solutions to problems of major importance to stakeholders'. Their approach is more suited to practical applications. In practice, the engagement with theory technique would have a limited range of use, but the current study has shown that theoretical engagement can be valuable.

## **9.5 Opportunities for further research**

This study was undertaken as the UK entered a period of great change in its economic situation. All predictions by respondents in the study suggest that the public sector in England will face very stringent funding limits in the years to come. The incoming national government also promised extensive changes to governance and the bureaucracy in pursuit of greater efficiency, which included reform to or abolition of the regional structures.

Given the very tight constraints on Smesto authorities found in the current study, it is difficult to envisage that their precarious situation will change for the better in the coming years. In fact, the extensive and rapid change underway in the latter part of 2010 suggests a time of flux and a far more hostile climate for governance authorities. An opportunity exists to examine whether, and how far, Bauman's liquid modernity applies in the radically different economic and governance climate now prevailing. The predicted cuts to public sector posts, and very constrained finances, suggest that as Bauman predicted, more will be drawn into vagabond status as their room to make real choices shrinks.

The study also found that some respondents raised serious issues of political governance in their areas, with a few predicting worrying outcomes for the health of democracy. It appears likely that there is a relationship between the relatively powerless Smesto authorities and the state of democracy in those towns. A further study of northern towns, both in the two-tier areas and those newly made unitary, could provide useful findings on the nature of that relationship and how it is changing. The incoming government has promised greater autonomy for local areas as part of 'place-shaping', and it would be useful to examine whether this is making any difference to people's willingness to engage in politics. One respondent's claim that in times of free-flowing resources governments decentralise, while in constrained times they centralise power and resources, could be tested as part of such a study.

The situation of coastal towns has attracted interest from government in recent years, and with it a growing recognition that such towns are in a different economic situation from other towns. Further research into the progress or otherwise of the two coastal towns in the current study could be helpful in achieving a deeper understanding of the nature of those differences. A broadened European focus could provide useful comparative research into the management of decline in towns and cities, which is more widely studied in countries such as Germany.

## **9.6 Postscript**

The changes that have taken place in the economic and political sphere since fieldwork for this project was completed have been dramatic. They are so far-reaching that one academic (Hall 2010, p357) has said it is 'like living through a revolution'. Specifically, the governance changes detailed in s.9.4 above have been accompanied by cuts in funding to public services of up to 21 per cent in some cases. The loss of posts in the

public sector is expected to reach 610,000 by 2016, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility (BBC 2010).

These changes are not evenly distributed. Experian (2009) has highlighted the greater economic vulnerability of the North and Midlands compared with the South East of England. Its 'resilience index' or 'heat maps' show a familiar pattern of greater problems in old industrial areas, partly because a higher proportion of their employment is in the public sector. Indeed, much of the improvement in the employment situation of the North under the previous government can be attributed to increased public sector jobs (Coutts, Glyn and Rowthorn 2007). On growth prospects (*ibid*, p14), peripheral coastal or rural areas, again in the North and also in Wales, are 'worst'.

Even this picture may underestimate the effect on Smestos in the North, however. The 'resilience' map is compiled by considering the proportion of public sector to private sector jobs in a district; the lower the proportion, the more resilient the place is considered to be. But towns of the type in this study often lacked basic public services that others enjoyed: typically, Smestos have no district hospital (like Caslon), or their hospital is a satellite of a trust based elsewhere (Garamond), and little or no higher education (Caslon, Audubon). They may have a town hall and the staff based in it, or they may not (like Audubon).

In reality Smestos may suffer greater economic problems because they are disproportionately reliant on a very few larger private firms, and a higher than average proportion of sole traders. The three case studies in this project have all drawn attention to the serious effects of over-reliance on one large employer when that firm closes or moves business elsewhere. Sole traders are in a precarious situation during lean times and are not positioned to lead a local economic recovery.

The Coalition government has promised greater local freedoms for councils, but within a very constrained budgetary environment. While the first is clearly welcome, is difficult to see that it will have more than a marginal effect when the latter is far more powerful. Experian (*ibid*, p4) warns that the 'tectonic pressure' of rising needs and reduced funding has yet to reach its conclusion. The austerity currently dominating debate on the public sector looks certain to continue for some years.

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**Appendix 1: List of abbreviations**

ADP	Approved Development Programme
CAA	Comprehensive Area Assessment
CLG or DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
CPA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment
Defra	Department for Farming and Rural Affairs
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
Espon	European Spatial Planning Observation Network
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GO	Government Office
GVA	Gross Value Added
HCA	Homes and Communities Agency
HMO	House in Multiple Occupation
HMR	Housing Market Renewal
HRA	Housing Revenue Account
IMD	Index/indices of Multiple Deprivation
KLOE	Key Lines of Enquiry
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
Maff	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
MTI	Market Towns Initiative
NAHP	National Affordable Housing Programme
NDC	New Deal for Communities
NRF	Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
NWSG	Northern Way Steering Group
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
RDA	Regional Development Agency
RES	Regional Economic Strategy
RMTP	Rural and Market Towns Programme
RSS	Regional Spatial Strategy
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
Smesto	Small or medium sized town
SNR	Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration
SRB	Single Regeneration Budget
UK	United Kingdom

**Appendix 2: Towns matrix**

Town (authority)	LA Type	Population	City region status <sup>1</sup>	CPA 03/04	CPA 2008	Index of depriv'n 2004 rank*	GVA workplace 2004 (index 100 England) NUTS3	stock transfer
Grimsby (NE Lincs)	unitary	87,574	A	Weak	Good	52	89	2005
Darlington	unitary	86,082	B	Good	Excellent	90	97	
Scunthorpe (N Lincs)	unitary	72,660	A	Excellent	Excellent	121	89	2007
Carlisle	district	71,773	C	Good	Good	108	85	2003
Crewe	dist	67,683	A	Good	Good	174	106	2003
Scarborough/Scalby	dist	57,649	A	Good	Good	91	85	2004
Macclesfield/Prestbury	unitary	53,957	B	Good	Good	276	106	
Barrow-in-Furness	dist	47,194	A	Fair	Fair	29	66	
Lancaster	dist	45,952	A	Fair	Good	107	84	
Northwich (Vale Royal)	dist	39,568	B	Good	Excellent	176	106	2003
Bridlington								
(E Riding Yorkshire)	unitary	33,589	B	Excellent	Excellent	208	71	
Peterlee (Easington)	dist	29,936	A	Excellent	Excellent	8	65	ALMO
Beverley								
(E Riding Yorkshire)	unitary	29,110	B	Excellent	Excellent	208	71	
Kendal (S Lakeland)	dist	28,030	B	Weak	Weak	200	85	ALMO
Ashington (Wansbeck)	dist	27,335	B	Fair	Fair	45	68	
Congleton	dist	25,400	D	Weak	Good	205	106	1998
Whitehaven (Copeland)	dist	24,978	A	Fair	Fair	82	66	2005
Consett/Leadgate (Derwentside)	dist	24,932	B	Good	Good	62	65	2003
Bishop Auckland (Wear Valley)	dist	24,764	A	Fair	Excellent	32	65	ALMO
Rawtenstall (Rossendale)	dist	21,797	B	Poor	Good	92	84	
Workington (Allerdale)	dist	21,514	B	Fair	Fair	105	66	1999
Seaham (Easington)	dist	21,153	A	Excellent	Excellent	8	65	ALMO
Selby/Brayton	dist	18,657	D	Weak	Excellent	239	85	
Guisborough								
(Redcar & Cleveland)	unitary	17,186	B	Good	Excellent	44	72	2004
Ripon (Harrogate)	dist	16,468	B	Fair	Good	277	85	
Northallerton (Hambleton)	dist	15,517	D	Excellent	Excellent	285	85	1998
Clitheroe (Ribbles Valley)	dist	14,697	B	Fair	Good	288	84	
Penrith (Eden)	dist	14,471	B	Fair	Fair	200	85	1998
Skipton (Craven)	dist	14,313	A	Fair	Fair	262	85	2003
Whithy (Scarborough)	dist	13,594	A	Good	Good	91	85	2004
Morpeth	dist	13,555	B	Weak	Good	197	68	
Berwick-upon-Tweed	dist	12,870	A	Weak	Weak	124	68	
Malton/Norton (Ryedale)	dist	11,966	B	Good	Good	242	85	1993
Great Driffield								
(E Riding Yorkshire)	unitary	11,245	B	Excellent	Excellent	208	71	
Ulverston (S Lakeland)	dist	11,210	A	Weak	Weak	258	66	ALMO
Hexham (Tynedale)	dist	10,682	A	Good	Good	207	68	2001

<sup>1</sup> As given in SQW/Cambridge Econometrics (2006), A = more remote from city region

\* low = most deprived

Sources: ONS, Communities and Local Government, Audit Commission

**Appendix 3: Timeline for fieldwork**

Interviews with regional stakeholders were conducted in the period from November 2008 to February 2009. Four of these were face-to-face and the rest by telephone.

Interviews with 'long list' respondents were conducted from February 2009 to June 2009. All of these were by telephone.

Interviews with case study respondents were conducted from May 2009 to November 2009, in the following order: Caslon, Garamond, Audubon. Five of these were by telephone (three in Caslon, one in Garamond and one in Audubon) and the rest face-to-face.

## **Appendix 4: Sample topic list for ‘long list’ respondents**

### **Topic areas for discussion**

Emphasise anonymised, permission to record. Explain about the research and confidentiality.

### **Preliminaries**

Ask about interviewee’s role, how long in post, previous position/organisation.

### **A Profile and context**

Ask about the history of the council, particularly over the last decade: politics, context, key trends and developments.

### **B Governance**

What structure does the council currently have, and how has it changed over the last 10 years? Ask about Smestos within the council area: do they have autonomy (to what extent, how?) and have they a different character from each other?

### **C The housing function within the council**

Where does housing sit within the structure of the council? What priority is it given in the pecking order of commitments? (Consider LSVT or retention here, and when transfer took place). What is the relationship of the housing, regeneration and economic functions? How has housing strategy developed within the council?

### **D Regional connections**

Consider the changes over last decade – how does the council plug into RDA, Assembly etc and regional/sub-regional strategies? What differences have these structures brought? Is geography a significant factor in how the council works with these bodies?

### **E Relationships and funding streams**

Changes in view of, eg, development of LSP, regional housing board, single capital pot, etc. How has the council worked with the Housing Corporation (and plans with HCA)?

### **F Engagement or otherwise with national and regional bodies**

Introduce work of Bauman: are councils able to engage with bodies at other levels, or do they *feel* disempowered, disengaged? How has this changed over the decade? Do they feel compelled to compete? Who with, and on what level? Can they take the initiative and get things done locally? What might constrain their ability to act?

### **G Room for manoeuvre: national versus local priorities**

Issue of competition versus place making: how do they deal with the tensions in policy? What actual differences in housing has regional work produced, and what has the council (and partners) been able to achieve locally? Do council officers feel obliged to engage in forums that don’t really produce benefits, or is networking helpful in practical ways? Is decision making in housing and economics becoming blurred? Are constant national and sub-national initiatives and reorganisations helpful, or a problem?

**H Capacity**

There is quite a lot of evidence that capacity is a particular issue for smaller councils, both in resources and in recruiting/retaining high quality staff. Is that the case with this council? Conversely, there is evidence of much greater involvement and engagement of local people where councils are smaller. Where does the best balance lie? (Tailor questions when interviewing at councils about to be reorganised.)

**Roundup**

Conclude with thanks, ask if other topic areas missed or any extra comments the interviewee wants to make.



**Appendix 5: Northern Way city regions ‘purple haze’ map**

[map removed]

Source: NWSG (2004)